Curie Virág

Emotions, Measurement and the *Technê* of Practical Wisdom in Xúnzǐ's Ethical Theory

Among the philosophers of the Warring States Period (ca. 475–221 BCE), Xúnzǐ 荀子 (c. 310–220 BCE)[1] was arguably the most intellectually ambitious and systematic, forwarding a vision of how the psychic and bodily workings of human beings were integrated with the broader social, political and cosmic realities of which they formed a part.[2] This unified approach was premised on a growing sense during this period that the natural world operated according to intelligible patterns and processes, and that these patterns and processes grounded human reality as well, both explaining human tendencies and capacities, as well as providing normative guidelines for their fulfillment. It also depended, crucially, on an account of emotions – one that is more complex and multifaceted than any other to have survived from the pre-imperial era.[3]

Although Xunzi did not articulate a theory of emotions as such, he theorized extensively about a broad range of issues that would reasonably fall under what we would commonly refer to as emotions. This includes the widely-debated moral psychological categories of *xìng* 性 (inborn nature) and *qíng* 情 (innate/affective dispositions),[4] as well as terms pertaining to dispositional states such as desire (*yù*欲), liking/loving (*hǎo* 好) and disliking/hating (*wù* 惡). It also includes

1 I would like to thank David Konstan and Máté Veres for their valuable feedback on this paper.

2 Scholars have not been able to verify Xúnzǐ's precise dates but those given here follow a widely accepted range of approximate dates within which Xúnzǐ is believed to have lived. For a reconstruction of Xúnzǐ's life and work supporting these dates, see Knoblock (1982-3).

3 On the "invention" of such an integrative vision in late Warring States period, see Sivin (1995). Virág (2017) traces the rise and development of early Chinese philosophical thinking about emotions within the context of emergent anthropological and cosmological thinking. On Xunzi, see Virág (2017) 163–188.

4 *Qíng* represents an alluring candidate for comparison with the modern term "emotions" insofar as it served as the umbrella category for various groupings of certain basic emotions, which in Xúnzǐ's case consisted of the six feelings of liking (*hǎo* 好), disliking (*wù* 惡), happiness (*xǐ* 喜), anger (*nù* 怒), sadness (*āi* 哀) and joy (*lè* 樂). It would be highly problematic, however, to assume a one-to-one correspondence between *qing* and the modern concept of emotions, since the two terms cover vastly different conceptual territory. For a survey of the conceptual history of *qíng* in traditional Chinese thought, see Eifring (2004). On the terminological and methodological complications involved in investigating "emotions" in the context of early Chinese thought, see Virág (2017) 6–10.

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various specific emotions such as delight/pleasure (*lè* 樂), anger (*nù* 怒), happiness (*xǐ* 喜, *yú* 愉), and sorrow (*yōu* 憂), and more socially complex notions such as courage (*yǒng* 勇), shame (*chǐ* 恥), and respect (*jìng* 敬). These discussions take place within a number of distinct explanatory contexts, including the account of human nature and self-cultivation in the "Human Nature is Bad" (Xìng'è 性惡) chapter (Ch. 23); the elaborations of affective dispositions, or *qíng*, as a focus of training in the "On Honor and Disgrace" chapter (Ch. 4); the natural theory and philosophical anthropology outlined in the "Discourse on Heaven" (Tiān lùn天論) chapter (Ch. 17); and the analysis of ritual and its therapeutic, aesthetic and ethical functions in the "Discourse on Ritual" (Lǐ lùn 禮 論) chapter (Ch. 19).

What to make of these discussions is not entirely straightforward. The *Xúnzǐ* seems to propose a variety of distinct pronouncements about what the emotions are and what ought to be done with them, not all of which are easy to reconcile with one another. But even more basically, there is the perennial problem of how to confront the very topic of emotions in the early Chinese context, given the limits of our modern terms and analytic categories. While it would be convenient to simply take a certain familiar formulation and look for its presumed classical Chinese counterpart in Xúnzǐ's writings, this does not necessarily lead us to an understanding of what the emotions were, in their broader sense, inclusive of its complex layers of meanings and phenomenological features.

It is this more expansive sense of emotions that this paper seeks to bring out – a task that requires not only examining assertions about certain emotion terms, but also interrogating a fuller range of issues with which emotions were entangled in Xúnzǐ's conception: 1) the ontological question of how the natural world operates, the realm of human beings included; 2) the epistemological question of what the criteria of knowledge and understanding are, and how the human agent has access to them; and 3) the ethical question of how right understanding is cultivated and carried out. As envisaged by Xúnzǐ, emotions pervaded and linked together all of these realms, furnishing the site of resonance between the human and cosmic worlds. It was through the proper fulfillment of emotional dispositions, which represented the intelligible patterns and processes of nature within humans, that we enacted our proper role within the cosmos, thereby achieving a condition of alignment with Heaven and Earth. Thus realized, the emotions formed the keystone of what Philip J. Ivanhoe has termed a "grand *ecological ethics*" in which the optimal condition of human beings was to harmonize with Heaven and Earth "for the fulfillment of all three," bringing to realization "a design inherent in the universe itself."[5] A more complete account

5 Ivanhoe (1991) 310.

of Xúnzǐ's understanding of emotions, then, needs to recognize and take into consideration the multiple, overlapping spheres of theoretical concern within which emotions were embedded, and to pay due attention to Xúnzǐ's ideal of cosmic alignment, which prioritizes the fulfillment and optimal realization of human emotional dispositions as the proper condition of human beings.

The crux of this alignment is the realm of human intelligence, cognition and right judgment. This is a realm that includes, but is not fully covered by, Xúnzǐ's ideas about the heart-mind (*xīn* 心). As is evident from the existing scholarly literature, how one understands the nature and normative implications of emotions in Xúnzǐ depends considerably on how one understands the operations and potentialities of the cognitive faculty. The latter is a topic that is in need of deeper exploration, and I propose here that some of the limitations of existing accounts of emotions in Xúnzǐ's philosophy can be traced back to a narrowly circumscribed conception of Xúnzǐ's approach to cognition and understanding – one that focuses specifically on rational control. In this paper I aim to contribute to a more conceptually informed account of emotions in Xúnzǐ's thought through an expanded view of the cognitive domain, approached through his account of practical wisdom. I argue, in brief, that Xúnzǐ articulated a robust conception of practical wisdom to which he attributed a capacity to achieve perspicacious insight into the workings of reality and to arrive at sound methods of responsiveness. Such an ideal of responsiveness provides a quite different perspective on emotions from the standard account, which presents Xúnzǐ as taking emotions as objects of control through the exercise of reason and "external" standards of rightness. It points, instead, towards a normative framework defined by the alignment of human beings with the patterns of Heaven and Earth itself, instantiated through the *fulfillment* of human emotions.

