Taoism Essay, Research Paper

Classical Chinese theory of mind is similar to Western "folk

psychology" in that both mirror their respective background view of

language. They differ in ways that fit those folk theories of language. The core

Chinese concept is xin (the heart-mind). As the translation suggests, Chinese

folk psychology lacked a contrast between cognitive and affective states

([representative ideas, cognition, reason, beliefs] versus [desires, motives,

emotions, feelings]). The xin guides action, but not via beliefs and desires. It

takes input from the world and guides action in light of it. Most thinkers share

those core beliefs. Herbert Fingarette argued that Chinese (Confucius at least)

had no psychological theory. Along with the absence of belief-desire explanation

of action, they do not offer psychological (inner mental representation)

explanations of language (meaning). We find neither the focus on an inner world

populated with mental objects nor any preoccupation with questions of the

correspondence of the subjective and objective worlds. Fingarette explained this

as reflecting an appreciation of the deep conventional nature of both linguistic

and moral meaning. He saw this reflected in the Confucian focus on li (ritual)

and its emphasis on sociology and history rather than psychology. The meaning,

the very existence, of a handshake depends on a historical convention. It rests

on no mental acts such as sincerity or intent. The latter may accompany the

conventional act and give it a kind of aesthetic grace, but they do not explain

it. Fingarette overstates the point, of course. It may not be psychologistic in

its linguistic or moral theory, but Confucianism still presupposes a psychology,

albeit not the familiar individualist, mental or cognitive psychology. Its

account of human function in conventional, historical society presupposes some

behavioral and dispositional traits. Most Chinese thinkers indeed appear to

presuppose that humans are social, not egoistic or individualistic. The xin

coordinates our behavior with others. Thinkers differed in their attitude toward

this natural social faculty. Some thought we should reform this tendency and try

harder to become egoists, but most approved of the basic "goodness" of

people. Most also assumed that social discourse influenced how the heart-mind

guides our cooperation. If discourse programs the heart-mind, it must have a

dispositional capacity to internalize the programming. Humans accumulate and

transmit conventional dao-s (guiding discourses?ways). We teach them to our

children and address them to each other. The heart-mind then executes the

guidance in any dao it learns when triggered (e.g., by the sense organs). Again

thinkers differed in their attitude toward this shared outlook. Some thought we

should minimize or eliminate the controlling effect of such conventions on human

behavior. Others focused on how we should reform the social discourse that we

use collectively in programming each other?s xin. Typically, thinkers in the

former group had some theory of the innate or hard-wired programming of the xin.

Some in the latter camp had either a "blank page" or a negative view

of the heart-mind?s innate patterns of response. For some thinkers, the sense

organs delivered a processed input to the heart-mind as a distinction: salty and

sour, sweet and bitter, red or black or white or green and so forth. Most had

thin theories, at best, of how the senses contributed to guidance. While it is

tempting to suppose that they assumed the input was an amorphous flow of "qualia"

that the heart-mind sorted into categories (relevant either to its innate or

social programming). However, given the lack of analysis of the content of the

sensory input, we should probably conservatively assume they took the na?ve

realist view that the senses simply make distinctions in the world. We can be

sure only that the xin did trigger reactions to discourse-relevant stimuli.

Reflecting the theory of xin, the implicit theory of language made no

distinction between describing and prescribing. Chinese thinkers assumed the

core function of language is guiding behavior. Representational features served

that prescriptive goal. In executing guidance, we have to identify relevant

"things" in context. If the discourse describes some behavior toward

one?s elder, one needs a way correctly to identify the elder and what counts

as the prescribed behavior. Correct action according to a conventional dao must

also take into account other descriptions of the situation such as ?urgent?,

?normal?, etc. These issues lay behind Confucian theories of

"rectifying names." The psychological theory (like the linguistic) did

not take on a sentential form. Classical Chinese language had no

"belief-grammar", i.e., forms such as X believes that P (where P is a

proposition). The closest grammatical counterpart focuses on the term, not the

sentence and point to the different function of xin. Where Westerners would say

"He believes (that) it is good" classical Chinese would either use

"He goods it" or "He, yi (with regard to) it, wei (deems:regards)

