

Why Is Human Nature Good?

—An Anthropological Discussion of “Human Nature Is Good”

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Abstract

Mencius’s judgment that “human nature is good” is not only a metaphysical statement but also an anthropological one. The purpose of this article is to support such a judgment by applying anthropology. In the first part, I with some research results of anthropologists show that humans have “good sprouts” that are different from apes. In the second part, I discuss that the good sprouts came from the random adventure for cooperative behavior of common ancestors of humans and apes, and an accidental “just” distribution of the tribal leader. This led to tribal and individual gains, such as large-scale hunting, grandma effect. In the third part, I discuss first-order morality and second-order morality. In the fourth part, I argue that the gains of cooperative behavior in turn strengthened cooperative behavior, making it a custom within the tribe that leads them to outcompete other tribes. In the fifth part, I consider more complicated situations. In the sixth part, I discuss that a series of small changes in good behavior gradually accumulate to form a more obvious goodness. After a long period of evolution, the changes in behavior cause changes in body structure and are finally internalized into genes, which distinguished the species from the common ancestor of humans and apes, making them humans. Therefore, human nature is good. In the seventh part, I discuss the moral competition and elimination. Finally, in the eighth part, I argue that because goodness not only brings about the development of wealth but also depends on cooperation between people, it brings room for greed and easily crossed gaps to evil, so evil and goodness are always inseparable. Ultimately, evil is secondary, and goodness always prevails in human nature.

Keywords

Human Nature, Morality, Anthropology, Evolution

1. “Human Nature Is Good” Are Not Empty Words

Mencius said, “The difference between human beings and animals is little”

(Mencius, 1988: p. 421). The minor difference between human beings and other animals is mainly morality. In other words, human nature is good. He said, “Why do I say all human beings have a heart which cannot stand to see the suffering of others? Even currently, if an infant were about to fall into a well, anyone would be upset and concerned. This concern would not be because the person wanted to get in good with the baby’s parents or because s/he wanted to improve his or her reputation among the community or among his or her circle of friends. Nor would it be because he or she was afraid of the criticism that might result from a show of nonconcern” (Mencius, 1988: p. 341). This is pure goodness. The act of saving a child is not for other motives—neither relatives nor friends, nor fishing for fame. He also said, “The mind of mercy means benevolence; the mind of shame means righteousness; the mind of respect means courtesy; the mind of right and wrong means wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, courtesy and wisdom are not internalized by outsiders but are inherent in me” (Mencius, 1988: p. 469). This is a person’s innate goodness, or innate morality.

We generally believe that Mencius’s quotes above are not a true description of people but a good wish for an optimistic expectation of people’s moral education. In fact, we have no way to know how Mencius came to such a judgment in the distant Warring States Period. There is also a possibility that Mencius made this judgment based on his extensive observation of people and deep introspection. If so, this judgment has anthropological significance. In fact, modern scholars who make judgments of people also largely base their thinking on introspection. We find that Hume’s *On Human Nature* rarely quoted other works or evidence, while Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* had no references at all. This shows that when the two authors discussed human nature, because they were human beings, they used their own internal introspection to represent the introspection of all people. Of course, this is not an exact correspondence, but it is not bad as an analogy on the whole.

However, the view that “human nature is good” has been criticized, and some people advocate that human nature is evil. In China, Xunzi advocated that “human nature is evil”. In his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant said, “Man is born evil” (Kant, 2016(a): p. 247). In modern China, Mencius’ “theory of good nature” has been criticized, which is one of the reasons why China relies on ethics but lacks a developed rule of law. However, anthropological research in recent years, especially observations and research on the origin of morality, supports the judgment that “human nature is good”. For example, Christopher Bohm’s *The Origin of Morality* made many observations and did much research into the behavior and psychological motivation of people in comparison with their close relatives—chimpanzees, bonobos and gorillas; in the comparative contrast, we can obtain the judgment that “human nature is good” (Bohm, 2015: pp. 133-151).

The view that “human nature is good” does not mean that human beings have no evil behavior—Kant listed a large number of cruel human behaviors when he denied that “human nature is good” but he also said that, compared with other

animals, especially those close relatives who share the same ancestor with human beings, human beings uniquely have morality. “Morality” refers to rules of conduct that are “prosocial” and tend to promote cooperation, humility and respect between people. The result is that human society is more orderly, the division of labor can be deeper, and there is less conflict. This kind of society is more effective, more just and more peaceful than other animal societies.

Therefore, when we want to prove that human nature is good, we do not need to avoid a large number of human evils but first assess and confirm the behavior of several kinds of apes against human behavior. Before human beings were separated from these close relatives 8 million years ago, they shared the same rules of behavior with them. After that, the rules of behavior that only appeared in human beings have accumulated, which is human nature. The variation in human nature is morality, which is an inherent good. Now let us see if so-called morality and so-called goodness are all variations in human beings that are not found in these apes.

Briefly, we will compare them according to Mencius’s “four good sprouts”. In his book “The Origin of Morality”, Christopher Bohm judged the common ancestors of apes and humans in terms of morality by comparing chimpanzees and bonobos. With regard to compassion, he said that “human ancestors indeed have a lot of preadapted ‘reserve capital’ which is sufficient to help the evolution of conscience. But this does not mean that the evolution of conscience is inevitable or very likely to occur.” On the right and wrong mind, he said that we can “assume that our common ancestor did not have the moral sense of right and wrong that we know today” (Bohm, 2015: p. 150). With regard to shame, after citing several examples of chimpanzees or bonobos or gorillas, he concluded that they had no feelings of guilt, only fear of authoritative people, and they “never blushed because of (self trial) shame” (Bohm, 2015: p. 151). He did not mention respect. We hypothesize that this is a higher moral emotion, and the common ancestor of men and apes did not have it. They might be afraid of the group leader but not respectful.

The “four good sprouts” are Mencius’s observations on the innate nature of human beings: “I am born to have these four good sprouts”. If these sprouts are not there, that is “nonhuman” (Mencius, 1988: p. 469). Therefore, today’s anthropological observations of apes prove that Mencius is right in saying that the difference between human beings and other animals is “little”—“four good sprouts”. In fact, Mencius was not alone in this view. There are two ways to express “human nature is good”. One is through direct expression, and the other is through indirect expression. The direct expression is to say directly that “human nature is good”, and the indirect expression is to say first that “the way of heaven is good” and then “human nature is the same as the way of heaven”. The prominent example of someone using the former statement structure is Mencius.

The latter, indirect structure is exemplified by The Doctrine of the Mean. The Doctrine of the Mean says, “Destiny is nature, and following one’s nature is the Tao” (Zisi, 1988: p. 25). Here, “Tao” is the way of heaven; “nature” is human

nature. In Confucian terms, “the way of heaven” means ideal public institutions. The same ideal is true of Taoism. The Tao Te Ching says, “The highest good is like water, which is almost Tao” (Laozi, 2017: p. 25). It is also said that the Tao is good. The author also said, “The Tao always does nothing but does everything. If the king can be self-disciplined, everything will be self-transforming” (Laozi, 2017: p. 94). As long as there is no intervention, the universe will evolve freely. This is also a good result. Therefore, the way of heaven is good. The statement that “following one’s nature is the Tao” means that following human nature is the way of heaven. This is equivalent to equating nature and the Tao. Since the way of heaven creates the best institutions and the way of heaven is good, human nature is also good.