The topic of practical wisdom in Xúnzǐ's thought has not received much attention. Most of the scholarly emphasis has been on Xúnzǐ's moral philosophy – particularly the normative dimensions of his theory of human nature, self-cultivation, and moral agency – to the relative neglect of his understanding of the epistemology and ontology of the virtuous human agent more broadly.[6] When these matters have been discussed, the emphasis has been on the operation of "rational" judgment, whose main function is to "approve of" (*kě* 可) and apply external standards of rightness.[7] Correspondingly, emotions are primarily

6 Justin Tiwald's (2012) generous conception of "moral expertise" points, exceptionally, to some of the important intellectual features that I highlight in this paper. See also note 18, below.

7 See, e.g., Van Norden (2000) 124–125; Lodén (2009); Slingerland (2003) 217–264. The basic model of emotions and desires as objects of training, restraint, and transformation has remained intact through the recent turn towards practice-centered approaches to ethics, which has

construed as "mental states" comprised of those unreflecting desires and impulses that need to be tamed, directed and trained through the exercise of one's reason. The default model invoked to capture this process is the craft analogy laid out in the "Human Nature is Bad" chapter, where Xúnzǐ compares the enterprise of cultivating the inborn nature (*xìng* 性) with the various crafts – the carpenter straightening out a piece of warped wood with a steam press, the sword maker honing metal into a sharp blade, and the potter fashioning a vessel out of a lump of clay.[8] Just as a craftsman applies external force to give shape to a formless, or ill-formed, mass of material, so must some presumably "external" agent shape and direct an amoral raw nature with deliberate effort (*wei* 偽) so as to achieve her chosen ends. The logic of the craft analogy suggests that, for Xúnzǐ, emotions and desires are passive, malleable objects to be shaped, trained and refined.

While Xúnzǐ's concern with training and cultivating one's desires and preferences is an important part of his blueprint for ethical, social and political reform, it concerns only one end of the scale of cultivation – that of the uncultivated individual whose "raw" affective dispositions are out of alignment with standards of virtuous and intelligent attainment. Xúnzǐ, however, recognized a spectrum of human possibilities with respect to moral development and attainment, and made clear that those who engaged in the craft-like enterprise of abiding by preestablished guidelines – the "men of standards" (*fāng zhī shì* 方之士) – were just of the middling sort, inferior to the "sage" (*shèngrén* 聖人) who, being capable of deliberation (*lǜ* 慮), firmness (*gù* 固), and fondness (*hǎo* 好) for the Way, represented the "ultimate in the Way" (*Dào zhī jí* 道之極).[9] Xúnzǐ, then, explicitly posits two distinct models of virtue, with the superior one being that of the sage who goes beyond mere conformity to standards and who is able to grasp and put into practice the proper course, or the Way, through insight and deliberation.

What this means for the emotions is that they could have wide-ranging ontological and ethical profiles depending on the situations in which they are actualized, and on the cognitive attainments of the individual human agent. And indeed, we find other important discussions of emotions in the *Xúnzǐ* that are not consistent with the standard passive account, and that reflect a different understanding of the nature and workings of cognition and judgment as well. These

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focused on the somatic and therapeutic aspects of Xúnzǐ's theory of ritual. See Kline (2004), Kline (2006), and Tavor (2013).

8 E.g., *Xúnzǐ* 23/113/9; 23/114/9; and 23/115/13-23/115/17. Passages from the *Xúnzǐ* correspond to book/page/line numbers in Lau/Wah/Ching (1996).

9 *Xúnzǐ* 5/19/3. Translated passages from the *Xúnzǐ* are those of Hutton (2014), with occasional modifications.

correspond to a conception of practical wisdom in which cognitive mastery and skilled responsiveness work in tandem, and which are premised on the possibility of achieving balanced and perspicacious insight into the nature of reality – and thus also of the emotions as well. Xúnzǐ theorized such ideas by way of a technical discourse of measurement that established the possibility of making genuine claims about balance, moderation and appropriateness.

This discourse played a key role in Xúnzǐ's efforts to outline what I call a *technê* of practical wisdom. It involved references to measuring instruments such as the scale (*héng* 衡), the ink-line (*shéng* 繩), the compass (*guī* 規) and the carpenter's square *(jǔ* 矩), and to their corresponding activity of gauging the weight and the dimensions of things. It also included standards for assessing the physical properties of things, such as squareness and roundness (*fāngyuán* 方圓), light and heavy (*qīngzhòng* 輕重), and straight and crooked (*qūzhí* 曲直), as well as certain optimal criteria of evaluation such as balance (*quán* 權), moderation (*jie* 節) and proper measure (*dù* 度). Although the presence of such terms in Xúnzǐ's ethical theory is often taken as evidence of a conception of virtue based on conformity to standards that lie outside of the human agent, I propose here that it be read, instead, as an important part of Xúnzǐ's conceptual strategy of introducing and legitimating an ideal of sagely intelligence premised on balanced, objective and perspicacious understanding of how things are in the world. Displaying the cognitive resources grounding Xúnzǐ's *technê* of practical wisdom, they help to sustain the idea that the sagely mind responds intelligently and strategically to one's circumstances through expert understanding, or *shù* 術.

In approaching Xúnzǐ's account of emotions through this more expansive conception of *technê* as a paradigm of practical wisdom, I have sought to benefit from engagement with scholarship in classical Greek and Hellenistic thought, where the more intellectual dimensions of *technê* have been a topic of significant interest for decades. With respect to the issue of skill more generally, Julia Annas has long argued for the need to go beyond its narrow conception as mindless and mechanical conformity to set models, and to recognize the relevance of broader notions of expertise that is inclusive of intellectual virtues.[10] And as far as the technical vocabulary of measurement is concerned, a compelling case has been made for both Plato and Aristotle that its application in the context of emotions reveals an effort to establish the capacity of the rational agent to properly grasp how things are, as the basis for making right decisions. Henry Richardson has proposed that the

10 Annas (1995), Annas (2003), and Annas (2011). For an overview of the wide-ranging recent approaches to the skill analogy in virtue ethics, virtue epistemology and psychology, see Stichter (2018).

theory of measurement in pleasure, as postulated by Socrates in the *Protagoras*, should be primarily taken as an epistemic point, where "the emphasis certainly seems to be on the precise description of objects, rather than on the precise making of a choice."[11] In the case of Aristotle, where ideas of quantification and measurement in ethics emerges particularly strongly in the Doctrine of the Mean, Christof Rapp has similarly argued that the idea of the mean as a criterion of virtue in between the extremes of excess and insufficiency "does not presume a decision procedure, or method for determining the right course of action," but instead, represents "the aspects of rightness, correctness or goodness in the definition of ethical virtues."[12] What is being highlighted is the capacity of the wise person to determine the right course of action, rather than a strict conformity to the quantitative midway point between extremes.[13]

