“The Heart That Cannot Bear…the Other”

Reading Mengzi on the Goodness of Human Nature

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This paper will discuss the ancient Chinese thinker Mengzi’s 孟子 (ca. 390-ca. 305 B.C.) thought of human nature. But let us first quote from an increasingly influential modern French thinker: Emmanuel Levinas. The purpose of this citation is two-fold: on the one hand, it is an attempt to form a potentially constructive dialogue between what we will say about Mengzi in this paper and what Levinas has said about man as being inescapably responsible for the other; on the other hand, this citation should also serve to situate our discussion in wider philosophical contexts. We hope thus we may be able, at least in an implicit manner, to bring closer two thoughts or two intellectual traditions, viz., Chinese and European, and also to show how Mengzi’s thought of human nature, as it is read and interpreted in this paper, can go beyond the borders of Chinese thought and language, and take on more universal significance.

Thinking of the subjectivity of the human subject as sensibility, as total exposedness to the other, or as bearing, Levinas uses the figure of maternity and writes in his later work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*,

> [Sensibility] is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothing; it is maternity, gestation of the other in the same. Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks. Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor.[1]

We now turn to our discussion of Mengzi’s thought of human nature. In the Chinese tradition, in which his fundamental position has seemed beyond any doubt, Mengzi is the first to maintain that human nature is originally good (*xing shan* 性善). However, it would still require a considerable amount of theoretical courage and academic sincerity for one to attempt to sustain such a doctrine on the original goodness of human nature in our modern or post-modern times, in which

1 Levinas 1981, p. 75.

individualistic views of modern theories on human nature have been explicitly or at least implicitly accepted, even though the *Mencius* has long been designated, along with the *Analects* 論語, the *Great Learning* 大學, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸, as the four fundamental Confucian classics since the Song dynasty, and even though it would have been difficult to conceive the intellectual movement of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism 宋明理學 as well as that of modern new Confucianism 新儒家 without Mengzi's decisive influence.[2] Already in his own times, Mengzi had to argue with those who did not think that human nature should be regarded as originally good. Later on, against Mengzi's doctrine, Xunzi 荀子 asserts that human nature is originally bad (*xing e* 性惡), because man is born with sensual desires. Facing these seemingly profound traditional and modern "insights" into the "darkness" of human nature, Mengzi's insistence on the original goodness of human nature seems today a little too simplistic and naïve for one to attempt to defend in an philosophically adequate manner.

Is Mengzi's doctrine on human nature simply an overoptimistic classical belief in humanity that has proven untenable in our times? Or, on the contrary, could it be that it is in this classical thought about human nature, with which we may perhaps not have been able to come to grips, that the truth of human nature has first shone? And in that case we moderns or post-moderns may still be far away from Mengzi's true insight into humanity? Hence we ought to read or re-read Mengzi's discourse on the goodness of human nature.

Mengzi maintains that human nature is originally good, and that man's becoming bad or evil has nothing to do with this original goodness. But what is the ground that Mengzi has provided for this assertion? On what evidence can Mengzi so confidently insist on the original goodness of human nature? In order to understand his doctrine on human nature, we have to look in Mengzi's thought for the ground in which the goodness of human nature can be truly grounded. Since Mengzi thinks that human nature is good in itself, to look for this ground is to look in human nature itself for that which would have originally made human nature good.

The evidence Mengzi provides for the original goodness of human nature is that every human being possesses the *si xin* 四心, or the "four hearts", which are the "heart of *ceyin*" 惻隱之心, the "heart of *xiuwu*" 羞惡之心, the "heart of *cirang*" 辭讓之心, and the "heart of *shifei*" 是非之心. In D.C. Lau's popular English translation of the book *Mencius*, these expressions get translated respectively as the "heart of compassion", the "heart of shame", the "heart of respect", and the "heart of right and wrong".[3] In Mengzi's view, these four "hearts" are the germs or beginnings

2 The influence of Mengzi's conception of human nature was decisive for the School of the Mind (*xinxue* 心學) from Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (i.e. Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, 1139-1193) to Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995), who is representative of modern new Confucian philosophers, gives Mengzi a unique position by systematically privileging the School of the Mind in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism.

