

How to Understand Mencius's View That Human Nature Is Good: Interpretations and Judgments

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In interpreting Mencius's theory that human nature is good, scholars have proposed, consciously or unconsciously, many different views throughout more than 2000 years, of which about 10 typical views are as below: (1) the good-heart view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as based on a good heart; (2) the goodsprout view, interpreting the good human nature as based on moral sprouts; (3) the gooddirection view, interpreting the good human nature as with good direction; (4) the goodcapability view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as good capability; (5) the good-part view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as being partly good; (6) the good-comparison view, namely the human-beast distinction view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as based on human-beast distinction; (7) the goodtotality view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as being dominated by good from within; (8) the cosmological view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as from a good cosmological origin, proposed by neo-Confucians such as Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi; (9) the ontological view, also might be called as a discovery view, interpreting the good human nature as based on benti 本体 which shall be grasped by intuitive moral cultivation, proposed by Wang Yangming and his disciples; (10) the living-course view, interpreting the so-called good human nature as an appropriate course toward goodness.

Moreover, scholars often assume, consciously or unconsciously, one or several of 10 types of judgment as the theoretical basis of Mencius's view that human nature is good: (1) the a priori judgment that human nature is a priori good; (2) the posterior judgment that human nature is empirically good; (3) the metaphysical judgment that human nature is essentially good; (4) the phenomenon judgment that human nature is characteristically good; (5) the comprehensive judgment that human nature is completely good; (6) the particular judgment that human nature is partly good; (7) the general judgment that human nature is generally good (dominated by the goodness); (8) the comparative judgment that human nature is relatively good (in comparison with animals); (9) the value judgment that human nature is good according to a man-made criterion; (10) the factual judgment that human nature is factually good.

This paper will categorize various of interpretations of Mencius's view that human nature is good since Mencius's own time to present time into 10 interpretations which were made on basis one or several of 10 different judgments. A review of these views (interpretations) and judgment assumptions would help clarify the logical basis of Mencius's theory that human nature is good.

【Key Words】 the view that human nature is good, ten interpretations, 10 judgments