

Heart and Person

Early Chinese Thought

As with many traditions of thought in the ancient world, it is virtually impossible for us to put together a systematic picture of early Chinese philosophical views of the person. The textual tradition is often fragmented, and long-standing beliefs about when and by whom certain texts were written, for almost all the important relevant documents, have been seriously called into question by recent archeological and historical investigations. What we have long been told about defined “schools” or, more accurately, lineages of philosophical thought (家 *jia*) that date back to the Warring States period in Chinese history (c. 480–221 BCE) is perhaps dodgy at best. The earliest versions of seminal philosophical works like the *Dao De Jing* include materials that seem to bridge what only later would be neatly categorized Daoist, Confucian, and Mohist thought rather than to demarcate them. And much of the actual corpus of received works from early China was likely composed and compiled at various periods during the Western Han (西漢, 202 BCE–9 CE) rather than in the tumultuous civil war of previous decades and centuries. In what follows, therefore, it must be borne in mind that we are dealing with a broad array of assumptions about what constitutes human beings. Some of these assumptions are shared and some are argued over, in the latter case even among philosophers of largely aligned persuasions. That is to say, we are not dealing here with clearly defined scholastic orthodoxies that are always oppositional with respect to other orthodoxies but with overlapping ideas and arguments in dynamically developing traditions of thought.

Nonetheless, it does seem possible to piece together some of these broadly held assumptions about what constitutes human

existence for the early Chinese thinkers who exerted the longest-lasting influence through history. This chapter will draw largely upon the received texts of the *Mozi* (墨子), *Mengzi* (孟子), *Xunzi* (荀子), and *Zhuangzi* (莊子). These texts will help us see a constellation of those assumptions that were both most widely shared as well as heatedly argued over, since these texts generally contain the most extended narratives and clearest arguments available that help us flesh out these assumptions. Other significant texts will occasionally be called on to supplement the account as well. But the views extracted from these early texts that will be of crucial significance for this study can by way of brief introduction be summarized as follows.¹

First of all, the human body, besides being a living, acting, and speaking creature that is thoroughly and dynamically related to its natural and social environments, is, to a significant degree, conscious. It is, to begin with, enlivened by wind (風 *feng*) and vital vapor (氣 *qi*)² that respond not merely physiologically to changes in the natural surroundings or to different sorts of food and drink but also in dispositional ways to cultural phenomena like music and various kinds of intentional cultivation. Moreover, the body's sensory organs, particularly the eyes and ears, are fairly universally said to themselves desire (欲 *yu*), love (好 *hao*), differentiate (異 *yi*), and know (知 *zhi*) things with which they actively, and not just passively, engage. Depending on the circumstances, the feelings and awareness of the sense organs can be incapacitated, suppressed, obstructed, transformed, or made more acute. But the fact is that the sense organs have specific and entirely natural capacities for sensuously and emotionally involving themselves with things, even at times quite independently of the activities of the heart. The body is therefore often seen as analogous to a kingdom, with each sensory organ being one of its governing officials (官 *guan*), each with its own specific competencies and responsibilities.

The heart (心 *xin*) is, within this larger framework of the conscious body, only one among the collection of natural organs.³ It certainly has physiological functions, including the distribution of vital fluids about the body, which is made especially evident by the fact that the ancient graph for the word includes both the heart muscle as well as the aorta blood vessel. However, there is general agreement that, while the heart is hardly the sole source of awareness, its specific capacities of awareness can lend

to it alternatively an orientational and moral preeminence that in some, though not all, cases is considered the central mark of our humanity. The heart can survey the dispositions or feelings (情 *qing*) of the other sensory organs and select (择 *ze*) which among these, if any, it will follow. It can also approve or disapprove (是非 *shi fei*) of various desires of the other organs, as well as of principles and patterns of conduct that may be recommended by others. It has the unique ability to tally (符 *fu*) the sensations of the other organs and, by virtue of this process, is able to discern everything from whether a thing really is what it is said to be to whether other persons actually conduct themselves in accordance with their pledges and principles. Like the other sense organs, the heart has things that it specifically and spontaneously desires and loves. While some thinkers claim foremost among these is benefit (利 *li*), the *Mengzi* conspicuously singles out feelings such as inner pity (惻隱 *ceyin*) and deference (辭讓 *cirang*), which provide the incipient beginnings of human moral and social virtue. Based on the presence of these special capacities, many early Chinese thinkers deemed the heart to be the governor (治 *zhi*) of the other sense organs. The *Zhuangzi* however, at least in places, is bold in asserting that the heart only takes turns with the other organs in guiding the person's aims and ideals.

