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The Role of *Qing* 情 in the *Huainanzi*'s Ethics

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The second-century BCE text *Huainanzi* purports to be an exhaustive compendium of all knowledge needed to successfully govern a vast, diverse empire like the one administrated by the early Han dynasty. As such, it addresses topics from a range of theoretical and applied fields like military theory, politics and the administration of government, economics, geography, ritual practice, and much more, all within the metaphysical framework of correlative cosmology in vogue at the time. In developing an overall program for how the Han empire should be administered, the *Huainanzi* authors take normative stances on these issues, and the text consequently includes a great deal of ethical content. The authors' syncretic vision based in correlative cosmology provides the meta-ethical foundation upon which they build this ethical program. Thus, their program of ethical self-cultivation—how humans can move from a state of imperfection toward one of sagely perfection—partakes of the same theoretical framework that shapes the argument of the text as a whole.

In the correlative cosmology popular in the early Han, the phenomena that make up the cosmos were thought to change and transform according to resonances between similarly constituted *qi* 氣. Since these changes were thought to follow a certain overall pattern, uncovering or detecting the features of this pattern would necessarily disclose a norm for proper action. This indeed is the position the *Huainanzi* authors take in the text's ethical content. The specific program of self-cultivation recommended, moreover, focuses on recovering the innate ability of the human mind to detect underlying cosmic patterns. To explain the medium through which these patterns

are disclosed, or the phenomena which sages apprehend when they act in ideal accord with cosmic pattern, the *Huainanzi* authors use the term *qing* 情.

The term *qing* in classical Chinese seems to take one of several valences depending upon the context in which it is used. The two most common English terms for translating *qing* are ‘feelings/emotions’ and ‘the facts of the situation.’ In modern Chinese, the character indeed takes on both of these meanings, and functions differently depending upon the character with which it is paired in a compound. Chad Hansen implies that *qing* is open to a more definite turn toward the meaning of “emotion” after the introduction of Buddhism to China, and A. C. Graham notes that after the advent of Neo-Confucianism in the Song, *qing* takes on the more definite meaning of “passions.”¹

In classical Chinese, *qing* does indeed carry meaning that would make both ‘feelings’ and ‘facts of the situation’ seem appropriate in certain contexts. The meaning of *qing* is actually not quite met by either of these options, but rather *qing* represents a separate concept that manifests as both the essential facts of a situation and a sort of affective content in human experience. In this essay, I examine how *qing* functions in the second-century BCE text *Huainanzi*. I argue that in the *Huainanzi*, *qing* functions in much the same way that it does in other Warring States and early Han texts, except that it also carries a cosmological significance particularly important to the *Huainanzi*’s ethical project. After a brief overview of several scholars’ treatments of the semantic range of *qing*, I examine in detail the actual instances of the term in the *Huainanzi*, noting how its various characterizations support the text’s vision of ideal human conduct.

¹ Chad Hansen, “*Qing* 情 (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” in *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 183. .A. C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 59.

Finally, I review some important features of the overarching ethical argument of the text to characterize its authors' treatment of *qing*.

In one important sense, *qing* in the *Huainanzi* means, as elsewhere, the essential properties of a thing. As Graham puts this concept, “the *qing* 情 of X is what X cannot lack if it is to be called X.”² The significance of this definition is that *qing* refers only to properties without which something cannot be *called* X, and not properties without which something cannot *be* X. In this sense, *qing* is fundamentally indexed to human faculties of identification or distinction. It therefore refers, at least in part, to a reality apprehensible by humans. As Graham notes, classical Chinese thought includes several conceptual aspects that contribute to the reality of a thing, rather than the familiar dichotomy of existence and non-existence found in the West.³ Reviewing some of these other aspects will help to distinguish the domain covered by *qing*.

The *qing* of something “is often contrasted with its *xing* 形 ‘shape’ or *mao* 貌 ‘guise, demeanour.’”⁴ Because it has to do with naming and not being, *qing* need not refer to a physically tangible reality. *Xing* or *mao*, by contrast, specifically refer to the outward, physically tangible appearance of a thing or person. The implication of this contrast, moreover, is that while a thing’s *xing* or *mao* is potentially misleading, *qing* cannot be misleading because it is a basic criteria for definition. For instance, a statue may have a human *xing*, but it clearly cannot be included in the category “human” because it lacks human *qing*. Likewise, a deformed or mutilated person may lack the typical human *xing*, but might still be included in the category “human” by virtue of having human *qing*.

² Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 63.

³ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 60.

⁴ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 60.

Since *qing* does not depend on shape or appearance, things which can be said to have *qing*, “essential qualities” or “essence” need not be said to exist in the sense of being *shi* 實 “solid, really existing.” This means that *qing* can refer to conceptual as well as discrete objects. In fact, much of the time when early Chinese authors apply the concept of *qing* to humans, the result is a sense that certain inclinations or qualities, rather than organs or structures, are what essentially define them. Zhuangzi argues that the *qing* of mankind includes the tendency to divide the world in terms of right and wrong or “that’s it and that’s not” (*shi fei* 是非), and thereby obscure the underlying patterns for harmonious action provided by Heaven.⁵ Mengzi argues that the “four sprouts” of virtue and the tendency toward good are the *qing* of humans.⁶ Graham also makes much of the idea in *Lushichunqiu* and elsewhere that humans have certain *qingyu* 情欲 “essential desires.”⁷ The idea here is that, among the many desires that humans experience, there are some which are actually essential to human nature and not learned, and which are “few and easily satisfied.”⁸ In this same sense, in *Xunzi* and in the *Liji* the *qing* of humankind is taken as the unlearned impulses we more readily associate with actual emotion. “In these texts, but nowhere else in pre-Han literature, the word refers only to the genuine in man which it is polite to disguise, and therefore to his feelings.”⁹ In both cases of unlearned behavior, we see the intimate connection of *qing* with *xing* 性, commonly translated as “nature.”

