

When Political Philosophy Meets Moral Psychology: Expressivism in the *Mencius*

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I. Introduction

A casual survey of the backgrounds of the contributors to this journal, as well as to our sister journals such as *Philosophy East & West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, and *Asian Philosophy*, shows that most of the contributors are university teachers in departments of philosophy or religious studies. This partly explains why, in our studies of classical Chinese philosophy, we have a characteristically analytic approach to texts. The strength of this approach is that our passion for rigorous arguments leads to thorough analysis of early Chinese philosophical texts that focuses on how an author states his or her theory and argues for it. However, this approach does have its weaknesses. When we focus on the arguments in the texts, we tend to see these early Chinese philosophers only as scholars; we easily forget that many of them were also political advisors or consultants, and the audience of their arguments was often a powerful ruler. One of the main goals of this article is to show that we cannot study Mencius' moral psychology without studying his political philosophy at the same time. More specifically, this article shows that Mencius' expressivist moral psychology is the result of his responding to certain questions and debates in the political philosophy of his time.

I believe that our study can also shed light on a debate among contemporary scholars who study philosophical psychology or philosophy of action in early China. Herbert Fingarette is probably the first to claim that Confucius did not have the concepts of "choice," "choosing," "deciding," or "inner life" (Fingarette: 18-56). Chad Hansen claims that classical Chinese thinkers made no distinction between human actions and the natural course of events, nor did they have the distinction between "agent causation" and "event causation" (Hansen: 378). According to Henry Rosemont, classical Chinese thinkers did not have concepts of (or words for) "action," "rational agent," or "choice"

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(Rosemont: 173). In contrast to these scholars, David Nivison has argued that Mencius did have a concept of action. More specifically, Nivison argues that Mencius had a theoretical account of action in terms of an inner mental act of thought: what distinguishes actions from reflexes is the presence of an inner act of thought in actions and the absence of it in reflexes. Nivison's argument is based largely on 6A15 of the *Mencius*, which we shall examine closely.

In spite of many disagreements, there are unstated presuppositions shared by these scholars. The two sides have at least two assumptions in common. First, they all believe that, in order to have a concept of action, one must have a concept of an inner mental act (thinking, willing, deciding, choosing, or agent causation). Second, they take it for granted that classical Chinese thinkers must have been addressing the same questions we today consider important, such as "How do we give a general and theoretical account of human action?" or "How do we distinguish voluntary actions from mere reflexes?" They are central questions in contemporary philosophy of action. However, it can be argued that both assumptions are false. First, as Wittgenstein has shown, it is not true that an inner mental act is the essence of human actions, because human actions have no essence.¹ Second, as this article shows, the classical Chinese philosophers in fact had other kinds of questions in mind, to which their moral psychology was responding.

It is very interesting that there is a parallel debate in the study of classical Greek thought. In his Sather Lecture, Bernard Williams mentions a popular view among classics scholars that Homer's characters have no concepts of action, agency, or responsibility. Williams argues that what those scholars find lacking in Homer is actually a "bad philosophy," which assumes that, for an action to be an action, a mental action must always be present prior to the action:

All that Homer seems to have left out is the idea of another mental action that is supposed necessarily to lie between coming to a conclusion and acting on it: and he did well leave it out, since there is no such action, and the idea of it is the invention of bad philosophy. (Williams 1993: 36)

Elsewhere, Williams calls this the "doubling of action": to perform any voluntary action, one must first perform another mental action (Williams 1995: 71). Following Nietzsche, Williams argues that "such a peculiar account must have a purpose, and that the purpose is a moral one" (Williams 1995: 72).