In Xúnzǐ as well, there is a case to be made for extending ideas of mastery to the epistemological domain, and generally for recognizing a far greater scope for cognitive agency of a deliberative kind than is usually acknowledged.[14] Thus far, when it comes to issues related to *technê*, most of the attention has been on notions of mastery involving spontaneity, effortless ease and virtuosity of performance in matters of practical skill. These features have usually been associated with the *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 and have tended to be identified as non-intellectual, or even anti-intellectual, and as defying rational comprehension. Such a conception is relevant to Xúnzǐ as well, and Aaron Stalnaker has productively applied notions of skill mastery to Xúnzǐ's conception of ritual performance.[15] But it is also important to emphasize that Xúnzǐ's *technê* of practical wisdom goes beyond applying or approving of "external" criteria of right and wrong, and gives priority of place to the attainment of perspicacious insight into the workings of things more generally – a far more demanding conception.

As outlined here, Xúnzǐ's understanding of practical wisdom aligns with what Jason Swartzwood has summed up – taking his cue from Mencius – as "understanding that enables us to identify what should be done and how to pull it off."[16] Like Mencius, Xúnzǐ recognized the activities of "weighing" and "deliberating" as

11 Richardson (1990) 25.

12 Rapp (2006) 106.

13 Rapp (2006) 111.

14 A collaborative volume, edited by Tom Angier and Lisa Raphals, on the ethical dimensions of skill across the ancient traditions of China, Greece and Rome was published after the completion of this article and could not, regrettably, be taken into account. See Angier/Raphals (2021). Of particular relevance is the paper on Xúnzǐ by Tang (2021).

15 Stalnaker (2010); Stalnaker (2019) 79–132.

16 Swartzwood (2013) 512.

necessary for responding intelligently to one's predicaments.[17] More than an analogy for the craft-like enterprise of abiding by techniques and standards, Xúnzǐ's technical discourse of measurement ultimately presents us with an ambitious conception of sagely wisdom that recognizes the mind's capacity to grasp the proper order of things, and to achieve meta-level insight that allows one to evaluate and adjudicate received standards and methods themselves.[18] Such a conception corresponded to a reevaluation of the emotions as well: the possibility of cognitive mastery as the basis for sound practical action meant that the emotions, like other natural phenomena, were knowable and measurable, and that bringing about their highest expression in harmony and beauty of form was a task of utmost importance. As Xunzi emphasized in the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter, the affective disposition (*qing*) of human beings were natural features of the inborn nature that ought to be properly nurtured (*yǎng* 養) so as to "complete the accomplishment of Heaven" (*quán qí tiān gōng* 全其天功).[19]

1 The Intelligibility of Nature

Xúnzǐ's vision of sagely understanding and of the proper course of action goes hand in hand with his descriptive account of the world of natural phenomena as patterned and intelligible. In this respect, we can identify in the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE) the emergence of what Geoffrey Lloyd has argued for the ancient Greeks: the "invention" of Nature as a coherent and intelligible realm by thinkers seeking to establish new criteria of knowledge and expertise that challenged traditional approaches.[20] Xúnzǐ's naturalistic discourse may be read

17 On "weighing" and "measuring" in Mencius' conception of sagely discernment, see Stalnaker (2019) 103–114. Hutton has analyzed Mencian moral reasoning as a form of "moral connoisseurship" in Hutton (2002).

18 This speaks to what Julia Annas has identified as one of the explanatory outcomes of the skill-based analysis of virtue: namely, an account of "just how the agent is to be able rationally to criticize and evaluate the deliverances of her tradition," in Annas (1995) 238. Along these lines, Justin Tiwald has observed that the "great Confucian scholar" (*dà rú* 大儒) – Xúnzǐ's term for the bearer of sagely wisdom – is one whose moral expertise goes beyond the application of models to a certain level of "deliberative autonomy" that allows them to assess and evaluate the correctness of models themselves. Possessing a "comprehensive grasp" of various fields of expertise, they can "use themselves as living standards or tools of measurement (*yi ji du* 以己度), and thus know, without consulting the historical record, that these descriptions are correct (*Xúnzǐ* 5.4–5)." In Tiwald (2012) 286–287.

19 *Xúnzǐ* 17/80/13.

20 Lloyd (2005).

along similar lines, and is also implicated in his attempt to redefine sagely intelligence as capable of perspicacious understanding of the natural world and its operations, although he was also adamant that we not go too far in this direction. On the other hand, Xúnzǐ was arguably more upfront than the Greeks about his purposes: denouncing widespread belief in prognostication, divination and other ways of appealing to inscrutable "higher" forces beyond human control, Xúnzǐ stressed that the proper object of human concern was the workings of the world itself, and that one must learn how to respond appropriately to one's situation. Accordingly, he endeavoured to establish the intelligibility of worldly phenomena by identifying certain patterned features.

First, Xúnzǐ emphasized the constancy and regularity by which things in the world proceeded. In the cosmic realm, this is evident in the regular movements of the constellations and the heavenly bodies, as well as in the cycle of the seasons and weather conditions:

> The arrayed stars follow each other in their revolutions, the sun and the moon take turns shining, the four seasons proceed in succession, yin and yang undergo their great transformations, and winds and rain are broadly bestowed.[21]

Such observations about the constancy and regularity of things in the natural world provides the basis for making observations about comparable features in the human realm. Indeed, Xúnzǐ often formulated this connection by way of a neat triad of Heaven, Earth and Human. This was an especially important motif in the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter, where he observes, "Heaven has a constant way (*chángdào* 常道), Earth has a constant measure (*cháng shù* 常數), and the gentleman has a constant substance (*cháng tǐ* 常體)."[22] Here, Heavenly Way, Earthly measure, and human substance are posited as analogous, structurally corresponding features, and specifically point to the human constitution or substance (*tǐ* 體) as that which is constant and knowable in the human realm.

In addition to possessing constant tendencies and features, Xúnzǐ also emphasized that the phenomenal world proceeds through a mechanism of causation that explains why and how things happen – a causality that represents the natural unfolding of prior conditions in the substance of things. In the "Exhortation to Learning" chapter (*Quànxué* 勸學), he directly extends this idea to the domain of human action, observing that one's fate is similarly the result of one's virtue (*dé* 德):

21 *Xúnzǐ* 17/80/5. Hutton (2014) 176.
22 *Xúnzǐ* 17/81/1. Hutton (2014) 178.

