

Must We All Have a Vast, Flowing *Qi*? Revisiting *Mengzi* 2A2

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ABSTRACT: The concept of a “vast, flowing *qi*” is often discussed as one of the core elements constituting Mengzi’s argument for the innate goodness of human nature. This paper discusses the problem of coherence of early Chinese texts and, reading *Mengzi* chapter 2A2 as a coherent literary composition, concludes that a “vast, flowing *qi*” is not a quality of humans in general but one that serves to distinguish Mengzi as a supreme exemplar of the Ru tradition.

Keywords: philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, *Mengzi*, *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣

The concept of a “vast, flowing *qi*” (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣) appears only once in *Mengzi*, in chapter 2A2. Yet, it has come to be viewed as one of the core ideas of *Mengzi* philosophy, along with the belief in an innate human tendency towards moral goodness as well as the mental faculties of compassion, shame, deference, and judgment, which provide the basis for the ethical qualities of humaneness, propriety, etiquette, and wisdom-capacities shared by all humans.^① Since these core ideas of *Mengzi*’s philosophy are often mentioned together, it is tempting to assume that they all apply to all

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① The phrase *haoran zhi qi* is not attested anywhere else in early Chinese literature, but it is quoted already (and verbatim as it appears in *Mengzi* 2A2: “孟子曰我善養吾浩然之氣”) in the Han compendium *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, in chapter 77, “Conforming to the Way of Heaven” (“Xun tian zhi dao” 循天之道), so we can safely assume that it has been seen as a signature idea of Mengzi from early on. *Chunqiu fanlu yi zheng* 春秋繁露義證, comp. Su Yu 蘇輿 (1874–1914) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 447, or *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin* 春秋繁露逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994), 16.6/76/22. *Mengzi* is cited here and in the following after *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義, comp. Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987).

humans equally. In what follows I propose a reading of *Mengzi* 2A2 that understands *haoran zhi qi* as an exceptional quality that is by no means shared by humans in general but is a trait belonging only to the most accomplished exemplar of Ru 儒 ethics.

Due to the relative lack of sustained, systematic argumentation in the “masters texts” from early China, writing the history of Chinese philosophy often takes the shape of a selective discussion of core passages from these texts that pertain to the same topic. Systematizing accounts of the philosophy of a particular master are constructed by arranging representative extracts from the texts attributed to that master in an order that in aggregate provides a more complete position on the philosophical issues under discussion than the individual chapters from which the extracts are cited would yield, thus making these extracts building blocks of a consistent philosophy.

To name the single most influential English-language history of early Chinese thought as an example, A. C. Graham states explicitly that “Mencius’ case for the goodness of human nature has to be assembled from separate discourses, some concentrated after the Kao-tzu dialogues, others scattered over the whole book.”^① Evidently understanding his endeavour as the reconstruction of one larger, consistent philosophical argument, Graham starts with an account of the Mengzi-Gaozi dialogues in chapter 6A; then he constructs the basic argument for the innate spontaneous human inclination towards goodness from the claim in 2A6 that everyone would save a child from falling into a well, a claim that is further elaborated in the idea of the four beginnings (*si duan* 四端). Graham then moves on to chapter 4A27, where the inclination towards goodness is described as spontaneous, just like the irresistible urge to move one’s body that music evokes in humans. He then proceeds to 2A2, regarding it as complementing the view that moral growth is spontaneous with the insight that moral energy belongs to the *qi* and “that moral growth can be hindered by trying to force it.”^②

The Author Is Dead

The manner of reconstructing a consistent philosophical position from separate discourses described above, confronts us with a number of difficult questions: Whose philosophy does such a method reconstruct? Can we read the compilation *Mengzi* as the collected wisdom of the thinker and teacher Meng Ke 孟軻?^③ Is *Mengzi* the prime and only source from which to reconstruct this master’s

① A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 125.

② Graham, *Disputers*, 127 (Graham lays out his reconstruction of Mengzi’s argument on pp. 125–32).

③ Throughout this article I will refer to the book 孟子 as *Mengzi*, in italics. Whenever I do not italicize the name Mengzi, I refer to the literary figure presented in the book *Mengzi* or any other text and stay agnostic with regard to the relationship of the historical person Meng Ke on the one hand and the literary figure Mengzi or the text *Mengzi* on the other hand.

philosophy?^① While the complicated process of formation and transmission of early Chinese “Masters Literature”^② has always been a subject of scholarly discussion, the practice of interpreting the texts as the philosophy of the master figure to whom the respective texts were traditionally ascribed still prevails, despite a shift in modern scholarship away from the masters towards the texts themselves as the carrier of ideas. In a recent account of eight philosophical books from early China, Paul Goldin reflects on this problem and helpfully explains: “I prefer to read each text *as a text*: not necessarily the manifesto of a school, nor even necessarily as the work of a single brilliant mind.”^③ He adds that the attribution to the masters after whom the texts are named “would not be helpful even if it were valid, since we know virtually nothing about the person who bore the name” and cautions us that “sustaining the fiction that each classical Chinese philosophical text is the product of a great mind ... encourages a presumption of philosophical coherence where there may be scant historical warrant for it.”^④ And yet the reception of the texts compiled under the name of a master as the work of a particular philosopher is a historical fact and has generated a rich commentarial tradition and informed philosophical works of later periods. This will require us to explore new ways of considering the role that the texts we study played in their own time and interpreting them accordingly, and such an exploration includes disentangling their understanding from later interpretations and uses.^⑤

The Author Is Not That Dead

Since simply ignoring the figures to whom the texts are traditionally attributed does not solve the problem, we will need to consider less literal understandings of the meaning of these “author” figures. To name just a few of the many important contributions to this vast topic: after Mark Edward Lewis’ description of how the “masters texts” create their author figures as well as Griet Vankeerberghen’s and Martin Kern’s study of the construction of author figures in the intellectual milieu of the early empire,

① Sources for the thought of Kongzi 孔子 are much more widely dispersed than those for Mengzi, as recently shown by Michael Hunter, who also discusses at length the complicated issues of dating, authorship, and ideological consistency of the text ascribed to the figure of Kongzi. See Michael Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

② Wiebke Denecke discusses the construction of Chinese philosophy after a European fashion beginning in the early modern period. See Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

③ Paul Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 2.

④ Goldin, *Art of Chinese Philosophy*, 3.