3 Lau, pp. 163, 83, where he translates the heart of *cirang* 辭讓 as the "heart of courtesy and

of the four *de* 德 or "cardinal virtues", *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, and *zhi* 智, which in Lau are rendered respectively as benevolence (仁), dutifulness (義), observance of the rites (禮), and wisdom (智).[4] Among these *de* 德 or virtues, *ren* 仁 has been the most fundamental virtue since Confucius. *Ren* 仁 is the central concept in the *Mencius* as well as in *The Analects*, in spite of the fact that Mengzi seemed often to juxtapose *ren* 仁 with *yi* 義, dutifulness, or sense for the right. According to Mengzi, the very meaning of *ren* 仁 is "*ren* 人", whose literal meaning is simply "man". By this traditional method of interpretation, in which one Chinese character is used to interpret and define the meaning of another character of the same pronunciation, what Mengzi means is this: *ren* 仁 as a virtue would determine the being-human or humanity of the human (7B16).[5] Therefore, *ren* 仁 is more than benevolence considered simply as a moral virtue. It is rather the essential nature or the essence of man. If, according to Mengzi, it is the "heart of *ceyin*" 惻隱之心 that signifies *ren* 仁 ("the heart of *ceyin*: that is *ren*" *ceyin zhi xin, ren ye* 惻隱之心，仁也, 2A6), then the "heart of *ceyin*" is clearly the most important and most fundamental of man's "four hearts". This is why Mengzi says that without a "heart of *ceyin*", a man would not yet or would no longer be a human being (*wu ceyin zhi xin, fei ren ye* 無惻隱之心，非人也, ibid.). Therefore, if human nature is originally good, this has to be for the very reason that every man originally possesses an inborn "heart of *ceyin*".

Since Mengzi grounds the goodness of human nature almost exclusively in the "heart of *ceyin*", which according to him is necessarily possessed by every human being, to understand his thought we must try first to understand this remarkable human "heart of *ceyin*". What does the "heart of *ceyin*" signify with respect to the essence of human nature? In the *Mencius*, the expression "the heart of *ceyin*" first occurs in Mengzi's sustained discussion of the "*bu ren ren zhi xin*" 不忍人之心, which, if we follow the commonly accepted English translation, may be rendered as "the heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others".[6] According to Mengzi, the ideal government must be a natural consequence of this "heart that cannot bear (the

modesty". Others have rendered the Chinese word 心 *xin* differently in this context. Chan translates it as "feeling" (1963, p. 54), Schwartz as "sentiment" (1985, p.267). We would also like to remind the reader that many have tended to render 心 *xin* in general as "heart/mind" to show that this Chinese word can mean either or both of these two meanings. This "undifferentiation" or "indiscrimination" between the two concepts of heart and of mind in Chinese poses an important philosophical question especially when it is viewed against Western philosophical tradition. However, we will have to leave this question outside of our discussion due to the limit of space here.

4 Since our purpose here is to concentrate on the concept of *ren* 仁, we will not discuss whether the English translation of the other three concepts by Lau is appropriate. We are aware that David Nivison, Alan Fox, and others have suggested that the concept of *yi* 義 should be rendered as "sense of rightenousness" or "sense of right (and wrong)". I thank Ulrike Middendorf for prompting me to add this note.

5 Compare the almost identical expression in "Zhongyong" 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean): "*Ren* means humanity (*ren zhe*, *ren ye* 仁者，人也)", *Sishu jizhu quanyi*, p. 53.

6 *Mengzi*, 2A6.

suffering of) others", a heart that is necessarily possessed by every man: "Every man possesses a heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others. It is because the Former Kings had such a heart that could not bear (the suffering of) others, there was the government that could not bear (the suffering of) its people. To govern with this heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others, the ruling of all beneath heaven would be as easy as turning a small object on one's palm." (ibid) It is in order to illustrate this universally possessed human heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others, that Mengzi offers us his famous (albeit perhaps fictitious) example of the child who is on the brink of falling into a well. Here Mengzi maintains that on suddenly seeing this, any person would "have a heart of *chuti ceyin*" (*jie you chuti ceyin zhi xin* 皆有怵惕惻隱之心)". The expression "a heart of *chuti ceyin*" here is more emphatic than "a heart of *ceyin*", as *chuti* 怵惕 has the meaning of being alarmed and fearful of. Later on, in his discussion of the original goodness of human nature, Mengzi would simply use the expression "the heart of *ceyin*" to refer to the same "heart" mentioned here. For the moment, we will not have to discuss thematically the meaning of *chuti* 怵惕. As for the meaning of *ceyin* 惻隱, although early on we have mentioned its usual English translation as "compassion", we are yet to find what "compassion" or "commiseration" as a human feeling means here with respect to the human nature in question. Not assuming that we have already understood what such a human "feeling" really signifies in human nature, let us temporarily take it for granted, according a certain reading of this text, that Mengzi here means that the sight of the endangered child would necessarily arouse immediately in anyone some fearful and painful feeling. For Mengzi, then, the "heart of *chuti ceyin*", or simply the "heart of *ceyin*" for the convenience of expression in Mengzi's later discussion, is just a typical manifestation in an extreme situation of the "heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others". Therefore, although later on in his discussion of the goodness of human nature Mengzi adheres to the expression "the heart of *ceyin*", this expression can not be adequately understood without first analysing the meaning of the "heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others".