These two narrative methods of deriving that “human nature is good” have been inherited from Confucianism. Both Neo-Confucianism and the Philosophy of the Mind have discussed this aspect. Mr. Cheng Yichuan said, “The mind is connected with the Tao, and then can distinguish right from wrong” (Zhu, 1995: p. 113); Zhu Xi said, “The nature of destiny is everywhere, but when you look for it, you should first look for it from yourself.” Therefore, “nature is in the form of the Tao” (Zhu, 1995: p. 469). These are all indirect expressions of “human nature is good”. If we were to suppose that humanity (nature, mind) is connected with heaven or the Tao, or even amounted to the same thing, then again, we would have to conclude that human nature is good because the way of heaven is good. The tradition of the Philosophy of the Mind directly says “human nature is good”. As Wang Yangming said, “Sages are also ‘to know through learning’, and people are also ‘to know once born’.” He explained that “everyone knows this from childhood” (Wang, 1995: p. 310). Conscience is goodness and the way of heaven.

In the world, the theory that “human nature is evil” is not so absolute. The Bible says that people have original sin. However, as Kant said, “Although it advanced evil to the beginning of the world, it did not put it in people after all, but in an original spirit with noble regulations... People are seen as falling into evil through temptation, not fundamentally (even in terms of the initial endowment toward good) corrupted, and can still be improved” (Kant, 2016b: p. 486). That is, humans are not inherently evil but are misled by temptation. People have the potential to be good. It happens that there is a similar case of this logic in ancient China. Xunzi, who advocated the theory that “human nature is evil”, believed that “loving benefit”, “hating evil”, and “loving good voice and appearance” are innate to human nature and that “there must be a way to become civilized from teachers, and a way of etiquette and justice” to make people do good (Xunzi, 2015: p. 452). However, this is no longer “nature”, but “pseudo”-nature, that is, an artificially formed culture. However, Xunzi’s implication is that people can be good. This kind of good nature has been included in human nature, which is consistent with Mencius’s “good sprouts”. “Good sprouts” are only the beginning of good, not good itself, but they have the conditions and the seeds for

good. In the long run, if we can move toward goodness, we will become good.

However, why people can move toward goodness is not only to use good culturally to restrain evil in human nature but also, through long-term development, to make goodness rooted in human nature. In modern language, this means that following the rules of good behavior will eventually change genetics, internalize goodness, and make good behavior an innate human behavioral pattern. Therefore, human nature is good. This judgment has been confirmed by some anthropological observations. For example, people with brain damage also had moral abnormalities. “Gage was a kind and easy-going person, but he became impulsive, irritable and indecent after being injured” (Bohm, 2015: p. 28). A priest repeatedly molested children because of a brain tumor but returned to normal after the brain tumor was removed (p. 29). Thus, the human brain already has a special role in dominating moral behavior. Another example is that 6-month-old infants prefer persons who are kind toward others (Hamlin et al., 2007, cited from Bregman, 2022: p. 260).

Even the innate morality of human beings was not something internalized only at the emergence of civilization but something that was rooted in the biological evolution of billions of years before that. Biologist Wilson pointed out that in the competition between biological groups, the group with altruism will be better off than the group dominated by egoism. One reason is that altruism is conducive to the division of labor within the group, making it more efficient for fertility, development at a larger scale and combat. Because of the genetic similarity between sterile individuals and fertile individuals, the genes they share are the most effective for reproduction. This is a bigger topic. It not only says “human nature is good” but also says “the rules of the universe are good”, that is, “the Tao is good”. This is consistent with the views of Taoism and Confucianism.

2. How Did Good Sprouts Happen?

Of course, even if there is goodness in the universe, human goodness is obviously different from that of nonhuman animals. What we want to explore is how this difference comes about. By virtue or morality, we mean “cooperation”, “friendship” or “respect” between individuals. “Cooperation” broadly includes recognition of each other’s rights, following common rules for competition, and the specific division of labor and cooperation. “Friendship” and “respect” go further by promoting cooperation and increasing people’s sense of pleasure. Because cooperation between individuals will lead to the improvement of the social situation, it is also called “prosocial” behavior. Long-term cooperation will promote the division of labor and then make the division of labor more specialized, which can improve the efficiency of production or services.

However, cooperation and even the division of labor are full of risks. The premise of cooperation is that the wealth increment brought by cooperation can be fairly distributed among cooperators. This requires a corresponding alloca-

tion mechanism. There is a certain time interval between initial cooperative efforts and income, which makes people worry that there is no return for their efforts, so they refuse to cooperate. A relatively simple and reassuring way to cooperate is to do an exchange or trade, that is, exchange your own goods for other people's goods, which can only be done with the consent of both parties. However, even barter is risky because the other party may not give his or her goods after getting others' goods. It is said that there is a "silent trade" in the Kucong people in China. They put their goods on the open land in the forest, hide in the forest, and wait for Han businessmen to take them away and put the "equivalent" goods on the ground. This is exchange. However, the risk is that Han businessmen are likely not to put goods of equivalent value.

Moreover, a great deal of cooperation among human beings is not bartered. As far as my own research is concerned, there is behavior exchange, that is, exchanging one's own behavior for another's behavior, thus forming a custom (Sheng, 2021); there is also a long time interval between giving and obtaining exchanged goods or behaviors. For example, in credit or advance payments, gifts, and elderly care (exchanging your old age for others' old age), the exchange risk is greater, and the difficulty is greater. From the current cost-benefit calculation, these exchange behaviors will not be adopted due to the high risk. Once you pay, if there is no return, it is a loss, which will weaken your own interests. If you do this for a long time, you will be eliminated, so no one will consciously adhere to such behavior.

Only when a human individual goes beyond the calculation of current interests and acts for other motives, such as aesthetic, emotional or exploratory motives, does this action generate a utilitarian result after a certain interval of time; that is, it brings benefit to the actor, and the individual will persist in this habit. At this point, what was a mutant behavior becomes a new habitual behavior. Because it is a choice outside the existing utilitarian framework of the species, it expands the space for choices, and because it brings initially unexpected utilitarian results, it is equivalent to creating a variation that brings more efficiency. Other individuals in the group will follow suit one after another, so this new behavior is popularized in the group. Finally, new behaviors lead to the improvement of the efficiency of the whole group and an advantage in competition with other groups.

