Constructing Morality with Mengzi: Three Lessons on the Metaethics of Moral Progress

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Introduction

It is in some ways surprising to include the early Confucian philosopher Mengzi (Mencius) [372-289 BCE] in a volume devoted to neglected voices in metaethics, and in other ways, not surprising at all. It is surprising in that in contemporary east Asian cultures and philosophy, Mengzi is not neglected. He is one of the most prominent and influential philosophers in east Asia, and in terms of relative impact both on philosophical traditions and on public life, he has been one of the most influential philosophers in history. It is *not* surprising to include Mengzi in this volume, however, for at least two reasons. First, despite being one of the most influential philosophers in history, Mengzi is largely ignored in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy. Second, Mengzi himself seemed less interested in questions we might think of as metaethical and much more interested in theoretical questions at the intersection of moral psychology and normative ethics, as well as in practical and normative questions about moral development, virtue, political legitimacy, and good governance.

But, despite his limited interest in metaethical issues, we will argue here that there are several valuable insights for contemporary metaethics that we can draw from Mengzi's work – especially concerning moral change, discovery, and progress.[1] There seem to have been genuine

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[1] Mengzi represents what some would call the intuitionist wing of Confucianism and may be largely responsible for the impression that Confucianism and even the whole of Chinese philosophy relies heavily on intuitions. Even though Mengzi did not directly engage in what we would call metaethical inquiries, his normative and naturalistic

instances of progressive moral change, which we will call "moral progress" (e.g., a person in the mid-19th century coming to believe that slavery is wrong, or that it is impermissible to limit educational opportunities by gender). This progress could be understood as agents acquiring knowledge of objective, mind-independent moral facts (realism) or as agents merely somehow improving their morally-relevant beliefs or desires (constructivism and some other forms of anti-realism). Insofar as any metaethical view is committed to the possibility of moral progress, however, that view owes us an explanation of how this progress can occur (Kitcher 2011; Campbell and Kumar 2012, 2013; Kurth 2017; Arruda 2017).

The issue we address in this paper is how Mengzian ethics could help anti-realists better explain moral progress. A growing number of philosophers have defended anti-realist accounts of moral progress, according to which moral progress amounts to developing processes, systems, and attitudes in which our moral values are applied more broadly, consistently, or successfully rather than, as moral realists believe, uncovering mind-independent objective moral truths.[2] Somewhat surprisingly, proponents of these accounts argue that they have several advantages over realist accounts of moral progress. Most obviously, in rejecting or ignoring the existence of objective moral facts, they are ontologically more parsimonious. But they may also provide

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framework provided a foundation that blossomed into rich metaphysical discussion in Neo-Confucian philosophy throughout east Asia between the 11th and 16th centuries.

[2] For example, moral progress might consist in developing moral systems that better fulfill the original, cooperative function of morality (Kitcher 2011) or, more importantly for our purposes, in reasoning our way to a more consistent application of our antecedently-held moral values and principles (Campbell and Kumar 2013, 2012). There is not universal agreement about how we should delineate moral realism and anti-realism. For example, Copp (2007) treats any theory according to which there are moral truths as realist, whether they are objective in a strong mind-independent sense or not. Here, we restrict moral realism to what we might think of as "strong" moral realism, according to which moral truths are a mind-independent feature of the universe.

better explanations of moral progress than realist views. This paper does just that – we argue that Mengzian ethics can help us build better accounts of moral progress than realist accounts.

More specifically, we'll offer one general lesson and two smaller, particular lessons for moral anti-realists looking to provide explanations of moral progress (though they aren't limited in interest to anti-realists). Our goal is not to develop and argue for a single complete Mengzian account of all relevant forms of moral progress, but instead to show how extant accounts of moral progress can be helpfully supplemented by some key ideas in Mengzi's ethical system.[3] We also want to showcase some especially nice features of what a broadly Mengzian account of moral progress might have. The first, more general lesson is that accounts of personal moral progress should focus on improving and shifting perspectives over and above mere changes in beliefs. We will say more about perspective shifting in Section 3, but suffice it to say for now that in addition to containing beliefs, perspectives also structure them according to salience and centrality, and beyond beliefs, perspectives include patterns of perception, interpretation and inference, attitudes, emotions, and associations (Camp 2006, 2013; Riggs 2016; Elgin 2002, 2010). Mengzian theories of moral psychology and moral development are especially well-suited to provide useful insights on eliciting and facilitating changes of perspectives that amount to moral progress. The second and third lessons concern Mengzian applications of the first lesson