So now let us ask, how should the "heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) others" be understood? In order to understand it, we need first to understand the very concept of *ren* 忍. In the *Mencius*, this concept first occurs in a dialogue between King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 (r. 455-405 B.C.) and Mengzi. In this dialogue, when the king wishes to know if he himself possesses the virtue for being a true king, Mengzi gives him an unambiguously affirmative answer. Mengzi's ground for this affirmation is that he heard from Hu He 胡齕 that the king once ordered to spare the life of an ox which was about to be killed for its blood to be used to consecrate a new bell. The ostensible reason that he spared the life of the ox is simply that the king "could not bear to see it shrinking with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution".[7] King Xuan of Qi did not understand why he had acted like this on seeing the suffering of a mere animal. Hence his question for Mengzi: "What

7 *Mengzi*, 1A7.

kind of *heart* (*xin* 心) is this (that I had at that moment)?" Here *xin* 心 means what is felt and what is going on in one's "heart" or mind, that is, the state of mind, and can accordingly be rendered as feeling or emotion. His question about his own "heart" thus means that he wanted to know the inner emotional motivation of his act. Mengzi's explanation for the king is that even if it is merely an animal, a gentleman would still be unable to bear to see its suffering.[8] And it was out of this "being unable to bear" *bu ren* 不忍, that the king took action to relieve the ox from its suffering. In Mengzi's view, this "being unable to bear" is the very possibility for the king's becoming a true king in caring for and keeping his people under protection: being unable to bear to see the suffering of even an animal, one would be necessarily even less able to bear to see the suffering of other human beings.

However, what does this important phenomenon of "being unable to bear" itself signify? "Being unable to bear" already presupposes a "being able to bear". And "being able to bear" is a human ability. But this ability is not merely an ability to bear something physically heavy, as any act of human bearing, even if it is allegedly purely "physical", requires some mental effort on the part of the bearer, let alone the act of any mental bearing. Therefore we have first to analyse the phenomenon of "bearing" itself, with which we have been translating the Chinese word *ren* 忍 in question so far. However, *ren* 忍 in Chinese means more than simply to bear. *Ren* 忍 implies that one has to make some effort in order to *endure* what one would not have been able to bear in one's natural capacity. Therefore, *ren* 忍 is to bear more than what one can "naturally" bear. Such an act of bearing more than one can bear thus requires initiative on the part of the one who is made to bear and has to bear. It is because *ren* 忍 or to bear beyond one's capacity must be the activity of the bearer, that we would say in Chinese to someone who has been wounded and undergoing enormous pain: "[Try to] endure (*ren* 忍) it a little. In a moment it will be gone" (*ren zhe diar*, *yihuier jiu hao le* 忍着點兒，一會兒就好了). Here *renzhe diar* 忍着點兒 or "endure it" is a demand which is addressed to the one who is undergoing acute pain. Such a demand is only possible because the bearing of one's wound and pain is usually understood as an act of one's will. However, before such an act of free will (this implies reflection, decision, and determination) becomes possible for me, the wound and pain that I am determined to bear must have *already* come upon me. That is to say, before I can ever begin to *actively* endure them, I must have necessarily already been *passively* bearing my wound and pain. But even the expression "*passively* bearing" here seems tautological, as to bear is already passivity itself. *Having to* actively bear my wound and pain already presupposes this passivity, passively undergoing one's wound and pain despite oneself. Therefore, in the "act" of bearing one's wound and pain, the line drawn between activity and passivity has already become blurred. And here we are no longer sure if this "act" can still be called an act, since an act implies free will and conscious activity. In suffering or in pain, which have come upon me despite myself, no matter whether I am resolved

8 Ibid.

and ready to bear my suffering and pain, and whether I am really able to endure them, I *still* have to bear them, and must have already been bearing them, against my own free will. This *having to* and this *already* come from the very fact that I "have" a body, and that the body always already has to "bear" its sensations. If I cannot be separated from my body, a body always already "with" its sensations, then as the "bearer" of my own body, that is to say, being necessarily corporeal, I am from the very beginning a "bearer", i.e. someone who has always already to bear despite themselves. In this sense one can even say that the body is in fact already sensibility itself. It is because I have always already started to bear despite myself, that I *have* to bear and *must* bear, up to the point of giving up this inalienable bearing, which would then amount to a total giving up of my own life. One has to and must bear because one's body is already what one has to bear in the first place. From the very beginning of one's life, one already has to bear the hunger, thirst, fatigue, disease, wounds, and the ageing of the body. A human being with a body, a corporeal being, is *bearing* itself from the very beginning. Therefore, so-called "actively bearing one's wound and pain" is only a conscious recognition of what I have already been undergoing in a "bodily" manner, of what is inescapable for me. In other words, to be determined to endure my pain is to be *actively passive*, which can then only mean: to "accept" or "assume" one's original, or better, pre-original, passivity.[9] The having-to-bear presupposes this original or pre-original passivity.