> All the things and the kinds that come about (*wù lèi zhī qǐ* 物類之起)
> Surely have a point from which they start out (*bì yǒu suǒ shǐ* 必有所始).
> Honor (*róng* 榮) or disgrace (*rǔ* 辱) that comes unto you
> Surely reflects your degree of virtue (*dé* 德).
> In rotten meat bugs are generated.
> In fish that's spoiled maggots are created.
> Lazy, haughty men who forget their place
> Shall have misfortune and ruin to face.[23]

As Xúnzǐ makes clear, understanding the causal mechanisms that operate in the natural world illuminate the workings of the human world: just as events in the natural world do not occur mysteriously, but are the result of causal processes, so it is in the human realm, where an individual's success or failure depends on the unfolding of one's accumulated virtue. It is not the consequence of inexplicable factors, or of chance, but of what human beings bring about as a result of their virtue, or the lack thereof. More specifically, one's fortune and misfortune are determined not by the "operations of Heaven" but by how we *respond* (*yīng* 應) to our situation:

> There is a constancy (*cháng* 常) to the operations of Heaven (*tiān xìng* 天行). They do not persist because of Yáo. They do not perish because of Jié. If you respond (*yīng* 應) to them with order, then you will have good fortune. If you respond to them with chaos, then you will have misfortune.[24]

Xúnzǐ's naturalistic discourse, then, points to the conclusion that the proper object of human investigation is the nature and workings of the world itself, insofar as it furnishes the arena of human action and dictates the nature of proper responsiveness to one's circumstances. This implies a need to understand the nature of human beings as well – a concern that can be seen in his more general attempts to theorize about the common faculties and tendencies of "all people" (*fánrén*凡人):

> All people (*fánrén* 凡人) share one thing in common (*tóng* 同): when hungry they desire to eat, when cold they desire warmth, when tired they desire rest, they like what is beneficial and hate what is harmful. This is something people have from birth; it is not something one awaits to become so. This is something in which Yǔ and Jié were the same. The eyes distinguish between light and dark, beautiful and ugly. The ears distinguish between noises and notes, high and low sounds.[25]

Like the heavenly bodies, human beings, too, possess certain unavoidable tendencies and preferences arising from their natural endowments.

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23 *Xúnzǐ* 1/2/3. Hutton (2014) 3.
24 *Xúnzǐ* 17/79/16. Hutton (2014) 176. Cf. *Xúnzǐ* 17/80/27-17/81/1.
25 *Xúnzǐ* 4/15/7-10. Hutton (2014) 27.

It is in this context, I propose, that we situate Xúnzǐ's theorizing about the inborn dispositions, or *qíng*. In the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter, Xúnzǐ endeavors to provide a naturalistic account of *qing*, which he defines under the rubric of "Heavenly dispositions" (*tiān qíng* 天情). Comprised of a package of six feelings – liking (*hǎo* 好), disliking (*wù* 惡), happiness (*xǐ* 喜), anger (*nù* 怒), sadness (*āi* 哀) and joy (*lè* 樂) – which all human beings presumably possess from birth, these are in turn accompanied by a set of other innate endowments: the "Heavenly faculties (*tiān guān* 天官)," consisting of the five sense faculties; the "Heavenly lord (*tiān jūn* 天君)," referring to the heart-mind (*xīn* 心) that controls the senses; "Heavenly nourishment (*tiān yǎng* 天養)," defined as the capacity to "use what is not of one's kind as a resource for nourishing what is of one's kind (*yǎng qí lèi* 養其類);" and "Heavenly government (*tiān zheng* 天政)," which is the ability to "accord with what is proper to one's kind (*shùn qí lèi* 順其類)." Within this framework, our ethical task is to align with and bring to fulfillment all of these natural endowments, and it is success in this very endeavour that defines the achievement of the sage: the sage, in Xúnzǐ's account, "keeps clear his Heavenly lord, sets straight his Heavenly faculties, makes complete his Heavenly nourishment, accords with his Heavenly government, and nurtures his Heavenly dispositions, so as to keep whole the accomplishment of Heaven."[26]

The realm of affective dispositions, or *qíng*, then, is part of a set of natural endowments that human beings possess from birth, and that require nurturing and fulfillment. From a broader perspective, this *qíng* is simply the human correlate of what Xúnzǐ understands as the disposition (*qíng*) of things more generally, which he regards as the proper object of human investigation. The human ethical project thus rests on a proper understanding of how things in the phenomenal world operate and, on this basis, arriving at a proper course or method for navigating through it. The quality of our destiny – whether we achieve happiness, success and fulfillment, or end up in misery, frustration, and failure – is determined by how intelligently we respond to the reality around us. Essential to this vision is the idea that there exist objective criteria for assessment and evaluation, both with respect to external reality (*qing*) and to the reality of human beings (*qing*), and that such criteria are knowable to the human agent. The technical discourse of measurement was instrumental in establishing such an idea.

26 *Xúnzǐ* 17/80/9-15. Hutton (2014) 176–7.

2 Weighing, Measuring and Sagely Cognition

Xúnzǐ's account of perfected human understanding and proper responsiveness is premised on an ideal of intelligence that prioritizes comprehensive insight into the workings of things. One of the most sustained discussions of this ideal can be found in the "Undoing Fixation" chapter (*Jiě bì* 解蔽), where Xúnzǐ outlines the various forms of cognitive failure that have afflicted past and current thinkers, and then proceeds to define his own standard of knowledge against it. Xúnzǐ's targets include influential figures of the various schools, such as Mòzǐ 墨子, Sòngzǐ 宋子, Huìzì 惠子, and Zhuāngzǐ, whose ideas and teachings he criticizes for their limited, narrow concerns – what he calls "fixations" (*bì* 蔽). He explains that such fixations lead to a distorted and instrumentalized approach to the proper course of action, or the Way:

> Thus, if one speaks of it in terms of usefulness, then the Way will consist completely in seeking what is profitable. If one speaks of it in terms of desires, then the Way will consist completely in learning to be satisfied. If one speaks of it in terms of laws, then the Way will consist completely in making arrangements. If one speaks of it in terms of power, then the Way will consist completely in finding what is expedient. If one speaks of it in terms of wording, then the Way will consist completely in discoursing on matters. If one speaks of it in terms of the Heavenly, then the Way will consist completely in following along with things.[27]

According to Xúnzǐ, such limited approaches demonstrate the "disaster of being fixated and blocked up" (*bì sāi zhī huò* 蔽塞之禍) in one's thinking and of considering "merely one corner of the Way" (*dào zhī yī yú* 道之一隅). What is needed is a more comprehensive grasp of the larger picture, and a more expansive way of understanding how to live in, and respond to, that reality. Xúnzǐ's rhetorical strategy, then, is not to point to the wrongness of the claims of his intellectual rivals, so much as to diminish them by upholding a standard of comprehensivity – having a full view vs. having a partial, incomplete and imbalanced view of things – and measuring everyone against it. In contrast to the limited understanding displayed by his intellectual competitors is the fullness of the Way itself, whose "substance (*tǐ* 體) is constant (*cháng* 常), yet it covers all changes" and about which "no one corner is sufficient to exhibit it fully."[28] What distinguishes the sage is precisely the capacity to comprehensively grasp the Way:

> The sage knows the problems in the ways of the heart, and sees the disaster of being fixated and blocked up in one's thinking. So, he is neither for desires, nor for dislikes, is

27 *Xúnzǐ* 21/103/9-12. Hutton (2014) 227.
28 *Xúnzǐ* 21/103/11-12. Hutton (2014) 227.