I have thought about and analyzed filial piety—children's love for their parents—and found that this kind of behavior, which seems to be taken for granted today, was quite accidental at first. The rule of nature is that when parents complete the reproductive task plus a short period of nurturing, they will have no further practical functions. To live is to consume resources in vain, so they should die. This phenomenon can be seen in many animals (such as elephants and fish). Until very recently in history, there was still a custom of abandoning elderly people among human beings. For example, the older people over 70 years of age described in the Japanese film "Investigation of Qiu Mountain Festival" would be carried to the mountain to worship the mountain god. However, some

people, out of love for their parents, do not have the heart to throw them away. They would rather eat less and support their parents. Therefore, parents lived longer (Sheng, 2021). Unexpectedly, people found that elderly parents not only consumed food but also helped take care of their grandchildren. Anthropologist Hawkes found that families that live with grandmothers have more children and are healthier. This is because the grandmother can help her grandchildren find food and take care of the baby after her daughter gives birth, so that the interval between multiple pregnancies is shorter (Hawkes, 2003).

In other words, a variation in human behavior is firstly random and caused by other reasons than utilitarian purposes. However, when this variation leads to a utilitarian result after a period of time, whether the actor realizes the relationship between the behavior and this result or not, because he or she actually enjoys a good result, he or she will continue this variation, making it normal. When others see the benefits of this behavioral variation, they also follow suit. This variation spreads among the group and forms a stable custom.

The key is, how did these mutations first appear among people, and why did chimpanzees and bonobos, close relatives of humans, not have such mutations? Since the evolution of the biological world contained the rule that the species was originally good, which was also deeply embedded in the genes of higher organisms, it was conservatively speculated that there were genes expressing this original goodness in the common ancestor of humans and apes. These genes did not calculate a current utility value. They were “pure” morality, or as Kant said, “The principle of good is not only in a certain era, but from the beginning of human origin, it has come to humanity from heaven in an invisible way” (Kant, 2016(b): p. 305). Therefore, these original goodness genes emerged occasionally, not to satisfy their own preferences, not for utilitarian purposes, but purely to think that they were good. It is only by accident that some apes had more goodness and others had less. More mutated apes would develop in the direction of human beings, while apes with fewer mutations would remain unchanged.

Of course, in specific situations, not all apes had the same environment and conditions. Some apes lost their forest homes due to climate change, and they were forced to walk upright on the plains; some apes migrated to places where there were large animals, and they started a hunter-gatherer lifestyle; there were also some apes in the mountains where there were stones that could be made into better hunting tools. These different conditions and environments also affected the behavior of apes. Some ape populations had improved the quality and quantity of nutrition, improved their health and extended their lifespan due to more effective hunting and gathering. Some groups had formed a larger scale, promoting the development of the social brain. Some groups were located in dry and cool areas, which was conducive to food preservation. Some groups were near salt lakes and used salt earlier to prevent meat spoilage. Therefore, these different special circumstances provided a relatively loose set of situations for behaviors without utilitarian calculations to emerge, which made them easier to

implement and finally produced utilitarian results.

However, there was a certain interval, even quite a long time, between utilitarian results and these aberrant behaviors, similar to the grandma effect. The key was whether these mutated apes could detect the causal relationship between the two. In simple variations, this relationship was more obvious in families. For example, the grandma effect was intuitive, and it could be perceived that grandma could help care for the grandchildren. The benefits of large-scale hunting of large animals for the group might not be so intuitive, but in the view of the developed brain, the causal relationship was also within the scope of reason. When apes discovered that their behavior variations had brought about a utilitarian result, whether the original variation had a utilitarian motive or not, this result encouraged them to continue their behavior. Good behavior had been consolidated and expanded. Compared with the group without such behavior, the group with such behavior had an advantage and would flourish and win in natural selection.

The behavior that gives a group an evolutionary advantage is selected for, which means that it was not only passed down in the group as a tradition but also internalized in the gene pool of the group. Because biological organs are developed by use and discarded without use, repeated behaviors will induce changes in the corresponding organs in the body to develop toward support of this behavior. The Indian sage Swami Vivekananda once said that if you do good deeds, you will become a good person; not because you are a good person, then you do good deeds. Good deeds lead to good bodies. This implies that the human body has become “good” with the change in human behavior. As anthropologists have said, the human male’s face has become softer in recent millennia, which is related to less violence.

3. First-Order Morality and Second-Order Morality

We can call the customs formed like this a first-order morality. This includes all kinds of behaviors inclined toward cooperation, friendship and respect, which formed the rules of behavior. Over time, people generally believed that these rules of conduct were a code of morality. After generations of transmission, these rules of conduct, as social knowledge that a person learned from his or her parents, are imprinted into his or her mind since childhood. When people follow morality, they can no longer tell whether this specific behavior itself has a moral nature or whether they believe that following the rules of just conduct is following morality. The latter is regarded as a higher level of morality by Kant. He said, “That an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined” (Kant, 2013: p. 30). Regardless, people practice moral behavior to a large extent because they have a sense of morality; that is, they believe that it is moral to follow the rules of just conduct. We call the concept of “following the rules of just conduct” second-order morality.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, so-called moral behavior is an exchange of behavior that still carries certain risks. In other words, a moral act may be unilateral at a particular moment. For example, in market transactions, the buyer pays first. If the seller does not deliver at this time, the buyer will suffer losses. However, the rule of due conduct requires that the seller deliver. If the goods are not delivered, it is a violation of the rules of just conduct, that is, a violation of morality. At this time, the buyer and other people will show moral indignation to the person who violates the rules. The specific forms of this indignation can be varied, either as verbal condemnation or forced delivery. In short, there will be costs for the seller who violates the rules, making him or her feel that it is better not to breach the contract. In most cases, even if the seller wanted to violate the rules, he or she would give up the idea at the thought of the moral indignation he or she might incur. Therefore, the rule of just conduct is enforced. The case of buying and selling may be the simplest case, and the implementation of other rules of conduct with longer intervals also depends more on this mechanism of the fear of moral indignation from others.

If you want to “follow the rules of just conduct”, you must first know what the “rules of just conduct” are, that is, first-order morality. Although the mutation mentioned above seems accidental, it may come from the heart of the people. This is related to the congenital morality mentioned above. Mencius said that one of the “four good sprouts”—the mind of right and wrong—is innate and mainly refers to justice. The sense of justice is innate, which means that after hundreds of millions of years of evolution, correct choices are just choices. Unfair choices will bring disadvantages to groups and will be eliminated naturally, so the rules of justice are internalized in the human body and brain structures. We instinctively know what is fair and what is unjust. This can mainly be used to judge whether there is asymmetry in the exchange behavior. Asymmetry is injustice. When a person does not deliver the goods after receiving the money, it is obviously unfair; it is also intuitive to judge the unfair distribution of prey after hunting together. Research shows that children know as of age 3 that a cake should be distributed evenly, and at age 6, they will have a stronger objection to the unfair distribution of cake (Starmans et al., 2017, cited from Bregman, 2022: pp. 283-284).