good." Similarly zhi (to know) takes noun phrases, not sentences, as

object. The closest counterpart to propositional knowledge would be "He

knows its being (deemed as) good." The xin guides action in the world in

virtue of the categories it assigns to things, but it does not house mental or

linguistic "pictures" of facts. Technically, the attitude was what

philosophers a de re attitude. The "subject" was in the world not in

the mind. The context of use picked out the intended item. The attitude

consisted of projecting the mental category or concept on the actual thing. We

distinguish this functional role best by talking about a disposition rather than

a belief. It is a disposition to assign some reality to a category. The

requisite faculty of the heart-mind (or the senses) is the ability to

discriminate or distinguish T from not-T, e.g., good from bad, human being from

thief. We might, alternately, think of Chinese ?belief? and ?knowledge?

as predicate attitudes rather than propositional attitudes. Predicate attitudes

are the heart-mind?s function. A basic judgment is, thus, neither a picture

nor representation of some metaphysically complex fact. Its essence is picking

out what counts as ?X? in the situation (where ?X? is a term in the

guiding discourse). The context fixes the object and the heart-mind assigns it

to a relevant category. Hence, Chinese folk theory places a (learned or innate)

ability to make distinctions correctly in following a dao in the central place

Western folk psychology places ideas. They implicitly understood correctness as

conformity to the social-historical norm. One of the projects of some Chinese

philosophers was trying to provide a natural or objective ground of dao. Western

"ideas" are analogous to mental pictographs in a language of thought.

The composite pictures formed out of these mental images (beliefs) were the

mental counterparts of facts. Truth was "correspondence" between the

picture and the fact. Pictures play a role in Chinese folk theory of language

but not of mind. Chinese understood their written characters as having evolved

from pictographs. They had scant reason to think of grammatical strings of

characters as "pictures" of anything. Chinese folk linguistics

recognized that history and community usage determined the reference of the

characters. They did not appeal to the pictographic quality or any associated

mental image individuals might have. Language and conventions are valuable

because they store inherited guidance. The social-historical tradition, not

individual psychology, grounds meaning. Some thinkers became skeptical of claims

about the sages and the "constancy" of their guidance, but they did

not abandon the assumption that public language guides us. Typically, they

either advocated reforming the guiding discourse (dao) or reverting to

"natural," pre-linguistic behavior patterns. Language rested neither

on cognition nor private, individual subjectivity. Chinese philosophy of mind

played mainly an application (execution of instructions) role in Chinese theory

of language. Chinese theory of language centered on counterparts of reference or

denotation. To have mastered a term was for the xin and senses working together

to be able to distinguish or divide realities "correctly."

?Correctly? was the rub because the standard of correctness was discourse.

It threatened a regress?we need a discourse to guide our practical

interpretation of discourse. Philosophy of mind played a role in various

attempted solutions. Chinese philosophers mostly agreed (except for innatists)

that actual distinguishing would be relative to past training, experience,

assumptions and situation. However, they did not regard experience as a mental

concept in the classic Western sense of the being a subjective or private

content. An important concept in philosophy of mind was, therefore, de

(virtuosity). One classic formulation identified de as embodied, inner dao. De

though "inner," was more a set of dispositions than a mental content.

The link seemed to be that when we learn a dao?s content, it produces de. Good

de comes from successful teaching of a dao. When you follow dao, you need not

have the discourse "playing" internally. We best view it as the

behavioral ability to conform to the intended pattern of action?the path

(performance dao). It would be "second nature." We may think of de,

accordingly, as both learned and natural. We can distinguish Chinese thought

from Indo-European thought, then, not only in its blending affective and

cognitive functions, but also in its avoiding the nuts and bolts of Western

mind-body analysis. Talk of "inner" and "outer" did

distinguish the psychological from the social, but it did not mean inner was

mental content. The xin has a physical and temporal location and consists of

dispositions to make distinctions in guiding action. It is not a set of

inherently representational "ideas" (mental pictograms). Similarly, we

find no clear counterpart to the Indo-European conception of the faculty of

reason. Euclidean method in geometry and the formulation of the syllogism in

logic informed this Indo-European concept. Absent this apparatus, Chinese

thinkers characterized the heart-mind as either properly or improperly trained,

virtuous, skilled, reliable, etc. Prima facie, however, these were social

standards threatened circularity. The heart-mind required some kind of mastery

of a body of practical knowledge. Chinese thinkers explored norm realism mainly

through an innatist strategy. Innatists sought to picture the heart-mind?s

distinctions as matching "norms" or "moral patterns"

