

The Challenge of Selfish Actions to the Fight against COVID-19 and Mencius's Condemnation of Yang Zhu

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Abstract

Many still regard government guidance or measures to fight COVID-19 as necessary despite the presence of doubt about the “globally approved” necessity. The reopening dilemma faced by government leaders in the U.S. after their president made them decide for their own states is an evidence of this doubt. Since many still believe the measures are important, many people regard the actions that defy these measures as selfish and malevolent. The actions are both selfish and malevolent since the threat of COVID-19 is real. If the virus continues to spread, many people (old and young) will continue to die. So, if the measures are not complied with, the lives of many people, specifically of those who have been identified as vulnerable to the disease, is compromised. In other words, the actions are selfish because they show no concern for the well-being of other people, and they are malevolent because they would cause harm to others. In this paper, I focus on the condemnation of the actions as selfish. I argue that this condemnation, the condemnation of selfish actions, and Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu can be connected. They can be connected because Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is condemnation of *weiwo* (為我) and Mencius viewed *weiwo* as not unlike the theory of ethical egoism, a theory that endorses the conduct of selfish actions.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Mencius, Yang Zhu, selfish actions, ethical egoism

Introduction

Many still regard government guidance or measures to fight COVID-19 as necessary. This is despite the presence of doubt about the “globally approved” necessity. The dilemma or the “macabre question” of “How many deaths are an acceptable price to pay to restart the economy?”¹ faced by government leaders in the U.S. after their president, Donald Trump, made them decide for their own states is evidence of this doubt. Since many still believe the measures are important, many people regard the actions that defy these measures as selfish and malevolent.² The actions are both selfish and malevolent since the threat of COVID-19 is real. If the virus continues to spread, many people (old and young) will continue to die. So, if the measures are not complied with, the lives of many people (specifically of those who have been identified as vulnerable to the disease) is compromised. In other words, the actions are selfish because they show no concern for the well-being of other people, and they are malevolent because they would cause harm to others. In this paper, I focus on the condemnation of the

¹ Coronavirus Briefing, *The New York Times*, available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/us/coronavirus-today.html>; accessed 22 April 2020

² That many still believe the measures are important is seen in a survey conducted by NBC News (<https://www.nbcnews.com/>) and *The Wall Street Journal*. According to the poll, 58% Americans are “more concerned that the government will move too quickly to reopen the economy and ease coronavirus restrictions, while only about a third are concerned that the restrictions will be kept in place too long” (<https://www.newsweek.com/58-percent-americans-concerned-us-moving-too-quickly-ease-coronavirus-restrictions-poll-shows-1498819>; accessed 21 April 2020). Accordingly, majority in the U.S. believe that while ‘freedom, rights, and economy’ are very important considerations, the threat of COVID-19 is an undeniable concern. People are dying from the disease. On April 20, 2020, New York state through their governor, Cuomo, reported 478 deaths, ‘the lowest single-day toll in more than two weeks’ (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/20/us/coronavirus-live-news.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styln-coronavirus-world®ion=TOP_BANNER&context=storyline_menu; accessed 21 April 2020).

actions as selfish. I argue that that condemnation, the condemnation of selfish actions, and Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu can be connected. Mencius (c. 372-289 B.C.E.) was a later follower of Confucius (trad. 551-479 B.C.E.). Yang Zhu (5th-4th century B.C.E.) was a prominent figure who was known to have adhered to a set of ideas relating to self-preservation, which was frowned upon by early Confucians.³ Mencius accused Yang Zhu of propagating false doctrines and condemned him specifically for advocating *weiwo* 為我, a principle that, for Mencius, did not lead one to help the world.

The two condemnations can be connected because Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is condemnation of *weiwo* (which Mencius thought Yang Zhu's philosophy was all about) and Mencius viewed *weiwo* as not unlike ethical egoism. Ethical egoism is the theory which claims that the only actions we ought to perform are those that promote exclusively our own interests (*selfish actions*, in other words). In the present pandemic crisis, particularly in the Philippines, any action that defies the measures would have to be deemed *selfish*. This is clear, for example, in one of the three moral implications of the COVID-19 pandemic that Christopher Ryan Maboloc has identified: the need to underscore *individual moral responsibility*.⁴ He expresses this implication in the following words:

Beyond state measures, rules and policies that focus on the control of the population in order to protect public health, societies can begin to look into the importance of individual moral responsibility.⁵

For Maboloc, according to these words, consideration by societies of individual moral responsibility and its importance is valuable, aside from making sure that essential measures are in

³ See the *Huainanzi* 13.9.

⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Globalization and Consumer Culture: Social Costs and Political Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 30, 3 (April 2020), 77-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 79

place. What he specifically means by *individual moral responsibility* is a person's responsibility to *be not selfish* or to *be considerate*. This is clear in the example he gives. The example is about a senate official of the country who was tested positive for the virus but ignored home quarantine. The senator's conduct is selfish for two reasons: (1) it was insensitive to the difficult situation of the many affected by the strictly imposed measures; and (2) it possibly spread the virus.⁶ The condemnation of selfish actions and Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu are connected, in other words, because the latter is a condemnation of ethical egoism, and because it seems certain that a parallel can be drawn between *the condemnation of ethical egoism* and *the condemnation of selfish actions*. A parallel can be drawn between them because it is *only selfish actions* that ethical egoism approves of.⁷

This paper begins with an exposition of the condemnation of Yang Zhu in the *Mencius*. Then, since my argument depends on the truth of the proposition that Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is equivalent to condemnation of ethical egoism, an attempt to prove that the proposition is true follows.

Mencius's Condemnation of Yang Zhu

In this section, I discuss Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu in the *Mencius*. The *Mencius* is a Confucian text from the Warring States period (481-221 B.C.E.). The text is named after Mengzi 孟子 (latinised as 'Mencius'), a follower of Kongzi 孔子 or Kong Fuzi 孔夫子 (latinised 'Confucius'). Confucius is the thinker who sought to quell the socio-political unrest that started to intensify in the Spring and Autumn period (771-481 B.C.E.) by having 'superior' or 'noble' or virtuous men (*junzi*

⁶ Ibid. Cf. Jeffrey Olen and Vincent Barry, *Applying Ethics: A Text with Readings* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1999), 5, 7-15, where the authors discuss *individual morality* and *social morality*.

⁷ It must be noted, though, that the theory also approves of actions that benefit others, but it does so as long as the actions in the ultimate promote one's self-interests.

君子) in government. Mencius was like St. Paul to Jesus, according to Jeffrey Richey, because he interpreted the thought of Confucius for later ages while at the same time putting his own mark on his master's ideas.⁸ Yang Zhu 楊朱 and Mo Di 墨翟 (or Mozi 墨子) are two “influencers” who Mencius identified as opposing Confucius's teachings.

There are only three pertinent passages in the *Mencius* in the study of Yang Zhu's ideas. In all the three passages, anything related to Yang Zhu is condemned and the condemnation comes with the condemnation of anything related to Mozi.

Passage 3B.9

Passage 3B.9 presents Mencius's response to his disciple's question (that of Gongduzi 公都子) of why it is the case that people describe him as *haobian* 好辯 (*hao*^{fond} or love (of) *bian*^{disputation}). Mencius's response is an elaboration on his answer that the people have held a mistaken view. Mencius is saying that that he appears to love *bian*^{disputation} is only because he had said words (言, *yan*) against Yang Zhu and Mozi. In his response, we find Mencius's condemnation of the two thinkers:

... The words of Yang Zhu and Mo Di fill the world such that those who do not preach the doctrines of Yang Zhu preach those of Mozi. ... If the *daos* [道] of Yang and Mo don't cease and the Dao of Confucius is not clear to all, then deviant doctrines will deceive the people and humanity and righteousness will be blocked. To block out humanity and righteousness is to lead the beasts and devour the people, and the people will be led to eat one another.

“This is why I am alarmed, and why I defend the Dao of the past sages [先聖之道] and confront Yangists and Mohists, driving out depraved speech so that errant doctrines will no longer flourish. When they flourish in

⁸ Jeffrey Richey, “Mencius”, in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; available from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/mencius/>; accessed 10 January 2020

one's heart, they infect one's acts, when they flourish in one's acts, they infect one's governance [政] – were a sage to arise once again, he would not change a single word of mine.⁹