Xing refers to the set of all qualities with which a thing is imbued simply by virtue of its basic constitution. For human beings, this includes the form of the body and the composition of the mind, as well as one’s basic disposition to certain actions. Graham points out that Xunzi makes

⁵ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 61-62.

⁶ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 62.

⁷ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 63.

⁸ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 63.

⁹ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 64.

an important distinction between two senses of *xing*: first, “the course or direction of spontaneous activity,” and second, “spontaneous activity itself.”¹⁰ *Qing* is intimately related to the second sense in that *qing* refers to actual phenomena (as opposed to the conditions which give rise to them) that are genuinely part of a person’s constitution. These phenomena include things like desires, impulses and emotions. With this we have the basic parameters for a definition of *qing* that will cover its meaning both as “the genuine or essential facts of a situation” and as the affective impulses corresponding to those facts.

Chad Hansen criticizes Graham’s treatment of *qing* on the grounds that it, like other traditional readings, relies too heavily on Western “folk-psychology” to define terms like desire and emotion.¹¹ Although this part of Hansen’s argument is not strictly relevant here, his solution to the “problem” of using Western folk-psychological concepts does provide a sense of the meaning of *qing* which will be useful in understanding how the term is used in the *Huainanzi*. Hansen argues for an overall meaning of *qing* as ‘reality responses’ or ‘reality input.’ The idea here is that, since the *qing* of X has to do with naming that thing ‘X’, “the *qing* of a thing are the reality-related, extralinguistic criteria that practically guide use of its name.”¹² According to Hansen, *qing* are phenomena which humans encounter regardless of what set of conventions (*dao* 道, according to Hansen’s terminology) they are using to evaluate the world. Hence, they are the input from reality—what is *actually there*—that humans subsequently use to linguistically evaluate their world.

For Hansen then, *qing* can come to mean feelings because in some instances the input they provide comes in the form of pleasure, anger, sadness, hate, etc:

¹⁰ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 65.

¹¹ Hansen, “*Qing* 情 (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” 181.

¹² Hansen, “*Qing* 情 (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” 196.

Qing, in sum, are all reality-induced discrimination or distinction-making reactions in *dao* executors. They guide the application of terms in real time in real (and inevitably unique) situations. Thus the fundamental sensory distinctions . . . are *qing*. But so also is the reality feedback we get from executing a *dao*^{guiding discourse}.

It is the feedback type of input, according to Hansen, that engenders more specific affective states like pleasure, sadness, etc. *Qing* is thus not defined as these various affective states, but does provide the input or impulse for their arousal. Hansen's conception of how this process actually works is not really relevant here, but it will suffice to reiterate two distinctions he makes about *qing*. First, *qing* are genuine, prelinguistic responses to actual situations encountered by humans; and second, these responses are (normally) interpreted and given meaning by socio-linguistic conditions.

Hansen goes on to argue—contra Graham—that Zhuangzi's famous exchange with Hui Shi is meant to show that all *qing* always involves a *shi-fei* distinction, based on linguistic parameters, and that the best one can hope for is to simply not let such distinctions harm oneself.¹³ Graham argues that this passage instead shows Zhuangzi's antipathy to rationality and suggests rejecting the attendant process of making *shi-fei* distinctions altogether.¹⁴ I am more inclined to accept Graham's reading, but it will be interesting to note Hansen's take on this issue in light of the *Huainanzi*'s treatment of *qing*.

In examining the use of *qing* in the *Huainanzi*, I find it helpful to take the view suggested by Michael Puett in his own discussion of *qing* in early Chinese literature.¹⁵ Instead of trying to pin down one definition for *qing* that is applicable throughout early Chinese history, Puett argues that the term actually did have a broad semantic range and that as such different authors

¹³ Hansen, "*Qing* 情 (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought," 198-199. The Zhuangzi passage is in chapter 5, see A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981, 82.

¹⁴ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 60-63.

¹⁵ Michael Puett, "The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought," in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 37-68.

emphasized different aspects of its meaning to further their own arguments.¹⁶ Many of these authors were engaged in the debates of the Warring States and early Han about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of traditional forms of moral authority. The *Huainanzi* engages this debate at length, and Puett notes how its authors crafted their interpretation of *qing* to fit with their overall vision of sagely government, and their concomitant characterization of the sources of moral authority.

Puett examines the Guodian text *Xingzimingchu* 性自命出, as well as passages from the *Xunzi* and *Huainanzi* to provide his sketch of the *qing* debate in early China. The *Xingzimingchu* uses *qing* in a sense that seems to indicate, “the ways that humans relate to the world.”¹⁷ The character of this relationship, moreover, is provided by one’s *xing*. “For example, the fact that one has the *qi* of sadness is part of one’s *xing*; but the fact that one will grow sad in a given circumstance is due to one’s *qing*.”¹⁸ The text goes on to argue that moral self-cultivation consists in, “refining that which comes through *qing*.”¹⁹ This is achieved by using the mind to fix the will upon exemplary forms laid down by the sages in the form of the *Documents*, *Odes*, *Rituals* and *Music*. This process works essentially because the sages, “took the worthy traditions from the past, organized them, patterned (*li* 理) their *qing*, and thereby made them available to educate the latter-born.”²⁰ Thus the *Xingzimingchu* uses the concept of *qing* to legitimate the further use of traditional forms of moral authority.

In *Xunzi*, Puett sees not the beginning of any semantic shift in the use of *qing*, but rather a certain ambivalence to its role in ritual stemming from *Xunzi*’s part in the debate. Where Graham sees the *Xunzi* as the earliest turning point where *qing* began to mean something akin to

¹⁶ Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” 42.