“Compassion” or “sympathy” is also innate, which is one of the “four good sprouts” mentioned by Mencius. This view was emphasized by Adam Smith in modern times. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith said, “By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (Smith, 1998: p. 6). Research in modern psychology and neuroscience has proven that this ability of sympathy and empathy is because people have the same neuronal system. When one person has a certain action or situation, the

mirror neurons of another person who is observing will be activated, allowing him or her to have the same (albeit slightly attenuated) feelings. As one scholar said, “The area with dense mirror neurons has considerable overlap with the emotional brain and social brain (i.e., empathy brain and other-mind-cognitive brain)” (Ye et al., 2013: p. 168). Obviously, compassion has a solid physical and psychological basis.

However, it is said that the experiment of “activating mirror neurons” was initially successful in monkeys, indicating that monkeys also have the neural basis for sympathy. Therefore, what is the difference between humans and monkeys? Perhaps the degree is different. Anthropologists have also found through experiments that monkeys can use this empathy to guess how other individuals will react to guide their own actions. For example, in an experiment, the researcher buried fruit before a young monkey and then asked all the monkeys to find it. Those older monkeys who did not see where the fruit was hidden saw this young monkey digging up the fruit from the ground, and when the experiment was repeated, the older monkeys would stare at the younger one. Wherever the younger monkey was digging, the older monkeys drove it away and dug up the fruit. Later, the young monkey pretended to dig in a place where no fruit was buried. When the older monkeys went to dig there, he then went to the place where the fruit was buried (Bohm, 2015: p. 121). However, there seems to be no experimental evidence that monkeys or apes use this empathy to help other individuals. Mencius said that people’s ability to sympathize was compassion; that is, they felt the misfortune or pain of others and wanted to help them avoid or reduce the pain.

The customs formed by the mind of right and wrong and the mind of sympathy constitutes first-order morality. Shame and respect can strengthen the sprouts of first-order morality. Shame is the feeling that occurs when a person does something that he thinks is wrong; he feels ashamed before others accuse him of wrongdoing. Anthropologists say that blushing is a physiological reaction to human shame (Bohm, 2015: p. 204). Apes do not blush (Bohm, 2015: p. 149). Shame helps people consciously follow morality through self-restraint. The mind of reverence is generally considered to be respect for someone or something. In fact, reverence is actually respect for a certain value. For example, respect for the group leader is respect for his talent, demeanor and bravery, and respect for an outstanding scholar is respect for his erudition, elegance and humility. Therefore, respect is actually respect for a certain value, so respect also strengthens compliance with moral values.

At the beginning, morality was mainly a sense of right and wrong and a sense of compassion. When a human thought that a behavior deviated from right and wrong or compassion, he or she would feel ashamed, and then this behavior would be stopped or weakened; when he or she thought he or she had done right, he or she would feel honored. This was the opposite of shame. A sense of honor and disgrace will help people reduce their antisocial behavior and in-

crease their prosocial behavior. The reason for the sense of honor is that people show respect for what they think is valuable. Honor is self-respect. Therefore, the sense of shame and the sense of respect strengthen people's initial good sprouts—compassion and right and wrong—which also strengthen people's adherence to first-order moral principles, which is an act of second-order morality.

When the customs formed by the good sprouts gradually highlighted the embedded rules of conduct, which gradually became independent from their original purpose, these customs themselves became the objects of shame and respect. Bohm wrote that when no one from his culture was watching an Australian aboriginal man, the researcher advised him to eat a female opossum, which violated the tribal custom. The man replied, 'I cannot do this. It is wrong to do this.' And he could not give any reason" (Bohm, 2015: p. 254). This was probably due to shame or respect. The so-called morality of this situation was already a second-order morality, which is the morality that follows the rules of conduct. Shame and respect are relative to whether the rules of conduct are followed or violated. This is a higher level of morality and the moral meaning intended by Kant. Kant said, "I may have the inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action, but I cannot have respect for it...Simply the law of itself...can be an object of respect". Gradually, people's moral concept is no longer a moral value of behavior itself but a question whether this behavior conforms to the universally recognized code of conduct.

4. Group Selection of Goodness of Fit

Bohm concluded that morality originates from three aspects. First, when apes began to hunt large animals and distribute them to each family, they left the hierarchy to enter an egalitarian society and then gradually developed a mechanism of social sanction against the alpha tyrant. When people found that the tyrant was obviously unfair in distributing prey, they would take action, from gossip, verbal attacks, and expulsion to killing. In this way, the suitability of this type of leader would be reduced. Such punishment had occurred many times over approximately 45,000 years and thousands of generations, which was enough to change the structure of the gene pool. The suitability of leaders with stronger self-restraint and more humility and goodness would increase, the survival rate would be high, and the genetic inheritance would be more.

The second is sexual choice. Women liked men who were generous and helpful, which would increase the chance for men with more altruistic genes to inherit offspring, thus increasing the altruistic genes.

The third aspect is group selection. That is, the choice is not individual but impactful to the group. In this case, altruistic behavior has gone to an extreme form. For the common interests of the group, altruistic individuals can sacrifice themselves or reduce their chances of breeding offspring. From the individual perspective, the genes of this altruistic individual will be less frequent in the population or even not passed on, but the group carries the same or similar gene

as him or her, which will flourish because the group benefits from altruistic behavior. In the competition with the group with less altruistic behavior, those with this genetic advantage will take the upper hand, and the less altruistic will decline or even die out due to a failure in competitiveness, or else they will stay at a lower stage of development. Edward Wilson called the former society “true sociality”. He said that in addition to six kinds of insects, such as ants, termites and wasps, the species with true sociality is humankind (Wilson, 2019: p. 64).

The first explanation seems slightly problematic. Ordinary members of the group united to kill the tyrant because they thought that the tyrant was unfair in distributing goods. However, they had formed moral values at this time. They punished the tyrant by virtue of their moral indignation. This story illustrates the situation after the existence of morality, not the occurrence and formation of morality. Moreover, it focuses on the impact of punishment on the gene pool and does not seem to explain why an egalitarian society brought about by punishment could exist and continue. The logical guess should be that because egalitarian distribution could bring greater incentives and more effective allocation of resources (more large-scale hunting), an egalitarian society would obtain more material products, form a larger scale, and outcompete a hierarchical society. Here, reward rather than punishment plays a more important role.

The second explanation also seems to be problematic. The character and temperament of male members who were generous and helpful should not be formed by accident. It had to be that after the moral code had matured, the talent who followed this code showed such a character and temperament. The ability of women to appreciate the charm of men should also be formed after the formation of moral values. However, this cannot explain how morality is formed.

It seems that we should also focus on the third interpretation, which is to discuss the formation and gradual internalization of morality from the perspective of group selection, and show how the human nature of apes accumulated bit by bit. However, since “true sociality” is not unique to human beings and low-level insects such as ants and termites are far away from human beings, we should first distinguish between true human sociality and true insect sociality. The true sociality of ants or bees is shown by the degeneration of the reproductive function of a group of female individuals, who only do the work of foraging or defense, while only one female individual, the queen, specializes in reproduction. This true sociality is manifested as a natural physiological change, which is not voluntarily chosen by these worker ants or worker bees. That is not true of people. There is no division of labor between fertility and infertility due to physiological changes in humans. Wilson believed that religious people had a similar division of labor. In various religions, it is a common tradition to ask clergy to stay unwed. Of course, in the Confucian tradition, there is no such requirement. However, Confucianism has the tradition of sacrificing life for justice.