Of course, in ancient China, persons are not just sensors, feelers, and thinkers. They also build personal characters that are highly individuated. Indeed, the very comportment of a person's body or his or her countenance was often thought sufficient to reveal aspects of his or her moral character. But the sure touchstones of character were believed to be a person's actions. While in ideal cases words could match deeds in such a way as to indicate trustworthiness, words or guiding principles themselves could also be false, misleading, or calculated to manipulate others to achieve only the speaker's own advantage. In some contexts, such as deceptive forms of warfare or kinds of statecraft, such deception is recommended by some preferred advisors. But, among other lineages of teaching, inconsistencies between words and practice were considered especially dangerous among would-be teachers, exemplars, and especially in ministers and rulers. Only those could be trusted with governing whose maxims and teachings were demonstrably and successfully put into practice in a way that instituted a widely beneficial and sustainable order for all of society. In addition to such things as the continuity of

tradition and varying theories of legitimate rulership, the slowness and modesty of words coupled with virtuosity in conduct were the signs of a person's moral credibility.

However, in some circles of thought represented in the *Zhuangzi*, it was not the consistency of word and deed, nor the ordinary reliability of the body and its senses, nor even the orientational and moral capacities of the heart that could lead one to consummate personhood. For the composers of this almost singularly rare collection of texts, the highest potentials of everyone, from recluse to criminal to craftsman to ruler, lay in spirit (神 *shen*). While words and contesting principles of guidance might lead to endless wrangling, the heart may become fixated and one-sided in its own preferences and 氣 *qi* may become wasted in vain pursuits and disperse at death, the actualization of spirit could make the disabled and the dying into moral models, wheel-makers and butchers into teachers of princes, and recluses into companions of the immortals. While all else may lead to artificiality, spirit enables people to be utterly genuine (真 *zhen*).

The Conscious Body

In her recent work on descriptions of the body in early Chinese thought, Deborah Sommer has identified four distinct but overlapping conceptions that characterized specifically human bodies.⁴ These she gives as the 躬 *gong* or ritualized body that is adorned for and performs the deeds of ceremony; 身 *shen* or the body that accounts for both socially relational and individually cultivated personhood; 形 *xing* or the bodily form, its visible features, shape, and edges; and finally 體 *ti* or the "cosubstantial" body, the body as an organic part of the larger natural, ancestral, and social bodies to which one belongs. Obviously, all of these senses of body are elements of one's personhood. In varying ways, all of these bodies are alive, the *xing* body has a lifespan and can either be healthy or mutilated; the *ti* body consumes food and functions within a natural environment; the *shen* body reflects on its own behaviors, disciplines itself, and carries out social interaction; and the *gong* body fulfills ritually required duties. We will focus especially on the notions of body as form and cultivated personhood in what follows, though the other two senses of body will also be addressed.

The *xing* and *ti* bodies are kept alive by vital powers of various sorts and are nourished by the environment as well as one's conduct. But what is conspicuous about these vital powers and energies is that they are responsive to both the physical and aesthetic surroundings, and they are so not necessarily only in human bodies but in the bodies of all things. The best-known passages evidencing this are in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where Zigong instructs Ziyou about the "piping of heaven" and how all creatures respond to it according to the constitution of their bodies.

夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。是唯无作，作則萬竅怒呿。而獨不聞之
 嚶嚶乎？... 冷風則小和，飄風則大和，厲風濟則眾竅為虛。而
 獨不見之調調、之刁刁乎？

When the Great Clump belches forth its vital breath (氣 *qi*), we call it the wind (風 *feng*). As soon as it arises, raging cries emerge from all the ten thousand hallows. Don't tell me you've never heard of how long the rustling continues, on and on? . . . A light breeze brings a small harmony, while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand (大和 *da he*). And once the sharp wind has passed, all these holes return to their silent emptiness. Have you not seen all the tempered attunements, all the cunning contentions? (*Zhuangzi* 2:3 [Ziporyn 2009, 9])

What we experience as wind is here the vital vapor (氣 *qi*) of the earth as a whole, and when it is emitted, all things that have orifices respond with sound, thus creating a great harmony in nature.

This natural music is emulated in human music, which for Confucian thinkers also has palpable effects on human psychology and behavior.