It is because a human being is already itself bearing, that he or she needs to bear and can "actively" bear. But active bearing as a conscious act is inseparable from the determination of the *xin* 心 (heart/mind). The so-called bodily wound or physical pain can never be purely "bodily" or "physical". That there have never been such pure physical or bodily wounds and pain is because they necessarily *dongxin* 動心 or "move (one's) heart", as Mengzi put it. Therefore, to be determined to bear one's wound and pain is just to not allow one's heart to be "moved" by any wound and pain that one is suffering from. Since the stirring or movement of the heart generates emotion, active bearing in effect amounts to the controlling or even repression of emotion. Such controlling or repression aims to cut off the "natural" link between sensations, which are normally seen to be bodily or physical, and the heart, which is traditionally regarded as emotional. The usual Chinese word to describe this controlled or repressed condition is *yong* 勇, or "courage". To be able to receive and to bear one's bodily wound and pain in an entirely unmoved manner, and to not let one's heart be "naturally" moved by them, is usually regarded as an embodiment of one's great courage. And courage is traditionally thought to be what enables one to deal in a composed or unmoved manner with anything recognised as dangerous, difficult, or painful. Hence the desirability of "a heart that cannot be moved" or an "unmoved heart" (*bu dong xin* 不動心) as a great virtue in Mengzi. It is precisely because bodily injuries and wounds would necessarily move one's "heart" (which is to say, bodily sensations would "naturally" generate emotion or influence the state of

9 On this original or pre-original passivity, we refer to Levinas 1981.

heart/mind), but one can nevertheless increase one’s ability to endure bodily pain or suffering through physical training and spiritual cultivation, that Mengzi confirms that one can indeed attain the condition of having an “unmoved heart”. And the basic method of arriving at this condition is to cultivate one’s personal courage (*yang yong* 養勇). The expression, “unmoved heart” (*bu dong xin* 不動心, which literally means “do not move one’s heart” or “not let one’s heart be moved”, and, consequently, “(being able to have) an unmoved heart”, however, must already presuppose the possibility of the heart being moved. It is because in its natural or uncontrolled condition the human heart would always be “moved”, despite itself, by anything that touches it through sensation, that sometimes one has to consciously stop it from spontaneously doing so. That which can most likely touch my body and move my heart is always the other. The other is the one who can harm me in all sorts of ways, thus throwing me in pain and suffering. Therefore, not surprisingly, the examples that Mengzi gives in his discussion of the unmoved heart are all about those who tried very hard to train themselves so as to be able to confront the other fearlessly: “The way Beigong You 北宫黝 cultivated his courage was by not shrinking from a stabbing into his skin or towards his eyes. For him, to yield the tiniest bit was as humiliating as to be cuffed in the market place. He would no more accept an insult from a prince with ten thousand chariots than from a common fellow coarsely clad. He regarded killing the prince the same as killing the common fellow. He had no fear of any feudal lords, and would always return whatever harsh tones came his way”.[10] Here, Beigong You’s courage was cultivated only in the confrontation with or hostility towards another person. The way Meng Shishe 孟施舍 cultivated his courage was also by “being able to be without any fear (of the other)”.[11] Among the examples Mengzi gives here, even Zengzi 曾子, Confucius’ most famous student, also talked about Confucius’ conception of great courage in terms of being not afraid of the other, despite the fact that in Confucius’ conception of great courage, whether or not I am fearful of the other should be determined by whether or not I feel that I am righteous. Thus, no matter how different these types of courage are in nature and in their degree, it is always the other – the other person’s threat to me – who can “move” my heart through threatening to wound my body, and to be able to have an unmoved heart therefore always means not to allow my heart to be moved by any wound inflicted upon my body by the other.

