



Mengzi's Maxim for Righteousness in *Mengzi* 2A2

Dobin CHOI¹

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Abstract

In this essay, I argue that in *Mengzi* 2A2 Mengzi 孟子 proposes his method for cultivating righteousness (*yi* 義) by showing that on the way of achieving *yi*, such topics as the unperturbed hearts, cultivating courage, Gaozi's 告子 maxim, and the flood-like *qi* 氣 ultimately converge. Toward this aim, first, I argue that Mengzi's short remark “*bi you shi yan er wu zheng, xin wu wang, wu zhu zhang* 必有事焉而勿正, 心勿忘, 勿助長” can be read as his maxim for achieving *yi* that structurally parallels with the preceding maxim of Gaozi that Mengzi quoted. It tells us that neither our blind obedience to the words nor our impetuous boost of *qi* is helpful for achieving *yi*; instead we should concentrate on the heart's moral sentiments and perform righteous actions. Second, I argue that Mengzi believes that *qi* is crucial in one's proper self-cultivation. The centrality of moral sentiment in his teaching redirects our attention to *qi*'s positive aspects—exemplified by the flood-like *qi*—though *qi*'s impulsivity often makes it appear negative. If the four sprouts are to accompany the spontaneous movement of *qi*, it can be said that properly expressed *qi* signals the moral health of one's heart. Moreover, I show that strong positive *qi* not only constitutes moral sentiment that serves as a fair standard for self-examination but also leads the will to perform moral actions without delay.

Keywords Righteousness (*yi* 義) · Vital energy (*qi* 氣) · Unperturbed heart (*budongxin* 不動心) · Courage (*yong* 勇) · Flood-like *qi* (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣)

1 Introduction

In this essay, I argue that Mengzi's 孟子 teaching in the early part of *Mengzi* 2A2 culminates in his simple method for cultivating righteousness (義 *yi*). A structural analysis of this chapter will show that cultivating *yi* 義 is the converging point of its

✉ Dobin CHOI
dobinphil@gmail.com

¹ Department of Philosophy, The University of Iowa, 170 English-Philosophy Building, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1408, USA

various topics about self-cultivation—the unperturbed heart (*budongxin* 不動心), cultivating courage (*yong* 勇), Gaozi’s 告子 maxim about the words (*yan* 言), the heart (*xin* 心), vital energy (*qi* 氣), the relation between the will (*zhi* 志) and *qi*, the flood-like *qi* (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣), and an analogy of the farmer of Song 宋.¹ To argue this point, I suggest that the gist of Mengzi’s teaching can be found in his short remark—“*bi you shi yan er wu zheng, xin wu wang, wu zhu zhang* 必有事焉而勿正, 心勿忘, 勿助長”—delivered between his descriptions on the flood-like *qi* and the farmer analogy, and that this remark is structurally parallel with Gaozi’s maxim. While Gaozi seeks the precedence of the words over the heart and *qi* for achieving something, Mengzi reveals the priority of the heart over the words and *qi* for achieving it. Given this object’s necessary relevance with the previous topics of this chapter, I argue that its best candidate is *yi*. Hence, this short remark can be called Mengzi’s maxim for cultivating *yi*.

In addition to illuminating Mengzi’s maxim for *yi*, this holistic reading of *Mengzi* 2A2 allows us to understand his insight regarding our appropriate treatment of *qi* for moral self-cultivation. As to courage and righteousness, commoners might believe that invigorating their bodily *qi* accounts for the primary method for cultivating such virtues, of which appearances are highly related to the fortified *qi* in their eyes. As we can presume, one’s excessive stimulation of *qi* is not desirable. I also argue that Mengzi’s farmer analogy figuratively points out the harm of our direct and immoderate promotion of bodily *qi* for achieving *yi* through our uncritical conformity to such commonsense beliefs. One’s proper control of *qi*, however, does not mean one’s mere suppression of its natural emergence. Mengzi believes that *qi*, which has the force to lead the will, is also crucial in one’s proper self-cultivation, as *qi* constitutes the heart’s sentimental part as in the four sprouts.

In the first two sections, by analyzing Mengzi’s partial acceptance of Gaozi’s maxim and the remarks on the flood-like *qi*, I argue that *yi* is this chapter’s principal topic. Next, based on these analyses, I show Mengzi’s maxim for achieving *yi*, which rearranges the order of words, the heart, and *qi* in Gaozi’s maxim. Lastly, from the centrality of the heart for Mengzi’s *yi* achievement, I argue that the natural arousal of positive *qi* in the heart ultimately functions as the standard for both assessing moral propriety and performing virtuous actions.

2 Unperturbed Hearts, Gaozi’s Maxim, and *Qi*

In *Mengzi* 2A2, we notice three different goals that are achievable through one’s self-cultivation: an unperturbed heart, courage, and the flood-like *qi*. It is difficult to explicate clearly what these states stand for, but this chapter shows that each goal allows a degree of variation. Mengzi informs us of three levels of accomplished courage, including “great courage (*dayong* 大勇)” (*Mengzi* 2A2). Also, both Gaozi and Mengzi achieved the remarkable status of an unperturbed heart, but only Mengzi was able to nourish the flood-like *qi*. As these goals are displayed in the flow of a dialogue with his disciple, it is reasonable to believe that Mengzi would have thought something in common, closely connected with these

¹ I mainly use Bryan Van Norden’s translation (Van Norden 2008) unless otherwise noted. Hereafter, for “vital energy” and “righteousness,” I mostly maintain their *pinyin* transcriptions, *qi* and *yi*, to avoid possible confusion.

achieved states. In this section, I aim to argue that this common subject in Mengzi's mind is the virtue of *yi*, and he instructs us in the method for cultivating *yi* especially in association with *qi*.²

For this aim, I believe that a structural analysis of this dialogue is more helpful than expounding the meanings of such various topics and concepts, which would be painstaking but remain presumptive given the limited texts. Regardless of our understanding of such notions as unperturbed hearts and flood-like *qi*, we are structurally able to decide upon the essential source for achieving such goals among the given options in the text. A structural analysis to search for this common subject in Mengzi's mind can begin with a brief discussion on Gaozi's maxim amid *Mengzi* 2A2:

GONGSUN Chou [公孫丑] next asked, "May I hear about your unperturbed heart, Master, and Gaozi's unperturbed heart?" Mengzi replied, "Gaozi said, 'What you do not get from doctrines, do not seek for in your heart. What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi* (*bu de yu yan, wu qiu yu xin; bu de yu xin, wu qiu yu qi* 不得於言, 勿求於心; 不得於心, 勿求於氣.)' 'What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi*,' is acceptable. 'What you do not get from doctrines, do not seek for in your heart,' is unacceptable." (*Mengzi* 2A2)

This dialogue presents us with some clues for our structural analysis. First, Mengzi believes that assessing Gaozi's maxim distinguishes his unperturbed heart from Gaozi's, as his critical comments are commenced with his disciple's question about their differences.³ Second, this maxim aims to instruct us how to achieve a certain end, the object to "get" (let us call "it"). Third, Mengzi disapproves the first part of Gaozi's maxim but embraces the second. In other words, Gaozi's teaching focuses on: "If you do not get 'it' from the words, you do not seek

