OVERCOMING

OUR EVIL

Human Nature

and

Spiritual Exercises

in Xunzi

and Augustine

Aaron Stalnaker

CHAPTER ONE

Comparative Ethics

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If the term "religious ethics" is to be more than a catchall, a thoughtless expansion of Christian ethics to be as inclusive as possible, then the field of religious ethics needs thoughtful comparison of different "ethics" (in the plural). This comparison can and should go on both within and across religious traditions. Some of the distinctive challenges and possibilities of comparative ethics come into sharpest relief, however, in cross-traditional inquiry.

Indeed, comparison is central, perhaps even essential, to the history of religious studies as a discipline.[1] To talk about religions in the plural generates the problem of what "religions" are, and how they relate to each other. To address these issues, one must compare different religions, which itself requires the differentiation and relation of suitable objects of comparison.[2]

This chapter examines how contemporary ethicists have arrived at a similar point of intellectual departure, with analogous dilemmas and creative possibilities. It addresses four related topics in sequence: why comparison is desirable in religious ethics, how to conceive of multiple ethics, the strengths and weaknesses of various strategies of comparison, and why this study's proposed comparison has been chosen and framed as it has.

COMPARISON IN RELIGIOUS ETHICS

Comparison in ethics shares certain virtues with all other sorts of comparison: First, it can illuminate each of the objects compared in new and sometimes surprising ways, revealing easily overlooked details or themes; second, it provokes, tests, and develops various theoretical generalizations about the compared objects; and third, it can thereby help generate new theories about the substantive domain being considered. In ethics, for

example, comparing conceptions of courage found in the early Confucian Mencius and the medieval Christian Thomas Aquinas illuminates both of their treatments, leading to substantive insights into courage and refinement of virtue theory generally.[3]

The potential for theoretical creativity inspired by comparison deserves special comment, because this can occur in various ways, each of which is significant. First, through comparison, the concepts with which analysis is pursued are themselves put to the test and, if need be, revised or discarded. So, for instance, this study attempts to analyze and refine ideas of "human nature" and "spiritual exercises." But these are not just categories for ordering primary material from other sources; they are also topics of inquiry themselves. So to the extent that we can refine such concepts, we also gain greater purchase on the subject matter at hand. Through serious engagement with multiple significant accounts of a topic, comparison can help generate a hypothetical dialogue between various positions, creating a new dialectic that points toward positions that would have been difficult to arrive at without comparison. Explicating how this sort of fruitful juxtaposition can proceed, by exemplifying it as fully as possible, is a central task of this book.

Comparison also holds real potential for theoretical critique. Comparative work can be just as effective as historical and "genealogical" studies in bringing to consciousness the full range of consequences of common contemporary ways of framing ethical issues, and thus calling them into question.[4] Indeed, when comparison crosses traditions from different regions and/or cultural spheres, it promises not only skeptical questioning on the basis of surprising narratives of subtle corruption, or the unmasking of dubious origins, but also the articulation of genuine alternatives. These alternatives may or may not be fully satisfying in themselves, but they at least provide positive possibilities on which to base future constructions.

Comparison has always possessed these general virtues. In the contemporary West, and arguably the entire contemporary world, it takes on an added practical urgency as well. Religious diversity is a significant social fact, and it has shaped the modern West in deep and abiding ways, perhaps most notably by providing an impetus for the creation of secular modes of governance and theories of social and political order, which in turn have reinforced religious diversity by allowing it to proliferate more freely.[5] In the wake of changes in immigration law in the 1960s, the United States has become significantly more religiously complex, and this trend shows no signs of abating; similar if somewhat more limited stories could be told about other Western and non-Western countries.[6] These accelerating social realities mean that thoughtful engagement with neighbors from sometimes

vastly different religious backgrounds is becoming a recurrent necessity for larger and larger numbers of people. The challenge of successfully working with people with different religious and ethical orientations is fast becoming an essential component of responsible citizenship in contemporary Western democracies.

Comparative ethics is well positioned to analyze such interreligious negotiations, and also to engage the profound philosophical, theological, and ethical issues such religious plurality poses.[7] Just to mention a few, religious diversity sharpens questions regarding ethical universalism and relativism, how to understand and justly order religiously complex communities, and how to navigate multiple religious and social identities, as well as meta-ethical problems about the nature of moral norms. And sustained comparative attention to specific cases provides a way to base analyses of these broader questions in real data about concrete particulars.

In the past few decades, the most common general theoretical approach to disagreement about "comprehensive visions of the good" has been to develop social contract theories, such as those propounded by John Rawls.[8] But this move can relegate religious life to seeming theoretical irrelevance, as an accidental detail of individuals' private lives. Religious and other critics of liberalism have seized on this as a reason to denounce liberalism as a political theory, and as one more sign that modernity is a supposedly decadent epoch. Even democracy as a mode of governance can be suspected as hostile to religion and to coherent ethical practice.[9]

Partly under the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre's electrifying jeremiad *After Virtue*, both philosophical and religious ethicists have turned to virtue ethics as at least a complement, and sometimes a replacement, for abstract social contract–based accounts of modern societies, as well as the rule-centered moral theories that generally accompanied them in the past. As Jeffrey Stout has argued, however, this somewhat romantic turn to traditions of virtue as a preferable ethical alternative to modernity generates odd dilemmas as people try to square modern democratic commitments with the premodern social presuppositions of, for instance, Aristotle and Aquinas.[10] This dynamic makes it necessary to "retrieve" the ethics of virtue from these past thinkers, saving and amplifying what is still admirable and needed in such classic accounts without importing objectionable premises.[11] Provided that we face the seriousness of the difficulties in such attempted recoveries, I applaud this return to ancient conceptions of virtue, in part because I do not fully share Stout's confidence that the practices of democracy are sufficient in themselves to cultivate virtuous citizens, in the absence of religious or quasi-religious traditions of personal formation.[12]

Grappling with alternative regimes for the cultivation of virtue is a uniquely apt way to address contemporary needs for two things: the cultivation of richly grounded, virtuous human beings; and analysis of the problems and new possibilities created by societies that are culturally and religiously complex and disintegrated. Recovery efforts that stay within the West risk submerging or misconstruing the distance that separates the contemporary Western world, in all its complexity and diversity, from some previous European one. In contrast, a comparative study that addresses multiple sophisticated traditional accounts of personal formation provides a broader and more suitable context for thinking through the contemporary retrieval of past models, theories, and practices of personal formation. In a comparative study, the issues of religious disagreement and social complexity can never be massaged away or misleadingly written off as symptoms of corrupt modernity.[13] To be clear, I am not claiming that "the West" is somehow spiritually bereft or bankrupt, in need of enlightenment from "the East." I am claiming that the multiplicity of traditions now present and interacting in the Western world generates compelling intellectual and indeed moral problems that need to be addressed through disciplined comparative study.

The sort of comparative ethics I propose here provides a way to move beyond the simplistic tradition/modernity dichotomy that often seems presupposed in the analysis of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, while also answering Stout's rejoinder that democratic traditions and practices are themselves sufficient to produce excellent human beings, by addressing the striking power of various religious regimes of spiritual exercises to change and form people into ethical agents.

CONCEPTUAL DIVERSITY, NOT CONCEPTUAL RELATIVISM

At this point, a critic might justifiably ask for a fuller account of these "ethics in the plural" that one is to compare. How are they to be appropriately identified and adequately described and interpreted? This section develops a terminology for discussing different forms of ethics, while avoiding certain widespread philosophical mistakes.

For comparative ethics to have a compelling intellectual rationale, it needs to be able to articulate the possibility of social and conceptual diversity without collapsing into either naive universalism or pernicious relativism. If, for example, eighteenth-century Americans, ancient Chinese, medieval Maya, and contemporary Middle Eastern Muslims all share so much as human beings that their differences of thought and life are not

particularly significant, then there is no real point in attending to the differences in ethical conceptions between (let alone within) these groups. But few people who reflect carefully on these matters remain tempted by this possibility for long. The more frequent danger is some form of relativism, which attempts to cordon off distinct cultures or groups and insist that what each believes is "true for them." Versions of this line of thought tend to rely on dubious conceptions of cultures as unified, harmonious, and insulated wholes; have problems accounting for their own pronouncements (i.e., are self-referentially incoherent); and are in effect defensive operations against taking anyone's normative commitments seriously, because all such commitments are not only justified but "true for" those who hold them. (Moral debate becomes hard to fathom under such a model.) Comparative ethics would be pointless and indeed impossible if this sort of relativism were both intelligible and correct.[14]

So what way of framing the issues is most fruitful when trying to articulate social and conceptual diversity, without prematurely throwing up one's hands in despair? I will argue that three contemporary pragmatists and one antiempiricist cousin—specifically Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom, and Jeffrey Stout—are most helpful here. This might seem surprising, because Davidson, for one, is renowned for his demolition of "the very idea of a conceptual scheme," which has seemed to many to be exactly the tool to use when examining ethics across cultures.[15] But Davidson and especially the explicitly pragmatist Rorty, Brandom, and Stout provide a better way to address conceptual diversity through their discussion of alternative "vocabularies" for social life. Because these thinkers, especially Davidson, Rorty, and Brandom, are attempting to recast central debates in analytic philosophy of language, epistemology, and even metaphysics, I do not here attempt to give an overview of their projects as wholes but instead focus only on those ideas they develop that are useful for comparative studies of religious thought.[16]

This limited foray into issues of method in religious ethics might seem to be a digression, but in fact it is essential, because it helps clarify what is at stake in cross-traditional comparisons. Though it is true that all thinking is comparative in the sense that it draws distinctions between things that differ in some respects, while being the same or similar in others, there is still a difference worth attending to between comparisons within a tradition, and across traditions. Interpreting different religious ethics as different "vocabularies" for social life, that make both thought and action possible, provides a way to do justice to the interpretive challenges that come up in both sorts of comparisons (within or across traditions). It provides a way to think about

the subtle differences that obtain between, for example, Augustine and Calvin on sin and redemption, as well as both the subtle and the massive differences between Augustine on Jesus Christ and Xunzi on the *Dao* 道 or Way.

In sum, the notion of vocabulary I develop here is useful for comparative ethics because (1) it makes human conceptual diversity explicit, undercutting both naive universalism that takes a particular ethical terminology and set of moral "problems" or "questions" for granted, and the common relativism that freezes and hermetically seals vocabularies as if they were never used by real people acting in the world; (2) it provides the conceptual resources necessary for grappling with differences between ethics that share much, as well as those that might appear to share little, and everything in between; and (3) it shows that comparison, even of the sort attempted here, is not intellectually exotic but instead continuous with more typical language use and interpretive practice, even while it makes certain problems of interpretation more explicit. This conception of "vocabulary" is also useful for ethics generally, especially for a study of virtue or spiritual exercises, because of the way it intrinsically links discourse and theory with action and practice.

To summarize, in his famous article on conceptual schemes, Davidson is motivated by the specter of conceptual relativism, which holds that something might be true for one person or group but not for another, differently situated. (Thus God might really exist for Christians but not for strict Theravada Buddhists.) He endeavors to rule out this possibility by demonstrating the unintelligibility of the very idea of a "conceptual" scheme"; he targets this idea because relativists often use it to argue that truth is relative to different schemes. Davidson first suggests that the idea of a "scheme" is interchangeable with the idea of a language, so that incommensurability of schemes is equivalent to untranslatability between languages. He then attempts to show that we cannot make sense of complete or even partial untranslatability between human languages, because we cannot even identify a specific confusion or disagreement without an enormous basis of shared background beliefs; this background is required to be sure that we are even talking about the same topic.[17] So, particular difficulties in translation can only emerge when enormous amounts of belief are already shared. Thus, of particular importance, we must interpret strange others charitably, presuming that they are right about most things for it to be even possible to identify topics about which we seem to disagree.[18]

Terry Godlove refers to this line of thought as "content holism," but what he takes this to imply shows the dangers of relying only on Davidson. Godlove thinks Davidson's argument for content holism is important to scholars of religion because it "requires us to reject the notion that religions

are alternative conceptual frameworks," and moreover, "it requires us to reject conceptual relativism in any interesting form—say the imputation of divergent epistemes, paradigms, worldviews, forms of life, radical alterity, and so on."[19] This is sloppy. Of course we should reject the absurdly totalizing idea that religions are conceptual frameworks, and not only because we cannot make sense of the idea of neutral content that is organized differently by different schemes. Davidson does help to ward off conceptual relativism. But the idea that refusal of conceptual relativism implies that people from different cultures and religious traditions could never differ significantly in "worldview" or "form of life" is baffling and wrong, given any typical sense of these expressions. The issue here is the tendency to confuse the distinction between conceptual *relativism* and conceptual *diversity*; the latter can be sorted out and analyzed, sometimes only laboriously, but it is certainly quite real. And any assessment of the truth of religious beliefs, or even the responsible identification of certain beliefs and practices as competing with each other, requires heavy interpretive lifting and careful comparative bridge building. (These can and indeed should be construed as Davidsonian points.)

Properly understood, Davidson's theory of radical interpretation can be enlisted to help explicate cross-cultural understanding,[20] but it still tends to obscure certain issues that need to be highlighted in comparative studies of religious thought. Here I discuss two. Davidson is tempted by the idea that human languages, for the most part, share an ontology of simple objects that help provide the "background" before which particular difficulties of translation or understanding can be intelligible.[21] But exactly how much of an ontology particular languages share, from everyday objects to more abstract religious and social matters, is an open question, to be decided by actual inquiry, not transcendental argument. In particular cases, one might be able to identify quite significant differences in ontology, and ethics, and then continue from there with further comparative analysis.[22]

More deeply, the conflation of conceptual scheme with language is a mistake, as others have pointed out.[23] The metaphor of conceptual "schemes" can impute excessive coherence to the ideas of a culture, and it understates the expressive possibilities of any natural language. As P. M. S. Hacker argues, even if we grant "that there is no precise distinction between what is theory and what is pre- or non-theoretical," we can nevertheless distinguish between theories and languages. Languages are in no sense theories, do not fit or predict reality, and can frame many assertions that predict and describe reality in contradictory ways.[24] Put more generally, there are dramatic differences in the degree to which concepts interrelate in a whole language; in a particular milieu with competing schools of thought sharing

certain disputed terms; in an identifiable tradition (with its own debates, to be sure); and in the writings of a particular thinker, especially if she or he is a systematic one aiming to produce a coherent theory. Because it can be used for all of these, there is an inevitable looseness to the idea of "conceptual schemes," which helps somewhat to explain the power of the idea in multiple realms and the heat of the debate over its value.

Many of Davidson's critics on this issue wish to resurrect the terminology of conceptual schemes. But I fear that this way of speaking always brings with it hopes for the elusive "given" that lies beyond all such schemes and yet is somehow to be organized by them, which was one of Davidson's rightful targets all along. Comparativists need more precise and less misleading terminology.

A better candidate is the notion, pioneered by Rorty, of alternative "vocabularies" for different social and intellectual practices.[25] Rorty's central idea is that vocabularies are tools for doing things, for helping people to "cope" with reality, and should not be seen as more or less transparent mediums for "representing" reality.[26]

As Brandom notes, thinking about vocabularies as tools implies that vocabularies have purposes, and both he and Rorty vigorously contest the notion that all vocabularies must share the single overriding purpose of "representing reality" as it is in itself—indeed, they think such a purpose is dangerously misconceived. Instead, their antirepresentationalist pragmatism invites what Brandom calls "discursive pluralism." Different vocabularies will aim at different purposes (e.g., social justice, aesthetic fulfillment, or prediction and control), and we have no reason to wish that we might find a super-vocabulary that would be best for all possible purposes. Thus individuals and communities will make use of a variety of vocabularies on this account, and this is a good thing.[27]

More specifically, a vocabulary implies a set of related social practices. Brandom's inferentialist philosophy of language focuses on the practices of inference and reason giving that are essential to linguistic communication. More broadly, human practices in general are discursive, on this model, because they involve interpretation and understanding (of beliefs, intentions, states of affairs, etc.) that can only be conducted with vocabularies, that is, with roughly integrated collections of concepts that stand in complex relations of mutual entailment and interrelation.

The central linguistic practices of inference, commitment, and "licensing" that Brandom charts are normative, and indeed for both Rorty and Brandom norms of *any* sort are only possible for creatures that use languages. Vocabularies and the practices they make possible are shot through with implicit normative "proprieties" concerning everything from when it

is appropriate to use certain words to when it is right to take certain actions. These norms can be made explicit through reflection on and articulation of shared social practices, but the implicit norms and practical "know-how" of social actors are primary, at least on Brandom's model.[28] Brandom even defines "vocabularies" as "implicitly normative discursive practices."[29]

This practical context for vocabularies has important implications. New vocabularies make new purposes possible, and thus in some sense create or at least accompany new practices, new forms of life.[30] Rorty and Brandom seem to share a romantic, historicist conception of how such new vocabularies arise: Great geniuses "like Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel" struggle to create a new vocabulary that then "catches on" more widely, changing the way large numbers of people speak, interpret, and act. Charting the rise and fall of vocabularies becomes a mode of intellectual and cultural history.[31]

But Brandom's latest reflections on vocabulary change suggest that such a picture is overdramatized. As he writes, "Every claim and inference we make at once sustains and transforms the tradition in which the conceptual norms that govern that process are implicit." To apply conceptual norms by using concepts is at the same time to transform them, he thinks, because the use of concepts, of words, "consists largely in making novel claims and novel inferences." (He takes it to be an empirically verified claim about language use that the sentences uttered by adults are in large part unprecedented, simply because of the complexity of grammar and the size of our vocabularies.)[32] And this sort of habitual production of novel sentences "leads inexorably to changes, not just in the claims we are disposed to make, but thereby in the concepts themselves. To use a vocabulary is to change it."[33] So human beings, as linguistic creatures, are constantly creative in their use of language, with unpredictable results. Languages in use are languages in flux, albeit slowly, and change is an intrinsic tendency of languages, not merely the result of the intellectual labors of heroic "strong poets" of the past.[34]

One of the vague points in this line of thought is the relation of vocabularies to other vocabularies, and to actual languages such as English or Latin. Rorty speaks of vocabularies as "alternative language games," and he gives a variety of examples, such as "the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson's, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud's, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden."[35] Thus a vocabulary, on this account, appears to include a normative theory of a given realm (e.g., politics or physics), which is expressed in particular terms, which together reflect the implicit norms (and presumably some explicit ones) governing the use and application of the concepts involved. Thus a vocabulary for Rorty is more like a theory than a language, so that both Blake and Dryden, for instance, can use the English of their

respective eras. However, in addition to explicit theoretical commitments, such as claims about reality and standards of judgment or justification, a vocabulary would seem to include characteristic tropes, images, and narratives, adding up to a distinctive style of speaking, interpreting, judging, and acting. So a given language will probably include numerous vocabularies, some of which will rarely come into contact, and others of which might conflict, merge, or alternate as human beings use them to get along in the world.

Although Rorty is prone to speak somewhat antagonistically of "alternative language games" that are incommensurable in the sense of being irreducible to a single master vocabulary,[36] the relations between vocabularies would seem to be almost infinitely various. I develop a brief proposal below for modeling cross-traditional hermeneutics, but for now suffice it to say that problems of translation, interpretation, and judgment are best addressed in particular cases rather than by general accounts or methods that can then be mechanically applied.

Part of what makes vocabulary change possible, on this account, also helps to explain why it might be worthwhile to step back and adopt what Brandom calls the "vocabulary vocabulary" as a way to become more reflective about our own practices and commitments, and more productively inquisitive about other possibilities.[37] Brandom argues that "linguistic norms are special, in that being constrained by them gives us a distinctive kind of freedom." By agreeing to be constrained by the norms of a vocabulary, we give up freedom from constraint, or "negative freedom"; but at the same time, we gain "unparalleled positive freedom" to make new claims, conceive new purposes, and to do things that were previously impossible because inconceivable.[38] We cannot glorify God, for example, without learning a vocabulary of theism.

The recitation of cherished texts serves as one way to begin to learn a vocabulary, but on Brandom's account, as noted above, we most often use vocabularies to produce novel sentences. We thus "spend most of our time on untrodden inferential ground," where commitments implied by novel claims are in some sense "controlled" by the norms implicit in our vocabulary. But the process of speaking, of creating novel utterances and following out their implications, is not at all "determined" by those norms. These norms direct us in a general direction but do not map out a precise path in advance; moreover, they are not guaranteed in advance to be mutually reinforcing and coherent in all their implications.[39]

James Bohman has helpfully described this distinction as the contrast between "enabling" and "limiting" conditions for knowledge. Enabling conditions for knowledge are "variable and alterable," in contrast to limit-

ing conditions, which are "determinate and fixed." The fact that we can, however laboriously, bring any particular part of our own vocabularies to consciousness is critical if interpretation is to have any deep effect on our thoughts or lives. We are not "judgmental dopes," utterly caught up in our culture's roles, norms, and skills, and neither is anyone else.[40]

Just as the eye allows us to see, our normally prereflective command of various vocabularies current within our social setting allows us to act meaningfully and interpret others' actions. Nonskeptical conclusions follow from this understanding. The necessity of using shared vocabularies does not affect the status of any particular belief, skill, or interpretation; this "background" to interpretation is epistemologically neutral. Interpreting in terms of a vocabulary is seen as working within certain flexible constraints, rather than strict limits, and thus leads to fallibilism, not radical contextualism. Bohman calls this general view "weak holism," in contrast to the "strong holism" of the conceptual relativist.