> neither or the origins, nor for the end results, is neither for what is near, nor for what is far away, is neither for what is broad, nor for what is shallow, is neither for the ancient past, nor is for the present. He lays out all the myriad things and *in their midst suspends his scales* (*xiàn héng* 縣衡). For this reason, the various different things are unable to become fixating and so disorder his categories of judgment.[29]

Xúnzǐ invokes the imagery of the scale here to capture the balanced perspective of the sage that has access to a clear and all-inclusive understanding of reality. Although the image of the scale and other measuring tools has been taken as evidence of Xúnzǐ's deployment of an external standard by which to assess things, a closer examination of how the weighing imagery is used, both in Xúnzǐ's writings and in other Warring States texts, does not bear this out. Griet Vankeerberghen has argued that the imagery of weighing (*quán* 權) in many early moral and political writings about human action conveys the possibility of arriving at a true and objectively correct assessment of things, and even to a capacity for balanced, discretionary judgment that calls for breaking and defying fixed rules and standards if the situation calls for it. In other words, weighing points to a cognitive ability and access to objective criteria, rather than to the sheer presence and application of some fixed standard.[30] While such a capacity has often been associated with the use of weighing imagery in Mencius,[31] it is also arguably applicable to Xúnzǐ as well. Xúnzǐ often uses the terms of weighing and measuring to convey the idea that there is an objective and universal standard by which to know and assess things, thus providing a basis for distinguishing true understanding from false. As Xúnzǐ explains in the "Correct Naming" (*Zhèng míng* 正名) chapter, just as it is necessary to use properly calibrated scales in order to determine the correct weight of things, so it is that, in any situation where people must decide upon a course of action, there must be a "balance" (*quán jù* 權俱):

> Thus, for every action people make, they must come prepared with a balance (*quán jù* 權俱). If a set of scales (*héng* 衡) is not correct (*bù zhēng* 不正), then what is heavy (*zhòng* 重) will hang in the raised position, and people will think it is light (*qīng* 輕). Or what is light will hang in the low position, and people will think it is heavy. This is how people become confused about light and heavy.[32]

Xúnzǐ goes on to explain that, from antiquity to the present, this scale is none other than the Way (*dào* 道) and that taking the Way as standard is to be

29 *Xúnzǐ* 21/103/16-18. Hutton (2014) 227.
30 Vankeerberghen 2005.
31 Stalnaker (2019) 103–114.
32 *Xúnzǐ* 22/111/24-22/112/1. Hutton (2014) 245.

contrasted with "proceeding from within oneself" (*nèi zì zé* 內自擇). It is, accordingly, by way of this very imagery of tools of measurement that Xúnzǐ asserts that the inherited tradition of ritual practice (*lǐ* 禮) constitutes correct and appropriate action:

> And so, when the ink-line (*shéng mò* 繩墨) is reliably laid out, then one cannot be deceived by the curved (*qū* 曲) and the straight (*zhí* 直). When the scale (*héng* 衡) is reliably hung, then one cannot be deceived by the light (*qīng* 輕) and the heavy (*zhòng* 重). When the compass (*guī* 規) and carpenter's square (*jǔ* 矩) are reliably deployed, then one cannot be deceived by the circular (*yuán* 圓) and the rectangular (*fāng* 方). The gentleman examines ritual carefully, and then he cannot be deceived by trickery and artifice. Thus, the ink-line is the ultimate in straightness (*zhí zhī zhì* 直之至), the scale is the ultimate in balance (*píng zhī zhì* 平之至), the compass and carpenter's square are the ultimate in circular and rectangular (*fāng yuan zhī zhì* 方圓之至), and ritual is the ultimate in the human way (*rén dào zhī zhì* 人道之極).[33]

Xúnzǐ's account of the optimal course of action in terms of the tools of measurement is revealing. First, these tools do not merely represent a technique or standard to abide by, but instead, support the idea that those of sagely attainment *possess* and *use* these tools. Through them, they are able to consider things correctly and have access to the right course of action. Indeed, Xúnzǐ asserts that those of sagely understanding embody the true standard itself in their capacity to deploy it in responding to her circumstances: "One who knows the Way and observes things by it, who knows the Way and puts it into practice, is one who embodies the Way (知道察, 知道行, 體道者也).[34] The sage, then, does not look outward for guidance, but rather, is one who, possessing the standard, "makes oneself a measure (*yǐ jǐ dù zhě* 以己度者)."[35] Moreover, Xúnzǐ's imagery of measurement allows him to outline a *sliding scale* of attainment and virtue – one that distinguishes between an adequate virtue of abiding by the right standards, on the one hand, and the fully realized one of the sage, who is able to go beyond mere conformity:

> Those who nevertheless do not take ritual as their model (*bù fǎ lǐ* 不法禮) nor find sufficiency in it (*bù zú lǐ* 不足禮) are called standardless commoners (*wú fāng zhī mín* 無方之民). Those who take ritual as their model and find sufficiency in it are called men of standards (*fāng zhī shì* 方之士). To be able to reflect and ponder (*sīsuǒ* 思索) what is central to ritual is called being able to deliberate (*lǜ* 慮). To be able to be undeviating in what is central to ritual is called being able to be firm. When one can deliberate and be firm (*gù* 固), and adds to this fondness (*hǎo* 好) for it, then this is to be a sage. Thus, Heaven is the ultimate in height (*gāo zhī jí* 高之極), Earth is the ultimate in depth (下之極), the boundless is the ultimate in breadth (*guǎng zhī jí* 廣之極), and the sage is the ultimate in the Way (*Dào zhī jí* 道之極). And

33 *Xúnzǐ* 19/92/13-19. Hutton (2014) 205.
34 *Xúnzǐ* 21/104/6. Hutton (2014) 229.
35 *Xúnzǐ* 5/19/3. Hutton (2014) 36.