According to this, Mencius condemned Yang Zhu and Mozi because their *dao*^{doctrines} (道), together with the *dao* of Confucius not being clear to all, led to there being deviant doctrines deceiving the people, thereby blocking humanity and righteousness (*renyi*仁義, *ren* is humanity; *yi* is righteousness). What is wrong with “blocking *ren* and *yi*” is that it leads ultimately to “people devouring people” (*ren jang xiang chi*人將相食). The picture of “humans (人) eating (食) human kind (相)” seems to be the image of people killing other people, which in the passage (3B.9) is what was extinguished by Confucius in the writing of the *Chunqiu*, a historical text. Given that the *dao* of Kongzi is *dao* that sees ‘ministers murdering their rulers and sons murdering their fathers’ as abomination and inimical to ‘the way of the former sages’ (*xian sheng zhi dao*先聖之道), *ren jang xiang chi* is inimical to *xian sheng zhi dao*. (*Xian* 先 means “former” or “ancient”, *sheng* 聖 means “sages”, *dao* 道 means “way” or “doctrine”, and *zhi* 之, here, acts as a particle representing possession). It follows from this that the doctrines of Yang and Mo were inimical to *xian sheng zhi dao*. Because it is clear to Mencius that *ren jang xiang chi* is not a result of what *xian sheng zhi dao* stands for, he deplores their doctrines. To Mencius, *xian sheng zhi dao* stands for there being good government and home or family. Mencius condemns Yang’s doctrines and Mo’s as doctrines that do not stand for there being good government and home or family.

To Mencius, *xian sheng zhi dao* stands for there being good government and home or family, because of what appears to be

⁹ Robert Eno, *Mencius: Translation, Commentary and Notes* (2016), 79; available from https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23423/Mencius_%28Eno-2016%29.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

the common deed of the three sages ultimately marked out in the passage. The three sages are Yu 禹, the Duke of Zhou (*Zhougong* 周公), and Confucius. The former sages (*xian sheng* 先聖) are the exemplary rulers before the Spring and Autumn period. Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Tang 湯, and Wuding 武丁 are some of these rulers.¹⁰ Mencius mentions some of them in the passage. According to the passage, Yao through Yu took care of the flood that devastated human dwelling. Shun is mentioned; he is lumped up together with Yao. The Duke of Zhou, according to the passage, drove away Tyrant Zhou 紂 who destroyed people's homes to make room for parks, ponds, and lakes. By also mentioning Confucius, Mencius regards his master as one of the former sages. Confucius is said to have put an end to there being murderous ministers (towards rulers) and sons (towards fathers) in the writing of the *Chunqiu*. The common good deed of the three marked out sages seems to be restoration of government and home. This is corroborated by the final section of the quote: Mencius says that if “errant doctrines” flourish in the *xin*^{heart-mind} (心), that would lead ultimately to “infection in regulation in government (*zheng* 政)”. That the doctrines of Yang Zhu and Mozi would harm *zheng*^{government} means that they are like a virus that is fatal to *xian sheng zhi dao* and therefore must be contained.

A further support to this is the specific condemnation of the two thinkers in the passage. Yang Zhu's principle of *weiwo* 為我 is looked at as equivalent to *wujun* 無君. *Weiwo* is *wei*^{doing (for)} *wo*; oneself and *wujun* is *wu*^{absence (of)} *jun*^{prince;ruler}. 3B.9 has the following:

The maxim of the Yangists is ‘Each for himself’ [*weiwo* 為我], a world of men without rulers; the maxim of the Mohists is ‘Universal love’, a world of men without fathers. To know no father [*wufu* 無父] and no ruler [*wujun*] – this is to be nothing but a beast! Gongming Yi said, ‘When a

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

ruler has fat meats in his kitchens and fat horses in his stables while his people are pale with hunger and starved corpses lie in the wastelands, he leads the beasts and devours the people.’
 [庖有肥肉，廄有肥馬，民有飢色，野有餓莩，此率獸而食人也]¹¹