A question arises here with regard to this desire for an “unmoved heart”. Why should I desire to have an “unmoved heart”? Why should I not let my heart be spontaneously “moved” (*dong* 動) by the other? To desire an entirely “unmoved heart” is to desire an ideal self that is completely at home with itself, utterly autonomous and self-determining, and never affected by the other. In this desire to maintain my self as the self that closes itself in upon itself, or as the subject in complete possession of itself, the other is precisely the one that can break my self-

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10 *Mengzi*, 2A2.
11 Ibid.

enclosure and open me up. And the opening up can only be an opening to the other. My being open to the other manifests itself precisely in my heart's being able to be spontaneously moved by the other. Therefore, to try not to let my heart be moved by the other is to try to close me up to the other or close the other outside myself. Being not open to the other, no one will ever be able to affect me and disturb my being at home with myself. However, this desire to obtain and maintain an unmoved heart against the other shows precisely that, the I, as a being of flesh and blood, have always already been exposed, hence open, to the other, and to all the possible insults and injuries that may be inflicted upon me. It is precisely because of this "being always already exposed to the other", that I can ever desire to cultivate my courage in confronting the other, that is, try to not let my heart be moved by any insult, rage, and wounds. However, as the unmoved heart necessarily presupposes the possibility of one's heart's being able to be moved by the other, courage – the ability to fearlessly confront the other – necessarily implies my being already exposed to the other, that is, to wounding. This means that the self, the subject, or the subjectivity of the subject, is essentially sensibility, and sensibility is essentially vulnerability, as Levinas would say. As sensibility, I have always already been offered, in an originally completely passive way, to the other without any holding back. Levinas says, "In the having been offered [to the other] without any holding back, it is as though the sensibility were precisely what all protection and all absence of protection already presupposes: vulnerability itself."[12] Similarly, we can say that what the need for courage and the cultivation of it signifies is precisely my original vulnerability.

If to actively bear means to be able to have an unmoved heart under any circumstances in which one's heart would have been moved spontaneously, and if these circumstances should include both the situations of the heart's being moved by one's own physical pain as well as by the other (wherefrom comes any possible wounding), we can then understand better the meaning of this Chinese expression, *ren xin* 忍心, which literally means "to let one's heart endure", "to be able to endure". The act of bearing a physical burden is inseparable from a certain determination of the heart/mind. That is to say, to bear can never be merely "physical", like a marble pillar supporting the weight of a roof. To bear is eventually to let one's heart bear. In determinately bearing something, be it physical burden, bodily pain or the threat of the other, one must not allow one's heart to be moved, one must make it endure. Therefore, to "have the heart" to (that is, to be able to let one's heart) bear one's pain is to be able to have an unmoved heart despite the pain, and to "have the heart" to bear the pain of the other is to be able to maintain an unmoved heart despite the suffering of the other. The former seems to show a laudable courage, whereas the latter appears to be "hard-hearted" (*hen xin* 狠心) or "cruel against others" (*canren* 殘忍, literally, "enduring cruelty"), therefore, *ren xin* 忍心, or being able to make one's heart bear/endure more than it can bear, is an

12 Levinas 1981, p. 75.

ambiguous quality. Sometimes one has to make one's heart bear what it may not have been able to bear. According to Mengzi, those who were chosen by Heaven to bear a great burden all underwent the training of having to make one's heart to bear: "This is why Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to move (*dong* 動) his heart, enable his nature to bear better (*ren xing* 忍性), and make good his deficiencies".[13] Here, to "move his heart" (*dong xin* 動心) is precisely to train one's heart so that it can eventually stay *unmoved* when being touched and stirred, and to "enable his nature to bear better" amounts to letting one's heart bear more than it can bear.

If all the bearing (*ren* 忍) is after all necessarily *ren xin* 忍心: to let one's heart bear more despite itself, that is, to consciously control one's feeling and emotion, then all the not bearing (*bu ren* 不忍) is necessarily *bu ren xin* 不忍心, or not letting one's heart bear what it cannot spontaneously bear. However, this "not letting" cannot mean: not letting one's heart bear any burden at all, because the heart has always already been bearing, regardless whether one has let it or not. It can therefore only mean: let one's heart be moved by what it can no longer bear. In the case of the King Xuan of Qi, what his heart must have already born (as the result of being already exposed to an other) but still cannot bear is the suffering of the ox about to be killed. It is precisely because he had let his heart be spontaneously moved by the suffering of this animal,[14] he could no longer "heartlessly" *bear* to see it go to death.

So the king's "being unable to bear" is a certain *inability* to let his heart bear the suffering of an animal. But, curiously enough, this *in-ability* is simultaneously an "ability": being *able* to let his heart be moved by what it is *unable* to bear, that is, by the suffering of the other. Out of this "ability" which is at the same time also an "inability", he took action to relieve the other of its pain. In Mengzi's view, if the king could extend this heart to the suffering of his people, and take action to relieve them of their suffering, he would of course be able to become a true king in caring for his people and in keeping them under protection. Therefore, the possibility of his becoming a true king in caring for and keeping his people under protection lies precisely in this very "heart" that can be moved by the suffering of others, and that will not allow itself to bear it without being moved by it. The "heart that cannot bear (the suffering of) other people", of which Mengzi speaks, is this very heart that would be spontaneously moved by the suffering of the other.