> so, learning is precisely learning to be a sage – one does not learn solely so as to become a standardless commoner."[36]

Here, Xúnzǐ differentiates among three types of people: those "standardless commoners" who fail to take ritual as their model and to find sufficiency in it; those scholars or persons of standing who take ritual as their model and find sufficiency in it; and those who go beyond this and achieve even more worthy attainments. It is in this third category that we find the sage, who is not simply one who adheres to ritual standards, but who "reflects and ponders" on "what is central to ritual" and is thus deemed capable of deliberation (*lǜ* 慮). The sage, moreover, is firm (*gù* 固) in his devotion to ritual, and is also fond of (*hǎo* 好) it. These attitudinal qualities of firmness and fondness set the sage apart as an "ultimate (*jí* 極)" among human beings, as Heaven is the ultimate in height, Earth is the ultimate in depth, and boundlessness is the ultimate in breadth.

By way of the discourse of measurement, then, Xúnzǐ posits an ethical vision that eschews the idea that true virtue and attainment can be captured in a formula, or reduced to a set of principles to apply. While working with fixed guidelines might be necessary for those who are completely untrained in virtue and in ritually proper conduct, the most wise and virtuous, Xunzi stresses, go beyond mere conformity to predetermined standards of proper conduct. To a certain extent, this is a way to accommodate the practical problem of the corruptibility of institutions. Xúnzǐ notes that, however correct one's standards, they are not sufficient for bringing about a viable social and political order. There still has to be a virtuous ruler at the top to ensure that standards are properly instituted, and that the entire system remain in good order. A system is only as good as the one who oversees the whole, since right measures can be circumvented or ultimately put to ill uses. Thus, as Xúnzǐ observes, "Setting up scales (*héng shī* 衡石) and measuring out weights (*chēng xiàn* 稱縣) are means to establish what is balanced (*píng* 平), but if the superior is fond of overthrowing people, then his ministers below and the hundred functionaries will take advantage of this to act precariously."[37] Proper tools, then, are not enough, and it is only when they are expertly deployed by a virtuous and sagacious ruler that they achieve their true purposes. As Xúnzǐ concludes, "proper use of such equipment and measures (*xiè shù zhě* 械數者) *is what flows from good order* – it is not the fount of good order."[38]

36 *Xúnzǐ* 1919/92/16-19. Hutton (2014) 205–6.
37 *Xúnzǐ* 12/57/12-13. Hutton (2014) 118.
38 *Xúnzǐ* 12/57/14. Hutton (2014) 118. Emphasis added.

3 Emotion and Right Measure in Ritual

The sagely virtues of comprehensiveness, balance, and right measure have important repercussions for Xúnzǐ's conception of emotions. Xúnzǐ uses the same terminology in explaining what the emotions are and how they are to be optimally realized – a theme that he develops to a high level of specificity in his theorization of ritual. Prior to examining this account, it is worth taking a look at what Xúnzǐ has to say more generally about the proper stance with which one ought to approach the emotions in the first place. This is a topic that Xúnzǐ takes up in his criticisms of other thinkers like Sòngzǐ and Mencius, whose attitude towards the emotions he considers extreme. In one passage in "The Twelve Masters" chapter (*Fēi shí èr zǐ* 非十二子), he points out that, while some of them "give rein to their inborn dispositions and nature," others "resist their inborn dispositions and nature." Xúnzǐ's verdict is that these thinkers, with their one-sided, "fixated" point of view, "do not understand the proper scales for unifying the world and establishing states and families."[39] The proper standpoint, as we have seen, is the balanced one embodied by the sage, who is "neither for desires, nor for dislikes," and who "lays out all the myriad things and in their midst suspends his scales (*xiàn héng* 縣衡)." Xúnzǐ extends this ideal of balance to the emotions as well, which in their optimally realized form abide by right measure, avoid unreasonable extremes, and are fully appropriate. Attaining such an idea involves not only training and habituating one's innate dispositions, but also nurturing (*yǎng* 養) them – an endeavour that the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter explains as "using what is not of one's kind as a resource for nourishing what is of one's kind."[40] One of the most important of these resources is ritual, which Xúnzǐ refers to as the *measure* (*dù* 度) of all goodness, and that which one ought to deploy so as to order one's *qi* (*zhi qi* 治氣) and nurture life (*yǎngshēng* 養生).[41]

How ritual works to achieve this condition is explored in the "Discourse on Ritual" chapter, which focuses specifically on the workings of grief and sorrow in rites of mourning, and on the criteria for the optimal performance of such ritual so as to allow emotions to achieve their most satisfying and proper expression. The language of measurement pervades this discussion. In this chapter, Xúnzǐ affirms that ritual, along with rightness (*yì* 義) and patterned conduct (*wén lǐ* 文理), is what one uses to "nurture one's dispositions" (*yǎng qíng* 養情).

39 *Xúnzǐ* 6/21/13-19. Hutton (2014) 40.
40 *Xúnzǐ* 17/80/11. Cf. *Xúnzǐ* 1/1/14-15: "The gentleman is exceptional not by birth, but rather by being good at making use of things (*shān jiǎ yú wù* 善假於物)." Hutton (2014) 2.
41 *Xúnzǐ* 2/5/11. Hutton (2014) 10.

Such nurturing involves engaging and satisfying the desire for sensual and bodily gratification:

> Thus, ritual is a means of nurture (*yǎng* 養). Meats and grains, the five flavors and the various spices are means to nurture the mouth (*yang kǒu* 養口). Fragrances and perfumes are means to nurture the nose (*yang bí* 養鼻). Carving and inlay, insignias and patterns are means to nurture the eyes (*yang mù* 養目). Bells and drums, pipes and chimes, lutes and zithers are means to nurture the ears (*yang ěr* 養耳). Homes and palaces, cushions and beds, tables and mats are means to nurture the body (*yang tǐ* 養體). Thus, ritual is a means of nurture.[42]

As Xúnzǐ makes quite explicit here, ritual works through the nurturing of the senses in such a way that it not only guides and trains the emotions to achieve their proper realization, but also provides the means to fulfill and satisfy the emotional needs and desires of human beings. There is an optimal alignment of what the senses naturally desire and find delight in, with correct ritual form, leading to the completion and fulfillment of both.