According to this, denial of one’s prince or having no prince (*wujun*) is to be like beasts. The reason why Mencius thinks that *weiwo* amounts to *wujun*, and *wujun* is to be like beasts, is understood through Mencius’s reference to Gongming Yi’s statement. The statement specifically helps to explain why *weiwo* amounts to *wujun*. According to Gongming Yi’s statement, which is addressed to a *jun*^{prince} (a ruler), the *jun*^{prince} is only nourishing himself and is concerned with strengthening his army (‘In your kitchen there is fat meat [肥肉], and in your stables there are fat horses [肥馬]’), and he is not feeding his people (that is why they look gaunt (*jise* 飢色) and are dying of starvation. By mentioning this statement of Gongming Yi, Mencius is saying that, first, with what the *jun*^{prince} is doing, the *jun*^{prince} is *weiwo*. Secondly, Mencius is saying that because the *jun*^{prince} is *weiwo*, the people are living like they do not have a *jun*^{prince} (*wujun*), because they do not have one looking after them. The reason why *weiwo* amounts to *wujun*, then, is that a prince who is *weiwo* (who only looks after himself) does not look after his people. To have a prince who does not look after his people is like having no prince (*wujun*). About *wujun* (“to know no prince”) as “to be nothing but beasts”, it could then be explained that *wujun* is “to be nothing but beasts” because the people do not have anyone looking after them. They live like beasts. This is the condemnation here and it is linked to the passage’s general condemnation (of Yang Zhu and Mozi) as

¹¹ Ibid., 79. “庖有肥肉，廄有肥馬，民有飢色，野有餓莩，此率獸而食人也” is the sentence said by Gongming Yi in the passage.

thinkers whose doctrines does not represent that of the *xian sheng* (先聖).¹²

Passage 7A.26

That Yang's doctrines and Mo's are condemned as doctrines that do not stand for there being good government and home or family appears to be akin to one of the two condemnations that appear to be made in 7A.26. It is akin to Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu as one who is unwilling to contribute anything at all for the good of society as a whole. This condemnation is seen by first noting the passage's possible main message. 7A.26 seems to convey the idea that the *dao*, which Mencius recognizes to be the correct *dao*^{way}, consists in not being fixed to a single point in the spectrum of ideas having Yang and Mo's ideas as the extremes. In conveying this idea, the passage elaborates on what each of Yang and Mo *qu*^{takes; adopts;chooses} (取) to be the proper principle in "profiting the world" (or *litianxia* 利天下). *Li* 利 means "profit" or "benefit". *Tianxia* 天下 is literally "(all) under *tian*^{Heaven}". Here, *tianxia* means "the empire" or "world", as what is under Heaven is the world. As "world", it refers to *the entirety of human society*. What each of Yang and Mo takes (*qu*) to be the proper principle is a principle about *li*^{profit(ing)} *tianxia*^{the world} or contributing something to the benefit of the world, because Mencius's elaborations show that each of the principles is about *litianxia*, although with the use of body hair metaphor. Mencius talks about *litianxia* ideas. This is found in the first part of the passage:

Mencius said, "Yang Tzu chooses egoism [為我]. Even if he could benefit the Empire [利天下] by pulling out one hair he would not do it. Mo Tzu advocates love without discrimination [兼愛]. If by shaving his head and showing

¹² Parts of this paragraph are from Ranie Villaver, "Zhuangzi's Scepticism in Light of Yangist Ideas". *PhD thesis* (UNSW, 2012), 33-34.

his heels he could benefit the empire [利天下], he would do it. ..."13

According to this, first, a rivalry exists between Yang Zhu and Mozi. This is indicated by Mencius's contrast between having one's number of hair intact and having every hair shaved (extremes). Secondly, according to this, the rivalry between Yang and Mo can be explained by the amount of contribution one is willing to give for (indicated by the body hair metaphor) supporting or sustaining the world. That the principles taken are about the amount of contribution one is willing to give for *litianxia* means that they are principles on "giving support or sustenance to the world" (*litianxia*), taken as proper. *Litianxia* appears to mean here "contributing to the benefit of the world",¹⁴ for the reason that it is Mencius who is condemning the maxims. If what I gathered about the content of the tradition of the three sages (in 3B.9) is correct, that belief also lends support to that meaning of *litianxia* that is taken to be its meaning here. Mencius criticized the two thinkers in light of their willingness to contribute something to helping the entirety of society.

From the foregoing, it appears clear that Mencius condemns Yang Zhu for not willing to contribute anything at all for *litianxia*. According to Mencius, Yang Zhu's chosen maxim, *weiwo* 為我, means absence of willingness to share something for the purpose of helping the world. *Weiwo* is condemned as having nothing to do with *litianxia*. In 7A.26, Mencius appears to be emphasizing the relation of *weiwo* to *litianxia*. To Mencius, *weiwo* does not have anything to do with *litianxia*. One who is *weiwo* would not care about helping the world. Accordingly, to Mencius, Yang Zhu does not care about *litianxia*. Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu, then, is condemnation of *weiwo* as a

¹³ D. C. Lau, *Mencius: The Bilingual Edition* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2003), 299.