樂者，聖王之所樂也。而可以善民心其感人深，其移風易俗 . . . 凡姦聲感人 而逆氣應之逆氣成象而亂生焉，正聲感人而順氣應之，順氣成象而治生焉。唱和有應，善惡相象，故君子慎其所去就也。

Music is something which the sage-kings found joy in, for it has the power to make good the hearts of the people, to influence men deeply (移風, *yi feng*—literally meaning

“alters their wind”) and to reform their ways and customs with facility. . . . When depraved sounds move a man, they cause a spirit of rebellion (逆氣 *ni qi*, literally meaning “opposing *qi*”) to arise in him, and when such a spirit has taken shape, then disorder results. But when correct sounds move a man, they cause a spirit of obedience (順氣 *shun qi*, once again, meaning “compliant *qi*”), and when such a spirit has arisen, good order results. As singers blend their voices with that of the leader, so good or evil arise as a response to the force that calls them forth. Therefore, the gentleman is careful to choose his environment.⁵ (*Xunzi* 20:8, 9 [Watson 1963, 118–119])

It is, according to the *Xunzi*, precisely because music has such profound effects on people’s winds and *qi* that the ancient sages were so fastidious in codifying the classical odes and hymns. This great attention to music would not have been necessary to begin with were *qi* itself, within the human body, not both physiologically and psychologically responsive to people’s environing conditions.

Beyond these facts, of course, *qi* can also be intentionally cultivated in ways relevant both to one’s capacities of awareness as well as one’s moral comportment.⁶ The *Zhuangzi* in places dramatically suggests that *qi* can do a far better job of sensing and guiding people through both tasks and perilous social situations than the sense organs themselves, which normally preside over such functions.

若一志, 无聽之以耳而聽之以心, 无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳, 心止於符。氣也者, 虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者, 心齋也。

If you merge all your intentions into a singularity, you will come to hear with the mind (心 *xin* or “heart” should be understood for all references to “mind” in this passage). Further, you will come to hear with the vital energy (氣 *qi*) rather than with the mind. For the ears are halted at what they hear. The mind is halted at whatever verifies its preconceptions (符 *fu*, the “tallies” of the heart).⁷ But the vital energy is an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings. The Course (道 *dao*) alone is what gathers in this emptiness. And it is this emptiness that is the fasting of the mind. (*Zhuangzi* 4:8 [Ziporyn 2009, 26–27])

In addition, in an extended dispute with Gaozi, Mengzi is represented as exploring what sort of role *qi* plays in the process of moral cultivation. In the first instance, Mengzi is actually depicted as agreeing with Gaozi that the source of moral behavior cannot be found in the *qi* since, as we shall see and contra the previous *Zhuangzi* passage, the former believes that source is the heart. But that does not mean in the least that, for the *Mengzi*, *qi* is not an important factor in moral cultivation. On the contrary, the success of moral cultivation depends on how one tends to it. After conceding that a person's aims or will (志 *zhi*) may either be overcome by their *qi* or overcome it, Mengzi is depicted as claiming:

其為氣，至大至剛，以直養而無害，則塞于天地之間。其為氣也，配義與道，無是，餒也。是集義所生者，非義襲而取之也。行有不慊於心，則餒矣。 . . . 無若宋人然；宋人有閔其苗之不長而揠之者，芒芒然歸。謂其人曰，“今日病矣，予助苗長矣。其子趨而往視之，苗則槁矣。天下之不助苗長者寡矣。以為無益而舍之者，不耘苗者也，助之長者，揠苗者也。

It is a *qi* that is supremely great and supremely unyielding. If one cultivates it with uprightness and does not harm it, it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a *qi* that harmonizes with righteousness and the Way. Without these, it starves. It is produced by accumulated righteousness. It cannot be obtained by a seizure of righteousness. If some of one's actions leave one's heart unsatisfied, it will starve. . . . Do not be like the man from Song. Among the people of the state of Song there was a farmer who, concerned lest his sprouts would not grow, pulled on them. Obviously, he returned home and said to his family: "Today I am worn out. I helped the sprouts to grow." His son rushed out and looked at them. The sprouts were withered. Those in the world who do not "help" the sprouts to grow are few. Those who abandon them, thinking it will not help, are those who do not weed their sprouts. (*Mengzi* 2A2 [van Norden 2008, 39–40])

In this construal, we see that *qi* can alternatively sprout "weeds" that will choke a person's character if left untended, or can be ruined by people trying to force it in moral directions, or starve if courses of action persistently unsatisfying to the heart are followed. The

only way to cultivate *qi* that will ensure successful moral conduct is to follow the dictates of rightness (義 *yi*), which, as we shall see, Mengzi believes the heart naturally loves and slowly accumulates (積 *ji*) through a pattern of conduct. This process of accumulation will enable the *qi* to “overflow” and connect the human with the natural order by enabling the former to complete its moral potentials.

All these senses of *qi* that we have examined strongly suggest that it must be considered aware in some important ways. To return in this context to my translation of the term above as “vital vapor,” the most prevalent associations of *qi* in this early Chinese philosophical literature seem to have to do with activities like breathing, the connection between the atmosphere, odors, sounds, and the comportment of the environment to one’s states of health and feeling, as well as internal energies, all of which nurture the body and its collective awareness in significant ways. The body is enlivened by a refined fluid that is dynamically and dispositionally nourished by and responsive to its natural and social environment, and accounts for much in one’s temperament, perception, and habits of conduct. The *qi* can also, it is sometimes said, guide our conduct in the world even more reliably than the other sense organs.