¹⁷ Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” 45.

¹⁸ Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” 45-46.

¹⁹ Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” 47.

²⁰ Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought,” 50.

affect, and Hansen sees *Xunzi* as the point where the gap between *qing* and *yu* 欲 narrows, Puett argues that *Xunzi* instead treats *qing* as something to be both curbed and fulfilled because he is responding to new developments in the debates about traditional moral authority.²¹ Puett says that *Xunzi*'s polemical position was to, on the one hand, acknowledge the role of artifice in ritual—that is, concede that it is a constraint on one's Heaven-born *qing*—and on the other hand argue that this artifice is an absolute good. The *Huainanzi* takes up the opposite side of the debate and argues that the reason traditional authority (that is, that derived solely from antiquity in general, and the Classics in particular) is defunct is precisely because it is so artificial.

Puett provides a cogent analysis of some of the important instances of *qing* in the *Huainanzi* and argues convincingly for its polemical use in the debate against traditional authority. His analysis, however, does not seek to address the larger program of normative ethics we read in *Huainanzi*, and so does not capture the full range of signification *qing* takes in the text. The *Huainanzi* does make an important entry into early Han debates on the proper sources of moral authority, but in so doing it also belongs to another tradition of debate about the nature of personal self-cultivation, including the function of various contemplative techniques of breath-cultivation found in what we now identify as early Daoist literature.²² The authors' use of *qing* is also carefully crafted to fit with their characterization of breath cultivation and their argument for and about its benefits. A close examination of the various ways *qing* is used in the text will yield

²¹ Puett, "The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* 情 in Early Chinese Thought," 56-57.

²² This includes, most importantly, the "Neiyue" 内业 and two "Xinshu" 心術 chapters of the *Guanzi*, as well as *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*. I do not mean to imply that there was any sort of self-identified "Daoist" lineage prior to the Han dynasty, nor argue that *Huainanzi* is directly related to those texts. However, Harold Roth has argued convincingly for an identifiable theme relating to meditative practice running throughout these texts, such that we may retrospectively identify it as early "Daoist" literature, even if its authors would never have used that term. For more on the debate about the existence of pre-Han Daoism, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China" in *T'oung Pao* 89 no.1 (January 2003): 59-99. For Roth's argument about the continuity of early Daoist contemplative literature, see especially his *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), and for his argument for *Huainanzi* as a Daoist text see "*Huainanzi* and Han Daoism" in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, ed. Liu Xiaogan (New York: Springer, 2015).

a more precise picture of how the *Huainanzi* authors placed breath cultivation in their overall ethical project, and therefore help to characterize normative ethics in the text.

To identify the most important areas covered by the semantic range of *qing* utilized by the *Huainanzi* authors in their ethical program, I also have found helpful Christoph Harbsmeier's broader semantic analysis of *qing*.²³ Drawing on sources from throughout the classical period, Harbsmeier identifies seven basic meanings of *qing*:

1. Factual: The basic facts of a matter.
2. Metaphysical: Underlying and basic dynamic factors.
3. Political: Basic popular sentiments/responses.
4. Anthropological: General basic instincts/propensities.
5. Positive: Essential sensibilities and sentiments, viewed as commendable.
6. Personal: Basic motivation/attitude.
7. Emotional: Personal deep convictions, responses, feelings.²⁴

Harbsmeier notes that this list is not definitive and that in many instances several meanings of *qing* shade into each other and overlap.²⁵ This is certainly the case in the *Huainanzi*, and I would venture to say that all of the above meanings appear in the text at one time or another. I will not engage in a more extensive treatment of Harbsmeier's rationale for each category, but instead point out four of the categories that will be especially important in the *Huainanzi*.

The metaphysical sense of *qing* includes, "something like a metaphysics of essential inner driving forces that determine the course of changes in the universe."²⁶ This is the most important sense of *qing* in the *Huainanzi*, and the one which shapes almost every aspect of its use.

Harbsmeier describes the anthropological meaning of *qing* as "fundamental human sensibilities" and "natural appetitive drives associated with likes and dislikes."²⁷ This is the sense in which

²³ Christoph Harbsmeier, "The Semantics of *Qing* 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese," in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 69-148.

²⁴ Harbsmeier, "The Semantics of *Qing* 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese," 71-72.

²⁵ Harbsmeier, "The Semantics of *Qing* 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese," 72.

²⁶ Harbsmeier, "The Semantics of *Qing* 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese," 76.

²⁷ Harbsmeier, "The Semantics of *Qing* 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese," 84, 86.

qing are subject to *li* “sorting out in a principled way,” and is important in the *Huainanzi*.

Harbsmeier notes that positive uses of *qing* abound in early Daoist sources, and this is indeed the case in *Huainanzi*, as well. The personal meaning of *qing* is closely related to the anthropological, but with a more subjective or individual aspect. These two senses are closely linked and appear together in many instances. I will not use these categories as the primary structure of my analysis, but it may be useful throughout my discussion to refer back to them to clarify some of the meanings of *qing* in the *Huainanzi*.

I will first discuss some general patterns in the *Huainanzi*'s use of *qing*, and then examine specific instances in five categories that relate to the text's definition of *qing* in service of its overarching ethical themes.

Qing in the Huainanzi

The character *qing* appears one hundred twenty-two times in the *Huainanzi*.²⁸ The most immediately striking feature of its use in this text is that in every single case it functions as a noun. Graham specifically notes an adjectival or adverbial sense of *qing* in which it means “genuine” or “genuinely.”²⁹ The adverbial use is common especially in *Mozi*, and the adjectival sense features prominently in his example of *qingyu* 情欲 ‘essential desires’ from the *Lüshi chunqiu*. Moreover, in roughly half of the instances of *qing* in *Huainanzi*, it is preceded by either *qi* 其, *zhi* 之, or some specific noun or pronoun indicating that it is a case of the *qing* of *something*. From these facts I conclude that the authors of the *Huainanzi* had a very definite

²⁸ All references to the text of *Huainanzi* are from *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引, Chinese University of Hong Kong Chinese Ancient Texts series, ed. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992). I do not include the instance of *qing* at 20/226/16 because Lau emends the text here to drop the character.