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[3] Readers may at this point wonder how Mengzi (or a Mengzian-inspired constructivist) would, in general, distinguish between moral progress and mere moral change. Providing a full answer to this question that adequately respects both the richness of the original text and of the panoply of historical and contemporary scholarly interpretations of it would require far more space than we have here, so, instead, we'll provide a bare sketch of an answer here. For Mengzi, moral changes in line with the *dao* (the Way 道) are instances of moral progress. We can come to know the *dao* via the moral sensibilities of our heart-mind (*xin* 心). These moral sensibilities are naturally oriented in the right direction, in that we have in us the inclination and potential (including the emotions and intellectual abilities) to become moral. Our natural moral sensibilities can be cultivated and enriched in various ways including focusing one's attention on these moral sensibilities and the mindful practice of ritual (*li* 禮) invented by the ancient sage-kings. A fully-enriched and cultivated heart-mind can appreciate the *dao* and thus is able to identify moral improvements.

and are drawn from case studies of two key passages in *Mengzi*: (1A7 and 3A5 respectively).[4]

The second lesson is that analogical reasoning, namely using pre-cognitive associations between similar matters/situations, facilitates changes in one's perspectives and thus enables moral progress. The third lesson is that anti-realist accounts of moral progress can be helpfully supplemented by exploring how emotions that become prominent in certain situations can lead to moral progress. Mengzi's text provides several useful examples of this. We should emphasize here, at the outset, that we are not claiming that Mengzi should be interpreted as an anti-realist or a constructivist, but instead that aspects of his moral theory can be utilized by moral anti-realists and constructivists to improve their accounts of moral progress.

1. Moral progress

Intuitively, there are instances of moral progress. Moral progress can happen in our personal lives – when we come to realize that something we didn't think of as immoral actually was, or that something we thought of as immoral really wasn't. It can also happen in society at large – think of the shifts in moral opinions after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or the media coverage of the Selma marches. Both moral realist and non-skeptical anti-realist metaethical theories should explain both what that progressive moral change amounts to and how it can happen. Moral realist theories, according to which there are objective moral facts, can perhaps provide the most straightforward account of such progress: moral progress works like epistemic progress in other objective domains of inquiry. Progressive moral change happens when people learn or discover new objective moral facts. Yet, in a fascinating recent development in metaethics, several philosophers have argued that some anti-realist theories can

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[4] The volume of dialogues accredited to Mengzi is titled *Mencius* or *Mengzi*. We use italic to refer to the book. The volume has 7 sections that are named Book 1 through Book 7. Each section contains parts A and B. For example, *Mengzi* 1A7 refers to Book 1 of *Mengzi*, section A, passage 7.

explain moral progress as adequately or even better than realist theories can (Kitcher 2011, 2012; Campbell and Kumar 2013; Kurth 2017; see Arruda 2017). These arguments typically function by examining paradigmatic cases of moral progress and finding that straightforward realist explanations seem to capture the moral change in question very poorly. As Richard Campbell and Victor Kumar (2013) gloss Philip Kitcher's (2011) version of the argument:

> Moral innovators who push towards progressive moral change…do not enter into psychological processes that give any indication that they are responding to mind-independent moral facts that would make the changes objectively progressive on the supposed conception of objectivity. Indeed, if we suppose the reformers to be sincere, they view the reasons for moral change in ways that are entirely mind-dependent. (Campbell and Kumar 2013, 447)

Thus, error theorists and fictionalists such as J.L. Mackie (1991) or Richard Joyce (2007), pragmatic naturalists such as Kitcher (2011) or Owen Flanagan, Hagop Sarkissian, and David Wong (2016) and constructivists such as Sharon Street (2006) have developed broadly anti-realist accounts that might better capture what really happens in cases of moral progress. In this chapter, we will be most interested in anti-realist constructivist accounts of moral progress. Street (2006, 2010) has described metaethical constructivism as claiming that "the truth of a normative claim consists in the claim's being entailed from within the practical point of view" (Street 2010, 367) and "the subject matter of ethics is the subject matter of what follows from within the standpoint of creatures who are already taking this, that, or the other thing to be valuable" (Street 2006, 367). Caroline Arruda provides a helpful "ecumenical" description of metaethical constructivism as "the view that morality is underwritten by the practical attitudes of agents" and constructivist moral progress as "changes in the way that an agent relates to those

attitudes that do the work of underwriting moral claims" (Arruda 2017, 18). In short, for constructivists, the justification of moral claims does not come from their correspondence with mind-independent objective facts but from their relation to the moral perspectives, attitudes, and values of actual or counterfactual agents. Thus, moral progress does not consist in learning new objective facts but instead in bringing our moral beliefs into better alignment with relevant actual or counterfactual perspectives, attitudes, and values.

