



## BOOK REVIEW

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*Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*. Edited by Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Hackett Publishing, 2002. 249 pages. \$16.95.

This volume joins an impressive series of collections of essays on classical Chinese thinkers, which have been consistently put together by Philip Ivanhoe and various collaborators: the collection on Zhuangzi (1996), Laozi (1999) and Xunzi (2000). The English-language scholarship of Mengzi (390–305 BCE) has flourished in recent years, and it is indeed high time for us to have such a splendid volume on Mengzi's moral philosophy. This volume, edited by Xiusheng Liu and Ivanhoe, consists of eight essays. Three of them have been published before; the other five are published here for the first time. A. C. Graham's and Irene Bloom's essays are about Mengzi's view on human nature; Liu's essay is on Mengzi's view on the relationship between moral judgment and motivation; David Nivison's essay focuses on one major difference between Mengzi's and Xunzi's moral psychology; Xinyan Jiang's essay is on Mengzi's view on courage; and the last three essays by Eric Hutton, David Wong, and Ivanhoe focus on moral reasoning in the *Mengzi*.

It is difficult to do justice to the richness of all the essays in this short review. Instead of trying to cover them all, I focus on the common themes that emerge from the book as a whole. The most striking feature of this volume is that most of the authors have adopted an analytic philosopher's approach—they read Mengzi as a philosopher, and they aim to articulate and reconstruct Mengzi's views and arguments as rigorously as possible. This is no easy task, given the fact that, unlike the *Xunzi*, which consists of treatise-like essays, the *Mengzi* is a collection of fragmentary remarks and compressed dialogues. The authors seem to have come up with two strategies to deal with this problem. The first is to cast a narrow net by applying their analytic skills to only a limited number of passages, sometimes focusing on just one elliptical passage (e.g. Liu's essay is devoted to 6A4, Wong's and Ivanhoe's essays to 1A7). The second strategy is to make use of well-defined concepts from contemporary ethical theory to articulate Mengzi's moral philosophy. Mengzi emerges from

this volume as a skilled philosopher whose arguments and views, when properly reconstructed, turn out to be sophisticated and compelling.

The strength of these strategies also implies a weakness; one gains depth at the expense of breadth. The reader should consult other books if she is looking for analyses of the historical, political, or social contexts of Mengzi's moral philosophy, or analyses of Mengzi's thoughts on religion, politics, history, hermeneutics, economy, war, or punishment. One may also wish that the authors had reflected on their hermeneutic practice of using concepts from contemporary ethical theory to reconstruct Mengzi's philosophy. However, they could respond by saying that this book is meant to serve a different purpose, which is to "bring [Mengzi's moral philosophy] into conversation with contemporary Western moral and philosophical theories" (x).

Graham's 57-page essay, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," was published in 1967 and is reprinted here as the first chapter of the book. This is apt because this path-breaking essay, together with David Nivison's essays on Mengzi's moral psychology written in the 1970s, really laid the foundation for the study of Mengzi's moral philosophy in the English-speaking world. Originally trained in theology, Graham was one of the first sinologists to take Mengzi seriously as a philosopher. Graham suggests that Mengzi's concept of human nature is derived from the Yangzhu School, which is the "oldest Chinese philosophy of human nature known to us" (12). They use *xing* (nature) of a human being to refer to both the process of a person fulfilling one's life cycle and the goal of the process, which is health and longevity. Mengzi accepts their teleological concept of human nature, but he insists that they have got its specific content wrong (19). They think that the inherent end of human beings is health and longevity, whereas Mengzi believes that it is "moral perfection" (33), which all humans have the potential to achieve.

In her 1994 essay "Mengzian Argument on Human Nature (Ren Xing)," reprinted here, Irene Bloom defends Graham's reconstruction of Mengzi's view against Roger Ames's critique, presented in his 1991 essay "The Mengzian Conception of Ren Xing: Does it Mean 'Human Nature'?", which is not included here. Ames argues that Graham is wrong to translate Mengzi's *ren xing* as "human nature," because Mengzi's *ren xing* is radically different from the teleological, essentialist, Western concept of human nature. The Mengzian *ren xing*, according to Ames, is not "some innate endowment present in us from birth," but rather the result of "cultural achievements" by individuals who are "unimportantly similar" but "importantly distinct" (cited by Bloom, 74 and 81). Bloom rejects these points in her essay and has since ignited a well-known and still ongoing debate, joined by an impressive array of scholars such as Kwong-loi Shun, Shu-hsien Liu, Anne Birdwhistell, Chung-ying Cheng, Mark Lewis, and Maurizio Scarpari.

The issue of how to understand Mengzian moral reasoning is another common theme, which runs through the remaining six essays in this book. Owing to lack of space, let me briefly mention only the essays by Liu, Wong, Ivanhoe, and Hutton.

In “Mengzian Internalism,” Liu first introduces the notion of “internalism,” which is the view that “there is a necessary or conceptual (internal) connection between moral judgment and motivation” (102). He then offers his interpretation of 6A4 to show that Mengzi is an internalist. The issue of whether moral judgment or reason necessarily motivates action is at the center of modern meta-ethics, involving many moral philosophers such as Kant, Hume, Bernard Williams, Thomas Nagel, Christine Korsgaard, to name just a few. This issue is often formulated in terms of moral reason; Liu’s conclusion can also be put as follows: Mengzi is an internalist in that he believes moral reason is internal, meaning that moral reason necessarily motivates action.