It can be seen that in human society, there is a group of people who give up or

reduce their chances of breeding children for the sake of social interests, and some people even sacrifice their lives for this. This social division of labor is not a congenital physiological division of labor but a voluntary choice of individuals. The reason for their altruism is that they clearly realize that they are providing a kind of social service for society, and because they are proud of this, they think it is worthwhile to sacrifice their chances to produce children. Therefore, humans' true sociality comes from human morality, while insects' true sociality does not come from individual morality.

On the other hand, why did anthropoid apes, close relatives of human beings, not develop true sociality? This brings us back to our original question: why can human beings develop morality while chimpanzees cannot? In other words, why is human nature good? To simplify the problem, we can imagine two tribes of apes sharing the same ancestor. There was no difference in physiology between the individuals. They are in adjacent places, so we can ignore the difference in the environment. Their technical and cooperative capabilities are the same. With their existing technology and cooperative ability, they have been hunting smaller animals as a supplement to gathered wild fruit. Suddenly one day, they find large animals, which require larger group cooperation to hunt. This requires more individuals to participate in hunting, but there will be a certain risk because the distribution of prey occurs after catching it. If the hunters do not get their due share in the distribution, will their efforts be worthwhile? However, if you do not participate in hunting, you will not get large prey, let alone a distribution of the share. This is a dead end.

In fact, the original good sprouts have been hidden in the apes of these two tribes, which is more primitive than Mencius' "good sprouts", and the probability of their emergence is very low. At this time, following a small probability, primitive goodness appeared in the mind of an individual of one of the two tribes. The individual(s) felt that it was a good idea and worth pursuing at the expense of some benefits. At this time, she/he (they) accepted the request to cooperate in the hunting of large animals and did not care whether they received a reward after that. As a result, the pattern of hunting large animals appeared. Of course, the probability of such a situation is very small, but as long as the time is long enough, such as tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of years, it will happen at least once. Therefore, the apes began to hunt large animals.

When large prey was hunted, the tribe would distribute the prey meat. At this time, the characteristics of the leader of the tribe were also uncertain. The nature of the species was to think of itself first, so the leader would distribute most of the food to itself and its relatives and a small part to distant relatives. It did not give any meat to members who had participated in hunting but had little relationship with the leader. There is also a small probability that because he inherited the original goodness generated in the biological world, he generously and mercifully distributed the meat to all members fairly. However, because the probability was very small, this situation was also rare. However, as long as the time was long enough, such as tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of

years, this situation would eventually occur.

These two key links, risking that no meat would be distributed to the hunter and the leader fairly distributing meat, are both low probability events. If two low probability events want to occur at the same time, their probability is much smaller. However, as long as the time is long enough, such an event with minimal probability can still occur. Because the members who took risks in hunting got their share under fair distribution, their behavior was affirmed and encouraged, so they did not hesitate to participate in the next hunt. Therefore, the pattern of hunting large animals was finalized and consolidated. This tribe often had large prey for more adequate meat. The more nutrition the individuals received, the healthier they were, and the more energetic and successful they were in hunting. If food was sufficient and women were healthy, more children would be born. After several generations, the scale of this tribe was obviously larger than that of the neighboring tribe, which had not developed a cooperative model of hunting large animals.

The neighboring tribe had only two ways to cope. One is to determine how its neighbor had developed so much, then determine how to organize the hunting of large animals and recognize that the key was the relative fairness in distribution. Those groups that learned and implemented this method became egalitarian societies that could hunt large animals and distribute meat fairly with the effect that the tribe also developed.

Another way is that the tribe did not learn the “advanced” hunting mode of its neighbor, or no member was willing to “take part in” large-scale hunting before ensuring that the distribution could be fair. Alternately, the leader might have been unwilling to distribute meat fairly, resulting in the tribe abandoning the large-scale hunting mode. It would continue with its original hunting mode and only eat the meat of small animals, without more meat sources. This tribe had remained in its original state. This is today’s chimpanzee tribe, and that “advanced” tribe would develop into humans in the future.

5. More Complicated Imagination

Now, we can also imagine that the opportunities for these two tribes to perform good deeds were not random (the probability is the same). For example, one of the tribes had certain characteristics, which increased the probability of the original good sprouts. For example, members of one tribe were more willing to take the risk of not getting a return. In addition, we should also imagine that large-scale hunting activity was a collective action with a public nature, and the individual’s position in it was relatively vague. It was risky to participate in such cooperation. Before that, people would cooperate more in the private field, such as exchanging fruit, small prey, birds or fish. At this time, they would also experience the risk of noncooperation, but obviously, the risk is much smaller than that of participating in large-scale hunting activities, and exchanges were more likely to occur.

If members of a tribe had made more private exchanges and the exchange had brought benefits to the relevant individuals and the tribe as a whole, this exchange behavior was recognized and encouraged. The deeper meaning of this behavior was that they had the courage to do things that had not been done before and dared to take risks that might not get a return. These behaviors were recognized and encouraged and then internalized into patterns or even genes. When faced with the risk of participating in large-scale hunting activities, they would be more inclined to take this risk, thus facilitating the improvement of this hunting activity. Moreover, the risk-taking gene might become a more basic characteristic of this group. Since risk taking entails doing things that have not been done before, it expands the space for conceivable choices and brings more possibilities for choosing better behavior strategies. This is what distinguishes humans from other animals, especially their close relatives, chimpanzees and bonobos.

The biggest difference between taking risks and staying safe is whether you are willing to pay for things that do not promise an immediate benefit. In the common ancestor of humans and apes, there were already some nonmaterial spiritual needs, such as emotional, aesthetic and moral needs. As mentioned earlier, children were unwilling to throw their parents into the mountains because of their feelings for their parents. Similarly, feelings that a person or thing was so beautiful that an individual would be willing to pay for it reflects the development of an aesthetic. It reflects the emergence of moral thought to recognize that a kind of behavior (such as helping others) is good and be willing to implement it, which is also a spiritual aesthetic. In today's view, emotional, aesthetic and moral needs are also kinds of needs that are no different from material needs. The satisfaction of such needs will also bring spiritual pleasure. However, in early human history, productivity was low, and the material supply was insufficient. These spiritual needs were not put in the same prioritization as the material needs.

However, once we break through current needs and choose behaviors to meet our spiritual needs, although we do not expect any return at the time, these behaviors will in fact indirectly bring returns or a wider range of returns, thus confirming and encouraging the choice to repeat these behaviors and ultimately solidifying and developing them. Nonmaterial emotions, aesthetics and morality themselves became more intense as needs, not only as a spiritual need to promote the behavior of tribal members but also because of the strengthening effect of predictable indirect and social rewards, such as the grandmother effect. As a result, the tribes that initially chose to take risks in nonmaterial needs, because they formed a higher evaluation of emotion, aesthetics and morality, were more inclined to make breakthrough choices in noncurrent interests. They had a greater space in which to make choices with potential long-term benefit and had a greater possibility of development. Although these individuals did not necessarily expect a result with practical benefits, after a certain period of time, their behaviors might produce a practical result beneficial to the whole society.