¹⁴ Carine Defoort, "The Profit That Does Not Profit: Paradoxes with *Li* in Early Chinese Texts", *Asia Major (Third Series)* 21 (2008), 172-174.

principle that does not have caring about giving anything for the purpose of helping the world as its connotation.

In the passage, Yang Zhu and Mozi are also criticized in terms of broadness of mind or perspective. This is because of the idea being conveyed by the passage. According to 7A.26, the *dao* is not about being fixed to a single point

Tzi-mo [Zimo] holds on to the middle, halfway between the two extremes. Holding on to the middle is closer to being right, but to do this without [*wu* 無] the proper measure [*quan* 權] is no different from holding on to one extreme. The reason for disliking [*wu* 惡] those who hold to one extreme is that they cripple the Way. One thing is singled out to the neglect of a hundred others.¹⁵

In this part of the passage, it seems clear that, to Mencius, the *dao* involves significantly broad-mindedness. He says that he abhors (*wu* 惡) those who stick to an extreme of the spectrum of *litianxia* ideas because they cripple or injure (*ze* 賊) the *dao*. They injure the *dao*, according to Mencius, by being narrow-minded or having a closed mind towards a plurality (*bai* 百) of ideas.¹⁶ Mencius's assumptions here appear to be, first, that there is a plurality of *litianxia* ideas and, second, that the *dao* which Mencius recognizes to be *the dao* is multi-faceted or a whole whose parts are the many ideas. It is clear that, to Mencius, a way to injure the *dao* is to have the whole only have a single component. This is also because this is not unrelated to the point of Mencius's criticism of Zimo of "not having balance" (*wuquan* 無權). (*Wu* 無 means "absence" and *quan* 權 means "balance".) As presented by Carine Defoort, the metaphor, as it is

¹⁵ Lau, *Mencius*, 299.

¹⁶ *Bai* is the term in *baijia* 百家, translated as "hundred schools of thought", as *jia* 家 is "school". *Baijia* refers to "doctrinal plurality". The concept of *doctrinal plurality* is an important main connotation in Karyn Lai, "Philosophy and Philosophical Reasoning in the *Zhuangzi*: Dealing with Plurality", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, 3 (2006), 365-374.

used in the *Mencius*, is about reflection or reflecting,¹⁷ which is a human act; in 4A.17, Mencius seems to be saying it is foolish to stick rigidly to *li* propriety in behavior 禮 (doing so is not reflection).¹⁸ Consequently, that, to Mencius, having the *dao* to only have one part is one way to injure it means that Yang Zhu is condemned by Mencius as injuring the *dao*. Yang Zhu held on to one extreme.

Passage 7B.26

7B.26 seems only to show a condemnation of Yang Zhu that is consistent with the condemnation of Yang's doctrines as deplorable in 3B.9. In 3B.9, Yang Zhu is condemned as inimical to *xian sheng zhi dao*, indicating that Mencius found his doctrines deplorable. He found them to be that because in the passage Mencius mentions this as the reason for already being *haobian* (fond of disputation). In 7B.26, we find the condemnation of Yang's doctrines as deplorable, because Mencius's words show that the doctrines of Yang and Mo are to be strongly opposed. In the passage, Mencius says:

“Those who desert the Mohist school are sure to turn to that of Yang; those who desert the Yang school are sure to turn to the Confucianist. When they turn to us we simply accept them. Nowadays, those who debate with the followers of Yang and Mo behave as if they were chasing strayed pigs. They are not content to return the pigs to the sty, but go on to tie their feet up.”¹⁹

Mencius's words here seem to say that in dealing with the followers of Yang and Mo (or in disputation), the idea is not so much to prove that their arguments are wrong as to make

¹⁷ Carine Defoort, “Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh: The Middle Position of the Guodian Text “Tang Yu Zhi Dao”, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 76 (2004): 48.

¹⁸ Bryan Van Norden understands 權 as “discretion” and appears to connect the exercise of it with prudence. Bryan Van Norden, *Mengzi* (USA: Hackett, 2008), 97.