This article is largely a Williamsian project. It shows that Mencius' moral psychology should not be understood as his impartial and objective account of the human mind; rather, it serves a moral and political purpose, and this is crucial to the understanding of his moral psychology, as well as to his political phi-

¹ In the early parts of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues that phenomena such as "game," "meaning," and "reading" have no essence, and that "family resemblance" is a helpful metaphor to understand them. He gives a similar treatment to "voluntary action" in the later parts of the book. For a detailed argument, see Xiao 1999.

losophy. In section II, I discuss Nivison's reading of 4A15, and argue that it is important to know to which question Mencius' idea about the inner act of attending is an answer. In section III, I suggest that the question to which Mencius' moral psychology is responding is a political one, and I use SHANG Yang 商鞅, a contemporary of Mencius', to show that there is an intimate connection between Shang's political philosophy and his moral psychology. In section IV, I first draw the connection between Mencius' political ideal of benevolent governance and his expressivist moral psychology; I then show how Mencius' expressivist moral psychology is at work through an analysis of 3A2.

II. An Idea Is Always an Answer to a Question

II.1. Nivison's Reading of 4A15

The publication of Nivison's *The Ways of Confucianism* in 1996 was a major event in the field of Chinese philosophy. It is a collection of papers written and presented in the 1970s, in which Nivison makes us see the connection between philosophy of action and moral psychology on the one hand and Confucius' and Mencius' major ideas on the other.² David Wong speaks for us all when he says, "On Nivison's readings, Mencius became for me a moral psychologist" (Wong: 1).

Based on his reading of 6A15 of the *Mencius*, Nivison argues that Mencius has an account of the difference between actions and reflexes. Let me quote his argument in full here:

[Mencius says,] "It is not the function of the ears and eyes to think (*si* 思), and they are obscured by [external] things. When one thing interacts with another, as a matter of course it leads it away. The function of the heart is to think. If it thinks then it will get it. If it does not think, then it will not get it" (6A15). The picture could be reinforced by other passages, but this should be enough to show that Mencius makes these assumptions: we naturally have a liking for and an impulse to seek certain things—the beautiful, the delicious, etc., and also the good and right. We will automatically seek objects of the former, physical kind if they are within reach, unless we choose not to (if we see that to do so would be wrong). However, our natural "pro-attitude" toward the good and right in no way guarantees that we will seek them. We will not unless we focus our thought on them and seek them *voluntarily*, performing this *inner act of thought*, so to speak, *as we would perform any other voluntary act...* The moral acting of perfected individuals *remains act, and does not become reflex*. They do it freely, not automatically, and remain moral agents. (Nivison 1996a: 85; emphases added)

Nivison seems to be saying that, according to Mencius, what distinguishes our

² Nivison mentions that he has been influenced by several contemporary philosophers' writings on the weakness of the will and self-deception, such as Harry Frankfurt, Richard Jeffrey, Michael Bratman, and Herbert Fingarette (Nivison 1996b: 309). Speaking about the 1970s when he wrote these essays, Nivison says, "I learned much from Donald Davidson at this time, and earlier" (Nivison 1996a: xiii).

voluntary actions from reflexes cannot be explained in terms of our natural “pro-attitudes” such as desires and emotions. For Nivison, we have to appeal to something else, namely, an “inner act of thought,” which is performed by the organ of *xin* (the mind-heart). It is this inner act of thought that makes the moral action of individuals an action, not a reflex. In other words, it is the capacity for the inner act of thought that makes individuals agents.

I agree with Nivison that there is a concept of the inner act of thought in Mencius; however, I do not share his implied assumption that Mencius was trying to answer the question of how to distinguish actions from reflexes, voluntary from involuntary actions. I believe Mencius was using the idea to answer the question about why some people fail to become virtuous persons. In other words, we have identified the same idea in a text, yet we take the idea as an answer to different questions.