In another tribe, its members abide by the consistent laws of nature, pay only for things with immediate benefit, and do not waste energy on nonmaterial interests and risky things. This is a sound strategy in the moment, but it loses the opportunity to break through the existing range of options and expand space for development. Moreover, because the tribe that tended to take risks and innovate had developed a new model for exchange, their production efficiency had been significantly improved, the scale of the tribe had been increased, the food quantity and quality available to each member had been improved, their physical condition had been greatly improved, and the tribe had an advantage in competition or conflict with the conservative tribe. As a result, the tribe that only paid for current utilitarian benefits parted ways from the tribe that took risks without immediate results. The former remained in the state of chimpanzees, while the latter went to humans.

This more complex situation, on the surface, seems to reflect that a tribe had actively changed its behavior, while on a deeper level, it was still a random choice. For example, the tendency to take more risks was also randomly distributed. By chance, in one tribe, this tendency was greater than that in another tribe, and the results were also random. By chance, in one tribe, the results of that risk that brought benefits were more likely to happen, so the risk-taking behavior was more certain. Therefore, in general, the separation between humans and chimpanzees was accidental, and which part became human and which part remained chimpanzee is also random.

Although it is random, once humans and chimpanzees separated, even a small discrepancy led to worlds apart. The two basic differences were 1) whether you dare to do something that has no direct return and 2) the evaluation of nonmaterial needs. From the perspective of moral evolution, it is whether to do things that are considered good, regardless of whether there is a direct benefit.

6. Behavior Variation—New Equilibrium—Internalization—Variation

We now look at such a process of accumulating human nature from across the whole earth and over a long period of time. As mentioned earlier, the probability of such prosocial behavior variation is extremely low. As far as we know today, human beings have only one ancestor. This means that eight million years ago, among millions of ancestors shared by humans and apes, at least tens of thousands of chimpanzee groups and bonobo groups, only one of them had this mutation. The process of variation also went through millions of years and hundreds of thousands of generations.

This process was not completed at once but many times, though only a little bit each time. This is probably the pattern and path of evolution. First, good (prosocial, moral) behavior variation (such as providing for the aged, exchanging, and helping) occurred in a tribe. After a period of time, this behavior showed a utilitarian result, which benefited the individual and society by en-

couraging this variation in behavior. Therefore, the variation was encouraged, and more people followed such behavior, so that more people benefited and society gained more benefits. As a result of the improvement of this kind of behavior, this tribe had higher production efficiency, a more suitable life for its members, faster population growth and a larger tribe size than its neighbors. It stood out in tribal competition. Other tribes stayed in their original state, while this tribe moved forward greatly.

Over time, this repeated variation became a typical behavior and custom of the tribe, which meant that people followed this custom, repeating it many times, and internalizing it into the genetic code through multiple generations. This process reflects, as Edward Wilson said, that “the first change should be behavior, then structure” (Wilson, 2019: p. 15). He continued, “Social behavior is also often used as the pioneer of evolution. The entire evolutionary process generally includes behavior changes, followed by morphological changes” (Wilson, p. 16). The corresponding organs will change when they are used or disused, and they will be more adapted to the new behavior. Finally, the new behavior and adapted physique will be internalized into the genetic code and become a biological trait that will be passed on to future generations.

After many generations, the descendants of this tribe developed into many tribes. At a certain point, the good (prosocial, moral) behavior of one of the tribes changed, and after a period of time, utilitarian results appeared. This behavior was recognized and encouraged, and then it was popularized within the tribe into customs. After many generations, it was internalized into genes. Of course, sometimes, aberrant behaviors do not produce utilitarian results, so such behaviors are not recognized and encouraged and do not form customs but disappear in the process of evolution.

Over a long history, the evolutionary process is a cycle of behavioral variation—utilitarian result—expansion—accustomation—internalization into the gene pool—another behavior variation. In each cycle, the tribe with the variation and confirmed utilitarian results would emerge, while other tribes could either learn from it or keep their old ways but fail in competition with the mutant tribe. In this way, it seems that there would be many intermediate man-ape states that were eliminated on the road to humankind, but in archaeology, there are only a few species in such intermediate states. Why? One explanation is that the eliminated intermediate state was too short to form a distinct species, and because of its short existence, there is too little bone evidence left to be found.

However, anthropology and archaeology have still found some intermediate states, such as Neanderthals. This is a kind of human who is obviously different from modern humans in body structure. Both modern humans and Neanderthals were descendants of human ancestors who parted ways with chimpanzees 8 million years ago. The bifurcation between them began 500,000 years ago, until the disappearance of Neanderthals 30,000 years ago (Pääbo, 2018: p. 109, p. 292). According to genome sequencing, Neanderthals and modern humans

crossed paths 90,000 to 40,000 years ago (Pääbo, 2018: p. 320). Neanderthals moved from Africa to Europe approximately 500,000 years ago. It is speculated that modern humans moved from Africa 400,000 years later, and the two had developed independently for a long time. This is an enlarged case. It can be imagined that, more likely, modern humans had changed in Africa, while Neanderthals had stayed in their original state. This resulted in great behavioral differences, as well as the resulting structural differences in the body. When modern humans expanded to Europe, Neanderthals lost to modern humans in competition. Only a few cases of hybridization occurred.

Archaeologists have said that the brain capacity of Neanderthals was not smaller than that of their contemporary humans, and they had developed technology and culture. Their hunting tools, decorative items, and other aspects, such as the use of pigments (Zilhão et al., 2010), obvious symbolic use of feathers (Finlayson et al., 2012), dietary breadth (Stringer et al., 2008), and burial practices were similar to that of modern humans at that time. Perhaps the difference is that Neanderthals exhibit less prosocial behavior than modern humans and lack altruistic genes. Therefore, although they were not inferior to modern humans in technology, they lacked organizational level and scale. Therefore, due to their low efficiency, in competition with modern humans, whether peaceful—group size, population, and command of resources—or military, the disadvantaged group finally ended in extinction. Although we cannot see many examples from behavioral variation to genetic variation in the demise of competitors, the Neanderthal example gives us a good demonstration.

This long process of evolution, which included many cycles, was a process of accumulation of goodness and the gradual advancement of human nature. With this evolutionary process, such humanoid animals were becoming increasingly similar to humans. Generally, what should be formed and internalized first is first-order morality, that is, compassion and the sense of right and wrong, followed by second-order morality, that is, compliance with moral rules. The sense of right and wrong is the sense of justice. This includes two points. One is whether the income of an individual is matched with its contribution, and the other is whether the distribution of meat in a tribe is roughly fair. The first point concerns the ownership of goods. The basic rule is that the prey and the fruit will belong to whoever catches or picks them, which is the original concept of property rights. This is a natural result because the results of labor (or preemption) are naturally controlled by laborers. However, as a concept, it is human beings that began to form this as a practice. It is natural in its formation, but it is not natural as a prerequisite for exchange.