⑤ I have discussed this problem at more length in Matthias Richter, “Roots of Ru 儒 Ethics in *shi* 士 Status Anxiety,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137 (2017): 449–71.

especially in the *Shi ji* 史記, a particularly helpful approach is Heng Du's understanding of the author figure, in clear distinction from the producers of the text, as a paratextual device providing closure to the text, limiting its availability for appropriation and creative change, and making it an object of reception as the thought belonging to the master to whom it is now ascribed.^①

This distinction between author figure and originator of the text helps us recognize that what Goldin calls a "presumption of philosophical coherence" is primarily a product of the text's reception after its closure, rather than a quality it had from the beginning. Goldin's preference "to read each text as a text" is therefore sound advice, but it poses yet another thorny problem: what should we recognize as a text in the sense of a meaningful composition with a claim to coherence of thought, and what is more appropriately understood as a compilation of at best loosely connected textual units that perhaps needed to be combined into a larger text for primarily pragmatic reasons, such as organizing a large collection of smaller textual units to form a collection with an accessible order (in modern terms, a library)?^② The study of newly discovered original manuscripts of the late Warring States and early imperial periods promises to provide us, over time, with a clearer picture of the gradual process that led from typically short texts, written individually on a small number of bamboo slips, to multi-text manuscripts and to extensive compilations with a claim to forming a meaningful whole.^③

① Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Griet Vankeerberghen, "Texts and Authors in the *Shiji*," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 461–79; Martin Kern, "The 'Masters' in the *Shiji*," *T'oung Pao* 101 (2015): 335–62; Martin Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han," in *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*, ed. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 268–307; Heng Du, "The Author's Two Bodies: The Death of Qu Yuan and the Birth of *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句," *T'oung Pao* 105 (2019): 259–314. See also Li Wai-yee's discussion of concepts of authorship (in the sense of text production) in her "Concepts of Authorship," in *Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yee Li, and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 360–76. For a concise discussion of the great variety of possible authorial functions, see the introductory chapter of *That Wonderful Composite Called Author: Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Christian Schwermann and Raji C. Steineck (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

② The most famous and best documented example of such an endeavor is of course the imperial library project led by Liu Xiang 劉向 in the late first century BCE. For an excellent study of this process, see Xu Jianwei 徐建委, *Wenben geming: Liu Xiang, Han shu "Yiwenzhi" yu zaoqi wenben yanjiu* 文本革命：劉向，《漢書·藝文志》與早期文本研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2017).

③ To name a few recent studies: Zhou Boqun recognizes similar clusters of texts in newly discovered manuscripts and in transmitted literature. Xiao Yunxiao reconstructs a multi-text manuscript from three separately published groups of slips in the Tsinghua University collection of Warring States Chu manuscripts, resulting in a chronological sequence of texts. Kun You's study of the Mawangdui manuscript text "Shiliu jing" 十六經 reveals that the dialogic framing of the short military-political texts therein also uses chronology as an organizing principle. All three studies are cases of texts not originally composed as parts of a whole, for which the way they are organized to form (in modern terms) a book suggests a certain of content coherence. See Boqun Zhou, "A Translation and Analysis of the Shanghai Museum

Which of these scenarios applies—coherent composition vs. merely pragmatically motivated or entirely random compilation—can make a difference to the interpretation of any part of a book. Can we as readers find coherence in the text of an entire chapter, or does coherence extend only to parts of it, which would make the chapter a loose assemblage of smaller units that were composed independently of each other and not originally intended to form part of a larger text? Many studies of early Chinese literature, especially in the past two decades, have addressed the composite nature of early Chinese texts, as well as composition techniques and the literary means these texts employ to achieve their rhetorical goals.^① How we study the issue depends to a large extent on the nature of the text: while the content of a compilation like the *Analects* is so strongly decontextualized that the strongest element of coherence derives from the association with Kongzi and his disciples, the thematic essays of a compilation like the *Xunzi* suggest a strong coherence. Yet, that coherence may in part be provided by the boundaries of chapters and their thematic titles and, despite appearances, may only in part correspond with an actual logical coherence of the text's arguments. Speeches in historiographic texts, for example, can draw on originally unrelated textual material and be imbued with coherence by their narrative framing; compilations of anecdotal material can exhibit very different degrees of coherence.^② The compilation *Hanfeizi* contains several extensive collections, presented with very different degrees of systematic order.^③ In *Zhuangzi*, the anecdotes in the inner chapters exhibit a great degree of thematic

Manuscript **Wu wang jian zuo*," *Monumenta Serica* 66.1 (2018): 1–31; Yunxiao Xiao 肖芸晓, "Shilun Qinghua zhushu Yi Yin san pian de guanlian" 試論清華竹書伊尹三篇的關聯, *Jian bo* 簡帛 8 (2013): 471–76; and Kun You, "The Yellow Emperor as Paratext: The Case of Mawangdui *Shiliu jing* 十六經" (forthcoming in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*).

① See William G. Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 50–78; for studies of various literary forms and their rhetorical effect, see Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer, ed., *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); the articles by Wolfgang Behr, Joachim Gentz, Dirk Meyer, Ulrike Middendorf, and Christian Schwermann in the thematic section on "Komposition und Konnotation: Figuren der Kunstprosa im alten China" in *Bochumer Jahrbuch für Ostasienforschung* 29 (2005); and, most recently, Yegor Grebnev, "Aural-mnemonic Architectonics of Ancient Chinese Philosophical Texts," *Monumenta Serica* 68.2 (2020): 289–314.

② For an important recent study of the use of anecdotes in early Chinese literature, see Paul van Els and Sarah Queen, *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China* (Albany: SUNY, 2017).

③ While the "Shuo lin" 說林 chapters present their anecdotes without any apparent coherence or explicit order, Michael Reeve's doctoral dissertation attempts to discover systematic features in these anecdote collections. The anecdotes of the four "Nan" 難 chapters are less random in that they are presented as examples of specific teachings whose validity is then challenged. *Hanfeizi*'s largest anecdote collection, the six "Chu shuo" 儲說 chapters, is also the most systematic. Here, anecdotes are keyed as expositions to systematic catalogues listing principles of rulership, which lends the collection a high degree of thematic coherence. Heng Du gives a detailed analysis of the structure of the "Chu shuo" chapters and shows how that structure even supports the systematic aspect of the entire compilation *Hanfeizi*. See Michael Reeve, "Demonstrating the World: Mind and Society in the Shuo Lin Chapters of the *Han Fei Zi*" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003); and Heng Du, "From Villains Outwitted to Pedants Out-Wrangled: The

coherence, while later chapters are often seen as random compilations. This judgment regarding the later Zhuangzi chapters, however, may be affected by a prejudice derived especially from the labelling of Chapters 23–33 as “miscellaneous” (*za pian* 雜篇), while in fact their coherence might just be less obvious. There is a significant degree of thematic coherence to be found in at least some of those alleged “ragbag” chapters, which does make a difference to their interpretation.^①

In the case of *Mengzi*, it is hard to argue for a systematic arrangement of content throughout the compilation, but we can discern thematic clusters, more clearly than in the *Analects*, on the level of individual books (*juan* 卷), and a high degree of content coherence on the level of the individual chapters (*zhang* 章) within the seven books. A particularly coherent thematic cluster of chapters is found in the first half of book six, in which Mengzi lays out his case for the innate goodness of human nature. While most of these chapters use the typical form of scenes of teaching, in which a brief question sets the stage for the master to expound on the respective topic and some chapters even just present a short monologue of Mengzi, Chapters 6A3–5 employ the dialogue form in a meaningful way as an exchange of ideas, building up the respective arguments gradually. Especially in 6A4 the dialogue drives the argument forward.

