

맹자의 성선설과 순자의 성악설: 진화론적 윤리 론 관점의 해석

Mencius' Goodness of Human Nature vs. Xunzi's Evil of Human Nature: An Explanation from the Perspective of Evolutionary Ethics

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맹자(372-289 BC)가 인간의 본성이 선하다고 주장한 이후로 인간의 본성이 선한지 악한지는 중국에서 지속된 난해한 주제이다. 이러한 맹자의 주장은 인간의 본성이 악하다고 주장하는 순자(325-238 BC)에 의해 반박되어 왔다. 그러나 다윈의 진화론적 윤리설에 이르러 우리는 인간 본성의 양자택일적 혹은 이분법적 관점을 뛰어넘는 방법이 있을 수 있다는 것을 알게 된다. 잘 알려졌다시피 다윈은 생존을 위한 동물들의 투쟁을 통하여 인간과 집단의 상호의존성을 우리에게 상기시켰다. 이 상호의존성이 상황에 따라 개인이 선 혹은 악, 이타적 혹은 이기적일 확률을 결정한다.

모든 생명체는 그들 자신의 유전자 복제를 진작하기 위해 그 자손이 필수적이며, 그러므로 그 자손들의 안전을 지켜야 한다. 이러한 관점에서 그 자손에 대한 개인의 보살핌은 이타적인 동시에 이기적이다. 자손을 위해 자신의

생명체와 이익을 희생하므로 이타적이다. 그러나 자손을 통해 자신의 유전자를 복제하고 존재를 지속시키므로 이기적이다. 그러므로 우리는 모든 생명체는 어느 정도는 사회적이면서 이기적이라 말할 수 있다.

하지만 고난의 시기나 기근일 때 개인의 생존 본능은 사회적 본능을 압도하며 동류에 해를 끼치거나 잡아먹게 한다. 예를 들어, 무당벌레나 거미는 먹을 것이 없는 경우 생존을 위해 자신의 형제를 잡아 먹을 것이다. 먹을 것이 없다는 상황은 악이 드러나도록 한다. 뿐만 아니라 지성이 집단의 결속을 증진시킬지라도 지성 역시도 사회적 본능과 어긋날 수 있다. 지적인 계산에 따라 개인은 자기 종의 생존보다 자신의 생존을 혹은 자신의 장기적인 이익보다 단기적인 이익을 선호할 가능성이 높다. 이에 따라 악이 발생한다. 그러므로 인간은 지성에 있어 개미보다 우월하지만, 인간의 이혜타산으로 인하여 개미보다 이타적일 수는 없을 것이다.

선과 악, 이기심과 이타심, 개인과 가족의 상호의존성을 고려하면 우리는 악 역시 타고난 인간 본성이며, 한 개인이 자신의 이익과 집단의 이익을 적절히 균형을 맞출 만큼 지적이지 않은 경우 혹은 이기적 욕망에 물들었거나 압도된 경우에 나타날 것이라 말할 수 있다. 이러한 상황에서 그는 자신의 유전자와 존재를 동족의 도움 없이도 보전할 수 있거나 혹은 자신의 유전자를 존속시키는데 동족을

위험요소라 판단할 수 있다. 이러한 사례는 사회가 더욱 발전할수록 동족의 도움이 필요없기 때문에 사람이 더욱 이기적이고 사악하게 변하는 이유를 제시한다.

그러므로 이 진화론적 기초를 참고하여 맹자가 혈연적 이타주의는 가족에 대하여 무제한이기 때문에 인간 본성의 선함을 주장했다고 우리는 말할 수 있다. 순자는 개인이 동족의 희생을 통해서라도 자신의 생존을 위해 투쟁한다고 보았기 때문에 인간의 본성이 악하다고 주장했다. 하지만 맹자도 악의 존재를 부정하지도 않았고 순자 역시 인간 심성에 의로움[義]의 감정이 있으며 인간이 사회적이라는 사실을 부정하지 않았다. 다시 말해서 맹자나 순자나 모두 생존이 인간 본성의 선과 악을 결정하는 역할을 함을 깨달았다. 맹자는 인간 본성이 가족(동족)의 생존을 위하여 선하게 된다고 주장했으며 이는 순자도 부인하지 않았다. 순자는 인간의 본성이 개인의 생존 때문에 악하게 된다고 주장했다. 구체적으로 순자는 타인을 고려하지 않는 이기적인 소유를 위한 개인의 끝이 없는 욕망을 말하였는데 이는 맹자도 인정한 부분이다. 따라서 우리는 진화론적 윤리설의 관점에서 인간 본성에 대한 맹자와 순자의 논쟁에 새로운 시각을 제공하기를 바란다.