2. Lesson One: Progress in Perspective

The first lesson is that moral progress involves shifting between and improving perspectives, and should not be limited to changing moral beliefs. In this section, we will first discuss what a perspective is in this context, and with help from Mengzi, we will begin to make the case why understanding moral progress in terms of changing of perspectives has advantages over focusing only on the changing of beliefs.

Standard characterizations of constructivism (Street 2010; Arruda 2017) explicitly refer to standpoints or perspectives, but a standpoint or perspective is not just a set of beliefs. Elisabeth Camp, who argues that perspectives cannot be reduced to sets of propositions (Camp 2006), treats perspectives as "ongoing dispositions to structure one's thoughts," including dispositions "to notice and remember certain types of features rather than others" and "to treat some classes of features as more [causally, motivationally, or explanatorily] central" (Camp 2013, 336). Intuitively, perspectives include patterns of association and inference and they can be shaped not only by our beliefs but also by values, emotions, attitudes, basic evaluative tendencies, and moods. This raises the tantalizing possibility of accounting for moral progress in terms of improved perspectives rather than merely in terms of improved beliefs. Insofar as a perspectival model of our minds is more psychologically accurate than a purely-propositional model, and

insofar as some moral perspectives intuitively *are* better than others, we have good reasons to pursue a perspectival account of moral progress. Importantly, moral progress on such an account could occur not only from small improvements in individual components of perspectives (such as in one's moral beliefs) but also in wholesale perspective shifts. Consider Catherine Elgin's discussion of how perspectival models of the mind are generally epistemically superior to belief-oriented models:

> Human beings [we might think] seem to gather information in the way that squirrels gather nuts. Bit by bit, we amass data and store it away against future need. Many epistemologists and laymen take cognitive progress to consist in data gathering…[but] this conception of cognitive progress both constricts and distorts the subject…it cannot even make sense of a variety of cognitive innovations that figure in the advancement of science. (Elgin 2002, 1–2)

Though Elgin here is interested in general epistemic progress and epistemic progress in science, the point applies to morality as well. In fact, there is an even stronger case for perspectival models of progress in moral domains, since our moral concerns are not limited to our moral beliefs. Moral progress solely in terms of changes in moral beliefs without concomitant changes in our emotions and emotional dispositions, and patterns of association, interpretation, or perception would be quite limited. Mengzi certainly seemed to think so: in the two passages we'll examine below (1A7 and 3A5), his strategy can be seen as attempts to shift his interlocuters' moral perspectives.[5] In particular, Mengzi utilizes patterns of emotive association

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[5] We need to be careful here with our interpretive methodology. It would be obviously implausible to claim that Mengzi's picture of human psychology cleanly maps on to contemporary philosophical views. Instead, our claim is that Mengzi's working model of our moral minds is complex and rich in many of the ways that contemporary perspectival models are.

and interpretation to *prepare* his interlocutors for the appropriate perspective shift. As we'll see, in 1A7 Mengzi prepares King Xuan for a perspective shift concerning his obligations to his citizens by reminding the king of an emotionally-laden decision he made to spare a sacrificial ox, and in 3A5 Mengzi prepares his interlocutor Yi Zhi for a perspective shift concerning moral theories by reminding Yi Zhi of an emotionally-laden decision to provide a lavish funeral for his parents.

In light of recent scholarship on *Mengzi*, it is clear that Mengzi takes our moral minds to include more than sets of beliefs and rational inferences. Mengzi employs a famous botanical metaphor to illustrate his view of the goodness of human nature. He claims that all human beings possess four sprouts (or beginnings): the sprout of *ceyin* (a compassion-like emotion 惻隱), *xiuwu* (a shame-like reaction or emotion 羞惡), *cirang* (a sense of deference 辭讓), and *shifei* (a sense of right and wrong 是非). These four beginnings, on Mengzi's account, have the potential to mature into his four cardinal virtues: *ren* (benevolence, humaneness 仁), *yi* (righteousness 義), *li* (propriety, observance of rites 禮), and *zhi* (wisdom 智). The four moral beginnings are multifaceted mental processes that include cognitive, affective and motivational aspects (Van Norden 1991; Flanagan 2014; Wong 2015), that are governed by one's heart/mind (*xin* 心), an organ that is simultaneously cognitive and volitional. This psychological framework helps us see that propositional beliefs and rational inference are, according to Mengzi, merely one part of moral deliberation. Mengzian moral deliberation also includes (and even focuses on) one's affective and motivational responses. For example, when highlighting the altruistic nature of human beings, one of Mengzi's key arguments is based on people's immediate natural affective