²⁹ Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 59.

sense of *qing* as a property present in or attributable to people, things and situations. It will be my task in this section to draw a more complete picture of just what this entails.

It is also interesting to note the variety of verbs that take *qing* as an object. The most common verb associated with *qing* is *shi* 適 “to accord with, meet or match,” taking *qing* as object in ten instances. Other popular *qing*-verbs include *tong* 通 “to penetrate to,” *shun* 順 “to accord with, go along with,” *zhi* 知 “to know, to understand,” *li* 理 “to order, put in order,” and *fan* 反 “to return to”; also negatively, *luan* 亂 “to disorder,” and *shi* 失 “to lose, lose touch with.” From these examples it is clear that *qing* is something that can in some way be grasped with human faculties (penetrated to, understood), and also something that can provide a norm for action (accorded with, matched to). There are also two set phrases using *qing* that will be important for what follows.

The *Huainanzi* uses the phrase *xingming zhi qing* 性命之情 “the essentials of nature and destiny” seven times, plus two times where *xing zhi qing* 性之情 “the essentials of nature” is almost immediately followed by a reference to *ming zhi qing* 命之情 “the essentials of destiny.” This is clearly an important phrase, and its full meaning is much more nuanced than the translation suggests. A closer examination of the text will illuminate this meaning. *Qing* also appears in combination with *xing* as a paired noun some eight times, suggesting the close relationship between the two words. The meaning of this combination is something like a combined sense of Xunzi’s two aspects of human nature mentioned above: the configuration of one’s innate disposition, and the actual impulses resulting from that disposition.

The chapters where *qing* plays the most important role in the *Huainanzi* are chapters one, seven, ten, and eleven. Together they contain nearly half of the occurrences of *qing*. There are

only five references to *qing* in chapter one, *Yuan dao* 原道 “Originating in the Way,” but since this chapter is crucial to laying out the vision and project of the text, these references are very important.³⁰ Likewise, chapter seven, *Jing shen* 精神 “Quintessential Spirit,” only has ten references, but it is a relatively short chapter and one that contains the most important discussion of psycho-physiology in the text. Chapter ten, *Mou cheng* 繆稱 “Profound Evaluations,” and chapter eleven, *Qi su* 齊俗 “Integrating Customs,” contain twenty-six and fourteen references to *qing*, respectively. *Mou cheng* deals with the art and practice of discerning true conditions and appropriate actions, and *Qi su* deals extensively with the psychological bases of ritual and custom.

In approaching the use of *qing* in the *Huainanzi* as it relates to the text’s overall vision of self-cultivation, I have divided the passages where *qing* appears into five categories: Those which emphasize...

1. *Qing* as the actual constitution of a thing or situation
2. *Qing* as something which can be (and ought to be) accorded with, complied with, etc.
3. *Qing* as the true or genuine responses of a person or thing in relation to some other person, thing, or situation.
4. *Qing* as a person’s basic needs or dispositions.
5. *Qing* as a subtle inner condition linked to an outer manifestation.

To be sure, in some contexts these categories will overlap, and some passages may be used as evidence for more than one category. Overall, the complete picture given by the ideas expressed in these five categories represent the *Huainanzi*’s vision of *qing* as the actual condition of dynamic processes in a universe of correlatively resonant *qi* that abides by certain subtle Heavenly patterns which the cultivated individual can discern and use as a guide for spontaneous, effective action. Thus *qing* will be that which cultivated individuals both understand and accord

³⁰ I follow the translations of chapter titles used by the editors and translators of the full English translation of *Huainanzi*, as well as their division of sections within chapters. See Major, et al, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

with when they allow their *shen* 神 to spontaneously harmonize with the underlying patterns of their world.

I. *Qing* as actual constitution

The sense of *qing* as the actual configuration of circumstances is central to all the other meanings of *qing* in the *Huainanzi*. It is in this sense that *qing* means the underlying subtle but detectable reality patterned on the quasi-mechanical workings of *Tian* 天. This sense derives meaning from the *Huainanzi*'s overall view of correlative cosmology and the notion of *ganying* 感應. *Ganying* “stimulus and response” is the idea that in a universe composed of various *qi*, those with corresponding affinities will resonate with each other, and a change in one will cause a change in the other—just as identically tuned strings on a musical instrument will resonate together when only one is struck. In such a universe then, the various *qi* that make up the world and everything in it, including living things like humans, are constantly changing, causing attendant resonant changes in other things and in turn changing again. Although this type of system is not actually mechanical in the Newtonian sense of a vast, cosmic clockwork, it does exhibit certain underlying patterns (*li*) which can be discerned and spontaneously accorded with so that one's actions will always be effective. According with *li* is like going with the grain of the universe, as it were, instead of against it, and the outcome is always ultimately what is appropriate to the total context of a situation. This does not mean that such outcomes will necessarily be positive or pleasing to human sensibilities, but simply that they will comply with the inherent tendencies within a situation, and thus conduce to overall, systemic harmony. This, then, constitutes the

most basic normative position of the text, and the authors' ethical program centers on cultivating or recovering the ability of individuals to enact it.