Abstract

Whether human nature is good or evil has been a lasting and puzzling topic in China since Mencius (372-289 BC) proposed that human nature is good. It has been refuted by Xunzi's(325- 238 BC) proposition of human nature being evil. However, when we come to Darwin's evolutionary ethics, we find there may be a way to transcend the either-or dichotomic view of human nature. As is known, Darwin reminded us of the interdependence of individual and group, especially in animals' struggle for survival. This interdependence determines the likelihood that an individual can be either good or evil, altruistic or selfish innately in terms of circumstances.

From the perspective that all creatures need their offspring to promote the copying of their own genes and thus secure the safety of their offspring, an individual's care of its offspring is both altruistic and selfish. It is altruistic because it sacrifices its own life and interest for its offspring; but it is selfish because it copies its own genes and continues its existence through its offspring. Hence, we can say, all creatures are, to some degree, social and altruistic.

However, at hard times or famine, individual's instinct of survival may overshadow his social instinct and lead him to harm or consume his same kind. For example, ladybugs

and spiders will consume their siblings in order to survive when there is no food. This leads to the appearance of evil. Moreover, although intelligence can enhance the unity of a group, it can work against social instinct, too. With the calculation of intelligence, an individual would be likely to give preference to self survival over the survival of the species, or the individual's short-term interest over his long term interest, and thus produce evil. Hence, human beings are superior to ants in their intelligence, but will not be as altruistic as ants because of the calculation of human beings.

Considering the interdependence of good and evil, selfish and unselfish, individual and family, we can say, evil is also innate in human nature, and will rise when an individual is not intelligent enough to balance his own interest with the group's interest, or when he is trained or overwhelmed by selfish concerns. For at the situation, he would assume that he can continue his genes or existence without the help of his same kind, or see his same kind as a threat to the continuance of his own genes. This explains why the more advanced a society is, the more selfish or evil the people will become, for they do not need the aid of his same kind.

Hence, taking this evolutionary framework as reference, we can say Mencius claimed human nature to be good because he found kin altruism was unconditional in a family. Xunzi assumed that human nature was evil because he found that individuals struggled for their survival at the sacrifice of their same kind. However, neither Mencius denied the existence of evil, nor Xunzi denied the fact that human heart-mind had the feeling of appropriateness/yi, and human beings were social. In other words, both Mencius and Xunzi realized the role of survival determined the goodness or evil of human nature. Mencius proposed human nature to be good from the survival of the family (species) which Xunzi did not deny; Xunzi claimed human nature to be evil from the survival of the individual, i.e., the individual's undue desires for selfish possessions regardless of others, which Mencius also acknowledged. Therefore, we hope to provide a new explanation of Mencius and Xunzi's debate of human nature from the perspective of evolutionary ethics.

Whether human nature is good or evil has been a lasting and puzzling topic in China since Mencius (372-289 BC) proposed that human nature is good. It has been refuted by Xunzi's(325- 238 BC) proposition of human nature being evil. However, the general trend for Chinese people is to believe that human nature is good, and everyone has been endowed with a conscience innately, and people can be moved to good through moral education and good deeds.

