

## Article

# Beyond Good or Evil: “Human Nature Is Good” Reinterpreted

Fei Lan

Department of Philosophy and Religion, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677, USA; fln@olemiss.edu

## Abstract

This paper discusses Dai Zhen’s 戴震 (1724–1777) interpretation of human nature against the backdrop of Mencius’s claim that human nature is good. I argue that Dai Zhen ingeniously reinterprets the “shan” 善 (good; goodness) in terms of “fen” 分 (allotments; distinction) to view the claimed “goodness” as the unique and finest physical makeup of human nature that possesses the potential ability to know moral goodness, viz. *liyi* 理義 (principle & righteousness). Nonetheless, rather than a transcendental principle or some heavenly endowed virtue, *liyi* is present in human relationships and everyday life. At the crux of the issue is how to activate the given ability and advance our intelligent mind for principle and righteousness. By ridding “*xingshan*” 性善 (human nature is good) of its inherent moral properties as Mencius posits in his theory of human nature, Dai Zhen, from a naturalistic and empirical stance, proposes an unconventional approach to the longstanding debate over whether human nature is good or evil in Confucian discourse. While his interpretation may unsettle us that are accustomed to the traditional view of the “goodness” of human nature as one’s innate moral feelings of *ren yi li zhi* 仁義禮智 (benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety), Dai Zhen’s reading has undoubtedly thrown a new light on this famed Mencian thesis.

**Keywords:** Dai Zhen 戴震; Mencius 孟子; *renxing* 人性 (human nature); *xingshan* 性善 (human nature is good); *fen* 分 (allotments; distinction); *xueqi xinzh* 血氣心知 (blood; breath; and the intelligent mind); *shenming* 神明 (godlike illumination)



Academic Editors: Zhongjiang Wang and Hongxing Lin

Received: 31 July 2025

Revised: 15 September 2025

Accepted: 30 October 2025

Published: 18 November 2025

**Citation:** Lan, Fei. 2025. Beyond Good or Evil: “Human Nature Is Good” Reinterpreted. *Religions* 16: 1464. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16111464>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) is a great Confucian moral thinker and scholar of 18th century China. In his masterpiece *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證 (*Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius*), he reexamines the age-old issue of human nature. He says, “Nature is a general term for birds, fish, animals, and plants, but nature that is good is about the nature of human beings.”<sup>1</sup> Dai Zhen makes a distinction between “*xing*” 性 (nature) and “*xingshan*” 性善 (nature being good). What is “good” about human nature then? To address the issue, this paper first examines Dai Zhen’s conception of human nature in terms of *xueqi xinzh* 血氣心知 (blood, breath, and the intelligent mind) and then investigates the meanings of “*xingshan*.” I argue that Dai Zhen unconventionally looks at the “goodness” of human nature in light of “*fen*” 分 (allotments; distinction) to see the “shan” 善 (goodness) as the physical makeup of human nature resulting from the movement of *yin yang* and *wu xing* 五行 (the five elements/phases) and allowing for continuous enlargement and advancement. With his naturalistic<sup>2</sup> view of human nature, Dai Zhen greatly challenges our understanding of the notion “*xingshan*” that is deeply imbued with the influence of Mencius’s 孟子 (c. 372–289 B.C.E.) thought.

In Mencius's theory of human nature, human nature is inherently good, possessing the seeds of the four ethical virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom which all human beings are born with but require continuous nurturing and cultivation (See the *Mencius* 3:6; 11:6; & 13:21).<sup>3</sup> According to Dai Zhen, however, human nature is good in the sense that human nature as the finest physically constituted substance possesses the capability, potentially to be further developed capability, of knowing the moral goodness, namely *liyi* 理義 (principle & righteousness). Yet, for Dai Zhen, the so-called goodness or *liyi* is not a heavenly endowed virtue or a transcendental principle residing within the human mind. Instead, principle and righteousness are the order and patterns present in things which Dai Zhen favorably phrases as *renlun riyong* 人倫日用 (human relationships and everyday life). "Where there is a thing, there is its norm" 有物有則 (*youwu youze*) (Wang 2015, p. 708), as Dai Zhen often cites the *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Poetry*) (See Dai 1995a, No. 3, No. 8, No. 10 & No. 13). Accordingly, Dai Zhen states, "Desire is the thing and principle its norm" (欲, 其物; 理, 其則也. Dai 1995a, No. 10, p. 160). Specifically, human relationships and the daily human activities are the things, wherein lie humanity, righteousness, and propriety their norms.<sup>4</sup> The so-called principle and righteousness do not exist outside human daily existence of drinking, eating, and having sex. Since human nature comprises *xueqi* 血氣 (blood and breath) as well as *xinzhi* 心知 (the intelligent mind), from which both human desires and the capabilities of knowing are derived, not only do we have the inclinations of the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth towards sounds, colors, smells, and tastes, we also have the inclination of the mind towards the order and patterns. For Dai Zhen, the inclination of *xueqi* and *xinzhi* towards what is delightful to them from outside is what is natural about human nature.

As human desires arise in our physical contact with sounds, colors, smells, and tastes, I argue that with Dai Zhen the given knowing capability of human nature is activated in our encounters with other people with respect to the actual reality of *renlun riyong*. Because of our experiential knowledge of the most fundamental reality of human existence of "having drink, food, and sex,"<sup>5</sup> we can understand not only our own desires but also other people's desires. Therefore, Dai Zhen believes that human knowing awareness is greater than that of other animals. Yet, we need to further develop this innate knowing ability to bring what is natural to its full realization. As a result, we can not only fulfill our own desires but also help other people till all under heaven fulfill their desires. In this way, we will advance from what is (自然 *ziran*) to what ought to be (必然 *biran*) (See Dai 1995a, No. 15, No. 26, & No. 32, pp. 169–71, 188, 201). Dai Zhen interprets this "greater knowing awareness above things" (知覺大遠乎物 *zhijue da yuanyu wu*) as what Mencius means by "*xingshan*" (See Dai 1995a, No. 21 & No. 27, pp. 183, 191); he interprets this "contextual and situational knowledge" (隨在而知 *suizai erzhi*) as the meaning of the Mencian notion of "*xingshan*" (See Dai 1995a, No. 21, p. 183); and he takes "what ought to be—the complete realization of what is natural" (必然, 乃自然之極則. Dai 1995a, No. 26, p. 188) to be the goodness "*shan*" (善, 其必然也. See Dai 1995a, No. 32, p. 201).

For a tradition that is preoccupied with the question of whether human nature is good or evil, Dai Zhen's innovative approach prompts our inquiries about the metaphysical take on the issue. Mencius not only proposes that human nature is endowed with the innate moral feelings of "*siduan*" 四端 (the heart of commiseration, the heart of shame and dislike, the heart of deference, and the heart of right and wrong) (See the *Mencius* 3:6), but also maintains that human beings have "*liangneng*" 良能 (innate ability) and "*liangzhi*" 良知 (innate awareness) so that people are born to know how to love their parents and respect their elder brothers (See the *Mencius* 13:15). In a similar way to Mencius, Dai Zhen holds that human nature possesses within itself the natural capability of knowing, but Dai Zhen insists that the so-called "*shan*" or "*liyi*" can only be found from without, namely from our

interaction with other human beings as regards the basic human daily existence about the fulfillment of fundamental human necessities of food, drink, and sex. Dai Zhen identifies this natural ability of knowing as the Mencian “*xingshan*.”

Mencius does not deny human physical desires, but he is highly appreciative of people’s love for virtues 故好是懿德 (See the *Mencius* 11:6) and advocates that we should nurture and follow our “*dati*” 大體 (great body) to become “*daren*” 大人 (great persons) (See the *Mencius* 11: 14 & 15). Likewise, Dai Zhen points out, “Desire is the naturalness of blood and breath; and the enjoyment of virtue is the naturalness of the intelligent mind. This is why Mencius says that nature is good.”<sup>6</sup> While Dai Zhen earnestly defends human desires, he persuades people not to be selfish by only focusing on their own desires and needs (See Dai 1995a, No. 10 & No. 30). He points out, the full realization of desire means the fulfillment of not just *jizhiyu* 己之欲 (the desire of one’s own) but *renzhiyu* 人之欲 (the desire of the others) as well. Mencius encourages us to extend our heart-and-mind (心 *xin*) to lead our innate moral sprouts to the fully grown virtues of *ren yi li zhi* 仁義禮智 (benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety). As a result, our virtues will shine brightly like fire and suffuse the world as the spring water does (See the *Mencius* 3:6). Nevertheless, for Dai Zhen, the journey of self-cultivation does not start with the inborn moral feelings or senses as the word “goodness” presumably indicates but rather begins with unlocking our physically well-constituted mind by birth through thinking and self-reflection. To further the process, we need to constantly advance our mind to godlike illumination so that we can fully comprehend principles and righteousness in our relationships with people and daily activities.

In his preface to the *Shu Zheng*, Dai Zhen exclaims, “Learning the way of the sages must begin with Mencius. Alas! We cannot make any change!”<sup>7</sup> Dai Zhen sees himself as an adherent to Mencius, his defender and custodian (See Dai 1995a, “Preface,” p. 148). Through closely reading Dai Zhen’s two philosophical works of *Shu Zheng* and *Yuan Shan* 原善 (Inquiry into Goodness) along with Mencius’s work, I carefully examine Dai Zhen’s reading of Mencius on the latter’s famous claim that human nature is good. This paper argues that Dai Zhen has made a bold move to depart from the influential and commonly held Mencian position that has often been deemed orthodox in the Confucian tradition. As a great exegetist of the Qing dynasty, Dai Zhen’s philosophy is built on his critical interpretation of the classics. With his very novel interpretation of “*xingshan*,” Dai Zhen sheds new light on this well-established thesis that human nature is good.

## 2. Xueqi Xinzhi: The Makeup of Human Nature

### 2.1. Xueqi Xinzhi: Natural Allotments from the Material Force of Yin Yang and Wu Xing

Dai Zhen formulates his theory on human nature in terms of *xueqi xinzhi*, a term he has adopted from the Confucian classic of the *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites). He says,

Owing to the allotments from *yin yang* and *wu xing*, there are human beings and things. Restricted by each their own allotments, humans and things form their different natures. *Yin yang* and the five elements are the substantial embodiment of *Dao*; blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are the substantial embodiment of nature. Being actual substances, they can be allotted; because they are allotted, they are uneven.<sup>8</sup>

In Dai Zhen’s formulation, human nature comprises *xueqi* (血氣 blood and breath) and *xinzhi* (心知 the intelligent mind). *Xinzhi* is the knowing faculty of the mind and *xueqi* the physical construct of the body that has the sensory functions of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting and the like. Yet, *xueqi* and *xinzhi* both have their origins in the material force of *yin yang* and *wu xing* and are thereby both physical and inseparable from each

other. As the interactive activities of the *yin yang* force and the five elements give rise to myriad things including humankind, human beings and all other living creatures receive their respective allotments to form each their own distinct natures fitting for their different species and kinds. Therefore, human nature is none other than what has naturally come along with its given physical substance.