Qing in this system takes on Graham's meaning of "the facts of the situation" and also Hansen's meaning of the reality input presented to one who is able to discern it. Because *qing* in this sense is the underlying configuration of a dynamic system, it also fits squarely into Harbsmeier's metaphysical sense of *qing*. Most of the examples from this category have to do with knowing or discerning the *qing* of various things or situations. The difference, incidentally, between the *qing* of things and the *qing* of situations is not one of kind but of scope. The *qing* of a thing is the overall configuration and disposition of its component *qi*, whereas the *qing* of a situation is the overall configuration and disposition of the component *qi* of all the things it involves, as they relate to each other. Thus the *qing* of *xing* and *ming* "nature and destiny" can be conceived as the actual reality responses generated by one's inborn constitution as it interacts with the actual circumstances of one's lot in life.

For instance:

是故夫得道已定, 而不待萬物之推移也, 非以一時之變化而定吾所以自得也. 吾所謂得者, 性命之情, 處其所安也.

Therefore when the realization of the Way is secure and it does not depend on the comings and goings of the myriad things, it is not because of a moment of transformation that I secure the means to realize it myself. What I am calling "realization" means realizing the truth [essentials] of my nature and destiny and resting securely in the calmness that it produces.³¹

This passage shows how understanding or grasping the *qing* of one's nature and destiny is tantamount to realizing the Way. This realization does not come from some outer change that puts one in a better position to discern the way, but rather from coming to discern the dynamics of that process of transformation directly. In a similar setup in 14/133/1-2 we have:

³¹ 1/9/6-7, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 73

通性之情者，不務性之所無以為；通命之情者，不憂命之所奈何。

Those who fully comprehend the genuine qualities of their nature, do not strive to accomplish what their nature cannot accomplish. Those who fully comprehend the genuine qualities of their destiny, do not concern themselves with what their destiny cannot control.³²

In this passage, the person who fully comprehends the *qing* of both *xing* and *ming* could be said to comprehend *xingming zhi qing*. By realizing the actual circumstances of nature and destiny one will not waste one's energy on trying to change what cannot be changed, and instead work more effectively within these boundaries.

In 17.228/184/14 there is a description of how sages are able to engage things and know the actual circumstances of their reality:

聖人之偶物也，若以鏡視形，曲得其情。

When a sage matches things up, it is as if he holds up a mirror to their form; from the crooked [reflection] he can get to the nature [of things].³³

Here we see the sagely ability to look past appearance and perceive the underlying configuration of a thing as it actually is, based purely upon how the sage reacts to it himself (like a mirror).

This will become important later, but for now it will suffice to note the fact that there is such a subtle underlying sense of reality.

While the *qing* of *xing* and *ming* denotes at times the actual circumstances or reality responses of an individual's nature and destiny, the more general sense of “the way the world actually is” is served by the phrase *tiandi zhi qing* 天地之情 “the actual constitution of Heaven and Earth.”

This phrase is used in 2/13/6 to describe how the ways of governing taught by various teachers of the past were all lacking in some way:

己自以為獨擅之，不通之于天地之情也。

³² 14/133/1-3, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 539.

³³ 17.228/184/14, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 708.

Each one [of Mozi, Yang Zhu, Shen Buhai, and Lord Shang] thought that he alone had a monopoly [on true governing]; they did not understand the true condition of Heaven and Earth.³⁴

The meaning here is that these previous teachers could not possibly have had the whole truth, because their teachings were based on the idea that some theory they propounded accurately described the way things really are. The authors of the *Huainanzi*, however, argue here that such theories could only *approximate* the way things really are. Every once in awhile these approximations are bound to be accurate, and that is why they say that each teacher did have some grasp of a corner of the Way. However, only the program laid out in the *Huainanzi*, based on classical Daoist inner cultivation techniques, lays hold of the true condition of Heaven and Earth *as it is in actual fact*. Without understanding *tiandi zhi qing* in this first-hand way, the *Huainanzi* argues, any tradition-bound program will eventually break down. The further ethical significance of grasping something's *qing* is that it provides a direction for action that can be used as a normative guide for action.³⁵

II. *Qing* as something to be accorded with

As noted above, *qing* in the *Huainanzi* often receives the action of verbs that involve some sense of according with, matching, or following along with. Here I will analyze a few examples of these, as well as some negative examples where not according with *qing* leads to disaster or

³⁴ 2/13/6, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 94.

³⁵ The other passages including *qing* that I have identified as carrying the sense of something's actual circumstances or constitution are: 2/16/10, 2/16/17, 2/16/24, 3/19/13, 4/35/5, 8/64/13, 9/71/10, 9/75/2, 9/75/4, 9/75/8, 11/96/2, 11/96/15, 11/101/5, 13/120/26, 13/128/13, 13/128/21, 15/149/21, 15/149/24, 15/151/24, 15/151/29, 18/193/1, 19/207/1, 20/219/8-9, 21/226/26, and 21/227/13. Most of these cases can be grouped under this category without much controversy. In most of these cases Major et al translate *qing* as "essential qualities" or "true conditions." In 9/75/2, 9/75/8, 15/149/21, 15/149/24, 15/151/24, 15/151/29, and 18/193/1, however, *qing* refers to an individual, such as a ruler, military leader, or minister. These instances may also fit into the category of *qing* as an individual's genuine responses, but I decided to include them here because the context suggests to me that the *qing* of these individuals are not being considered as individual responses but rather as part of the *qing* of the situation (e.g. a tactical or political situation).

misfortune. The sense in these passages is that, because *qing* is the feeling of feedback one gets from interacting with the actual constituent factors of a situation, the information *qing* yields as to the proper course of action will never be wrong. Conversely, if one loses sight of these reality responses and focuses instead on the artificial rules imposed by tradition, or the excesses of indulgent desires, there is no way that one can know how to act so as to avoid disaster. *Qing* in this sense thus still retains Graham's meaning of "facts" and also what is "genuine" or "essential," as well as Hansen's meaning of reality inputs. Clearly, this use is also a case of Harbsmeier's positive range of meanings, common to early Daoist sources.