² Commentators have been more concerned with making thorough analyses on each topic of this chapter than its holistic reading. Jeffrey Riegel gives us his step-by-step interpretation of *Mengzi* 2A2, but it is too brief to capture Mengzi's overall intention in this dialogue. I agree with Riegel's focus on the notion of "propriety (*yi*)" for an "unmoved mind" but not entirely with his interpretation that *yi* stems from "the socializing inclination of the mind," as this view can neglect *yi*'s self-regarding dimension (Riegel 1980: 444). David Nivison's seminal essay regarding this chapter exposes a hidden conundrum about self-cultivation, entitled "a problem of immediate action" (Nivison 1996: 108), but I will argue later that this problem does not necessarily take place. Van Norden and Philip Ivanhoe concentrate on Mengzi's discussion of courage, associated with the feeling of fear, but are less concerned with the notion of *yi*, which I believe is identical with "great courage" (Van Norden 1997, Ivanhoe 2006). SHUN Kwong-loi investigates the true sense of Mengzi's partial acceptance of Gaozi's maxim, but does not further extend his analysis to the different topics (Shun 1991, 1997). Manyul Im takes it as Mengzi's view that "justification for ethical norms should be sought in the heart-mind and not in external properties or circumstances" (Im 2004: 69), but I believe that, despite this view's acceptability, it does not necessarily follow that Mengzi's whole lesson in this chapter aims at one's control of *qi* through the epistemic self-justification. Lee Rainey and Alan Chan propose their sequential reading of this chapter with their focus on *qi* (Rainey 1998, Chan 2002). I partly consent to Rainey's emphasis of positive *qi*, but not to the extent that "It is not the will or the *xin* that is cultivated; the central concept here [the very text of the flood-like *qi*] is *qi*. *Qi*, coupled with rightness [*yi*] can give us courage; *qi* reaches the *Dao* itself" (Rainey 1998: 100). I also endorse Chan's positive view on *qi* that "Mencius shared with his contemporaries a basic understanding of *qi* as constitutive of the person, but he differed from them in locating in it a source of moral excellence" (Chan 2002: 42). Chan's turn to taste is right to the point; not only that taste is associated with *qi*'s arousal, but also that taste and *qi* prove the manifestation of the internal *yi* as in *Mengzi* 6A7 (see Choi 2018). However, by focusing on a structural analysis of this chapter rather than Chan's historical approach, I proceed to argue that the primary issue in this chapter is not *qi*, but *yi*.

³ At the beginning of this chapter, Mengzi admits, "Even Gaozi, though he did not understand the Way, had an unperturbed heart before I" (*Mengzi* 2A2).

the heart for ‘it.’” In contrast, Mengzi emphasizes: “If you do not get ‘it’ from the heart, you do not seek the *qi* for ‘it,’” to which Gaozi would also consent.⁴ In short, Gaozi’s primary source for “it” is the words, while Mengzi’s is the heart. Both see *qi* as inadequate for “it.”

From these facts, we gain some more advanced clues. From the first clue, it follows that “it” is related to accomplishing an unperturbed heart. If one gets “it” continuously, one’s heart would be unperturbed on a genuine level. Also, the assumed popularity of Gaozi’s maxim to his contemporaries would be ascribed to people’s uniform esteem for “it” from its practical significance for fulfilling one’s life. Moreover, Gaozi’s contemporaries would acknowledge that the sources for achieving “it” are the words, the heart, and *qi*, but confuse the priority among them. However, both philosophers’ equal denial of *qi* as the primary source for “it” conversely echoes a prevailing belief of commoners that advancing bodily *qi* is a dependable method for “it.” If not so, Gaozi would not have bothered denying *qi* in his maxim, which would have been designed to instruct ordinary people on how to achieve “it” for an unperturbed heart.

What is obscure in this maxim is Gaozi’s stance about the heart. Given the parallel of its two parts, the second part indicates that he partially approves the heart over *qi*. He would believe that the heart is a better source for “it” than *qi*, perhaps provided the words’ firm direction of the heart. This observation redirects us to interpret this maxim’s first part from a different context: given the heart’s partial advantage for “it,” people might proceed hastily to the heart with no sufficient reference to the words, but for achieving “it” we should adhere to the words tenaciously. This sense, if plausible, is directly extended to the second part. Mengzi would endorse that, given the mundane belief of *qi*’s advantage for “it,” people tend to proceed hastily to *qi* with no sufficient reflection on the heart, but for achieving “it” we should adhere to the heart tenaciously. If this extension is acceptable, the remaining question is how to understand Mengzi’s stance about *qi*. What does he think about *qi* for achieving “it”?

Provided that Gaozi’s partial approval of the heart is within the words’ control, it is structurally assumable that Mengzi concedes that *qi* is also a good source for “it” if the heart tightly supervises *qi*. This condition coordinates with his subsequent remark about the relationship between the will and *qi*: “The will is the commander of the *qi*, and *qi* fills the body” (*Mengzi* 2A2).⁵ Contextually, this remark suggests a different perspective to Mengzi’s thought regarding the second part of Gaozi’s maxim, related to an unperturbed heart. Indeed, *qi*’s movement appears to be a definite sign of the heart’s perturbation, and then the method for an unperturbed heart has something to do with controlling *qi*. Given the will’s capacity to supervise *qi*, however, it follows that the will is responsible for *qi*’s movement. Hence, *qi*’s expression would not be entirely

⁴ Regarding the ancient commentaries about Gaozi’s maxim, see Shun 1997: 113–115. Moreover, I translate *yan* 言 as “the words” rather than “doctrines,” as this structural analysis has less interest in specifying its precise sense.

⁵ According to Graham, *qi* in ancient China means “the energetic fluid which vitalizes the body, in particular as the breath, and which circulates outside us as air” (Graham 1989: 101). Van Norden interprets *qi* as “the physical medium through which one’s emotions and personal characters are manifested,” and further remarks that “the ‘will’ is simply the heart when it is focused on some goal” (Van Norden 2008: 37–38).

blamable for the heart's perturbation, but the will is mainly to blame.⁶ In this case, one's failure to get "it" is ascribed not to *qi* but to the heart.

Mengzi sees advancing *qi* as inadequate to achieve "it," not because *qi* is negative by nature, but because merely concentrating on *qi* discloses no fundamental path toward "it." Contrary to his idea, ordinary people would seek a path to an unperturbed heart by strengthening *qi* to prevent its rash movement.⁷ This commonsense approach redirects us to the beginning of this chapter. To his disciple's question about "a Way of having an unperturbed heart," Mengzi first brings up BEIGONG You's 北宮黶 unperturbed heart, achieved through his "cultivation of courage (*yangyong* 養勇)" by not shrinking his body and not blinking his eyes to external stimuli (*Mengzi* 2A2). He would be anxious to prevent his perceptual stimulation from agitating bodily *qi* to perturb the heart, as in such cases as trembling with fear and being startled with surprise. Furthermore, when the assassin saw his agitated *qi* from his own standpoint, he did not let his heart's function of reflection become involved. BEIGONG You treated all emotive *qi* of different degrees aroused by various insults as equivalent and trained the will to only follow *qi*'s immediate direction without exception.⁸ This would mean that he fortified his bodily *qi* to not move easily irrespective of the will's supervision.⁹ An unperturbed heart in a secular sense would be achieved by making the *qi* in the heart unmoved from external stimuli,¹⁰ as well as by reinforcing *qi* even to dominate the will's direction.¹¹

BEIGONG You's unperturbed heart achieved through his cultivation of courage gives us some additional clues about "it." As Gaozi's maxim informs us that genuine "it" is unachievable by one's concentrating on *qi*, "it" is a more important virtue than courage, but so relevant to *qi* that ordinary people mistake *qi* for the proper source of "it."

⁶ This point is supported by Mengzi's remark: "When your will is fixed somewhere, the *qi* sets up camp there" (*Mengzi* 2A2; Van Norden 2008: 38). This would mean that if wrongly expressed *qi* perturbed the heart, the cause of perturbation would be mainly attributed to the will's mistaken fixture. Slingerland shows a comprehensive reading of the will's role in commanding *qi*: (1) "It is the job of the commander to give guidance to his troops, who, left to their own devices, would simply mill about in confusion"; and (2) "the intention/mind is also somewhat dependent upon the *qi*, because a general cannot fight a battle without his troops" (Slingerland 2003: 155). Moreover, regarding the farmer analogy, Slingerland adds: (3) "Although the role of the heart/mind is to guide the *qi* in the direction of rightness like a commander marshaling his troops, it cannot push the *qi* too far or the 'troops' might revolt" (Slingerland 2003: 156). These points are by and large acceptable, but they seem to rely too much on the metaphorical interpretations of this passage, which could render Mengzi's teachings much less logical.

⁷ Shun admits the possibility of this commonsense view: "One is supposed to seek in *ch'i* if one does not *te*^b in the heart/mind (unlike both Kao Tzu and Mencius)" (Shun 1997: 121).

⁸ When BEIGONG You slashed people, he did not care about their social status: "He was not in awe of the various lords. If an insult came his way he had to return it" (*Mengzi* 2A2).