Dai Zhen's naturalistic take on human nature sets him apart from Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077 C.E.), Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 C.E.), and other Neo-Confucian thinkers, who contrarily hold that human nature consists of the nature of heaven and earth 天地之性 (*tiandi zhixing*) and the nature of physical temperament 氣質之性 (*qizhi zhi xing*) that are in opposition to each other. Of a dualistic worldview, the Song Neo-Confucians attribute the nature of physical temperament to *qi* 氣 (material force), to the human physical body but ascribe the nature of heaven and earth to heaven, to *li* 理 (principle). Due to their different origins, only the heavenly endowment is the true nature while the physical temperament is merely desire. By drawing a line between the nature of physical temperament and the nature of heavenly endowment, the Song Confucians set up an abstract principle *li* that overrides all that is physical. In Dai Zhen's view, human nature that is made up of *xueqi xinzhì* correlates with Dao that is composed of *yin yang* and *wu xing*. Whether they are the constituent substance of the human nature or Dao, *xueqi xinzhì* and *yin yang wu xing* are all derived from the transformation of heaven and earth. Henceforth, human nature is physical in the same way as Dao is material. With an emphasis on one same root in the material force of *yin* and *yang*, Dai Zhen maintains that both *xueqi* and *xinzhì* are physically constituted and thus inseparable from each other. Human nature comprises at once the faculty of knowing and the natural propensities for favorable flavors, sounds, smells, and other physical comforts.

In contrast, from Dai Zhen's point of view, the Song Confucians mistakenly propose a heavenly principle as if it were something real (以理為如有物焉) (See Dai 1995a, No. 5 & No. 41, pp. 154, 212) and thereby attach an alleged heavenly nature to human natural endowments (Dai 1995a, No. 7, p. 184). For Dai Zhen, there does not exist a so-called metaphysical principle *li* or *tianli*, which is nothing but the order and patterns present in the things of the world. With respect to physical things, *li* is their physical patterning or structure visible as "*fenli*" 分理 (division and patterning), "*jili*" 肌理 (skin texture), "*couli*" 腠理 (skin texture or the natural fiber under skin), "*wenli*" 文理, 紋縷 (veins, structural pattern), and "*tiaoli*" 條理 (orderly pattern) (See Dai 1995a, No. 1, p. 151). Regarding human beings, Dai Zhen claims that the so-called heavenly principle resides in human desire. If we can discern and follow these patterns and order, we will be able to well grasp the reality wherein we are situated and properly conduct ourselves among other human beings. As Ying-Shih Yu has observed, "Thus, he transformed *li* from a Neo-Confucian idea of a priori moral principles to something like 'laws' or 'patterns,' which are inherent in things and thereby constitute the very object of knowledge on the part of man" (Yu 2016, p. 120).

## 2.2. *Xueqi Xinzhì: Commonality and Distinction Between Humankind and Animals*

Dai Zhen brings into sharp focus the material nature of both *xueqi* and *xinzhì*, which, paradoxically, make human beings and other animals resemble each other on the one hand, and on the other set them apart. In particular, he points to the intelligent mind wherein lie both their similitude and distinction. Mencius believes that the distinction between humans and beasts is very slight, but he does not elaborate on the "slight difference." Instead, Mencius only states that the ordinary people lose it while the sages preserve it and that people are not far away from becoming beasts if they fail to retain their original nature.

Another great Confucian thinker Xunzi 荀子 (c. 314—c. 217 B.C.E.) on the other hand says vividly that humans are human not because human beings are biped and not hairy so that they are distinguished from beasts for their physical appearance, but rather because humans know rituals (See *Xunzi*, Chapter 5 “Feixiang” 非相 Contra Physiognomy). In chapter 9 “Wangzhi” 王制 (The Regulations of Kings), we read,

Fire and water have qi [氣] but are without life [生 sheng]. Grass and trees have life but are without awareness [知 zhi]. Birds and beasts have awareness but are without yi [義]. Humans have qi and life and awareness and, moreover they have yi [義]. And so they are the most precious [貴 gui] things under Heaven [天 Tian]. [Humans] are not as strong as oxen or as fast as horses, but oxen and horses are used by them. How is this so? I say it is because humans are able to form communities while the animals cannot. Why are humans able to form communities? It is because of social divisions. [分 fen] How can social divisions be put into practice? I say it is because of yi. And so if they use yi in order to make social divisions, then they will be harmonized. If they are harmonious, then they will be unified. If they are unified, then they will have more force. If they have more force, then they will be strong. If they are strong, then they will be able to overcome the animals. And so they can get to live in homes and palaces.<sup>9</sup>

In this text Xunzi offers a hierarchical view on the existence in the world to differentiate human beings from other living beings and physical things. Even though animals possess vital energy and certain degree of awareness, Xunzi asserts that humans are the noblest beings because they alone can make distinction and form social communities through rituals *li* and righteousness *yi*. The human capability for *liyi* enables human beings to stand above animals, despite being physically weaker. Elsewhere in Chapter 1 of “Quanxue” 勸學 (Encouraging Learning), a similar idea is found in Xunzi’s discussion on the difference between a bird called the *meng* dove and a gentleman.<sup>10</sup> The latter knows how to select a fitting community while the former cannot. In so doing the man is likely to come closer to fairness and right. In Xunzi’s philosophy, nonetheless, *liyi* is not something human beings are born with. Rather, human nature is inherently evil because man is born with passions, desires for beautiful sights and sounds, and fondness for profit (See *Xunzi*: Chapter 23 “Xinge” 性惡 Human Nature is Evil). Therefore, people need to learn principles and rituals that were established by the ancient sages to transform their original bad nature, the base and raw material, into good nature (See *Xunzi*: Chapter 19 “Lilun” 禮論 Discussion on Rites). In this view, *yi* or *liyi* is what distinguishes human beings from other animals, but humans do not possess *liyi* at birth. The human capability for rituals and righteousness is an acquired ability, and the goodness of human nature is the result of the conscious activities of diligent learning and education (See *Xunzi*: Chapter 23 “Xinge”).

In like manner, Dai Zhen treats the subject of *renqin zhibian* 人禽之辨 (distinctions between humanity and beasts) as an ethical issue as the two Confucians do. Following Mencius, Dai Zhen also states that talking about the distinctions between human nature and the nature of other animals solely in terms of their biological characteristics is “like grouping humans together with dogs and cattle without noticing their differences.”<sup>11</sup> Other than the external physical features and functions of *xueqi*, it is the intelligent mind *xinzhi* that separates humans from beasts.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Dai Zhen both pinpoints and rules out the intelligent mind as the locus of the divergence. For him not only do human beings and other animals both have *xueqi* and hence a similar liking for the appetitive and physical satisfaction, but they also both possess *xinzhi*. Like Xunzi, Dai Zhen believes that animals have the ability of knowing as humans do. The knowing faculty of the mind is not unique to humankind alone. In the above-mentioned hierarchical structure Xunzi presents in his

writing, “*zhi*” —the innate ability common to birds, beasts, and humans is put in a lower order below “*yi*” —the human acquired morality. Xunzi identifies *yi* as the determining factor that distinguishes humans from animals to stress the importance of learning rituals and moral standards from the sages. By contrast, Dai Zhen’s focus falls on the human intelligent mind.

Dai Zhen takes special notice of two salient features that he believes both humankind and all other living creatures have in common, namely loving life and fearing death that lead to the utilitarian pursuit of profit and avoidance of harm. He says,

All those who have blood and breath know loving life and fearing death and consequently they seek profit and avoid harm. Despite the difference in being clear or obscure, their knowing does not go beyond cherishing life and fearing death. The distinction between human beings and birds and beasts does not reside here. Birds and beasts know their mothers but not their fathers. This is due to the limitations of their awareness. Yet, they love the ones who have given them life and the ones whom they have given life to; the females love the males and the males love the females; Members of the same species do not bite one another, and the different species do not gnaw at one another with their teeth once they get used to staying together. This is also out of love for life and fear of death. Being concerned about oneself, one is concerned about those who are close. This is the characteristic of kindness; caring about oneself, one is kind to oneself and further extends this kindness to those who are close. The intelligent mind arising from nature is just like this. The distinction between human beings and birds and beasts do not reside here either.<sup>12</sup>

According to Dai Zhen, the so-called “*xinzhì*” is but a crude sense of “*huaisheng weisi*” 懷生畏死 (cherishing life and fearing death) that is shared by both humankind and all animals. Moreover, owing to their intelligent mind, animals can extend their care for themselves to those that are close as well. What is more, we could even observe from the behavioral patterns of some living creatures the seemingly Confucian virtues of *ren* 仁 (goodness, humanity) and *yi* 義 (righteousness). On this Dai Zhen strikingly comments, “As regards the birds feeding the elderly in return, the water pigeons retaining female and male distinction, the bees and ants knowing to be ruler and subject, and the wolves sacrificing their preys and the otters offering up their caught fish, their behaviors comply with what we humans call humanity and righteousness, but they each just follow their own animal’s nature.”<sup>13</sup> When the other living creatures are brought into view in comparison with us, it seems that the human intelligent mind is not that distinct anymore.

If that is the case, how does human nature differ from the natures of other living beings then? Simply, what is human nature? In my view, “*fen*” 分 (allotments; distinction) holds the key to the question. By *fen*, Dai Zhen makes it very clear that *xing* 性 (nature) and hence *renxing* 人性 (human nature) are just natural physical allotments of distinguishable characteristics so that they not only distinguish humankind from other creatures but also make human beings different among themselves. Dai Zhen does not explain how the physical substance of human nature is uniquely formed compared with that of other living beings. However, he believes that the human mind has greater knowing capability than that of other animals and claims that this greater awareness is what Mencius means by “*xingshan*.”<sup>14</sup> Further, even more importantly, he holds that this capability could and must be further developed. In Dai Zhen’s view, the intelligent mind of human beings greatly differs from the intelligent mind of other creatures in that only the former is able to “*kaitong*” 開通 (be open, connected, comprehending, discerning & penetrating) and “*zhi shenming*” 致神明 (attain godlike illumination), whereas the latter cannot. As he explicitly puts, “The

distinction between humankind and beasts lies in the fact that only human beings can attain godlike illumination although they both have the incipient luminosity.”<sup>15</sup>

Why only humans can extend their mind while other living beings cannot? What makes the human intelligent mind distinct since human nature and the nature of other living creatures are both materially constituted from the same material force of *yin yang* and *wuxing*? Again, Dai Zhen does not provide us with an answer. Obviously, he is not interested in a scientific investigation of the issue as scientists do today to study the anatomy, physiology, and the neurological systems of animals and humans to understand their physiological structures and functions. Rather, Dai Zhen simply concludes that it has been always so from time immemorial.<sup>16</sup>

It is rather fascinating to see how Dai Zhen dialectically negotiates between human physical allotments and the possibility to further develop and enhance their natural endowments. The corporality of *xueqi xinzhì* does not limit human beings from advancing their intelligent mind to reach godlike illumination; but on the other hand, the pursuit of godlike illumination does not dismiss the physical features of their intelligent mind. No matter how great is *jingshuang* 精爽 (incipient luminosity) of the human mind, humankind still largely bear resemblance to other animals, of which the desire to preserve life and fear about death is the most prominent. As long as human incipient luminosity remains unaltered, it is merely the intelligent mind in its original natural state.