This suggests that learning how to use new vocabularies, and seeing how they relate to ones we already know well, is continuous with normal, intrinsically creative linguistic practice. Even the creation of new vocabularies is not "abnormal," as Rorty once termed the process (in order to praise it), but a response to practical needs to cope with new people and previously unknown texts that speak in unfamiliar ways.

To sum up, vocabularies, languages, and the practices and cultures that go along with them function as enabling conditions. They make social activity possible and undergird any sort of reflective inquiry, whether our own or that of some thinker from the distant past. Though they partially constrain and direct, they do not close us off from each other, and they in no way preclude the very possibility of gaining understanding and knowledge about the world or other people. "Cross-cultural" interpretation is a refinement and continuation of the sort of reflective interpretation to which anyone must resort when it becomes apparent that the person they are trying to understand does not share their assumptions and vocabulary.

The "vocabulary vocabulary" has several virtues. It provides a helpful way to address and analyze conceptual diversity while steering clear of the problems Davidson diagnoses with "conceptual schemes," it highlights the practical context of all language use, and it helps account for my own position as an interpreter in a way that does not presuppose a radical disjunction between theorist and human objects of study.

Nevertheless, certain difficulties remain. First, the vagueness of the scope of "vocabulary" is a minor problem. On the one hand, vocabularies can be seen broadly as a social group's available repertoire of terms and skills that allow the pursuit of various more or less distinctive purposes; on

the other, vocabularies can be seen as the creations of particular people or small groups as they pursue and articulate more precise purposes, and practices and modes of life that support these ideals. I thus propose that, where necessary, the more general sense be marked by the term "conceptual repertoire."[41] This captures the sense of multiplicity and openness to varieties of use that seems appropriate for a species as disputatious as our own. It also avoids the imputations of unity, planning, and intentional structure that go with the predecessor notion of "scheme" but are inappropriate for the full panoply of the past ideas in any tradition, whether construed broadly as an entire civilization or more narrowly as a school or a religious group.

I further propose that a "conceptual apparatus" be used when we need to specify the more or less systematic formulation and use of elements of a cultural-linguistic conceptual repertoire by a particular thinker (or small group) in a particular tradition and cultural context. The notion of an apparatus focuses attention on someone's *constructing* a system of thought and practice out of available materials, and it implies both that such a system exists for certain ends and that it is put to use by people with productive results: the ordering of personal and communal life, in a way that is at least potentially sustainable, depending on the extent of its influence. Obviously, a conceptual apparatus is no more inherently unchangeable than a conceptual repertoire or culture, and some do become broadly influential in a larger society (e.g., those of Zhu Xi, Luther, or Calvin). And when we wish to highlight the continuity between these two ends of the spectrum of discursive practice, or when retaining a more general frame of reference, we can simply stick with "vocabulary."

The second difficulty is related, and it concerns the thought that vocabularies are tools with purposes: It seems misleading to think of whole vocabularies as having a single purpose, like a hammer; in my terminology, a conceptual repertoire would have numerous "purposes" that it can articulate and assist. A conceptual apparatus could be usefully thought of as facilitating a single overriding goal, such as the conversion of human beings to God or of ordering the world according to the Way. But even here, one might want to suggest that particular words are more like tools, and that vocabularies consist of numerous tools that together help one to become a particular sort of person or help a group become a certain sort of community (e.g., a guild of plumbers or painters, to follow out the analogy). This, too, seems to be a minor point, however.

A more significant issue concerns the metaphysical and meta-ethical presuppositions, if any, of this view. Rorty and Brandom make occasional crass remarks that mention religious belief and observance, only to link them to fanaticism; and in their more careful moments, they argue that

at the very least religiosity should be a strictly private affair.[42] In contrast, Stout's "mild-mannered" pragmatism, including his use of Brandom's inferentialism, highlights the social nature of rational justification and is more conspicuously broad-minded about which beliefs and practices might be rationally justified for conscientious believers, explicitly including religious ones.[43] Though Stout is concerned to argue, successfully to my mind, for the objectivity of moral norms on a purely social basis in a world without an Augustinian God, this does not constitute an argument against theological premises. Nor does the Brandomian inferentialism Stout champions imply that there cannot be divine purposes as well as human ones. It does imply that for human beings to come to understand such purposes, they would need to be articulated in a human vocabulary, or at least a vocabulary that humans could understand well enough to use—but this cannot be controversial for theists, especially for Christians. To borrow Stout's metaphor, the fact that it is possible to play soccer without a referee does not make it impossible to play with a referee.[44] In this book, I rely on the pragmatist notion of a vocabulary simply as a way of articulating human normative practices and recognizing what diversity they possess. None of this "vocabulary vocabulary" should be taken to surreptitiously decide substantive questions in the comparative philosophy of religions.[45] How human purposes and the vocabularies with which they are articulated and pursued relate to any nonhuman or transhuman aims, if there are any, is a question that the notion of "vocabulary" does nothing to settle.

STRUCTURAL CHOICES AND PRODUCTIVE COMPARISONS

Even the most patient and open-minded critic would continue to wonder whether this study can avoid the familiar weaknesses of comparative studies that I have not yet addressed directly, and which the terminology of different vocabularies for ethics does not address by itself. Does not comparison, this critic might ask, rest on unjustified generalizations about whole traditions (e.g., "Hindu ethics" and similar imaginary reifications), and thereby issue in dubious, impressionistic conclusions? And does not the need for quick closure of summary accounts in order to move on to comparison itself mean that all such accounts will be radically inadequate, because they are so decontextualized and simplified that they lose touch with any potential objects of comparison before the inquiry gets off the ground? Other errors of historical interpretation, such as anachronism, are also common. And how could one person possibly develop the scholarly expertise necessary to handle materials from several different cultural and historical complexes? These are important and wise questions, the hard-won fruits of past

comparative studies of religion that were often badly flawed. In the process of sketching out what I take to be the intellectually responsible options for comparative ethics, and the trade-offs among them, this section attempts to answer these questions. The responses should be sufficient to win over the curious but skeptical, although perhaps not the hardened despiser of comparative work.

The most basic choice to make when setting up comparisons is between depth and precision of treatment, on the one hand, and generality of scope, on the other.[46] Many of the most objectionable difficulties with past comparisons, whether historical, theological, or philosophical, stem from the quixotic desire to encompass all religions in one study. Whether such efforts attempt to tell a story of universal spirit coming to self-consciousness, or to map the range of psychological archetypes that obtain across all of human history, or to argue for a single "deep structure" of "religious reason" that informs all traditions, the vastness of the ambition involved leads to predictable errors of interpretation, especially overgeneralization and anachronism.[47]

Although there have been some better recent attempts to circumvent the problems of wide scope by using teams of scholars, each bringing specialized expertise, this approach risks other problems, most notably a failure to actually engage in rigorous comparison, rather than merely juxtaposing accounts of various traditions, organized around themes. A heavy burden devolves to the editors of such collected volumes, who must do much of the work to draw out similarities and differences between materials with which they are not deeply familiar.[48] Perhaps the best solution to the group approach is to assemble specialists who are also seriously interested in comparison, who can then work together to develop comparisons jointly, through multiple drafts of interrelated essays or coauthored books. Such projects, obviously, require logistical acumen, personal commitment from all involved, and significant support.[49]

The other possibility is to narrow the scope of a comparative study to focus more precise attention on particular objects to be compared. This path has been followed by the most successful and illuminating recent comparative studies, including Lee Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*, and Karen Carr and Philip Ivanhoe's *The Sense of Antirationalism: The Religious Thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard*.[50] By focusing in depth on only a few figures, in cultures and traditions that an author knows well, it becomes possible to approximate the level of contextualization in capable intellectual history. Most important, tightness of focus, on the basis of real scholarly expertise in the relevant languages, cultures, and traditions, allows a level of precision in both treatment and comparative

analysis that is otherwise unattainable. Moreover, generalizations about single thinkers, especially if they have systematic tendencies, are much more defensible, and can be more effectively qualified as necessary, than generalizations about whole religions or traditions.[51] If the figures to be compared are to be taken seriously as thinkers, with theoretical positions and vocabulary that are worthy of careful attention, then the model of comparing two thinkers in depth around a particular theme of interest will be hard to surpass.

The present study aims to continue to develop this mode of comparative ethics. The dangers in this way of proceeding are excessive narrowness and potential limitations of audience, but these dangers are less intellectually serious than those courted by more generalizing approaches. Narrowness, in particular, can be overcome by careful choice among topics and objects to be compared, on the basis of broader debates in religious ethics and knowledge of the relevant traditions, so that tightness of focus in a comparative project is no more objectionable than in a topical study that stays strictly within a single tradition or era or that focuses on a particular figure.[52]

A second general strategic choice is between historical contextualization and creative, emblematic generalization. The virtues of carefully contextualized historical accounts are currently well known and celebrated: insightful interpretations that recreate as closely as possible the initial conditions for a text's reception, and thus perhaps as well authorial intention. Again, if insight into particular "classic" texts or thinkers is desired, this approach will generally be superior.[53]

Against this, David Hall and Roger Ames's collaborative project *Thinking Through Confucius* is based on a method they describe as one of "cross-cultural anachronism," whereby they take a current Anglo-American philosophical problem (the nature and importance of thinking) and look for resources to address it in the *Analects* of Confucius, which does not explicitly entertain such an issue. They argue that only such a course will allow us to recognize what is truly alien and distinctive in Confucius's thought and practice, by uncovering hidden biases and projections inhering in our categories of analysis. Their ultimate goal is to detail certain "fundamental presuppositions" they find underlying conceptions of "thinking" in China and the West.[54] Although Hall and Ames claim at times to be illuminating the *Analects* and even the historical Confucius, several of their interpretive claims are dubious.[55] I think their work is most profitably interpreted, first, as a somewhat exaggerated dialectical response to preceding trends in Western accounts of Confucius, and second, as a creative attempt to articulate a form of "New Confucianism" that draws heavily on American pragmatism.[56] Thus Confucius serves as the

emblem and "launch pad" for their own creative philosophizing in a Confucian vein. The main potential virtue of this strategy is the development of novel approaches to familiar material.

I have argued elsewhere that such creative productions on the basis of past sources or exemplars, considered strictly as new theoretical constructions, should be judged on their own intellectual merits, regardless of historical faithfulness to their sources.[57] Nevertheless, though the temptation, even the compulsion, to see oneself as uncovering the essence of Confucian thought for today might be hard to resist, that impulse should not be allowed to obscure the distinctive tasks and responsibilities of the historian. The danger with emblematic generalization, then, is of losing touch with the historical sources that provoked one's efforts in the first place. Depending on the author's abilities, this in turn increases the chance of producing something new but second rate, or not even new.[58]

Robin Lovin and Frank Reynolds have discerned a third fundamental methodological choice between "holistic" interpretations that are sensitive to context and "formalistic" interpretations that attend to the logical structure of ethical beliefs or theories.[59] Their targets are the comparative work of David Little and Sumner Twiss on formal definitions of moral, religious, and legal reasoning; and that of Ron Green on the "deep structure of religious reason" that he discerns in a variety of religious traditions.[60] Lovin and Reynolds's edited volume is noteworthy in that it was the first to borrow an empirical, holistic approach from the history of religions in order to situate the ethics of various thinkers and traditions carefully in their larger cultural and historical contexts; I also adopt such a holistic approach to ensure adequate historical engagement with my sources. Little and Twiss and Green are all concerned, although in different ways, with formal structures of ethical thought; localizing this concern, I look carefully at the vocabulary or conceptual apparatus of each thinker to be compared, the better to attend to the philosophical or theological issues at play in their presentations. In other words, properly constructed comparative studies can have the virtues of both these sorts of studies and can escape the false dilemma of this previously apparent methodological choice.

The current inquiry, then, seeks to transcend past difficulties in comparative studies by carefully focusing attention on the work of two influential thinkers on topics of significant contemporary ethical interest, topics about which both developed sustained reflections. In this way, they can be addressed as theoretical interlocutors and not merely as objects of study awaiting the organizing ministrations of the contemporary interpreter. A tight focus makes it possible for one person to develop the relevant kinds of expertise and to give each party something approaching his or her due

as a sophisticated thinker. Careful historical contextualization and depth of treatment ward off the sorts of dubious generalizations that provide more insight into the mind of the comparativist than into different reflective modes of religious life.

BRIDGING RELIGIOUS WORLDS

However it might be structured, any comparative ethical study faces two fundamental challenges: It must bring distant ethical statements into inter-relation and conversation, and it must simultaneously preserve their distinctiveness within the interrelation. In the present work, careful analysis of each thinker's distinctive vocabulary meets the second goal; the first goal is pursued by means of "bridge concepts."[61] Bridge concepts are general ideas, such as "virtue" and "human nature," which can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry yet are still open to greater specification in particular cases. They differ from "thin concepts" only in that they are chosen specifically to facilitate a particular comparison of a delim-ited number of objects, and so are chosen with those objects in mind. The process of selection and refinement is thus in an important sense inductive, and any broader applicability any given set might possess is essentially hypo-thetical and subject to further testing and revision in wider inquiries.

Bridge concepts are not, then, hypotheses about transcultural universals that purport to bring a "deep structure" of human religion or ethics to the surface; I am skeptical about all such deep structures or "epistemes" that are supposed somehow to determine or explain thought and practice, whether for humanity as a whole, or merely within a single tradition or era.[62] In con-trast, as general topics, bridge concepts may be projected into each thinker or text to be compared as a way to thematize their disparate elements and order their details around these anchoring terms. Bridge concepts often work best if near-equivalent terms for the various aspects of the bridge concept can be found in each set of writings to be compared, but this is not necessary.[63] In this study, the primary bridge concepts—to be discussed in the next chapter—are "human nature" and "spiritual exercises," with sec-ondary attention to ideas of a "person" and the "will."

One might worry that if given too much specific content, bridge con-cepts could move beyond guiding inquiry to determining it. The projection inherent in this sort of procedure might move beyond what is normally accepted in any historical or philosophical exegesis organized around themes and become boringly self-fulfilling, as unanimity is discovered in the unlike-liest places. More subtly, one might be tempted to find that every thinker in every tradition is deeply concerned with one's own preexisting questions,

providing a variety of "answers" to them, rather than proposing questions and answers of their own. In contrast, bridge concepts are designed to elicit theoretical formulations in each object compared (i.e., their "vocabulary"), including questions and basic orientations, but to refrain from reshaping the terms each thinker uses into some fundamentally new form. The analysis of each thinker's vocabulary thus safeguards each side's uniqueness within the comparison. Articulating a vocabulary in this sense focuses attention on the way particular ideas fit into larger visions, and on the metaphorical linkages and logical relations within these larger systems, thereby allowing more nuanced comparisons of seemingly similar ideas across traditions.

This "vocabulary vocabulary" is a productive tool for comparative ethics because it facilitates the construction of what Charles Taylor has called "languages of perspicuous contrast" to distinguish precisely between the elements of different ethics.[64] Bridge concepts can be articulated in the process of comparison in such a way that they highlight both similarities and differences, and even more subtle similarities within differences, and differences within similarities.[65] But bridge concepts are not conceived as junior versions of Esperanto that might come to fully articulate both vocabularies in a new, third idiom; they merely assist in the process of creating comparative relations between distant ethical positions.[66]

Bridge concepts and the comparisons they facilitate serve as important tools for what Rorty calls "edifying philosophy." He writes:

> Since "education" sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use "edification" to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. The attempt to edify (ourselves or others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline which seems to pursue incommensurable aims in an incommensurable vocabulary. But it may instead consist in the "poetic" activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new disciplines, followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics: the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions. . . . For edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings.[67]

Although I do not wish to go everywhere Rorty wishes to lead us, as far as "more interesting" ways of speaking are concerned, I do second the suggestion that analyzing, critiquing, and thus changing and enriching our own vocabularies, our ways of speaking and acting, is truly edifying. Comparative religious ethics, as argued earlier in this chapter, is a particularly

powerful way of bringing preconceptions to consciousness, while simultaneously generating new ethical possibilities, through careful engagement with exotic "others" such as Augustine and Xunzi. By expanding and reordering our own conceptual repertoire, we gain new inspiration for refining or even reconstructing our own conceptual apparatuses. Whether we might become "new beings" in the process is not something that can be judged in advance.

WHY XUNZI AND AUGUSTINE?

Although meta-ethical concerns and curiosity about the potentials of comparative religious ethics certainly played roles in the genesis of this project, the most formative impetus came from attempts to grapple with the specific subject of the cultivation of virtue. How could anyone really become more virtuous over time? Analogous questions were central to widespread debates in ancient China about *xiu shen* 修身, usually translated as "self-cultivation." And as Pierre Hadot has taught us, practical regimens of personal formation, which he calls "spiritual exercises," were equally essential to Greco-Roman "philosophy" as a shared way of life. Engaging sophisticated accounts of such exercises helps to develop virtue ethics in a fruitful new direction, by stressing the intentional cultivation of character through methodical practices. These practices can be described and analyzed in detail, just as particular virtues can, and such close analysis sheds much light on the moral psychology of character development. Whether moderns are able to cultivate virtue is, after all, one of the central issues in critiques of modernity and liberalism. If we wish to understand virtue, and perhaps even become better ourselves, it would be wise to reflect carefully on some of the most sophisticated past accounts of this process.

This leads directly to Augustine and Xunzi. Both develop subtle and insightful accounts of personal formation that include detailed analysis and advocacy of particular practices. They also build their accounts of personal formation on the basis of clear-eyed but distinctive assessments of humanity's propensities to do evil. Their analyses of "human nature" as fallen or bad profoundly shape the practical regimens they each suggest, which are tuned to restrain, ameliorate, or even transform our more questionable impulses.

Although I cannot fully argue the point here, some form of the general view that aspects of human nature are seriously problematic, and thus that people need significant formation to become moral, seems right. But there are many versions of this sort of account, cast in quite different terms. Are human beings selfish rational agents, each seeking to maximize our individual economic benefit regardless of the "costs" to others? Are we delinquent

children of God, in sinful rebellion against our creator, seeking our own aggrandizement at the expense of others? Are we social beings whose instincts are foolishly shortsighted and often destructively selfish? Are we servants of our own will to power, or possessors of a death instinct? And what are the implications of such diagnoses for efforts to improve our situation? Grappling with Augustine's and Xunzi's accounts of these matters can help us to reflect both on substantive questions of anthropology and ethical formation, and on various possible vocabularies for such reflection. None of these vocabularies are in any sense necessary for human thought (even certain traditional Western ones that claim such necessity); all of them are candidates for contemporary assessment and use.

The fact that people display tendencies to covetousness, cruelty, revenge, greed, and lust for domination, to name a few of our less splendid propensities, does not rule out the existence of more sociable and compassionate impulses, as both Augustine and Xunzi recognize. Recent efforts to relate "evolutionary psychology" to ethics often carefully attend to these more benign impulses.[68] This study contends that it is inadequate to focus only on "prosocial" human impulses without careful attention to what might be called the "antisocial" side of humans, which as Augustine understood particularly well can twist even the most seemingly sociable motives to destructive ends. For beings like us, the cultivation of virtue requires the restraint and redirection of certain impulses, as well as the cultivation of others.

It is also insufficient to simply take modern contrasts between "altruism" and "egotism" for granted as setting the terms in which "morality" is to be understood. We need to be much more alert to the nuances of different possible vocabularies for understanding ethics, and for understanding "human nature," which is a far from self-evident idea, much less an empirically simple datum to be read off of our genetic code. Significantly different ways of articulating both "human nature" and "ethics" are not only possible but actual, and particular versions of these ideas cannot simply be assumed. Comparative ethics can be particularly helpful in bringing such differences to awareness and in analyzing their philosophical and practical consequences.