and motivational response to a child falling into danger (1A7), as opposed to people's general, abstract moral principles and reasoning. In contemporary scholarship, excellent work has been done on the rich terrains of the Mengzian moral mind, especially work on moral sensitivity and connoisseurship (Hutton 2002; Ivanhoe 2011), on Mengzi's theory of moral development (Flanagan 2014; McRae 2011; Wong 2015; Shun 1997), on the psychological mechanisms by which Confucian ritual is taken to promote moral growth (Sarkissian 2010; Slingerland 2011), and on Mengzi's views in light of dual process theories of moral judgment or moral foundations theory (Kim 2016; Luo 2015). Clearly, Mengzi is concerned with moral epistemic improvement across a much wider variety of dimensions than moral belief. This is why reading Mengzi is tremendously helpful for thinking about moral progress in terms of perspective: in doing so, we do not restrict ourselves to focusing exclusively on abstract rational inferences and beliefs. For Mengzi, legitimate moral progress can be initiated by changes in non-abstract mental states: by visceral bodily and emotional reactions, or by seeing one thing *as* another (e.g. seeing an ox being led to sacrifice *as* an innocent prisoner being led to execution).

This is not to say that Mengzi (or a Mengzian-inspired account of moral progress) is unconcerned with improving our moral beliefs. If this were the case, there would be an obvious objection: improvements in our moral beliefs are *part* of moral progress. We claim that Mengzi is especially helpful for anti-realist and constructivist accounts of moral progress because his accounts of moral development and moral psychology show how *legitimate* moral progress can both occur in and be prompted by changes in our non-propositional mental states, structures, and processes. Justified improvements in our moral beliefs might ride on the coattails of changes and improvements in the rest of our moral perspectives.

According to Mengzi, moral development happens primarily by developing and "extending" one's basic moral capacities or dispositions: the four sprouts / beginnings. We have these beginnings as part of our human nature, and moral development consists in cultivating them through a variety of means. However, many types of moral development are not particularly relevant to the debate between realists and anti-realists about the best accounts of moral progress. One site of disagreement in that debate concerns cases that realists accounts of moral progress seem to explain especially well: cases in which a person's moral beliefs change from being apparently incorrect to apparently correct. Thus, we'll focus here on two famous passages in *Mengzi* that *do* fit this mold. In these passages, Mengzi seems to be applying his theory of moral development to cases of changes in moral belief or perspective. In the first (1A7), Mengzi attempts to elicit a change in King Xuan's moral perspectives concerning his citizens, and in the second (3A5), Mengzi describes people coming to believe that they were obligated to bury their parents.

3. Lesson Two: Analogical Reasoning

Campbell and Kumar (2012, 2013) develop one anti-realist account of moral progress: consistency-based reasoning, which takes as a paradigm case the reasoning implicit in Peter Singer's famous famine relief argument (Singer 1973). Their basic idea is that we can convince someone to change her moral belief from "Φ is not wrong" to "Φ is wrong" by pointing to an action that is similar in all morally relevant respects and which that person already thinks is wrong. Refusing to save a drowning child because doing so would cause one's suit to get wet, so the argument goes, has no morally relevant differences from refusing to donate to famine relief. Such consistency-based reasoning is a familiar form of ethical argument. Campbell and Kumar point out, however, that, since people tend to be motivated to be morally consistent, and not for

purely epistemic motives (e.g., for social motives such as not wanting to be seen as a hypocrite), consistency-based reasoning can produce progressive moral change. We see this when we look at other paradigmatic cases of progressive moral change such as the abolition of slavery and the expansion of civil rights to women: certain people applied their moral principles inconsistently to different groups of people, realized this, and then adjusted their moral beliefs. And thus, according to Campbell and Kumar, we can account for many paradigm cases of moral progress without appeal to the new discovery of any fully mind-independent moral facts.

In short, the idea is that we can spot an inconsistency in someone's overall moral beliefs and convince that person to make amendments accordingly. In this section, we argue that what appears to be consistency-based reasoning induced moral progress may sometimes in fact be a result of other methods, such as analogical reasoning (which we will introduce shortly). Understanding alternative forms of moral reasoning can help enrich anti-realist accounts of moral progress. We can see this by considering the case of "the king and the ox" (1A7), one of the most frequently discussed passages in *Mengzi*. At first glance, readers might think that in this passage Mengzi is appealing to consistency-reasoning. However, on a closer reading, we can see that there are equally plausible alternatives explanations of Mengzi's strategy for inducing progressive moral change:

> Mengzi said, "I heard your attendant Hu He say,
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> While the king was sitting up in his hall, an ox was led past below. The king saw it
> and said, 'Where is the ox going?'
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> Hu He replied, 'We are about to ritually anoint a bell with its blood.' The king said,
> 'Spare it. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the
> execution ground.'

Hu He replied, 'So should we dispense with the anointing of the bell?' The king said, 'How can that be dispensed with? Exchange it for a sheep.'"