implicit in the natural stasis or harmony of the world. Return to Outline

Historical Developments: The Classical Period Confucius indirectly addressed

philosophy of mind questions in his theory of education. He shaped the moral

debate in a way that fundamentally influenced the classical conception of xin

(heart-mind). Confucius? discourse dao was the classical syllabus, including

most notably history, poetry and ritual. On one hand, we can think of these as

"training" the xin to proper performance. On the other, the question

of how to interpret the texts into action seemed to require a prior interpretive

capacity of xin. Confucius appealed to a tantalizingly vague intuitive ability

that he called ren (humanity). A person with ren can translate guiding discourse

into performance correctly?i.e., can execute or follow a dao. Confucius left

open whether ren was innate or acquired in study?though the latter seems more

likely to have been his position. It was, in any case, the position of China?s

first philosophical critic, the anti-Confucian Mozi. Again concern with

philosophy of mind was subordinate to Mozi?s normative concerns. He saw moral

character as plastic. Natural human communion (especially our tendency to

"emulate superiors") shaped it. Thus, we could cultivate utilitarian

behavioral tendencies by having social models enunciate and act on a utilitarian

social discourse. The influence of social models would also determine the

interpretation of the discourse. Interpretation takes the form of indexical pro

and con reactions?shi (this:right:assent) and fei (not this:wrong:dissent).

The attitudes when associated with terms pick out the reality (object, action,

etc.) relevant to the discourse guidance. We thus train the heart-mind to make

distinctions that guide its choices and thereby our behavior?specifically in

following a utilitarian symbolic guide. Utilitarian standards also should guide

practical interpretation (execution or performance) of the discourse. At this

point in Chinese thought, the heart-mind became the focus of more systematic

theorizing?much of it in reaction to Mozi?s issues. The moral issue and the

threat of a relativist regress in the picture led to a nativist reaction. On the

one hand, thinkers wanted to imagine ways to free themselves from the implicit

social determinism. On the other, moralists want a more absolute basis for

ethical distinctions and actions. Several thinkers may have joined a trend of

interest in cultivating the heart-mind. Mencius? theory is the best known

within the moralist trend. He analyzed the heart-mind as consisting of four

natural moral inclinations. These normally mature just as seeds grows into

plants. Therefore, the resulting virtues (?benevolence?, ?morality?,

?ritual?, and ?knowledge?) were natural. Mencius thus avoided having to

treat the ren intuition as a learned product a social dao. It is a de that

signals a natural dao. This view allowed Mencius to defend Confucian ritual

indirectly against Mozi?s accusation that it relied on an optional and, thus,

changeable tradition. Mencius? strategy, however, presupposed that a

linguistic dao could either distort or reinforce the heart-mind’s innate

program. In principle, we do not need to prop up moral virtue educationally.

Linguistic shaping, other than countering linguistic distortion, therefore, ran

an unnecessary risk. It endangered the natural growth of the moral dispositions.

The shi (this:right:assent) and fei (not this:wrong:dissent) dispositions

necessary for sage-like moral behavior should develop "naturally." His

theory did not imply that we know moral theory at birth, but that they develop

or mature as the physical body does and in response to ordinary moral

situations. The heart-mind functions by issuing shi-fei (this-not this)

directives that are right in the concrete situations in which we find ourselves.

It does not need or generate ethical theory or hypothetical choices. The xin?s

intuitions are situational and implicitly harmonious with nature. A well-known

advocate with the natural spontaneity or freedom motivation was the Taoist,

Laozi. He analyzed the psychology of socialization at a different level.