Mengzi 2A2 uses a similarly sustained dialogical pattern. The entire chapter is phrased as a dialogue between Mengzi and Gongsun Chou 公孫丑. In such dialogues the parts of interlocutors are often very unevenly distributed—one interlocutor asks, merely triggering the lengthy instruction of the teacher figure; yet, Gongsun Chou here not only speaks repeatedly, but his questions also seem to determine the direction of the dialogue just as much as Mengzi’s responses. This dialogue, however, does not appear to be as straightforward an exchange of arguments pertaining to the same narrowly defined issue as the one in 6A4. In 2A2 the conversation keeps taking turns that seem to make it veer off topic repeatedly. This impression, which has caused much perplexity, of course depends on what we identify as the topic of the dialogue. If we approach 2A2 as a text that primarily serves to lay out Mengzi’s concept of *haoran zhi qi*, its composition seems indeed odd, and we may suspect that this apparent incoherence results in part from a compilation practice combining elements of Mengzi’s teaching that do not form an ideal fit. So it seems worthwhile to see if this extended dialogue offers another element of coherence that would reveal the composition as more meaningful.

Function of Anecdotes in the Shifting Rhetoric of the Han Feizi,” in *Between History and Philosophy*, 193–228.

① For studies that argue for such coherence, in the case of Chapter 26, “Waiwu” 外物, see Wim de Reu, “A Ragbag of Odds and Ends? Argument Structure and Philosophical Coherence in *Zhuangzi* 26,” in *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*; and, in the case of Chapter 32, “Lie Yukou” 列禦寇, see Matthias Richter, *Guan ren: Texte der altchinesischen Literatur zur Charakterkunde und Beamtenrekrutierung* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 217–26; as well as Matthias Richter, “Handling a Double-edged Sword: Controlling Rhetoric in Early China,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 68.4 (2014): 1022–24.

Reading Mengzi 2A2 as a Literary Composition

The text begins with the typical challenge put to ambitious idealists by those who doubt the practicability of their ideals. Gongsun Chou asks Mengzi (in a somewhat provocative tone, it would seem) whether he could remain unmoved in his heart (*bu dong xin* 不動心) if he were given the highest political office in Qi 齊, potentially elevating that state to the status of hegemon. When Mengzi affirms that, having passed the age of forty, he has attained this quality, Gongsun Chou's somewhat incredulous response — “If this is the case, you far surpass Meng Ben 孟賁!”^① — sets the tone for the remainder of the text. The following dialogue is phrased as a comparative characterization and evaluation of specific personalities, who function in this text as exemplars of certain qualities.

Mengzi dismisses the comparison with Meng Ben—a man about whom we know no more than that he hails from Wei 衛 and is an exemplar of bravery^②—with a cutting remark against Gaozi 告子, calling the quality of an unmoved heart “not difficult,” since even Gaozi had achieved it before him. Gongsun Chou apparently realizes that his comparison of Mengzi to Meng Ben fails to impress Mengzi. Meng Ben's kind of bravery or Gaozi's unmoved heart are not qualities Mengzi wants to be known for. When his interlocutor now inquires after the method of maintaining an unmoved heart, Mengzi continues to speak in the mode of evaluation and comparison. This seems surprising and has left Willard Peterson wondering that “Mengzi seems to go off on a tangent with examples of courage as an expression of an unmoved heart” and Peter Bol observing that the reader faces the question of whether the chapter is “an exposition constructed in service of an argument—a whole whose parts are intended to move the reader along a well-plotted course—or ... a dialogue that begins somewhere but soon takes leave of the main line as Mencius and a student move laterally to explore related subjects.”^③

I believe that it is possible to read the entire chapter as a well-crafted text in which all steps of the dialogue serve the rhetorical purpose of the text.^④ Comparing and ranking different types of personality

① All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own, but nevertheless indebted to D. C. Lau's excellent English rendering of *Mengzi* in Lau, *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 1970).

② Jiao Xun's annotation compiles the scarce information in early sources, which agree on the label “brave/courageous serviceman” (*yong shi* 勇士). See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 188.

③ Peterson describes how the chapter has puzzled readers in the following statement: “There is no obvious theme or thread. The responses by Mengzi to Gongsun Chou's questions seem to go off in a direction not apparently implied by the question. Some of Gongsun Chou's questions pick up on a phrase or a point made by Mengzi, but others seem to lurch off into a new topic.” See Willard Peterson, “Are You a Sage?” and Peter Bol, “There Has Never Been One Greater than Confucius,” in *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, ed. Pauline Yu, Peter Bol, Stephen Owen, and Willard Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 45, 49.

④ I agree with Stephen Owen, who reads the text as “the imitation of a dialogue,” rather than “as a true dialogue

is at the core of how Mengzi constructs his argument; it should therefore also guide our understanding of the concepts Mengzi expounds, and it may point to the main rhetorical purpose of the chapter.