II.2. *An Idea Is Always an Answer to a Question*

R. G. Collingwood believes that an idea is always an answer to a question (Collingwood: 29-76). It is possible that two ideas that have the same propositional content may not be exactly the “same” ideas if they are answers to two different questions. This has important implications for the practice of the history of philosophy. As Bernard Williams puts it, “you could not understand what was being said by an author unless you understood—this did not imply, explicitly formulate—the question that he was trying to answer” (Williams 2006: 344).³ This does not necessarily imply a radical relativism, according to which thinkers from distant historical periods or cultures have nothing to say to us today. Williams mentions Peter Strawson’s remark that we should treat great past philosophers the same way we treat great living philosophers, which is to read them as having something to say to us. Williams remarks,

Collingwood would have agreed with this, so long as it is not assumed that what the dead have to say to us is the same sort of thing as the living have to say to us. He would not have agreed, that is to say, with Ryle’s frequent injunction to treat something written by Plato, for instance, as though it had come out in *Mind* last month. (Williams 2006: 344)

Here we shall try to identify the questions that Mencius was trying to answer. As we shall see, they are not questions that contemporary philosophers of action are trying to answer, but they are not questions that are irrelevant to our time either.

II. 3. *What Is the Question to Which Mencius’ Theory Is an Answer?*

I believe that Mencius’ concept of *si* is used to answer an entirely different question. It is curious that Nivison does not cite the early part of 6A15 in his

³ I am grateful to Bernard Williams for having drawn my attention to Collingwood. His then unpublished essay on Collingwood is now included in Williams 2006. For a detailed discussion on how classical Chinese scholars deal with hermeneutic issues, see Xiao 2006.

remarks. Here is the entire passage divided into three parts:

(1) Gongduzi asked, “We all are human beings, why some are great men, and some small men?” Mencius replied, “Those who follow their ‘great part’ are great men; those who follow their ‘small part’ are small men.”

Gongduzi asked again, “We all are human beings, why some follow their great part and some their small part?”

(2) Mencius said, “It is not the function of the ears and eyes to attend (*si* 思), and they are obscured by [external] things. When one thing interacts with another, as a matter of course the external things lead the ears and eyes astray. The function of the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is to attend. If the heart-mind attends, it will get it. If it does not attend to it, it will not get it.

(3) This is what Heaven has given me. If one first stands fast on his great part, then his small part cannot take it away. In this way, one cannot but be a great man.” (*Mencius* 6A15)

Part (1) of this passage shows clearly that Mencius is not really answering our question about how to distinguish action from reflex. Mencius is answering a series of questions raised by the student Gongduzi, whose first question is why some people fail to become great men. This has to be read in light of Mencius’ famous claim that everyone is capable of becoming a Yao or Shun (*Mencius* 3A1 and 6B2). These are sage-kings who practice benevolent governance. This means that Gongduzi’s question is, at least partly, about the fact that there are some rulers who fail to practice benevolent governance. Mencius’ answer is that they fail because they do not follow their “great part.”

However, Gongduzi is not satisfied with this answer: “Why do some follow their great part and some follow their small part?” It is clear that Part (2) and Part (3) are Mencius’ answer to this question. Mencius seems to be saying that some people follow their great part because their heart-mind “attends” (*si*), and some follow their small part because their heart-mind does not “attend.” It is obvious that Mencius is not using the concept of *si* (the inner act of attending) to give an account of the differences between actions and reflexes.⁴

It must be acknowledged that most of the time in his *The Ways of Confucianism*, Nivison does not read Mencius as addressing questions in philosophy of action, but rather questions in moral psychology, especially the issue of the weakness of the will, which is the question of how it is possible that some people fail to do what they ought to do. Nevertheless, even though I agree with Nivison that Mencius is interested in the question of the weakness of the will, Mencius’ interest and perspective are still very much different from that of contemporary philosophers, such as Davidson. As I shall argue, Mencius’ moral psychology needs to be understood in a different context, especially involving

⁴ This is not to deny that Mencius’ ideas *can be used by us* to answer our question in contemporary philosophy of action. We may put this point as follows: had Mencius been presented with and felt need to address our question, there would have been sufficient conceptual resources in his own thought for him to draw upon.

questions of political philosophy in his time.⁵

III. A Question of Political Philosophy

III. 1. A Central Question in Politics

Both Mencius and SHANG Yang 商鞅 lived in the middle period of the Warring States. Mencius was born around 389 or 385 BCE and died around 305 or 304 BCE (Qian Mu: 619, 695 and Yang: 1); SHANG Yang was born around 390 BCE (Qian Mu: 618 and 263-7) and died in 338 BCE. Both of them were *shi* 士, scholars traveling from state to state, seeking to be a ruler's political advisor or military strategist. It is mentioned in the *Mencius* that Mencius received money and housing from rulers for his service. These traveling advisors often had a significant influence on the ruler, and some of them even became powerful high-ranking officials.