At this point, the founding judgment of this study that both Xunzi and Augustine have particularly profound vocabularies for overcoming human evil can only serve as a promissory note, to be cashed in detailed analyses of their prescriptions. But readers should take some comfort in the immense historical significance of both figures in their respective traditions. Augustine is the original "master of suspicion" in the West, at least as profound as his later inheritors Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.[69] Augustine strove to create

a theological-ethical system in order to know and love God better, and his ideas became enormously influential in later Western culture. It is probably safe to say that "the West" would not be "the West" without Augustine. He is also the subject of intense recent interest as a theological and philosophical hero to be restored to his rightful preeminence, so it behooves us to reflect carefully on what is distinctive to his way of framing key issues in ethics.[70]

Xunzi provides a particularly useful object for comparison with Augustine. He shares in a rough way some basic Augustinian presuppositions (that humans have a destructive or bad "nature," and therefore must change to become good) while not sharing others (the preeminence of God, Christ, the Bible, and divine grace). Thus there is reason to hope that fine-grained comparisons can be developed between them, because the similarity in the general morphology of their views is the basis for the bridge concepts used to compare them. Furthermore, Xunzi is an equally sophisticated theorist and thinker, and so he will not be overwhelmed or subtly marginalized in the comparison.[71] Crucially, Xunzi does not articulate his positions as either an acceptance or rejection of central Augustinian doctrines about the will, or God, and so at the level of theoretical detail provides a true alternative rather than another layer of commentary on the Pelagian controversy. And last, Xunzi is an important and influential figure in Chinese intellectual history, although not equivalent in stature to Augustine in the West: Xunzi was eventually eclipsed by his predecessor Mencius in a way that never happened for more than brief periods with Augustine.[72]

NOTES

1. Sharpe 1975.

2. For a recent account of "religion" and related terms that doubles as a brief history of religious studies, see Smith 1998. For an insightful analysis of common modern metaphors for "religion" and their various intellectual consequences, along with a brief comparison with medieval Chinese ways of discussing what could be called "religion-analogues," see Campany 2003.

3. Yearley 1990. Yearley's work is discussed more fully later in this chapter, and in chapter 9.

4. On the issues involved, see Rorty 1984; Herdt 2000, esp. 180; and Lewis et al. 2005. On "genealogy," see, e.g., Nietzsche 1967; Foucault 1977, 1978; and MacIntyre 1990.

5. For a believably modest version of this "secularization" narrative, see Stout 2004, 92–118. For a fuller history of how South and East Asian religions and philosophies have contributed to modern European civilization and its offshoots, see Clarke 1997.

6. For details, see Eck 2001.

7. Bruce Grelle and Sumner Twiss make similar points in the introduction to their coedited volume (1998).

8. Rawls 1971, 1993.

9. I refer here to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (e.g., 1984, 1988) and Stanley Hauerwas (e.g., 1981), among others.

10. For a fuller narrative of the development I sketch here, along with a distinctive analysis, critique, and alternative proposal, see Stout 2004.

11. Exemplary practitioners of this sort of approach include: Martha Nussbaum (1986) on Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 1988) on Aristotle and Aquinas, Jean Porter (1990) on Aquinas, Annette Baier (1991) on Hume, and Onora O'Neill (1989) on Kant.

12. Stout 2004, 147–61 (esp. 151–52 on democratic questioning and exchange of reasons), 162–73 (esp. 165 on essay writing as a spiritual exercise), 192–98, 203–24, 278–83, 287–308 (esp. 293 on "social practices directed toward excellence" and the "discursive practices of ethical deliberation and political debate").

13. Indeed, the sort of unified, harmonious, clearly bounded community MacIntyre (1988, 370–88) sketches as part of his analysis of "languages-in-use" seems to be at best a rare accident of history, when compared with the much more frequent cases of changing, conflicted, interconnected communities that contemporary historical research reveals. For a trenchant critique of the conception of culture embodied in MacIntyre's account, see Tanner 1997. Tanner argues that cultures cannot be precisely individuated, tend to be subject to internal conflicts, and have been in a more or less continuous process of change as our many interrelated histories have rolled forward. For similar arguments, see Moody-Adams 1997. For a powerful feminist critique of the traditionalism MacIntyre has espoused, see Okin 1989, 41–73.

14. Much of the best contemporary work on relativism grows out of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophical debates about the rationality of alien cultural practices, which have often revolved around the objective truth of beliefs apparently presupposed by such practices. Important publications in this line include Evans-Pritchard 1937; Winch 1958, 1970 [1964]; MacIntyre 1970a [1967], 1970b [1964]; Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982; Krausz 1989; and Simon 1990. For an excellent book-length study of moral relativism informed by early Chinese thought, see Wong 1984. On the relation of culture(s) to ethics, see Fleischacker 1994 and Moody-Adams 1997.

15. Davidson 1984, 183–98.

16. The best introduction to this line of thought for a religious studies audience is Stout 2002. See also the broad but clear and relatively concise introduction in Brandom 2000a, 1–44. Brandom 1994 gives the fullest version of this general approach. I am indebted to Jeff Stout, John Reeder, and John Kelsay for probing questions and helpful discussions regarding the relation of these lines of thought to comparative ethics.

17. To be more precise, Davidson (1984, 191–92, 195–97) is ruling out zones of untranslatability between languages, e.g., over religious matters, but leaving space for particular difficulties of translation, of specific words such as "grace" or *qi* 氣.

18. For a fuller and more precise analysis of Davidson's arguments and the subsequent debate about conceptual schemes, see Stalnaker 2001, 19–38.

19. Godlove 2002, 12. Note also his important earlier work, Godlove 1989.

20. See, e.g., the more congenial statements about the complexities of "coming to understand one another" in Godlove 2002, 15–16.

21. Davidson (1984) writes at one point: "A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by any predicates at all, in some other language. What enables us to make this point in particular cases is an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects. We can be clear about breakdowns in translation when they are local enough, for a background of generally successful translation provides what is needed to make the failures intelligible" (192). But compare this from his closing comments: "It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of language, at least—share a common scheme and ontology" (198).

22. For a general critique of Davidson on this issue, see Kraut 1986, esp. 406, 409, 415. A. C. Graham has reflected extensively on this issue in relation to the Chinese case. For a concise, late summary, see Graham 1989, 389–428. For more detailed statements, see Graham 1990b, 1990c, and 1991.

23. See, e.g., Hacker 1996 and Case 1997.

24. Hacker 1996, 297.

25. See Rorty 1979, esp. chaps. 7 and 8, and Rorty 1989, esp. chaps. 1–3. Robert Brandom (2000) has written an excellent analysis of this theme in Rorty's thought. See also Rorty's (2000) appreciative response in the same volume.

26. Brandom 2000b, 159; Rorty 1989, 13–15; Rorty 1979, 368. Similarly, according to Rorty, it would be a mistake to think of languages as a barrier between people or cultures; instead, they should be seen as the main tools people use to deal with each other.

27. Brandom 2000b, 168ff.

28. For fuller discussion see Stout 2002, 35–41.

29. Brandom 2000b, 167. See also the briefer definition of "vocabularies" as "linguistic practices" on 178.

30. Rorty 1989, 12–13. Foucault is perhaps the most notable recent theorist of the social productivity of discourses, and of the complex interplay between the development of discourses and practices. See particularly Foucault 1977 and 1978.

31. Rorty 1989, 12–22; Brandom 2000b, 168–81.

32. Brandom 2000b, 175.

33. All quotations in this paragraph are from Brandom 2000b, 177.

34. In other words tradition, understood in a certain way, is the right category for the analysis of vocabulary change over time. Brandom puts these points in terms of traditions of language use in Brandom 2000b, 177. For broader discussion, see Shils 1981; cf. MacIntyre 1988.

35. Rorty 1989, 5.

36. See, e.g., Rorty 1979, 388, and 1989, 11–13. He is of course not alone in this habit; MacIntyre's theory of conflicting traditions develops such an account in much

greater detail. See, e.g., MacIntyre 1988, esp. 164–82, 349–403, and MacIntyre 1990.

37. Brandom 2000b, 177.

38. Brandom 2000b, 178.

39. Brandom 2000b, 176.

40. Bohman 1991, 119–21.

41. Rorty at one point (1989, 22) suggests that we think of our "intuitions" as "the habitual use of a certain repertoire of terms," but he does not develop this remark. Rob Campany (2003, 317–19) has recently proposed that we think of religions "as repertoires of resources" for human social life. He is building on the empirical and theoretical work of Ann Swidler (2001) on cultures as repertoires.

42. See e.g., Brandom: "We can all too easily imagine our scientific institutions falling into the hands of theological fanatics who can describe in excruciating detail just how the revolutionary change from present day science to their loopy theories represents decisive progress along the essential dimension of pleasingness to God" (2000b, 171). On the inappropriateness of religious discourse in public political deliberation, see Rorty 1994.

43. Stout 1988, 13–33 and passim; Stout 2004, 92–117, 163–79 (note esp. 317 n. 8.), 199–202, 256–69. Note as well the similarity of this account to the "cultural-linguistic" approach to religion developed in Lindbeck 1984 for ecumenical reasons, and with theological intent.

44. Stout 2004, 183–286, esp. 270–78. The image of God as the referee of a game is at best very limited. To speak more theologically, to talk of God as judge does not rule out discussing God as creator, sustainer, father, mother, etc.

45. For a serious and commendable effort to grapple with these questions, see McKim 2001.

46. For capable recent surveys of the methodological terrain in comparative religious ethics, each with fuller bibliography, see Twiss 1998b and Lewis 1998.

47. Although I would vigorously contest Hegel's account of the history of Chinese thought, for example, I do not question his considerable significance for modern Western thought. Here I simply want to address the adequacy of certain sorts of comparisons as comparisons. For a thoughtful development of certain Hegelian themes for the purposes of comparative ethics, see Lewis 2005. The other references are to the work of Carl Jung and his admirers, such as Joseph Campbell, and to Ronald Green. Green's work (1978, 1988), while flawed by his efforts to find a basically Kantian structure of practical reasoning in numerous different traditions, is nonetheless illuminating in several ways, partly through the very effort to find the "deep structure of religious rationality" in places where it is not obviously present.

48. Noteworthy examples of group efforts include Lovin and Reynolds 1985; Reynolds and Tracy 1990, 1992, 1994; and Cabezón 1998.

49. The most ambitious and admirably self-conscious recent effort along these lines is the Comparative Religious Ideas Project, which culminated in three volumes edited by Robert Cummings Neville (2001a, 2001b, 2001c). For a fine coauthored volume, see Carr and Ivanhoe 2000. Another collaborative effort at comparison is the

Journal of Religious Ethics 33, no. 2 (Summer 2005), a focus issue titled "Anthropos and Ethics," which includes essays by Berkson, Lewis, Schofer, and Stalnaker, and a jointly authored introduction.

50. For comparative theological works that exemplify the virtues of this general approach, see Clooney 1993, 2001.

51. Jonathan Z. Smith (1990, 117–18) rightly criticizes this sort of "holism," by which he means the assumption of homogeneity of whole "religions" in such a way that, for example, different Christianities in antiquity can be presumed to share more with each other than with contemporaneous Judaisms or other varieties of antique religions, when in fact this assumption is false. Needless to say, this assumption of homogeneity is very different than the sort of holism in interpretation that the present study advocates.

52. Narrowness can have more subtle consequences, of course: One might simply be unaware of particularly profound treatments of a given topic in traditions that are beyond one's competency, or even outside one's awareness, and so choose poorly when constructing a study of that topic. But those who work within only one historical complex or tradition are even more prone to this intellectual vice than comparativists.

53. Awareness of later commentaries, interpretations, and reworkings is obviously also very helpful. Thus, for example, we can gain greater insight into Augustine's thought, and our own modern reactions to it, by having at least some awareness of how he has been read and used by Aquinas, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Kant, Kierkegaard, and many others.

54. Hall and Ames (1987, 11–25) contend, for example, that the "deep presuppositions" supposedly "dominating" "Anglo-European" and Chinese thought can be summarized in dichotomies between "transcendence" and "immanence," "conceptual disjunction" and "conceptual polarity," and "history" and "tradition," with the first of each pair describing the orientation of Western culture and the second that of Chinese culture. Such historical shorthand is equally unfair to the complex traditions of both China and Europe. For a more developed argument against these sorts of essentialist claims, see Puett 2002. Although I disagree with them on some basic issues of methodology, Hall and Ames's work is rich with specific insights and intriguing suggestions, and a full assessment of it is far beyond the scope of this chapter.

55. For example, consider their account of *yi* 義, normally translated as "righteousness" or "justice," as something more like "disclosure of personal significance" (Hall and Ames 1987, 83–84, 89–110).

56. In particular, Hall and Ames rightly seek to counter Herbert Fingarette's (1972) treatment of Confucianism as lacking a sense of interiority or individuality. On their desire to make Confucian thought a viable participant in contemporary philosophical conversation, see Hall and Ames 1987, 6, 313–36.

57. Stalnaker 2005. Please see this article for fuller discussion and necessary qualifications.

58. There are deep and difficult issues here, particularly with regard to personal engagement with and appropriation of classical sources, that I cannot pursue in this venue. The best work on these issues is still Gadamer 1989.

59. Lovin and Reynolds 1985, 1–35.

60. Little and Twiss 1978; Green 1978, 1988.

61. I owe this way of framing things originally to John Reeder. And although arrived at independently, my "bridge concepts" and Neville's "vague categories" of comparison seem to function in similar ways in the process of inquiry (Neville 2001a, 9–16). Perhaps the main difference is one of scope: Neville's Comparative Religious Ideas Project aims to bring six different traditions (conceived and articulated in various ways by various authors) into mutual imagined dialogue, and to flesh out their vague categories in the process into a metavocabulary capable of accurately relating all six traditions' claims about the topic marked out by the category. I am less hopeful than Neville and his fellows that this degree of scope will yield rich insights, when compared with more carefully specified and delimited comparisons, but this is only partly a matter of judgment, partly a hunch, and partly a result of my own limitations as an investigator.

62. For different versions of this sort of "deep structure" view, see Green 1978 and 1988, and Foucault 1971. Foucault, at least in this work, is the more straightforward determinist; Green recognizes the possibility of deviation from his "deep structure of religious reason," as for example in early China, but still argues that such occurrences are rare and have predictable negative consequences.

63. Sometimes a thinker might have several words that cover the territory of a particular English word, sometimes none at all. The deeper issue is to take care to map a thinker's use of a particular concept or concepts, even if he or she does not have a word that translates easily into English as the bridge concept in question. To assume that someone cannot have a concept for something unless they possess a word for it has been called the "lexical fallacy." On this, see Van Norden 2003b.

64. Taylor 1985b.

65. For discussion, see Yearley 1990, 4–6, 170–75.

66. To be more precise, the present study attempts to represent the ethical thought and practice of Xunzi and Augustine in the English language, obviously not the native tongue of either thinker, by means of bridge concepts that are themselves articulated in English. These bridge concepts are designed to guide inquiry into the "vocabularies" of each thinker, originally framed in late antique Latin and classical Chinese. The transliteration, translation, paraphrase, and exegesis involved in this process of representation are essential to the interpretation of both thinkers, and to the comparison of them. The English-language interpretations offered here are not exhaustive but are oriented to and shaped by the comparative purposes of this study.

67. Rorty 1979, 360.

68. See, e.g., Thomas 1989; de Waal 1996; Sober and Wilson 1998; Katz 2000.

69. The phrase "master of suspicion" comes from Ricoeur 1970, 32.

70. Probably the most prominent such Augustinian is the theologian John Milbank. But note also younger scholars such as Charles Mathewes (2001).

71. This issue haunts Yearley's book on Mencius and Aquinas (1990), because of the centrality of virtue *theory* to both Aquinas's thought and Yearley's comparative project.

72. For a fuller accounting of Xunzi's historical influence, see Knoblock 1988–94, vol. 1, 36–49.

CHAPTER TWO

Contexts for Interpretation

✦

I argued in chapter 1 that if one's goal is to engage culturally distant thinkers precisely as thinkers, as theorists who have developed religious conceptions worthy of careful study, then the best comparative strategy is to interpret them with sensitivity, alert to the various contexts and traditions in which they moved and worked. This is not particularly controversial, but neither is it obvious what this implies. Proper contextualization of interpretations does not require a lengthy account of "the context" that would duplicate or mimic specialist histories; it is rather a matter of perceptive interpretation of particular points in each thinker, leading to insight into broader themes in their visions of life. Thus to charge that a historical account has been "decontextualized" must be a reasonable critique of specific aspects of the account in question, not some sort of blanket complaint about the amount of generalized discussion of the historical background presumed by the account.

Moreover, readers often generate conflicting interpretations of profound and broad-ranging thinkers such as Augustine and Xunzi. Choices of organization and emphasis must be made in any study; evidence and counterevidence must be weighed. In important respects, the investigator constitutes the objects of her study by choosing the approach and themes that guide it, as well as the evidence to be given greatest prominence. It behooves all interpreters to remember that even the most articulate objects of study do not determine some proper form that interpretations of their words must take; Augustine and Xunzi tell many stories, not just one, and it is up to us as readers to be clear about how we approach them and why.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I first offer very brief introductions to the life and historical context of Xunzi and Augustine, designed only to orient readers who may be unfamiliar with either. I then discuss in more detail

the "bridge concepts" to be used as organizing themes in this study: human nature, personhood, spiritual exercises, and the will.

XUNZI AND AUGUSTINE

Obviously Xunzi lived in a profoundly different culture from the modern United States, used a language unrelated to English, and was responding to a distinctive (and in certain ways quite alien) intellectual scene. With Augustine, we may be misled by the thought that he is Western, and hence "ours." Peter Brown rightly insists that "the Christianity of the . . . Middle Ages—to say nothing of the Christianity of our own times—is separated from the Christianity of the Roman world by a chasm almost as vast as that which still appears to separate us from the moral horizons of a Mediterranean Islamic country."[1] We must be alert to the distance between contemporary ideas that descend from Augustine and his own conceptions expressed in similar or even apparently identical terms, as well as to a cultural world almost as foreign as ancient China. In many ways, the problems generated by historical and cultural distance are quite parallel, and similar skills are necessary to navigate both. I thus provide brief introductions to the life, context, and thought of each of our subjects.[2]

Xunzi was born in the state of Zhao around 310 BCE, during the Warring States period of Chinese history, and he probably lived just past the unification of China by Qin Shihuang in 221 BCE. This era was marked by continuing strife between several states seeking to conquer the others and succeed the clearly moribund Zhou Dynasty. In this environment, violence and social disruption were common, and ongoing debates over the proper ordering of self and society took on a new intensity as a "hundred schools of thought" contended for influence with rulers seeking the proper Way of human existence.

Xunzi seems to have been precocious: He left home at fifteen to go to perhaps the preeminent center of learning of his day, the Jixia "Academy" in the capital of the state of Qi, where scholars of every philosophical and religious persuasion debated each other and enjoyed the king's largesse. In such an environment, Xunzi was exposed to all the major intellectual currents of his day, and he distinguished himself sufficiently among the attending thinkers that he was honored three times as head libationer at the official ancestral sacrifices. He also traveled fairly widely. In between extended stays at Jixia in Qi, he spent a number of years at the court of the southern state of Chu after King Min of Qi overreached militarily and was hunted down and killed. He also visited Qin, the eventual victor in the internecine conflicts,

where he was confronted with a powerful and ruthless state that impressed but saddened him.

Near the end of his life, Xunzi was appointed magistrate of Lanling in Chu, a post of uncertain but probably not enormous gravity, where he continued to teach his students and in all likelihood worked to put his literary legacy in order. A perhaps apocryphal story describes a very old Xunzi, having lived to see the unification of China by Qin with the help of his own turncoat student Li Si, declining an honorary post in the new regime offered by his renegade pupil. In any case, Xunzi died shortly thereafter, having failed to convince any of the kingly pretenders to adopt his Way. The future official "triumph" of Confucianism could not have been foreseen.[3]

Xunzi borrowed ideas from numerous sources to rearticulate the tradition of the Zhou Dynasty passed on by Confucius and his followers; he self-consciously described himself as one of this group of *Ru* 儒, generally termed "Confucians." In particular, he took issue with his Confucian predecessor Mencius over the character of human *xing* 性, or "nature." Where Mencius suggests that human *xing* is good, Xunzi argues instead that it is bad, and that any human goodness is a matter of "artifice." The innate desires that make up our *xing* often aim at real goods, Xunzi thinks, but tend to be destructively shortsighted and selfish. They disrupt our lives, gnawing at us if unsatisfied, growing without limit if we do manage briefly to fulfill them, turning families and communities against themselves in a chaotic struggle for scarce goods. Reforming these desires is the task of a demanding program of traditional Confucian ethico-religious cultivation, centering on ritual practice, musical performance, and textual study, which Xunzi likens to straightening crooked wood in a steam press or hammering blunt metal on an anvil. If this is pursued over many years, he thinks, a complete transformation of human dispositions and desires is possible, so that even a "person in the street" can become a sage.

Xunzi's influence was most profound in shaping the Confucianism that followed him, which was officially declared orthodoxy in the Han Dynasty. His students transmitted several of the versions of key classical texts that survive today, and his general turn back to the importance of textual study was decisive in shaping later Confucianism. Nevertheless, his direct influence seems to have waned as the Han Dynasty continued, and the first extant commentary on his works dates from the Tang Dynasty, written by one Yang Liang in 818 CE. Xunzi was further eclipsed by the ascent of Zhu Xi's Mencian-inflected "Neo-Confucianism" in the Song Dynasty, which relegated Xunzi's position on human nature to the status of heterodoxy until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, since the eighteenth century, interest in Xunzi has been growing, inspired mostly by the sophistication of his thought

and the development of indigenous traditions of modern historical-critical scholarship in China and Japan, and augmented since the 1920s by a slow but steady stream of Western studies.[4]

Although we know a relatively large amount about Xunzi's life when compared with other early Chinese thinkers, and can even speculate about the chronology of some of his writings, scholars know vastly more about Augustine's life, context, and works, many of which can be dated quite precisely. Augustine was born on November 13, 354 CE, in Thagaste, a town in Roman North Africa. His parents had limited means, and they barely managed to provide him with a classical literary education, at a time when mastery of the shared literary and rhetorical culture of the Roman Empire was one of few avenues for social and economic advancement. In 370, he gained sufficient support to go to Carthage to continue his studies, and while there took a mistress, with whom he had a son.