These sense organs, for their part, were considered by classical Chinese philosophers to be aware of their own accords in even more distinct ways. It must be noted that, although the sense organs like the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and flesh are physically susceptible to sensing other material things, that susceptibility does not, in the main, account for their sensing. The engagement of the sense organs with things is consistently described in terms of their specific “desires,” “loves,” and capacities to “differentiate” and “know” things according to their kinds. Indeed, left to their own devices, the attractions of the sense organs to things operate spontaneously and can even become unrestrained.

目欲綦色，耳欲綦聲，口欲綦味，鼻欲綦臭，心欲綦佚。

The eyes desire the greatest extreme of colors, the ears desire the greatest extreme of sounds, the mouth desires the greatest extreme of tastes, the nose desires the greatest extreme of smells, the heartmind desires the greatest extreme of comfort. (*Xunzi* 11:10 [Geaney 2002, 21])

若夫目好色，耳好聽，口好味，心好利，骨體膚理好愉佚，是皆生於人之情性者也。

The eyes' love of color, the ears' love of sounds, the mouth's love of flavors, the heartmind's love of profit, the bones, flesh and skin-lines' love of pleasure and ease: these are all born of a person's *qing* (condition, disposition) and nature. (*Xunzi* 23:8 [Geaney 2002, 19])

In addition to this, Confucian philosophers tend to hold a kind of anthropological universalism with regard to the preferences of the sense organs. They believed that all human eyes, ears, and tongues desire and love the same things, lending warrant to their moral ideals that are made possible by the conviction that all human hearts are also the same in their love for goodness.

口之於味也，有同者焉，耳之於聲也，有同聽焉，目之於色也，有同美焉。至於心，獨無所同然乎？心之所同然者何也，謂理也，義也。

Mouths have the same preferences in flavors, ears have the same preferences in sounds, eyes have the same preferences in attractiveness. When it comes to hearts, are they alone without preferences in common? What is it that hearts prefer in common? I say that it is order and righteousness. (*Mengzi* 6A7 [van Norden 2008, 151])

The *Zhuangzi* of course strongly contests this notion that the sense organs of human beings, most of all the organ of the heart, love the same colors, flavors, and values, but even in this dissent, it agrees that the sense organs are naturally attracted to things of their own initiative. The text drives this point home by comparing the natural attractions of human beings with those of animals but then makes the relativity among human preferences clear by parlaying the point as a criticism of widely held moral virtues. The language that this comparison is put in is most revealing, as it speaks of creatures "knowing" what is best for themselves.

民溼寢則腰疾偏死，鱗然乎哉？木處則惴慄恟懼，猿猴然乎哉？三者孰知正處，民食芻豢，麋鹿食薦，螂且甘帶，鴟鴞耆鼠，四

者孰知正味，猿？獼狽以為雌，麋與鹿交，鱖與魚游。毛嬙，麗姬，人之所美也，魚見之深入，鳥見之高飛，麋鹿見之決驟。四者孰知天下之正色哉？自我觀之，仁義之端，是非之塗，樊然殽亂，吾惡能知其辯！

When people sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If people live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but what about monkeys? Of these three, which “knows” which is the right place to live? People eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which “knows” the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, bucks mount does, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them, they dart into the depths, when birds see them, they soar into the skies, when deer see them, they bolt away without looking back. Which of these four “knows” what is rightly alluring? From where I see it, the transitions of Humanity and Responsibility and the trails of right and wrong are hopelessly tangled and confused. How could I know how to distinguish which is right among them? (*Zhuangzi* 2:8 [Ziporyn 2009, 18])

Despite its skepticism about our ability to articulate what is really better or worse, the passage coheres with the notion that the physical sense capacities of creatures, both animal and human, which seek comfort, flavor, and allure, are conscious, are themselves attracted to things and impel individuals to pursue them.

As the previous *Zhuangzi* passage reveals, in addition to having their own attractions and loves, the sense organs themselves, and sometimes the body as an integrated whole, are widely said to “know.” It is highly significant, as Jane Geaney has pointed out, that the textual tradition largely employs the same term, 知 *zhi*, to characterize the knowledge both of the sense organs and the heart.⁸ In different contexts, the *Mozi* speaks extensively to the body’s and sense organs’ direct capacities for knowledge. When condemning ancient, malevolent rulers for indulging their needs for sensual gratification at the expense of the populous, the text speaks of pleasing sounds, sights, flavors, and states of comfort:

雖身知其安也, 口知其甘也, 目知其美也, 耳知其樂也, 然上考之不中聖王之事; 下度之不中萬民之利。

Although the body knows they are comfortable, the mouth knows they are gratifying, the eyes know they are delightful and the ears know they are pleasing, yet they are found not to be in accordance with the deeds of the sage-kings of antiquity and not to contribute to the benefits of the people at present. (*Mozi* 32:1 [Mei 1929, 175])

Here it is the naturally and socially relational 身 *shen* body of Sommer's classification that knows comforts. And, in its extended discussions favoring the evidence for the existence of ghosts and spirits and refuting the existence of fate, the *Mozi* takes the hearing and sight of the people, and certainly that of the ancient sages, as sufficient standards (法 *fa*) upon which to base the credibility of such beliefs.