As such, we should look at the incipient luminosity of the human mind in two ways. On the one hand, the *jingshuang* manifests the basic feeling of loving life and fearing death that human beings share with all those who have *xueqi xinzhì*, but on the other, the human incipient luminosity has within itself the possibility of being further developed and advanced to go beyond their instinctive feeling of loving life and fearing death to be able to comprehend principle and righteousness. For this reason, while Dai Zhen overtly argues for human physical and biological needs as a necessary part of human nature, he insists that we should extend our mind to know the principle and righteousness. In this way, not only can we take care of our own needs and desires but can also attend to other people’s needs and desires; not only can we extend our kindness to the ones that are close but also to those who are distant, and finally to all under heaven. I argue that the intelligent mind that is capable of being opened and further developed is exactly what the “goodness” of human nature means for Dai Zhen. It is the goodness in this sense that fundamentally marks human nature off from the natures of all other living beings and makes humans human.

### 3. *Xingshan*: Human Nature Is Good

Dai Zhen makes the same claim as Mencius does that human nature is good. Yet, Dai Zhen’s assertion brings up two questions for us to think. First, to state that “human nature is good,” is “*xingshan*” a statement about the inborn moral property of human nature? Second, to state that “human nature is good,” is “*xingshan*” a claim about a universally identical human nature? I argue that Dai Zhen’s notion of *xingshan* is not a reiteration of the innate moral traits or *siduan* 四端 (the four beginnings; four sprouts) inherent in the human mind as what Mencius has held. Rather, Dai Zhen’s take on “*xingshan*” is an affirmation of the physicality of human nature on the one hand and on the other an argument for enhancing our intelligent mind to fully comprehend principles and righteousness, which do not reside within our mind but lie in human relationships and daily activities. To be sure, Dai Zhen has greatly departed from Mencius with his very original interpretation of this well-established thesis.

### 3.1. “Xingshan”: The Unique Physical Makeup of Human Nature

To begin with, I maintain that the concept of *xingshan* is a biological or generic definition that Dai Zhen employs to specify the human species.<sup>17</sup> By *xingshan*, Dai Zhen refers to that which differentiates humankind from other living creatures. In this sense, “*xingshan*” is the characteristic of “*renxing*” 人性 (human nature). Although both humans and other animals have *xueqi xinzhi*, “*shan*” tells them apart. As cited earlier, “Nature is a general term for birds, fish, animals, and plants, but nature that is good is about the nature of human beings.”<sup>18</sup> In Dai Zhen’s explanation, this is the reason that “Mencius did not say ‘There is no nature that is not good’ but instead said that ‘There is no one that is not good.’”<sup>19</sup> Why? Dai Zhen’s two statements cited above make a circular argument: This is because nature “*xing*” 性 regards plants and other animals, whereas “*xingshan*” 性善 refers to human nature alone. In other words, “There is no one that is not good” is an absolute claim about the status of humans, whereas, speaking of the non-human beings, Mencius did not say that “There is no nature that is not good.” This is because *shan* is not applicable to all living beings but only relevant to humankind. It means that humans are so well constituted that they all have this deemed “goodness” of substance. As such, to say “one is good” is equivalent to saying “one is a human” because there is no person who has not received this superior makeup; and to say “one is not good” is the same as saying “one is not a human” because non-human beings do not have the same good makeup as humans do. Dai Zhen uses the word “*shan*” to specify the special physical construct that only humans have. As the very defining quality of the human natural construct, *shan* physically singles out human beings from other living creatures and things.

In the Confucian discourse on human nature, people have talked about the goodness of human nature in respect of its intrinsic moral attributes ever since Mencius. However, it is worth iterating that Dai Zhen here is not speaking about the moral virtues that humans possess but refers the goodness of human nature to the physical entities that are characteristic of humankind. For Dai Zhen, all humans are good in the sense that they are all of the good or fine physical substance. As opposed to the commonly held view, this good human nature does not possess any innate moral attributes. Thus, Dai Zhen remarks: “Therefore, although (human) nature is good, there are no fewer petty persons.”<sup>20</sup> He also questions, “How can humans be human if rid of their physical endowments?”<sup>21</sup>

Here, as in many other places throughout his writing, Dai Zhen demonstrates his great exegetical skills in drawing meanings out of his readings. Sometimes we may say that he has read into the texts. In support of his own position, Dai Zhen quotes and expounds his views on Mencius to show that he is in line with this great Confucian master, only the latter has been misread by Xunzi, by Zhu Xi, by “*Songru*” 宋儒 (Song Confucians), by “*Houlu*” 後儒 (later Confucians), by Mohists, Buddhists, and Daoists. In Dai Zhen’s criticism, Xunzi does not trust the ordinary people’s own ability to know rituals and morality if they do not have the guidance from the sages, whereas the Song Confucians make up two conflicting natures with the nature of heaven and earth opposed to the nature of the physical temperament (See Dai 1995a, No. 27). Nevertheless, it remains a question to ask: Does Dai Zhen really align himself with Mencius in his reading of this patriarch of the Confucian tradition?

While Mencius leaves scholars to speculate whether human nature is physical or moral or both, Dai Zhen explicitly insists on the physical “goodness” of human nature, that is, the natural endowment par excellence, the superlative physical composition among all creatures.<sup>22</sup> “Goodness” indicates the very uniqueness and supremacy of this natural construct without implying anything antithetical to what is morally bad or evil within the human mind. In other words, human nature is good in the sense that they have the

most exquisite physical substance appropriate for responding to moral goodness which Dai Zhen defines as *ren* 仁 (humanity), *li* 禮 (propriety), and *yi* 義 (righteousness).<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to see how Dai Zhen appropriates the Mencian statement to posit quite a different notion of goodness about human nature. If “*shan*” is not a moral property but the physical characteristic of human nature as Dai Zhen poses, to say “human nature is good” does not mean that human beings are already good morally or have the incipient moral seeds sown at birth. Rather, in Dai Zhen’s philosophy, what the physical makeup of human nature possesses is the capability of knowing alongside other faculties of seeing, hearing, and the like owing to its blood, breath, and the intelligent mind. And what genuinely matters to Dai Zhen is that the human intelligent mind can be further developed.

### 3.2. “*Xingshan*”: The Distinctive Knowing Faculty of the Mind

Dai Zhen rejects ascribing the “goodness” of human nature to the innate moral feelings of the Mencian *siduan* or to the Song Confucian *li*; he speaks up for the “*xueqi*” aspect of human nature to defend human physical desires and needs. Does Dai Zhen’s approval of the physicality of human nature make him side with Gaozi? Master Gao holds that human nature is neither good nor evil but contingent on the external environments and circumstances. The well-known debate between Gaozi and Mencius well reflects Gaozi’s view on human nature. Master Gao said, “A person’s nature is like whirling water, so it will flow to the east at an opening towards the east and flow to the west at an opening towards the west. Human nature does not distinguish between good and not good just in the same way as water does not distinguish between the east and the west” (The *Mencius* 11.2). To continue, the *Mencius* 11. 6 cites what Gongduzi has heard from Gaozi saying that “human nature is neither good nor not good” or “human nature can be good as well as can be not good” or “some human nature is good and some human nature is not good.” In brief, from Gaozi’s perspective, whether human nature is good or not good is determined by external factors.

Before proceeding to compare Dai Zhen with Gaozi, I want to first clarify that the term “*xingshan*” carries different meanings for Gaozi and Dai Zhen. With Master Gao the term “*xingshan*” refers to the virtuous quality of human nature, while with Dai Zhen “*xingshan*” means the good physical substance of human nature. In view of Gaozi’s several statements cited above, human nature to Gaozi is neutral or amoral, lacking inner virtuous quality and utterly subject to the influences from the outside environments. Dai Zhen also holds that there are no moral virtues inherent in human nature. In this respect, it seems that these two philosophers have something in common. Nevertheless, it is hard to put Dai Zhen and Gaozi in the same camp. Gaozi sees human nature in its likes for sex and food (see The *Mencius* 11.4). He uses the metaphor of swirling water to characterize human nature that has no moral direction. As a result, good time forms good nature and bad time shapes evil character (see The *Mencius* 11.6). By contrast, while Dai Zhen firmly defends human desire as an indispensable part of human nature, he also draws our attention to the intelligent mind of human nature to highly regard its capability of knowing and potential for advancement. For Dai Zhen, besides *shise* 食色 (food and sex) human nature also has the capability for *liyi*.