In Carthage, Augustine was inspired to seek wisdom by reading a now-lost work of Cicero, and after rejecting the Christian scriptures as stylistically uncouth, he became a Manichean "hearer." He became a teacher of rhetoric, first in Thagaste, then in Carthage, and finally in Rome. His fame as a rhetorician grew, and in 384 he moved to Milan, seat of the Western imperial court, where he continued to teach rhetoric, gave occasional panegyrics for famous men at court, and drifted into a circle of intellectually refined Neoplatonic Christians centered around Ambrose, bishop of Milan. His mother followed him to Milan, and arranged a marriage to a very young heiress; Augustine's longtime concubine was forced to return to Africa, although their son remained with him. Augustine admired Ambrose's sermons, first for their stylistic refinement, and later for their content; after an initial serious study of Paul's letters, Augustine converted to Christianity, which was also for him a conversion to sexual abstinence. He called off his socially advantageous marriage, resigned his post in Milan, and retired to the countryside in philosophical retreat with some like-minded friends. That spring, on Easter in 387, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose in Milan, and shortly thereafter his mother died, after they shared a vision of God.

After a delay in Rome, Augustine returned to Africa in 388 and founded a small monastic community dedicated to the shared practice of spiritual exercises; during this time, his son also died, quite young. On a visit to Hippo in 391, Augustine was compelled by the local populace to be ordained as a priest. He again organized a monastic community, undertook an intensive reading of Christian scripture, and eventually succeeded Valerius as bishop of Hippo in approximately 396. As bishop, Augustine had immense responsibilities. He preached numerous sermons each week, was the chief min-

ister in the celebration of the Eucharist and the giving of baptism, and was in charge of his congregation, his clergy, the ecclesiastical property, and the administration of the church and its alms distribution. As Roman authority weakened (Rome itself was sacked in 410), he also took on increasing local authority, judging legal cases such as familial disputes over wills. He publicly debated opponents, whether Manichees, Donatists, or others, and as a Catholic in a heavily Donatist area of North Africa, he was the leader of a minority religious population in a time of violent clashes between factions.

Augustine traveled frequently, attending church councils and preaching at distant churches. Despite all this, he kept up a voluminous correspondence and wrote more than one hundred books, many but not all polemical, in a variety of genres. He lived a long and trying life, exercising considerable influence and power, and died on August 28, 430. While he lay on his deathbed, the Vandals—who in a single year had swept across North Africa, destroying much of the Roman Christian civilization he had labored to rejuvenate—laid siege to Hippo, the last Roman town standing in North Africa. Hippo fell and was partly burned a year later, but Augustine's library survived.[5]

Augustine teaches that humans live in a "fallen" and "penal" state, possessing a damaged *natura* that bears only a shadowy resemblance to our "nature" as originally created by God. For Augustine, this *natura* does not stand for uncultivated impulses, but is our essential being, locating us in the divinely ordered hierarchy of existence. On this account, people are afflicted with "ignorance" and "difficulty," and more broadly with "concupiscence," a syndrome of covetous and ill-directed desire. With hearts darkened and chilled, we no longer have the power to love the good and act rightly. As the mature Augustine argues against his Pelagian enemies, only divine grace can heal the wound of original sin, and during this earthly life such healing can only be partial. And yet, for Augustine, we should also seek the aid provided within the church by *exercitationes*, "exercises," and *disciplina*, "teaching," "training," and "discipline." By "crucifying the [fallen] inner man" and "refashioning" the divine image within our minds, we can "make progress day by day" in righteousness. As the love of God is poured into our hearts, our desire for God will be kindled and our minds illuminated.

Augustine's influence on the West has been profound and multifaceted. He is one of few authors to have been read constantly from his death until the present day, having been carefully studied by such diverse thinkers as Boethius, Bede, Anselm, Aquinas, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Descartes, Pascal, Rousseau, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger.

The distance between these two thinkers and ourselves should be clear. Nevertheless, relying on advances in understanding made possible by modern

historical and linguistic scholarship, we are now, paradoxically, in a relatively better position than those in intervening eras to try to engage Augustine and Xunzi on their own and their contemporaries' terms.

What such study reveals, however, is not always particularly congenial to modern sensibilities, or, more important, to considered ethical and political judgments worthy of our committed allegiance. Some of these thinkers' views present serious barriers to our appreciation of their ideas and thus need to be addressed before going further. The most glaring obstacle is presented by the hierarchical, stratified, and thoroughly patriarchal social orders Augustine and Xunzi both took for granted and, to varying extents, lauded as good.

Although powerful arguments justifying certain sorts of hierarchy may be extracted from Xunzi and Augustine (e.g., concerning appropriate teacher–student relationships), their assumptions about sex and class hierarchy should be exposed and rejected.[6] How should one approach this issue? First, it is essential to face the problems head on, with appropriate criticism, rather than attempting to ignore real issues through, for instance, quietly importing gender-neutral language into translations or explications of ancient texts that presuppose male dominance.[7]

Moreover, one may use universalistic aspects of their thought (according to Augustine, men and women's minds are both created in the image of God, in identical positions relative to God and salvation; according to Xunzi, all "people in the street" have the potential to become sages) to argue against unjustifiably particularistic aspects, oriented to sex and class. One may also excuse both thinkers for not foreseeing many centuries of political and economic development that make possible more egalitarian societies, which would have been unimaginable in the fundamentally agrarian economies of ancient China and Roman North Africa. A final, more difficult step is to articulate "Augustinian" and "Xunzian" views in more contemporary idioms, at least when moving beyond description to retrieval, so that the burden of imaginative reconstruction does not rest wholly on the reader. At the same time, it is important to remember that one reason both Xunzi and Augustine deserve attention today is that they are suspicious of easy narratives of social progress and pleasant proclamations of humanity's goodwill and sociability. I hope this study allows them to interrogate the present as much as it allows the present to interrogate them.

BRIDGE CONCEPTS

One of the ironies of comparative ethics is the sharp disjunction between the process of research and representations of the results of that research.

The actual process of comparative study is one of moving back and forth between religious worlds, trying not to become disoriented and confused. While doing this, one slowly refines both the categories of analysis (what I call bridge concepts), and one's initial hunches about the salient similarities and differences between the objects compared. Thus what I am about to say about the four bridge concepts used in this study will give every appearance of determining the structure of inquiry into Augustine and Xunzi, but in fact emerged out of the comparison, as I attempted to place them in imaginary dialogue with each other. This is important, because the analysis and refinement of concepts such as "human nature" is one of the important intellectual results of this sort of comparison.

As noted above, bridge concepts are general ideas that guide and thematize comparative inquiry, while leaving space for greater specification in particular cases. My primary bridge concepts in this work are "human nature" and "spiritual exercises," each of which can be linked to a range of ideas and specific terms of art in both Xunzi and Augustine. In the course of further comparison, I also deploy ideas of "person" and "will." In this section, I specify what I mean by these terms and give preliminary defenses of their aptness and utility in a study of this sort.

These bridge concepts were chosen from among many possibilities. The overarching goals were substantive and were derived from my sense that virtue ethicists need to attend more carefully to religious models and practices of training, personal formation, and even transformation. Thus, in setting up this comparison, I needed a way to represent both the "raw" and the "cooked" state of human beings, as well as the proper methods and techniques for the cooking, religiously speaking. The question in this case could be framed more precisely as follows: What are human beings like before, during, and after the processes of ethico-religious change advocated by Augustine and Xunzi, why do they think such changes are necessary, and how practically are they accomplished? Numerous rubrics—including "self-cultivation," "technologies of the self," "subjection," "asceticism," and "spiritual exercises"—have all been used to examine such processes of personal cultivation, formation, or development.

Pierre Hadot is perhaps the most illuminating of several recent writers on these topics. As I discuss more fully below, his focus on particular practices of cultivation, and not only general theories of moral reformation over time, opens up a new angle of vision on Xunzi, as well as both the Roman philosophy that entranced the young Augustine and the mature Augustine's own ethics of lifelong Christian discipleship. Michel Foucault, at least in his last published works, also provides helpful guidance for analyzing the components of personal formation across traditions or cultures.

Hadot at times seems to undercut the importance of theory for the practice of spiritual exercises, and at one point he even suggests breezily that moderns can still practice ancient exercises while simply jettisoning the ancient views of nature and universal reason that justified them.[8] But from another angle, his historical analyses can be read as showing the practical import and power of ethical theory and even metaphysics: His emphasis on how worldviews are passed on via traditions of quite specific practices that sustain and invigorate those same conceptions of life is relevant to many religious thinkers. Furthermore, his methods of textual interpretation prompt interpreters to attend much more carefully to the practical context and consequences of what might seem to be purely "theological" works. An Augustinian example would be *On the Trinity*, which is in fact centrally concerned with human spiritual "reformation" to the image of God and is a rich resource for Augustine's understanding of spiritual exercises.

Turning now to Foucault, both Hadot and Maria Antonaccio, among others, criticize Foucault for giving his account of ancient spiritual exercises an excessively "aesthetic" cast that focuses on the cultivation of a particular "style" of existence while submerging the universalistic philosophical underpinnings of ancient spiritual exercises, as well as the universalistic moral claims that were essential to them.[9] Though this judgment is generally apt, especially with regard to Foucault's interest in the potential relation of ancient spiritual exercises to contemporary modes of self-cultivation, it ironically overlooks some significant and original Foucaultian contributions to religious ethics. Arnold Davidson has compellingly articulated what is at stake in Foucault's general account of "ethics" in volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality*.[10]

Perhaps most significant is Foucault's innovative mapping of ethics, in self-conscious reaction against a rule-centered conception of morality, as involving four main aspects: first, the "ethical substance," or an account of moral personhood, that part of the self properly subject to moral evaluation; second, the "mode of subjection," meaning the way in which one conceives of one's relation to moral obligations; third, the "ethical work," or practices of self-formation by which one transforms oneself into an ethical subject (what I, following Hadot, call "spiritual exercises," and what Foucault elsewhere describes as "technologies of the self"); and fourth, the ethical *telos* or ideal at which one aims.[11] Though this admittedly does suggest a remarkably subjectivist account of ethics, Foucault is in this context only attempting to analyze the ethics of self-formation, leaving other aspects to the side. And Davidson rightly argues that with regard to the history of ancient ethics, Foucault's errors of interpretation do not undercut the fruitfulness of his analytical *conceptualization* of the ethics of personal formation, which need not be tied to a relativistic aestheticization of existence.

Indeed, Foucault's schema can illuminate the ethics of thinkers committed to universalistic conceptions of ethics, including both Xunzi and Augustine.[12] Though I do not adopt his conceptions wholesale, they inform my choice and construal of bridge concepts. "Human nature" is a particularly common way of interpreting our "ethical substance," in Foucault's terminology (i.e., the parts of ourselves for which we are morally responsible, and thus also the parts that we attempt to change if needed). Thus "human nature" deserves close scrutiny and analysis, particularly in this case given past readings of Xunzi, and to a lesser extent Augustine. But what is "natural" to us may not cover all the elements of our being that these figures believe we can and should change or develop—so some broader conception of human beings will be needed as well. For this I use the English "person," among various possibilities, for reasons discussed below. As a bridge concept, however, "person" points as well to Foucault's "ethical telos," the ideal person or state that is the object of self-formative striving.

I interpret Foucault's "mode of subjection" as referring to the cognitive and imaginative resources made available by a particular ethical vocabulary, the usually traditional stories, images, metaphors, and symbols that constitute some particular conception of existence. More narrowly, Foucault's concern with subjection, evident even before his last works on the care of the self in antiquity, suggests the fruitfulness as well of particular attention to the role of various authorities, conceived in distinctive ways, to the spiritual exercises advocated by Augustine and Xunzi. And last, Foucault's conception of the "ethical work" we do on ourselves maps directly onto Hadot's conception of spiritual exercises.

So "human nature," "person," and "spiritual exercises" have each been chosen as a way to focus attention on particular points within the larger problematic of studying ethical formation or cultivation. I add a fourth bridge concept, "the will," in order to focus more specifically on various aspects of moral psychology that are central to Western conceptions of ethics.

I chose these particular bridge concepts because they seemed fairest to both Xunzi and Augustine, offering thematic guides for sympathetic yet critical investigations that could reveal detailed contours of their strengths without hiding their weaknesses. In general, this meant choosing topics that could elicit significant formulations from both thinkers, but at least in some cases risked highlighting differential levels of treatment of particular issues (e.g., regarding the "will").

As with other sorts of concepts, bridge concepts can vary in character. Most simply, they can be univocal and strictly delimited. More frequently, however, bridge concepts multiply under comparative scrutiny to cover a cluster of related ideas that can be specified more precisely, but that may

or may not cohere in any systematic way; in cases of this sort, comparison serves as a prod to conceptual analysis, and it uncovers the complexity and tension in frequently used terms such as "human nature" and "the will."[13] Such clusters, incidentally, will often but not always seem to share a "family resemblance" in the sense explored by Wittgenstein, once we free ourselves from their intuitive simplicity and obviousness; their precise constituents, and mutual logical coherence, are a matter of complex but contingent historical processes. Bridge concepts may also take the form of a focal meaning with specifiable features, accompanied by various secondary meanings that share some but not all of these characteristics.[14] In the present study, "spiritual exercises" is closest to this model. Other forms are of course possible, but they will be left to the side for present purposes.

Human Nature

Richard Rorty suggested in 1989 that historicist thinkers have taught us that "socialization, and thus historical circumstance, goes all the way down." There is nothing, he thinks, "beneath" socialization or "prior" to history that makes or defines us as human. More specifically, there is no such thing as a "human nature" that might help us know who we really are, or how best to live.[15]

For better or worse, Rorty's ironist philosophical therapy is not carrying the day. The idea of human nature seems to be making a vigorous comeback, in both popular and scholarly publishing, propelled by increasing excitement about the "new sciences of human nature," such as cognitive neuroscience, behavioral genetics, and evolutionary psychology.[16] But not everyone is excited, and there seem to be good historical reasons to be worried.

I would suggest that at least some of both the anxiety and excitement stems from intermingling very different senses of what "human nature" might mean, and that it would be helpful to get clear on these differences. On the basis of reflecting on classical Chinese and Christian conceptions of human beings, it now seems to me that talk about "human nature" is a way of addressing at least four distinct sorts of issues. First, it points to human beings' physicality and animality, our most basic, inevitable needs to breathe, drink, eat, and sleep; our needs for care and feeding when young, old, or disabled; and with our less clear-cut but still hard-to-resist desires and aversions (e.g., for food, companionship, attention, sex, status, activity, learning, and expression; and against pain, hunger, humiliation, and death). Second, "human nature" is also a way of discussing what is common to all or most people, underneath or alongside our many individual and group differences. Sometimes it carries a third meaning, in tension with the first:

It marks out what is distinctively "human" about human beings, what does or should separate us from other animals; this is true of Augustine's account of *natura* but not of Xunzi's understanding of *xing*. These three senses are often related to a fourth issue, which is the idea of a natural course of human development, which is often seen as good and desirable, or sometimes lamentable and dangerous. For all these senses or uses—especially the first, third, and fourth—the conjunction of "nature," however conceived, with normative accounts of personal development is quite common. Thus "human nature" is hardly one thing at all but a family of related concerns that may or may not be seen as aspects of any one postulated theoretical entity.[17]

As noted in the first section of this chapter, in their own ways Augustine and Xunzi each regard the fallenness or badness of "human nature" as the paramount problem in human life. It thwarts our sometimes confused aspirations to ethical existence, and it is a crucial part of any explanation for the cruelty and suffering endemic to human societies. Articulating a manifold bridge concept of human nature allows us to tease out the complexities of their views, going beyond a blinkered focus only on the words previously translated into English as "human nature" in each figure. In this way, we can more precisely locate different aspects of their accounts in relation to their larger visions, and to each other.

A critic, perhaps a friend of Rorty, might ask why anyone today should take such a retrograde idea seriously, no matter how it is sliced up. A comparison of multiple versions of such an idea would be particularly pointless—at best a repetition of autopsies. There is no "metaphysical biology" or "essence" shaping human beings, this popular line of thinking goes, and to pretend otherwise is to smuggle dubious presuppositions into the inquiry, perhaps for reactionary political ends. There are two different sorts of criticism in this reply: an antimetaphysical factual objection, and a political worry.

Regarding the first objection—although, in the Western tradition, there certainly have been some highly metaphysical conceptions of human nature as essentially determining each person's status in the cosmos and their proper course of development and form of life—these aspects are not essential to the conception as just laid out. A thin conception of human nature such as the bridge concept I use here aims as much as possible to bracket questions of metaphysics and cosmology, concentrating on our shared organismic life as animals, and what this implies about our developing and living as distinctively human beings. In his most recent book, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Alasdair MacIntyre develops an argument to the effect that humans are a type of animal sharing important resemblances to and commonality with other intelligent animals.

Most notably, these resemblances include intentionality directed toward the satisfaction of certain basic needs and desires, vulnerability to disability and death throughout our life span, and especially in our case weakness and neediness in childhood and old age, leading to significant and at times inescapable dependence on other people.[18] Evaluations of these facts about our animality may vary, but in this study I consider two subtle statements that at least some of these biologically based, mammalian, and more specifically primate needs and desires are seriously problematic. If all such views are wrong (including Freud's and Nietzsche's), and all our natural promptings are benevolent and constructive, then our repeated, spectacularly foul behavior toward each other, in this and every other century, remains a great mystery.[19] One of the points of this study is to examine the different ways Augustine and Xunzi conceive of such an aspect of our being and to grapple with the significant differences in their conceptions. That elements of Augustine's conception of human nature may in the end be objectionable does not rule out all uses of the idea; instead, it ought to spur us to disentangle the various strands of his account and to search for other formulations as well.

The political objection might appear to have more bite. In the not so distant past, conceptions of distinctive natures shaping different "races" were used to justify the most heinous abominations: mass killing of different ethnic groups and systematic racial slavery.[20] In our own time, some natural law theorists argue for the unnaturalness and hence wrongness of homosexual sex acts and thus of any relationships of which they might form a part.[21] And yet here again I will argue that a suitable version of the idea of human nature does not imply ultravicious or even conservative consequences; on the contrary, versions of this line of thought have been deployed for liberatory ends. Martha Nussbaum's and Amartya Sen's "capabilities approach" to development economics and politics is a prime example.[22] Nussbaum argues on neo-Aristotelian premises that there are nine basic capabilities that are distinctive to humanity and therefore ought to be safeguarded by any regime and systematically supported by any developmental scheme. Her approach is thoroughly feminist in its commitment to the dignity and potential of girls and women, and friendly to homosexuality. Though her conception of human nature is again "thicker" than the one I deploy here to facilitate comparison, it does serve as a counterexample to the objection.

A third possible exception needs to be considered as well. Even if my analysis of the complexity of "human nature" as a topic is granted, one could still question whether there is anything common to human beings, including aspects of our physical existence, that is sufficiently robust and significant that it can provide anything like a "baseline" for personal formation. Even if

we abstract from differences of upbringing and experience, this critic could say, individual temperaments and talents are too various to allow illuminating ethical generalizations about spiritual exercises, which must be tailored to particular individuals, as differential treatment by "masters" of various "disciples" suggests. This is a fundamental and important objection, but its force can only be evaluated with regard to particular conceptions of human nature, as they are interpreted within larger programs of personal cultivation. (In other words, it is not a direct objection to the bridge concept itself but to theories that such a concept might be used to study.) To forecast later arguments, Augustine is somewhat more vulnerable to this sort of criticism because of his account of the universal pervasiveness of extremely serious sin, while Xunzi's view can accommodate a relatively greater variation in natural moral "talent." However, both Xunzi and Augustine should be read as intelligently arguing against this sort of objection, which can itself be read as a competing account of "human nature" as either (1) very limited in import and scope, or (2) being defined almost entirely in terms of each individual's "natural course of development," to the exclusion of the other elements of my fourfold sketch, with this natural course understood as extremely various across different individuals.