In 7/54/28 we learn that sages:

法天順情，不拘於俗，不誘於人。

model themselves on Heaven,
accord with their genuine responses,
are not confined by custom,
or seduced by other men.³⁶

This quote comes in a passage at the beginning of the chapter *Jing shen* 精神, explaining how Heaven is the source of *jingshen* "Quintessential Spirit," and *jingshen* is thus the source of the sage's power to accord with Heaven and not be confined or seduced. In subsequent sections, the authors of this chapter explain how an abundance of *jingshen* leads to powers of *shenming* 神明 "spirit-like discernment," which can then be used to detect the actual conditions of situations and spontaneously accord with Heavenly patterns (*li* 理). In the passage quoted here, modeling oneself on Heaven is associated with according with *qing*. It is therefore clear that *qing*, as actual conditions, are a sort of window into the workings of Heaven, and by according with them—that is, taking them as guiding impulses—one can likewise spontaneously follow the patterns of Heaven in one's actions.

³⁶ 7/54/28-7/55/1, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 241.

Similarly, in 13/129/14 we find that:

適情辭餘, 物所誘或.

If you accord with your feelings and eschew excess, there will be nothing to entice and mislead you.³⁷

The idea again is that *qing* (here interpreted as feelings, and indeed carrying the meaning of some kind of subjective, felt response) provides the impulse toward what is congruous to the patterns of *Heaven*, and that by following *only* these subtle and fundamental impulses, one cannot go wrong.

In 7/60/29, after hearing about several rulers who met with disastrous losses after indulging in greed and licentiousness we learn that,

使此五君者, 適情辭餘, 以己為度, 不隨物而動 . . .

If these five princes had matched their genuine responses to the situation and relinquished what they did not really need, if they had taken their own inner self as their standard and not run after external things . . . [then they would not have met with such disaster].³⁸

Here the lesson is a negative one: if a ruler does not accord with *qing*, then terrible things will happen to him and his people. It is also important to note here the emphasis on *qing* as an internal, presumably subjectively experienced reality (or reality response as Hansen would have it). Following one's *qing* as the actual internal response to the conditions of reality is also essential to acting in the best way available to humans.

In 14/133/8 the *Huainanzi* authors speak of the activities that lead an individual to the ability to conduct him- or herself well:

原天命, 治心術, 理好憎, 適情性, 則治道通矣.

Trace the source of Heaven's Decree,
cultivate the techniques of the mind,

³⁷ 13/129/14, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 520.

³⁸ 7/60/29, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 260.

regulate likes and dislikes,
follow your disposition and nature,
and the Way of governing [oneself] will come through.³⁹

This verse is explained in the text that follows in terms of the benefits a person can derive from these practices and the ways they can improve his or her interactions in the world. The specific benefit of following your disposition and nature is, as before, the ability to regulate one's desires so that your impulses do not stray from actual reality responses into boorish crapulence.⁴⁰

In 13/130/1 the text gives more information as to precisely why indulging in superfluous desires is harmful. After the oft-quoted anecdote about a thief in a crowded marketplace who steals a piece of gold only to be quickly apprehended, the text explains his reckless disregard for the law and his own freedom:

志所欲，則忘其為矣。是故聖人審動靜之變，而適受與制度，理好憎之情，而和喜怒之節。

When the mind is preoccupied with desires, it forgets what it does. For this reason, sages scrutinize the alterations of movement and rest, accord with the due measures of receiving and giving, order the feelings of liking and loathing and harmonize with the occasions of happiness and anger.⁴¹

Afterward, the text states that the benefit of ordering the *qing* (“feelings”) of liking and loathing is that, “anxiety will not come near.”⁴² Both desire and anxiety are kinds of preoccupation which will eventually lead the mind to make pointless mistakes like stealing gold in a crowded marketplace. Conversely, following only one's “genuine” responses, which arise at the level of *qing*, will create a situation where there is no need for worry.

In 10/86/24 we learn that,

³⁹ 14/133/8, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 539. Note that this part of the text is actually one of the “sayings” in the *Quan yan* 詮言 “Sayings Explained” chapter, and thus (presumably) not written by the *Huainanzi* authors, though they do endorse it in the accompanying explanation.

⁴⁰ See 14/133/8-11, and Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 540.

⁴¹ 13/129/28 – 13/130/1, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 521.

⁴² 憂弗近 (13/130/2, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 521).

情先動，動無不得；无不得，則無著；發著而後快。故唐虞之舉錯也，非以偕情也，快己而天下治。

When actions are preceded by genuine feelings, no action is unsuccessful. When nothing is unsuccessful, there is no vexation. Released from vexation, you become content. Thus, the comportment of Tang [Yao] and Yu [Shun] was such that it did not violate their genuine feelings. They pleased themselves, and the world was well ordered.⁴³

This passage illustrates not only the phenomenon that when one acts purely from the impulses of *qing* there is no chance for excessive anxiety, but also that doing so inevitably produces positive, tangible results. This is the point made earlier that, because *qing* are the input derived from interaction with actual circumstances, they necessarily provide impulses in accord with the underlying patterns of Heaven that govern how the world works. By according with what actually works, all of one's actions must necessarily be appropriate, and therefore in accord with ultimate moral norms. It remains to be seen, however, how the authors of the *Huainanzi* think *qing* manifest themselves to the individual.⁴⁴

III. *Qing* as true or genuine response

The sense of *qing* that Hansen develops as “reality input” or “reality feedback” is the sense most closely approximated when we translate *qing* as “genuine response.” The meaning here is subtle and not easily translated into Western philosophical language. On the one hand, *qing* in this

⁴³ 10/86/24 – 10/87/1, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 368 with my emendations.