Xúnzǐ appeals to naturalistic reasoning in order to explain and justify this ideal of optimal alignment. Rather than simply invoking precedent or tradition, Xúnzǐ argues that, in their workings, ritual practices are perfectly suited for nurturing the innate dispositions. The discourse of measurement is a key element in this argument, and Xúnzǐ deploys it in a number of senses. First, he states that proper ritual form is based on "taking measure" of *qíng* (*chèng qíng* 稱情), and thus on an awareness and appreciation of people's emotional needs and circumstances. Given that emotions and desires are an undeniable part of the inborn nature of human beings, the proper course of action is to engage in correct forms of ritual practice, which are calibrated in accordance with human dispositions as they actually are. As he explains in the case of the three-year mourning period for one's parents:

> What is the reason for the three-year mourning period? I say: It *takes measure* of *people's dispositions* (*chèng qíng* 稱情) and establishes a proper form (*lìwén* 立文) for them. It accordingly ornaments the various groups of people, distinguishing different regulations for close and distant relatives and for the noble and the lowly, such that *one can neither add to nor subtract* from it (*bù kě yì sǔn* 不可益損). Thus I say: It is *a method* (*shù* 術) that is to be neither adapted nor changed. When a wound is great, it lasts for many days. When a hurt is deep, the recovery is slow. The three-year mourning period *takes measure of people's dispositions* and establishes a proper form for them. It is the means by which one sets a limit for the utmost hurt. Wearing the mourning garments, propping oneself on a crude cane, dwelling in a lean-to, eating gruel, and using a rough mat and earthen pillow are the means by which one ornaments the utmost hurt. After the twenty-five months

42 *Xúnzǐ* 19/90/5-8. Hutton (2014) 201.

> of the three-year mourning period, the sorrow and hurt are not yet done, and the feelings of longing and remembrance are not yet forgotten. Nevertheless, ritual breaks off the mourning at this time. Surely this is in order that there may be a proper stopping point (*yǐ* 已) for sending off the dead and proper regulation (*jiē* 節) for resuming one's normal life, is it not?"[43]

Here, Xúnzǐ explains that the particular prescriptions corresponding to the three-year practice of mourning serve both to recognize the enduring sense of loss and to ensure the continuity of life in the wake of the death of one's parents. Ritual manages to perform all of these functions at once, and its fittingness is established through the many references to the correct measuring of the depth and degree of sorrow, and to the length and extensiveness of ritual prescriptions.

Apart from signaling the fittingness and appropriateness of established ritual prescriptions, Xúnzǐ's use of the language of measurement also defines the optimal condition of emotions as one of balance and moderation, and explains the role of ritual in bringing about such a condition. The logic of right measure thus implies that what ritual does is to make suitable adjustments to one's feelings to ensure that its expression is neither inadequate nor excessive. Xúnzǐ explains this in detail by outlining how the goods and materials used in ritual settings work to moderate and retrain the emotions from falling into indulgence or perversity:

> *Ritual cuts off what is too long (duàn cháng* 斷長) *and extends what is too short* (*xù duǎn* 續短). It subtracts from what is excessive (*sǔn yǒu yú* 損有餘) and adds to what is insufficient (*yì bù zú* 益不足) . It achieves proper form for love and respect (達愛敬之文), and it brings to perfection the beauty of carrying out rightness (滋成行義之美者). Thus, fine ornaments and coarse materials, music and weeping, happiness and sorrow – these things are opposites, but ritual makes use of all of them, employing them and alternating them at the appropriate times. And so, fine ornaments, music, and happiness are that by which one responds to peaceful events and by which one pays homage to good fortune. Coarse mourning garments, weeping, and sorrow are that by which one responds to threatening events and by which one pays homage to ill fortune. Thus, the way ritual makes use of fine ornaments is such as not to lead to exorbitance or indulgence. The way it makes use of coarse mourning garments is such as not to lead to infirmity or despondency. The way it makes use of music and happiness is such as not to lead to perversity or laziness. The way it makes use of weeping and sorrow is such as not to lead to dejection or self-harm. *This is the midway course of ritual* (*lǐ zhī zhōng liú* 禮之中流).[44]

43 *Xúnzǐ* 19/96/8. Hutton 2014: 213. Emphasis added.

44 *Xúnzǐ* 19/94/8-12. Hutton (2014) 209. Cf: *Xúnzǐ* 19/94/19-21. Emphasis added.

Xúnzǐ thus highlights the function of ritual to balance out excess and deficiency, and to prevent emotions from falling into harmful extremes. This ideal of balance and right measure is captured in what Xúnzǐ refers to as "the midway course of ritual."

But there is another crucial sense in which ritual serves as a "midway" point, and this brings us to the question of what, ontologically speaking, emotions are. Xúnzǐ argues that ritual is necessary for bringing about the proper fulfillment of the emotions of love and respect that tie human beings together. It is through the actual performance of ritual that human beings attain a proper balance of the dispositions (*qíng* 情) and form (*wén* 文), and can find their fulfillment:

> In every case, ritual begins in that which must be released, reaches full development in giving it proper form (*wén* 文), and finishes in providing it satisfaction. And so when ritual is at its most perfect (*zhì bèi* 至備), the requirements of inner dispositions (*qíng* 情) and proper form are both completely fulfilled (*jù jìn* 俱盡). At its next best, the dispositions and outer form overcome one another in succession. Its lowest manner is to revert to the dispositions alone so as to subsume everything in this grand unity.[45]

Xúnzǐ's idea of balance thus has an ontological correlate: namely, a vast, differentiated world of interrelated and potentially resonant components that find their optimal realization in a convergence that is appropriately measured and that, in tallying with one another, become part of a harmonious and interdependent whole.[46]

Within this conception, it becomes difficult to extricate the emotions from other realms of human action and expression, and to delineate the boundaries between them. For Xúnzǐ, what we might call "emotions" can assume any number of these forms, and indeed, it is through ritual that "one gives a shape to that which is without substance (狀乎無形) and magnificently accomplishes

45 *Xúnzǐ* 19/92/3-3. Hutton (2014) 204.

46 Xúnzǐ uses this logic elsewhere, for instance, in explaining the relationship between human nature (*xìng* 性) and deliberate effort (*wěi* 偽), which he similarly sees as two sides of one interdependent whole. As Xúnzǐ puts it:

> Thus, I say that human nature is the original beginning and the raw material, and deliberate effort is what makes it patterned, ordered, and exalted. If there were no human nature, then there would be nothing for deliberate effort to be applied to. If there were no deliberate effort, then human nature would not be able to beautify itself. Human nature and deliberate effort must unite, and then the reputation of the sage and the work of unifying all under Heaven are thereupon brought to completion. And so I say, when Heaven and Earth unite, then the myriad creatures are born. When yin and yang interact, then changes and transformations arise. When human nature and deliberate effort unite, then all under Heaven becomes ordered. (*Xúnzǐ* 19/95/1-3; Hutton [2014] 2).

proper form (影然而成文)."[47] Ritual thus represents the giving of proper form to one's emotions and dispositions and, to that extent, is inseparable from the emotions themselves. Such ritual-as-emotion spans a whole range of expressions, from one's facial expressions, to one's dress and movements, and even to the way one orders one's environment. Xúnzǐ provides a detailed account of how this plays out in the following passage:

> And so, a joyful glow and a shining face, a sorrowful look and a haggard appearance – these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow (吉凶憂愉之情) are manifest (*fā* 發) in one's countenance (*yánsè* 顏色). Singing and laughing, weeping and sobbing – these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are manifest in one's voice (*shēngyīn* 聲音). Fine meats and grains and wine and fish, gruel and roughage and plain water – these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are manifest in one's food and drink (*shí yǐn* 食飲). Ceremonial caps and embroidered insignias and woven patterns, coarse cloth and a mourning headband and thin garments and hempen sandals – these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are manifest in one's dress (*yīfú* 衣服). Homes and palaces and cushions and beds and tables and mats, a thatched roof and mourning lean-to and rough mat and earthen pillow – these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are manifest in one's dwelling (*jūchù* 居處).[48]

As Xúnzǐ relates here, if the look on one's face represents the manifestation (*fā* 發) of one's feelings of happiness and sorrow in one's countenance (*yánsè* 顏色) – the realm to which some modern theorists of emotion would limit their inquiry – there are correlates in other domains as well: in one's voice, in one's food and drink, in one's dress, and in one's dwelling. All of these forms, according to Xúnzǐ, are inseparable from the affective experience itself, and point to the way in which emotions are situated in, and interdependent with, the dynamics of our environment.[49]

For Xúnzǐ, then, emotions represent an expansive domain that extends far beyond the realm of mental states and bodily symptoms to which many contemporary scholars of emotion have relegated them.[50] Xúnzǐ's ritual theory presents a complex world of differentiated components in which meaningful human activity is conceived as an orchestration and optimal interaction of do-

47 *Xúnzǐ* 19/89/9-10. Hutton (2014) 217.

48 *Xúnzǐ* 19/94/14-19. Hutton (2014) 210.

49 The idea that affectivity "extends" beyond the boundaries of the person has been a prominent theme in the work of Giovanna Colombetti and her collaborators. See, e.g., Colombetti and Roberts (2015) and Colombetti (2017).

50 On this theme, see Virág (2021).

mains that come together in very particular ways. The language of measurement provides an important foundation for the claim that these realms share an optimal standard of realization, and that they can, through such realization, be brought into resonance and alignment with one another.

4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have traced the role and significance of the technical discourse of standards and measurements in Xúnzǐ's ethical vision. I have argued that it presents us with a far more complex and dynamic conception of emotions than is usually acknowledged – and one that is integrated with the workings of practical wisdom. Insofar as they can be properly measured and assessed, the emotions, as Xúnzǐ envisions them, are not simply passive objects of rational control, to be shaped and channeled through the application of "external" standards. Instead, they form an essential part of the constitution of human beings and proceed, like other natural phenomena, in an intelligible, constant and predictable way. Moreover, insofar as their proper state is defined by the qualities of right measure, balance and appropriateness, which are best achieved in conjunction with the beautiful sights, sounds, movements, and material trappings of ritual performance, they represent the locus of connectivity uniting human beings with each other, with their environment, and with the workings of the cosmos itself. I have also argued that Xúnzǐ's deployment of the tools and criteria of measurement to establish that emotions can be known and evaluated in terms of such objective criteria as fittingness, appropriateness, and fulfillment, reveals an expanded vision of human cognitive possibilities as well. For those of sagely intelligence who possess balanced, perspicacious, and all-inclusive understanding, the workings of the world are not mysterious or ineffable, but ultimately knowable. This is what enables them to respond appropriately to the conditions of the world, and to make use of things to nurture and fulfill one's own "kind."

That Xúnzǐ invoked such ideas in the context of his discussions of the time-honoured ritual system preserved by the Confucians, of which he was a staunch defender, takes us beyond the (ultimately modern) project of reconstructing what "emotions" might have been for Xúnzǐ, and points us towards what Xúnzǐ's own priorities, at least as far as we can reconstruct them, might have been. For in appealing to such criteria as rightness and fittingness in emotions in his account of the received ritual practices, Xúnzǐ offered a basis for justifying the ritual system on something other than tradition. As Michael Puett has argued,

what makes the ritual system right is that they are "fitting and proper for humans" and are thus optimal.[51]

This is a bold claim, and one that resonates with what appears to be a similar deployment of notions of measurement and balance in the classical Greek tradition, as noted above. There would be much to unpack from this fascinating convergence, but any effort to do so will need to consider not only the common recourse to the technical language of measurement, but also certain shared explanatory contexts and exigencies as well. Xúnzǐ, like his Greek counterparts, deployed ideas of balance and right measure to establish and justify the idea that true standards of ethical attainment were accessible to the sage or the wise person by virtue of her cognitive access to what things were like. That he appealed to such language when it came to matters of ethics and statecraft might well be read as a key element in his strategy to assert the value and rightness of his own vision. In the competitive intellectual and political world of 3rd century BCE China, the use of technical vocabulary, as Mark Csikszentmihalyi has emphasized, was part and parcel of the effort among competing thinkers representing diverse fields of expert knowledge to proclaim the value and authority of their own forms of *shu* 術, or expertise.[52] Xúnzǐ was clearly deploying such rhetoric to defend his own claims by arguing that *his* form of understanding was superior to the rest – and indeed, that it represented a Way that united diverse *shu* under an all-encompassing, comprehensive vision.[53] Through his account of practical wisdom Xúnzǐ outlined extraordinary new cognitive capacities for those who devoted themselves to the pursuit of this Way. As he put in no modest terms, single-minded devotion to the Way would enable one to achieve

51 Puett (2004), 58.

52 Csikszentmihalyi (1997) has noted that this was the case even prior to the Han period, when boundary-crossing among fields of expertise became almost *de rigeur* among thinkers who were operating within a discursive field that valued comprehensive knowledge over narrow, specialized forms of expertise. Such thinkers explored ways to integrate technological modes of explanation into discussions of ethics so as to present them as part of a single discourse.

53 These claims were clearly tied to intellectual filiations: Xúnzǐ's claims about the proper form of knowledge and the basis of cognitive authority are inseparable from the question of who occupied the most privileged place among the learned. Xúnzǐ's answer on this count was clear: it was the sages and the gentlemen who represented the virtues and attainments forwarded by the Confucians, or the *Ru*. What distinguished Confucius, Xúnzǐ observed, was his learning of *various method*s, and through them, arriving at the necessary standard of discernment, understanding and judgment required for efficacious action in the world. As he asserts, "Confucius was humane and wise, and was not fixated, and so through his learning (*xué* 學) of various methods (*luàn shù* 亂術), he was worthy of being one of the former kings." *Xúnzǐ* 21/103/15. Hutton (2014) 227.

nothing short of "spirit-like understanding" (*tōng yú shén míng* 通於神明) and to realize one's potential to "form a triad with Heaven and Earth" (*cān yú tiān dì* 參於天地)."[54]

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