As far as we know, there was no personal encounter between Mencius and Shang, and we do not find any cross-references to each other in the *Mencius* and the *Shang Jun Shu* 商君書 (*The Book of Lord Shang*).⁶ However, based on existing texts, we can see that they occupied two opposing positions in term of their political philosophy, and we find each of them arguing against ideas that have been most clearly articulated by the other. How to govern a country in this time of conflicts and turmoil was of central concern to both of them, although they endorsed radically different solutions.

The traveling advisors in the Warring States period were all keenly aware that they were living in a brutal war-torn reality that was quite different from the Three Dynasties of the sage-kings. Physical force seemed to be the only thing that mattered; virtue and morality no longer mattered. This is how Mozi 墨子 describes the situation:

Ever since the ancient sage-kings passed away and the world lost the order of justice (*yi* 義), the feudal lords have relied upon the force (*li* 力) of arms to attack one another. To the South there are the kings of Chu and Yue, and to the North there are the rulers of Qi and Jin. They all mercilessly drill and train their troops with the aim of attacking and absorbing one another, and thereby gaining control of the empire. (Wu: 265; Ivanhoe and van Norden: 802)

Shang sees the world in the same way. He says, "Those countries that have no strength (*li*) will necessarily be dismembered" (*Shang Jun Shu*, 31/185). For Mozi and Shang, the central question in politics is a strategic one: how can a state increase its power in a world where only physical force matters? This is

⁵ The connection between Mencius' political philosophy and his moral psychology has been underexplored by contemporary scholars. Among the significant recent studies of Mencius' moral psychology are Shun, Chan 2002, Liu and Ivanhoe, Liu, and Behuniak.

⁶ *Shang Jun Shu* is not a book written by the historical figure SHANG Yang; there is evidence that some chapters were written after his death. However, some chapters might have been composed by Shang himself.

how Shang puts it:

A country of a thousand chariots is able to preserve itself by defending itself, and a country of ten thousand chariots is able to round itself off by attacking others; even [a bad ruler like] Jie would not be able to twist words to subdue his enemies. If a country is incapable of attacking other countries, or defending itself, then [even a benevolent ruler like] Yao would have to surrender to stronger countries. Based on this observation, we know that whether a country is taken seriously and respected by other countries depends entirely on its force (*li* 力). Therefore, force is the basis on which a country gains both prestige and respect. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 182/325)

However, as we shall see, Mencius does not believe that the question should be understood as a strategic one in terms of force. Rather he sees it as an ethical question in terms of benevolent governance (*renzheng* 仁政). In this part of the article, we discuss Shang's militarist political philosophy and the moral psychology that goes hand in hand with it; in the next part, we shall discuss Mencius' ideal of benevolent governance and its connection to his expressivist moral psychology.

III. 2. SHANG Yang's Political Philosophy of Force

For twenty-one years (359 BCE—338 BCE), Shang was the architect of what has later been known as “SHANG Yang *Bianfa* 商鞅變法” (SHANG Yang's Reform); he was mainly responsible for having made Qin 秦 into the most powerful country among the warring states. He indeed laid down the foundation for Qin's eventual unification of China in 221 BCE, the founding of the first unified empire. In other words, Shang was the primary theorist and strategist of empire-building of his time.⁷