When we come to Darwin's evolutionary ethics, we find there may be a way to transcend the either-or view of human nature. This way is to explain human nature from the perspective of the survival instincts of a creature. When an individual's or his/her child is not threatened, he/she generally inclines to help his/her neighbors or strangers in need, and improve the chance of survival of his/her own kind. Alexander Sutherland hence stated, "The emergent type in the end is that wherein parental and conjugal sympathies widen out into general social sympathies, as possibilities arise, without endangering his own existence or that of his family, to lend a helping hand to other individuals under less happy circumstances, the average chances of the race are thereby improved." (1974 vol.1:292) This help is Darwin's social instinct which guides community selection, determining human nature to be good.

When an individual's or his/her child is threatened, he/she will compete for resources with his/her own kind. This competition will cause his/her attack or killing of others, and is what Xunzi said human nature is evil. If we read carefully the text of the Mencius, we can also find that Mencius admitted that human beings would become evil during famine although he claimed human nature is potentially to be good. Hence, if we explain human nature from the perspective of survival, we can account for why human nature can be good or evil according to circumstances, and will step out the baseless imagination that human nature is either good or evil.

Recently, a few scholars have started to explore Mencius from the perspective of evolutionary ethics. Donald Munro (2002) explains Confucian ethics from the perspective of evolutionary ethics, and argues that recent theories in the evolutionary sciences regarding the basis of altruism and infant bonding might lend credence to Mencius' of human nature. Such theories, says Munro, support Mencius' contention that moral concepts derive from something that is inborn. In an essay, Ryan Nicolas (2011) aims to

understand how the Early Confucianism represented in the Analects and the Mencius converted biological and evolutionary norms into social and moral norms. However, he mainly explains filial piety from the perspective of reciprocal altruism, and does not understand that Confucians and Daoists explain filial piety in terms of the same origin and the empathetic one of the living things. James Behuniak, Jr. (2011) naturalizes Mencius mainly from Dewey's philosophy of process although he mentions Munro's evolutionary view of Mencius. Wang Miquan (2016) says that Mencius' goodness of human nature can be supported with evolutionary ethics, but Xunzi's emphasis on culture makes up what Mencius' theory ignores. But Wang neither explains how Darwin's social instinct can be identify with Mencius' goodness of human nature, nor how to distinguish morality from ants' social behavior from the perspective of culture and intelligence. Cai Zhen (2016) addresses that the biology of primates and evolutionary ethics provide empirical support for Mencius' theory of sympathy and goodness of human nature. Based on De Waal's evolutionary moral theory, Cai defends Mencius' moral internalism and rejects veneer theory, especially Gaozi's moral theory. But he does not explain the rise of evil and the reaction of human intelligence to human nature and social instinct.

I have traced the origin of Confucian sympathy to social instincts and parental care, but insists that filial piety is more than social instinct. It is a mixture of reciprocal altruism and infant bonding based on human intelligence, which elevates human beings above ants and bees and make morality possible.(Tan 2012) Recently, I find that Confucian and Daoist theories of the organic unity of all creatures bolster benevolence more than reciprocal altruism, which many evolutionary ethicists neglect.

1. An Evolutionary Explanation of the Goodness of Human Nature

Mencius assumed that human nature is good. His famous argument runs, "Human nature is good just as water runs to low place. There is no body without good nature as there is no water not running to low place." In other words, if it is immanent and spontaneous for water to run to low place, it should be immanent and spontaneous for human nature to be good too. With regard to the content of human nature, Mencius said,

The feeling of commiseration belongs to all men; so does that of shame and dislike; and that of reverence and respect; and that of approving and disapproving. The feeling of commiseration implies the principle of benevolence; that of shame and dislike, the principle of righteousness; that of reverence and respect, the principle of propriety; and that of approving and disapproving, the principle of knowledge. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge are not infused into us from without. We are certainly furnished with them. And a different view is simply owing to want of reflection. (Mencius 6A.6, James Legge's translation)

This implies that the content of human nature is benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom, with the feelings of commiseration, shame and dislike, respect and reverence, approving and disapproving as their manifestations. Confirmed with practice, people will run to save the child who crawls near the verge of a well, or feel upset and uneasy when seeing a stranger's suffering.