Learning names was training us to make distinctions and to have desires of what

society considered the appropriate sort. Both the distinctions and the desires

were "right" only according to the conventions of the language

community. Learning language not only meant losing one?s natural spontaneity,

it was and subjecting oneself to control by a social-historical perspective. We

allowed society to control our desires. His famous slogan, wu-wei, enjoined us

to avoid actions motivated by such socialized desires. We achieve that negative

by forgetting socially instilled distinctions?by forgetting language! His

implicit ideal had some affinities with that of Mencius except that his

conception of the "natural" realm of psychological dispositions was

considerably less ambitious in moral terms. Interpreters usually suppose that he

assumed there would be a range of natural desires left even if socialized ones

were "subtracted." These would be enough to sustain small,

non-aggressive, agrarian villages. In them, people would lack the curiosity even

to visit neighboring villages. This "primitivism" still requires that

there is a natural level of harmonious impulses to action, but not nearly enough

to sustain Mencius? unified moral empire. The LATER MOHISTS became skeptical

of the neutral status of these allegedly "natural" heart-mind states.

They noted that even a thief may claim that his behavior was natural. They

watered down the conventionalism of Mozi by appealing to objectively accessible

similarities and differences in nature. Our language ought to reflect these

clusters of similarity. They did little epistemology especially of the senses,

but supposedly, like Mozi, would have appealed to the testimony ordinary people

relying on their "eyes and ears." Others (See ZHUANGZI) insisted that

any apparent patterns of similarity and difference were always perspectival and

relative to some prior purpose, standards or value attitude. Linguistics did

shape heart-mind attitudes but neither reliably or accurately carves the world

into its real parts. The Later Mohists had given a cluster of definitions of zhi

(to know). One of these seemed close to consciousness?or rather to point to

the lack of any such concept. Zhi was the capacity to know. In dreaming the zhi

did not zhi and we took (something) as so. They analyzed the key function of the

heart-mind as the capacity to discriminate linguistic intention. Zhuangzi takes

a step beyond Laozi in his theory of emotions. Zhuangzi discusses the passions

and emotions that were raw, pre-social inputs from reality. He suggested a

pragmatic attitude toward them?we cannot know what purpose they have, but

without them, there would be no reference for the "I." Without the

‘I’, there would be neither choosing nor objects of choice. Like Hume, he argued

that while we have these inputs and feel there must be some organizing

"true ruler," we get no input (qing) from any such ruler. We simply

have the inputs themselves (happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, fear). We cannot

suppose that the physical heart is such a ruler, because it is no more natural

than the other organs and joints of the body. Training and history condition a

heart?s judgments. Ultimately, even Mencius? shi-fei (this-not this) are

input to the xin. Our experience introduces them relative to our position and

past assumptions. They are not objective or neutral judgments. XUNZI also

concentrated on issues related to philosophy of mind though in the context of

moral and linguistic issues. He initiated some important and historically

influential developments in the classical theory. His most famous (and textually

suspect) doctrine is "human nature is evil." While he clearly wanted

to distance himself from Mencius, the slogan at best obscures the deep affinity

between their respective views of human nature and mind. Xunzi seems to have

drawn both from the tradition advocating cultivating heart-mind and from the

focused theory of language. This produced a tense hybrid theory that filled out

the original Confucian picture on how conventions and language program the

heart-mind. Xunzi made the naturalism explicit. Human guiding discourse takes

place in the context of a three-tier universe?tian (heaven-nature) di

(earth-sustenance) and ren (the social realm). He gave humans a special place in

the ?chain of nature,’ but not based on reason. Animals shared the capacity

for zhi (knowledge). What distinguishes humans is their yi (morality) which is

grounded on the ability to bian (distinguish). Presumably, the latter ability is

unique among animals with knowledge because it is short-hand for the ability to

construct and abide by conventions?conventional distinctions or language. One

of Xunzi?s naturalistic justifications for Confucian conventional rituals is

economic. Ritual distinctions guide people?s desires so that society can

manage scarcity. Only those with high status will learn to seek scarce goods.

His departure from Mencius thus seems to lie in seeing human morality as more

informed or "filled-out" by historical conventional distinctions.