It is rather evident that Dai Zhen does not accept the Mencian view of innate moral feelings inherent in human nature, but he does believe in the inborn capability of the human intelligent mind to know moral goodness or *liyi*. For him, the functions of the four limbs and other bodily organs and the faculty of the mind are both essential to human beings. In the same way as pleasant sounds, colors, and tastes are appealing to the ear, the eye, and the mouth, the mind is attracted to patterns and order. Through the organ of the heart and mind, the most refined substance allotted from heaven, human beings are capa-

ble of knowing principles and righteousness besides food and sex. Dai Zhen's comment on the *Mencius* 14: 24 is very revealing in this regard. He says,

We should understand that how patterns and order are delightful to the heart and mind is just like how tastes are delightful to the mouth, sounds are delightful to the ear, and colors are delightful to the eye. They are all pertinent to nature. Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things but are received by my blood and breath; patterns and order reside in things and affairs but are received by my intelligent mind. Blood, breath and the intelligent mind have their own inherent capacities: The mouth is able to distinguish flavors, the ear to distinguish sounds, the eye to distinguish colors, and the heart and mind to distinguish patterns and order. Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things and not in me, but when they are received by my blood and breath and the faculties of my blood and breath can distinguish and take delight in them; what delights me must be something that is extremely good. Principle and righteousness reside in the patterns and order of the things and affairs, but when they are received by my intelligent mind, the faculties of my heart and mind can distinguish and take delight in them. What delights me must be what is the utmost upright.<sup>24</sup>

From a naturalistic stand, Dai Zhen attributes one's liking for principle and righteousness to the natural faculty of the intelligent mind comparable to those of the ear, the eye, and the mouth in their desire for sounds, colors, and tastes. Mencius says, "The fact that my heart takes delight in principle and righteousness is like how my mouth takes delight in the meat of grass and grain-fed animals."<sup>25</sup> We may consider Mencius's words a figure of speech for moral persuasion, but Dai Zhen emphasizes that this is not an analogy.<sup>26</sup> For Dai Zhen, whether one's want comes from the intelligent mind or from the mouth, the eye, and so forth, the inclinations are just the natural functions of human *xueqi* and *xinzhì*. As he says elsewhere, "Desire is the naturalness of blood and breath; and the enjoyment of virtue is the naturalness of the intelligent mind. This is why Mencius says that nature is good."<sup>27</sup>

In Dai Zhen's theory of human nature, the Mencian *xingshan* is translated into this naturalness of the intelligent mind. The goodness of human nature turns out to be the distinct knowing capability of the mind or its inclination toward good rather than a person's moral property. As Dai Zhen astonishingly identifies the goodness of human nature with its physical makeup, it is likewise striking that he locates principles in things and affairs rather than in the human mind. Since the likes and dislikes of the eye, the ear and other physical organs are but the spontaneous reaction of the bodily organs to the physical presence of the colors, sounds, and tastes in the things, similarly, the likes and dislikes of the mind are but the spontaneous reaction of the mind to the actual presence of the order and patterns in things. For this reason, although the human mind has the capability to take delight in principles and righteousness, this inborn capability for *liyi* should not be mistaken for *liyi* itself. To Dai Zhen, principles and righteousness are but the patterns and order present in things. Furthermore, if humans do not use and develop their given ability to comprehend *liyi*, it is also impossible that they will become virtuous. That is why Dai Zhen states as well that there are no fewer petty persons even though they have the "goodness" of human nature. For Mencius, one is evil due to the loss of the original goodness of human nature, namely the heart of commiseration, the heart of shame, and so forth. To Dai Zhen, there are petty persons because these people do not avail themselves of their given capability to pursue good, what is morally good. People may refute Dai Zhen's argument in holding that the ability of opting for *liyi* as such is already an ethical matter and the human natural propensity towards *liyi* is truly a moral disposition.

As is discussed earlier, in my view, *xingshan* for Dai Zhen only indicates that human nature is physically constituted with such a unique capability that it is ready to respond to what is morally good, be it “*yide*” 懿德 (virtue; moral excellence) or “*liyi*.” Of course, there are different levels of readiness as far as human nature is concerned. The sages are completely ready while the common people are ready partially, but there is no one that is unable to get prepared.

### 3.3. “*Xingshan*”: Individually Distinct Human Nature

Not only does Dai Zhen decline to accept a human nature that is morally good at birth but also denies a human nature that is universally good without distinction. Whereas *xingshan* is universal in the sense that every human being is apportioned from heaven “*shan*” — the goodness of fine physical substance, people do not have a unanimous goodness due to the differences in their received allotments, complete or partial, thick or thin, bright or murky. Dai Zhen makes it clear that each person’s allotment is different hence the person’s *renxing*.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to an abstract and transcendental heavenly human nature as proposed by Zhu Xi, Zhang Zai, and other Neo-Confucian thinkers, in Dai Zhen’s writing, human nature is made of the material substance and hence inevitably marked with irregularities and unevenness. So to speak, whereas “human nature is good” is universal, applying to every human being, the “goodness” of human nature is individual, varying from person to person.

To compare Dai Zhen with Mencius, it is intriguing to see how Dai Zhen is both in line with and stands apart from this Confucian patriarch. Dai Zhen’s belief in the goodness of human nature aligns him with Mencius, but the manifestation of the goodness tells them apart. While Mencius, as A. C. Graham and Irene Bloom have remarked, posits a universal *renxing* (Graham 2002, p. 20; Bloom 2002b, pp. 65, 96). Dai Zhen believes that each individual has distinct human nature because the human *xueqi xinzhì* as actual substance is unevenly allocated. As a result, human natural endowments not only differ from those of other living creatures but also vary among human beings themselves. Although *xingshan* applies to every human being to make humans human, their allocated goodness varies with different people. Unlike Mencius who believes that every human being has the inbuilt “four beginnings,” namely the four intrinsic moral senses of commiseration, shame and dislike, propriety, and right and wrong,<sup>29</sup> Dai Zhen upholds a physical goodness that is not without disparity from beginning. According to Mencius, if people differ from one another, their differences are not due to what they were originally given but because of the later nourishment 養 (*yang*) or lack of nourishment 失養 (*yang*), self-damage 自賊 (*zizei*), self-harm 自暴 (*zibao*), and self-abandonment 自棄 (*ziqu*) regarding their inherent goodness (See the *Mencius* 11:7; 3:6; & 7:10).

Therefore, while the Mencian “*xingshan*” implies a universal or even a transcendental “goodness” bestowed to every human being by birth, Dai Zhen’s “*xingshan*” is physical and specific with each individual. Considering the great divergence in their opinions of the goodness of human nature, it is intriguing to see how Dai Zhen draws on Mencius to make his own argument. For instance, Dai Zhen states, “Whenever Mencius speaks of the goodness of human nature, he always talks about Yao and Shun. This does not mean that all people are born to be Yao and Shun. After Yao and Shun, how great have been the differences among people?”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly enough, Dai Zhen is suggesting that Mencius actually does not believe that the so-called “goodness” is generally found in all people because Mencius only attributes “*shan*” to the sages whenever he uses the word. Yet, whereas Dai Zhen is very skeptical about a universal human nature that erases the differences between people, he is likewise suspicious of any ineradicable distinction between the sages and the ordinary people. Therefore, even though people all have the goodness of nature,

they are not all sages. Conversely, Yao and Shun's human nature may be perfect and flawless whereas the ordinary people's human nature is irregular and uneven, but there is no insurmountable gulf between the common people and the sages. What really matters is that the gap between the common people and the sages necessitates human efforts to further develop their mind. For Dai Zhen, the journey towards sagehood does not start with the inborn four beginnings but rather with their inbuilt capabilities that is uneven, irregular, varying from person to person.

It is worth noting that Dai Zhen also attempts to explain the distinctions in human nature through his interpretation of Confucius's claim about "*xingxiangjin*" 性相近 (human nature is similar).<sup>31</sup> He comments, "The so-called goodness is not the goodness without original graduation of differences. This is what Confucius means when he talks about 'being close.'"<sup>32</sup> To look at "*shan*" in terms of "*jin*" 近, Dai Zhen intently disproves a metaphysical take on human nature that proposes a unified intrinsic moral goodness as opposed to evil. He says, "If it is not good, opposite to good, then it is already greatly different from good, how can there be any closeness?"<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, he remarks, "Good and evil are the names of the opposites not the names for being far or being close."<sup>34</sup> In Dai Zhen's interpretations, I see two points he wants to make: First, Confucius also acknowledges the differences in human nature; second, "not good" or "evil" is not the right concept to characterize human nature simply because "not good" or "evil" does not apply to human nature or human beings. For "not good" means the lack of the physical entities that feature humans as humans.

In light of Dai Zhen's philosophy, as far as *xingshan* is concerned, human nature that is good is the absolute divide between human beings and non-human beings rather than the opposition of the good and evil. Put differently, being not good is about non-human species, whereas being different yet close is regarding human beings. On this account, when it comes to the distinction between human nature and the natures of non-human beings, *xingshan* sets human beings apart from plants, birds, and beasts; but as for the distinction in human nature, *xingshan* indicates that their differences can be overcome since human nature is essentially similar or close. In Dai Zhen's words, "Having no human nature is what is meant by saying that one shows oneself to be a beast, whereas having human nature means being close, namely being good."<sup>35</sup>

In his reading of "*xingxiangjin*," Dai Zhen interpretively equates Confucius's saying "nature is close" with Mencius's statement that "there is no one that is not good." Yet, the analogy drawn between Mencius's "*xingshan*" and Confucius's "*xingxiangjin*" reads to me less a defense of the Mencian thesis about the goodness of human nature or an argument for the closeness of human nature than an exegetical strategy Dai Zhen employs to refute a transcendental notion of human nature. As opposed to applying the metaphysical and abstract principle to human nature as favored by Zhang Zai, Zhu Xi, and other Neo-Confucians, Dai Zhen's theory of human nature refers to the distinctive makeup of human nature that sets humans apart from non-human beings on the one hand and on the other features the distinctions among humans. From his theory of human nature, we draw an important moral significance regarding self-cultivation. As what Ying-Shih Yu remarks, in Dai's theory, "moral character can be achieved by man only through a gradual development (*kuochong* 擴充) of his intellect (*zhi* 智) by which he is essentially distinguished from animals" (Yu 2016, p. 44).

Speaking of the distinction between humans and animals, "*xingshan*" serves as a moral admonition to warn people against living like animals. Because of human nature comprised in both *xueqi* and *xinshi*, people are entitled to their physical needs and desires. However, if we only know how to satisfy our own needs and desire without thinking of other people, we are not different from birds and beast. When it comes to the distinctions

among humans, “*xingshan*” provides people with a great prospect for bettering themselves. By birth, people are not the same, but through later efforts we can push the limits we are born with. By bringing these distinctions to light, Dai Zhen urges us to extend our received goodness to turn ourselves from physical existence into moral beings. As he has well put, “What distinguishes human beings from other animals lie in the fact that human beings can comprehend what ought to be, whereas hundreds of living beings only each fulfill what is natural.”<sup>36</sup>

We are not just what we were born to be, but, more importantly, we are what we ought to be. Only through expanding our mind can we rise above our natural animal state to become true human beings that know *liyi* (See Dai 1995a, No. 21 & No. 28 for instance, pp. 183–84, 194). Although we are born with uneven capabilities of knowing, we can advance our mind to fully realize its potentials through later efforts. If we can extend our intelligent mind, even the dumbest persons can become sages to attain godlike illumination.