However, Mencius did not explain why human nature is good despite his detailed descriptions. From people's saving the child and feeling uneasy about other's suffering, we can infer that human beings should be endowed with something common. This common endowment arouses everyone that other's danger and suffering are closely bound with themselves, or implies that the danger and suffering will fall on themselves soon. What is this common endowment? It is the vitality of life 生意 in Confucianism, and the survival instinct in Darwinian evolutionary ethics. It is because of his respect of the vitality of the weed's life that Zhou Dunyi refused to remove them from the front of his window. In his understanding, the weed likes him, is a kind of life and needs survival. Similarly, based on his fondness of survival instinct, Alexander Sutherland concluded that human beings forms social sympathy and offer a helping hand to other individuals under less happy circumstances.

Hence, we can conclude that the goodness of human nature for Mencius is Zhou Dunyi's vitality of life, and the survival instinct in evolutionary ethics. This survival instinct is immanent in all life forms, so we feel miserable about our next-of-kin's suffering, are ready to lessen birds and beasts' suffering, and even are troubled by the destruction of weeds and trees.

It should be noted that the goodness of human nature in Mencius' context is not determined. Although the goodness of human nature likes water's running to low place, Mencius admitted that it could be changed by situation too. Just as water can run to east and west and upward with a pump's support, human nature can become good or evil in terms of circumstance. He said,

In good years the children of the people are most of them good, while in bad years the most of them abandon themselves to evil. It is not owing to any difference of their natural powers conferred by Heaven that they are thus different. The abandonment is owing to the circumstances through which they allow their minds to be ensnared and drowned in evil. (Mencius 6A.7)

Now that human nature can be changed upon circumstances, it implies that human nature in Mencius' context is a kind of potentiality instead of a fact. Neo-Confucian scholars interpreted Mencius' theory of human nature from this perspective, seeing benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom as a potential of human beings, needing to be fulfilled through learning and practice.

2. An Evolutionary Explanation of the Evil of Human Nature

Xunzi assumed that human nature is evil. He said,

Now, the nature of man is such that he is born with a love of profit. Following this nature will cause its aggressiveness and greedy tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear. Humans are born with feelings of disgust of evil, indulging these feelings cause violence and crime to develop and loyalty and trustworthiness to perish. Man is born possessing the desires of the ears and eyes (which are fond of sounds and colors).

Indulging these desires causes dissolute and wanton behavior to result and ritual and moral principles, precepts of good form, and the natural order of reason to perish. ...If we consider the implications of these facts, it is plain that human nature is evil and that any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. (Xunzi: 23.1a)

It is obvious that Xunzi discussed human nature from the perspective of consequence and potential. He just pointed out that following this nature, an evil result will appear. In other words, if a person could moderate his desires for profit, women and his disgust of evil, his nature would not lead him to be evil. For this reason, Xunzi proposed to moderate human nature with ritual propriety.

Why people's desires for profit and women and their disgust of evil will result in evil? Xunzi did not provide a clear explanation. We can add, people's desires for profit and women and their disgust of evil degenerate into evil because they harm other people when securing their fulfillments. However, before they infringe on others' interest, they are good and common to all living creatures. The former is crucial to the survival and reproduction; the latter is closely related to their self-protection. Hence, we can conclude that the desires for profit and women and the disgust of evil are the "vitality of life" that all living things possess. Without them, a living thing would become a dead clod.

Therefore, Xunzi's theory of human nature concerns about the vitality of life or the survival instinct, too. What he admonished is a person should not infringe on other's interest when fulfilling his desires. If we view them from the perspective of the vitality of life, we can find that desires for profit and women and disgust of evil are identical with benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom. For this reason, Mencius claimed, "bodily forms are identical with heavenly nature", that is, desires for food and women are human nature too. Failing to fulfill a person's food and sex, it will do harm to human life and result in cruelty. At this point, Wang Fuzhi shed his insight:

If we know the reason why human beings are different from beasts, we will find that in the classification of human being's fondness of food and love of sex, there are perfect benevolence and righteousness. We should not identify human being's fondness of food and love of sex with animal's. (Wang 1996: 1025)

Wang Fuzhi set a limit for the fondness of food and love of sex. He said,

Thus, Mencius regarded all of these bodies and shapes as lovely and beautiful. All so-called bad bodies and shapes are not bad in themselves. The cause of evil lies in the untimely and imprudent actions of human beings interacting with material things.