These are the products of reflection and artifice, not nature. However, in other

ways Xunzi seems to edge closer to Mencius. He also presents ritual as part of

the structure of the world?implicit in the heaven-earth natural context. One

natural line of explanation is this: while thought creates the correct

conventions, nature sets the concrete conditions of scarcity and human traits

that determine what conventions will be best for human flourishing. Return to

Outline Historical Developments: Han Cosmology The onset of the philosophical

dark age, brought on by Qin Dynasty repression followed by Han dynasty policies

resulted in a bureaucratic, obscurant Confucian orthodoxy. The Qin thus buried

the technical ideas informing philosophy of mind along with the active thinkers

who understood them. The ontology of the eclectic scholasticism that emerged was

essentially religious and superstitious. It was, however, overtly materialist

(assuming Qi (ether, matter) is material). So the implicit philosophy of mind of

the few philosophically inclined thinkers during the period tended toward a

vague materialism. The Han further developed the five-element (five phases)

version of materialism. They postulated a correlative pentalogy linking

virtually every system of classification that occurred to them. The scheme

included the organs of the body and the virtues. Interpretation and analysis of

"correlative" reasoning is a controversial subject. From here, the

mental correlations look more like a frequency selection from the psychological

lexicon than a product of philosophical reflection, observation or causal

theory. The Yin-yang analysis also had mental correlates. Following Xunzi,

Orthodox Han Confucians tended to treat qing (reality:desires) as yin (typically

negative). The yang (value positive) counterpart was xing (human moral nature).

The most important development of the period was the emergence a compromise

Confucian view of mind?s role in morality. It eventually informed and

dominated the scholastic Neo-Confucianism of the much later Sung to Qing

dynasties. The small book known as the Doctrine of the Mean gave it an

influential formulation. It presents the heart-mind as a homeostasis-preserving

input output device. The heart-mind starts in a state of tranquillity. The

account leaves open whether this is a result of ideally structured moral input,

resolution of inner conflicts, or the absence of (distorting) content. Xunzi?s

view of the empty, unified and still mind seems the proximate ancestor of the

latter aspect of the view. The vagueness, conveniently, makes Mencius?

doctrines fit it as well. The input is a perturbation from the outer world. The

output, the heart-mind?s action-guiding response, restores harmony to the

world and the inner state to tranquillity. If the inner state prior to the input

is not tranquil, the response will not restore harmony to the real situation.

Han Confucianism filled out this cosmic view of this black-box interaction

between heart-mind and world harmony using qi materialism. Qi is a rather more a

blend of energy and matter than pure matter?translations such as

"life-force" bring out an essential connection with vitality. This

makes it more appropriate for a cosmology that links the active heart-mind with

the changing world. Qi was the single constituting element of spirits and ghosts

as well. Wang Ch?ung?s skeptical, reductive application of qi theory focused

on shen (spirit-energy). He did not view its consequences for heart-mind as

particularly iconoclastic. It still lacked a notion of "consciousness"

independent of zhi (know). (Our zhi, he argued, stops when we are asleep and so

almost certainly it does when we are dead.) His arguments that nature had no

intentional purposes illustrated his reductive behaviorism?if it has neither

eyes nor ears, then it cannot have zhi (purposes or intentions). This argument

would hardly make sense if he had the familiar Western concept of consciousness.

Similarly, he argues that the five virtues are in the five organs so when the

organs are dead and gone, the virtues disappear with them. Return to Outline

Historical Developments: Buddhist Philosophy of Mind The next developments are

related to the introduction of Buddhist mental concepts into China. Most

accounts credit a movement dubbed "Neo-Taoism" with "paving the

way" for this radical change in philosophy of mind. Wangbi?s Neo-Taoist

system was explicitly a cosmology more than a theory of mind, but

interpretations tend to read it epistemically. Wangbi addressed the metaphysical

puzzle of the relation of being and non-being. (See YOU-WU) He postulated

non-being as the "basic substance." Non-being produced being. He

dubbed this obscure relationship as "substance and function."