⁹ Van Norden adds to this part: "Chengzi [程子, i.e., CHENG Yi 程頤] explains, 'If the heart is dominated by something, then it can be unperturbed'" (Van Norden 2008: 36). In BEIGONG You's case, this dominance would be attributed to his forceful *qi*.

¹⁰ GONGSUN Chou seems to possess this secular view of an unperturbed heart, as he merely brings up the courageous warrior MENG Ben's 孟賁 reputation to praise Mengzi's unperturbed heart in a moral sense.

¹¹ It is possible for *qi* to dominate the will, as Mengzi said, "When the *qi* is unified, it moves your will" (*Mengzi* 2A2). BEIGONG You's courage would represent the most advanced version of cultivating bodily *qi* in this secular sense. Despite his excellence in maintaining his *qi*, however, his courage would remain small. Just as BEIGONG You "regarded the least slight from someone like being beaten in the marketplace," he intended to maximize *qi*'s physical rigidity by neglecting his heart's reflective function for proper estimation (*Mengzi* 2A2). He was satisfied with maintaining his *qi* to the maximum level, and let his heart obey *qi*'s direct feedback to engage his unconditional actions of vengeance regardless of the circumstantial differences.

Also, the difference between Gaozi's and Mengzi's unperturbed hearts seems to originate from their discrepant views about how to get genuine "it," but we are unable to figure "it" out simply from this chapter. However, following Nivison's advice to "look at some of Mencius's philosophical idioms and conceptions elsewhere," we can pay attention to other uses of "seeking" and "getting" (Nivison 1996: 125–127). Regarding an old aphorism "Seek it and you will get it. Abandon it and you will lose it," ZHU Xi 朱熹 is convinced that the objects to "get" are the four cardinal virtues inherent in human nature.¹² If his interpretation is safely extended to Gaozi's maxim for getting "it," it would be one of the four virtues. Given the precedence of "it" over courage and the affinity of "it" with *qi*, it is reasonable to believe that what to "get" in this maxim is the virtue of *yi*.¹³

Gaozi's maxim is then understood as his brief advice for achieving *yi*, which rejects a commonsense view that *qi* is the best source for *yi*. This does not mean, however, that *qi* is entirely negative, as Mengzi admits that manipulating *qi* like BEIGONG You can be a path for attaining courage and an unperturbed heart at the lowest level.¹⁴ Moreover, we can assume that Mengzi's and Gaozi's discrepant understandings of *yi* caused the difference between their unperturbed hearts, which will be discussed in the next section.

3 *Yi* and the Flood-like *Qi*

After reassessing the second part of Gaozi's maxim about the heart and *qi*, Mengzi announces the flood-like *qi*. To GONGSUN Chou's daring question of "wherein you excel," Mengzi responds that he is good at "understanding doctrines [the words]" and

¹² The objects to "get" are the four cardinal virtues primarily because this aphorism is presented after Mengzi's identification of the four sprouts with the four virtues: "Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to us externally. We inherently have them. It is simply that we do not reflect upon them. Hence, it is said, 'Seek it and you will get it. Abandon it and you will lose it'" (Mengzi 6A6). The same aphorism is also mentioned in Mengzi 7A3, and the similar sense of "getting it (*de zhi* 得之)" appears in Mengzi 3A4, 4B14, 6A10, 6A15.

¹³ Other virtues of benevolence, propriety, and wisdom are obviously less connected with *qi* than *yi*. In common sense, righteousness would be replaced with "righteous *qi* (*yiqi* 義氣)," just as courage is interchangeable with "courageous *qi* (*yongqi* 勇氣)." Chan submits that a significant value term *yiqi*, the "*qi* of rightness" in modern Chinese represents "an important aspect of the Mencian legacy" (Chan 2002: 62). Shun clearly argues from reinterpreting the first part of Gaozi's maxim that "Mencius regarded *yi*²⁹ as something derived from the heart/mind," but does not approach its second part (Shun 1997: 118). Slingerland also agrees that "it is almost certain that 'it' refers to one's conception of rightness (*yi*), which in turn is the key to moral self-cultivation" (Slingerland 2003: 154). Nivison regards this object as *yi*, but infers it from Gaozi's account of external *yi*. Nivison argues that "if we need something we get from 'words' these must be others' 'words,' hardly one's own. So this thing comes from *outside* us" (Nivison 1996: 126). Referring to Gaozi's view that *yi* is "outside" while *ren* 仁 is "inside," Nivison concludes that what we get from "words" must be *yi* (Mengzi 6A4). However, his supposition merely sheds light on the relation between Gaozi's words and *yi*, leaving *yi*'s relation to the heart and *qi* unexplained. Moreover, Nivison assumes that the two parts of Gaozi's maxim respectively aim at different virtues: "We get *yi* from 'words,' and *ren* from our mind" (Nivison 1996: 126). I see, however, that its second half would be less associated with *ren* than *yi*, as the notion of *ren* rarely goes with *qi*.

¹⁴ From Mengzi's acceptance of the second part of Gaozi's maxim, Van Norden casts suspicion on Chan's view admitting *qi*'s positive aspects (Van Norden 2003: 277). I believe, however, that Mengzi did not intend to deprive *qi*'s positive roles for achieving *yi*, which could be supported by the fact that all appearances of *qi* in Mengzi (2A2, 6A8, 7B36) do not have negative connotations at all.

“cultivating his flood-like *qi*” (*Mengzi* 2A2). Though it is difficult to explicate the exact sense of the flood-like *qi*, a structural analysis enables us to examine Mengzi's thought about nourishing the flood-like *qi*.¹⁵ Mengzi replies:

It is difficult to explain. 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 up 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. Consequently, I say that Gaozi never understood righteousness, because he regarded it as external. (*Mengzi* 2A2)

This remark reveals a few notable points. First, Mengzi tells us the technique of nourishing the flood-like *qi*. One's nurturing the flood-like *qi* depends on one's accumulation of *yi* (*jiyi* 集義) beyond one's incidental cases of *yi* (*yixi* 義襲).¹⁶ To accumulate *yi* properly, one needs to grasp not only (1) the right method for achieving *yi*, but also (2) the true sense of *yi*. The first point shows the relation between Mengzi's pride in nourishing the flood-like *qi* and his previous assessment of Gaozi's maxim for *yi*. The second point explains why Mengzi briefly adds a negative comment about Gaozi's view of external *yi*. His misconception of *yi* as external made him fail to nourish the flood-like *qi* despite his unperturbed heart, which suggests Mengzi's answer to his disciple's earlier question regarding the difference between his unperturbed heart from Gaozi's. In short, to nourish the flood-like *qi*, achieved by accumulation of *yi*, one must understand *yi* correctly and do righteous actions incessantly.

Second, it is the heart that serves as the standard for both *yi* and the flood-like *qi*. In the text, two causes are responsible for the starvation of the flood-like *qi*: (1) disharmony with *yi* and the Way (*dao* 道), and (2) the unsatisfied heart with particular actions. The first implies that one should act in harmony with *yi* and *dao*, while the second brings the heart's evaluative role to the fore. These two causes re-emphasize the centrality of the heart for Mengzi's self-cultivation. Both *yi* and human *dao* reside in the heart, perhaps as the sources of moral motivation, and the heart's sentimental responses such as “the heart of shame and disdain” can form a yardstick for moral evaluation (*Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6).¹⁷ Thus, one's nourishing the flood-like *qi* necessitates one's introspection in the heart. This means not just to activate its function of reflection but also to preserve the mental causes for proper moral sentiment, as they

¹⁵ Due to the lack of texts, we can merely assume the sense of the flood-like *qi* contextually. Ivanhoe regards it as “spiritual energy—that special power that accrues to those who have, over time, worked to develop their moral sprouts—in order to do the right thing,” which functions as a “kind of motivational reserve” (Ivanhoe 2006: 225–226).

¹⁶ ZHU Xi comments, “Those who nurture their *qi* must take accumulating righteousness as their task . . .” (Van Norden 2008: 40).