The paratextual magnetism exerted by the master figure associated with the text invites the interpretation of every concept that the text presents as belonging to Mengzi. This may have contributed to an overly positive understanding of the concept of an “unmoved heart” as moral courage—an equanimity based on moral perfection. That Mengzi claims to have reached this quality at the age of forty further invites such a positive evaluation, as it recalls the alleged autobiographical statement of Kongzi in the *Analects* claiming that from the age of forty onwards he was not confused anymore—the stage directly preceding that of “understanding the commands of Heaven” at the age of fifty.^① Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) explicitly interprets Mengzi’s statement in that light: “Given such a heavy burden of responsibility, clearly his mind would be moved by some trepidation and doubts? ... That Kongzi was not confused anymore at the age of forty also refers to an unmoved heart.”^② This has obviously informed later interpretations. Such a high opinion of an unmoved heart would also be compatible with Mengzi’s claim to *haoran zhi qi*, but that would mean we are reading the text backwards from a preconceived knowledge of *haoran zhi qi* as the most prominent feature of that chapter. If we “read the text as a text,” as Goldin put it, and follow the logic of the dialogue, it becomes clear that an unmoved heart is not seen as a particularly valued quality by Mengzi, who has explicitly dismissed it as “not difficult” to attain; it is in fact a broad notion that can reach from stubbornness or obtuseness in a less enlightened person to morally founded equanimity and steadfastness in someone as accomplished as Mengzi.

This makes the manner in which Mengzi responds to Gongsun Chou’s question about the method of maintaining an unmoved heart not a digression; given the simplicity of Gongsun Chou’s understanding of the concept, Mengzi proceeds in two steps. He first demonstrates that an unmoved heart can be different things by providing examples of different types of courage: the fundamentalist, uncompromising type of Beigong You 北宮黝, who is unflinching in the face of even the most powerful, and, in contrast, the pragmatic Mengshi She 孟施舍, who is prepared to accept a defeat as a victory, if circumstances demand it.^③ Realizing that one cannot always win, Mengshi She does not

which has a ‘drift,’ guided by Gongsun Chou’s questions,” as Peterson seems to do, or as a strict argument, as Bol does. See Owen in *Ways with Words*, 54–55.

① *Lunyu* 論語 2.4: “四十而不惑，五十而知天命。”

② “任大責重如此，亦有所恐懼疑惑而動其心乎？... 孔子四十而不惑，亦不動心之謂。” *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注, comp. Zhu Xi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 229.

③ Opinions about this name vary. Some consider Meng 孟 as the family name, 舍 as the personal name, and 施 as a meaningless syllable; others read Mengshi She, yet others Meng Shishe. See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 191–92. The text itself uses She alone as personal name, and—although it is possible that She is short for the personal name Shishe—a bisyllabic family name Mengshi appears more likely.

occupy himself with fearful calculations of his adversaries' strength but relies solely on his ability to be fearless.

In a second step Mengzi compares these two examples, which provide only external manifestations of courage without saying anything about the mental state underlying it, with two prominent Confucius disciples, Zengzi 曾子 and Zixia 子夏. It is important to note that we are provided with examples of the superior type of courage that rests on particular inner qualities only from the circle of Confucians. In Zengzi's case, this quality is a restraint that is committed to principles (*shou yue* 守約) and based on self-reflection (*zifan* 自反).^①

Gongsun Chou's next question is again preoccupied with comparisons: how does Mengzi compare his own unmoved heart to Gaozi's? In reply, Mengzi cites Gaozi's views on how language, heart, and *qi* interact and says that he only agrees in part with Gaozi's assertions:

[Gongsun Chou] asked, "May I ask to hear how your unmoved heart compares to Gaozi's?" [Mengzi replied,] "Gaozi says, 'One does not seek in one's heart what one cannot obtain in language, nor does one seek in one's *qi* what one cannot obtain in one's heart.'—Not to seek in one's *qi* what one cannot obtain in one's heart is admissible, but not to seek in one's heart what one cannot obtain in words is inadmissible."

曰：“敢問夫子之不動心，與告子之不動心，可得聞與？”“告子曰：‘不得於言，勿求於心；不得於心，勿求於氣。’不得於心，勿求於氣，可；不得於言，勿求於心，不可。”^②

Intuitively, the point concerning language and heart seems to state the obvious: language is necessarily a simplified representation of an infinitely more complex reality; our manifold perceptions of as well as mental and physical responses to reality are so much richer than words can express. Literature throughout human history is a struggle with this limitation, and, considering the career that the sentiment “Language does not fully express meaning; writing does not fully express language” has had in Chinese literary history, we can be sure that Mengzi's position on that sentiment may have been widely shared.^③ If we take Gaozi's position in the sense that he believes that there is nothing to find

① *Shou yue* here describes an attitude of keeping one's commitments, being restricted by something, presumably ethical principles, to which one feels committed. The translation of this expression as “firm grasp of the essential” (Lau, *Mencius*, 76–77) or “preserved something crucial ... preserving what is crucial” (van Norden, *Mengzi*, 36–37) are clearly inspired by Zhu Xi's gloss “約，要也，” which gets closer to the mark when he characterizes Zengzi's practice as “self-reflection, conforming to the Pattern (of the Way), and having an exceptional grasp of the essential in his commitments” (反身循理，所守尤得其要也). *Si shu zhangju jizhu*, 230.

② *Mengzi zhengyi*, 194.

③ The *locus classicus* of this statement is in the *Xici* 繫辭 commentary of the *Zhou yi* 周易: “言不盡意，書不盡言。” *Zhou yi zhushu*, in *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, comp. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 7.70.

in our hearts that could not be said in words, it would imply that Gaozi is not aware of the common human experience that we cannot express everything on our mind, which seems to assume too much of simple-mindedness on Gaozi's part. But his statement would be much less absurd if we understand it to say that one *should* not pursue those things in our heart-mind that are not obtainable in language. This would imply that we cannot be guided by our hearts in our social behaviour, and would fit Mengzi's verdict later in this dialogue that "Gaozi has never understood propriety, because he considers it as external."^① If propriety is external, we can only acquire it through social conditioning, which is reliant on transmitting norms via communicable concepts, i.e., language.^② Mengzi has to reject this doctrine of Gaozi's in order to develop the core element of his teaching in this chapter, i.e., the somatic basis of morality. He continues to explain his point:

"Our will is the commander of our *qi*, and our *qi* is what fills our body. Where the will goes, the *qi* follows. Hence it is said, 'Hold fast to your will and do not violate your *qi*.'" [Gongsun Chou asked,] "As you had already said 'Where the will goes, the *qi* follows,' why did you add to this 'Hold fast to your will and do not violate your *qi*'?" [Mengzi] replied, "When the will is focused,^③ the *qi* is moved by it, and when the *qi* is focused, the will is moved by it. When one scrambles and stumbles, this is the *qi* adversely affecting one's heart."