### 3.4. “*Xingshan*”: Human Nature Open to Advancement

Dai Zhen compellingly convinces people of the necessity to advance the mind. He says,

The blood and breath rely on drink and food for nourishment. After being digested, the drink and food have become my blood and breath and they are no longer the things eaten and drunk. The same is true with the reliance of the intelligent mind on questioning and learning, from which the intelligent mind has been nurtured in the same way. Speaking of the blood and breath, it used to be weak but now has become stronger. This is owing to the nourishment of the blood and breath. Speaking of the intelligent mind, it used to be narrow and small but now has grown broader and larger; it used to be obscure and dark but now has become clear and discerning. This is owing to the fact that the intelligent mind has received nourishment. Therefore, we say that one will be illuminated despite one’s dullness. Although human blood, breath, and intelligent mind are allotted from heaven unevenly, nourishment or lacking nourishment makes big differences.<sup>37</sup>

In his writing, literally, in a biological sense, the process of extending the intelligent mind involves the same dynamism required for the growth of the physical body. Without doubt, the Mencian ideas of “*yang xin*” 養心 (nourishing the heart-and-mind) (The *Mencius* 11.8) and “*kuo chong*” 擴充 (extension) (The *Mencius* 3.6) have left an indelible mark on Dai Zhen’s thought.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, for Dai Zhen, to nourish and enlarge the mind is not to cultivate the inborn sprouts of virtue to augment our innate moral senses as Mencius proposes but to expand and enhance the capability of knowing of our mind for principles and righteousness. Given its naturally endowed physical goodness, human nature is capable of undergoing the perpetual self-transforming process to advance from its incipient luminosity “*jingshuang*” to godlike illumination “*shenming*.”

Speaking of “*jingshuang*,” the *Zuozhuan* thus defines: “The incipient luminosity of the mind is what is called by the spiritual soul and the bodily soul.”<sup>39</sup> Dai Zhen explains, “All that are living have incipient luminosity. Those going along with the fusion (*rong* 融) of the vital force (*qi* 氣) are pneuma (*ling* 靈) and henceforth differentiated as ‘bodily soul’ (*po* 魄); and those going along with the continuum (*tong* 通) of the vital force *qi* are spirit (*shen* 神) and henceforth identified as ‘spiritual soul’ (*hun* 魂).”<sup>40</sup> In Dai Zhen’s interpretation, “*hun*” distinguishes itself by being “*tong*” 通 (open, connected, comprehending) and hence marvelously perceptive and intelligent while “*po*” by “*rong*” 融 (in fusion and harmony) and hence marvelously receptive. For him, *hun* and *po* are the manifestation of the creative creativity of the transformation of heaven and earth in human nature. *Hun* and *po* work differently in accord with the virtues of heaven and earth, respectively. The abilities of the

ear to hear, of the eye to see, the nose to smell, and the mouth to taste are all the working of *po* or *ling* whose function is to receive. But as regards making decision or passing judgment, it is the function of *hun*. In Dai Zhen's words, "That which is in charge of giving adjudicates and that which conducts receiving listens."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, *hun* that adjudicates is to preside over *po* that listens. It is interesting to see how Dai Zhen interprets the *Zuozhuan*'s brief definition of "*jingshuang*" with an elaborate discussion on the functions of the mind. By drawing on the two concepts of "*hun*" and "*po*," Dai Zhen subtly differentiates the different functions of the intelligent mind that is deemed to hold two counterparts: the bodily soul and the spiritual soul.

The concept "*shenming*" appears in many early Confucian, Daoist, and Mohist texts. It has two basic meanings: (1) deity or gods; and (2) godlike intelligence and brilliance (Machle 2003, pp. 701–3; Knoblock 1988, vol. 1, pp. 252–255). Dai Zhen's use of the term apparently reveals much of Xunzi's influence.<sup>42</sup> In particular, in agreement with Xunzi, Dai Zhen maintains that this godlike intelligence of our intelligent mind can only come from the constant efforts of learning.<sup>43</sup> John Knoblock, a translator and interpreter of Xunzi, makes a comment on *shengming* saying, "It suggests a 'divine' or 'magical' clarity and sharpness of awareness, unmediated by conscious effort, which enable those who possess it to discern subtle and minute distinctions that others miss" (Knoblock 1988, vol. 1, p. 255). For both Xunzi and Dai Zhen, the godlike intelligence will never be "unmediated by conscious effort" but can only arise from the deliberate activities of learning and practice.<sup>44</sup> The chapter of "*Quanxue*" (Encouraging Learning) well conveys Xunzi's idea that only through the accumulation of human conscious efforts can people attain godlike illumination. Notwithstanding Dai Zhen's strong disapproval of Xunzi's negative view of human nature and condemnation of human desires, Dai Zhen speaks highly of Xunzi's exhortation to learning.<sup>45</sup>

Dai Zhen's reading of the *Zuozhuan*'s definition of "*jingshuang*" offers a perspective on the working of our mind and its advancement from an incipient luminosity *jingshuang* to godlike illumination *shenming*. Much has been said in this paper about the physical makeup of human nature in *xueqi* and *xinzhi*. Dai Zhen has kept us wondering how the intelligent mind viewed as a physical substance is capable of "knowing" *liyi*. Dai Zhen's exegetical commentary on *hun* and *po* sheds some light. As part of human nature, the intelligent mind is endowed with the capability of knowing. Nonetheless, Dai Zhen argues that it is only through the faculty of the spiritual soul "*si*" 思 (thinking, self-reflection) that the *jingshuang* of the human intelligent mind is kindled and enabled to comprehend *liyi*. He states, "Regarding the incipient luminosity of the mind, once thinking takes place, it will be unlocked, opened, and perceptive. This is the work of the spiritual soul, the so-called spirit that governs the act of performance."<sup>46</sup> In view of Dai Zhen's comment, the process of the development of the intelligent mind starts with this moment of *si*, which unlocks our mind, activates its ability, and opens us to the world.

Mencius has made a well-known claim: "The organ of the mind is thinking."<sup>47</sup> It seems that Dai Zhen follows Mencius to identify the function of the mind, but Dai Zhen goes further to pinpoint the spiritual soul *hun*, instead of the mind in general, as the agent of thinking. In my opinion, for Dai Zhen, what is special about human nature is not just that we have an intelligent mind inbuilt with the ability of knowing but that the mind holds its own key to open itself and activate its capability for *liyi*. That key is "*si*" —thinking or self-reflection. Thus, what matters to Dai Zhen is whether we can resort to our mind to utilize its function of thinking to unlock our mind and continue to have it developed. Here thinking and knowing are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Without the innate faculty of thinking, *jingshuang* or *xinzhi* is just some raw physical stuff or some finest material at most. If *xinzhi* is not opened, our mind will remain blocked,

which Dai Zhen describes as “*bige*” 蔽隔 (blocked and disconnected). From Dai Zhen’s point of view, the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth as the apertures of the body are open so that they are receptive to the world they encounter.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, *jingshuang* or *xinzhi* must be opened so that our intelligent mind can take in and comprehend what are present in things, namely the order and patterns. Once the obstruction is removed, there is nothing that the mind is unable to comprehend. Dai Zhen calls this unblocked and discerning mind godlike illumination.<sup>49</sup>

What is “*si*” and how does it work then? Dai Zhen makes use of the two concepts *hun* and *po* to explain the mechanism of *xinzhi* that manifests both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the mind. In view of Dai Zhen’s interpretation, the human intelligent mind comprises the bodily soul and the spiritual soul. The major function of the bodily soul is receiving, whereas the function of the spiritual soul is making choices and judgement. As such, because of its bodily soul, the human mind is likewise susceptible to external things and shows its natural tendencies towards what are pleasing to the senses. In other words, the human intelligent mind, in particular, the bodily soul of the human mind bears resemblance to the *jingshuang* of animals and reveals its animality in instinctively adhering to life and fearing death.

On the other hand, Dai Zhen also tries to explain that the bodily soul and other bodily organs alike are receptive to things fitting to them each, hence, the mind to patterns and order, the eye to colors, and the ear to sounds. In this manner, to Dai Zhen, human propensity towards *liyi* or the order and patterns is the naturalness of the mind just as the human inclinations towards sounds, colors, and tastes are the naturalness of the ear, the eye, and the mouth. Dai Zhen calls this naturalness “*ziran*” 自然 (natural; naturalness; what is natural). Therefore, the ear takes delight in beautiful sounds, the mouth takes delight in delicious food, and the mind takes delight in patterns and order. The inclination of *xueqi* and *xinzhi* towards what is delightful to them from outside is what is natural about human nature. Their natural tendencies are what they are. Nevertheless, only after the intelligent mind is opened, will the capability of knowing of *xinzhi* be activated to know *liyi*. For Dai Zhen, the key lies with the spiritual soul of the intelligent mind.

Apart from the bodily soul, the human intelligent mind has the spiritual soul as well. Therefore, *xinzhi* has the faculty of thinking, the ability of making choices and judgement that characterizes the spiritual soul *hun*. For this reason, not only can the mind make choices and judgement about its own likes and dislikes, given the governing role of *hun*, but it can also evaluate the likes and dislikes of the other organs of the human body. As such, the faculty of thinking presides over the overall functions of *xueqi* and *xinzhi*. To “think” is to judge the right or wrong of all human activities. To cite Dai Zhen, “The organs of the ear, the nose, and the mouth are the way of the subject and the organ of the mind the way of the sovereign. The subject utilizes his capacities whereas the sovereign approves or disapproves.”<sup>50</sup>

Whereas Dai Zhen asserts that the physical properties are common to both *xueqi* and *xinzhi* and henceforth the natural inclinations of *xueqi* and *xinzhi* are inseparable from each other, he takes special heed of the faculty of *si*—thinking and self-reflection, the major function assigned to the spiritual soul of *xinzhi*, and its sovereign role. According to Dai Zhen, *si* unlocks our mind in the actual reality of “*renlun riyong*” — the human relationships and everyday life. “Thinking” thus means that we can make choices and judgment about our own natural preferences with regard to other human beings. On account of *xueqi* as part of human nature, we are entitled to eating, drinking, and having sex. Yet, owing to the spiritual soul of our *xinzhi*, we have the faculty of thinking, through which we are able to know principle and righteousness in our daily activities. This is what Dai Zhen means by “*suizai erzhi*” 隨在而知 (situational and contextual knowledge).<sup>51</sup>

On this point, I disagree on the view to see Dai Zhen's "knowing" *zhi* as an intellectual knowledge.<sup>52</sup> In my view, with Dai Zhen, people's moral knowledge about *shan*, about *liyi* can only be acquired in their concrete life experience. Rather than an intellectual inquiry, we appeal to empathetic understanding. Dai Zhen distinctively defines this way of moral reasoning as "*yiqing xieqing*" (以情繫情 to gauge my feelings/desires/needs and situation with other people's feelings/desires/needs and situations. Conversely, to understand other people's feelings/desires/needs and situation with my own feelings/desires/needs and situations. Or simply, to put myself in another's place to understand his or her feelings/desires/needs and situation. Dai 1995a, No. 2, No. 3, No. 5, pp. 152–53, 155). When we can take other people into consideration in pursuing the satisfaction of our own desires, we are applying our given capability of thinking. As we unlock the mind through self-reflection, we perceive principle and righteousness in food, drink, and sex. As such, for Dai Zhen, "*xingshan*" is our experiential knowledge of *ren yi li zhi* in our concrete daily existence. To obtain this knowledge, "*yiqing xieqing*" provides us an ethical path of empathy and reciprocity.