⁴⁴ I include the following instances of *qing* in this second category without mentioning them in my discussion: 1/7/25, 7/59/17, 7/60/8, 7/60/9, 7/60/20, 8/61/7, 10/84/25, 10/86/3, 10/86/12, 10/91/23, 10/93/13, 11/97/15, 14/142/13, 15/144/23, 18/199/17, 18/191/26, 20/217/16, 21/224/3, 21/226/10, 21/226/16.

The instance at 21/226/10 presents a very interesting problem, which I have not been able to solve yet: 懈墮分學，縱欲適情，欲以偷自佚，而賽於大道也 “[But those who] idly and lazily set aside their studies, give free reign to their desires and indulge their feelings, and wish to misappropriate what they lack, will be obstructed from the Great Way” (21/226/10, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 856). Here, *shi qing*, which would be translated anywhere else in the text as something like “accord with their genuine responses,” has a clearly negative connotation. I suspect that this shift in usage has to do with the different circumstances in the composition of the *Yao lüe* chapter of *Huainanzi*, which stands as a post-face to the rest of the work. For more on the distinctive features of the *Yao lüe* chapter, see Judson Murray, “A Study of ‘Yaoliüe’ 要略, ‘A Summary of the Essentials’: Understanding the *Huainanzi* through the Point of View of the Author of the Postface,” *Early China* 29 (2004), 45-110, and Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 841-847.

sense means a subjective experience of an impulse of some kind toward some object outside the self. This much is clear in the *Huainanzi* from the notion that there is some sort of deep-seated guiding impulse in the mind that sages can discern and make use of (or more accurately, allow to make use of them). On the other hand, there is a sense in which *qing* has objective reality in that it represents actual conditions by which interaction and transformation takes place amongst the myriad things. The numinous clarity or spirit-like discernment (*shenming*) of a sage allows him or her to perceive the *qing* of things and situations as well as his or her own genuine responses thereto. For the authors of the *Huainanzi*, these responses are simply part of how the world works.

As I noted above, the concept of *qing* as genuine or instinctive responses is closely linked to the concept of *xing* “nature.” If *xing* is a set of dispositions and tendencies basic to human nature, then *qing* is the means by which those tendencies actually become action. In this respect, *qing* can be said to be ‘genuine’ in the sense that Graham develops it. It is also clear from this why it is so tempting to translate *qing* as feelings. The subjective aspect of *qing* as a kind of gut response resonates deeply with our Western sense of “feelings.” It is important to keep in mind, however, that in the *Huainanzi* at least *qing* always has the metaphysical meaning Harbsmeier describes, in addition to any or personal or emotional sense it may carry.

The passage at 10/85/17 helps to explain *qing* in the sense of genuine responses:

擊舟水中，魚沈而鳥揚，同聞而殊事，其情一也。

If you strike [the planks of] a boat in the middle of the water,
Fish plunge and birds scatter.
They hear the same thing; they behave differently.
Their genuine responses are one.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ 10/85/16-17, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 362.

Because of their respective *xing*, birds will never plunge into the water (fishing birds notwithstanding) and fish will never fly into the air (flying fish notwithstanding). However, they both have a response when they hear the sudden sound of something striking a wooden boat. Even though their actions are different, it is clear that they are both motivated by an impulse to escape from some perceived danger, based on information from the environment. Similarly, humans have their own automatic responses to environmental stimuli.

In 10/84/26 the *Huainanzi* uses the example of an infant's prelinguistic responses to help identify these innate impulses:

三月嬰兒, 未知利害也, 而慈母之愛諭焉者, 情也.

A three-month old infant does not yet understand the distinction between benefit and harm, but the love of a kind mother is conveyed to the infant because of her genuine responses.⁴⁶

The text uses this example to illustrate the power of *qing* in interpersonal communication. The mother cannot use language to explain to her child that her loving care is good for it, yet if she acts on her own genuine impulses engendered by her baby's needs and gives it tender care, the baby will nonetheless receive the benefit and flourish. The point here is that the mother's *qing* is prelinguistic and *actually exists* as an impulse to action. That is, *qing* actually exists in the sense that it has real, tangible effects in the world, and is a natural and necessary result of the subtle dynamic processes of the universe, but *not* in the sense that it has any actual physical form. Moreover, the mother's *qing* would have the same reality whether she was ever told that mothers *ought* to give their children tender care or not.

Because *qing* is thought to actually exist as an entirely natural, spontaneous, and inevitable response to circumstances, it can function as a reliable normative pattern. In a section describing

⁴⁶ 10/84/26, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 359, with my emendations.

the process by which the *zhen ren* 真人 “Genuine Person” becomes immersed in the Way, the text says:

真性命之情, 而智故不得雜焉.

There is a true expression of the instinctive responses invoked by [the sage’s] nature and life circumstances, so that wisdom and precedent are unable to confuse [him].⁴⁷

As we have seen above, when the sage attains this clarity of mind he will always act according to the impulses of his *qing* and thus always accord with Heavenly patterns. When a person has not attained this level of numinous clarity, however, he will act instead by artifice or else be motivated by lusts and desires that are an exaggeration of his subtle *qing*.

In the *Huainanzi*’s chapter *Qi su* 齊俗 “Integrating Customs,” traditional modes of ritual are repeatedly attacked for distorting people’s *qing*. At 11/97/16 the authors assert that,

夫三年之喪, 事強人所不及也, 而以偽輔情也.