Interpretations almost inevitably explain this on the analogy to Kant?s

Noumenon and Phenomenon. As noted, Wangbi had few epistemological interests, but

the analysis did have implications for heart-mind theory. He applied the

metaphysical scheme to his Confucian slogan?"Sage within, king

without." The mind was empty "within" while the behaviors were in

perfect conformity with the Confucian ritual dao. This tilts the Taoist

tradition toward the "emptiness" reading of the black-box analysis of

heart-mind. Wangbi also placed li (principle) in a more central explanatory

position. This paved the way for its use in translating Buddhism?s sentence or

law-like ?dharma?. It played roles in both Buddhist epistemology and theory

of mind. In sparse pre-Han usage, li was objective tendencies in thing-kinds.

(Intuitionists and naturalists took them to be the valid norm for that

kind?species relative bits of dao.) Wangbi gave it a more essentialist reading

in the context of the Book of Changes. He postulated a li guiding the mixtures

and transformations of yin and yang. One should be able to bypass the complexity

of the system by isolating and understanding its li. Buddhism introduced

revolutionary changes into Chinese heart-mind conceptual scheme. The original

Indo-European religion probably originated the familiar Western phenomenalism

(consciousness, experience-based mentalism). Indian philosophy came complete

with the familiar Western sentential analyses, mental content and cognitive

emphasis (belief and knowing-that). It even mimicked the subject-predicate

syllogism and the familiar epistemic and metaphysical subjective-objective

dualism. It introduced a semantic (eternal) truth predicate into Chinese thought

along with a representational view of the function of both mind and language.

Reason/intellect and emotion/desire formed a basic opposition in Buddhist

psychological analysis. An inner idea-world parallels (or replaces) the ordinary

world of objects. Soul and mind are roughly interchangeable and familiar

arguments for immortality suggest both metaphysical dualism and mental

transcendence or superiority over the physical. It conceptually links reality

(knowledge, reason) to permanence and appearance (illusion, experience) to

change. A universal chain of causation was a central explanatory device and a

mark of dependence and impermanence. Two caveats are in order, however. First,

although Buddhism introduced a dualist conceptual scheme, many schools

(arguably) denied the dualism so formulated and rejected any transcendent

?self?. Second, it is unclear how well the philosophy of mind was generally

understood and whether much of it actually "took" in China. One of the

early and notoriously unsuccessful schools was the "Consciousness

only" school (translated as "Only Heart-mind") which translated

the idealism of Yogacara Buddhism. The Yogacara analysis was Hume-like in

denying that anything linked the infinitesimal "moments of awareness"

into a real self. Scholars tend to blame its demise, however, as much on its

objectionable moral features (its alleged Hinayana or elitist failure to

guarantee universal salvation) as on its conceptual innovations. The most

successful schools were those that seemed to eschew theory of any kind?like

Zen (Ch?an) or Pure Land Buddhism?or those that opted for intuitive,

mystical simplicity (Tian T?ai and Hua Yen). The most important conceptual

legacy of Buddhism, therefore, seems to be the changed role and importance of

the character li (principle). In Buddhism it served a wide range of important

sentential and mental functions. It facilitated the translation of ?law?,

?truth?, and ?reason?. Neo-Confucianism would take it over (with

notoriously controversial implications) as key concept in its philosophy of

mind. Return to Outline Historical Developments: Neo-Confucianism

Neo-Confucianism is a Western name for a series of schools in which philosophy

of mind played a central role. Scholars (somewhat controversially) present these

schools as motivated by an anti-foreignism that sought to resurrect indigenous

classical systems. These had lain dormant for six-hundred odd years when the

freshness of Buddhism started to attract the attention of China’s intellectuals.

Resurrecting Confucianism required providing it with an alternative to Buddhist

metaphysics. For this, they drew on ch’i metaphysics, the black-box homeostasis

preserving analysis of heart-mind, Wang Pi’s and Buddhism’s li and Mencius’

classical theory of the inherent goodness of heart-mind. The intricacies of

Neo-Confucian systems are too rich to analyze in detail here. The earliest

versions focused on the notion of qi linkage between the heart-mind and the

world influenced by our action. They characterized the tranquil state of the

black-box as void. The school of li criticized that analysis as too Zen-like.