¹⁹ Lau, *Mencius*, 321.

certain that one's arguments are persuasive.²⁰ If this is correct, then the doctrines of Yang and Mo, to Mencius, are truly to be strongly opposed. Yang Zhu's and Mozi's words are persuasive. Mencius stood for *xian sheng zhi dao*. He would regard any doctrine that is hostile to the way as deplorable.

Mencius's condemnations of Yang Zhu in the three passages are related. However, 7A.26 gives more information about Mencius's criticism of Yang Zhu. The 3B.9 condemnation is ultimately one that is just explained by Mencius's words that say that the *dao* of the former sages (*xian sheng zhi dao*) is to prevail and any *dao* contrary to it is to be condemned. The criticism is also leveled against Mozi. The 7B.26 condemnation, as elaborated on, is related to that of 3B.9. 7A.26 is more informative for it gives two criticisms of *weiwo*: criticism of *weiwo* (thus of Yang Zhu) in relation to *litianxia* and in relation to the recognized correct *dao* of Mencius.

The Possibility of *Weiwo* as the Policy "I must never do anything bad to myself", and Ethical Egoism

In this section, I discuss the idea that it is possible that *weiwo* is the policy, "I must never do anything bad to myself". The discussion is helpful in understanding the claim that Mencius viewed *weiwo* as ethical egoism. This is because the idea that it is possible that *weiwo* is that policy sheds light on the meaning of ethical egoism.

It is possible that *weiwo* means the policy, "I must never do anything bad to myself", because it is possible that *jianai* 兼愛 is the policy "I must never do anything bad to others". It is possible that *jianai* is that policy because of a meaning of *jianai* that is expressed in the *Mozi* text. (*Jian* 兼 is "universal" or "impartial", and *ai* 愛 is "love" and *jianai* has been rendered as "universal love" or "impartial caring".) That meaning of *jianai* expressed in the *Mozi* shows that *jianai* is a policy and it is the policy of "I must never do anything bad to others". In the *Mozi's* section

²⁰ Cf. Eno, *Mencius*, 157.

16.13 (Part 3), Mozi asks whether we would “hate and injure” (*wuze* 惡賊)²¹ others’ parents if we were to become ‘filial sons’ (*xiaozi* 孝子, *xiao* 孝 is translated as “filial piety”). He gives the answer that we would not, because we would think of others’ parents’ reciprocal action and the alternative, “love and benefit” (*aili* 愛利) them, is what we must do.²² According to the passage, first, the assumption that the contrast between *jianai* and “graded love” (which is used to describe Confucian teaching) is not correct. It is not correct because if that were true, then Mozi would have criticized filial piety (*xiao* 孝) in the passage. Mozi appears to approve of *xiao*. What Mozi disapproves of is “hating and injuring” others’ parents. He approves of “loving and benefiting” (*aili*) them. Secondly, Mozi seems to be saying that the meaning of *jianai* is “not hating and injuring others” or “to not hate and injure others”.²³ That *jianai* means “to not hate and injure others” means that it is a policy. This is because “to not hate and injure others” is like non-maleficence. Non-maleficence is the duty of non-infliction of harm or injury to others. A person who carries out non-maleficence is following the policy, “I must never harm or injure others”. According to this, the policy of “I must never harm or injure others” is non-maleficence. “To not hate and injure others”, however, is different from non-maleficence, for the reason that it has the element of “hate” (*wu* 惡). I suggest that a person who carries out “to not hate and injure others” is following the policy, “I must never do anything bad to others”. Accordingly, that policy is the duty of “to not hate and injure others”. Since *jianai* means “to not hate and injure others” and “to not hate and injure others” is the policy “I must never do anything bad to others”, then *jianai* means the policy “I must never do anything bad to others”. That *jianai* is a policy means that *weiwo* must be as well. That is because they belong,

²¹ *Wu* 惡 means “hate” and *ze* 賊 means “injure”.

²² William Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, comp. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 72.

²³ That this idea is explicated in the passage is indicated by the title of the Section. Section 16 is titled “*Jianai*” 兼愛.

as extremes, to a spectrum of ideas. They are ideas in the form of policy or principle.