Adam Smith said, “Nobody ever saw one animal, by its gestures and natural cries signify to another, this is mine, that yours; I am willing to give this for that” (Smith, 1981: p. 13). A person’s sense of right and wrong first recognizes that another person’s labor income is deserved, and then if you want to obtain that person’s labor income, you must exchange your own equivalent goods for it. The

criterion for judging equivalence is that the other party agrees with your offer. Of course, robbery or deception is unacceptable. The mistake is to infringe upon or deny the income of others, which is unfair. It is more complicated to distribute prey fairly among a group. The simplest justice is equal distribution, but in fact, there will be deviations. If a member contributes a lot to hunting, he should get more. At this time, fair judgment includes how much tolerance there is for injustice. If the leader obviously favors himself or does not give meat to people without kinship to him, it may break the bottom line for the sense of justice. The sense of right and wrong helped a tribe establish a just mechanism for orderly exchange and distribution, so the tribe's development in turn consolidated the sense of right and wrong.

Compassion is to help others when they are in trouble, and Smith's definition of compassion is an extension or generalization of compassion. Compassion comes from the instinct of human sympathy. More broadly, from the perspective of empathy, compassion is not only the empathy of feeling others' difficulties but also the empathy of understanding others' needs. Thus, compassion can make people "feel" what others need. For example, a fisherman needs to eat rabbit meat. He can "feel" that a hunter needs to eat fish when he sees the hunter who catches rabbits. Therefore, he will exchange his fish for the man's rabbit. As mentioned earlier, exchange is also risky. After you give your goods to the other party, the other party may not give you the equivalent exchange. To overcome this risk, psychology draws on the instinct of sympathy and empathy. This instinct makes people more confident that the other party has a strong demand for the exchange and will not breach the contract after the other party delivers the goods. Therefore, the general tendency of human beings to exchange goods, based on the concept of "owning", is the result of the instinct of sympathy and empathy. Dogs cannot exchange goods, and in addition to lacking an "ownership" concept, there is no sympathy and empathy instinct. Unfortunately, Smith talked about exchange in the *Wealth of Nations* and sympathy in the *Theory of Moral Sentiment*, but he did not link the two.

The sense of right and wrong and of compassion is the "good sprouts" of first-order morality, while shame and respect are the "good sprouts" of second-order morality. When the morality that starts from right or wrong and compassion becomes normative, respect for moral norms will promote compliance, so that when actions deviate from moral norms, shame will arise to prevent such deviation. At this time, the object of respect and shame is no longer morality with a specific direction but morality as a rule. As Kant said, in morality, "the highest goal that people can never fully achieve" is "the love of the law" (Kant, 2016(b): p. 501). The mechanism of morality becomes more mature when people decide whether to act according to whether they conform to the moral law, regardless of the specific purpose of this law.

All the first- and second-order morality that is developed from these good sprouts, similar to the aforementioned process, evolves step by step until it finally forms a relatively mature moral system and tradition through many cycles

of variation, new equilibria, internalization and revariation. Perhaps the Neanderthals fell behind in natural selection precisely because they developed first-order morality but lacked the evolution of second-order morality, so they could not strengthen moral norms.

7. Moral Competition and Elimination

Since the change of behavior toward goodness happens occasionally in one of the many tribes, the new balance it brought was better in terms of group cooperation than other tribes, leading it to compete with these tribes. Their competition was mainly for survival-related resources. Since these tribes were the same technically and morally in the past, they also relied on the same resources for survival. When one tribe had an advantage in group cooperation, it would be able to obtain and occupy local resources more efficiently, while other competing tribes would be squeezed and could only obtain fewer resources. This would make the relationship between them tense.

If other tribes could not successfully imitate this evolved tribe, they only had two choices. First, it competed peacefully with the evolved tribe, continued to endure the reduction of resources brought about by high efficiency among the competing tribe, and gradually declined until its final demise. Another way is to engage in violent confrontation with the evolved tribe, weaken or eliminate them, and thereby defeat their competitor. However, there was no chance of success for the less evolved tribe. Because the evolved tribe improved their diet quality and physical fitness due to their high efficiency, its population increased, and the scale of their culture became larger due to their possession and consumption of more resources. In the event of armed conflict, it would also have an advantage. As long as they shared the same resources, the tribes that had not changed their behavior toward good would eventually die out, no matter what strategies they adopted. Perhaps that is how Neanderthals disappeared.

However, we still see a large number of chimpanzees and bonobos today. How could they not be eliminated by the humans who left them? The reason might be that the tribes that had evolved toward goodness had also changed their resource needs during evolution from the original resource needs of other tribes, thus reducing competition. For example, when human beings improved the efficiency of the hunt for large game through better cooperation, they differed from tribes that could not hunt large animals for food; the latter continued to hunt small animals, while the former mainly hunted large animals but did not exclude small animals. This means that although chimpanzees and bonobos were squeezed by human competition, there was still room for them.

Then, due to improvements in technology, the evolved tribes were faced with the prospect of fewer and fewer large animals. Human beings had evolved to have better cooperation and moved from their initial territory. Some people provided full-time protection for tribal products. The exclusive common property right system could be established so that the industry of domesticating ani-

mals and plants, namely, animal husbandry and agriculture, could be developed (North, 1991: pp. 95-98). People relied on their domesticated animals and plant products, and their ownership had been effectively protected, which avoided competition with other tribes. The number of animals and plants that people could enjoy had also increased greatly, which could be enjoyed calmly. As a result, humans no longer had to compete with chimpanzees or bonobos in hunting, and the latter would escape a fated extinction.

Since then, the evolution of human beings has moved along this path. When the development of agriculture and animal husbandry had been saturated, and human morality had evolved to enable more intensive trade, cooperation and long-term investments without return, commerce and industry would develop to avoid competition in agriculture and animal husbandry. Of course, the situation at this time was different from that when humans left chimpanzees. People working in industry and commerce also depend on the products of agriculture and animal husbandry to survive. They rely on the exchange of industrial products and commercial services for agricultural products and meat to obtain vital resources. Thus, agricultural and animal husbandry workers can also obtain industrial products and commercial services through exchange. They do not stay in a state of “nonevolution”. However, this relies on commercial transactions with higher frequency and density, so commerce itself may create more profit. Industry promotes the development of technology with its easier division of labor and specialization, making its efficiency much higher than that of agriculture; thus, some of those who were originally engaged in farming and animal husbandry can maintain the balance of income only by transferring to industry and commerce, leaving only a few people to continue to engage in farming and animal husbandry.