The empire that Shang envisioned was an empire of force. One of the most striking features of Shang's theory of governance is that it is essentially militarism applied to domestic politics. As Vitalii Rubin observes, “It is within the army that the principles of governing through a system of rewards and punishments, later proclaimed by the Legalists as the sole method of ruling society in general, are first worked out” (cited in Ames: 231). Shang sees war and punishment as two sides of the same coin. QIAN Zhongshu 錢鍾書 has made the observation that Shang believed that “*xing* 刑 means weapon” (*wu* 武) (*Shang Jun Shu*, 110/261), and that Shang described punishment and war as “using sword and saw [to punish people] at home, using armor and soldier [to attack people] abroad (*nei xin dao ju, wei yong jia bin* 內行刀鋸, 外用甲兵)” (*Shang Jun Shu*, 136/285). Qian concludes that Shang regarded military affairs and punishment as the same violent force applied differently—it is war when applied outside, and punishment when applied inside (Qian: 285). For Shang, domestic politics were the continuation of war by the same means, i.e., physical force and violence.

Shang's reform (*bianfa*) consisted mainly in getting rid of the existing Con-

⁷ SIMA Qian wrote the first biography of Shang, see Sima: 2227-2239.

fucian programs of moral education, and replacing the Confucian model of “governing by virtue” (*de zhi* 德治) with his new model of “governing by punishment” (*xing zhi* 刑治 or *xing zheng* 刑政) (*Shang Jun Shu*, 77/229, 136/284). He argued that physical force and violence, rather than the supposed transforming power of virtue, is the most effective means to achieve the following four goals: *zhi* 治 (making the country orderly), *fu* 富 (making the country prosperous), *qiang* 強 (making the army strong), and *wang* 王 (attaining supremacy, becoming a king). Shang saw the Confucian model of governing by virtue as a major obstacle to achieving these goals:

If a country has the following ten evils—the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Music*, the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, virtue, sagehood, filial piety, brotherly duty, integrity, and argumentation—then the ruler cannot make the people fight in a war, and the country will inevitably become weak and eventually collapse. If a country does not have these ten things, the ruler can make the people fight, and the country will be so prosperous that it will attain supremacy (*wang*) among all the other countries. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 45/199)

What Shang assaults here is the Confucian ideal of moral education. The first four “evils” (the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Music*, the *Book of Odes*, and the *Book of Documents*) are the main texts of the Confucian canon, and the remaining six “evils” on the list (virtue, sagehood, filial piety, brotherly duty, integrity, and argumentation) are the main goals of Confucian self-cultivation. According to the Confucian ideal, rulers and those who aspire to become government officials should receive such a moral education, because the Confucian ideal is to govern by moral exemplars. Under the transforming influence of these virtuous exemplars, the common people will become virtuous as well, and the country in turn will become an orderly one without any need for laws or punishments. This is the well-known Confucian model of “governing by virtue.”

Shang had a very different idea regarding how to govern a country. He believed that the best way to govern is “governing by punishment” (*xing zhi*), especially by heavy punishment. For Shang, heavy punishment for light offences could be justified as long as the purpose was to make the country orderly and strong:

If a country adopts the policy of abolishing punishments by means of punishments (*yi xing qu xing* 以刑去刑), it will enjoy order; if a country adopts the policy of bringing about punishment by means of punishment (*yi xing zhi xing* 以刑致刑), it will be in disorder. This is why I say that light offenses should be punished heavily, and [as a result], punishment will be eventually abolished, affairs will succeed, and the country will be strong. But if heavy offenses are punished heavily and light offenses lightly, penalties will remain, trouble will arise, and the country will be weak. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 49/203)

It is important to emphasize that Shang wanted to abolish punishment not because suffering or pain is bad in itself, as Mencius would argue; Shang believed that punishment was good because it made a country orderly and strong, and it deterred potential criminals from committing crimes in the future (130/279-

80). This is very similar to the classic utilitarian justification of punishment. However, Shang goes even further than the utilitarians, since he wants to prevent all potential crimes in the future, and eventually abolish punishment by means of punishment.