“夫志，氣之帥也；氣，體之充也。夫志至焉，氣次焉。故曰：‘持其志，無暴其氣。’” “既曰‘志至焉，氣次焉’，又曰‘持其志無暴其氣’者，何也？”曰：“志壹則動氣，氣壹則動志也。今夫蹶者趨者，是氣也，而反動其心。”^④

Mengzi explains the interrelatedness of our will (as the directional activity of our heart-mind) and our *qi* as its somatic basis: our will needs to be supported by a stable energetic constellation and its healthy flow in our body, and plays a part in maintaining this healthy flow. If the relationship between

① “告子未嘗知義，以其外之也。” *Mengzi zhengyi*, 202. Chapter 6A4 begins with this position presented as Gaozi's direct speech: “告子曰：‘食色，性也。仁，內也，非外也；義，外也，非內也。’” In Lau's translation: “Gaozi said, ‘Appetite for food and sex is nature. Benevolence is internal, not external; rightness is external, not internal.’” Lau, *Mencius*, 161; *Mengzi zhengyi*, 743.

② This hypothetical calculation of Gaozi of course does not account for non-verbal forms of teaching emphasized in other early Chinese texts, such *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* (in particular chapters 5, 23, 43, 56, 73) and later also in religious traditions, including Buddhism.

③ Jiao Xun explains that Zhao Qi's 趙岐 interpretation of *yi* 壹 as “blocked” (*bise* 閉塞) is based on reading the character 壹 to stand for the word *ye* 噎 (‘blocked/jammed’), which the *Shuowen jiezi* explains as “food stuck in the throat” 噎飯窒也。Zhu Xi's interpretation of the word to mean *zhuan yi* 專一 (“concentrated, focused”) is far more convincing. See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 197 and *Si shu zhangju jizhu*, 231.

④ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 196–97.

qi and will is intact, focusing our will enables us to direct our *qi*, and our *qi* will support the activity of our heart and help us achieve our ambitions. If, however, we hold on to our will to an unhealthy extent that erodes its somatic basis (in other words, if we pursue a goal to the point of physical exhaustion), then this mutually beneficial relationship breaks down. This is also true in the other direction: if the physiological response to our will and to external stimuli takes over and we lose mental control of the relationship (in other words, if we operate in auto-pilot mode), then we stumble, and our heart is moved in an untoward manner. With this Mengzi has sufficiently explained the “mechanics” of an unmoved heart and gone far beyond Gongsun Chou’s naïve initial understanding of this quality as mere bravery, but it is only in the following self-characterization, at Gongsun Chou’s request, that Mengzi connects these “mechanics” with his own moral values, thus expounding on his concept of, in Mark Csikszentmihalyi’s words, “material virtue.”^① And this passage, for which 2A2 is best known, is Mengzi’s response to Gongsun Chou’s question about his specific strengths:

[Gongsun Chou said,] “May I ask what your strengths are, Master?” [Mengzi] replied, “I know how to understand speech, and I am good at nourishing my vast, flowing *qi*.”^② [Gongsun Chou] said, “May I ask what you mean by ‘vast, flowing *qi*’?” [Mengzi] replied, “This is difficult to say. It is a *qi* that works with the utmost greatness and firmness. If it is nourished with uprightness and left unharmed, it will pervade Heaven and Earth; it is a *qi* that lives on matching propriety with the Way. If it did not, it would starve. It is something that is generated by a steady accumulation of proper actions; it cannot be acquired forcibly in one bout of proper action. If there is anything in one’s actions that upsets one’s heart, it will starve. Therefore I say that Gaozi has never understood propriety, because he considers it as external. One must make an effort for it, but one should not try to correct it. One’s heart should not neglect it, but one should also not urge on its growth. Don’t be like that man from Song. There was a man from Song who was distressed that his seedlings did not seem to grow, so he pulled them up. Wearily he went home and said to his family, ‘Today I am exhausted! I helped the seedlings grow.’ His son ran to have a look at the seedlings and found them already withered. Those in the world who do not help their seedlings grow are few indeed! Those who neglect their seedlings, considering any effort useless, just do not weed them. But those who help them grow pull them out. This is not only useless but positively

① Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

② Most English translations agree with D. C. Lau’s rendering of *haoran* as “flood-like,” which is a better match with the literal meaning of *hao* 浩 (to rise up, swell, surge)—a word probably cognate with *gao* 高 (high). The metaphorical use in English, as in a room “flooded with light” or a person “flooded with happiness/joy,” also speaks for that translation. Yet, the core connotation of “flood” that it is temporary and will eventually recede would seem to undermine Mengzi’s idea of *haoran zhi qi* as something that we can build up and aim to make permanent in us. I have therefore decided to follow Zhu Xi’s gloss: “*haoran* means ‘flowing in an exceedingly great manner’” 浩然，盛大流行之貌 (*Mengzi zhangju jizhu*, 231). For an overview of arguments for the alternative reading as “radiantly bright” (*haoran* 皓然), see Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue*, 152–56.

harmful.”

“敢問夫子惡乎長？”曰：“我知言，我善養吾浩然之氣。”“敢問何謂浩然之氣？”曰：“難言也。其為氣也，至大至剛，以直養而無害，則塞於天地之間。其為氣也，配義與道；無是，餒也。是集義所生者，非義襲而取之也。行有不慊於心，則餒矣。我故曰，告子未嘗知義，以其外之也。必有事焉而勿正，心勿忘，勿助長也。無若宋人然：宋人有閔其苗之不長而揠之者，芒芒然歸。謂其人曰：‘今日病矣，予助苗長矣。’其子趨而往視之，苗則槁矣。天下之不助苗長者寡矣。以為無益而舍之者，不耘苗者也；助之長者，揠苗者也。非徒無益，而又害之。”^①

It is only now—after what may feel like a meandering, but pedagogically efficacious back-and-forth between Mengzi and Gongsun Chou—that the master finally mentions the decisive qualities that constitute his moral fortitude. They are neither Beigong You’s pride, nor Mengshi She’s fearlessness, nor Gaozi’s commitment to a propriety that is external to the person and can therefore be fully expressed in language. Mengzi’s strength lies in nourishing the somatic basis of his virtue: a vast, flowing *qi* that results from the constant practice of a propriety that is matched not merely with the “best-laid schemes” of the Gaozi kind that would be fully expressible in language, but also with the Way, i.e., the underlying law of motion of our natural (and not just social) environment. Based on what Mengzi has explained earlier about the interdependence of one’s will and *qi*, he asserts that only by constantly practicing propriety, rather than forcing it in one big effort of the will, can we grow and strengthen our *qi*, the physical energy that structures and sustains us as individuals. So we cannot expect our heart (*xin* 心) to respond appropriately to challenges solely based on a resolve or will (*zhi* 志) that gets its direction from an external sense of propriety. Only if we have built up the necessary energy (*qi* 氣) in us that supports the psycho-physiological dynamics described by Mengzi earlier in the chapter, will we be able to respond spontaneously in the proper way. This expectation is illustrated convincingly elsewhere, in the famous example of the spontaneous impulse to save a child from falling into a well (2A6); the impulse is ready before we consider rules of behaviour or calculate how our action will make us look in the eyes of others. In Mengzi’s case, the *qi* that embodies propriety in us is developed to an impressive extent that “pervades Heaven and Earth,” implying that there is no situation in life that would compromise his propriety. With this Mengzi has fully answered Gongsun Chou’s initial question: not only would he maintain an unmoved heart were he to be elevated to the highest political office in Qi, but he would also maintain his propriety that derives from the Way of the cosmos and not just from the ways of humans: a propriety that generates—and is in turn sustained by—his vast, flowing *qi*.