### 3.5. "Xingshan": From What Is to What Ought to Be

Physical substance constitutes our human nature in blood, breath, and the intelligent mind. In this light, the "goodness" of our human nature appears to be material as well. However, as a great moral thinker, Dai Zhen will not look at human beings just as what they are (naturally are) but what they ought to be. The dialectic of "*ziran*" 自然 (what is) and "*biran*" 必然 (what ought to be) captures Dai Zhen's theory of human nature. He uses the concepts "*xing*" and "*shan*" to explain the relationship between what is and what ought to be. He says, "'Goodness' is what ought to be and 'nature' is what is. The full realization of what is is the utmost of what is, wherein lie the ways of heaven, earth, humans, and things."<sup>53</sup> To Dai Zhen, what ought to be is not the negation of what is. As far as human nature is concerned, desire that is often blamably attributed to our *xueqi* or our physical body is not something to be overcome for higher values. Rather, *shan* or goodness, principles and righteousness, patterns and order reside in things, in our physical, material, and mundane existence. Undoubtedly, Dai Zhen gives us fresh insight into a morality that is hinged on the most basic and the most ordinary daily activities.

In this regard, in Dai Zhen's writing, the sages set up the perfect exemplary models for people to emulate. Dai Zhen says, "In governing the world under heaven, the sage experientially understood the people's feelings and helped them fulfill their desires, and the kingly way was completed" (聖人治天下，體民之情，遂民之欲，而王道備。 Dai 1995a, No. 10, p. 161). Because the sages have the first-hand experiential knowledge of human existence, they can sympathetically understand people's feelings and desires and thereby help them fulfill their needs. In Dai Zhen's view, the great virtue of the sages just lies in the fact that the sages have the extraordinary capabilities to "thoroughly understand the feelings of all under heaven and help people all fulfill their desires" (通天下之情，遂天下之欲。 Dai 1995a, No. 40, p. 211).

Being humans of blood, breath, and the intelligent mind, we are born with desires, passion, and needs. As Dai Zhen cites the *Shijing*, "The nature of the common folks lies in daily drink and food" (民之質矣，日用飲食， Dai 1995a, No. 36, p. 205). However, the physicality of human nature is not the obstacle to morality but our means to pursue principle and righteousness. The recognition of the physicality of human nature by no means will hinder people pursuing virtues to become morally good. We are not endowed with inborn moral virtues. Instead, Dai Zhen urges people to discover principle and righteousness from without in our daily life of *renlun riyong*. In my view, at the heart of Dai Zhen's ethical concern is that we should situate ourselves in the concrete reality we are living in

to cultivate our morality in the human relationships and everyday life rather than adhering to an abstract principle or some fixed moral norms and ideas. We are entitled to food, drink, and sex because we are born what we are. Nevertheless, as we pursue our own life, we can extend our pursuits to help other people till all under heaven fulfill their desires, we embody humanity.<sup>54</sup> Then, like the sages, we will advance ourselves from what we are to what we ought to be.

#### 4. Conclusions

Dai Zhen offers a very innovative reading of the most celebrated doctrine in Confucian thought: “Human nature is good” from a naturalistic standpoint. A revolt against the Neo-Confucian metaphysical discourse on the principle and its identification of the genuine human nature with the heavenly principle, Dai Zhen unconventionally identifies the goodness of human nature with the physical substance of its makeup of *xueqi* and *xinshi*. *Xingshan*, deprived of its inherent moral properties as upheld in the Mencian theory, comes to refer to the physical allotments of the physically constituted substance of human nature. Thus, rather than being unanimously bestowed with the moral senses, or the four virtuous sprouts, in Dai Zhen’s theory of human nature, the goodness of human nature is physical, graded, and uneven, being complete or partial, thick or thin, bright or murky depending on each person’s received allotments of the makeup.

Dai Zhen does not believe that human nature has innate moral properties as Mencius does. However, like Mencius, who maintains that human beings have “*liang neng*” 良能 (innate ability) and “*liang zhi*” 良知 (innate awareness),<sup>55</sup> Dai Zhen maintains as well that the human mind possesses an innate ability of knowing, a natural capability to recognize *liyi* and to fully comprehend principle and righteousness as long as the mind is opened via thinking and constantly developed and extended.<sup>56</sup> Yet, it is crucial to Dai Zhen that the alleged *shan* or *liyi*, principle and righteousness, or the order and patterns reside in things rather than within the mind. However, inasmuch as the physical substance of human nature contains within itself such capability or potential to know or incline towards principle and righteousness, we may wonder whether this goodness of human nature is physical only without implying already something metaphysical. For we may ask how the human intelligent mind has the natural inclination towards principle and righteousness, or the order and patterns without an initial moral awareness of what is good. If this natural propensity towards *liyi* is conceived to be inherently inbuilt in human nature, it may be said that Dai Zhen’s naturalistic theory of “*xingshan*” has indeed a metaphysical implication. We would not expect Dai Zhen to conduct a scientific probe into the issue as is expected of neuroscience, cognitive science, and psychology nowadays to provide us empirical data on the functions of the mind. Dai Zhen has no interest in a scientific examination of the subject. Rather, his philosophical inquiry about human nature is based on a premise that human mind is capable of knowing *liyi*, and of being further advanced. He claims that it has been always so from the ancient time just as human beings have been thereby different from birds and beasts since time immemorial. As such, we may say that human beings are destined to pursue good no matter whether because they are endowed with innate capacities as Dai Zhen posits to know *liyi* or because they are bestowed with moral goodness itself to have innate four virtuous seeds of *ren yi li zhi* at birth.

As two foundational figures of the Confucian tradition, both Mencius and Xunzi have developed their distinct theories of human nature that have henceforth set the tone for the later ongoing Confucian discourse on the subject. Deeply indebted to both Mencius and Xunzi, Dai Zhen nonetheless proposes an alternative approach to the subject of human nature. The innovativeness of his thought is well reflected in his fresh interpretation of the “goodness” of human nature. For Dai Zhen, the claimed moral goodness is not an inborn

moral property of human nature. Rather, “Where there is a thing, there is its norm,” as Dai Zhen often cites the *Shijing*. With Dai Zhen, human relationships and everyday life are the things, wherein lie humanity, righteousness, and propriety their norms.<sup>57</sup> The so-called principle and righteousness do not exist outside human daily existence of drinking, eating, and having sex. Nevertheless, owing to our distinct intelligent mind endowed with the distinctive capability or potential to know, we could make choices and judgment about our needs and desires against other people’s needs and desires to evaluate whether our desires and needs are appropriate. Once we can take other people into our consideration, we are pursuing good. We may agree or disagree on Dai Zhen’s interpretation of the goodness of human nature, but it is unquestionable that Dai Zhen has stood with both Mencius and Xunzi in his promotion of human efforts to continuously better themselves.

**Funding:** This research was funded by The University of Mississippi’s Department of Philosophy and Religion.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dai Zhen 戴震, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證 (*Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius*), No. 27, p. 190: “性者，飛潛動植之通名；性善者，論人之性也。” All subsequent references to this work are put in the format of Dai (1995a): section #, and page #. In this article, all English translations of the citations from Dai Zhen and other Chinese texts are my own unless indicated otherwise; hereafter, the title of the work will be abbreviated as the *Shu Zheng*.
- <sup>2</sup> By “naturalistic,” I mean a philosophical stance in Chinese philosophy that attributes the conditions and causes of the cosmos, plants, animals, and human beings included, to the material force of *qi* 氣 (vital force; vital energy), to the movement and transformation of *yin yang* and *wu xing* rather than to the divine, an external supernatural entity, or a transcendental principle. As regards Dai Zhen’s conception of human nature, I employ the term to describe the way in which Dai Zhen considers human nature none other than what has naturally come along with its given human physical substance to be a physically constituted entity that is of the faculties of knowing and other bodily desires. The issue will be explored in-depth in the pages to come. “What counts as ‘naturalistic’ is a highly contentious issue” (Liu 2015, p. 33), as JeeLoo Liu has observed, but, in her same article “In defense of Chinese qi-naturalism,” she also points out that “naturalism should not be restricted to the narrowest conception of Scientific Naturalism, according to which what exists is only what can be ultimately explained in terms of natural sciences” (ibid), and proposes “Chinese theories of qi as qi-naturalism” (Liu 2015, p. 33). In their work on Chinese philosophy, some academics like Liu have borrowed or adapted the term “naturalism” to illuminate features of Chinese worldviews that resonate with certain meanings of the term but manifest distinctive Chinese characteristics. For instance, Mary Evelyn Tucker maintains that “The emphasis of Confucian naturalism is on cultivating one’s Heavenly endowed nature in relation to other humans and the universe itself ... the microcosm of the self and the macrocosm of the universe are implicitly and explicitly seen as aspects of a unified, but ever changing, reality” (Tucker 2023, p. 17). Elsewhere in another article, Tucker states, “Therefore, instead of claiming Confucianism as a religion (which is problematic in itself for many people), we are suggesting that Confucianism is a religious naturalism with cosmological orientation” (Tucker 2019, p. 88). Bray and Bauman comment, “Mary Evelyn Tucker takes up the art of Confucian immanent naturalism, which might be described as discovering one’s cosmological being amidst daily affairs” (Bray and Bauman 2023, p. 8). In view of Allen Barry, “Naturalism is a polemical term, and the polemic does not translate well into the terms of traditional Chinese thought. The closest analogy to naturalism I find in Chinese thought is an idea of immanence, the ontological immanence of nature .... Different versions introduce further conditions, but naturalism is always a thought about immanence, and that gives us a point of entry into the Chinese material” (Barry 2022, p. 255).
- <sup>3</sup> The work of the Mencius which is referenced to, cited, and translated from throughout the article is Yang’s (1960) *Translation of the Mencius with Annotated Notes* 孟子譯注. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- <sup>4</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 34, p. 203: “How can we talk about the wise and the dull, the worthy and the unworthy beyond the daily existence and human relationships? Therefore, there is a saying that there is no one that does not eat or drink, but people are rarely able to know their taste. Drinking and eating concern human relationships and daily existence; and knowing the taste

means that one acts without erring. If we deny human relationships and daily existence to take something else as *Dao*, this is to look for flavor outside drinking and eating .... Human relationships and daily existence are the things and humanity, righteousness, and propriety are their norm” (然智愚賢不肖，豈能越人倫日用之外者哉？故曰：‘人莫不飲食也，鮮能知味’ 飲食，喻人倫日用；知味，喻行之無失；使舍人倫日用以為道，是求知味於飲食之外矣 ..... 人倫日用，其物也；曰仁，曰義，曰禮，其則也)。

The phrase of “*yinshi nannv*” 飲食男女 (drink, food, and sex) is from the chapter “*Liyun*” of the *Liji*. See Sun (1989), p. 607.