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13 *Mengzi*, 6B15.

14 We are well aware of the seemingly paradoxical nature of the expression of "*let* one's heart be 'spontaneously (naturally)' moved", because if it is truly spontaneously or natural, then there cannot be any question of *letting* it be so moved, and if one has to let it be so moved, then it seems that it is not yet or no longer "spontaneously" or "natural". However, is it not the essence of the phenomenon of *ren* 忍 or "bearing"? Something "natural" has to be let be natural in order for it to be natural: this is perhaps what is most enigmatic about man's relationship with itself as well as with the other.

That my heart would necessarily be moved not only by my own physical pain, but also by the suffering of the other is because I, as someone with a body, as sensibility, have always already been passively bearing my exposure to the other. My body, as sensibility, is itself my being exposed to exteriority, or to the other. But this "being exposed to the other" is not only an exposure to any possible wounding that may be inflicted on me by the other. It [this "being exposed to the other"] is also necessarily an exposure to the suffering of the other, such as in the case of the King seeing the ox suffering, or in the case of the one seeing the child in an imminent danger. Being exposed to the other, being "touched" through my sensibility, or through my self as sensibility, by the pain suffered by the other, I must bear and have always already been bearing the other – the other's pain – in me. For me there is no escaping from this necessary bearing. I, as sensibility, have always already been the bearing of the other in me. However, although the other – the other's suffering – is what I always already have to bear, it is also what I cannot bear simply out of my own "spontaneity". This is perhaps what the Chinese expression *bu*^not 不 *ren*^bear 忍 *ren*^man 人 means. It is precisely because I have always already been bearing the other, but by nature I still cannot bear (the suffering of) the other spontaneously, as though it is always too heavy a burden for me, that relieving the other from its suffering is a necessity for me, and not only my voluntary generosity towards the other, a generosity which would come out of my "having already the ten thousand things in me".[15] If, on the contrary, I try resolutely to make my heart bear the suffering of the other that I cannot spontaneously bear, and not let it be moved by this unbearable bearing, I would be doing something against my own human nature. This "against my nature" thus can only mean this: against my heart. It is against my heart in that my heart is made to bear what is unbearable to it. This *against* my heart would then signify that I have become *ren xin* 忍心, or in a sense "cruel". But it is precisely because making one's heart bear what for it is unbearable goes against one's nature or one's humanity, that becoming *ren xin* 忍心, or "cruel", is not "natural", not the "natural condition" in which man would first find himself. To be able to make one's heart bear the unbearable would require "unnatural" psychological or mental strength, active effort, and long-time anti-human training

We seem to be in a better position now to understand the ontological meaning of Mengzi's famous "heart of *chuti ceyin*", or "heart of *ceyin*". This is the very heart that by its nature cannot bear the suffering of the other. But the expression "heart of *ceyin*" itself, in serving to illustrate the heart that cannot bear the suffering of the other, says more about this very heart. As *ce* 惻 and *yin* 隱 both mean deep and profound pain, this expression tells us that this heart that cannot bear the suffering of the other would "actually" feel great pain on being touched by the sight of the child

15 *Mengzi*, 7A4. This "having the ten thousand things in me (*wanwu jie bei yu wo* 萬物皆被於我)", as it is asserted by Mengzi, would seem to be contrary to what we are trying to argue here. It requires a detailed separate reading to illustrate its complicated relation with what we try to argue "for" Mengzi's "heart of profound pain (*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心)" here.

about to fall into the well. One immediately tends to interpret as purely emotional this "pain" of the heart that cannot bear the suffering of the other. Being emotional, this "pain" should then be understood only as a figure of speech, as one would not think that the heart regarded as the seat of emotion can literally feel any pain. However, are we here able to distinguish clearly an emotional pain from a physical pain? What would it signify if a certain state of heart/mind here seems to have to be described by a word allegedly borrowed originally from the sphere of bodily sensation?