The unquestionable importance of Mengzi’s concept of nurturing his vast, flowing *qi* tends to

^① *Mengzi zhengyi*, 199–206.

overshadow the fact that he presents it to Gongsun Chou as part of a two-fold argument.^① Doubtless, the exposition of *haoran zhi qi* as a personal quality of Mengzi is the culmination of the text, which becomes apparent in at least two ways: first, that the text here has for the first time ceased to speak in the mode of comparing individuals shows that with Mengzi we have reached the summit of our journey from simpler types of courage to higher degrees of perfection; second, the supreme importance of *haoran zhi qi* is confirmed by the fact that this is the only concept found in need of or deserving a guideline-explanation (*jing-shuo* 經說) structure: that Mengzi uses the anecdote about the farmer from Song to illustrate how the nurturing of the somatic basis of our morality cannot be rushed makes this point stand out as the main teaching of his dialogue with Gongsun Chou. Yet, despite its supreme importance, Mengzi presents his vast, flowing *qi* as the complement of another strength, namely his ability to “understand speech.”

[Gongsun Chou said,] “What do you mean by ‘understanding speech’?” [Mengzi] replied, “From biased speech one can understand wherein someone is obfuscated; from excessive speech one can understand by what someone is captivated; from heterodox speech one can understand where someone strays; from evasive speech one can understand where someone is at his wits’ end. Once [any of these faults is] engendered in someone’s heart, it will harm their policy; once manifested in their policy, it will harm their performance. Were a sage to rise again, he would surely follow my words.”

“何謂知言？”曰：“諛辭知其所蔽，淫辭知其所陷，邪辭知其所離，遁辭知其所窮。生於其心，害於其政；發於其政，害於其事。聖人復起，必從吾言矣。”^②

While nurturing one’s *qi* is concerned with the individual, “understanding speech” addresses the individual’s social context. Since Mengzi has his morality embedded in his person and is, unlike Gaozi, not restricted to an external morality that is based on verbal precepts, he is able, based on his deep understanding of human psychology, to understand speech not merely at the surface of the meaning of language; rather, he understands both locution and illocution and is able to recognize a person’s mentality and character by their manner of speaking.^③ It is important to note that Mengzi discusses the

① An example of an interpretation that ties *Mengzi* A2A into the same discourse as the Gaozi chapter is Manyul Im’s article on that passage. Im focuses on the aspects of self-control and courage, eclipsing the *zhi yan* 知言 part of the text altogether. Although an entire section of his article is devoted to the topic of language, he does not mention Mengzi’s classification of types of speech and their connectedness to political practice at all. See Manyul Im, “Moral Knowledge and Self Control in Mengzi: Rectitude, Courage, and *Qi*,” *Asian Philosophy* 14.1 (2004), 59–77.

② *Mengzi zhengyi*, 209–12.

③ Csikszentmihalyi (*Material Virtue*, 151) and Van Norden (*Mengzi*, 37–41) translate *zhi yan* 知言 as “understanding doctrines,” which rather obscures the political implications of the text and moves it to the area of Confucianism as a teaching tradition. Even Zhu Xi’s commentary does not compel such an interpretation.

weaknesses in a person's character with explicit regard to their potential to harm their performance in political service (政 ... 事). The sentences describing his diagnostic method stand out in their perfect regularity, and could well be a catalogue of didactic statements that existed outside of *Mengzi* and was incorporated in the text during its composition.^① The form of this catalogue is strongly reminiscent of a genre of texts widely used during the Warring States period and early empire in the context of recruiting officials—pragmatic texts concerning diagnostic methods of recognizing particular qualities of individuals, their suitability for civil or military offices, and the description of personality types. Traces of this genre, for which I have suggested the name *guan ren* 官人, can be found in many early Chinese texts, in their most complete form in the chapters “Wen wang guan ren” 文王官人 of *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 and “Guan ren jie” 官人解 of *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書; subsequently the genre is transformed creatively into a more systematic form by Liu Shao 劉邵 (early third century CE) in his *Renwu zhi* 人物志 in the changed social environment of the early medieval period.^② Given how widespread these texts were in early China, it is likely that the author of *Mengzi* 2A2 expected the audience to recognize the indebtedness of how *Mengzi* describes his “understanding speech” to the genre of *guan ren* texts. Noticing this allusion is crucial, because it will be relevant when we get back to the initial concern with the coherence of chapter 2A2 and to the question of how *Mengzi*'s concept of a vast, flowing *qi* can be integrated in a reconstruction of *Mengzi*'s philosophy, in particular his belief in the innate goodness of human nature in general.

After *Mengzi* has explained the pair of complementary strengths that distinguish him from others, Gongsun Chou's initial question seems to be answered exhaustively, so the reader would be justified to assume that the text is coming to an end here and may conclude with a conventional expression of thanks or admiration on the part of the interlocutor, as similar dialogues of instruction or persuasion in early Chinese texts often do.^③ But over one third of the chapter is yet to come. While the dialogue

① In each sentence pairing a manner of speaking X with an underlying character flaw Y, the respective words X and Y are linked in assonance (see the Old Chinese and Late Han Chinese pronunciations as reconstructed by Axel Schuessler), and the endings of the four sentences are in assonance as well, as in an a-b-a-b rhyme pattern: 訛 *pai(h) > piɑi ... 蔽 *pets > piɑs; 淫 *lɑm > jim ... 陷 *grɑms > gem; 邪 *s-la > zia ... 離 *rai > liai; 遁 *lũns > duən ... 窮 *guŋ > guŋ.

② A brief characterization of these texts is found in Matthias Richter, “Self-cultivation or Evaluation of Others? A Form-critical Approach to *Zengzi li shi*,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* LVI.4 (2002): 879–917. For a fuller discussion and more examples of the genre, see Richter, *Guan ren: Texte der altchinesischen Literatur zur Charakterkunde und Beamtenrekrutierung*.