¹⁷ Human *dao* is no less internal than *yi*. Mengzi articulates, “Benevolence is simply being human. The Way is simply to harmonize with benevolence and put it into words” (*Mengzi* 7B16). Given Mengzi's internal *ren*, it is reasonable to regard human *dao* as internal. The heart's role as a moral standard would be fulfilled by one's natural feeling of aversion. Just as a beggar's heart of shame and disdain recognizes the contempt within the given food (*Mengzi* 6A10), BEIGONG You would have recognized the insults given to him through his feelings of aversion. However, his sentiment-based moral evaluation is not well-founded as he shut down his heart's function of reflection.

provide a milestone for reflection to operate more efficiently.¹⁸ Furthermore, as the heart's sentimental evaluation of actions is associated with the starvation of the flood-like *qi*, Mengzi's remark—"If some of one's actions leave one's heart unsatisfied, it will starve"—conversely implies that one's performing moral actions is required for achievement of *yi*. To get *yi*, one must concentrate on both reflective and sentimental parts of the heart and act based on their guidance. For this reason, Mengzi would have approved the second part of Gaozi's maxim. As the heart offers a standard for both *yi* and the supreme flood-like *qi*, Mengzi instructs us not to advance *qi* in a rush for *yi*, but to adhere to the heart to seek both the motive and the standard for performing moral actions.

Third, this passage implies that nourishing the flood-like *qi* is self-regarding. The full-blown flood-like *qi* exhibits its intensity and magnitude with no concern for others. Originating from one's heart, it fills up the cosmic space between Heaven and Earth, and seems to be a cosmic honor awarded to those who have accumulated *yi* throughout their lives regardless of social concern. This self-regarding aspect of the flood-like *qi* would be derived from its primary source of *yi*, grown from the heart of shame and disdain that usually takes the self as its intentional object.¹⁹ Just as a beggar refuses the food given with contempt to protect his/her moral self, the ultimate sense of *yi* involves one's acting for preserving one's human dignity that Heaven has inscribed in the heart (*Mengzi* 6A10).

This self-regarding aspect of *yi* contrasts with the other-regarding effects of benevolence (*ren* 仁). Accomplished through the method of extension, benevolence is sufficient "to care for all within the Four Seas," but one's losing it results in the failure to "care for one's wife and children" (*Mengzi* 1A7). By contrast, one's failure to feed *yi* results in one's malnourishment of the flood-like *qi* with less influence to others' welfare. With *ren*, we care for others, while with *yi*, we preserve the moral self.²⁰ This contrast suggests the two dimensions of Mengzi's moral self-cultivation. To cultivate *ren*, we are to care for others, while to achieve *yi*, we are to perform righteous actions that protect our dignity. While our

¹⁸ Mengzi articulates that "the function of the heart is to reflect," and this function is important to "get" it (*Mengzi* 6A15). For one's efficient reflection, however, one needs a standard for deliberation. D. C. Lau suggests that *qi* functions as a practical touchstone. Regarding the "evening *qi*" in *Mengzi* 6A8, he mentions that "Mencius is doing more than giving a metaphorical account of the moral tendencies in a man, he is in fact giving him a *practical touchstone* for gauging his own moral progress. The freshness and spontaneity a man feels in the morning after a good night's rest constitutes the best conditions for preserving and developing his true heart" (Lau 1969: 27; my emphasis). In agreement with Lau's view, later I argue that emotive *qi* serves as a practical standard for rational deliberation.

¹⁹ In practice, one's righteous actions would have social impacts and overlap with other-regarding virtuous actions.

²⁰ Shun gives a remarkable distinction between *ren* and *yi*: "*Jen*^a has to do more with affective concern [for others] and *yi*^b more with a strictness with oneself" (Shun 1997: 63). While the distinctive features of *ren* are "both not wanting to harm others (*Mengzi* 7B31, 7A33) and not being able to bear the suffering of others (*Mengzi* 7B31, cf. 1A7, 2A6)," *yi* emphasizes "a strictness with oneself, a commitment to abide by certain ethical standards ..." (Shun 1997: 63). However, Shun's reference to "ethical standards" needs illumination. Distinguishing Mengzi's "ethical standards" from ordinary "social standards," Shun claims that their contrast parallels not only with Mengzi's distinction between "Heavenly orders," the inherent virtues, and "human orders" in a society (*Mengzi* 6A16), but also with the contrast between "what is esteemed within him [a person]" and "that which [other] humans esteem" (*Mengzi* 6A17; Shun 1997: 61). Shun also says that "For Mencius, *yi* as an ethical attribute of a person has to do with a firm commitment to such standards" (Shun 1997: 62), but he does not explain what these "ethical standards" are except that they are not ordinary social standards. Later, I suggest that the heart's sentimental part—the natural causes in the heart for moral sentiments—functions as such ethical standards.

performing benevolence leads to social welfare and such peaceful governing as “governments that were not unfeeling toward others (*bu ren ren zhi zheng* 不忍人之政)” (*Mengzi* 4A1), our acting for *yi* would award us the honor of the flood-like *qi*.

In the text, it is clear that the flood-like *qi* is nourished by one's continuous achievements of *yi* through moral actions. Hence, what Mengzi is supposed to teach us next would be his method for achieving *yi*, which should be more substantial than his partial approval of Gaozi's maxim.

4 Mengzi's Maxim for Righteousness and the Analogy of a Farmer of Song

After adding a critical comment on Gaozi's view of external *yi*, Mengzi presents a short remark:

Bi you shi yan er wu zheng, xin wu wang, wu zhu zhang 必有事焉而勿正心勿忘勿助長.

One must work at cultivating [A], but do not fix oneself to [B]. The heart should not forget [C] and do not help [D] grow. (*Mengzi* 2A2; my translation)

This passage contains four imperatives with some unidentified objects like Gaozi's maxim—let us call them respectively A, B, C, D. In the first imperative, A would be not so much the flood-like *qi* as *yi*, since Mengzi had already announced that accumulation of *yi* is the proper method for the former.²¹ Provided that *yi* is what we are to cultivate, I believe that the remaining three imperatives—*wu zheng*, *xin wu wang*, *wu zhu zhang*—address Mengzi's method for achieving *yi*, even though the unidentified objects B, C, D make it less clear. The goal of this section is to trace his insight in this remark by elucidating the unidentified objects as much as possible.

Regarding the sense of *wu zheng* 勿正, depending on what its object is, notable commentators exhibit strikingly different views. First, ZHU Xi reads *zheng* 正 as “assuming success (*yuqi* 預期),” and thus *wu zheng* means “do not assume success.”²² It seems true that for one's self-cultivation there is no need to expect future success. One's assuming success may render one impatient with a long-term cultivation, but hasten to its early achievement by intentionally helping it grow. This reading may sound plausible, yet contextually it is less appropriate. Given this passage's condensed structure, it is likely that *wu zheng* and other imperatives are premised on Mengzi's previous teachings. However, this reading of “assuming success” hardly appears to be based on the prior dialogue, but rather to be linked with the upcoming story of the farmer of Song, who assumed his early success of farming.

²¹ This reading displays its direct connection with Mengzi's preceding criticism on Gaozi's misconception of external *yi*. James Legge translates this imperative with an object of *yi*: “There must be the constant practice of this righteousness” (Legge 2011: 190).

²² Following ZHU Xi's view, Van Norden's translates *yuqi* 預期 as “assuming success” (Van Norden 2008: 40).

Second, *zheng* can mean “stop, or halt (*zhi* 止)” (Jiao 1987: 203; Yang 1960: 70). This view makes sense especially when this phrase is combined with the first: “One must work at cultivating, and do not halt.”²³ However, this view is also less connected with the previous discourses. As one’s continuous efforts are taken for granted for moral self-cultivation, this advice of “do not stop [cultivating]”—which merely reemphasizes the first imperative—hardly represents the structural significance of this condensed maxim properly.

Lastly, we can read *zheng* as to “fix and square” to a given criterion, following WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (Yang 1960: 70). In this case, *wu zheng* means that “one must not anchor oneself to a settled norm.”²⁴ This view instantly reminds us of Gaozi’s insistence to get *yi* from “the words,” which would let us suppose that the undisclosed object of *wu zheng* would indicate the words. Taking this view, we can assume that this imperative *wu zheng* would be designed to oppose Gaozi’s teaching: “Do not fix oneself to the words.” This imperative’s possible contradiction to Gaozi’s maxim implies that Mengzi would have presented his maxim for achieving *yi*, which would structurally parallel with the arranged order of Gaozi’s maxim regarding common sources for *yi*—the words, the heart, and *qi*.