Hence, a person's love of courage, profit and sex is the manifestation of heavenly virtue and the Kingly Way. Otherwise, a person would turn commiseration, shame and honor, right and wrong and respect and reverence into evil if he attaches to the pursuit of things and forgets his nature.(Wang1996: 960)

3. Survival Instinct determines a person to be either good or evil

Based on above discussion, we can conclude that both Mencius and Xunzi's theories of human nature can be subsumed under the vitality of life or the survival instincts of living creature. Mencius theory of good nature aims to promote the vitality of life positively, while Xunzi's theory of evil nature cautions the overflowing of desires and their harm to the vitality of life. However if the desires for profit and sex and the disgust of evil are controlled in due measure, they are no difference from Mencius' benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom, and succeed in the security of vitality of life. If the feelings of commiseration, shame and honor, respect and reverence, right and wrong are improperly expressed, they can result in evil too. At this point, we believe, we can transcend the debate between Mencius and Xunzi if we discuss human nature from the perspective of vitality of life or the survival instinct of living creatures.

As is known, Darwin reminded us of the interdependence of individual and group, especially in animals' struggle for survival. This interdependence determines the likelihood that an individual can be either good or evil, altruistic or selfish innately in terms of circumstances.

From the perspective that all creatures need their offspring to promote the copying of their own genes and thus secure the safety of their offspring, an individual's care of its offspring is both altruistic and selfish. It is altruistic because it sacrifices its own life and interest for its offspring; but it is selfish because it copies its own genes and continues its existence through its offspring. Hence, we can say, all creatures are, to some degree, social and altruistic. Frederic Cuvier thus concluded that moral conscience, a seemingly distinctive human trait, was rooted in the animal instinct of sociability.(Richar 1987:65) Therefore, the safety of one's offspring is the continuance of one's existence, and all

creatures, more or less, show the tendency or instinct to love their same kind. An aunt feels affection for her nieces and nephews and so distributes her resources for the benefit of the bodily health of her brother's children. This increases her inclusive fitness since the genes of these children contain copies of her genes. Hence, Wilson concludes, "by doing a favor to a relation, which helps him or her to survive and reproduce, an individual can be helping to propagate his or her own genes." Therefore, it is evident that all creatures have the instinct to promote the survival of their same kind and are potentially good in nature.

Sutherland further indicated that the species contrived to continue their genes either through producing a huge army of offspring to raise the rate of survival or through sending forth out a limited number but succeed by protecting them better, i.e., parental care. (Sutherland 1974 vol.2: 40) Hence, parental care aims not only to protect the safety of offspring, but also to continue the genes of the parents. It becomes the sprout or origin of social sympathy or social instinct which Darwin supposed will develop into conscience. Robert Richards elaborates, "Social sympathy still takes its rise in family life, still do we see the more specially preservative feelings towards child and wife spreading outward to embrace a wider area. They who love a child because it is their own may have by far their warmest fervor of devotion only for their own offspring. Yet they will experience a certain predisposition to tenderness toward children in general; and this feeling indeed overflows the bound of the species, giving rise to a certain compassionateness towards the young of all animals."(Richards 1987:353) Parental care overflows because the same species share the same ancestor or similar genes, while all creatures share the same origin—the primitive cell creature, so they are more or less genetically related, just as Zhuangzi and the Neo-Confucians claimed, all creatures shared the same qi and the same Heaven, and could empathy and influence each other.