是與天下之所以察知有與無之道者, 必以眾之耳目之實知有與亡為儀者也; 請惑聞之見之, 則必以為有。

The way to find out whether anything exists or not is to depend on the testimony of the ears and eyes of the multitude. If some have heard it and some have seen it then we have to say it exists. If no one has heard it and no one has seen it then we have to say it does not exist. (*Mozi* 31:3 [Mei 1929, 161])

今天下之士君子或以命為亡, 我所以知命之有與亡者, 以眾人耳目之情, 知有與亡. 有聞之, 有見之, 謂之有; 莫之聞, 莫之見, 謂之亡. 然胡不嘗考之百姓之情? 自古以及今, 生民以來者, 亦嘗見命之物, 聞命之聲者乎? 則未嘗有也. 若以百姓為愚不肖, 耳目之情不足因而為法, 然則胡不嘗考之諸侯之傳言流語乎? 自古以及今, 生民以來者, 亦嘗有聞命之聲, 見命之體者乎? 則未嘗有也.

Among the gentlemen of today some think there is fate and some think there is no fate. That I am able to judge whether there is fate or not is by the sense-testimony of the multitudes. If some have heard it and some have seen it, I shall say there is fate. If none has heard it, none has seen

it, I shall say there is no fate. Why not then let us inquire into the sense-testimony of the people? From antiquity to the present, since the beginning of man, has any seen such a thing as fate, or has any heard the sound of fate? Of course, there is none. If the common people are considered stupid and their senses of hearing and sight unreliable, then why not inquire into the recorded statements of the feudal lords? But from antiquity to the present, since the beginning of man, has any of them heard the sound of fate or seen such a thing as fate? Of course, none of them has. (*Mozi* 36:2 [Mei 1929, 189–190])

There is, of course, also the famous passage in the *Mengzi*, quoting the *Zuozhuan*, where heaven itself is said to use the ears and eyes of the people as indications of whether or not rulers are being benevolent toward them and thus whether or not they are worthy to rule.

天視自我民視; 天聽自我民聽。

Heaven sees as my people see. Heaven hears as my people hear. (*Mengzi* 5A5 [van Norden 2008, 124])

In the process of such direct sensory knowing, the organs have the capacity to “differentiate” (異 *yi*) among the things to which they are naturally susceptible.

形體, 色理以目異; 聲音清濁, 調竽, 奇聲以耳異; 甘, 苦, 鹹, 淡, 辛, 酸, 奇味以口異; 香, 臭, 芬, 鬱, 腥, 臊, 漏廔, 奇臭以鼻異; 疾, 癢, 滄, 熱, 滑, 鉞, 輕, 重以形體異; 說, 故, 喜, 怒, 哀, 樂, 愛, 惡, 欲以心異。

Forms, bodies, colors and patterns are differentiated by the eye. Sounds and tones, clear and muddy, modes and harmony and strange sounds are differentiated by the ear. Sweet, bitter, salty, bland, pungent, sour, and strange tastes are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrances and stench, perfumes and rotten orders, putrid and rancid smells, dank and sour smells as well as strange smells are differentiated by the nose. Illness and wellness, cold and hot, smooth and sharp, light and heavy are differentiated by the form and

body. Speech and causes, happiness and anger, sadness and joy, loves, hates and desires are differentiated by the heartmind. (*Xunzi* 22:5 [Geaney 2002, 44–45])

Here, while the heart has specific things like dispositional feeling states as well as “speech and causes,” the other sense organs directly differentiate among their specific contents without any mediation from the heart at all. It should also be noted that the “form and body” that differentiate among tactile sensations, temperature states, and states of health are identified as what Sommer would call both the body as form and the “cosubstantial body” (形體 *xing ti*). The fact that the body and sense organs distinguish not only between different shades of color, pitches of sound, kinds of texture, and so on, but also whether the sensations are appealing or repulsive in various ways is also indicative of their abilities of both sensation and affect.⁹

From all of the foregoing, we can conclude that early Chinese thinkers generally believed that the body was almost entirely and vibrantly conscious. The basic energies that give it vitality were considered physiologically and even psychologically responsive to the environment and were even amenable to being moved by everything from music to moral cultivation. The sense organs themselves, even independently of the heart, were robustly aware not only of the seen, heard, touched, and felt features of things but of their aesthetic qualities and how these qualities were either naturally attractive or repellent to human sensibilities. Each organ was considered to have its own “office,” which it could not, as the *Xunzi* asserts, trade with the other organs. In this framework of thought, the heart was by no means the only seat of awareness in the person but rather was merely considered another bodily organ. Though it has crucial and in some cases uniquely human powers, the heart had to cooperate with the other systems of awareness in the body in order to guide it in the ways that different philosophers idealized.