The third imperative of *xin wu wang* 心勿忘 is relatively clear, even though its object also needs clarification.²⁵ As we have seen, the centrality of the heart distinguishes Mengzi’s method for achieving *yi* from both Gaozi’s source of the words and commoners’ source of *qi*. The location of this imperative again supports the assumption that Mengzi would rearrange a new order among the three sources of *yi* to declare his maxim for *yi*.

The last imperative *wu zhu zhang* 勿助長 is followed by an interesting episode of a farmer of Song, who pulled up “sprouts (*miao* 苗)” with hope for their faster growth only to see them wither. As “sprouts” are reminiscent of the “four sprouts (*siduan* 四端)” in the heart, *wu zhu zhang* may portrait Mengzi—who urged King Xuan 宣 to actively extend his heart of compassion—as partly admitting that “forcing the development, doing something you’re not ready to do, will actually hurt you” (Nivison 1996: 109). As one’s intentional extension of compassion might be considered as a kind of assistance for the sprouts’ growth, we can question the permissible degree of active self-cultivation. This apparent paradox—which Nivison entitled “the problem of immediate action”—can be settled with our identification of the object of *wu zhu zhang* (Nivison 1996: 108). Given this maxim’s parallel structure with Gaozi’s, it would correspond to *qi* in the raw state, to mean “do not help *qi* grow” for achieving *yi*. The farmer would then analogically exemplify those who concentrate on enhancing *qi* excessively as commoners. The sprouts indicate bodily *qi*, often considered as ambivalent, since they cover a much broader area in the heart than the four moral seeds.

²³ Commenting that ZHAO Qi 趙岐 and CHENG Yi 程頤 read “*bi you shi yan er wu zheng* 必有事焉而勿正” as one sentence, Zhu Xi admits this reading’s plausibility (Jiao 1987: 203; Yang 1960: 70).

²⁴ YANG Bojun 楊伯峻 sees this view as the most plausible among the three: “*Zheng* is to ‘conform’ and ‘observe.’ When one points out the objects, one must make a precise standard and necessarily follow it” (Yang 1960: 70). In addition to these probable interpretations, Riegel reads “*bi you shi yan er wu zheng*” as “one must be concerned about it, but not correct it,” and sees “it” as the “proprietary inclination within him,” related to *yi*. In this phrase, he emphasizes the heart’s emotive standard for moral determination: “Each action should be put to the test of his own better feelings rather than ‘correcting’ these to what one might anticipate is correct because of the rules or conventions of others” (Riegel 1979: 445).

²⁵ The object of *xin wu wang* is discussed in the next section.

Therefore, since what to extend for benevolence is different from what not to assist with, we can conclude that Nivison's problem of immediate action hardly occurs.

Reading *wu zhu zhang* as “not to help *qi* grow” is supported by Mengzi's observation of ordinary people: “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).²⁶ The majority of people voluntarily help the sprouts grow, whereas extending compassion to others is barely what they commonly favor to pursue. The vulgar King Xuan—who felt compassion toward a sacrificial ox—would be one of those who was eager to help the sprouts grow to their advantage. Mengzi compared the king's disposition of favoring courage with mediocre fellows’ “small courage,” and asked him to achieve “great courage” with which King Wen 文 and Wu 武 brought peace to their people (*Mengzi* 1B3). In favor of small courage—“a product of only blood *qi*”—ordinary people would strive to help *qi* grow rapidly, perhaps to deter others from insulting them as BEIGONG You did.²⁷ Believing that *qi* partakes in both courage and *yi*, people would adopt the same method for achieving *yi* as his method for cultivating courage: acting based upon their excessively charged *qi*. People's imprudent manipulation of *qi* results in harming them, mainly because it is against human nature in a moral sense.

In the text, those who recklessly assist *qi*'s growth are contrasted with those who do “not weed their sprouts.” This means that Mengzi is also concerned with those who entirely disregard *qi* from their belief in its futility for achieving *yi*. One's negligence of weeding *qi* is no more desirable than one's forced enhancement of *qi*. Both beliefs are erroneous because they pay no regard to the true nature of what is to be cultivated. On the one hand, if the sprouts were neglected, they would still thrive to become “overgrown brush” that blocks the narrow path in the heart heading toward the mind-inherent virtues (*Mengzi* 7B21). On the other hand, *qi* is helpful for achieving *yi* to some extent, if it is well arranged by the heart's reflection. This reading, coherent with our previous analysis of Mengzi's partial approval of Gaozi's maxim, shows that Mengzi does not disregard the positive role of *qi* for moral self-cultivation.

Mengzi's endorsement of positive *qi*, highlighted by the flood-like *qi*, is also exposed in his emphasis on “evening *qi* (*yeqi* 夜氣).” As the “repeated fettering” during the day destroys *qi*, one's preserving of the pure and invigorating *qi* is indispensable for maintaining humaneness (*Mengzi* 6A8). Just as the sprouts and shoots grow everywhere in Ox mountain given sufficient respite and ample moisture, bodily *qi* will burgeon out all areas around the heart. Wrongly situated, the *qi*-sprouts may overgrow to brush that would perturb the heart. The sprouts and brush are of the same kind, but each respectively would account for *qi*'s positive and negative aspects. In this case, our

²⁶ Some commentators also regard this object as *qi*. Seeing this maxim as concerned with the practice of *yi*, Legge construes this object as “passion-nature,” close to emotive *qi* and distinguished from the heart in *xin wu wang* (Legge 2011: 190). Rainey also identifies the sprouts with *qi*: “*Qi* must not be forced or stretched beyond its powers as the man from Song tried to stretch his plants” (Rainey 1998: 103). Slingerland further believes that *qi* supports the four sprouts: “Like the man of Song's grain sprouts, *qi* and the heart-sprouts it supports grow at their own natural pace, and any attempt on the part of the intention to force them to grow faster will be futile” (Slingerland 2003: 155).

²⁷ ZHU Xi comments, “Small courage is a product of blood *qi*, but great courage is an expression of *yi* and the pattern” (*Mengzi* 1B3; my translation). This remark suggests that “great courage” can be identified with *yi*, achieved through one's introspection into the patterns in the heart. In contrast, BEIGONG You's courage with his unperturbed heart would represent the most advanced version of “small courage” through his *qi* cultivation.

appropriate control by weeding the sprouts is required to reveal the full positive aspects of *qi*.

In short, Mengzi's short maxim for *yi* aims to draw attention to the heart's central role rather than the words and *qi*. Also, this farmer analogy would be introduced to amend commoners' thoughts regarding cultivating *yi* through their blind fortification of *qi*. Nonetheless, *qi* is not always negative. The perfection of *yi* is derived not from entirely silencing *qi*, but from the heart's *proper* direction to promote *qi*'s positive effects, well exemplified by the flood-like *qi*. If this reading sounds plausible, then the next question is to figure out what is meant by the proper direction of *qi*.

5 The Heart, the Four Sprouts, and *Qi*

The heart is central to achieving *yi*, which is the key to the best kind of unperturbed hearts. As uncontrolled *qi* would cause the heart's perturbation, the method for directing *qi* would involve precluding *qi*'s improper agitation. If *yi* is derived from the heart's proper direction of *qi*, it seems that the heart's reflective part plays a leading role in supervising *qi*. However, I argue that Mengzi's focus in his maxim is not the heart's function of reflection, but its natural patterns that cause the uniform arousal of positive *qi*.

The imperative *xin wu wang* 心勿忘 in Mengzi's maxim tells us that the heart should not forget something.²⁸ At a glance, it seems to order the heart's reflective part to be alert in order not to disregard this unknown object. Contextually, this object appears relevant to the heart's role as an evaluative standard for nourishing the flood-like *qi* through accumulating *yi*. Given the heart's natural capacity to determine what is morally proper—relevant to *yi* as propriety—it is plausible that we should rely on this capacity as a touchstone of our rational deliberation (*Mengzi* 6A10). In Mengzi's thought, this natural moral standard is obviously offered in the form of “the heart of shame and disdain (*xiu wu zhi xin* 羞惡之心),” which is similar to the moral sentiment of disapproval (*Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6).²⁹

We should note that the aroused sentiment is regarded as the effect of a mental process of perception. People's uniform approval of the sages, or disapproval of an instance of indignity, demonstrates the occurrence of the same effect of moral sentiment, and this conversely presupposes their sharing the same natural cause in the heart.³⁰ In this regard, we can think that although our uniform sentiments confirm the existence of the four sprouts, their essence is not necessarily located at their status as emotions, but rather as the natural causes of such sentiments in the heart, which would

²⁸ Van Norden treats the heart as the object of *xin wu wang*: “One should not forget the heart” (Van Norden 2008: 40). The heart can also be the subject, as it comes before “forgetting.”