8. The Evil of Human Nature under the Premise of Good Human Nature

When human beings become more efficient due to the development of morality and the prosperity of human society, two fatal factors are buried at the same time, which inevitably develops the evil of human nature. One factor is that the wealth created by human goodness provides a material basis for some individuals' greed. The better human nature is, the more extensive and close cooperation between people will be, and the more wealth will be created, which will create more space for greed. This is the inevitable result of good human nature. The second factor is that human goodness ultimately achieves utilitarian results for society by promoting cooperation among people. We know from the beginning that cooperation is risky. Although this risk is basically overcome by people's morality, the more people abide by morality, the more likely they are to use the gap of cooperation to increase their own interests at the expense of others. For example, in a society with a high degree of credit, cheaters can take advantage of trust to gain personal benefits from the common belief that people will keep

their promises.

Therefore, the evil of human nature is attached to the good of human nature, which is a fatal defect that cannot be eliminated. If we believe in the goodness of human nature, it is bound to be accompanied by the evil of human nature, which good human nature can never eliminate. As Lao Tzu said, “The world knows that good is good, for there is evil.” It is precisely because evil exists by virtue of the existence of good that the existence of evil tells us that there must be good. This is not a technical issue, but a philosophical one. Therefore, we cannot expect that we can create a world where there is only good, but no evil; the more human beings eliminate evil, the better, and the more space they will create for the development of evil. Conversely, compared with good, evil is always dependent and derived. If goodness is eliminated, evil will also be eliminated. Therefore, from the perspective of philosophy, goodness is always the first and the basic nature of human beings; as a part of human nature, evil is relatively secondary. As Mr. Yichuan said, “All words about good and evil are good before evil.” This strengthens human confidence in the good.

When human beings increase the wealth of each individual through social cooperation, accumulating wealth, according to human self-interest, a person may think that the cost of seizing, stealing or cheating others for their wealth is lower than that of obtaining wealth through labor. When we say “possible” here, we consider that there is a factor that varies from person to person, which is the level of morality. Because robbery, theft or deception violates moral rules, shame should prevent such behavior. However, the degree of compliance with moral rules is different. For various reasons, such as being born to an incomplete family and lacking moral education, some people have low moral standards and a lack of shame and respect so that they do not fear moral laws. Driven by self-interest, they take immoral actions. Of course, there is also a cost-benefit calculation. When the cost of seizing wealth in violation of morality plus the mental moral cost is less than the wealth seized and less than the cost of moral ways to obtain equal wealth, he or she will take this evil action. The formula is as follows:

$$\text{Wealth seizure cost} + \text{moral cost} \begin{cases} < \text{Wealth gained} \\ < \text{The cost of behavior to morally obtain equal wealth} \end{cases}$$

Two factors have a relatively great impact. First is wealth; that is, as people’s moral standards improve, social cooperation is strengthened and deepened, and more wealth is generated, which will bring greater space for evil desires. Second, the higher the moral level, the higher the moral cost of doing evil. Under a certain level of social prosperity, people with different moral levels have different tendencies to do evil. People with low moral standards have low moral costs and are more likely to do evil. This, of course, brings about the need for moral education.

Another key point in support of the fact that good inevitably brings evil is that the form of good behavior is communication, cooperation, common adherence to rules, mutual help and mutual respect among people. The absence of these creates the possibility of evil. Pro-social cooperation depends on communication. Human beings have created language to promote communication, which also brings space for lying and cheating. Language is a simple way to describe specific situations, but because it is a set of symbols different from specific situations, it may distort the description and transmit false information. It is consequently no surprise that Xunzi called culture a “pseudo” phenomenon. Other examples include counterfeit currency since currency facilitates transactions; since religion has the function of moralizing and purifying the mind, some people will use the cover of a clerical identity and the confession of believers to coopt vulnerabilities and commit sexual assault. When the government provides public goods and improves the safety and efficiency of society, some people will steal government positions, abuse power and seek private interest. Every step of human progress in morality involves the risk of being used and betrayed. Evil follows goodness closely.

Of course, if we find that evil follows goodness, we will also find ways to reduce the space for evil to use good. For example, the principle of freedom of expression is used to form linguistic conditions that eliminate the space for lies as much as possible; to reduce the popularity of counterfeit currency, currency printing methods or currency verification techniques can be improved. Public opinion and supervision and a fair justice system can restrain administrative abuses of power and corruption. This can certainly reduce the loopholes of good deeds that can be used for evil deeds, but it is impossible to completely eliminate such loopholes. This is the destiny of mankind and the universe.

Another possibility is that evil deeds consume all the benefits brought by good efforts, making the cooperation promoted by moral behaviors unprofitable and preventing people from carrying out such cooperation. This is equivalent to the situation before the evolution of morality. People will be unwilling to cooperate because the risks and costs will be too high, resulting in social stagnation in the original state or elimination by groups more evolved in morality. In principle, this is the difference between humans and chimpanzees. Therefore, to stabilize the progress of good, people must fight against evil. Simultaneously, they must try not to stay in the chimpanzee’s position rather than completely eliminate evil.

9. Conclusion

As many sages have said, human nature is self-interested at its most fundamental, which is what Xunzi called “nature”. However, self-interest is not necessarily evil. For an individual, within the proper scope, self-interest is necessary to maintain life. Similarly, for individuals, a self-interested nature can also develop morality or good humanity. A morality that promotes cooperation between

people will improve the production efficiency and harmony of society. Individuals will share this social effect and promote their own interests. Moreover, a more moral society, because of its peace and prosperity, will eliminate more immoral societies so that the more moral individuals and their descendants can survive, which implies that genetic perpetuation is a form of self-interest. Therefore, if human nature is self-serving, goodness is the main part of human nature. If we compare human beings with nonhuman animals and call that which all human beings have, which nonhuman animals do not, “human nature”, then human nature is good.

The conclusion that human nature is good is exciting because it means that no matter how much suffering human beings experience, how many evils there are, it is good that ultimately overcomes evil. This “happy ending” enables us, as human beings, to build up the confidence that we can build a better world and enhance our courage to fight for it.

However, when we say “human nature is good”, it does not mean that every one of us has morality, but that we have “good sprouts”, that is, we have a good foundation and can be educated into a moral person. It is great to have good sprouts and be educated. A chimpanzee has no such sprouts and cannot be educated. As a whole, the fact that humans “can be educated” is the main reason why we have confidence in other humans. “Educated” does not mean that everyone’s moral improvement is passive, and he or she can also educate himself or herself. Confucianism calls this “self-cultivation”, which begins with his or her own good sprouts.

Of course, when we are glad that we have good sprouts and that good will eventually overcome evil, we should not forget that it is good that creates space and opportunities for evil and makes evil a haunting nightmare in human life. Therefore, just because human nature is good, we should not assume that evil will not happen or have high expectations of human society. Based on the goodness of people and the general good of the universe, we should suppress and overcome the disasters caused by evil deeds through the exploration and publicity of good sprouts.

If the goodness of human nature does not need to be developed by the good sprouts of human beings and if the goodness of human nature does not create space and opportunities for evil deeds, people will not need any effort to obtain a perfect world. This is, however, not good and not perfect. Because goodness is a process, if there is no process attempting goodness, there will be no goodness from the process; that is, evil will be produced instead. If there is no effort toward a perfect world, there will be no perfect process, and it will not produce a perfect world.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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