Spiritual Exercises

A common theme in the study of Chinese philosophy and religion is "self-cultivation," the theory and practice of becoming a flourishing, ethical human being. A classic distinction separates "discovery" and "development" models of this process.[23] A development model, as found paradigmatically in Xunzi's predecessor Mencius, sees self-cultivation as a process of nurturing one's nature, on an analogy to plants, through which it will grow slowly but steadily into fully formed moral personhood; Mencius describes this process as the cultivation of four "beginnings" or "sprouts" of virtue, which when developed become humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.[24] A discovery model, by contrast, as found in the Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming and certain Chan Buddhists, sees self "cultivation" as a profound and sudden transformation of vision and orientation, resulting from a breakthrough to a previously obscured layer of the self, one's true underlying nature, which is complete and perfect in its moral and cosmic awareness.[25] This schema has been supplemented by Jonathan Schofer, who suggests that Xunzi represents a third way, a "reformation" model, wherein human nature is seen as inadequate on its own and must be reshaped like raw material into a better, finished form: full ethical personhood.[26]

Although this tripartite model of types of self-cultivation has proven useful within the study of Chinese religions, it will not be particularly helpful

in the current comparative study. Augustine and Xunzi are both, in their own ways, examples of a reformation model, so some finer theoretical tool is necessary to bring out the details of each of their views.

Many examinations of this sort in patristic sources construct an object of study in terms of "asceticism," a highly controverted term.[27] However, despite recent attempts to rehabilitate *askesis* as a way of talking about practices of personal formation, "asceticism" often still suggests a focus on the renunciation or suppression of physical desires like hunger and sexual appetite. Such practices are important to Augustine, but they are not as determinative as they might seem to casual contemporary readers of his *Confessions*, and if focused on exclusively could skew the interpretation of Augustine's overall understanding of personal formation. "Monasticism," another common category in Christian studies, similarly implies too much about the scope and social location of such formative practices.

Hadot has investigated phenomena in the ancient Greco-Roman world that were similar to those classed as "self-cultivation" in the study of China, and "asceticism" and "monasticism" in the study of early Christianity. My second bridge concept, "spiritual exercises," is a premodern coinage that Hadot has recently revived. He argues that all the Hellenistic schools of philosophy were centered around a variety of partially shared "spiritual exercises." By this term, he means certain methodical practices that engage thought, imagination, and sensibility; that have a significant ethical component; and that ultimately aim at a broader transformation of vision, a metamorphosis of the whole personality. Drawing on lists of such practices by Philo of Alexandria, Hadot divides them into four rough types: (1) disciplines of attention, particularly to one's own thoughts and feelings, or to what is occurring at the present moment; (2) meditations, often on maxims of one's tradition, or on trying to see and respond to the world as they suggest, but also frequently on death and suffering; (3) other intellectual exercises, such as reading, writing, listening, philosophical dialogue, and exegesis of authoritative texts, designed to expand and reshape one's awareness and "inner discourse" of interpretation; and (4) active exercises of various sorts, intended to create habits. On Hadot's view, ancient philosophy was primarily therapeutics, concerned especially with rationally regulating the passions. It was a way of life that was also training for death, for the separation of the soul from the body with its desires. Philosophical theories, Hadot claims, served these deeper practices of personal transformation and were not the primary end of ancient philosophy. In his view, the goal of philosophical speech and writing was almost always to pull the hearer onto or further along the path of spiritual progress.[28]

Hadot's work on Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* shows the strengths of his way of proceeding. Cautioning against the sort of "psychohistory" that on the basis of his *Meditations* has wrongly judged Marcus to have been pessimistic, despairing, or even an opium addict, Hadot insists on situating the received text in the context of ancient philosophy generally, and of Stoicism in particular, as a way of life and a tradition of spiritual exercises. Hadot argues that ancient authors were not expressing their own personal creativity and idiosyncratic views, which might justify such psychological analyses of their works. Rather, they were strictly constrained by rules of rhetoric concerning literary genre, structure of exposition, style, and figures of thought, and by rules concerning the subject matter and themes that must be addressed. According to Hadot,

> In the case of Marcus Aurelius, we have seen that the spiritual exercises that he wrote down were prescribed by the Stoic tradition, and in particular by the form of Stoicism defined by Epictetus. Canvas, themes, arguments, and images were provided for him in advance. For Marcus, the essential thing was not to invent or to compose, but to influence himself and produce an effect upon himself.[29]

Marcus was following Epictetus's counsel to write daily to vivify the dogmas and principles of Stoicism within one's mind. Apparently "pessimistic" musings on the vanity of human activities, the certainty of death, and the alarming "brute facts" about food or sex are actually traditional figures that Marcus reenacted by writing them down, repeatedly, in various vivid forms, to impress the truths of Stoicism more firmly on his mind in the course of his duties as emperor.[30] Marcus's writing was thus itself a spiritual exercise, an attempt to master his "inner discourse" about things and events, in accord with Stoic doctrine. This doctrine was both theoretical and practical: It described the world and human life in order to rationally justify a certain form of philosophical life.[31]

Although a full discussion of Marcus's exercises is beyond the scope of this chapter, a few remarks are in order. First, these disciplines or exercises aim to internalize certain theoretical positions about the cosmos and human beings, ones that are seen as true and rationally justified. Marcus tries to reshape himself according to Stoic doctrines that the only real good is moral good, that is, virtue, the purity of intention, which is within our power as free, reason-possessing human beings. Similarly, the only real evil is moral evil. Everything that does not depend upon our inner freedom is subject to Destiny, necessarily determined by the will of universal Nature and Reason, and morally indifferent (although not valueless). As exercises,

these ideas are mobilized in the practices of developing and assenting only to "adequate" or rigorously objective descriptions of events, stripped of any personal interest, and of stamping out judgments that include typical self-interested hopes and fears; of limiting our passive desires to the pious hope that everything will happen according to Destiny, the will of the All, and rejecting selfish desires for fame, wealth, and even life; and of restricting our active impulses to those spontaneously and purely seeking the common good of humanity as "one body" of rational beings.[32] Theoretical structures are thus integral to the orientation and emotional tonality of a distinctive way of life; practicing the appropriate spiritual exercises internalizes these ideas and cultivates related habits of judgment, feeling, and action.

Second, the form of the relevant spiritual exercises is closely correlated with, and arguably even derived from, a theoretical account of the activities of the human soul or psyche, and of the human person more generally.[33] The present study examines how analogous practices are structured both within and outside the ancient Roman context, without some of its largely shared presuppositions about the structure of the human person and psyche. One could expect that such practices would correlate with whatever account of personhood is offered by the thinker in question; for the cases of Xunzi and Augustine, whether this is true, and if so, exactly how, remains to be seen.

More generally, Hadot rightly insists on attention to literary genre and rhetorical style for the proper interpretation of ancient texts, and he highlights the importance of the social context, literary traditions, and practices behind a text that may motivate it and shape its form and content, and are essential to what it recommends. Though neither Augustine's nor Xunzi's writings provide examples as extreme and obvious (in hindsight) as Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, Hadot's interpretive emphases do illuminate several of their texts; and some of the specific traditions he discusses, such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism, shed light on Augustine's works.[34] Conversely, Xunzi's social and literary context is quite different from Augustine's Roman North Africa, and so the precise content of ancient Greco-Roman spiritual exercises is less relevant in his case than Hadot's methods of interpreting texts. Hadot argues that discovering authorial intention is still the primary interpretive goal, and that contextual analysis of the sort discussed above is the best way to reach this goal. These views are especially compelling in a case like the present one, where the texts in question are religious and philosophical ones that promote a certain set of ideas and a certain form of life, community, and polity.

Finally, the idea of spiritual exercises also hits the right note for both Xunzi and Augustine, encompassing yet transcending common references

to "self-cultivation" and pointing to the crucial importance placed by both men on teachers and companions on the path of ethico-religious development. It is important for us not to read into ancient Roman and Chinese authors a modern sense of individuality and distinctive selfhood, where the depth of one's interiority may be cast in terms of one's distance from the "crowd" or "herd," and one's depth of purpose tied to a degree of distance from sociality.[35] Augustine and especially Xunzi had strongly communal orientations, which is visible in numerous ways, including their accounts of spiritual exercises, most of which involve other people. Both recognize the importance of individual, solitary work at spiritual cultivation, but this is not the norm for either of them, and it is but one aspect of much larger programs for developing flourishing personhood.

As with "human nature," I have deployed the idea of "spiritual exercises" not only because it seems to illuminate important issues in the texts of both Xunzi and Augustine but also because both of them in fact used analogous concepts and practiced analogous exercises. For Xunzi, "spiritual exercises" correspond in a narrow sense to his idea of xiu shen 修身, usually translated as "self-cultivation" but meaning more precisely something like "improving oneself." More broadly, his conceptions of li 禮, ritual, and yue 樂, music, can also be profitably interpreted as being in significant ways spiritual exercises, aimed at personal and social transformation. For Augustine, his discussions of exercitationes animi, "exercises of the soul," and disciplina, "teaching" or "training," are sometimes overlooked but provide a distinctive avenue of entrance to his better-known theological teachings about grace and the will. More broadly, two contexts that might be seen primarily as concerning ritual, Augustine's monastic societies and his church congregations, can also be analyzed as settings for spiritual exercises. And as remarked above, Augustine as a young man became a passionate student of philosophy, and thus he came into personal contact with some form of the traditions Hadot has investigated; their influence is perhaps most noticeable in his early works, written before his entrance into the priesthood in 391.

To sum up, then, "spiritual exercises" as a bridge concept guides us to examine particular practices of personal formation in their full imaginative and theoretical context, which includes but goes well beyond explicit theories about proper ethico-religious development. We can hypothesize that these exercises will correlate quite precisely with the conceptions of human beings, and especially human psychology, that each figure develops. We can also test some of Hadot's other interpretive generalizations—such as his fourfold schema for types of exercises, his focus on training for death, and his picture of spiritual exercises as bringing the passions into

congruence with the demands of universal reason—against a wider array of evidence.[36]

Self or Person?

In this section, I begin by introducing the influential recent line of philosophical thought about personhood pioneered by Harry Frankfurt and continued by Charles Taylor. This analysis accomplishes two tasks: It supplies context and precedent for the somewhat abstract account I develop of "person" as a bridge concept. It also provides a basis for later assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this sort of highly general and abstract modern account, when compared with the "thicker" accounts proffered by Augustine and Xunzi, which are no less universal in aspiration.[37] In the rest of this subsection, I examine the strengths and weaknesses for comparative inquiry of several general terms for human beings used by Frankfurt and Taylor: self, subject, agent, and person. I argue that this analysis requires only a bridge concept, not a full-fledged theory of personhood, and that "person" is the best candidate for such a concept, because it distorts Augustine's and Xunzi's thought least, is most capacious, and fits well with the themes of this study.

Frankfurt, in his much-read essay "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," presents a fairly minimal contemporary account of what we mean when we use the word "person."[38] He begins by distinguishing between "first-order" and "second-order" desires. First-order desires are simply desires to do or not do something. Second-order desires are those a person has for some first-order desire to move him or her effectively to action (or to refrain from acting, according to the case). For example, on some hot July day, I might want to go swimming, which would be a first-order desire. I might also want my desire to go swimming to become stronger and more regular, so that I would get into shape and enjoy the benefits of good health; this would be a second-order desire. First-order desires are common to all animals, Frankfurt thinks, whereas second-order desires are unique to humans and are the products of reflective self-evaluation of one's existent first-order desires. He defines "will" simply as the first-order desire that is or will be effective in moving one to act. When someone has a second-order desire for some first-order desire to become effective (i.e., to become his will), he or she has a "second-order volition"; Frankfurt thinks having second-order volitions is essential to being a person, in contrast to being merely a member of the human species. Humans without second-order volitions he terms "wantons," because such creatures would simply not care about their wills; and regardless of how rational and deliberative they might be in the pursuit of satisfying their first-order desires, they still

would fail to evaluate them and thus would follow them blindly. True persons not only seek to fulfill their desires but also care reflectively about what sort of desiring person they are and might become.[39]

Taylor deploys Frankfurt's ideas about first- and second-order desires, but he goes beyond Frankfurt's focus on desire, arguing in more detail for the importance of evaluation as constitutive of fully human *selfhood*, a change in terminology to which I shall return. Taylor suggests that the "reflective self-evaluation" Frankfurt discerns as intrinsic to second-order volition comes in two varieties, which Taylor calls "weak" and "strong" evaluation. Weak evaluation concerns outcomes only and typically reduces to matters of ungrounded personal preference. In weak evaluations, it is sufficient that something be desired to judge it good, and some other desire might be set aside only because it is contingently incompatible with the one chosen. For example, I feel like both going for a swim and eating lunch; I decide to go swimming because the pool is only open now and I will be able to eat lunch later, but not vice versa. Strong evaluation, by contrast, concerns the "qualitative worth" of different desires, motivations, and actions. It typically rests on evaluative distinctions that are not contingent, and it deploys vocabularies of qualitative contrast such as good and bad, noble and base, deep and shallow. Refraining from some cowardly evasion of duty rests on qualitative distinctions between courageous and cowardly behavior that would not change depending on scheduling or some other contingent factor.[40]

These two kinds of evaluation are related, Taylor thinks, to two different kinds of self. Someone who evaluates only weakly Taylor calls a "simple weigher of alternatives," in contrast to a "strong evaluator." A simple weigher would be capable of evaluating alternative courses of action and acting on something other than the impress of immediate desire; he or she would thus possess reflection, evaluation, and will, but not "depth." Such a person could give no further reason beyond greater attractiveness (or circumstantial conflicts between desires) for choosing one thing over another. A strong evaluator, however, can articulate the superiority of some courses of action over others in terms of the qualities those actions possess. Such qualities are built on contrasts between "different possible modes of being of the agent." In fact, Taylor holds that there could be no true "simple weighers of alternatives," and that "the capacity for strong evaluation in particular is essential to our notion of the human subject."[41] Taylor writes:

> To characterize one desire or inclination as worthier, or nobler, or more integrated, etc. than others is to speak of it in terms of the kind of quality of life that it expresses and sustains. I eschew the cowardly act above because I want to be a courageous and honorable human being. . . . [For

the strong evaluator,] motivations or desires do not only count in virtue
of the attraction of the consummations but also in virtue of the kind of
life and kind of subject that these desires properly belong to.[42]

Strong evaluations are the vehicle by which people become the kind of sub-
jects they intend to become. They are the means by which one seeks and
perhaps attains a definite ethical and religious shape.

Taylor goes on to argue that we are not completely free to choose the
criteria for our strong evaluations, and that these criteria define our identity
as persons and agents. They provide the "horizon of evaluation" within which
we may live. Our strong evaluations, according to Taylor, are "articulations"
of our deepest, generally inchoate sense of what is decisively important,
higher, more worthy, and the like. Through repeated attempts to articulate
our deepest motivations and ideals, we become partially responsible for our
character as subjects.

Owen Flanagan has criticized Taylor's view as excessively intellectualist
and moralistic, and inferior to a position more akin to Frankfurt's, from
which Flanagan thinks Taylor has departed. Flanagan argues that Taylor's
notion of strong evaluation hinges not so much on qualitative distinctions
as on qualitative *moral* distinctions, conceived as such. This seems to me to
be a plain misreading of Taylor's original position, where strong evaluation
is definitionally linked to qualitative distinctions per se and the possibility
of nonethical evaluative distinctions is explicitly recognized.[43] Taylor can
perfectly well accept Flanagan's point that people need not see themselves
primarily in ethical terms, nor make only or primarily moral evaluative
distinctions, in order to be recognizably human agents. Flanagan's second
point, that Taylor overemphasizes the role of reflection and articulateness in
human agency, providing an excessively linguistic and intellectualist view,
has more bite. Nevertheless, Taylor can parry the objection, as he does in
Sources of the Self, by accepting that strong evaluations can be unspoken
assumptions absorbed in one's upbringing and yet function as guides to
action, even if the actor cannot articulate the reasons for such action.[44] In
any case, Flanagan is happier with Frankfurt's more minimalist approach;
but as I argue below, even this is more than is needed in the present study,
so I shall leave Flanagan's own position to the side.

Taylor's use of the term "horizon" of evaluation signifies his debt to
Hans-Georg Gadamer, as does his use of "articulation" as a way of theoriz-
ing the importance of interpretation in human life (even if one wanted,
like Flanagan, to press on Taylor the possibility of inarticulate, unreflective
action based on inchoate interpretations of social realities). Like Gadamer,
Taylor recognizes that such horizons of self-interpretation and -evaluation

are passed on to each of us through the traditions within which we are raised and live.[45] But this attention to tradition ought to lead quickly to the recognition that there are many different traditions capable of providing terms and ideals sufficient for strong evaluation. Alternative vocabularies for making these qualitative distinctions are crucial, however reflectively they are held and used, and produce distinctively different sorts of "subjectivity."

Before two such alternatives can be addressed in later chapters, however, basic theoretical choices must be made regarding the terms in which this study is to be cast. Where Frankfurt restricts himself to the notion of a "person," Taylor also uses the words "self," "agent," and "subject" to make his points. These four bridge concept candidates, although certainly similar, are not identical. Even when a stipulative definition is at issue, it is useful to interrogate typical usages to see which is closest to what is needed.

To assess these possibilities, one should note the implied contrast terms in each case, and what aspects of human existence are thereby highlighted. The increasingly ubiquitous "self"[46] is typically contrasted with "other," perhaps the vaguest and most equivocal term in all contemporary philosophical writing. This self–other combination carries echoes of a Hegelian dialectic of self-consciousness, and the term "self" at least denotes conscious inner awareness or understanding of one's existence. Even if I were to define the term to leave this heritage behind, it would still encourage a uniquely modern individualism wherein a human being is conceived as making a fundamental distinction between her- or himself on the one hand, and everything and everyone else on the other. Though this term certainly can be helpful as a way of discussing different modes of internal awareness and self-understanding, I will not use it as a primary bridge concept because some of its associations are misleading when trying to explicate the thought of both Augustine and Xunzi.

"Subject" carries many of the same associations with German Idealism and its offshoots, and in this aspect is often contrasted with "object," again focusing attention on consciousness and inner awareness, but also on perception of external realities. At least this term, unlike "self," has the advantageous implication that other human beings are recognized as other subjects, leading to discussions of ideas like "intersubjectivity." An older usage of the term relates a "subject" to a "sovereign," a lord or ruler who looks over and commands the subject, and to whom he or she owes loyalty and even devotion; in this aspect, the word conjures up feudal social hierarchy. (Alternatively, one may be "subject" in this sense to some greater power simply by virtue of one's weakness, and feel toward it nothing but resentment, fear, and perhaps awe.) Issues of authority are important to distinguishing Augustine's and Xunzi's proposals, so I will attend to their differing

accounts of "subjection." But it would be counterproductive to try to build some general account of subjection into my theoretical tools before beginning, rather than describing the relevant differences as they are manifest in each thinker's conceptual apparatus. Nor is the issue so central to the comparison that it should be made preeminent through terminological choice.

"Agent," like "subject," has desirable features but is not in the end the best overarching choice. It describes the human being as an actor, moving through a world of other agents and inert things upon which they may act. "Agent" comes from a tradition of discourse stretching back to Kant, which has become a subfield within contemporary analytic philosophy, the philosophy of action. It is also part of the classical liberal tradition of political philosophy, which is alien in significant ways to both Augustine and Xunzi.[47] Recent philosophical approaches centered on agency often view the capacity to choose rationally among alternatives as the most essential and definitive human characteristic—a stance that also conflicts with both our subjects. Though exactly how people act or fail to act is an important part of this study, it is not its sole focus, and in particular I am less concerned with an assessment of what acts might be good or bad than with what kind of person it would be best to be, and how Xunzi and Augustine answered that question and its natural follow-up, how to become such a person.

With "person," the entities to which it is to be contrasted are on the one hand animals, the not fully human and thus not, properly speaking, persons. On the other hand, there are superhuman contrasts like spirits, angels, Heaven and Earth, and gods or God, which might be analogized as "personal" but are not (or are at least no longer) persons in the usual sense. These contrasts, moreover, are relations of some sort of implied hierarchy on a continuum containing many members, which suits both Xunzi and Augustine, although each would specify the hierarchy differently. "Person," moreover, is not essentially a matter of inward self-awareness or conscious self-conception, although it doesn't exclude these. And in contrast to "self" and "subject," it essentially includes the notion that we are physically existing animal beings, although without specifying exactly how persons are to be understood or analyzed into parts or aspects. All these elements are useful for present purposes.

As discussed above, the theoretical impetus behind the use of bridge concepts is the desire to bring culturally distant religious figures into an imagined dialogue, to relate their distinctive bodies of thought and associated practices by describing them around certain shared themes. The paradigmatic danger of such a move is to obscure or confuse differences. Thus, when choosing bridge concepts, we should strive to take nothing for granted that may be at issue between the two, and in general to be as spare

as possible. In cross-traditional interpretation, we need to open ourselves to other conceptions and formulations of personhood more than we need to test them by familiar standards. Ergo, this study needs a bridge concept, not a full-blown theory of personhood; a minimal, "thin" concept rather than a thicker, more complex one articulated in familiar categories like volition. In comparative ethical studies, one should take as little as possible for granted, the better to learn more.