That *weiwo* means the policy, “I must never do anything bad to myself” follows from *jianai* being the policy “I must never do anything bad to others”. This is because *weiwo* is the other extreme. The opposite of the policy “I must never do anything bad to others” is “I must never do anything bad to myself”. The terms *wei* 為 and *wo* 我 appear useless in judging whether the claim (that *weiwo* is that policy) is correct. The characters together only mean “doing for or deeming oneself” or, literally, “for me”.²⁴ However, it may be said that the policy “I must never do anything bad to myself” is consistent with the literal meaning of *weiwo*. This means that one who adopts the policy is following it for her own self (*weiwo*).

What does the idea that *weiwo* could be the policy “I must never do anything bad to myself” tell us about ethical egoism? The policy “I must never do anything bad to myself” is not the policy of ethical egoists. Since the claim of ethical egoism is “It is wrong for anyone to not pursue exclusively their own interests”, then the policy of ethical egoists is “I must pursue my own interests only, and only those interests, (for that is the right thing to do)”. One who adopts that policy is not necessarily an ethical egoist. One who adopts that policy would be an ethical egoist only if she also holds the belief that that policy ought to be everybody’s policy. The policy of ethical egoists is certainly different from “I must never do anything bad to myself”. The latter is consistent with the ethical egoists’ policy because one’s never doing anything bad to oneself is for one’s advantage. They are, however, not identical. Accordingly, if *weiwo* means the policy “I must never do anything bad to myself”, then *weiwo* is not the policy of ethical egoists. If it is not the policy of ethical egoists, then one who holds *weiwo* is not an ethical egoist. For

²⁴ “為我” appears in *Analects* 6:9, as meaning literally “for me”, since “善為我辭焉” is translated, for example by D. C. Lau, as “Decline the offer for me tactfully [or in the manner that is *shan* 善, *shan* is ‘good’]”. D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 82.

one to be an ethical egoist, she must hold the policy “I must pursue my own interests only, and only those interests, (for that is the right thing to do)”, and she must hold the belief that that policy must be everyone’s policy.

Mencius’s View of *Weiwo* as Ethical Egoism

What does the claim, that Mencius viewed *weiwo* as ethical egoism, mean? According to the meaning of ethical egoism, that claim means that Mencius regarded *weiwo* as equivalent to ethical egoism. In other words, to Mencius, *weiwo* is the claim “It is wrong for anyone to not pursue exclusively their own interests” and a person who adopts *weiwo* is a person who adopts the policy “I shall always pursue my own interests only, and only those interests, (for that is the right thing to do)” and who holds the belief that that policy ought to be everybody’s policy.

What evidence or proof is there for the claim that Mencius regarded *weiwo* as equivalent to ethical egoism? What can be given here is a reasoning that starts from the scholarly consensus that, according to Mencius, Yang Zhu was egoist.²⁵ The reasoning then proceeds to the question of what sort of egoist Yang Zhu was, given the kinds of egoism that are discussed in contemporary literature. The kinds are *psychological egoism*, *ethical egoism*, and *rational egoism*.²⁶ It is possible that Yang Zhu’s is all of the kinds. Asking that question involves primarily the consideration of the meaning of each of the kinds. The consideration reveals, however, that it is not the case that Yang Zhu’s egoism is all of the kinds nor any two of them. It reveals that Yang Zhu is only an ethical egoist. That the consideration reveals this is seen in the following points (which are points that further elaborate on ethical egoism and shed

²⁵ Ranie Villaver, “Does *guiji* Mean Egoism?: Yang Zhu’s Conception of Self”, *Asian Philosophy* 23, 2 (2015), 216.

²⁶ See, for example, Robert Shaver, “Egoism”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta; available from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/egoism/>; accessed 15 April 2020.

light on what ethical egoism is, thereby providing further understanding of the condemnation of ethical egoism):

- (i) A person cannot be a psychological egoist, an ethical egoist, and a rational egoist all at the same time. This is because psychological egoism is a descriptive theory, while ethical egoism and rational egoism are prescriptive.²⁷ The claim of psychological egoists is that no human actions are other-regarding.²⁸ The claim of ethical egoists is that to disregard totally the welfare of all others is the only right thing to do.²⁹ The claim of rational egoists is that the pursuit of one's own interests is dictated by reason.³⁰
- (ii) A person cannot be all the three kinds because Yang Zhu is very likely not a psychological egoist. Yang Zhu is very likely not a psychological egoist because consideration of psychological egoism reveals that it is not a "live philosophical option". This is according to Bryan Van Norden.³¹ Van Norden writes that psychological egoism has been definitively refuted through cases of "altruistic motivations and self-destructive motivations".³² It is cases of the latter that appear to show clearly that the description, *all* human actions are self-regarding, is mistaken. Cases of altruistic motivations do not seem to do that because, suppose the soldier who threw himself to a grenade in a battle in order to save his comrades'