Mengzi continued, "I do not know if this happened."

The king said, "It happened."

Mengzi said, "This heart is sufficient to become King. The commoners all thought Your Majesty was being stingy. But I knew that Your Majesty simply could not bear the suffering of the ox."

The king said, "That is so. There were indeed commoners who said that. But although Qi is a small state, how could I be stingy about one ox? It was just that I could not bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground. Hence, I exchanged it for a sheep."

Mengzi said, "Let Your Majesty not be surprised at the commoners taking you to be stingy. You took a small thing and exchanged it for a big thing. How could they understand it? If Your Majesty was pained at its being innocent and going to the execution ground, then what is there to choose between an ox and a sheep?"

The King laughed, saying, "What was this feeling really? It's not the case that I grudged its value and exchanged it for a sheep. But it makes sense that the commoners would say I was stingy."

Mengzi said, "There is no harm. This is just the way benevolence works. You saw the ox but had not seen the sheep. As for the relation of gentlemen to birds and

beasts, if they see them living, they cannot bear to see them die. If they hear their

cries, they cannot bear to eat their flesh. (Mengzi 1A7)[6]

In this passage, King Xuan remembers ordering a sacrificial ox to be spared because its

(apparently) frightened expression reminded him of an innocent person going to the execution

ground. Mengzi praises King Xuan for this moment of compassion, but then presses the king to

see his people as proper objects of compassion too. Shortly thereafter (1A7.10), when the king

responds that he is unable to do, Mengzi scoffs that this response is like being able to lift 500

pounds while claiming that one could not lift a feather; the King was clearly able to feel

compassion and be benevolent towards his subjects.

There have been many interpretations of this passage. Many readers naturally interpret

Mengzi's strategy here as a straightforward example of consistency-based reasoning: if the king

feels compassion for the ox, the king should also feel compassion for his subjects. Thus,

Mengzi's strategy, on this view, is to elicit moral change in King Xuan by showing him that he

has inconsistent beliefs concerning who and what the King should show compassion towards.

Kwong-loi Shun (1991) has defended just such an interpretation. But while Mengzi's intention

here is not explicitly documented in the text, some scholars interpret Mengzi's strategy as instead

using "analogical reasoning" coupled with the "method of extension." Some interpreters (Van

Norden 1991; Ihara 1991; Wong 2002; Hu 2018; Ing 1999) have provided or come close to

providing what David Wong calls "emotive" interpretations of Mengzi's strategy, whereby

Mengzi is trying to extend the king's antecedent *compassion* (including the cognitive, affective

and motivational aspects of the emotional response) so that he is "impressed with sufficient force

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[6] This English translation is based on the original text of *Mencius* 1A7 in Yang 1962 and the English translation of Van Norden 2008: 8-10. All cited translations and original texts of the book of *Mencius* (or *Mengzi*) in this paper are from the abovementioned sources.

and vividness" by his moral emotions applied in new situations and to new targets (Wong 2002, 191). This happens through making the king recall what it was like when he felt compassion towards an object he spared and growing from there. The ox's frightened expression, as King Xuan recalls, reminded him of an *innocent* person going to the execution grounds. In recalling this memory, Mengzi is also priming Xuan to recall the feeling of compassion and the motivation for acting on it: for Mengzi these are all psychologically bound together. Instead of appealing solely to consistency (which has trouble accounting for why Mengzi ignores the sheep that was sacrificed in the ox's stead), Mengzi focuses on the king's association between the ox's fear and an innocent person's fear towards death. He tries to extend this association to additional innocent but suffering objects; the king's own citizens.[7] As Wong explains:

> In 1A7, there are two associations between two pairs of cases. Each comparison involves
> not only a comparison of the cases but of the agent's reactions to the cases. Within the
> first pair, the King likens the eyes of the innocent man to the eyes of the ox, likens the
> compassion he feels for the innocent man to his feeling for the ox. Within the second
> pair, Mengzi urges him to compare the plight of the ox to that of his people and to
> compare his compassionate reaction to the ox to what ought to be the compassion he feels
> for his people. In both pairs, reflection on the two cases involves the *perception of*
> *relevant similarity* (Wong 2002, 197, emphasis added).