Wong’s and Ivanhoe’s characteristically penetrating and philosophically sophisticated essays are part of an on-going debate about how to understand Mengzi’s concept of “extension” in 1A7. The passage 1A7 records a dialogue between Mengzi and King Xuan of Qi, in which Mengzi first helps King Xuan realize that he has compassion for an ox that is about to be sacrificed; Mengzi then remarks that what King Xuan needs to do to become a virtuous king is simply to “extend” his compassion to his people. Scholars have offered various interpretations of this passage since the revival of Chinese philosophy in the 1970s; David Nivison, Kwong-loi Shun, Bryan van Norden, Craig Ihara, Manyul Im have all contributed to this debate. Both Wong and Ivanhoe reject the “logical extension” and “emotional extension” interpretations suggested by previous scholars, on the ground that the former reduces Mengzian moral reasoning into a top-down logical reasoning in terms of general principles and consistency, whereas the latter draws an “equally mistaken” conclusion that there is no ethical reasoning at all in Mengzi (188).

In his stimulating essay “Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi,” Wong offers what he calls the “developmental extension” interpretation of 1A7, of which analogical reasoning is an important part. Drawing upon Iris Murdoch’s and John McDowell’s works on moral perception and reasoning, Wong develops a Mengzian model of analogical reasoning as an alternative to the top-down model that is usually found in Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. Wong’s analogical reasoning model “gives justificatory priority to the particular,” and it involves “careful comparison between particulars” without the mediation of general principles (188).

In his exciting essay “Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi’s Notion of Extension,” having thoroughly examined previous interpretations of 1A7, Ivanhoe offers what he calls the “analogical resonance” reading. The difference between Ivanhoe and Wong seems to be a matter of emphasis; Ivanhoe believes that “Mengzi emphasizes the role of emotional resonance not cognitive similarity” (226), and he also believes that various Mengzian ways of self-cultivation of one’s moral sensibility such as ritual, music, and “the study of paradigmatic examples from history” (224–225, 235) occupy a much more central role than analogical reasoning. Ivanhoe’s balanced and nuanced interpretation seems to be closer to Mengzi’s position overall.

What emerges from Wong’s and Ivanhoe’s essays is a theory of moral reasoning that is both Mengzian and compelling. Wong’s conclusion is

representative in this regard: "Besides being true to Mengzi, the conception of moral reasoning attributed to him here is a plausible conception on its own terms" (210). His arguments for this conclusion are based on contemporary psychologists' experimental research on judgment formation, as well as cognitive scientists' work on connectionist models of the mind. Ivanhoe also argues that Mengzi's analogical resonance contributes to "a more accurate and richer account of ethical life" (221). Wong's and Ivanhoe's essays exemplify another outstanding feature of the general approach adopted by all the authors of this volume, which is that expository work is always done with the purpose of achieving a position from which the reader is invited to ask whether Mengzi's view, or a reconstructed Mengzian view, is true. I have never seen readers of the *Mengzi* taking the truth-claim of Mengzi's philosophy so seriously and sympathetically.

Another contribution to the on-going debate about Mengzian moral reasoning is Hutton's illuminating essay, entitled "Moral Connoisseurship in Mengzi." By "moral connoisseurship," a term borrowed from Jay Wallace, he means an intuition-based capacity to perceive moral reasons in a situation at hand. Hutton makes the distinction between two basic models of moral connoisseurship. The first is "elemental connoisseurship": "the virtuous agent's refined perceptiveness reveals to him only the reasons for and against various actions in the situation at hand" (167); and the agent has to engage in some further weighing of these reasons in order to arrive at a conclusion. The second is "conclusive connoisseurship": "the virtuous agent's perceptiveness reveals to him not only the reasons for and against various reasons, but also the correct conclusion to draw from those reasons" (167). The main difference between them is that the elemental model allows the process of weighing these pro and con reasons to play some role in the formation of moral judgments, whereas the conclusive model does not. Hutton argues that we should attribute the conclusive model to Mengzi.

The difficulty with this interpretation seems to be that it attributes to the Mengzian agent a rather mysterious capacity of not only perceiving the reasons for and against the right action, but also the correct conclusion to draw from those reasons *without weighing them*. It seems that the only plausible way to understand this capacity is to claim that a Mengzian virtuous agent simply does not need to weigh the right reasons against the wrong reasons; she comes to the correct conclusion not because the wrong reasons are "outweighed" by the moral reasons, but rather because they are being "silenced" (to borrow a term from John McDowell) by them. In other words, the wrong reasons are not perceived to be reasons at all; hence there is simply no need to weigh them against moral reasons. To use Mengzi's own language, we may say that a virtuous person's heart/mind is not "moved" (2A2) by emotions and desires that are inconsistent with morality; they simply do not engage a virtuous person's motivational energy (*qi*) (2A2). We may call this the "unmoving model" or the "silencing model." I believe that Hutton is right to reject the elemental model; however, I think we should not attribute the conclusive model to Mengzi. Although Hutton entertains the possibility of the silencing model as a plausible interpretation of Mengzi, he eventually rejects it, on the ground that the

textual evidence supporting this interpretation is circumstantial and that there are other passages that defy it (176–177, 182).

It is not clear that we have arrived at definitive interpretations of all the aspects of Mengzi's moral philosophy. However, the exceptionally rigorous and inspiring scholarship offered by this collection has laid the groundwork for future inquires, and anyone interested in Chinese thought will benefit greatly from engaging with the authors' enlightening and rewarding reconstructions of Mengzi's moral philosophy. This is a remarkable achievement, especially given the fact that the *Mengzi* is an exceedingly difficult text. In fact, Arthur Waley made a famous remark in 1939 that the arguments in the *Mengzi* are "a mass of irrelevant analogies" that are "nugatory" (cited by Graham, 18). The authors of this volume have shown forcefully that Waley is wrong, and that if we cannot see Mengzi's arguments clearly, we are often at fault. This has, once again, confirmed the hermeneutic wisdom implied in Collingwood's remark about why we used to call the Medieval Age the "Dark Age"—it is not because it was dark, it is because we could not see.

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