To deal with this question, let us return to the situation of the child on the brink of falling into a well. In seeing this endangered child, the very "seeing" is itself already my being immediately exposed to the suffering of the other. Here my seeing is a sense perception. But this sense perception is never purely or merely an intuition through sight. The perception of the endangered child immediately seizes upon my whole self, thus generating some immediate bodily sensation in me. The Chinese word to describe this situation is *gan* 感: "to feel", "to affect", and "to be affected". I "feel" through sight that the child is about to fall into a well. This perception or "feeling" affects me, and I am affected. To feel can be a pure sensation, whereas to be affected puts me in the state of certain emotion. But, as the Chinese word *gan* 感 has indicated, these two conditions are inseparable. Hence the formation in Chinese of the two compounds (words consisting of two Chinese characters) with the word *gan*: *ganjue* 感覺, to feel, sense perception, feeling, and *ganqing* 感情, feeling, emotion.[16] However, in order to be affected, or to have emotion, a body is required. Without a body, I would never be able to feel anything inside myself, as I have no longer any "inside". Therefore, without a certain immediate internal bodily feeling or sensation generated by sense perception, no emotional pain – the heart of *ceyin* – could ever be possible, as this pain can never be separated from a certain bodily sensation. It is only because the emotional pain of the heart is not only inseparable from bodily pain, but is itself already an immediate bodily feeling, that the Chinese word *tong* 痛, which is an equivalent to the English word "pain", may be applied to describing both so-called bodily condition and so-called mental condition. Therefore, the "heart of *ceyin*", a heart that can be pained by the other, and that can thus feel "emotional" pain, is not just a figure of speech. Of course this pain is not to be reduced to "pure" bodily sensation, suppose we really know what such "pure" bodily sensation means in the first place, and suppose it has ever been possible for human being.

Thus, in the expression of the "heart of *ceyin*", a heart that can be pained by the sight of the suffering of the other, it becomes difficult to maintain the line traditionally drawn between bodily sensation and emotion. The "heart of *ceyin*" is a heart that can indeed *feel* pain. The pain felt by the heart is first an internal

16 See, for example, the entry *gan* 感 in *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (1980, p. 220, left column), where the compound *ganjue* 感覺 is translated as "sense perception; sensation; feeling", whereas the compound *ganqing* 感情 is translated as "emotion; feeling; sentiment".

"sensation". And sensation is always bodily or corporeal. Sensation cannot be conceived without the body which can suffer and which has to *bear* its suffering despite itself. It is the body, or the corporeality of the body, that is the condition of the possibility of paining and being pained. If man did not have a body, a body that is itself already the exposedness to the other, hence a body that can be wounded and pained, man would never be able to "feel" anything. If man were purely spiritual, that is, only an un-bodily intuition of everything, he could never have had any feeling of pain, be it bodily or mental, since a pure intuition without a body – if this has ever been possible – would not be affected by what it perceives. In the Chinese tradition, especially in Daoism and in some of the thinkers in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, there has been indeed such a tendency towards letting man become pure un-bodily intuition, or intuition essentially without a body.[17] And to let man become such pure intuition would amount to a total annihilation of any *human* feeling, which has never been able to become un-bodily or incorporeal.

And, without any human feeling, there would no longer be any ethical problems. Indeed, the author of the *Laozi* 老子 said: "Heaven and Earth are not humane (*ren* 仁), and treat all things as straw dogs; the sage is not humane, and treats all people as straw dogs". The sage is not humane precisely because he has managed to eliminate all human feeling from himself; he has trained himself to let his heart bear anything without letting it be moved. He has lost his heart or no heart at all.

However, the problem about this desire for a pure intuition without a body is that the becoming pure of intuition relies on the elimination of the body or the corporeality of the corporeal body, but it is only on condition of the existence of such a body, that any intuition becomes ever conceivable. Since a pure intuition can only be achieved by destroying what makes it possible in the first place, it is impossible. As the intuition *of* a human body, no intuition can ever avoid being affected by what it intuits or perceives. Man, or man's body, is itself sensation and sensibility. All the *human* feelings rely on the body as their condition, and all the human *feelings* in turn affect this body. Here all the emotions are grounded in bodily sensations, and all the bodily sensations are already feeling *or* emotion. In the sensibility of man, or in man as sensibility, therefore, "bodily" sensation and "spiritual" emotion are inseparable. It is precisely because man has a body that can feel (*gan* 感) and can be affected, that s/he can ever have any feeling, which, as a

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17 For example, one can read in the *Laozi* (Chan 1963, pp. 147, 145), "Attain the extreme of the void, / Maintain steadfast quietude. / All things come into being, / And I see thereby their return." (chap. 16), and, "The reason that I have great worry is that I have a body. /If I have no body, / What worry could I have?" (chap. 13). Cf. Levinas (1981): "At the height of its gnoseological adventure everything in sensibility means intuition, theoretical receptivity from a distance (which is that of a look). But as soon as it falls back into contact, it reverts from grasping to being grasped, like in the ambiguity of a kiss" (p. 75), and, "Maternity, vulnerability, responsibility, proximity, contact – sensibility can slip toward touching, palpation, openness upon…, consciousness of…, pure knowing taking images from the 'intact being,' informing itself about the palpable quiddity of things" (ibid., p. 76.).

rather "ambiguous" concept, necessarily refers to both sensation (*ganjue* 感覺) *and* emotion (*ganqing* 感情), that is, to what can be felt by and in a human body.