Dai (1995a), No. 15, p. 171: “欲者，血氣之自然，其好是懿德也，心知之自然，此孟子所以言性善。”

Dai (1995a), “Preface,” p. 147: 故求觀聖人之道，必自孟子始。嗚乎，不可易矣！

Dai (1995a), No. 16, p. 175: “分於陰陽五行以有人物，而人物各限於所分以成其性。陰陽五行，道之實體也；血氣心知，性之實體也。有實體，故可分；惟分也，故不齊。” *Xueqi xinshi* 血氣心知 is first seen in the chapter of “*Yueji*” 樂記 “Record of Music” of the *Liji* 禮記 *The Book of Rites*: “夫民有血氣心知之性，而無哀樂喜怒之常；應感起物而動，然後心術形焉” (Humans have the nature of blood, breath, and intelligent mind, but they have no constancy with their emotions of sorrow, joy, gladness and anger, which are aroused in response to the stimulation of the external things. As a result, the scheming mind is formed).

Xunzi, Chapter 9 “*Wangzhi*” 王制 (The Regulations of Kings) in (Hutton 2014, p. 76). (水火有氣而無生，草木有生而無知，禽獸有知而無義，人有氣、有生、有知，亦且有義，故最為天下貴也。力不若牛，走不若馬，而牛馬為用，何也？曰：人能群，彼不能群也。人何以能群？曰：分。分何以能行？曰：義。故義以分則和，和則一，一則多力，多力則彊，彊則勝物；故宮室可得而居也。故序四時，裁萬物，兼利天下，無它故焉，得之分義也)。

Except for the citation of the Xunzi on page 5 that is directly from Eric Hutton’s translation (see endnote 9), the work of Xunzi which is referenced to, cited, and translated/paraphrased from throughout the article is Wang’s (1986) *A Collection of Commentaries on Xunzi* 荀子集解. In *Comprehensive Collection of All Masters’ Writing* 諸子集成. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, vol. II.

See Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 182 and the Mencius 11: 3: “適同人於犬牛而不察其殊。”

Dai (1995a), No. 21, pp. 181–2: “凡血氣之屬皆知懷生畏死，因而趨利避害；雖明暗不同，不出乎懷生畏死者同也。人之異於禽獸不在是。禽獸知母而不知父，限於知覺也；然愛其生之者及愛其所生，與雌雄牝牡之相愛，同類之不相噬，習處之不相齧，進乎懷生畏死矣。一私於身，一及於身之所親，皆仁之屬也。私於身者，仁其身也；及於身之所親者，仁其所親也；心知之發乎自然有如是。人之異於禽獸亦不在是。”

Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 183: “若夫鳥之反哺，雉鳩之有別，蜂蟻之知君臣，豺之祭獸，獺之祭魚，合於人之所謂仁義者矣，而各由性成。” The “*Yueling*” (月令Proceedings of Government in the Different Months) chapter of the classic *Liji* is the earliest text that make remarks about otters sacrificing fish and wolfs sacrificing preys.

See Dai (1995a), No. 27, p. 191: “人以有禮義，異於禽獸，實人之知覺大遠乎物則然，此孟子所謂性善” (Human beings are different from birds and beasts owing to their propriety and righteousness. Indeed, this is because human awareness is far greater than the awareness of other living things. This is what Mencius means by saying nature is good.).

Dai (1995a), No. 6, p. 156: “人之異於禽獸者，雖同有精爽，而人能進於神明也。” Although Dai Zhen maintains that human beings and other living creatures all have breath, blood, and the intelligent mind, he obviously tends to use “*xinshi*” more often when talking about humankind and use “*jingshuang*” 精爽 or *xinshi jingshuang* 心之精爽 (the incipient luminosity of the mind) for both human beings and other living beings. In translating “*jingshuang*” 精爽, I have borrowed John Ewell’s rendering “incipient luminosity.” See Ewell (1990), Notes to Section 6, notes 13 & 14, p. 132. There are several different English translations of *shenming*, of which the examples given here are from some English translations of Xunzi and Dai Zhen’s works: “godlike understanding” (Watson 1963, pp. 17–8), “divine clarity of intelligence” or “spirit-like intelligence” (Knoblock 1988, vol. I, Book I, 138 & 253), “divine enhancement” (Machle 1993, p. 159), “supreme intelligence” (Cheng 1969, p. 146), “spiritual brilliance” (Ewell 1990, p. 132), “divine percipience” (Chin and Freeman 1990, p. 77).

See Dai (1995a), No. 20, p. 179: “然類之區別，千古如是也” (There have been distinctions among different species from far distant past.)

In one brief explanatory note, a contemporary scholar An Zhenghui 安正輝 explains Dai Zhen’s “*xingshan*” as biological characteristics, which fully resonates with my interpretation. See An (1979), p. 155. In addition, I find Irene Bloom’s “controversial” notion of “biological nature in Mencius” and assertion of the Mencian “four sprouts” as “part of the physiology of the mind” very helpful to our understanding of Dai Zhen’s conception of human nature in this regard. See (Bloom 2002b, p. 79). Here Bloom highlights the physicality or the physical dimension of human nature as she considers *xing* “the complex of biological and moral propensities that characterize human beings” (Ibid. 99); also, see (Bloom 1997, pp. 21–32; Bloom 2002a, pp. 91–102).

See note 1: “性者，飛潛動植之通名；性善者，論人之性也。”

Dai (1995a), No. 27, p. 190: “孟子不曰‘性無有不善’，而曰‘人無有不善’。”

Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 184: “故性雖善，不乏小人。”

Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 190; No. 27, pp. 92–3; and No. 28, pp. 180–1: “人之為人，舍氣稟氣質，將以何者謂之人哉？”

See discussions in Kwong-loi Shun’s (1997) *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 161–3, in which he presents two sets of interpretations from Mencius’ commentators and translators regarding whether human physical form is ethically neutral or has an ethical dimension. According to Shun, Dai Zhen, by taking the Mencian “*jianxing*” 踐行 as “fulfilling” one’s physical form, does consider human physical form having an ethical dimension. Similarly, A.C. Graham conceives *xing* as “at once factual and

normative.” See (Graham 2002, pp. 8, 44). Likewise, Bloom considers nature “both physical and moral.” See Bloom (2002b), p. 91. In his discussion of Dai Zhen’s notion of human nature, Justin Tiwald argues that “Dai Zhen holds that human nature is endowed with certain nascent moral capacities, including the capability to care about the lives of others and the capability to make complex moral judgments” (Tiwald 2010, p. 406).

See Dai (1995b), Ch. 1, p. 7: “Goodness is called humanity, propriety, and righteousness. These three are the great moral standard of all under heaven” (善: 曰仁, 曰禮, 曰義, 斯三者, 天下之大衡也).

Dai (1995a), No. 6, pp. 155–6: “明理義之悅心, 猶味之悅口, 聲之悅耳, 色之悅目之為性。味也、聲也、色也在物, 而接於我之血氣; 理義在事, 而接於我之心知。血氣心知, 有自具之能: 口能辨味, 耳能辨聲, 目能辨色, 心能辨夫理義。味與聲色, 在物不在我, 接於我之血氣, 能辨之而悅之; 其悅者, 必其尤美者也; 理義在事情之條分縷析, 接於我之心知, 能辨之而悅之; 其悅者, 必其至是者也。” The Mencius 11:7: “理義之悅我心, 猶芻豢之悅我口。”

See Dai (1995a), No. 8, p. 158: “Mencius says, ‘The fact that my heart takes delight in principle and righteousness is like how my mouth takes delight in the meat of grass and grain-fed animals.’ This is not a figure of speech.” (孟子曰: “理義之悅我心, 猶芻豢之悅我口”, 非喻言也)

See note 6 above.

See Note 6: “*Yin yang* and the *wu xing* are the substantial embodiment of *Dao*; blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are the substantial embodiment of nature. Being actual substances, they can be allotted; because they are allottable, they are uneven (陰陽五行, 道之實體也; 血氣心知, 性之實體也。有實體, 故可分; 惟分也, 故不齊.). Also, see Dai (1995a), No. 14, p. 167: “Humans and things are differentiated by kinds. Owing to what humans are endowed from birth, their vital energy is clear and bright and is thereby different from that of animals, which cannot be opened. But when compared with each other, how much difference do people have in talents and capacities? However, since the ancient sages knew that there were differences in talents and capacities among people, they emphasized inquiry and learning (*wenxue*) and valued extension (人物以類區分, 而人所稟受, 其氣清明, 異於禽獸之不可開通。然人與人較, 其材質等差凡幾? 古賢聖知人之材質有等差, 是以重問學, 貴擴充.).

Mencius discusses the “*siduan*” twice, in chapter 3 of “Gong Sun Chou” and chapter 11 of “Gaozi.” See the Mencius 3.6 and 11.6.

Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 183: “孟子道性善, 言必稱堯、舜, 非謂盡人生而堯、舜也, 自堯舜而下, 其等差凡幾?” See the Mencius 5:1.

See the Lunyu 17.2. The text of the Lunyu referenced to is Yang’s (1980) *Translation of the Analects with Annotated Notes* 論語譯注, 2nd ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Dai (1995a), No. 21, p. 184: “且其所謂善也, 初非無等差之善, 即孔子所云 ‘相近.’”

Dai (1995a), No. 23, p. 185: “若不善, 與善相反, 其遠已懸絕, 何近之有!”

Dai (1995a), No. 24, p. 186: “善惡則相反之名, 非遠近之名。”

Dai (1995a), No. 23, p. 185: “無人性即所謂人見其禽獸也, 有人性即相近也, 善也。”

See Dai (1995a), No. 15, pp. 168–9: “夫人之異於物者, 人能明於必然, 百物之生各遂其自然也。” Also see Dai (1995a), No. 15, p. 171.