When answering how parental love or kin altruism could extend to all the individuals of the same species, Darwin proposed that adequate intelligence would guide conduct that had been stimulated by social instinct to aid his fellow-men; moreover, this evolved intelligence allowed the individual to compare an unsatisfied social instinct with a more powerful urge, such as hunger, fear, or the sexual itch, to which it had been sacrificed. Through this comparison or calculation, the individual will aid his fellow-men as a mutu-

al benefit and indirectly enhance the copying of his own genes. However, this comparison or calculation by no means suggests that all moral conduct requires rational deliberation. For example, we would not hesitate, as Darwin pointed out, to consider moral a reflexive act of courage when a man jumps into the river to save a drowning child, literally without giving thought to his own safety. This shows that in our deep nature, we are social and good in order to continue our genes or save our same kind.

However, at hard times or famine, individual's instinct of survival may overshadow his social instinct and lead him to harm or consume his same kind. For example, ladybugs and spiders will consume their siblings in order to survive when there is no food. This leads to the appearance of evil. Moreover, although intelligence can enhance the unity of a group, it can work against social instinct, too. With the calculation of intelligence, an individual would be likely to give preference to self survival over the survival of the species, or the individual's short-term interest over his long term interest, and thus produce evil. Hence, human beings are superior to ants in their intelligence, but will not be as altruistic as ants because of the calculation of human beings, this explains why Laozi and Zhuangzi asked people to eliminate their mind of calculation and follow natural process. Paul Thompson defines evil in such a way: "Evil, I assert, is the attempt to enhance one's own individual fitness at the expense of the short or long-term perpetuation of the population to which the individual belongs. That expense ultimately reduces one's own fitness since population collapse thwarts the perpetuation of that individual's lineage along with everyone else. This concept of evil, I shall call the population concept of evil." Thompson further clarifies that this definition makes evil a function of behavior that breaks an implicit social contract understood in terms of evolutionary stable strategies for members of a group.(2002). But Thompson fails to take into account the case that the individual's short of wit or failure to balance his own interest and the group's interest, for not all individuals can be intelligent enough to be always clear in distinguishing selfish acts from altruistic acts before they see their consequence.

Nevertheless, Thompson is insightful in defining evil in terms of its betrayal or destruction of the group. Considering the interdependence of good and evil, selfish and unselfish, individual and family, we can say, evil is also innate in human nature, and will rise when an individual is not intelligent enough to balance his own interest with the group's

interest, or when he is trained or overwhelmed by selfish concerns. For at the situation, he would assume that he can continue his genes or existence without the help of his same kind, or see his same kind as a threat to the continuance of his own genes. This explains why the more advanced a society is, the more selfish or evil the people will become, for they do not need the aid of his same kind.

The interdependence of selfishness and altruism, good and evil also explains why a couple of parents always produce half altruists and half selfish ones, as Wilson observes. (Sober and Wilson 1998:67) Although altruists are useful to strengthen the survival of the family or group, they are likely to reduce the chance of its survival, too. Especially in the case that the whole family consists of altruists exclusively, the altruists will likely sacrifice themselves for the benefit of other families and abandon their own family. This explains why the Mohists in ancient China, proposing universal love and complete altruism, were criticized by both Mencius and Zhuangzi and faded quickly. But if the family consists of half altruists and half selfish ones, these altruists will serve their sibling first and enhance the multiplication of their parents' genes. This is why selfish individuals always accompany altruists in a family or tribe, or evil always goes with good.

Taking this evolutionary framework as reference, we can say Mencius claimed human nature to be good because he found kin altruism was unconditional in a family. Xunzi assumed that human nature was evil because he found that individuals struggled for their survival at the sacrifice of their same kind. However, neither Mencius denied the existence of evil, nor Xunzi denied the fact that human heart-mind had the feeling of appropriateness/yi, and human beings were social. In other words, both Mencius and Xunzi realized the role of survival determined the goodness or evil of human nature. Mencius proposed human nature to be good from the survival of the family (species) which Xunzi did not deny; Xunzi claimed human nature to be evil from the survival of the individual, i.e., the individual's undue desires for selfish possessions regardless of others, which Mencius also acknowledged. Therefore, we hope to provide a new explanation of Mencius and Xunzi's debate of human nature from the perspective of evolutionary ethics.

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