²⁹ I use “moral sentiment” to describe the emotive contents of Mengzi's four sprouts. It is well-known that Hume determines virtue and vice through the sentiments of approval and disapproval. For example, he says, “To approve of a character is to feel an original delight upon its appearance. To disapprove of it is to be sensible of an uneasiness” (Hume 1978: 296).

³⁰ Our universal approval of the sages' excellence is described in *Mengzi* 6A7. Also, our uniform disapproval is demonstrated by the example of a beggar who refused to accept the food given with contempt in *Mengzi* 6A10, provided that a beggar's low status reversely stands for the universality of his/her response. I see that Mengzi's taste analogy in *Mengzi* 6A7 serves for this aim to prove our sharing the natural moral patterns in the heart (see Choi 2018).

be best translated as “the pattern (*li* 理)” (*Mengzi* 6A7).³¹ Our universal possession of these natural patterns accounts for the heart’s capacity to detect what is morally valuable by aroused sentiment. This short imperative of *xin wu wang* would tell us that we should strive to engage our reflective thinking in order not to forget the heart’s natural patterns causing such moral sentiments.

It should also be noted that sentiments imply *qi*’s invariable movements. *Qi* is hardly dissociated from the four sprouts, as it is traditionally considered as the source of emotions. If one becomes alarmed with a compassionate feeling upon seeing a baby in danger, or one’s dignity is denied by others’ contempt, one’s heart of compassion or shame obviously accompany *qi*’s intense movements. In this case, the four sprouts would indicate that all people’s *qi* is naturally able to flow in an identical direction “like water tending downward” because it moves along the heart’s same patterns (*Mengzi* 6A2). The four sprouts would mean the heart’s natural causes for *qi*’s unidirectional movements on the one hand, and represent the paradigms of well-directed *qi* without the heart’s active intervention on the other. In other words, the heart’s natural capacity of moral evaluation is ontologically ascribed to its moral patterns, but empirically and psychologically confirmed by *qi*’s proper arousals.

If the object of *xin wu wang* designates the heart’s natural patterns, presumed from the uniform arousal of favorable *qi*, this further means that Mengzi does not rule out *qi*’s positive role for achieving *yi*. Uncontrolled *qi* would obviously cause the heart’s perturbation, but the heart’s proper direction of *qi* does not always mean precluding *qi*’s agitation. As in his implicit teaching from the farmer analogy, Mengzi consistently advocates *qi*’s positive features throughout this dialogue. If *qi* has advantageous features for achieving *yi*, he would be eager to embrace them to gain the *maximized* outcome from the progress of one’s *yi* cultivation. Perhaps our proper supervision of *qi* implies taking the *mean* between refraining negative *qi* and enhancing positive *qi* appropriately to the circumstances. However, how do we determine the mean for our proper direction of *qi*? To answer this question, we had better envisage what occurs in the heart with regard to *qi*’s movement.

Seeing Mengzi’s maxim from the standpoint of *qi* redirects our discussion back to the topic of the unperturbed heart. This superior state of the heart suggests another paradigm of well-directed *qi* especially by the will (*zhi* 志). Just after assessing Gaozi’s maxim, Mengzi continues to say:

“Your will is the commander of the *qi*. *Qi* fills the body. When your will is fixed somewhere, *qi* sets up camp there. Hence, it is said, ‘Maintain your will. Do not injure *qi*.’” GONGSUN Chou continued, “[...] why do you add, ‘Maintain your will. Do not injure *qi*?’” Mengzi replied, “When your will is unified, it moves the *qi*. When the *qi* is unified, it moves your will.” (*Mengzi* 2A2)

From Mengzi’s previous recognition of Gaozi’s unperturbed heart and critical assessment of his popular maxim for *yi*, it follows that even his wrong method of *yi*

³¹ Elsewhere, I propose a cause-focused account of the heart of compassion (*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心), which argues that the four sprouts indicate the natural moral patterns in the heart that cause uniform emotions (see Choi 2019).

achievement—to abide by the words—could keep his heart unperturbed. This further means that abiding by the words was able to control *qi* to some extent. Presumably, Gaozi’s doctrinal knowledge about how to “maintain the will” along with “not injuring his *qi*” would enhance his capacity to stabilize the improper arousals of *qi* in his heart, although his ignorance of *yi*’s genuine sense prevented him from attaining the flood-like *qi*—a far superior state to the calm and stabilized heart.

Contextually, as the unperturbed heart is related to controlling *qi*, it is plausible to think that this state would be achieved with the constant unity of the orientations of both the will and *qi*. Bodily *qi*, which “fills the body,” would tend to radiate without a designated orientation like the sprouts grown everywhere in the Ox mountain (*Mengzi* 6A8). *Qi*’s direction would be settled when the will intervened and handled *qi* with the right guidance as if it were “a commander of *qi*.” The will would lead *qi* to a desired point in the heart, estimated from reflective deliberation.³² This process reminds us of a commonsense method of moral self-cultivation: engage the will to control bodily impulses and emotional responses.

However, bodily *qi*, when unified, has the potential to move the will, too. The cases of *qi*’s leading the will do not necessarily have negative imports. For instance, strong *qi* would play dominant roles either to break our hesitation to take an immediate action for righteousness or to balk at doing inhumane and shameful deeds. Despite the will’s predominance in leading *qi*, *Mengzi* tells us that the will and *qi* are naturally able to collaborate with each other.³³ In all likelihood, our repeated attempts to improve the dynamics of the will and *qi* would elevate the frequency of their collaboration to form their unified orientation in the heart. Moreover, the more that the will and *qi* are habituated to tread on the harmonized direction without conflict, the more that the will’s role would diminish for supervising *qi*’s orientation. The well-cultivated *qi* not only becomes a reliable indicator for the heart’s proper function but also drive us to perform, without the will’s command, the same respectful actions as the will would have commanded us to do.

Our understanding of the dynamics of the will and *qi* would improve with attention to Van Norden’s intriguing discussion about “the perturbation of sages” (Van Norden 1997: 249). As he notices, it seems true that a kind of mental perturbation would accompany a feeling of alarm and compassion upon seeing a baby in danger, as well as the sage Shun’s 舜 long-lasting sadness over his parent’s hatred of him (*Mengzi* 5A1). In such cases, the sages with unperturbed hearts would feel the proper emotions even more sensitively. Van Norden submits two points that distinguish the sages’ mental movements from ordinary perturbations like fear and anxiety. First, the two emotional responses are demarcated by the discrepancy of the intentional objects. The intentional objects of the sages’ emotions give rise to “a perfectly virtuous concern,” for example, about righteousness and filial

³² Van Norden construes that the will is “simply the heart when it is focused on some goal” (Van Norden 2008: 38). His interpretation, however, appears too concise to capture the complicated play between the will and *qi* occurring in the heart.

³³ The Cheng brothers estimate that the cases of will’s leading *qi* take no less than ninety percent (Van Norden 2008: 38). Despite the plausibility of their quantitative presumption, it is still possible that the remaining ten percent would perform an important role for self-cultivation.

piety, whereas those of ordinary perturbation have much less relevance to virtues. Second, the sages' unperturbed hearts manifest "motivational harmony" even when their emotional responses are immediately expressed (Van Norden 1997: 249).³⁴ Though we commonly experience an inner conflict, for instance, between the desires for our complacency and for doing a righteous act, we often encounter motivational harmony as well. As indicated by our feeling compassion upon seeing the baby in danger, we are not always "of two minds" (Van Norden 1997: 249).

