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### Bad Faith Morality: The Nature of Man

Popular philosophy has long kept itself occupied with mankind's morality and the source of this morality in nature. While the nature of man has been widely discussed throughout history, several theories have remained at the forefront of modern moral philosophy. Some think that humans are naturally born good with intent of positive morality. Others believe the opposite, that humans are born selfish with intent to act immorally. Some reject the notion of man's nature entirely, instead arguing that man is born without intent of any kind, and that the concept of human nature is a creation of man and lacks any meaning. Mengzi, a proponent for man's natural goodness, proposed that although man is born good, one can only be truly moral with proper training. The nature of humanity is indeed a moral good, but does not require any training for morality to be mastered, rather it begins in nature as a pure morality, but is later dulled by the mass of society. Without the need that we as an organized group of society have created to be selfish, there would be no force which drives people to immorality, thus cementing humanity's natural morality indefinitely.

Mengzi proposes that true moral mastery comes about through development of the four major virtues, for although man in his view is born morally good, he still requires training on how to enact this good in the world, and this training further helps one to resist immoral acts. He says "then, though man is born good, he still may walk the way of immorality, not because he has been brought up to be immoral, but simply because he has not been brought up to be fully moral"(Mengzi 144). Mengzi makes an important point here about the way in which one's growth environment affects their moral development, but fails to see how being born morally good truly affects the ultimate moral outcome of an individual. In the case where a person is born

good, then their actions must at their most natural follow that which is inherently virtuous, such as keeping oneself satiated with water and food and ensuring one's survival. We consider these to be moral as they promote one's own well-being, which by extension enables one to promote well-being in others. The immoralities that stem from this are not inherently because one does not fulfill these virtues, but rather because one completes them at the expense of others, whether it be from fighting over food or water, stealing from others, or killing, and therefore we see that these stem not from a lack of moral guidance towards the good, but from a negative moral guidance which permits, if not promotes, one to sustain themselves at the expense of the greater good of all. We can see this negative moral development in society, all stemming from, as Rousseau puts it, "The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say, 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society"(Rousseau 29). When this first man took claim of something which previously belonged to no one, or perhaps to everyone, he became an immoral influence on all those who knew of this, for he said that man can no longer subsist and support himself on the basis of the means of the world, but on the means of others, thus creating the inequity which promotes those most basic moral wrongs.

Another perspective as to the true nature of man comes from Xunzi, who argues that man is born immoral. He states at the very beginning of his work on human nature that "People's nature is bad. Their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort"(Xunzi 248). Xunzi goes on to explain that man is born with a natural inclination towards vice, that this requires no effort on one's part, whereas moral acts require a willing effort to complete. This then in his view is the goal of moral education and guidance: to overcome one's own natural tendency for selfishness, want for profit, hatred, and all the other vices of man. Xunzi fails to realize though what it is that

enables man to be taught good if it is his nature to be bad. This is something Mengzi highlights in his deliberation with Gaozi:

“Water surely does not distinguish between east and west. But doesn’t it distinguish between upward and downward? Human nature being good is like water tending downward. There is no human which does not tend toward goodness. There is no water which does not tend downward.”(Mengzi 144)

It must be obvious then, that if man’s nature is bad, moral training could not ultimately bring a person to be truly moral as Xunzi suggested, but rather that human nature must be in some way good, otherwise a moral human being would be impossible. While he disagrees strongly with Mengzi on the nature of man, they both maintain that a moral education is required in either case to bring one to full morality.

Why do Xunzi and Mengzi both agree that moral education is ultimately necessary regardless of man’s nature? Mengzi and Xunzi both fail to see what the goal of moral education truly is, not ultimately to instruct man in the ways of what is right, but to instruct what is wrong and to teach against it. While they of course disagree on the nature of man, they both seem to ignore the source of both morality and immorality outside of merely human nature. Both scholars though look for this nature in the societal world, whereas to truly see the nature one must be able to view humanity in its pure state, not where civilization has proliferated both virtue and vice alike, but one where man must ultimately determine for himself what he will do, completely removed from any concept of wrong or right. These concepts being only constructs ultimately of language, we must look to what is truly right in the absence of all things but a person. To live is good, to die is bad, we can see this even in animals who seem to mourn over the deaths of others. We must then of course say that one pure virtue is to keep oneself alive, and there is of course

nothing in nature which seeks to do any less than what it must to stay alive. Xunzi says that “crooked wood must await steaming and straightening on the shaping frame, and only then does it become straight”(Xunzi 248), but in this analogy what causes the wood to be bent, other than to keep itself in view of the sunlight? One can see then that it is not the nature of man to kill, but to eat, not to steal water, but to drink, and not to die, but to remain in virtue to himself in order to live. The inherent problem with this comes again with the formation of civilized society, where one must constantly be at odds to survive, not with nature as it was before the dawn of civilization, but with his fellow man. This then we must see is the birthplace of vice, where one is forced, not inclined, to kill another to eat, and where man feels the need to be gluttonous, not because he needs the excess, but because he feels as though someone else may be forced to take it from him. This, however, does not follow Xunzi’s idea that humans are born selfish, but rather, that they are born to give and promote life. If we again look at the animal who seemingly mourns over its mate, we see that it does not become joyous that it no longer has to search for food to feed two, but instead becomes sad with the loss of someone cared for. If human nature was truly immoral, truly selfish, then why would one ever feel the need to mourn, to love, to protect, or to provide? It is clear then that human nature cannot be bad, for humans love, provide, and protect others, and therefore can be seen only as good, for there can be no higher virtue, none more pure, than the promotion of life not only of oneself, but of those one cares for.

Finally then, we can see that the root nature of humanity is to be good, not that humans are good because they want to be, nor because they want not to be bad, but because they simply exhibit that which is virtue in its highest form. Immorality can be taught well, and can be learned with ease. Morality can be taught well, and learned with even more ease. These teachings, although they help to make humans live more fully what we in civilized society have deemed as

the good, cannot remove nor add to any of man's inherent goodness and willingness to live both for himself and for others. The nature of humanity, then, is indeed a moral good, but does not require any training for morality to be mastered, rather it begins in nature as a pure and unblemishable morality, but can later be dulled by the mass of untameable society. Without the pressure of so many living together, of the individual viceful goals of those who so often shape our world, one could forever remain in the blissful peace of their own nature, to live, to love, to protect, and to provide.

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