The Heart: Keeping Tallies and Moral Feelings

Though it cannot be overemphasized that, in classical Chinese thought, the heart is only one of the body’s many systems of awareness, it is just as important to realize that the heart’s specific modes

of awareness, for most philosophers of the period under discussion, make it the ruler of the body and make us persons.

耳目鼻口形能各有接而不相能也: 夫是之謂天官. 心居中虛, 以治五官: 夫是之謂天君.

Ear, eye, nose, mouth and form, each has its own contacts (lit., “receptions” or “meetings”) and does not do things for the others. Now these are called the heavenly officials. The heartmind dwells in the central cavity and governs the five officials. This is called the heavenly ruler. (*Xunzi* 17:4 [Geaney 2009, 19])

無惻隱之心, 非人也; 無羞惡之心, 非人也; 無辭讓之心, 非人也; 無是非之心, 非人也.

If one is without the feeling (心 *xin* here can be understood as heart or feeling) of compassion, one is not human (“a person” is probably a better choice for 人 *ren*). If one is without the feeling of disdain, one is not human. If one is without the feeling of deference, one is not human. If one is without the feeling of approval and disapproval, one is not human. (*Mengzi* 2A6 [van Norden 2002, 46])

This predominantly Confucian view renders the heart as the nobleman or leader (君 *jun*) of the body as well as the organ that, by virtue of its possession of certain feelings, makes us into persons. Despite the fact that the text of the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* famously diverge on how such moral feelings are acquired, whether they are achieved through ritual or are inborn, there is a rather pronounced sphere of agreement between them regarding the heart’s special powers relative to the other sense organs. Some of these powers are acknowledged by texts with avowedly non-Confucian philosophical persuasions as well, witnessing to at least some ancient consensus on the heart’s constitutive role in our humanity.

First, while the other sense organs can know and be attached to things directly, as we have seen, the heart has what the *Xunzi* calls a “levying knowledge” (徵知 *zheng zhi*) with regard to its contents. It seems that, in the heart’s knowledge, two steps occur, the first being the presentation of the other sense organs’ aware-

ness to it and the second being the heart's "speaking" or perhaps identifying (說 *shuo*) each of those things.

心有微知。微知，則緣耳而知聲可也；緣目而知形可也。然而微知必將待天官之當 簿其類，然後可也。五官簿之而不知，心微知而無說，則人莫不然謂之不知。此所緣 而以同異也。

The heartmind has verifying knowledge. There is verifying knowledge; thus, because of [lit., caused by] the ear, it is possible to know sounds; because of [caused by] the eye, it is possible to know forms. However, verifying must await the heavenly officials' meeting and recording their kinds in order to be possible. If the five officials record without knowing, or if the heartmind verifies without speaking, then people will not fail to pronounce it "not knowing." It is this that causes sameness and difference. (*Xunzi* 22:5 [Geaney 2002, 48])

It is also surely important that the passage mentions at the end the ascertainment of "sameness and difference" (同異 *tong yi*) as a specific result of this process of "levying" or "verifying" knowledge. There are other passages in the *Xunzi* that suggest that the "employment" (使 *shi*) of the heart's special capacities is necessary in order for people to be fully aware of the things that they experience.

心不使焉，則白黑在前而目不見；雷鼓在側而耳不聞，況於使者乎？

If the heartmind is not being applied to it, then black and white may be right before one's eyes and not be seen; thunder and drums may be at one's side and one will not hear them. How much more so with one whose heartmind is occupied by something? (*Xunzi* 21:1 [Geaney 2002, 96])