In this case, all I need is a contrastive term to recognize the goal of spiritual exercises: developed, flourishing personhood, in contrast to raw animality. "Person" fits the bill. It also can be used in a more inclusive sense to recognize simple membership in our species, with our typical characteristics, that is, human nature, and so is congruent with the first part of the study. (Furthermore, when this contrast needs to be explicitly drawn, as it is when explicating Xunzi, I can distinguish merely being a member of the human species from being a fully cultivated person.)[48] Corresponding to Augustine's Latin term *persona*, and to Xunzi's classical Chinese *ren* 人, "person" does not import alien notions into either man's ideas or overemphasize particular aspects of human existence such as choice, agency, or inner reflexivity.

This concept of personhood takes little for granted about how exactly to understand "human nature," what the constituent elements of a person are (i.e., what sort of general account of the human person ought to be given), why spiritual exercises are necessary, what they are, what their ultimate *telos* might be, or how they produce their effects. In other words, this bridge concept is compatible with the desired comparative questions, without smuggling in answers ahead of time or focusing on extraneous or misleading issues. Only after describing the relevant parts of Xunzi's and Augustine's views, each forming a distinctive vocabulary of personhood, will it be profitable to return to Frankfurt's and Taylor's theories for comparison.

The Will

The idea of the "will" presents more serious difficulties than the previously discussed bridge concepts. To begin with, the word derives from Augustine's Latin term *voluntas* (still visible in the French *volonté* and English "voluntary"), which has no exact equivalent in Xunzi's philosophy or in early Chinese thought generally. *Voluntas* is absolutely central to Augustine's theological system, but the term in Xunzi often translated "will," *zhi* 志, though certainly worthy of sustained attention, is relatively less important overall to his views, occurring a total of ninety-four times in the extant corpus of his works. Just as the crucial role of spiritual exercises in Xunzi's ethical theory has prompted me to investigate analogous disciplines advocated by

Augustine, Augustine's preoccupation with the human will has led me to focus on the place of *zhi* 志 in Xunzi's system, along with other terms he uses that cover related philosophical and psychological territory. But even here, we should resist premature identification of the Augustinian *voluntas* with the modern English "will."

In this section, I review the conclusions of an essay by Charles Kahn on the "discovery of the will" in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, which capably analyzes some of the tangled threads making up our modern ideas about the will, with attention to Augustine and his predecessors and successors.[49] Suitably emended, Kahn's list of aspects of different ideas of the will may serve as a guide to inquiry into Xunzi's account, and for comparison of his ideas with Augustine's complex concept of *voluntas*.[50]

As Kahn points out, it is far from clear what exactly our conception of the will is, or if there is only one such idea. Current discussion of "the will" is sometimes a way of talking about making decisions, rationally or otherwise; sometimes about the strength of motivation or commitment; sometimes about moral responsibility for actions; sometimes about our intentions when acting; and sometimes about freedom and determinism as global metaphysical issues. Kahn discerns four different modern perspectives on the will, "each of which might lead to a different account of the history of this concept" if it were used as the basis for such a narrative.[51] The first he calls the "theological concept of the will," which begins with Augustine and culminates in Aquinas and the medieval "voluntarists," where the human will is seen as modeled on and responding to the prior will of God, which for this family of theories is the primary referent for the term. The second is the post-Cartesian idea of the will as volition, an inner mental event that causes or accompanies any outer movement of the physical body, and which is wedded to a dualism of mental and physical entities. The third is the Kantian notion of will as self-legislation, wherein we become aware of our existence as noumenal, nonempirical beings, and which is the root of stronger theories of the will such as Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's. The fourth is more of a theme, the problem of free will and determinism, which cuts across the previous three, and "in fact precedes them all, since it can be clearly traced back to Aristotle and Epicurus."[52]

Kahn's concern is to produce a more complex, philosophically oriented history of the notion of the will than the one provided in Albrecht Dihle's pathbreaking and influential account of the concept, which Kahn finds to be uniquely interested in the theological strand and its problematic of human response to divine will.[53] He thus systematically compares Aristotle's and Aquinas's theoretical accounts of human action and the psyche, finding a unified concept in Aquinas (*voluntas*) that draws together four largely unre-

lated elements of Aristotle's thought. He then turns to the historical developments intervening between these two men, and he discerns four major landmarks between them: first, the Stoic theory of action centered on the notion of *sunkatathesis* or "assent" standing guard between any "impression" (*phantasia*) and an "impulse" to action (*horme*); second, the translation of Greek philosophy into Latin, where disparate notions about action became expressed through *voluntas* and cognates like *voluntarium*, and the metaphor of freedom from constraint becomes habitually related to *voluntas* through the new Latin technical term *libertas*; third, the convergence of these trends in the later Stoicism of Epictetus and Seneca, writing in Greek and Latin, respectively, who expand the notion of assent into a broader conception of moral character and personal commitment, which is to affect and shape all our daily experiences of thought, feeling, and action through the thorough practical application of reason (what Hadot would call spiritual exercises); and fourth, Augustine's doctrine of the will, whereby on Kahn's account "Neoplatonic and Christian levels of spirituality are added to the Stoic and Roman conceptions of *voluntas* we have traced so far."[54] Kahn's thesis is that Augustine's and Aquinas's theories of the will certainly presuppose commitment to Christian traditions as an indispensable condition, but that the other Greek and Roman trends he documents are preconditions as well; in sum, their accounts of the will "have proved to be two of the most powerful and durable examples of eclecticism in Western intellectual history."[55]

As apt as this judgment may be, my goal here is not historical narrative but comparative ethical analysis. Furthermore, I reject Kahn's contentions that Augustine lacks a "systematic theory of human action" and especially that his concept of will is not part of a "theoretical model for the psyche," upon which Kahn bases his turn to Aquinas.[56] Augustine's views on these issues are outlined in chapters 4, 5, and 7.

Nevertheless, Kahn is right to distinguish different and even competing strands in modern statements about "the will." As a bridge concept, "will" is a list of areas of related inquiry: I examine Xunzi's and Augustine's accounts of human action; theories of what a person and "mind" are that undergird these accounts; assessments of human capacities for choice and decisive commitment; and any characteristic limitations, flaws, or dangers that afflict human decision and action. Precisely what terms each thinker uses, and how they are related, if at all, are central questions. For Augustine, obviously, *voluntas*, *libertas*, and *arbitrium* (meaning "choice" or "decision") are crucial. For Xunzi, I focus on *zhi* 志, roughly "intent"; *ke* 可, "assent"; and his various words for feeling and desiring, especially *qing* 情 and *yu* 欲. Furthermore, Kahn's discussion of the theological strand of thinking about the will, drawing on Dihle's insightful work, where human willing is seen

as modeled on and responding to divine willing, is useful for contrasting Augustine's and Xunzi's understanding of human ethico-religious life.

NOTES

1. Brown 1988, xvii.

2. Citations of Xunzi's works are to D. C. Lau's concordance (1996). All citations of this and the other Institute of Chinese Studies concordances will take the form chapter/page/line, so for example 19/97/9 would mean chapter 19, page 97, line 9. Lau's concordance is based on the *Sibu Congkan* edition of the *Xunzi*, which itself is a reprint of the *Taizhou* edition from the Song; Lau carefully notes his emendations, which are based on parallel texts and other manuscript traditions. For a discussion of the textual history of the *Xunzi*, see Knoblock 1988–94, vol. 1, 105–28. I have departed from Lau's text only three times, for reasons discussed in the notes. Unless otherwise noted, citations for Augustine's works refer to Jacques-Paul Migne's commonly accessible *Patrologia Latina*, now widely available via the Internet as a searchable database. Migne is unfortunately based on the Maurist edition of the collected works of Augustine compiled from French sources and published from 1679 to 1700. It thus does not share in the fruits of modern textual scholarship, and merely collects variant readings without attempting to produce true critical editions, as in the ongoing series *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* and *Corpus Christianorum*, which are still not complete.

3. On Xunzi's life and influence, see Knoblock 1982–83, and 1988–94, vol. 1, 3–49.

4. For fuller discussion and bibliography, see Knoblock 1988–94, vol. 1, 105–20.

5. The classic biography of Augustine is Brown 1967, which was supplemented with a lengthy new epilogue in 2000. For a good, short sketch more detailed than the one offered here, see Markus 1999. For recent revisionist accounts, see Wills 1999 and O'Donnell 2005.

6. To summarize roughly, Augustine lived in a society based economically on tenant farmers and slaves, and he saw slavery as a condition justly imposed on sinners, i.e., all of humanity. He also thought that hierarchical relations of dominance were intrinsic to human society, and that family relationships (e.g., husband–wife, parent–child, and master–slave) were defined by the giving and obeying of orders; ideally such relationships are governed by genuine concern for the welfare of the subordinate parties, rather than lust for domination (*civ. Dei* 19.15, 14). Xunzi takes for granted a system of tenant farming that supported government administration primarily via tax revenues, and a patrilineal social and kinship system where women's life possibilities centered on maintenance of male lines of descent. In his writings, Xunzi barely mentions women, remarking only occasionally on such things as women's role of nurturing (or perhaps feeding) children while men instruct them (19/97/9), and on the dangers of women's sexual attractiveness to (male) practitioners of Confucian disciplines (20/100/2).

7. For an outstanding example of this sort of critique applied to contemporary thinkers, see Okin 1989.

8. Hadot 1995, 211; see also 212, 273. For insightful discussion, see Antonaccio 1998, 75–78.

9. Hadot 1995, 206–13, Antonaccio 1998, 78–79. Against Hadot and Antonaccio, Nehamas 1998 tries to make this cultivation of a Nietzschean and Foucauldian "aesthetics of existence" essential to his conception of spiritual exercises, so that the true practitioner of such exercises both aims at and succeeds in shaping his or her life into something unprecedented and new.

10. Davidson 1994.

11. Foucault 1985, 25–33; see also Davidson 1994, 118ff.

12. For a much broader attempt to bring Augustine and Foucault into conversation, see Schuld 2003.

13. I thus use "concept cluster" differently than Rosemont 1988 and Berkson 2005. Rosemont and Berkson mean by this something more like what I call "conceptual apparatus," whereas I intend to focus on an apparently single idea like "human nature" that when tracked into multiple accounts in different languages can be analyzed into various constituent ideas of no necessary mutual relationship.

14. A famous example would be Aristotle's account in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156a6–1157b5 of the three kinds of friendship: complete friendship or friendships of virtue (the focal meaning), friendships of utility, and friendships of pleasure (the secondary meanings).

15. Rorty 1989, xiii.

16. The phrase comes from Pinker 2002.

17. Probably the most important recent book on human nature is Midgley 1995. Also valuable is MacIntyre 1999.

18. MacIntyre 1999, esp. 1–79.

19. And if, as some hopeful socialists and Marxists might contend, exploitive or otherwise unjust social arrangements cause our apparent viciousness, the question is merely pushed back another level. What is it about human impulses and/or sociality that often leads to such destructively organized communities?

20. My point here concerns using ideas about nature to support abominations like genocide; I am not trying to suggest that such horrors no longer occur, however they are "justified."

21. Obviously the moral status of homosexual sexual activity is controversial in contemporary U.S. society. I leave to the side any justification for my views on these questions; seriously examining these issues would stray too far from present purposes.

22. Nussbaum 1993, 1995, 1997.

23. For a fuller exploration of the general theme of self-cultivation in Confucianism, as well as of these and other models of the process, see Ivanhoe 2000a.

24. *Mencius* 2A6.

25. Ivanhoe 2002, 96ff.

26. Schofer 2000 [1993].

27. On the study of "asceticism" in early Christianity, see Clark 1999, 14–42. On asceticism more generally, see Wimbush and Valantasis 1995. On asceticism in Augustine, see Lawless 2000.

28. Hadot 1995, esp. 49–70, 81–125. Evaluation of Hadot's specific historical claims about ancient philosophy is beyond the scope of this study.

29. Hadot 1998, 243–44.

30. Hadot 1998, 243–306, 49–50, 102–5.

31. Hadot 1998, 35–53.

32. Hadot 1998, 35–231.

33. Hadot 1998, 40–53, 73–100.

34. Hadot 1993.

35. As with any generalization, there are likely to be exceptions, especially in this case with regard to eremitic traditions, of which both Augustine and Xunzi were aware. (Interestingly, Augustine admires and takes them quite seriously, as for instance in his *Confessions*, but Xunzi mocks them as ineffective; see *Xunzi* 21/105/14–16; cf. 24/6/8–10 on "reclusive scholars.") My point is to be alert to the possibility of deceptive projections of contemporary presuppositions.

36. For further discussion of the suitability of this category for analyzing Xunzi, see chapter 6, esp. n. 15.

37. Note also the outstanding essay collection building on a classic lecture by Marcel Mauss: Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985.

38. Frankfurt 1988.

39. Frankfurt 1988, 12–19.

40. Taylor 1985c, 15–21.

41. Taylor 1985c, 21–27, 25, 28.

42. Taylor 1985c, 25.

43. Flanagan 1990, passim, 37–41. For counterevidence, see esp. Taylor 1985c, 24 n. 7; Flanagan 1990, 42, quotes another recognition of this by Taylor (1985a, 239).

44. Taylor 1989, 77–78, 91–92. Flanagan 1990, 53, cites these passages and discusses the issue.

45. His concern with these issues shows in works like Taylor 1991 and esp. 1989.

46. For a review of some recent literature on this idea, see Lauritzen 1994. Some recent collections of essays on the subject are Rouner 1992; Ames, Dissanayake, and Kasulis 1994, 1996; and Allen 1997.

47. This is currently a hotly debated topic. See, e.g., the perceptive essays by Dawson, Jackson, Meilaender, Santurri, and White (all 1997) in *The Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 8, no. 2 (1997), which focus on Augustine and modern liberalism. Note also Gregory n.d.

48. "Humanity" often plays a similar evaluative role, pointing to an achieved level of ethical cultivation. In the end, "person" seemed to have the connotations closest to

what I was looking for, whereas "human" was closer to a straightforward attribution of membership in the species *homo sapiens*.

49. Kahn 1988.

50. The best survey of the growth of ideas of "will" in the West is Sorabji 2000, 303–40, although I depart from him in one crucial way in my reading of Augustine's psychology (see chapter 5, n. 14). His notes also serve as a more extensive guide to bibliography on this issue than I can provide here. Sorabji's analysis is closely tied to a range of related developments in the ancient Mediterranean and medieval Europe. Thus his analysis of the gradual clustering of the components of "will" into one idea is too closely related to Augustine (whom he sees as the pivotal figure in this development) to be the best choice for a bridge concept in the current study.

51. Kahn 1988, 235.

52. Kahn 1988, 235–36.

53. Dihle 1982. For Kahn's comments, see Kahn 1988, 236–38.

54. Kahn 1988, 238–56.

55. Kahn 1988, 259.

56. Kahn 1988, 238.

Comparing Human "Natures"

✦

REVISITING BRIDGE CONCEPTS

Bridge concepts aim to provoke accounts of widely separated figures in terms of a common set of topics that highlight particular points of similarity and difference. By creating more precise points of contact, the comparativist can provide the basis for an imaginary dialogue between the two positions thus articulated and thereby pursue more substantive investigations of the general topic the bridge concept specifies. Thus a bridge concept like "human nature" can serve to generate what might be called a *problématique* for inquiry. The process works as follows: Comparison provokes conceptual analysis of what at first seemed to be a straightforward idea such as "human nature," which in turn provokes deeper interpretive investigations on each side, which lead to articulated positions that can be seen, at least partially, to speak to each other in various ways. Sorting out the issues thus raised spurs further ethical analysis of the subtopics in question.

Most crucially in the present case, Augustine's and Xunzi's accounts of human nature are not theoretically isolated but are themselves enmeshed in larger projects of person formation. At the most general level, at least, both thinkers charge "human nature" with grave flaws and deficits, as well as important potentials. Both the deficits and the potentials, however, describe possible arcs of development, whether ascending toward the angels or sage kings, or descending into corruption and pettiness. This chapter begins to chart this motive aspect of accounts of human nature as justifications and guides for self-cultivation more explicitly, in preparation for the subsequent chapters on their proposed spiritual exercises.

To make headway with this comparison, then, we must first attend closely to the various aspects of "human nature" as a bridge concept and

thereby delve beyond the surface similarities in the views of Augustine and Xunzi to begin to grapple with the distinctive strengths and weaknesses of each figure's ethical vocabulary. Despite the facile identification of Augustine's and Xunzi's positions by Dubs in the middle of the twentieth century, the evidence adduced in chapters 3 and 4 suggests that the differences between their two accounts are quite significant.

For Augustine, the bridge concept of "human nature" correlates fairly well with his own term *natura*. According to him, human *natura* is our essential being, placing us high in the divinely ordained hierarchy of being, superior to inanimate things, plants, and animals but inferior to angels and God. This *natura* is shared by all human beings, and it is distinctive to us as a species in comparison with other types of things, each of which has its own *natura*. *Natura* includes every salient aspect of human beings, including what is distinctive to us, our rational minds, as well as what is shared with other animals: memory, habits, sensation, desires and fears, and the bodily existence that makes these things possible. In the wake of the primordial Fall, we have been justly punished with a vitiated version of our original nature, and our existence as persons, as mixtures of body, *corpus*, and soul, *anima* and *animus* (including mind, *mens*), is marked by profound deficits: a tendency toward covetous desire for earthly goods, including food, sex, companionship, praise, wealth, and power; and susceptibility to destructive habits that cement these desires into our memories in such a way that we become enslaved to a bestial and corrupt existence.

Although for Augustine our embodied existence has become a locus for the punishment of original sin, and for the repetition of sin, our mind still carries the indelible imprint of its creator. Our minds are made in the image of God, and no amount of sinning can destroy this. Our deepest desire remains fixed on God, and so we can never truly rest without full divine presence. Given this deep yearning for the divine, to the extent that we become entangled in carnal delight (i.e., the love of created things in themselves rather than as creations of God), we are inwardly at war with ourselves. For Augustine, however, this internal struggle does not map cleanly onto different psychological faculties, such as reason and emotion, or warring substances, such as light and darkness, or even aspects of human personhood like body and soul. On his account, we are composites of different substances joined in a "mixture" or "marriage" that should be loving and marked by obedience of lower to higher but is instead marked by disobedience and chaotic impulses of rebellion against just order. Perhaps surprisingly, Augustine characterizes this tendency to rebellion in terms of a structurally unified mind that speaks internal "words" involving the integrated activity of memory, understanding, and will or love. However, in

spite of its formal unity, the mind has been infected at the highest levels with a pride that divides it from God and, in a cascade of deviations, divides the mind against itself and the body from the soul.

For Xunzi, by contrast, the standard identification of *xing* 性 with "human nature" is incorrect, given my analysis of the idea as a multifaceted bridge concept. To get at Xunzi's views of human nature in a contemporary sense, one must attend not only to *xing*, "innate endowment" or "instincts," but also to *qing* 情, "disposition" and "emotion," as well as to Xunzi's separate discussions of what is unique about human beings and what is common to humans and other animals, as well as his larger accounts of psychology and moral development. Indeed, when considered in this larger context, it is clear that *xing* does not even exhaust what is common to human beings but instead focuses on what we do spontaneously and effortlessly, without thought, in contrast to all that is *wei* 偽, "artificial" or constructed in human life.

According to Xunzi, human beings have an innate endowment, the "raw material" of personhood, which is made up of sensory capacities and a responsive disposition. He construes this disposition as made up of certain positive and negative emotional tendencies, or rather he appears to conceive of emotions primarily as dispositions to feel and act in certain ways. These *qing* generate more specific desires as the sense organs discern objects and the heart/mind becomes aware of various possibilities. Our innate emotions and desires, however, are "bad" for two reasons. First, they produce awful consequences if followed without external or internal restraint. And second, they tend generally toward destructive, shortsighted selfishness (although they do include some sociable instincts as well). If dependably satisfied, they are liable to proliferate well beyond our basic needs. Except for our ability to form and follow distinctions, which seems also to underlie our metastasizing desires, human beings are no different from other animals, such as apes, who share similar appearance, sensory constitution, and responsive, desiring modes of action. According to Xunzi, our spontaneous impulses include our shared desires for food, sex, shelter, rest when tired, companionship with similar creatures, and social dominance.

The human heart/mind, however, can affect these spontaneous, instinctual processes in ways unavailable to other animals. It can examine and plan, consider possible actions and consequences, relate disparate perceptions and ideas into complex wholes, and above all learn new skills and information. All these activities can interpenetrate with our spontaneous desires in any given situation, especially through the heart/mind's ability to overrule spontaneous desires by assenting to particular aims or goals. Over time, the heart/mind can learn to remain empty, unified, and tranquil in the midst of

this active deliberation, even if at first these nascent abilities are limited and weak, and easily swayed by desires and aversions. Learning, whether correct or misguided, tends to accumulate and affect the judgments one makes and the actions one is moved to take. For Xunzi, the Confucian Way is the comprehensive object of learning, the pursuit of which will nurture these capacities into full flower.