Dai (1995a), No. 9, p. 159: “如血氣資飲食以養, 其化也, 即為我之血氣, 非復所飲食之物矣; 心知之資於問學, 其自得之也亦然。以血氣言, 昔者弱而今者強, 是血氣之得其養也; 以心知言, 昔者狹小而今也廣大, 昔者闇昧而今也明察, 是心知之得其養也, 故曰 ‘雖愚必明’. 人之血氣心知, 其天定者往往不齊, 得養不得養, 遂至於大異。”

See Dai (1995a), No. 6, p. 156: “This is what the *Zhongyong* means by saying that ‘Although one is dull, he can surely be enlightened’ and what Mencius means by saying that ‘The sage is the one who expands the heart and mind to the full’ (此中庸 ‘雖愚必明’, 孟子 ‘擴而充之之謂聖人’).

See Zuo (1999), Zuo Qiuming, “Zhao Gong Ershiwu Nian” 昭公25年 (The 25th Year of Duke Zhao): “心之精爽, 是謂魂魄。”

See Dai (1995b), 16: “凡有生則有精爽, 從乎氣之融而靈, 是以別之曰 ‘魄’; 從乎氣之通而神, 是以別之曰 ‘魂.’”

See Dai (1995a), No. 6, p. 156: “主施者斷, 主受者聽。”

As regards Xunzi’s idea of *shenming*, Edward J. Machle and Aaron Stalnaker have both offered very insightful discussions. See Machle (1992), pp. 361–86 and Machle (1993), pp. 159–63; and see Stalnake (2003), pp. 87–130.

See Dai (1995a), No. 25, p. 187: “He also says, ‘Pile up good deeds to create virtue and godlike understanding will come of itself; there the mind of the sage will find completion.’ How good is Xunzi at encouraging learning!” (又曰: ‘積善成德, 神明自得, 聖心循焉.’ 荀子之善言學如是).

See note 41 above.

See note 42 above.

Dai (1995a), No. 6, p. 156: “心之精爽, 有思輒通, 魂之為也, 所謂神也, 陽主施者也。”

The Mencius 11.15: “心之官則思.”

See Dai (1995a), No. 8, p. 158: “When what is external and what is internal communicate with each other, this is because there are openings, namely the apertures of the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth” (外內相通, 其開竅也, 是為耳目鼻口).

See Dai (1995a), No. 6, p. 156: “*Jingshuang* is the incipient luminosity of the mind being blocked up. When it is no longer obscured and blocked, there will be nothing that it cannot understand. We call this godlike illumination” (精爽有蔽隔而不能通之時, 及其無蔽隔, 無弗通, 乃以神明稱之).

- <sup>50</sup> Dai (1995a), No. 8, p. 158: “耳鼻口之官, 臣道也; 心之官, 君道也; 臣效其能而君正其可否。”
- <sup>51</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 27, p. 183: “In the reality of human relationships and everyday life, the intelligent mind knows commiseration, shame and dislike, respect and yielding, right and wrong, and can pick up these clues. This is what is meant by saying that nature is good ...” (然人之心知, 於人倫日用, 隨在而知惻隱, 知羞惡, 知恭敬辭讓, 知是非, 此之謂性善).
- <sup>52</sup> For instance, Yu Ying-shih says, “For Dai, the possibility is ruled out that there is a kind of innate moral knowledge independent of intellectual knowledge. As one acquires knowledge from constant inquiry and study, he believes, one’s moral nature will be substantiated day by day” (Yu 2016, p. 45). For the same reason, I do not see Dai Zhen would prioritize wisdom “*zhi*” (智 wisdom) over *ren* (*ren* humanity) as Kwong-Loi Shun maintains: “The emphasis on understanding is also seen from the priority that Dai Zhen gives to wisdom over humanity .... Because *li* underlies the life-giving and nourishing process, it is only when one has understood *li* that one can partake in the process” (Shun 2002, p. 225).
- <sup>53</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 32, p. 200: “‘善’, 其必然也: ‘性’, 其自然也, 適完其自然, 此之謂自然之極致, 天地人物之道於是乎盡。”
- <sup>54</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 36, p. 205: “When one pursues one’s own life, one can extend the pursuit so as to fulfill one’s life together with all other people under heaven. This is humanity” (一人遂其生, 推之而與天下共遂其生, 仁也).
- <sup>55</sup> See the Mencius 13.15: “What man is able to do without learning is original ability; what man is able to know without thinking over is original knowing” (人之所不學而能者, 其良能也; 所不慮而知者, 其良知也).
- <sup>56</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 6, pp. 155–6: “*Xueqi xinshi* have their own inherent capacities: the mouth can recognize tastes, the ear sounds, the eye colors, and the mind principle and righteousness” (血氣心知, 有自具之能: 口能辨味, 耳能辨聲, 目能辨色, 心能辨夫理義).
- <sup>57</sup> See Dai (1995a), No. 34, p. 203: “How can we talk about the wise and the dull, the worthy and the unworthy beyond the daily existence and human relationships? Therefore, there is a saying that there is no one that does not eat or drink, but people are rarely able to know their taste. Drinking and eating concern human relationships and daily existence; and knowing the taste means that one acts without erring. If we deny human relationships and daily existence to take something else as *Dao*, this is to look for flavor outside drinking and eating.... Human relationships and daily existence are the things and humanity, righteousness, and propriety are their norm” (然智愚賢不肖, 豈能越人倫日用之外者哉? 故曰: ‘人莫不飲食也, 鮮能知味’ 飲食, 喻人倫日用; 知味, 喻行之無失; 使舍人倫日用以為道, 是求知味於飲食之外矣 ..... 人倫日用, 其物也; 曰仁, 曰義, 曰禮, 其則也).

## References

- An, Zhenghui 安正輝. 1979. *Dai Zhen zhexue zhuzuo xuanzhu* 戴震哲學著作選注 *Annotated Selections of Dai Zhen’s Philosophical Works*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局.
- Barry, Allen. 2022. Naturalism with Chinese Characteristics. In *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*. Edited by Mario De Caro and David Macarthur. Oxon, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 255–63.
- Bloom, Irene. 1997. Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius. *Philosophy East and West* 47: 21–32. [CrossRef]
- Bloom, Irene. 2002a. Biology and Culture in the Mencian View of Human Nature. In *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*. Edited by Alan K. L. Chan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 91–102.
- Bloom, Irene. 2002b. Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature (Ren Xing). In *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*. Edited by Liu Xiusheng and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., pp. 64–100.
- Bray, Karen, and Whitney Bauman, eds. 2023. *Earthly Things: Immanence, New Materialisms, and Planetary Thinking*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Cheng, Chung-ying 成中英. 1969. *Dai Zhen Yuan Shan yanjiu* 戴震原善研究 *Tai Chen’s Yuan Shan*. Hong Kong: Oriental Society, South Sky Book Company.
- Chin, Ann-ping, and Mansfield Freeman. 1990. *Tai Chen on Mencius: Explorations in Words and Meanings*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dai, Zhen 戴震. 1995a. *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* (孟子字義疏證 *Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius*). In *Dai Zhen Quanshu* (戴震全書 *The Complete Works of Dai Zhen*). Edited by Zhang Dainian 張岱年. He Fei: Huangshan Shushe 黃山書社, vol. VI, pp. 143–218.
- Dai, Zhen 戴震. 1995b. *Yuan shan* (原善 *Inquiry into Goodness*). In *Dai Zhen Quanshu* (戴震全書 *The Complete Works of Dai Zhen*). Edited by Zhang Dainian 張岱年. He Fei: Huangshan Shushe 黃山書社, vol. VI, pp. 1–32.
- Ewell, John W. 1990. Reinventing the Way: Dai Zhen’s Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in Mencius (1777). Unpublished dissertation in History, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA.
- Graham, Angus C. 2002. The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature. In *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*. Edited by Liu Xiusheng and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., pp. 1–63.
- Hutton, Eric, trans. 2014. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Knoblock, John. 1988. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Liu, JeeLoo. 2015. In defense of Chinese qi-naturalism. In *Chinese Meta-Physics and Its Problems*. Edited by Chenyang Li and Franklin Perkins. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33–53.
- Machle, Edward J. 1992. The Mind and the shen-ming in the Xunzi. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 19: 361–86. [CrossRef]

- Machle, Edward J. 1993. The “Shenming 神明”. In *Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A Study of the Tian Lun*. Edited by Edward J. Machle. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 159–63.
- Machle, Edward J. 2003. Shenming (Shen-Ming): Gods or Godlike Intelligence. In *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*. Edited by Antonio S. Cua. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 701–3.
- Shun, Kwong-loi 信廣來. 1997. *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Shun, Kwong-loi 信廣來. 2002. Mencius, Xunzi, and Dai Zhen: A Study of the Mengzi Ziyi Shuzheng. In *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*. Edited by Alan K. L. Chan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 216–41.
- Stalnake, Aaron. 2003. Aspects of Xunzi’s Engagement with Early Daoism. *Philosophy East and West* 53: 87–130. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sun, Xidan 孫希旦, ed. 1989. *The Book of Rites with the Collection of Annotated Notes* 禮記集解. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Tiwald, Justin. 2010. DAI Zhen on Human Nature and Moral Cultivation. In *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*. Edited by John Makeham. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 399–422.
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn. 2019. Confucianism as a Form of Religious Naturalism. *Journal of Globalization Studies* 10: 87–96. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn. 2023. Confucianism as a Form of Immanent Naturalism. In *Earthly Things: Immanence, New Materialisms, and Planetary Thinking*. Edited by Karen Bray and Whitney Bauman. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 15–30.
- Wang, Xiumei 王秀梅, ed. 2015. *The Book of Poetry* 詩經. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Wang, Xuanqian 王先謙, ed. 1986. *A Collection of Commentaries on Xunzi* 荀子集解. In *Comprehensive Collection of All Masters’ Writing* 諸子集成. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, vol. II.
- Watson, Burton, trans. 1963. *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yang, Bojun 楊伯峻. 1960. *Translation of the Mencius with Annotated Notes* 孟子譯注. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Yang, Bojun 楊伯峻. 1980. *Translation of the Analects with Annotated Notes* 論語譯注, 2nd ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Yu, Ying-shih 余英時. 2016. Chapter 2 “Dai Zhen and the Zhu Xi Tradition” & Chapter 5 “Qing Confucianism”. In *Chinese History and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, vol. 2, pp. 40–56, 113–33.
- Zuo, Qiuming 左丘明. 1999. *The Zuo’s Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn* 春秋左傳. (6th–5th B. C. E.). See The WYG e-SKQS. (Wenyuange Siku Quanshu dianziban neilianwangban 文淵閣四庫全書電子版內聯網版. the Electronic Version of Siku Quanshu Wenyuange Edition Intranet Version). Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong & Digital Heritage Publishing Ltd.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.