To Van Norden's analysis, we can add another point regarding the collaboration of the heart's components. This notion of "motivational harmony" in the heart of compassion postulates that the heart's components are naturally harmonized to comprise an ulterior motive to proceed toward the baby. This harmony would involve the appropriate association between the heart's components, notably the will and *qi*. Their integration can be extraordinarily quick, as in the case of seeing the baby in danger, while a long duration of deliberation and desire satisfaction would not prevent them from emanating an intense feeling as in the case of the sage Shun's long-lasting sorrow. When this natural harmony between the will and *qi* occurs, it seems that the orientations of both *qi*'s expression and the will's anticipation are identical at the outset. Perhaps both the will and *qi* would jointly advance toward an intentional object without offsetting the respective merit of each component for performing a moral action. With spontaneous equation of the orientations of the will and *qi*, the heart would suffer neither disturbance from their clash, nor the loss of their motivational forces. When the will and *qi* naturally proceed in an identical direction, the heart would remain stable at least temporarily.

If an unperturbed heart were achieved by maintaining the stabilized harmony between the will and *qi*, various methods would be available to uphold their identical directions: either by reinforcing *qi* or by strengthening the will. First, we may fortify bodily *qi* not to move too quickly and just maintain the specific will only to perform designated actions. For his courage, BEIGONG You mainly enhanced his bodily *qi* and abided by his own principle of not feeling insulted. If he felt insulted, he would have activated the will for revenge and killed his enemies without hesitation in any given situation. Second, we may establish the simplest principle for the will's deliberation and merely adhere to it to minimize the need for the will's controlling *qi*. MENG Shishe 孟施舍 did not measure the enemy to decide when to advance, nor calculate the chances of winning, which he considered as a sign of being "in awe of the opposing force" (*Mengzi* 2A2). His unperturbed heart was derived from his will's simple adherence to the principle of equal probability. As winning or losing a battle has merely a fifty-fifty chance, he would seek no reason to fear the result of a

³⁴ Van Norden notes that "motivational harmony" is taken from SHUN Kwong-loi's terminologies (Van Norden 1997: 256).

battle or the forces of his enemy.³⁵ Third, like Gaozi, we may comply with the doctrinal knowledge that instructs in some qualified tactics to maintain the identical directions of the will and *qi* to avoid the heart's perturbation.

Mengzi does not deny that these methods can keep the heart calm enough to achieve an unperturbed heart. However, he would think that they are practically less appropriate for moral self-cultivation because they neglect human nature—the possibility of the *natural* collaboration between the will and *qi*—and merely force either the will or *qi* not to conflict. By contrast, Mengzi suggests the most natural method for an unperturbed heart. To lead the will and *qi* in a harmonious association, we do not need to force them deliberately. Our precise understanding of their nature can preserve their harmonious collaboration as well as their respective merit to us in their own right. The will, pertinent to rational reflection, can control *qi*, but *qi* is often vigorously expressed to overwhelm the will's modest control. Regardless of the will's command, one's well-cultivated *qi* can promote virtuous actions without one's hesitation. Given Mengzi's goal of the utmost moral cultivation, he would instruct us to maximize each component's advantage for our moral life by respecting the nature of the will and *qi*.³⁶ To direct *qi* properly, therefore, we first need to recognize its true nature and next engage the will not only to restrain negative *qi* but also to foster positive *qi*.

³⁵ There are some conundrums regarding Mengzi's assessment of the courage of BEIGONG You and MENG Shishe. First, Mengzi remarks that the latter resembles Zengzi 曾子 and the former is similar to Zixia 子夏, but it is difficult to grasp his intention of comparison. Van Norden points out three aspects in this contrast between Zengzi/Meng and Zixia/Beigong through his careful examination of these four historical figures (Van Norden 1997: 240–245). The first is the contrast between preserving either the central or the peripheral, supported by the text, and the second is emphasizing either emotion or behavior. The third is focusing on either “achieving their own excellence” or “being better than others” (Van Norden 1997: 245). Though I am not certain about the second point, the third point is meaningful. ZHU Xi comments, “BEIGONG You strived to confront with others, and MENG Shishe merely defended himself. Zixia faithfully trusted in the sage, and Zengzi examined himself and sought ‘it’ in himself” (my translation; see also Van Norden 2008: 36). In this obscure contrast, we can at least agree that Mengzi places more weight on the courage based on the self. While Beigong and Zixia may have acted in response to others, including the sages, Meng and Zengzi would have sought the inner principles to abide by from themselves. Yet, there are varying degrees of significance among the inner principles, which would distinguish Zengzi's courage from Meng's.

There is a more difficult conundrum about the meaning of “preserving what is crucial (*shouyue* 守約).” Mengzi first assesses Meng's courage as *shouyue* when compared with Beigong's, but soon remarks that Meng's “preserving *qi* (*shouqi* 守氣)” was not as good as Zengzi's *shouyue*. Rainey reports that many commentators say Meng's *shouyue* is “an error for *qi*” because “it would match the phrase below, ‘Meng's grasp of his *qi*’” (Rainey 1998: 93, note 4). Despite the plausibility of this reading, however, I believe that we can still propose an interpretation following the original text. Im reads *yue* 約 as “constraint,” which goes “along with the term ‘*suo* [緜],’ ‘upright’ or ‘drawn tight’” (Im 2004: 69). He claims that “the meaning of *suo*, and hence of *yue*, must indicate some kind of normative state of the agent, if it is to dictate whether one ought to be afraid or brave” (71). This reading also sounds plausible, but seems to lean too much toward the normative sense. I believe that Meng did both *shouyue* and *shouqi*, but in different ways. One's *shouyue* would mean to preserve the inner principles for reflection, while one's *shouqi* would stand for maintaining the effect of expressed *qi*, or sentiment, regardless of one's inner principles. Hence, when the courage of Beigong and Meng were compared, the latter, who observed his inner principle, would be considered as doing *shouyue*. However, given the degree of importance among the inner principles, Zengzi's great courage exhibits the best kind of *shouyue*, preserving the *natural* moral principles in the heart. Compared to Zengzi's courageous actions from his self-reflection based on the heart's natural principle, Meng's courage based on a simple principle of equal probability would be nothing more than maintaining his *qi* not to perturb (*shouqi* 守氣).

³⁶ I believe that Mengzi's practical goal of moral cultivation makes it subordinate to dispute over the priority between the rational will and bodily *qi* both in moral motivation and evaluation.

To avoid mental perturbation, it is essential to keep the harmonious association between the will and *qi*. Our sincere endeavor to operate their naturally cordial collaboration would compensate us with the best kind of unperturbed hearts. When this effort for mental tranquility goes along with our cumulative righteous actions throughout our lives, the invaluable flood-like *qi* is awarded to us as an honor from Heaven.

6 *Qi* and the Standard of Self-cultivation

Thus far, we have assumed that the four sprouts indicate both the causes and effects of the moral sentiments in the heart, as well as exhibit the paradigms of the temporary but natural harmonious collaborations between the will and *qi*. Moreover, aroused moral sentiments involve positive *qi*, but for moral cultivation, our reflective thinking should not forget their natural causes in the heart. In other words, Mengzi's four sprouts demonstrate that the heart originally has the natural potential to promote the cooperation between the will and *qi* toward goodness.

This view provides a more sophisticated defense for Mengzi's account of the inherent goodness of human nature.³⁷ Contrary to our common response to the baby in danger, it is hardly assumable that both the will and *qi* can naturally form a uniform orientation to the cases of evil. If we were to consider carrying out unrighteous and inhumane deeds, both components could respectively contribute to our refraining from doing them. While rational reflection would help us strengthen the will to avert what is wrongful, the spontaneous arousal of emotive *qi* like aversion and disgust would render us reluctant to be involved in such deplorable incidents. The will and *qi* function as the double defensive barriers that keep our moral potentials in the heart intact.