Thus, analogical reasoning does not consist in realizing that one is applying some moral principle or commitment inconsistently. Emily McRae explains, "the moral agent judges one

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[7] We should emphasize that Wong does not support this purely emotive interpretation as the sole explanation of Mengzi's strategy: "On the one hand, we cannot interpret Mengzi as holding that appropriate and motivationally effective moral feeling can be generated purely by appeal to logical consistency; but on the other hand, we cannot attribute to him the view that innate moral feelings are fully developed and already contain all the action-guiding content they need to have" (2002, 191). Thus, Wong suggests that Mengzi is not only trying to redirect King Xuan's moral emotions, but also trying to develop, refine and improve them, and further that this process cannot work by consistency-based reasoning alone: Wong calls this a "developmental" interpretation.

case to be relevantly analogous to another *prior to* formulating an abstract principle stating that relevant characteristic" (McRae 2011, 592-593, emphasis added). The implications for an anti-realist account of moral progress are straightforward - we can simply adjust Campbell and Kumar's account. Recall that on their account, sometimes moral progress occurs because a person realizes they are applying their antecedently-held moral beliefs, principles, or values inconsistently. On the present account, people immediately come to see certain cases as being morally alike. This illustrates a further difference between (and advantage of) analogical reasoning: consistency-based reasoning requires one to have an articulated general moral belief or principle with which to compare to antecedently-held moral beliefs and principles. However, we do not always have such fully-articulated general moral beliefs and principles: sometimes our moral opinions are more inchoate and nebulous. Moreover, analogical reasoning is capable of generating perspective shifts even in cases of consistent but misguided systems of moral beliefs. In such cases, it elicits changes in patterns of interpretation and association that can then change beliefs or principles. For example, King Xuan may have previously held a consistent view according to which being compassionate to his people will not help his political agenda, and this view may be more vulnerable to analogical challenges than to consistency-based ones.

For us, analogical reasoning is especially interesting for developing an account of moral progress in terms of improving moral perspectives rather than merely improving our moral beliefs. Analogical reasoning is better suited to describing the change of perspectives: to come to see and feel one thing *as* another thing. Further, since patterns of association and interpretation are key components of perspectives, analogical reasoning can *directly work on* greater portions of our perspectives than consistency-based reasoning alone. This means that

analogical reasoning can often be more effective in generating large perspective shifts. Further, a better understanding of analogical reasoning can explain why certain ethical arguments works better than other arguments, since their employment of emotionally-laden language helps facilitate analogical reasoning. Examples of analogical reasoning can be found in well-known and powerful ethical arguments in contemporary ethics. Let's consider just one - Peter Singer's famous case of Bob's Bugatti (based on a case developed by Peter Unger):

Bob is close to retirement. He has invested most of his savings in a very rare and valuable old car, a Bugatti, which he has not been able to insure. The Bugatti is his pride and joy. In addition to the pleasure he gets from driving and caring for his car, Bob knows that its rising market value means that he will always be able to sell it and live comfortably after retirement. One day when Bob is out for a drive, he parks the Bugatti near the end of a railway siding and goes for a walk up the track. As he does so, he sees that a runaway train, with no one aboard, is running down the railway track. Looking farther down the track, he sees the small figure of a child very likely to be killed by the runaway train. He can't stop the train and the child is too far away to warn of the danger, but he can throw a switch that will divert the train down the siding where his Bugatti is parked. Then nobody will be killed —but the train will destroy his Bugatti. Thinking of his joy in owning the car and the financial security it represents, Bob decides not to throw the switch. The child is killed. For many years to come, Bob enjoys owning his Bugatti and the financial security it represents. (Singer 2016, 38–40; Unger 1996, 135–36)

The argument that Singer eventually develops is normally seen as a consistency-based argument – that if one believes Bob's decision here was morally vile, one should (to be consistent) also think that refusing to donate to charity to save starving children is morally vile.

But, upon closer examination, the argument is more complex. Singer's description of the vulnerable child on a railway track brings out the urgency of the matter and accentuates one's anxiety and concern for the child's life: "[Bob] sees the small figure of a child very likely to be killed by the runaway train" (Singer 2016, 39). Singer may intend for readers to draw interpretive and emotional associations between the imaginary child on the track and between suffering children in the real world. The force of this argument depends not only on its logical soundness, but on the associations the audience draws between saving a child's life at the expense of a luxury car and saving many children from terrible life conditions at the expense of other luxuries. The analogy highlights certain similarities between the two cases: the urgency, the vulnerability of the children, and the grave potential consequences. A different scenario that appealed to consistency but did not highlight these similarities might be less persuasive. Vitally, analogical reasoning can work more directly on our motives than consistency-based reasoning typically does. In both the ox case and the Bugatti case, the argument *begins* with considerations for which the interlocutor already had strong emotional and motivational reactions. This is not merely an attempt at emotional appeal; these arguments aim to improve not just our moral beliefs but also our moral perspectives: how we perceive, interpret, understand, and react to (emotionally and motivationally) to certain circumstances. To genuinely instantiate moral progress via a moral perspective shift, patterns of reasoning beyond abstract consistency-based reasoning can be essential. Therefore, here is our second lesson for anti-realist accounts of moral progress: analogical reasoning is a powerful tool for moral progress - it can not only help us improve upon our moral beliefs, but it can also help us shift into better moral perspectives.