③ See, for example, Yan Hui's response to Kongzi's instruction in *Lunyu* 12.1: “Although I am not quick-witted, I shall strive to follow your instructions” (回雖不敏，請事斯語矣) or Zhonggong's identical reaction in *Lunyu* 12.2. Another conventional gesture is that of Zixia after Kongzi's instruction, as expressed in nearly identical form in *Kongzi jiayu* and *Liji*. In *Kongzi jiayu* the scene ends: “Zixia agitatedly jumped to his feet, stood with his back against the wall and said, ‘Would your disciple dare not to respectfully receive this (instruction)?’” (子夏蹶然而起，負牆而立，曰：弟子敢不承乎?). *Kongzi jiayu zhuzi suoyin* 孔子家語逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching (Hong Kong:

in the first third of the chapter progresses in a mode of comparing exemplary individuals, homing in on Mengzi's self-characterization, the last third of the chapter now opens up the perspective again and returns to the mode of comparisons: Gongsun Chou expresses his admiration for Mengzi by naming some of Kongzi's disciples as exemplars of different rhetorical strengths and by mentioning that Kongzi himself, who possessed all of these strengths, nevertheless downplayed his abilities with regard to rhetoric. Thus, Mengzi, Gongsun Chou concludes, must be a sage. This gives Mengzi, who has put that idea in Gongsun Chou's head in the first place—and in a not too subtle way (“If a sage were to rise again, he would surely follow my words”), the opportunity to display the conventional deference to Kongzi, while at the same time insinuating that he is at the very least a second Kongzi. He goes on to cite a dialogue between Zigong and Kongzi in which even Kongzi refused to claim sagehood for himself. Both interlocutors here use statements familiar from the *Analects*, suggesting that these must have been established elements of Ru tradition already.^①

When Gongsun Chou now wants to continue his comparisons within the Ru teaching milieu, comparing the specialist type of Ru scholar (“Zixia, Ziyou, and Zizhang all embodied one aspect of sagehood”) with the universalist type (“Ran Niu, Minzi, and Yan Yuan possessed all aspects to a small extent”) and asking with which type Mengzi would be content, Mengzi asks him to put the topic aside and moves from the narrower milieu of Ru scholars to considering Kongzi, and thus implicitly himself, in a wider historical scope and with regard to engagement in government. In this, the manner in which the text approaches its end mirrors how it began. Both parts speak in the form of comparing pairs of figures, here Bo Yi 伯夷, whose sense of loyalty would allow him only to serve his own lord and assist in governing his own people, is compared with Yi Yin 伊尹, whose sense of responsibility would make him follow the call of duty under any circumstances. These two types, each flawed in his own

Shangwu yinshuguan, 1992), 52.9. The *Liji* parallel is identical, except for the verb “remember” (*zhi* 志), where the other text says “receive” (*cheng* 承).“ See *Liji zhuzi suoyin* 禮記逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1992),139.6–7.

① Gongsun Chou's characterization of Kongzi disciples that “Zaiwo and Zigong excelled in persuasive speech; Ran Niu, Minzi, and Yan Yuan excelled in talking about virtuous conduct.” (宰我、子貢善為說辭，冉牛、閔子、顏淵善言德行) is largely consistent with the catalogue of exemplars of certain qualities in *Lunyu* 11.3: “Virtuous conduct: Yan Yuan, Min Ziqian, Ran Boniu, Zhonggong. Speech and conversation: Zaiwo, Zigong. Government affairs: Ran You, Jilu. Culture and learning: Ziyou, Zixia” (德行：顏淵、閔子騫、冉伯牛、仲弓；言語：宰我、子貢；政事：冉有、季路；文學：子游、子夏); the only difference is that *Mengzi* changes the quality of “virtuous conduct” (德行) to “talking about virtuous conduct” (言德行), which could appear comical were it not so easy to recognize as a necessary adaptation to fit the topic of rhetorical skills in the *Mengzi* dialogue. Mengzi's characterization of Kongzi as “not getting enough of learning nor tiring of teaching” resonates with *Lunyu* 7.2 and 7.34. While in *Lunyu* it reads like a plain self-characterization of a teacher, in *Mengzi* it sounds like an established doctrine, ready to be matched with two other core values “Never to get enough of learning is wisdom and never to tire of teaching is humaneness” (學不厭智也；教不倦仁也). *Mengzi zhengyi*, 213.

way, are then contrasted with Kongzi, who would serve with uncompromising propriety whomever and whenever it is appropriate to serve. He then goes on to cite Kongzi's disciples asserting that their master surpassed even the legendary rulers Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 and was able to rank the kings of the past. The language used to describe Kongzi's ability to "rank the kings of the ages" (等百世之王) is again strongly reminiscent of the *guan ren* genre: "See his rites to understand his government and hear his music to understand his virtue" (見其禮而知其政，聞其樂而知其德).^①

Mengzi ends his speech by asserting (for the third time in this last exchange) that "in human history there has not been anyone like Kongzi," and with this the text has reached its conclusion. That Mengzi humbly rejects the comparison with Kongzi is of course an expected gesture, and as readers we can probably feel invited to consider him as even greater. It is safe to assume that the text was composed by followers of Mengzi, rather than by the master himself in bold-faced self-adulation, and one purpose of the text is its originators' claim to their master's supremacy in a Ru tradition that apparently had already split into competing factions.

The Coherence of the Chapter and of the Compilation

To return to our initial question regarding the coherence of the chapter: if we read the text as an exposition of the concept of nourishing a vast, flowing *qi* as one element of Mengzi's argument for the innate moral goodness of humans in general, then most of the text would have little coherence, and the dialogue would seem to take unnecessary, even unhelpful, turns. If, however, the apotheosis of Mengzi is, as I propose, the main purpose of the text, and his vast, flowing *qi* is considered an extraordinary quality that distinguishes this master from everyone else, then the pervasive thread of comparing, evaluating, and ranking individuals is at the center of the text's rhetoric and gives it a high degree of consistency. This mode of argumentation is the very element that presents the apotheosis of Mengzi with the credibility of something demonstrated and not just claimed, and it lends this apotheosis the authority of already well-established meritocratic ideas.