(This was a typical and damning charge to participants in this movement,

although a Zen period in one?s development of thought was a common pattern

among Neo-Confucians.) The li school insisted that any adequate account of

heart-mind had to give it an original moral content. It did this by postulating

an interdependent and inseparable dualism of li and qi. The li permeates the

heart and all of reality, which is composed of qi. The most tempting (and

common) elaboration uses the Platonic distinction of form and content, but that

analysis teeters on the edge of incoherence. The school fell back on dividing

the human mind from some transcendental or metaphysical Tao-mind. This made it

dubious as a theory of mind at all?in the ordinary sense. It essentially

became a metaphysics in which heart-mind was a cosmic force. One way of

understanding the motivation that drove the otherwise puzzling metaphysical

gymnastics links philosophy of mind and ethics. Neo-Confucians were searching

for the metaphysical system such that anyone so viewing the cosmos and one’s

place in it would reliably do what was right. The goal was having the

metaphysical outlook of the sage. The criterion of right and wrong was that the

sage’s mind would so judge it. If we could replicate the outlook, we would be

sage-like in our attitudes?including both beliefs and motivations. The effect

on motivation and behavior was more important than the theoretical coherence of

the system. The complexity of moral choice and human motivation required so many

perturbations into their account of the proposed system that it became an almost

infinitely flexible rationalization for intuitionism. Mencian optimism about

innate heart-mind dispositions proved an uncomfortable legacy. If human nature

and the heart-mind are innately and spontaneously moral, it was unclear why we

require such mental gymnastics to cultivate and condition the dispositions. They

portrayed the li as inherently good in all things, but somehow humans, alone in

all of nature, might fail to conform to its own natural norms. The attempt to

explain this via the li qi dualism flounders on the metaphysical principle that

the dualism pervades all things. Despite this well known (and intractable)

Confucian problem of evil, the school again became the Medieval orthodoxy.

Office holding required being able to parrot the view in considerable detail to

show their moral character. The school of Heart-mind was a rebellion against

that orthodoxy. We best understand this rival as a species of normative,

objective idealism. It saw the actual heart-mind as li and therefore inherently

good. The xin projects that li onto the world in the act of categorizing and

dividing it into types. Thus our normative, (phenomenal) world is good but that

good is a function of the mind. Moral categorization and action are a

simultaneous and combined responses of the heart-mind to the perturbations or

the disharmonies we encounter. The analysis of mind is functional?there is no

goodness of the mind separate from the goodness of its categorizing and acting.

Knowing is acting. The school of heart-mind somewhat gingerly accepted the

implication of their Mencian heritage. There is no evil. I say

"gingerly" because whether one should formulate or teach this

conclusion or not is itself a choice that the mind must assess for its

contextual value. In itself, as it were, the heart-mind is beyond good and evil.

Others, hence, criticized school of heart-mind was for its own Zen-like

implications. Any moderately clever student could figure out that whatever he

chose to do was right (c.f., Zhuangzi?s initial criticism’s of Mencian

idealism). They, in turn, criticized the Buddhist character of their rival’s

assumptions that some kind of state of mind (enlightenment, realization) would

magically result in sagehood. The moralistic name-calling of this

inter-Confucian debate sapped further development of theory of mind. That

coupled with its irrational optimism in the face of growing awareness of the

vulnerability and weakness of China to resist Western and Japanese military and

political power resulted first in mildly more materialistic and utilitarian

systems. Eventually intellectuals developed a wholesale interest in the next

Indo-European thought invasion, which took the form of Marxism. Maoist theory of

mind was an unstable mixture of Marxist economic and materialist reductionism

and traditional Chinese optimism. The right political attitude (typically that

of the part member) would give good communists spectacular moral power and

infallible situational intuitions about how to solve social problems. Again, the

obvious failure in the face of irrational theoretical optimism has produced a

general antipathy to idealizations. One can guess that the next phase, like the

Buddhist phase, will be one of borrowing and blending. However, the current

skepticism about the general outlines of folk psychology in the West and its

essentially alien character probably will keep Chinese theory of heart-mind

distinctively Chinese.

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