Thus Xunzi takes *qing* and *xing*, terms that had been used before him in relatively strong ways to mark the "fundamental nature" or "essence" of a thing and its genetic trajectory of birth, growth, decline, and death, and redefines them in minimalist ways. Our *xing*, for Xunzi, is what is innate, thoughtless, and instinctive, what requires no work or delay to become so; in contrast, *wei* 偽, or "artifice," is necessary to develop the heart/mind and become truly human, to become persons in any strong sense. Our *qing* consists of evaluatively loaded dispositions to feel and act in certain ways, which in turn generate specific desires in response to particular situations. As a matter of logic, Xunzi seems to be assuming that certain potential capacities must exist in the heart/mind for it to be capable of learning complex theories about human life and the cosmos, restraining and reshaping emotion and desire, and commanding socially prescribed actions. Yet he does not ascribe these to our *xing* but to the heart/mind and to "artifice," his marker for that which takes conscious effort over time to achieve.

Xunzi and Augustine, then, differ both in the architecture and the substance of their moral anthropologies. Augustine unifies all human beings in the concept of *natura*, which he then specifies in terms of body, soul, "inner" and "outer man," and mind, each of which he analyzes in itself and in its relations to the other elements of human personhood. For Xunzi, what "makes us human" is our capacity to make distinctions, by means of the heart/mind; our innate endowment, dispositions, and desires are no different from other primates' and deserve no special respect. To become genuinely humane persons, Xunzi thinks, we must develop and rely on the educated heart/mind, and this process of development will eventually transform us from our animalistic beginnings.

The various aspects of "human nature" can have rather different theoretical valences. For both Augustine and Xunzi, accounts of our instinctive desires and aversions provide grounds for pointed criticism of some of our drives, and thereby partly define the problems and objectives for their regimes of personal formation. The powers that should be brought to bear on these drives, however, are for Xunzi at least emphatically not instinctive or spontaneous. For both thinkers, attention to human desires pushes us beyond a consideration of "human nature" alone, toward a broader account of moral

psychology and even moral anthropology. Much of the rest of this chapter comparatively develops various themes in this area, examining topics such as desire, emotion, habit, and will, in preparation for the subsequent analysis of their proposed spiritual exercises.

Both thinkers' assessments of what is common to all human beings, as well as what is distinctive to us as a species, help develop the substance of their moral anthropologies. These accounts of commonality and distinction also serve to place human beings in a broader religious cosmos. Contrary to readings of Augustine and Xunzi as pessimistic, both these thinkers give humans rather lofty stations in the broader ecology of existence. Strikingly, both place us in what could be called penultimate positions: inferior and subject to the greatest beings (angels and God, for Augustine) or powers (Heaven and Earth, for Xunzi), but superior to everything else in the universe. Their distinctive cosmologies help provide the tenor or color of their pictures of personal formation. (These themes are developed in greater detail in chapters 6 and 7.) For Augustine, we must take care to do all we can to ascend toward divinity, reversing the fall "downward," using lower beings only insofar as they contribute to this process, and cultivating grateful obedience, humble dependence on Christ, and active, joyful service. By such means we may eventually return to our true home and true rest, in effect leaving our current station and ascending to a more stable and blessed angelic position (*corrept.* 10.27). For Xunzi, we are to actively administrate the existence of all living things, especially ourselves, like good and capable ministers serving their lord. Xunzi explicitly warns us not to try to ascend in the cosmic hierarchy but to come to dwell happily and well in our current, inevitable station, which can be made splendid and beautiful, or wretched and chaotic, depending on the character of shared human activity. Eternal beatitude beckons Augustine; Xunzi dreams of the beautiful order of the Way prevailing completely under Heaven. Both figures are concerned to inspire their audiences toward dramatically better possibilities that can and will be achieved, if their proposals are followed.[1]

Last, both thinkers chart courses of "natural" development in order to warn us away from predictable doom; both decry the social chaos, war, and human degradation that uncorrected human action is prone to foment, and Augustine points as well to damnation as the final, just result of these evils for the individual souls that pursue them. This fourth aspect of the bridge concept serves to articulate more fully the dangerous consequences of human sinfulness, to use Augustinian language. At the micro level of individual formation, however, this developmental dimension serves to condition each figure's account of spiritual exercises by articulating various dangers

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Desire

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they see desire as in large part defining the
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For Augustine, desire always has a "vertical"
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desires fall into this category for Augustine, a
desire is still for rest in God.

For Xunzi, in contrast, there is no categoric
forms of desire. Human desires aim at real good
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and will therefore lead us astray, but they are
opposed to the goodness of the Way.

The first thing to note here is the centralit
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God's perfection essentially includes eternal
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sure, form, and order to the goodness of their
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Augustine's judgment that created things can n
cannot serve as fit objects for our strongest de
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this anxiety will inevitably give way to despair
love covetously (i.e., with *cupiditas*) fail or des
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God, by contrast, will never fail us. God gi
what is divine, which we yearn to participate i
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is incompatible with human happiness, which
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lutely invariant and stable (e.g., eclipses and
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reater detail in chapter 6.) So though people
that others will take their place, and that oth-
lly as family lineages and religious traditions
tions. Eternal rest is not a possibility in such a
d subsequent renewal of desire can never be
lical character. There can be no higher happi-
ly over time, for Xunzi; for him, the highest
ce, not a final end.

s impatient instinctive desires for food, beau-
her things, and one of the chief tasks of Con-
shape these desires over time. This requires
also a development of a stronger taste for the
er. When these new desires are awakened and
aining and experience, the beauty and justice
ing satisfaction will heighten our pleasures.

pleasure is an unalloyed good, and he thinks
his Confucian Way is that it provides so much
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thinks these groups' pleasures will be, and
. For Augustine, in contrast, the pleasure that
desire is almost always a trap, an entanglement
arthly goods and pulls us "down," away from
e the joys to be found in the service and wor-
are at times profound and intense, in this life
tely overwhelm the competing pull of carnal
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Xunzi thinks trying to eliminate or even mini...
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you have wandered off the path and become l...
to the correct path. Such vicissitudes are horr...
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More specifically, Xunzi could distinguish bet...
debilitating anxiety and fear felt by "petty" pe...
Way and know all too well the dangers they...
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So we can say that Augustine and Xunzi dis...
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Xunzi share numerous important ideas about
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both Xunzi and Augustine link emotion and
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In his works, Augustine
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identification also shows th
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relation of the object to oneself (e.g., we are i
that bear is 10 yards away from me), in order t
(22/111/14–15). Such cognitive content is al;
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As discussed in chapter 3, it is odd that
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not on desire per se as the object that spiritu
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stable disposition from particular response at a
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Perhaps we should think of Xunzian emotions a
to situations (I fear that the bear will hurt me)
cific (I want to run away from the bear and see

In his works, Augustine makes explicit the
tity—between emotion, love, and *voluntas*, wh
tions and desires are essential to righteousness
identification also shows that his account of lo
ment of any contemporary account of his view
use of two interchangeable groups of terms (*vo*
for love, e.g., *amor*, *caritas*, and *cupiditas*) for *bo*
emotions/desires has far-reaching effects in h
cises and his caution regarding the very idea of
further in chapters 7 and 8.)

Xunzi more clearly distinguishes dispositio
ing somewhat murky on emotions. This allows

...nt of habit.

mory, Habit, Sin

...more of memory than does Xunzi. For Augus-
...f our memories are in some sense ourselves,
...eflection and much of our personal reforma-
...d thoughts and sense impressions, according
...nd (most important) habits, which continue
...aptism. Xunzi, in contrast, sees memory as a
...t of the mind, worthy of mention but no seri-
...nceive of memory as a storehouse or library
...e wish to recall particular bits of information
... not develop this image. According to Xunzi,
...obsessed" (literally "obscured"), by partially
...als, hopes, or fears, this seems to be a prob-
...ntiveness as much as a failure of "emptiness"
...sions in memory. Once obsession is resolved,
...e; but for Augustine, the momentum of past
...ven after we have repudiated them and tried
...ereffects.

...ir to Xunzi. His account of obsession hinges
...e partly aware of the truth, become unduly
...rned and experienced, and thereby become
...ality. We love what we have learned from our
...me resentful of anyone who might question
...hings (21/102/5–10). Xunzi is here under-
...ming to understand and grasp the Way, which
... formulas or an invariable ranking of various
... complicated, and it is not easy to become
...nzi, we are prone to overestimate our own
...nding, and we resist those who could be our
...ts here of an account of self-justification and
... problem, making us prone to failure when
...ge in study of what is in fact the right Way; if

memory, and it underesti...
in our present fallen condi...
whether we are the sovere...
memory. For him, we cann...
to recall; but even more a...
to forget: illicit pleasures a...
memory "whispers" to us a...
possibilities we would pref...
fesses that in dreams he st...
10.30.41). Even the most ri...
because of the stringent inw...
sin, whether or not one suc...
Augustine, past sins presen...
but not completely resolve...

The primary engine of ...
cussed in chapter 4. Accor...
action, they bring a decept...
that even after the pleasure ...
longer avoid the illicit act in...
his exhaustive survey of Au...
focuses on the power of ha...
chains so strong that only G...
develop are fragile, liable at...
incessant divine support. O...
to the end" is a further gif...
tinuation of such virtues (...
17.42, 45–46).

This theorization of hab...
aspects of our resistance to ...
approaches. But it comes at...
the most obvious tool for co...
and act rightly—as a parad...
a theoretical tic that might ...
conceives of habit this way ...

articulate human progress
dge alone, or increasing-
ms of a physics of increas-
r God, not self. (I discuss
es of the pursuit of virtue
why he thinks such a theo-
is account of memory and

an does Xunzi. For Augus-
e in some sense ourselves,
t of our personal reforma-
se impressions, according
to habits, which continue
ntrast, sees memory as a
ny of mention but no seri-
as a storehouse or library
ticular bits of information
rage. According to Xunzi,
"obscured"), by partially
s, this seems to be a prob-
as a failure of "emptiness"
nce obsession is resolved,
e, the momentum of past
epudiated them and tried

count of obsession hinges
the truth, become unduly
ed, and thereby become
we have learned from our
ne who might question
. Xunzi is here under-

we pursue some merely partial and thus wrong
all too certain that we are becoming wiser and
further away from the right path. Intellectual
and we should take the utmost care to pursue t
continue to open us up to correction from real

From an Augustinian point of view, howeve
ure is still too shallow: It rests on a simplisti
memory, and it underestimates the scope of t
in our present fallen condition. Most strikingly
whether we are the sovereign masters of a flaw
memory. For him, we cannot always easily rec
to recall; but even more alarmingly, we cannot
to forget: illicit pleasures and the taste for si
memory "whispers" to us against our better j
possibilities we would prefer to reject: August
fesses that in dreams he still gives in to such
10.30.41). Even the most righteous have much
because of the stringent inwardness of his ethic
sin, whether or not one succeeds in satisfying su
Augustine, past sins present an ongoing problem
but not completely resolved until death.

The primary engine of this ongoing difficu
cussed in chapter 4. According to Augustine,
action, they bring a deceptive pleasure that ch
that even after the pleasure diminishes, as it wil
longer avoid the illicit act in question. As John
his exhaustive survey of Augustine's views of l
focuses on the power of habit formation for o
chains so strong that only God can break them,
develop are fragile, liable at any moment to sli
incessant divine support. Our virtues are gifts fr
to the end" is a further gift, which all believe
tinuation of such virtues (conf. 10.32.48, civ. De

uguatine, sees the possibility of habitual vice
o real depravity; but in contrast to Augustine,
nat there is an asymmetry of habit formation
his might seem to follow from his account of
show in the next chapter, Xunzi focuses with
e power of habit formation for good, as in
on" of goodness through repetitive Confucian
ossibility of "deviant" and "chaotic" customs,
l by them or the vices they generate. Such
ned and even reformed by good government,
's habits have been truly hardened over many
ore pliable, for Xunzi, for good and for ill.
again differ about quite significant issues.
of our spontaneous, innate desires misdirect
res are uniquely habit forming and thus pow-
sagrees, thinking that our desires can follow
and that habituation can occur in many direc-
results. For Augustine, in our fallen state we
l we find it particularly difficult to escape its
effort and divine aid; whereas for Xunzi, we
given the general tenor of our instincts. It is
etrain ourselves and our tastes, according to

ving three chapters, Xunzi thinks that depend-
achieve but eventually attainable, and he may
f perfect, sagely virtue. Augustine, however,
, a subtle trap set by pride. Sin's continuing
via memory to seduce our present and destroy
ce of dismay and anxiety for Augustine. The
rust in God's mercy (*conf.* 10.32.48).

re: Assent, Consent, and Dissent

d carefully to our conscious assent and dis-
action. Such decisive responses to the world

of suggestion, delight, and
later account of the unifie
similarities and differences
sent and attempts to ident
positions.

Xunzi's account is simpl
ter 3, Xunzi thinks all pe
"accept" or "assent to," eve
direction. Assent seems t
thing that might fail on occa
desire and assent conflict,
and we suffer deprivation w
a position seems blind to
and internal conflict and in
He clearly believes that ma
desire, and that all people
can prompt us to question
articulation of our difficulti
ur desires. Because our d
Xunzi's view, we only disse
they will lead us into relati
words, we dissent from the
make sense; even the viciou
their life or some other im
personal danger provides s
actions to be wrong, at lea
Xunzi thinks such a limite
mmitment to the Confuci

But even this sketch rai
moved some of the problem
ally convinced by the rig
uncertain or confused, an
r convictions by not atten
us desires? One might a

RES"

:ique power of pleasure to

:at if whole groups of peo-
:ly to satisfy their instinc-
:tic customs." This is "the
 heart/mind operating as
:s social and moral effect
:ossibility of habitual vice
:: in contrast to Augustine,
:metry of habit formation
:llow from his account of
:apter, Xunzi focuses with
:rmation for good, as in
:ugh repetitive Confucian
:: and "chaotic" customs,
:ces they generate. Such
:ed by good government,
:uly hardened over many
:zi, for good and for ill.
: quite significant issues.
:. innate desires misdirect
:: forming and thus pow-
:at our desires can follow
: can occur in many direc-
:ne, in our fallen state we
:arly difficult to escape its
:d: whereas for Xunzi, we
:enor of our instincts. It is
:: our tastes, according to

. Xunzi thinks that depend-
:lly attainable, and he may
:rtue. Augustine, however,

seem to be essential to the idea of having a wil
or ideals, as distinct from mere satisfaction. Xur
a characteristic and important activity of the he
of his treatment it becomes clear that he view
human powers making human reformation po
build such an operation into his mature structur
the Trinity, but very early he develops an accou
of suggestion, delight, and consent that he str
later account of the unified mens. This section
similarities and differences between Augustine'
sent and attempts to identify the relative streng
positions.

Xunzi's account is simpler, and so I treat it
ter 3, Xunzi thinks all people, even the unculti
"accept" or "assent to," even when their existi
direction. Assent seems to be a natural human p
thing that might fail on occasion because of the s
desire and assent conflict, assent just trumps o
and we suffer deprivation willingly (22/111/6,
a position seems blind to common human exper
and internal conflict and indecision. But Xunzi
He clearly believes that many people simply a
desire, and that all people start out this way. C
can prompt us to question ourselves and our de
articulation of our difficulties can open the log
our desires. Because our desires do not cease
Xunzi's view, we only dissent from following th
they will lead us into relatively greater trouble
words, we dissent from them when we believe t
make sense; even the vicious can usually control
their life or some other important interest is a
personal danger provides some foothold, Xunzi
actions to be wrong, at least in the most limi

observer would quickly reject (21/105/5–8).
dispositions, and thereby our whole experience
, at least saves Xunzi from the charge of blind-
redicament. But it does reveal him to be a sort
unt of morality and personal formation, in the
ing is the key to successfully transforming our
 for Xunzi, is a matter of correctly recognizing
y compelling features of a situation, so that we
ake and thereby know what we *must* do; in Xun-
means both "what we assent to" and "what [we
hallenge, then, is to account for our motivation
ontinue learning, about the Way, and to explain
o the transformation of our dispositions and to
eart/mind's abilities. For Augustine, of course,
od calls whom He will, initiating and sustaining
er of the elect.
consent is more complicated and occurs on mul-
 analysis of sinful willing in terms of suggestion,
tio, *delectatio*, *consensio*) as part of his exegesis of
 beginning as early as 389 in his first commentary
2.14.20–21).[11] On this account, all sin begins
r through sensation or memory, of some illicit
 the serpent's whispering to Eve in the garden.
e of seeing delicious food during a fast. Next, we
e prospect of the suggestion, for example, relish-
e food before us. This is akin to Eve in fact being
 that she delights in what he proposes, and in her
or carnal appetite, she actually eats the forbidden
ly, for sin to be "complete," we must consciously
ect before us. In the example, this would be a
 our fast wrongly and eat the food before us; the
oosing, even though "not seduced" as was Eve, to
dden fruit. Such consent is itself sinful, even if our
alized in action (*s. Dom. mon.* 1.12.34).

is desire; and the love that
14.7). Various possibilities a
tion of our loves, and we l

Let us try to coordinat
with the account given in
articulated most fully in
with the discussion of sensat
both of which provide obje
tine wants to insist on the
remaining attentive to vari
15). The trouble begins w
It appears that to capture
must assimilate *delectatio* r
and desire (*amor*, *diligo*,
account of the psyche deve
the form of "internal word
ur environment: This org
nsciousness, according
te words spoken to articul
words spoken in judgment

The problem is sharper
entifies emotion with

Certainly the will is in
other than wills (*voluntat*
ment (*in ... consensionem*
but a will in disagreement
man's will is attracted
of different things that ar
into feelings (*affectus*

The Latin generally tra
, *consentire*), here ren
rincipal meaning. Augustin
voluntates or "wills" cons

zi is not very articulate here,
ems simply by virtue of his
reform our *qing* in order to
on assenting repeatedly to
ems to think that disordered
we become grossly insensi-
s, and so we blithely assent
uickly reject (21/105/5–8).
ereby our whole experience
nzi from the charge of blind-
does reveal him to be a sort
personal formation, in the
ccessfully transforming our
ter of correctly recognizing
res of a situation, so that we
w what we *must* do; in Xun-
we assent to" and "what [we
account for our motivation
ut the Way, and to explain
of our dispositions and to
s. For Augustine, of course,
will, initiating and sustaining

plicated and occurs on mul-
ing in terms of suggestion,
as part of his exegesis of
389 in his first commentary
this account, all sin begins
memory, of some illicit
ring to Eve in the garden.
od during a fast. Next, we
gestion, for example, relish-
is akin to Eve in fact being

This picture is fundamentally an account o
broader issues in Augustine's vision of human
notably, it highlights the spontaneity and centr
tions of the will: Our *voluntas* is the collection
are movements of yearning toward various ob
and yearning are two alternate descriptions
Augustine says, "A love that strains after the po
is desire; and the love that possesses and enjoy
14.7). Various possibilities attract us according
tion of our loves, and we long to "possess and e

Let us try to coordinate this schema of sug
with the account given in chapter 4 of Augustin
articulated most fully in *On the Trinity*. "Sugges
with the discussion of sensation and memory in
both of which provide objects for our awarenes
tine wants to insist on the centrality of our *vol*
remaining attentive to various possible objects
15). The trouble begins with the differentia
It appears that to capture the motive force of
must assimilate *delectatio* or "delight" to Augus
and desire (*amor, diligo, caritas, cupiditas, libido*
account of the psyche developed in *On the Trin*
the form of "internal words" that we speak to
our environment: This ongoing flow of words i
consciousness, according to Augustine. But ho
ate words spoken to articulate recognition of
words spoken in judgment of that delight?