It is perhaps not possible for us to put together an entirely complete picture based on these allusions. We know from the previous passages that the sense organs of sight, hearing, and so on are able to discriminate (辨 *bian*) specific things from their background contexts as well as differentiate (異 *yi*) between things, so it may at first seem puzzling that in the immediately preceding passage the use of the

heart appears to be required in order for people to attend to things and recognize them for what they are. One way to resolve this conundrum might focus on the fact that, while the sense organs themselves may be able to identify things belonging to the same kind (类 *lei*), which is to say that the eyes, for example, can see a specific hue of “blue” as an instance of the color “blue,” and the ears can hear a particular peal of “thunder” as an instance of the sound “thunder,” they may not, on the *Xunzi*’s account, be able to compare “blue” with “thunder” or “grey” with “drums” by themselves. In the ascertainment of “sameness” and “difference,” the heart may be needed to exact the necessary “levy.” Elsewhere, the *Xunzi* very elliptically corroborates something like this view with the claim that the sense organs, with regard to the same kinds (类 *lei*) of things, intend just those things (意物 *yi wu*), and, because of this, the ancient sage rulers were able to codify “definite names” (約名 *yue ming*) for things that everyone in society could agree to use.¹⁰ In other words, the sameness (同 *tong*) of things, and thus the possibility of associating similar individual things into “kinds,” may be drawn from the sense organs themselves but not difference (異 *yi*), since telling the differences between things requires the knowledge of the heart. This depiction would not by any means deprive the other sense organs of the direct awareness of which they are themselves capable but would only enlist the special awareness of the heart.

In any event, the “levying knowledge” referred to here seems to have to do with the other sense organs’ meeting and recording their contents that are registered by the heart, for since the eyes cannot hear and the ears cannot see, the heart weighs the contents of each of the senses and perhaps associates their contents with one another in such a way as to make robust sense of attentive sensation and perception. Once again, the *Xunzi* seems to be alluding to two kinds of knowledge, one being the 知 *zhi* that people normally have through their sense organs, and the other being the 智 *zhi* or “understanding” that is brought about when they are able to “unify” things (所合 *suo he*), the latter of which, presumably, requires the capacities of the heart being discussed.¹¹

This may be corroborated by what the *Xunzi* and a few other texts of the classical period say about the heart’s ability to “tally” (符 *fu*). In denouncing the views of the *Mengzi* on the inborn character of human nature, the text credits the power with the

ability to observe and distinguish between phenomena, determine which characterizations and claims made about them are accurate or inaccurate, and apply those conclusions to conduct in successful ways.

凡論者貴其有辨合，有符驗。故坐而言之，起而可設，張而可施行。

In terms of those who analyze things, there is value in discrimination and matching, as well as tallying and confirming. Those who sit and talk should be able to stand and show that what they say can be established—that it can be enacted over a wide area. (*Xunzi* 23:13 [Geaney 2002, 94])

The heart's tallying here, and in other passages in the *Xunzi*, enables people to determine what things are and classify them accurately. The activity of tallying is in other places associated with the establishment of standard weights and measures, for example. Properly demonstrating that its discriminations and classifications help identify things and make them usable in human interaction, and even transaction, helps to establish social trust (信 *xin*).

合符節，別契券者，所以為信也。

Uniting the halves of tallies and tokens and separating contracts and deeds are the reason for trust. (*Xunzi* 12:2 [Geaney 2002, 94])

As Geaney pertinently points out, tallies in ancient China were sticks with matched notches that were broken in half, each half given to the parties of an agreement as a token of the contract.¹² With regard to the heart's special kind of knowing, then, tallying appears to classify things correctly and, on the basis of this classification, empowers people to tell correct from incorrect and use things for beneficial social ends. Failed tallies don't match visual sensations and words, kinds with kinds, and such failures not only make proper orientation in the world impossible but also render things unserviceable for reliable social use. It is interesting that the *Zhuangzi*, for as much as it mistrusts the standards of the heart to perhaps an even greater degree than the *Xunzi* trusts them, does not deny that tallying is the

function of the heart even while emphasizing that tallying represents the heart's limitation: "The heart stops at tallying" (心止於符).¹³

One broad agreement among early Chinese philosophers appears to be about the heart's capacity to select (擇 *ze*) which feelings it will prefer. The other sense organs have their natural desires, loves, and attractions, but the heart can decide which of these, if any, are to be preferred in terms of determining which course of conduct will be followed. This process of selection is represented in various ways as a kind of "pondering" or "reflecting" or "thinking."

性之好, 惡, 喜, 怒, 哀, 樂謂之情. 情然而心為之擇謂之慮.

The nature's love, hatred, pleasure, anger, sadness and happiness: [we] call this *qing* [condition, disposition]. Given that the *qing* is like this: the heartmind's acting upon this and selecting, [we] call this pondering. (*Xunzi* 22:7 [Geaney 2002, 86])

The terms 性 *xing* and 情 *qing* in this passage are difficult to translate with precision. While Geaney and many others render the former as "nature," and while there is some justification in this translation, the term 性 *xing* in classical and even modern Chinese is often closely allied with people's mood and temperament, as well as the *qi* that constitutes one's gender (both of these associations are invoked in the *Shuowen Jiezi*). Similarly, 情 *qing* can in many contexts be associated with "feelings" or "emotions," and the fact that this passage lists a series of emotional states beginning with "love" and "hatred" appear to indicate that what is being discussed here is that the heart's activity (為 *wei*) can be described as selecting (擇 *ze*) which of these feelings to prioritize. The "pondering" (慮 *lu*) that the *Xunzi* calls this activity of the heart seems also to be what the *Mengzi* has in mind when it speaks of the heart's native ability to "think" or "reflect" (思 *si*).