²⁷ A note should be made, however, that a question of whether psychological egoism is in actual fact indistinct from ethical egoism appears to be raised by Joel Feinberg in "Psychological Egoism," in *Reason and Responsibility*, eds. Russ Shafer-Landau and Joel Feinberg (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2004), 476-488.

²⁸ James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 63-75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-90.

³⁰ Alexander Moseley, "Egoism", in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP). Available from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/egoism/>; accessed 14 December 2016

³¹ Bryan Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 206.

³² *Ibid.*

lives had truly altruistic motivation but died, sceptics ask how we know that. Self-destructive motivations, as seemingly clear in actions of excessive smoking and drinking, for example, would refute the psychological egoists' claim. According to Van Norden, ethical egoism is the live philosophical option between the two. This means that there is no reason why a person cannot become an ethical egoist.³³ On the assumption that it is not clear that Van Norden deems rational egoism and ethical egoism as one and the same thing, I add that rational egoism is also a live philosophical option.

(iii) Since Yang Zhu is very likely not a psychological egoist, then Yang Zhu must be either an ethical egoist or a rational egoist. Yang Zhu can be both, because ethical egoism and rational egoism are related. They are related theories, in that rational egoism seems to provide justification for the claim of ethical egoists that the moral thing to do is to perform selfish conduct. On the basis that rational egoists hold that the ultimate guide is reason, the justification that rational egoism supplies is reason. However, Yang Zhu must be only an ethical egoist. This is since *weiwo* is not rational egoism. *Weiwo* is probably not rational egoism because there appears to be no textual support for the view that *weiwo* is about the compulsion of reason that we do selfish actions. It is from this that Yang Zhu must be an ethical egoist is revealed.

This proof is not conclusive, but it is proof nonetheless, for the thesis that Mencius regarded *weiwo* as equivalent to ethical egoism. Since Mencius viewed *weiwo* as ethical egoism, then Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is also condemnation of ethical egoism.³⁴ This condemnation is the condemnation that is

³³ The note in footnote #27 should be again noted here.

³⁴ An implication of the point that Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is condemnation of ethical egoism is that an important question of whether Mencius, as depicted in the *Mencius* text, is an advocate of commonsense morality may now be raised. Commonsense morality is that morality that treats balancing between concern

looked at as having a parallel with the condemnation of selfish actions in this paper.

Conclusion

In this paper, I presented and discussed a proof for the view that Mencius regarded *weiwo* as equivalent to ethical egoism. Although it is not conclusive, the proof is justification that Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is condemnation of ethical egoism. That Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is equivalent to condemnation of ethical egoism is crucial to the thesis that the condemnation of selfish actions and Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu can be connected. Because Mencius's condemnation is equivalent to condemnation of ethical egoism, Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu has something to say about the fight against COVID-19. There are measures, imposed by government, to fight the virus and defiance against these measures is condemned as selfish. In other words, Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu could be said to be saying that the defiance is to be condemned as selfish. This is possible because that condemnation, the condemnation of selfish actions (on the basis that a parallel can be drawn between the condemnation of selfish actions and the condemnation of ethical egoism, and that Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu is condemnation of ethical egoism) can be connected to Mencius's condemnation of Yang Zhu.

for one's own welfare and concern for that of others' welfare as obligatory. A criticism of ethical egoism is that it is incompatible with commonsense morality (see Rachels, *Elements*, 82-84). So, on this basis and on what is now discussed about commonsense morality, can it be said that Mencius is an advocate of that morality? If this can be said, then the *Mencius* would be a textual resource for commonsense morality. 'Commonsense morality' is mentioned by at least three scholars: James Rachels, Robert Frederick, and Richard Kraut (see Rachels, *Elements*, 82-84; Robert Frederick, "What is commonsense morality?", *Think* 8, 23 (2009), 7-20; Richard Kraut, "Altruism", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta; available from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/altruism/>; accessed 15 April 2020.

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