4. Lesson Three: Moral Emotion-elicited Moral Progress

We now move to lesson three, according to which moral emotions, instead of mind-independent moral facts, are main sources of moral progress. Of course, some realists would accept this claim too, if they believe that moral emotions can point to or make salient certain objective moral facts. Mengzi might believe something like this – but here we will focus on features of his view that are useful for anti-realists.[8] Further, we should note that the role of emotions is especially important for a perspectival account of moral progress: emotions are, in part, salience and motivation generators (see Lance and Tanesini 2004), and part of what perspectives do is structure the salience of our beliefs and the urgency of our motivations (Camp 2006; Riggs 2016).

Against accounts like Campbell and Kumar's, Kurth (2013, 2017) has argued that a consistency-based reasoning model fails to adequately explain certain paradigmatic cases of moral progress: cases where a person felt visceral moral anxiety at the prospect of some action, and thus came to believe that it was wrong. For example, the influential 17th century Quaker abolitionist John Woolman claimed that the key catalyst in his realizing the evils of slavery was that he suddenly felt "so afflicted in my mind" when he was asked to write a bill of sale for one of his employer's slaves (this case is prominent in the anti-realist literature on moral progress; see Kitcher 2011, 158–61; Kurth 2017, 1–2). It therefore seems that some cases of moral progress are best understood not as a discovery of new mind-independent moral facts, but as a response to moral emotions prompted by certain situations. Similarly, Mengzi discusses how

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[8] Thanks to Colin Marshall for suggesting we note this. There are two main advantages (over similar realist accounts) for anti-realists / constructivists that ground moral progress in our emotions: first, their view (which does not posit objective moral facts) is more parsimonious (and perhaps less ontologically "weird," see Mackie 1991), and second, they do not need to explain the sheer epistemic luck that would be required for our evolutionarily-shaped emotions to track objective moral truth (see Street 2006; Vavova 2015).

moral emotions led people to realize that they must properly bury their dead parents' bodies, instead of leaving them to be devoured by wild animals:

> Now, in past ages, there were those who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they took them and abandoned them in a gulley. They next day they passed by them, and foxes were eating them, bugs were sucking on them. *Sweat broke out on the survivors' foreheads. They turned away and did not look. It was not for the sake of others that they sweated. What was inside their hearts broke through to their countenances.* So they went home and, returning with baskets and shovels, covered them. If covering them was really right, then the manner in which filial children and benevolent people cover their parents must also be part of the Way." (Mengzi 3A5; emphasis added)

The protagonist in the last part of this passage first abandoned his parents' bodies in a gulley. No one instructed him about the rightness or wrongness of this action, but when he passed by the scene on the next day, he had a series of physiological and psychological responses such as sweat breaking out on his forehead and a compulsion to avoid directly looking at the scene. Mengzi further emphasizes, these responses are not for show, they come directly from the heart – meaning that these reactions are from innate emotions and not particular beliefs one may have acquired through learning.[9]

Mengzi did not specify in the text exactly which emotion he is discussing here. Shame, compassion (for the parents), and deference are all good candidates. Some commentators argue that this passage is discussing the origin of rituals associated with the moral emotion of deference (Hansen 1992). One could also argue that Mengzi has in mind compassion which

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[9] The claim here is not that Mengzi thinks beliefs are unimportant or superfluous for moral change, but just that in this (and like) cases, the natural emotional reaction is the engine that drives changes in other mental states.

originates from filial love, especially since the passage ends with the claim that "filial children and benevolent people cover their parents" (3A5). Shame seems relevant too, since this passage deals with what is right and what is wrong, which is associated with the moral emotion of shame in *Mengzi* (Chong 2003), and since the phenomenology described matches the phenomenology of shame. The consensus is that Mengzi is discussing one of the four sprouts / beginnings here. Setting aside which emotions are involved in this case (though, we'll return to the emotion of shame shortly), the general point is that leaving one's parents' corpses unburied brings out strong emotional reactions, which according to Mengzi not only compelled people into "returning with baskets and shovels, cover[ing] them" but also leads to the conclusion that burying one's parents' corpse is right, or part of the Way.