耳目之官不思, 而蔽於物, 物交物, 則引之而已矣. 心之官則思, 思則得之, 不思則不得也. 此天之所與我者, 先立乎其大者, 則其小者弗能奪也. 此為大人 而已矣.

It is not the function (lit., the "office," 官 *guan*) of the ears and eyes to reflect, and they are misled (lit., "obfuscated"

蔽 *bi*) by things. Things interact with other things and simply lead them along. But the function of the heart is to reflect. If it reflects, then it will get it. If it does not reflect, then it will not get it. This is what Heaven has given us. If one first takes one's stand on what is greater, then what is lower will not be able to snatch it away. This is how to become a great person. (*Mengzi* 6A15 [van Norden 2008, 156])

One of the preferred motifs of the *Mengzi* is the representation of the heart as the "greater" of all the other sense organs, calling it the greater part of one's 身 *shen* body, than the other parts and esteeming people who prefer its own desires over the desires of the other organs in the very next section. Here, the superiority of the heart over the other organs lies in its power to "reflect" and not simply be "pulled away" as the other organs supposedly are by their immediate desires for and engagements with things. Obtaining the things that are most appropriate to the idealized aims of human existence depends, for the *Mengzi*, on the heart's unique potential to reflect. But notable here also is the fact that the heart is not said to automatically reflect. The activity apparently takes some effort and therefore, in both the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, requires training and cultivation in order to reflect in a way that ensures the right moral choices.

For the *Xunzi*, the uneducated, unritualized, and uncultivated heart spontaneously prefers whatever feelings and actions will accrue to its own benefit (利 *li*), and this is primarily why the untrained dispositions of human feeling are judged by the received text to be "deformed," "ugly," or as many somewhat misleading translations have it, "evil" (惡 *e*). The *Mengzi*, by famous contrast, asserts that the heart has incipient feelings of compassion and respect, shame and the capacity to approve and disapprove of environing conditions, and it is only because of these feelings that people can become morally virtuous. Citing its most well-known example of the spontaneous, unpremeditated distress and pity that overtake the heart when one sees a child about to unsuspectingly fall into a well, the *Mengzi* argues:

惻隱之心，仁之端也；羞惡之心，義之端也；辭讓之心，禮之端也；是非之心，智之端也。人之有是四端也，猶其有四體也。有是四端而自謂不能者，自賊者也，謂其君不能者，賊其君者也。

凡有四端於我者，知皆擴而充之矣，若火之始然，泉之始達。苟能充之，足以保四海；苟不充之，不足以事父母。

The feeling of compassion is the sprout of benevolence. The feeling of disdain is the sprout of righteousness. The feeling of deference is the sprout of propriety. The feeling of approval and disapproval is the sprout of wisdom. People having these four sprouts is like their having four limbs. To have these four sprouts, yet to claim that one is incapable (of virtue), is to steal from oneself. To say that one's ruler is incapable is to steal from one's ruler. In general, having these four sprouts within oneself, if one knows how to fill them all out, it will be like a fire starting up, a spring breaking through! If one can merely fill them out, they will be sufficient to care for all within the Four Seas. If one fails to fill them out, they will be insufficient to care for one's parents. (*Mengzi* 2A6 [van Norden 2008, 46–47])

One finds in this connection an almost shocking correspondence in the *Zhuangzi*, where it is said that, of one "restriction" (戒 *jie*) conferred by heaven and the other dictated by propriety, the first, conferred by heaven, is:

子之愛親，命也；不可解於心。

A child's love for his parents is fate; it cannot be removed from his heart. (*Zhuangzi* 4:3 [Ziporyn 2009, 28])

On this aforementioned construal of the *Mengzi's*, what makes the heart the "nobleman" or "leader" (君 *jun*) of the person are the incipient beginnings of feeling that, when developed through cultivation and learning and extended to others, become the perfected virtues that can in turn make a person into a "nobleman" (君子 *junzi*). For the *Mengzi* then, the heart, like the other sense organs, has its own desires, its own natural pleasures, which, just like the other sense organs, can be obstructed and denied, but which make the heart superior to the other senses because what the heart loves are feelings that enable people to become moral.

We have seen in this section that rather wide-ranging agreement seemed to prevail among early Chinese philosophers, partic-