Above all, as moral sentiments necessarily involve the aroused *qi*, positive *qi*'s role should be admitted for interpreting Mengzi's account of the inherent goodness of human nature. He would regard both rational and sentimental parts of the heart as equally crucial for flourishing our natural seeds to virtues.³⁸ However, the immediately aroused *qi*—crystallized into proper moral sentiments—can serve as the natural standard of moral evaluation, since it testifies to the normal operation of the heart's patterns.³⁹ For Mengzi, this proper emotive *qi* is not a provisional standard, but works throughout the beginning and ending stages of one's self-cultivation. While self-cultivation begins with recognizing moral sentiments,⁴⁰ those who continuously

³⁷ As is well-known, Mengzi's innate goodness of human nature means that we have the capacity to become good. Mengzi said, "As for what they are inherently, they can become good. This is what I mean by calling their natures good" (*Mengzi* 6A6).

³⁸ I do not think that Mengzi had no strict distinction between emotion and reason in his conception about the heart (*xin* 心), nor takes its rational part to be much superior to the sentimental part (Wong 1991, Kim 2014). He would merely have less interest in discussing metaethical and epistemological issues than in performing moral practices within his main ethical goal of teaching moral self-cultivation.

³⁹ Additionally, positive *qi* can also become a strong motivational source for moral actions, as *qi* is often regarded as the source of our impulsive desires.

⁴⁰ In *Mengzi* 1A7, Mengzi admits that King Xuan's heart of compassion toward the sacrificial ox would enable him to become a true king, which necessarily demands his achievement of *ren*.

“examine oneself (*zifan* 自反)” as the sages and gentlemen did would appoint their ultimate moral standard to the sentimental part of the heart (*Mengzi* 2A2, 4B28).⁴¹

One’s self-examination with a sentiment-based moral standard resonates in the sense of “great courage.” After assessing the different degrees of courage and unperturbed hearts, Mengzi recalls what Zengzi heard from Confucius about great courage:

If I examine myself and am not upright, even if opposed by a man in baggy rags, I would not try to intimidate him. If I examine myself and am upright, even if it is thousands or tens of thousands of people who oppose me, I shall go forward. (*Mengzi* 2A2)

An agent’s self-examination regarding uprightness is indispensable for achieving great courage. This process of moral self-assessment, reminiscent of the method for achieving *yi*, would require a reliable evaluative standard, which would be either external or internal to the agent. Following Gaozi, we may find the standard of self-assessment from such external sources as the words, doctrines, rules of conduct, and so forth. However, Zengzi’s report rules out these external sources because those who oppose the agent, regardless of their inferiority or quantity, to some extent stand for outwardly bestowed standards. Other people’s appraisal often becomes a common benchmark for our self-examination, but Confucius’ standard is internal to the self. Given the internality of this standard, Mengzi would assign it to the effects of the heart’s patterns, or such natural moral sentiments.⁴²

Mengzi’s internalist approach has double merit. In theory, this view provides a stronger ontological foundation for morality, while in practice it elevates the feasibility of people’s self-cultivation. The authority of Heaven supports Mengzi in that the heart’s internal patterns of moral goodness are like the dispositions of bodily senses.⁴³ Moreover, this standard of moral sentiment, clear and accessible from ordinary people’s subjective mind, renders Mengzi’s teachings for self-cultivation much more intelligible and feasible to them.⁴⁴ Of course, our industrious reflective thinking must be essential and advantageous for our self-examination. However, it would not be efficient, unless we securely acknowledge in advance the standard for reflection. The heart’s sentimental part,

⁴¹ *Fan* 反 refers to “the act of evaluating or being introspective” (Van Norden 1997: 199).

⁴² It is obvious that Mengzi considers “examining oneself” as the principal method for self-cultivation (see *Mengzi* 2A7, 4A4, 4A12, 4B28, 7A4).

⁴³ Heaven endowed us with a heart that has naturally uniform moral sensitivity and preferences, just as it gave us the bodily senses that have natural aesthetic preferences (*Mengzi* 6A7, 6A15). Moreover, we can know Heaven by recognizing our human nature (*Mengzi* 7A1).

⁴⁴ I believe that Mengzi proposes two different methods of self-cultivation: the method of extension for cultivating *ren* in *Mengzi* 1A7, and the method for achieving *yi* in *Mengzi* 2A2. Regarding cultivating *ren*, Mengzi asks us to extend the sentimental heart to others and to perform appropriate actions out of such sentiments; regarding cultivating *yi*, he worries about both our blind obedience to the words for *yi* and the impetuous boost of bodily *qi*. These two methods of self-cultivation hardly conflict with each other because both methods culminate in one’s performing moral actions after one’s introspection into the heart. The notable difference in these two methods seems to originate from the discrepancy between the primary intentional objects of *ren* and *yi*. Both methods equally begin with our introspection into the sentimental heart, but for cultivating *ren*, we should extend it to care for others; whereas for *yi*, we should maintain our moral dignity as discerned by the heart.

embracing both the cause as its pattern and the effect as moral sentiment would offer a reliable standard of reflection.⁴⁵

In this regard, Mengzi's maxim for achieving *yi* culminates in his emphasis on the sentimental heart. The four sprouts, representing the normal operation of the heart's components, epitomize not only our natural potential to experience a spontaneous but harmonious association between the will and *qi* in the heart, but also temporary but natural occurrence of an unperturbed heart. We should note, however, the four sprouts are related with not so much as our reflective thinking as expressed *qi*.⁴⁶ As the four sprouts hint at the status of an unperturbed heart to some extent, Mengzi would believe that all humans have the potential to accomplish this superior status of an unperturbed heart. Moreover, given that both the will and *qi* have the natural tendency to collaborate to pursue goodness and to avoid evil, our self-cultivation would bear the best fruits with each mental component's maximized but balanced merits. In other words, our moral self-cultivation equally demands our fortification of the will as well as adequate nourishment of positive *qi*. However, as the will's control does not always promote positive *qi*, it is beneficial for us to add another method for nurturing *qi* independent of the will's control. This method for *qi* cultivation involves one's repeated performance of virtuous actions. If BEIGONG You's aggressive fortification of *qi* could partly contribute to his cultivation of courage, it would be his continuous acts of vengeance that adamantly strengthened his *qi*. Mengzi's nourishment of the flood-like *qi* also attests to the centrality of one's performing virtuous actions. One's valuable *qi* is developed by one's cumulative performances for *yi*, and to achieve *yi* one should examine the sentimental part of the heart.

7 Conclusion

In this essay, I argued that Mengzi proposed his method for cultivating *yi* in *Mengzi* 2A2. Such topics as unperturbed hearts, courage, Gaozi's maxim, and the flood-like *qi* ultimately converge upon the way of achieving *yi*. First, I argued that Mengzi's short remark "*bi you shi yan er wu zheng, xin wu wang, wu zhu zhang*" can be read as his maxim for achieving *yi* that structurally parallels with the preceding maxim of Gaozi. For achieving *yi*, neither our blind obedience to doctrines nor our impetuous boost of *qi* is helpful. Instead, we should concentrate on the heart's moral sentiments and perform righteous actions. Second, the centrality of moral sentiment redirects our attention to *qi*'s positive aspects, although *qi*'s impulsivity often makes it appear negative.

⁴⁵ Mengzian self-cultivation demands a moral standard internal to the self; it is utterly important for gentlemen to maintain it intact. This explains why Mengzi articulates that gentlemen are distinguished from others by "preserving the heart (*cun xin* 存心)" and not losing "the childlike hearts (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心)" (*Mengzi* 4B28/12). Gentlemen, the masters in self-cultivation, would go on to examine themselves with direct reference to their preserved hearts, plausibly the four sprouts, just as "those who learn must also make use of their 'compass and square'" (*Mengzi* 6A20).

⁴⁶ As the expression of positive *qi* on the face tells the good environment of one's residence, bodily and emotive *qi* may play the role of an indicator to one's healthy heart and inherent virtues (*Mengzi* 7B36).

If the four sprouts are to accompany the spontaneous movement of *qi*, it can be said that properly expressed *qi* signals the moral health of one's heart. Moreover, strong positive *qi* not only constitutes moral sentiments that serve as a fair standard for self-examination, but also leads the will to perform moral actions without delay. To maximize our achievement of virtues, Mengzi would desire us to develop the positive capacities of all the mental components—the will and *qi*. In this regard, achieving *yi* and cultivating *qi* are dependent upon each other. While one's positive *qi* forms both the evaluative standard and the initial motive for performing *yi*, one's continuous righteous actions performed through reflective deliberation strengthen one's *qi* enough to be in full accord with Heaven.

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