III. 3. *Shang's Moral Psychology*

Why did Shang believe that punishment can eventually be abolished by means of punishment? His answer was "Punishment produces force" (*Shang Jun Shu*, 49/204). As he remarks,

Force produces strength, strength produces awe, awe produces virtue (*de*); so virtue comes from force. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 109/259)

Punishment produces force, force produces strength; strength produces awe; awe produces virtue. [Therefore,] virtue comes from punishment. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 57/210)

Therefore, in general, a wise prince relies on force, not virtue, in his governing; and thus, without his being anxious or fatigued, real results (*gong* 功) will be achieved. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 90/243)

Here, Shang turns the Confucian hierarchy completely up side down: virtue (*de*) is now said to come from punishment or physical force. For Shang, physical force or violence is the only thing that has real power in the world; in order for virtue to have power, its power then has to come from the power of force. Ultimately, he implies that virtue no longer has power of its own. His political philosophy was built upon the belief that one can no longer govern by virtue in his time, but has to govern by force. He supported this political agenda with a narrow understanding of human psychology:

People naturally have likes and dislikes; it is due to this fact that people are governable. It is thus necessary that a prince should examine these likes and dislikes, which are the basis of rewards and punishments. Now, the nature of man is to like titles and rewards, and to dislike punishments and penalties. A prince should institute rewards and punishments in order to control people's wills and give them what they desire. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 88/241)

Therefore, if you govern by punishment, then the people will fear (*wei* 畏). Being fearful, they will not commit villainies; there being no villainies, people will be happy in what they enjoy. (*Shang Jun Shu*, 77/229-30; also see 130/280-1)

It is clear that Shang's moral psychology is closely linked to his political philosophy. He is making two bold assumptions about human psychology: First, fear is the strongest moral emotion; second, people's actions can be controlled by inducing their fear. These two assumptions provide the foundation for his punishment-based philosophy of governance.

IV. Mencius' Expressivist Moral Psychology and Benevolent Government

IV. 1. Mencius' Benevolent Governance: The External and Internal Arguments

What does Mencius mean by “benevolent governance” (*renzheng* 仁政)? It is essentially the opposite of Shang’s “punishment-based governance” (*xingzheng* 刑政 or *xingzhi* 刑治). Many of Mencius’ statements can be read as straightforward negations of the statements we have found in Shang, even though Shang’s name never appears in the *Mencius*. For Mencius, benevolent governance means “governance that tolerates no suffering of others” (*bu ren ren zhi zheng* 不忍人之政) (*Mencius* 4A1; also see 1A7).⁸ Mencius suggests that a ruler who practices benevolent governance should do at least the following things: reduce punishment and taxation (1A5), rejoice with his people (1B1), make sure that the masses are neither cold nor hungry (1A7), not fond of killing people (1A6), let no one starve to death (1A4), and take care of four types of people who are the most destitute (widows, widowers, old people without children, and young children without fathers) (1B5).

Mencius does not deny that physical force is powerful, nor does he deny the fact that certain large states have used force to become leaders (*ba* 霸) of the feudal lords. However, Mencius believes that physical force is not the only source of power; he strongly believes that virtue has power, too. He distinguishes between *ba* 霸 and *wang* 王:

One who uses force in the name of benevolence will become leader (*ba*) of the feudal lords, but to do so he must first be the ruler of a state of considerable size. One who puts benevolence into effect through the transforming influence of virtue will become a King (*wang*), and his success will not depend on the size of his state. (2A3)

Now we can characterize the difference between Shang and Mencius by saying that Shang believed that attaining supremacy by virtue was no longer possible in his time, and physical force was the only way to attain supremacy, whereas Mencius unequivocally denied it.

What are Mencius’ arguments for benevolent governance? We can find at least two types of arguments in the *Mencius*. According to what I call the “external argument,” benevolent governance is good because it brings about external benefits. For example, it “brings peace to the people within the Four Seas” (7A21). What I call the “internal argument” is one that emphasizes that benevolent governance is intrinsically good, and its inherent goodness is not dependent on whether it can bring about external advancement. There are passages in the *Mencius* in which Mencius argues that, if a ruler practices benevolent governance, he will necessarily attain supremacy (*wang* 王); in other words, the benevolent governance will ultimately profit the state:

If a man does good things (*weishan* 爲善), then amongst his descendants in future generations there will necessarily (*bi* 必) rise someone who will become a King (*wang*). (1B14)

⁸ Citations from the *Mencius* hereafter in this section will be indicated with book number, section letter, and paragraph number only.