We now can see that Mengzi's "heart of *ceyin*", or the "heart of profound pain", is just such a "feeling" – sensation *and* emotion – which is necessarily felt in one's being exposed to the suffering of the other. Mengzi maintains that it is as "natural" for man to have the heart of profound pain as for him/her to have four limbs. In the light of the above analysis, this "natural" analogy now points to a reading of the heart of profound pain that may not have explicitly intended by Mengzi, but that has nevertheless already been implied in this "natural" comparison. To say that the heart of profound pain is as natural as the four limbs is to maintain that the nature of man, or the *humanity* of the human, is essentially defined by its sensibility. Man is sensibility, and sensibility is one's being necessarily exposed to the other. Sensibility implies susceptibility and vulnerability. Being exposed to the other, to what the other is suffering or may have to suffer, I, essentially as the one with a heart of profound pain, or as sensibility, cannot not be affected, or, for better or for worse, be "wounded". Being affected or even "wounded" by the sight and feeling of the suffering of the other, I cannot help but feel pain inside myself, in my "heart". Therefore, to be thus pained is not in the first place my voluntary choice out of my nobility, as it might have been thought of. It is not I who nobly and generously *choose* to be pained by the suffering of the other, but the other who necessarily comes to pain me. Thus in being exposed to the other, I am entirely and originally passive. The pain that pains my heart or my whole body in my being exposed to the imminent suffering of the child comes before any reflection on my part as a subject. It comes upon me despite me. Therefore, I must have already born it before I can "assume" it in any way, as the act of assuming entails my conscious determination. In assuming the pain that has come upon me, my original *passive* bearing or suffering has already been turned into *active* bearing, which, as having been said above, is also expressed by the Chinese word *ren* 忍. If for man to have the heart of profound pain is as "natural" as for him/her to possess the four limbs, this then can only mean that man must necessarily suffer in him/herself for the other in being exposed to it.

Being necessarily pained in being exposed to the other, I have to "bear" the other's pain in my heart or inside my body despite myself. However, "having to bear" here means both this original and entirely passive bearing (the suffering) of the other, *and* a *certain* active bearing (the suffering) of the other. And here lies perhaps the entire *structural* ambiguity of the phenomenon of *ren* 忍 or to bear. I may be prompted by the unbearable pain that I have nevertheless already born, in being exposed the other, to take action to relieve it from its suffering, as what the King did in seeing the suffering of the ox. However, I may also be determined to actively or resolvedly bear the "unbearable" pain and do nothing, hence ignoring the suffering of the other. In the latter case, I am actually letting my heart bear more than I can naturally bear. And in this "bearing more" against my nature, I am becoming *ren xin* 忍心, or "cruel" (to others as well as to myself), and losing my humanity.

If there is anything that may have ever "prevented" me from going against my nature and becoming "*ren xin*" or cruel, it is the other to whom I am exposed, the other as the child whom, with a necessarily moved and pained heart, I am seeing on the brink of the well. The other here comes to oblige me, and I am therefore obliged by this other, and responsible for this other. I certainly can still turn away from the suffering of the other, as I can let my heart actively bear more than it can bear, and not allow it to be moved. But, in order ever to be able to become responsible *to* and *for* the suffering of the other, I must be able in the first place to be actually touched and pained in my heart or inside me by the other. The possibility of the humanity of the human, as opposed to the "heartless" inhumanity of Heaven-Earth or the sage of the *Laozi*, lies in this being able to be pained by the other.

If in Mengzi human nature is asserted to be originally good, then it is this original possibility of my being pained inside by the other, this human "heart of *ceyin*", or profound pain, this sensibility as being exposed to the other, that constitutes the original goodness of human nature. Human nature is not originally good because of my ability as the subject to voluntarily assume any goodness, but because of my "inborn" "heart of *ceyin*" as my original or pre-original sensibility which is vulnerability. As I am the very exposedness to the other, I am therefore obliged by the other to do well and to be good. Goodness comes and seizes upon me despite myself. However, as man nevertheless both has to bear and can bear what he is necessarily exposed to, there is always the possibility of their becoming *ren xin* 忍心 or cruel. In Mengzi this is known as losing one's "original heart" (*ben xin* 本心).[18] But since one can only lose one's heart inside oneself, the conscientious effort of becoming good can then be nothing other than letting one's heart – a heart that has nevertheless always already suffered the suffering of the other – again be touched and pained in one's being exposed to the other. In being pained, in feeling pain in one's heart, and in feeling the pain of one's heart, one regains one's heart of *ceyin*, that is, one's *ren* 仁, one's original goodness or one's humanity.

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