The cataloguing, comparing, and ranking of personality types and their qualifications are not just the quaint obsession of an ancient culture: they also perform the important function of breaking down a spectrum of an infinite variety of individuals into communicable and manageable segments. Cultures at any time and anywhere provide ideas about such sets of qualities and types of people as a framework in which to navigate the vast variety and unpredictability of fellow humans. Figures representative of certain qualities can serve as a shortcut to communicate ideas without having to spell them out in detail

^① See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 217.

(e.g., Zixia's expertise in exegesis, especially of the *Odes*; Zengzi's filial piety).^① The emblematic value of such figures typically derives from narratives with which the audience may be familiar to different degrees, depending on the position on a scale between canonical (within particular communities) and obscure that the texts carrying the respective narrative occupy. Even if these narratives fade into obscurity, the meaning of such figures stays fossilized in the lexicon of a language: calling someone a "doubting Thomas" (after Jesus' disciple in the New Testament) has a long history and wide scope, due to the global spread of Christianity, while calling someone a "faithful Dobbin" (after the figure in W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*) fails to communicate outside the smaller circle of people familiar with the novel. As the similarities between *Mengzi* and *Lunyu* pointed out above show, the emblematic values of figures in different early Chinese texts could be remarkably stable, especially if the texts are committed to a similar teaching tradition.

If we read *Mengzi* 2A2 as a text primarily concerned with asserting Mengzi's status among competing schools of the Ru tradition, rather than as a theoretical discourse about individual psychology and moral courage in particular, it becomes clear that the concept of a vast, flowing *qi* does not describe a quality shared by humans in general that we can use as one element among equals to reconstruct Mengzi's argument for the innate goodness of human nature. On the contrary, a vast, flowing *qi* of the magnitude described in this chapter is a quality that singles Mengzi out as superior to everyone else.^② This does not mean that what Mengzi says about nourishing one's *qi* is not compatible with the ideas laid out elsewhere in *Mengzi*. Yet, however compatible these ideas may be, discussing them indiscriminately as elements of one coherent philosophy results in a skewed picture.

To get a more precise sense of the applicability of individual ideas, it might be helpful to lay more emphasis on distinguishing the different types of discourse found in *Mengzi* and to reflect on their different functions and audiences. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of speech genres, forming an intersection of the better known notions of linguistic styles, rhetorical devices, and literary genres, may provide helpful inspiration to this end.^③ This undertaking (to rephrase Mengzi's description of nourishing his

① Categories such as the classical Four Humors or Four Temperaments functioned as a highly relevant ordering principle over many centuries and still inform patterns of thinking even today. Personifications of certain qualities (love, justice, prudence, etc.) were widely used in literature and visual arts. The fact that these largely fell out of use as ordering principles may diminish our awareness of their enormous historical significance. For a study of lists in early China in comparison with other ancient cultures, see Wang Haicheng, *Writing and the Ancient State: Early China in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

② Robert Eno also reads it this way, as "a detailed portrait of Mencius' psychology, in which it is made clear that Mencius belongs to a rare breed of men who have gained control over and focused their *zhi*." See Robert Eno, "Casuistry and Character in the Mencius," in *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 201.

③ See M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas

qi) cannot be achieved in one forceful act of interpretation, but will only lead to useful results in an accumulation of studies of the different types of text found in the compilations of transmitted literature and, more recently, the texts of newly discovered manuscripts from early China. While the materiality of the new manuscript sources may over time yield much useful information as to the social uses of texts, the reader of transmitted literature can only hope to glean some information from the features of the texts themselves. To give an example by drawing some rough, impressionistic distinctions between different parts of *Mengzi*, the dialogues with King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 at the beginning of book one are much more similar to the scenes of persuasion of a ruler in other texts than they are to chapter 2A2: the king's status as Mengzi's interlocutor lends dramatic effect, and his role in the exchange is restricted to asking a question, providing the cue for Mengzi to lay out his ideas unchallenged, probably composed for the benefit of Mengzi's followers involved in advising rulers. The Gaozi dialogues in book six, on the other hand, are more likely directed at an audience experienced in the dispute about philosophical issues in a more technical, abstract way. The roles of the interlocutors in the Gaozi dialogues are more equal, although they are of course set up in a way that makes Mengzi's arguments more successful. This kind of dialogue may have been used for training in disputes. The many chapters with pure Mengzi monologue may be less specific with regard to their possible audience. Chapter 2A2 presents a very different type of discourse, probably directed at Ru scholars in political office or with political ambition, as it discusses relevant ethical questions in this context and at the same time determines the status of important figures in their own tradition. The preceding chapter, 2A1, is strikingly similar to 2A2 in framing the dialogue as concerning the hypothetical case of Mengzi being in charge of the government of Qi and then discussing relevant aspects of the question in a mode of comparing emblematic figures as examples of different modes and qualities of exerting political power.^①

To summarize, reading *Mengzi* strictly as a literary creation, recognizing the different speech genres integrated in the compilation, and endeavoring to understand the underlying conventions and what they might tell us about their intended function and audience can help us, as modern readers, to gauge the applicability of the various concepts conveyed in *Mengzi*. Must we all, according to *Mengzi*, have a vast, flowing *qi* that fills the space between heaven and earth? This is not what Mengzi teaches Gongsun Chou. Mengzi extends his description of nourishing his vast, flowing *qi* to all humans as much as a Pavarotti saying "everybody can sing." It is doubtless true, but not every one of us will fill a concert hall and have the audience go home happy. Likewise, everyone can do their best to nurture their *qi* to make it strong and keep it in a healthy flow. It might just not fill the space between heaven and

Press, 1986).

① Speech genres of the same kind often form clusters in compilations. The Gaozi dialogues at the beginning of book six may be the most obvious one, but there are more, and their distribution as well as the structure of the rest of the individual books would merit a study in its own right.

earth, it might at times falter and not be sufficient to meet great challenges. Also, not all of us will be able to diagnose, as well as Mengzi, people's character and abilities by their manner of speaking. These special qualities of Mengzi are those of an exceptional political leader with great moral substance. The greatness of the example should not discourage us from aspiring to become as good as we possibly can in our own league.

“浩然之氣”是否人人必備？ “重訪”《孟子·公孫丑上》“不動心”章

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摘要：“浩然之氣”的概念通常被視為孟子人性論核心要素之一。本文討論先秦文本的連貫性問題，將《孟子·公孫丑上》“不動心”章作為一個前後呼應的作品來閱讀。筆者認為，考慮到“不動心”章的整體行文脈絡，“浩然之氣”並非人人皆有的普遍質量，而是一種孟子獨有的區別特征，以樹立其在儒家傳統中的最高典範地位。

關鍵詞：哲學 修辭 心理學 孟子 浩然之氣