Some anti-realists have argued that their accounts of moral progress are more descriptively accurate than moral realists' accounts, that when we pay close attention to paradigmatic cases of personal moral progress, the changes do not appear to be discoveries about some mind-independent objective morality. Mengzi's text provides an example of how moral progress can occur not through discovering mind-independent moral facts but through the emergence of moral emotions in particular situations. Mengzi is not the only philosopher who makes such a claim: sympathy, shame, and (as in Kurth) moral anxiety are each seen as causes of moral progress (in addition to Kurth 2013, see Boxill 1995; Jacquet 2016; Manion 2002; Appiah 2011). To take a familiar example, consider Martin Luther King Jr.'s shaming of white moderates in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," where he suggests that the "great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice" (King Jr. 1963). Since many would be ashamed to be considered worse than the Ku Klux Klan, by claiming that "white

moderates" were more problematic for black people than the Ku Klux Klan, King may have been (in part) attempting to shame certain people into moral progress and being more active in their support of civil rights.

One may wonder: since shame is widely considered a destructive, burdening emotion that targets the most vulnerable individuals, should we rely on it to make moral progress? The Mengzian system offers some guidance on this point. First, Confucian shame is a foreword-looking emotion that focuses on preempting situations that violate one's ethical standards. Hence, one often should not feel shame over violations of conventional standards, nor should one dwell on past experiences (Seok 2017; Shun 2013, 2015, 1997; Van Norden 2002).[10] Second, many besides Mengzi recognize the importance of shame at the foundations of morality: recall Protagoras's speech in Plato's *Protagoras*, in which he claims that Zeus gave all human beings a sense of justice and of shame so that cities and societies could exist (*Protagoras* 320c-328d). C.C. Raymond has shown shame's positive function in the work of Plato and Aristotle generally (Raymond, 2017; Raymond, 2013). That being said, shame and other moral emotions cannot be expected to produce adequate responses in all moral situations. Shame is only one of the four important moral emotions in *Mengzi*. The Mengzian system utilizes a multi-factor account of moral psychology which has a unique advantage in the interpretation of moral progress. One challenge for anti-realist accounts of moral progress that prioritize some highly particular function of morality, such as counteracting the negative consequences of our limited sympathies (see Mackie 1991, 107–111) or minimizing the damage from altruism failures (see Kitcher 2012), is that they seem overly narrow. Morality concerns issues of justice, truth-telling, loyalty, honor, respect, civility, and these do not neatly reduce down to one

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[10] Also, see Justin Tiwald (2017) for a thoughtful discussion on the relationship between the conventional standard and the personal ethical standard related to shame in the Confucian tradition.

narrow function. It is not hard to find counterexamples that are intuitively immoral but would not be treated as so on those fairly narrow accounts. [11] Kitcher, for example, faces potential counterexamples concerning, say, dictators minimizing conflict that could lead to altruism failures (on his view, an instance of moral progress) via brutal repression (see Kitcher 2011, 225–229). Now, whether Kitcher can accommodate such cases is an important question, but we should appreciate how Mengzi's sprout system simply avoids the issue: it does not try to reduce morality to any one particular function or value. Thus, Mengzian-inspired anti-realist or constructivist accounts can explain cases that promote one value (e.g. compassion for some people's material well-being) at the expense of another (e.g. a simultaneous affront to the dignity of other people). Various moral emotions, analogical reasoning, and consistency-based reasoning can all help explain cases of paradigmatic moral progress, without appeal to mind-independent moral facts.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have drawn three lessons from Mengzi on the metaethics of moral progress. The first and most general lesson was that it is possible to develop an account of moral progress not only in terms of improving moral beliefs but also in terms of improving moral perspectives. The second and third lessons provided Mengzian-inspired tools for developing such an account. The second lesson was that analogical reasoning could be utilized in accounts of anti-realist or constructivist moral progress in addition to consistency-based reasoning. The third lesson was that a variety of moral emotions can be utilized in accounts of anti-realist or constructivist moral progress. These three lessons suggest numerous avenues for fruitful further exploration. First, and most generally, we have suggested here several interesting and important components for *perspectival* metaethical theories (and theories of moral progress) gleaned from

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[11] Thanks to William Talbott at the Lost Voices Conference for raising this concern.

the philosophical work of Mengzi. Second, though our focus here has been metaethical, there are

useful lessons in practical ethics to be drawn from our discussion. Not only might Mengzi's texts

be mined for effective techniques of moral persuasion, they also problematize ingrained views

about critical engagement that treat the only epistemically legitimate type of persuasion as based

entirely on rational argument (anything else, we might think, is merely an "emotional appeal" or

manipulation). Problematic non-belief components of a persons' perspective might need to be

adjusted using methods other than rational argument (such as analogical reasoning). Third, the

perspectival ideas we've developed here might be useful in supplementing virtue ethical

interpretations of early Confucianism and virtue ethical theories in general (see especially Hutton

2002 and Ivanhoe 2011). Finally, our discussion in this chapter might suggest new avenues for

constructivist interpretations of the early Confucians and especially for Mengzi, who is likely the

major early Confucian philosopher least readily-interpreted as constructivist.

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