A benevolent man is the most powerful (*ren zhe wu di* 仁者無敵). (1A5; also see 7B3 and 7B4)

One who has the Way will have many to support him; one who does not have the Way will have few to support him (*de dao zhe duo zhu, shi dao zhe gao zhu* 得道者多助, 失道者寡助).... A *junzi* either does not go to war or else he is sure of victory. (2B1)

[A ruler] who models himself on King Wen [who practices benevolent governance will prevail over the whole empire, in five years if he starts with a large state, and in seven if he starts with a small state. (4A7; also see 4A13)

What we see here are arguments for benevolent governance based on its external benefits, such as becoming a King or winning battles.

However, we can also find a Mencius who insists that benevolent governance is good in and of itself; it is the expression of one's utmost nature. This is where Mencius' expressivist moral psychology comes in: "Humans all have hearts that cannot bear the suffering of others (*bu ren zhi xin* 不忍之心). The Former Kings have such hearts, and that is why they have government that cannot bear the suffering of others (*bu ren ren zhi zheng* 不忍人之政)" (2A6). Here we see a much stronger argument for benevolent governance. One's practicing benevolent governance is not based on one's belief that it will necessarily profit one's country; rather it is a natural expression of one's heart, which is intrinsically compassionate and must manifest itself in one's actions. In this passage, Mencius goes on to talk about the story of one's seeing a child about to fall into a well, which is one of the most famous examples from the *Mencius*:

The reason why I say that everyone has a compassionate heart is this. Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well. Everyone in such a situation would have a feeling of compassion, not because one wanted to get in the good grace of the parents, not because one wanted fame among their neighbors and friends, and not because one disliked the sound of the child's cry. (2A6)⁹

It is illuminating to see that this passage directly follows the argument for benevolent governance. In order to assure that the motivation for benevolent governance is independent of external factors, Mencius here emphasizes that the true source of compassionate acts is one's heart, which is inherently sensitive to the suffering of others. To put it another way, compassionate acts, as well as benevolent governance, are in fact natural expressions of one's inner nature. This is what I call Mencius' expressivist moral psychology.

IV. 2. *Mencius' Arguments in 3A2*

Now in order to understand better Mencius' expressivist moral psychology, we need to turn to more examples from the *Mencius*. Here we focus on 3A2, which shows how Mencius' expressivist argument is at work in a new context, namely, how to persuade someone to follow the Confucian ritual practice of mourning. As we shall see, just as in the case of benevolent governance, two

⁹ Here I follow Bryan van Norden's translation, with modifications (Ivanhoe and Van Norden: 125).

types of arguments can be found in 3A2; the first is an external one, and the second an internal and expressivist one.

The passage 3A2 is about the future Duke Wen of Teng seeking advice from Mencius about what mourning rituals he should follow after his father's death. Mencius suggests to the crown prince that he should be in mourning for three years. One of Mencius' arguments consists of a long quotation from Confucius:

Confucius said: "When the ruler dies the heir entrusts his affairs to the steward and sips rice gruel, showing a deep inky color on his face. He then takes his place and weeps, and none of his numerous officials dares show a lack of grief. This is because he sets the example. When someone above shows a preference for anything, there is certain to be someone below who will outdo him. The gentlemen's virtue is like wind; the virtue of the common people is like grass. Let the wind sweep over the grass, and the grass is sure to bend." (3A2)

Here Mencius is making the standard "governing by virtue" argument. Let us spell out the argument. The crown prince should practice the prolonged three-year mourning period, because by doing so he will set up an exemplar of virtue, which will influence the common people, turning them into virtuous persons as well. This is an external argument because the mourning practice is recommended for the reason that this ritual act will have good external benefits.