The problem is sharpened by the crucial p
identifies emotion with *voluntas*. Augustine wri

Certainly the will is involved in all [emotions];
other than wills (*voluntates*). For what is desire
ment (*in . . . consensionem*) with what we wish fo
but a will in disagreement with what we reject

t *voluntas* and the mind do not make this easy.
o look for a resolution would be Augustine's
Adam, Eve, and the serpent in *On the Trinity*
it in terms of different *intentiones*, "intentions"
e human mind. The superior application, sym-
a, "wisdom," and concerns the contemplation
. The inferior application, symbolized by Eve,
d is called *scientia*, "knowledge," presumably in
f good and evil provided by the tree in Eden.
rly to the earlier texts, with sensation offering
ve consenting, but this time as *scientia*, rather
al appetite." This apparent reallocation of psy-
ne very important benefit: Our concupiscent
would not be localized in an "appetite" that
selves, given that Augustine wants to insist that
our souls, and more specifically our minds,
r mind feeling delight and yearning, our own
by both licit and illicit possibilities. Augustine
tia a superior role in judgment, as "that *inten-*
upreme power to move the limbs to action or
? When the mind consents at its highest levels,

osed reading will not work. First of all, the dis-
sapientia tracks the distinctions between what
the one hand, from what is spiritual and eter-
t of consent to good or bad possibilities must
Moreover, in this same passage (*Trin.* 12.17),
tes *appetitus* "appetite" from "the reasoning of
iness of our *scientia* or "knowledge" is to attend
, material things. He speaks of the "carnal" or
soul," common to humans and animals, which
," toward material realities in such a way that
t off" from our *sapientia* or wisdom. So Augus-

as he does repeatedly, tha
itself sinful, as long as we
such a situation is lament
only dangerous, not damn
tensions with his considera
City of God. How are we t
us to action that are som
and desires be inarticulat
of illicit pleasures? Our
aspect of our unified mind
that are in some sense out

In some places, Augus
the words or thoughts to w
are somehow not verbaliz
1.2–2.3). But even the m
work against this unfortun
famous and penetrating ac
sions, the old, sensual tem
are quite specifically artic
memories (*conf.* 8.11.26
by our minds, in his fully
may be put sharply this wa
is, feel, such tempting sug
alien substance in the for
fallen minds, not just our s

To revise Augustine sli
gest version of his accoun
means of an ongoing intern
I suggest that for Augustine
at the "highest" level of our
ur inner discourse is not e
words we wish they did n
the service due to God, wa
internally; our own minds

em. So it appears that *delight*
agreement, for Augustine,

st, it appears that Augustine
ntaneous and involuntary
purposefully chosen *consen-*
nts or repulses us. But his
nd do not make this easy.
tion would be Augustine's
e serpent in *On the Trinity*
rent *intentiones*, "intentions"
superior application, sym-
ncerns the contemplation
ation, symbolized by Eve,
knowledge," presumably in
ded by the tree in Eden.
xts, with sensation offering
this time as *scientia*, rather
parent reallocation of psy-
benefit: Our concupiscent
lized in an "appetite" that
ugustine wants to insist that
re specifically our minds,
ht and yearning, our own
licit possibilities. Augustine
judgment, as "that *inten-*
ve the limbs to action or
nsents at its highest levels,

work. First of all, the dis-
distinctions between what
what is spiritual and eter-
or bad possibilities must

tine in this passage is distinguishing between
and real consent (both consciously chosen), n
considered consent. He also argues that our ap
soul" (recall that this is one of his characteristic
tions) are "close to" but distinct from the *inten*
our *scientia* or knowledge.

On the one hand, this way of parsing thing
as he does repeatedly, that merely feeling temp
itself sinful, as long as we do not consent to
such a situation is lamentable, part of our fal
only dangerous, not damning. But on the othe
tensions with his considered account of desires
City of God. How are we to make sense of "mov
us to action that are somehow outside our
and desires be inarticulate and yet still move u
of illicit pleasures? Our *voluntas* seems simult
aspect of our unified minds, and yet also to inc
that are in some sense outside our minds.

In some places, Augustine writes as if our
the words or thoughts to which we consent, an
are somehow not verbalized internally, despite
1.2–2.3). But even the metaphors he uses,
work against this unfortunate quarantine man
famous and penetrating accounts of the divide
sions, the old, sensual temptations are describe
are quite specifically articulate "whispers" fro
memories (*conf.* 8.11.26). These can only be
by our minds, in his fully developed psycholo
may be put sharply this way: Who is talking in
is, feel, such tempting suggestions? For Augus
alien substance in the form of our own bodi
fallen minds, not just our souls, and certainly

To revise Augustine slightly in the service

em tracks the distinction Frankfurt and Taylor
nd second-order desires, as long as we under-
" to be products of some more or less articu-
account suggests.[15] Furthermore, Augustine is
people cannot effectively consent to anything
the prospect. Without sufficient delight, "con-
, a second-order desire that registers as a form
ot be fulfilled.

about Augustine's account is that our choices
rticular things are only logically superior to our
e, choice freely serves our *voluntas*, in the sense
es. As sinners with divided loves, we may have
follow certain desires that now seem wretched,
e not to follow them. In fact, we may be power-
an consent to them, even with some awareness
is precisely the force of Augustine's account of

ot be more divergent from Xunzi's account of
ace. We frequently fail, according to Augustine,
or choose, although this raises at least a logical
ial consent to effective sinful desires (i.e., those
patient, charitable Augustinian would want to
t scope of his confidence about consent. What
need to dissent effectively from strong desires,
whatever? Xunzi's account seems to trade on
e 可, ranging from "possible" to "permissible" to
Suppose for now that any sane person will avoid
l or impossible, but does that mean that anyone
st their own strong desires?[17] Xunzi does seem
h some very significant caveats: Most will not
from their existing desires, and even when we
a primarily instinctive existence, we need very
ve any hope of reorienting ourselves to higher

n day-to-day activities
to help a child with h
in anger). In his view, it is
can control themselves in
in anger. Xunzi is n
erpowered by their pas
against the flood, one sh
And indeed, the places wh
perate are often either an
ines and wars do not occu
if I can say such a thing, by
intimates). All of this imp
part not as far gone in w
two men differ, then, ab
ur capacity to resist them
by force of circumstance

From Xunzi's point
less psychological epiphen
our strongest desire is in
accept this sort of picture
ates and acts most of the
think will be beneficial, w
insist that such a picture ca
student who must struggle
of a conscious commitme
tion, that is, staying on th

Xunzi would have to
something like addiction: i
it is no longer wished for
any move to universalize th
of human existence. He li
to have thought that the u
sufficient to scare signific

 our own inner discourse
 stronger delight in divine
 us loves decisively, even if
 are unable to consent, even
 mere wishes would be an

 sorts of "internal words."
 tion Frankfurt and Taylor
 sires, as long as we under-
 some more or less articu-
 Furthermore, Augustine is
 tively consent to anything
 ut sufficient delight, "con-
 ire that registers as a form

 account is that our choices
 ly logically superior to our
 our *voluntas*, in the sense
 divided loves, we may have
 that now seem wretched,
 In fact, we may be power-
 even with some awareness
 of Augustine's account of

 from Xunzi's account of
 all, according to Augustine,
 this raises at least a logical
 sinful desires (i.e., those
 Augustinian would want to
 ence about consent. What
 tively from strong desires,
 account seems to trade on
 ssible" to "permissible" to

goods; without such a strong reorientation, the
us much, because we will not know what to ass

Xunzi's moral psychological point is that
motivating factor than mere desire, although t
is not concerned with heroic feats of moral str
experience of self-control. The sort of case Xu
is not the case of struggling against an addictio
in day-to-day activities of the sort referenced i
sleep to help a child with homework, or restrain
in anger). In his view, it is just a misunderstan
can control themselves in this way have some
out in anger. Xunzi is not particularly intereste
overpowered by their passions. Because at tha
against the flood, one should avoid reaching s
And indeed, the places where Xunzi thinks hur
perate are often either amenable to political c
ines and wars do not occur), or can be properl
if I can say such a thing, by means of ritual (e.g
intimates). All of this implies that he thinks n
part not as far gone in viciousness as an Augus
two men differ, then, about the actual quality
our capacity to resist them if we are genuinely
by force of circumstance or personal convictio

From Xunzi's point of view, Augustinian co
less psychological epiphenomenon, merely th
our strongest desire is indeed moving us to
accept this sort of picture as an account of ho
ates and acts most of the time, because they
think will be beneficial, which is also their str
insist that such a picture cannot do justice to th
student who must struggle to overcome disor
of a conscious commitment to something hig
tion, that is, staying on the Way.

ners and more advanced practitioners struggle
nt (specifically, how does consent relate to the
oming of internal division?); and at the end,
finally reunited in something like perfect vir-
es.

HE CONTEXT OF FORMATIVE PRACTICES

ed by human resistance to moral reformation.
erwhelming, in effect, because no human being
ny combination of personal effort and merely
for pleasure, acclaim, and power are simply
overcome without shattering experiences and
n the God who pulls us back mercifully from
a decisive break with our penultimate yearn-
is world), they will remain hidden and effec-
ects for goodness we attempt to pursue. Only
xical situation, as beings so close and yet so far
scape it, having at last clearly understood what
lp.
eeply impressed by both the human need and
ur instincts cannot lead us to goodness; follow-
to which too many fall. Luckily, though, there
reformation available that marks out the path
ne good: Confucianism. Until we understand
unlikely to seek help; but after we do start to
cross a suitable teacher who can show us this
he Way, we will gradually come to understand
and in the process be transformed, intellectu-
y. Reinventing the Way by oneself is not even
ring the Way simply a matter of hearing some
ble to practice without difficulty; it is a long,
clearly recognizes that many will not become
f the Confucian Way from outside, and some

ably succumb to their own,
Whether anyone would ever
Xunzi and others like him.
e differ, then, on the role of
ormation. Crucial points of
ning how one begins a new
ramatic conversion experi-
anced practitioners struggle
w does consent relate to the
division?); and at the end,
something like perfect vir-

ORMATIVE PRACTICES

ance to moral reformation.
t, because no human being
personal effort and merely
im, and power are simply
shattering experiences and
us back mercifully from
th our penultimate yearn-
remain hidden and effec-
attempt to pursue. Only
ings so close and yet so far
t clearly understood what

oth the human need and
ad us to goodness; follow-
all. Luckily, though, there
e that marks out the path
ism. Until we understand
p; but after we do start to

are so far gone in vice that they will need to b
even executed. But the majority would welc
is convinced, even if their initial evaluations v
interested calculation.

These differing senses of the possibilities fo
shape both Augustine's and Xunzi's conception
the various elements of "human nature" are co
retical projections based on experience cond
serve to explain and justify that experience ar
tradition(s) of reflection and practice. Without
tinctive experiences of the difficulty of becomin
motive they would have had for developing th
human nature. Thus "human nature" is an excep
of it must be articulated in culturally condition
but it aims to articulate human existence in a
precisely to provide an account of continuing
Nothing else is possible for us, however, as ling
torically conditioned beings, so we should not v
illicit in such an attempt to get behind, underm

Nevertheless, all such attempts are linguis
analysis above has shown, respond to a variety
tions about human beings. There seems to be
decide which possible combination and framing
interpretive, humanistic studies of "human nat
concept cannot simply be superseded by emp
brain function, and the like. It is unlikely that
can be conducted in abstraction from concerns
should become (or avoid). Explicitly examin
between conceptions of "human nature" and no
mation and flourishing can serve to clarify vario
ing, along with their strengths and weaknesses

One rather obvious point does need to be
tine, who believes he has certain, divinely reve

...system.

...sting question, however, is which of them
...ccount of the character of observable human
...ropology more generally. But deciding such
...their underlying religious and philosophical
...history and the structure of the cosmos will
...without begging crucial questions.[18] In lieu
...global theological judgment, we can focus
...human experience that each thinker's vocabu-
...least generate hypotheses about greater depth
...e study, such hypotheses can serve to generate
...to the forthcoming accounts of each thinker's

...nemory and habit provide a particularly pow-
...r depth and complexity within human beings.
...by his striking account of the mind as struc-
...ally divided when looked at over time: Our
...stream of sometimes diametrically opposed
...owledge. Both of these theoretical moves help
...matize" the very idea of moral progress. And
...ugustine is clearly committed to the possibil-
...g progress in righteousness." So the strength
...ychological vocabulary for talking about hid-
...justice generates questions as well. What is
...eep suspicion of human motives? More spe-
...ion relate to his critique of pagan virtue, and
...tian redemption and increasing righteousness?
...account of internal moral conflict during the
...on does Xunzi provide? Is it shallow and inap-
...not, might it instead be seen as reasonable and
...riately fixated on certain recurrent instinctive

...his chapter, Augustine conceives of our desires
...ght be called a "vertical" dimension in relation

Augustine's conviction that
the form of rebellious lust
relatively short order, abs
go from being a seemingly
collapse of love for the
the radicality of the disea
ongoing therapy, as we sha

Xunzi, by contrast, see
ease. In fact, he eschews al
focuses on craft metaph rs
ing something beautiful an
Steady commitment will
at least the hope of eventu
raises is whether Xunzi is
radical evil, at least in th
seems to view this as a cont
under the pressure of
prevailing forces. Radical
pasively present in the fir
concerned about what mig
their appetites to guide th
they evaluate plans merely
benefit. But it is still an
ms that he ought to take
argue. From another angle
whether Augustine can im
cognizable as human g in
other words, is Augustine's
and categorical, in the en
Given his analysis of
Xunzi's focus on assent an
examine ourselves, in Xun
attention and lack of seri
which takes the form of as

arising "fleshly" desire are
ience. Not to belabor the
tenable view informed by
ound an idealized concep-
ntrast, seems wedded at a
gins, which colors his per-
sense of our relative alien-

wever, is which of them
acter of observable human
erally. But deciding such
religious and philosophical
ructure of the cosmos will
crucial questions.[18] In lieu
l judgment, we can focus
that each thinker's vocabu-
theses about greater depth
neses can serve to generate
accounts of each thinker's

rovide a particularly pow-
exity within human beings.
ount of the mind as struc-
ooked at over time: Our
es diametrically opposed
ese theoretical moves help
a of moral progress. And
mmitted to the possibil-
teousness." So the strength
ary for talking about hid-
questions as well. What is
iman motives? More spe-
tique of pagan virtue, and

to God. This relation decisively shapes the cha
our loving, and it effectively sorts our loves in
ceives as diametrically opposed. This schema
ways of discussing and analyzing what might b
row Kant's terminology.[19] Radical evil would
and potentially devastating in effect, given su
perhaps striking about Augustine's vision, in
Augustine's conviction that truly radical evil lu
the form of rebellious lusts that have infected
relatively short order, absolutely anyone—eve
go from being a seemingly good citizen to bein
collapse of love for the divine in the wake of c
the radicality of the disease demands the mo
ongoing therapy, as we shall see.

Xunzi, by contrast, seems to accent the re
ease. In fact, he eschews all language of diseas
focuses on craft metaphors, giving examples o
ing something beautiful and useful out of diffi
Steady commitment will lead to gradual impr
at least the hope of eventual perfection. One
raises is whether Xunzi is missing something.
radical evil, at least in the form of tyranny a
seems to view this as a contingent matter of ba
under the pressure of violent, chaotic circur
tervailing forces. Radical evil is extreme and
vasively present in the form of latent possibi
concerned about what might be called day-to-
their appetites to guide them without consider
they evaluate plans merely in terms of a calcul
benefit. But it is still an open question wheth
ties that he ought to take much more serious
argue. From another angle, however, this cont
whether Augustine can finally give a convinci

and the perhaps even more vexing question of
calculating what is beneficial to truly pursuing
own sake?

aine Augustine's and Xunzi's constructive pro-
on in more detail.

NOTES

t Xunzi and Augustine as respectively representing
at J. Z. Smith has called "locative" and "utopian" reli-
easier with Augustine than Xunzi. However, because
al exercises" rather than "religion" per se, I will leave
e terms, see Smith 1978, xi–xv, 67–207; and 1990,
42ff.
desire needs to be qualified by equal attention to his
ccount apparently trumps desire when the two con-
n more detail below in the section on "consent."
d William Babcock for assistance on these points.
ute to the long-standing error of reading Augustine
clearly concerned with the character of human life
ed at the deepest level to the fundamental goodness
vertheless, for Augustine the proper understanding
only be achieved in relation to the eternal, which
d proper destiny. All of this is very different from
Way.
might press back on this exact point, charging that
cent desire as an ever-present, genuinely dangerous
us and committed Christians leads to deep anxiety,
a clear-eyed awareness of the doctrine of predesti-
to themselves, to be loving Christians may fall away
dgment, withdraws the grace that lifted them heav-
does not seem to be as aware as he might be of the
such ideas can produce, but he would likely attribute
erved penal state after the Fall. The objection would
al point about human happiness in this life.

to be in flat contradiction
late that it is a holdover from
soul where reason is oppose
come to seem not weaker tha
written in the late 420s, near
in his thinking, not a transit
temporal sequence.

8. On these points, se
Xunzi the Way cannot be
9. The complications Au
are addressed in the next sec
10. Prendiville 1972.
11. For insightful discuss
hoven.) In this essay, TeSelle
Edenic drama in terms of wil
not directly corroborate the tr
ive texts that work out the
written in 389), and s. D
schema in en. Ps. 48.1.6, 83.
late precisely. The most inter
account in Trin. 12.17 (writt
chapter 4, n. 59, and again
itations are Gn. adv. Man. 2.
Note also s. 352.8, preached
together in conf. 10.30.41, an
12. This translation ha
13. Translation adapted
14. The alternative pos
000, 372–84, 400–17; and
tine's understanding of "conse
read Augustine as advocating
s , with the former being an as
latter being part of the mens, w
purely good. This recalls Plat
ery early conception in quan
shadows Thomistic faculty psy
ti n. Oddly, however, as Knuu

ners scarce.) But it remains
...late assent to his gradualist
...er, which governs his views
...ptiness, unity, and tranquil-
...ssent to this model without
...velopment, but he does not.
... question of how someone
...en more vexing question of
... beneficial to truly pursuing

... Xunzi's constructive pro-

...e as respectively representing
..."locative" and "utopian" reli-
...than Xunzi. However, because
...religion" per se, I will leave
...xi–xv, 67–207; and 1990,

...ified by equal attention to his
...mps desire when the two con-
...the section on "consent."
...assistance on these points.
...ng error of reading Augustine
...the character of human life
...the fundamental goodness
...the proper understanding
...ation to the eternal, which
...this is very different from

...his exact point, charging that
...present, genuinely dangerous
...istians leads to deep anxiety

6. Nussbaum 1986 is an important study in this
cal literature, such issues tend to be analyzed in term

7. The strongest counterevidence to my read
not the *Confessions* (as argued in chapter 4) but his o
Teaching about the need for certain sorts of rhetoric (t
Cicero) to move people when they know something
(*doc. Chr.* 4.4.6, 4.12.28, 4.13.29, but cf. 1.9.9; see a
to be in flat contradiction to the subtle picture devel
late that it is a holdover from classical traditions of rhe
soul where reason is opposed by and seeks to rule t
come to seem not weaker than reason but stronger
written in the late 420s, near the end of Augustine's
in his thinking, not a transition between different po
temporal sequence.

8. On these points, see Hutton 2001, 74–137
Xunzi the Way cannot be codified.

9. The complications Augustine's notion of cor
are addressed in the next section of this chapter.

10. Prendiville 1972.

11. For insightful discussion, see TeSelle 1994. (I o
hoven.) In this essay, TeSelle provides further referenc
Edenic drama in terms of willing in notes 1 and 2, p.
not directly corroborate the threefold analysis that is a
ive texts that work out the idea in detail are both ver
(written in 389), and *s. Dom. mon.* 1.12.33–36 (39.
schema in *en. Ps.* 48.1.6, 83.1.7, and 103.4.6, which
date precisely. The most interesting testimony for pre
account in *Trin.* 12.17 (written perhaps between 4
chapter 4, n. 59, and again below in the current secti
citations are *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.18.28, *cat. rud.* 18.30, c.
Note also s. 352.8, preached between 396 and 400. D
together in *conf.* 10.30.41, and several other places, e

12. This translation has been changed in several wa

13. Translation adapted from Hill 1991, 332.

14. The alternative possible line of interpretati
2000, 372–84, 400–17; and Knuuttila 2004, 152–7

On the Trinity, in favor of a more *psychologically* Pla-
 some evidence for the other interpretation, such as
 12.1–2 on animals and the outer man (depending
 imal appetites" in human beings—on my account,
 s we do such "appetites" can only be experienced as
 d); one remark in *civ. Dei* 14.19, in the midst of an
 at implies a separation between *affectiones* and *volun-*
 stine's discussion (in debate with Julian of Eclanum
 as bypassing our *voluntas*. Nevertheless, I think the
 high. After all, Augustine instructs us to crucify the
 f we would follow Christ (*Trin.* 4.6).
 nhoven 2004, chap. 3, sec. 6. I have profited greatly
 n's reading of Augustine in terms of modern debates
 especially with regard to his analysis of Augustine

 would seem to serve this need in Augustine's account
 where we succumb to desires we (partly) wish to

 Augustinian account sin is indeed strong enough to
 to physical suicide.

 attempts are manifold: First, incompatible basic
 peal to neutral facts or standards. Second, even in
 l to relatively neutral grounds (e.g., modern confi-
 n explanation for human origins), judgments about
 difficult and often question begging. For instance,
 very well be able to assimilate evolutionary theory
 s of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve to the
 ntyre's contrast between "progress" and mere "epi-
 difficulty, since one person's progress is another's
 works on such questions include MacIntyre 1988,
 Moody-Adams 1997.

 In this chapter, I outline M
 gious development. The fir
 general conception of th
 various evocative metaph
 which they are interwoven
 concept of spiritual exerci
 學, usually translated as
 the chapter as a whole, ex
 he advocates most strongly
 and appreciation. The thir
 what might be called a la i
 includes four broad stages
 man, and the sage.

F

 Although many religious t
 idea of religion as a "way
 translated in its most basi
 that the real or best Dao m
 all religious, and cosmi
 encompass or at least t
 the best way of referring t
 it was the closest availa
 "philosophy."

 In lieu of a survey of th
 can I here only to give a