There is also an internal and expressivist argument presented in 3A2. When the crown prince is advised by the elders and officials not to follow the prolonged mourning period, he is torn by the conflicting suggestions. He seeks Mencius' help again. The following is the last part of 3A2:

"I see," said Mencius, "But in this matter the solution should not be sought in the others (*bu ke ta qiu zhe ye* 不可他求者也)... It is up to the crown prince himself."

...

"That is so," said the crown prince, "It is, indeed, up to me" (*shi cheng zai wo* 是誠在我). For five months the crown prince stayed in his mourning hut, issuing no orders or prohibitions. The officials and his kinsmen approved of his actions and thought him well-versed in the rites. When it was time for the burial ceremony, people came from all quarters to watch. He showed such a grief-stricken expression (*yanse* 顏色) and wept so bitterly that the mourners were greatly *delighted* (*yue* 悅). (3A2; emphasis added)

There are two things worth noticing. First, the crown prince's action takes place immediately after his realization: "It is, indeed, up to me." With this realization, he starts to act out of his mind-heart or nature; his acts of mourning are spontaneous and genuine expressions of his emotions. Second, one may be surprised to see that the word "delighted (*yue* 悅)" is being used here in a passage describing a funeral ceremony. How could the mourners be "greatly delighted"? The following passage, in which the word *yue* also appears, may provide some clues:

Hence it is said: all palates have the same preference in taste; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should mind-hearts prove to be an exception by possessing nothing

in common? What is common to all mind-hearts? Pattern (*li* 理) and justice (*yi* 義). The sage is simply the first to discover this common element in my mind-heart. Thus pattern and justice *delight* (*yue* 悅) my mind-heart in the same way as meat delights my palate. (6A7)

So perhaps the mourners are delighted by pattern and justice? The following passage from 7A21 might be helpful as well:

That which a *junzi* follows as his nature, namely benevolence, justice, the rites, and wisdom, is rooted in his mind-heart, and expresses itself (*shengse* 生色) in his face, giving it a glowing appearance. It also shows in his back and extends to his limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words. (7A21; also see 4A15)

If we put side by side the above three passages, it becomes clear that what delights the mourners is not the grief-stricken expression on the crown prince's face, but the fact that the virtues are manifested in the expression. This reading can be supported by another passage, in which Mencius argues that when one mourns the dead, it is not for the external purpose of having any external effects:

Mencius said: "Yao and Shun had [virtue] as their nature. Tang and King Wu returned to it. To be in accord with the rites in every movement is the highest of virtue. When one mourns sorrowfully over the dead it is not to impress the living. When one follows unswervingly the path of virtue it is not to win advancement. When one invariably keeps one's word it is not to establish the rectitude of one's actions. A *junzi* merely follows the norm and awaits his destiny. (7B33; also see 7B11)

Here let me emphasize that it is very important that the crown prince's acts of mourning, as well as his expressions of sorrow, both flow spontaneously from his nature, which is rooted in his mind-heart. He has indeed followed Mencius' suggestion that it is up to him to express his nature through action. There must be a moment when he sought (*qiu*) within his mind-heart and attended to (*si*) his genuine emotions in order to know what to do. This seems to imply that his actions could not have been caused by external concerns, such as setting up a moral example for his people. In fact, Mencius believes that it is exactly due to the fact that the crown prince's actions are the spontaneous expressions of his inner nature that his virtuous actions have the transforming power over his people.

In conclusion, I hope I have shown that there is an intimate connection between Mencius' political philosophy and his moral psychology. It can be argued that part of Mencius' moral psychology is articulated in the specific context of the political concerns of his day. In his many conversations with kings and princes, Mencius developed a theory of human nature that accommodated his political ideal of benevolent governance. Without his expressivist moral psychology, Mencius might not have been able to argue for a way of governing that is not dependent on the power of physical force, but is rooted in the power of virtue. Furthermore, our discussion of how one is capable of practicing the Confucian rites of mourning by seeking within himself brings to light

the real message of Mencius' moral psychology, which is the belief that it is up to each one of us to become a virtuous person, and that our virtuous actions are always natural expressions of what lies deep within our hearts.¹⁰

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