The three year mourning period forces a person to what he cannot reach; thus he supplements his feelings with pretense.⁴⁸

The meaning here is that mourning is a genuine response, but that it stops being genuine long before the required mourning period is completed. Thus, although rites in general, “accord with *qing* and make for them an ordered pattern,” the Confucian mourning ritual in particular does not entirely accord with *qing*, and thus at some point will cause a person to cease being guided by *qing* and thereby invite disorder and inauspiciousness.⁴⁹ The authors of the *Huainanzi* argue that this is precisely why the Confucian approach is not sufficient to ensure a well ordered world.

A passage in the *Mou cheng* 繆稱 “Profound Precepts” chapter states,

善之由我, 與其由人, 若仁德之盛者也. 故情勝欲者昌, 欲勝情者亡.

⁴⁷ 8/64/26, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 280, with my emendation.

⁴⁸ 11/97/16, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 408.

⁴⁹ 禮因人情而為之節文 11/97/15, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 408.

[Someone whose] goodness comes from the self, rather than coming from others, is [a person] in whom Humaneness and Moral Potency flourish. Thus, If your genuine responses overcome your desires, you will flourish. If your desires overcome your genuine responses, you will perish.⁵⁰

The implication here is that traditional moral ideals are imposed from outside the self, while the actual source of truly moral behavior (represented by *ren* 仁 and *de* 德) is within the self—in the *qing*. *Qing* is opposed here, as elsewhere, with *yu* “desire.” There is a sense, which I will explore below, in which desires are a kind of perversion of *qing*. Desires orient appetitive impulses toward things utterly external—and therefore unnecessary—to the self. If one allows one’s *qing* to be dominant, one will always be in a positive, inward orientation and flourish, but if one allows one’s desires to be dominant, one will always be in a negative, outward orientation and eventually perish. This is significant because it reinforces the idea that *qing* is a normative standard based on the actual functioning of the human organism.

In another passage from the same chapter, the authors assert that,

凡行戴情，雖過無怒；不戴其情，雖忠來惡。

Whenever conduct stems from genuine responses, though [it is] excessive, [it will cause] no resentment. Whenever it does not stem from genuine responses, though one’s conduct is loyal, it will bring bad consequences.⁵¹

This statement is significant because it implicates *qing* not just as a normative moral standard but as an *absolute* moral standard. Given the orientation of the text, however, this makes perfect sense. If the universe does follow inevitable normative patterns, then actions which spontaneously accord with those patterns ought to be foolproof, and actions which do not so accord ought to consistently lead to disorder and harm. Moving from *qing* as impulse to actual appropriate action is thus quite simple, if rather hard to achieve in practice. This point leads

⁵⁰ 10/92/17, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 387, with my emendations.

⁵¹ 10/83/8, translation Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 353, with my emendations.

naturally into the next sense of *qing* used in the *Huainanzi*—the sense in which *qing* as impulses are oriented toward fulfilling very simple needs and dispositions.⁵²

IV. *Qing* as basic needs and dispositions

Another striking characteristic of *qing* in the *Huainanzi* is the idea that when one succeeds in according only with one's genuine impulses the result is that one's desires are naturally regulated and completely satisfied. The outcome of this regulation, moreover, is that one experiences only the most fundamental desires, which turn out to be very simple and easily satisfied. This sense of *qing* is what Harbsmeier describes as the anthropological. Claims about *qing* as dispositions in this sense are often similar to Graham's statement that *qing* are "what X cannot lack if it is to be called X." As with the other senses of *qing*, it also in some way remains what Hansen calls "reality input." That is, in this sense *qing* are the most basic, defining impulses of individual human lives, but they arise in response to environmental conditions or "reality."

According to the *Huainanzi*, Yao realized that genuine impulses lead only to the most basic desires to satisfy need, and that is why he lived in a house made of rough-hewn logs, ate only simple foods, and wore coarse garments and furs.⁵³ Indeed, the authors insist that,

聖人食足以接氣，衣足以蓋形，適情不求餘。

Sages eat enough to maintain their vital energy and wear clothes sufficient to cover their bodies. They meet their needs and do not seek for more.⁵⁴

Interestingly, the phrase translated as 'they meet their needs' is actually *shi qing* "to accord with/match with one's *qing*," which appears above in the examples of *qing* as something with

⁵² I include the following instances of *qing* in the third category without including them in my discussion: 1/4/9, 2/16/7, 2/17/13, 2/17/17, 6/54/1, 7/60/6, 7/60/10, 7/60/16, 7/60/19, 8/62/10, 8/62/11, 8/64/24, 10/84/23, 10/87/7, 10/88/1, 10/88/14, 10/88/17, 11/96/10, 11/97/17, 11/97/18, 11/104/1, 19/205/13, 19/207/24, and 20/221/23.

⁵³ See 7/58/13-14, and Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 251.

⁵⁴ 7/59/16-17, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 255.

which one can accord. From context, we can see that *qing* here is explicitly identified with a person's basic biological desires for food and warmth. Further in the passage, there is a wonderful analogy illustrating the simplicity of truly fundamental desires:

今贛人敖倉, 予人河水, 飢而殮之, 渴而飲之, 其入腹者不過簞食瓢漿 . . . 有之不加飽, 無之不為之飢.

If you offer someone the entire granary on Mount Ao or give them all the water in a river, were they to eat enough to sate their hunger and drink enough to quench their thirst, what would enter their bellies wouldn't exceed a plate of food or a ladle of drink . . . To own [these great supplies] does not make their satiation any greater and to not own them does not make their hunger any worse.⁵⁵

This example only works if one takes any desires beyond one's most basic biological needs to be superfluous. Otherwise, although owning the granary on Mount Ao would not satisfy one's hunger any more than not owning it, owning it *would* better satisfy one's desire for wealth. The authors of the *Huainanzi*, however, clearly consider such desires superfluous.

There is another passage in the text that makes this attitude even clearer:

人之情不能無衣食.

It is an essential quality of human beings that they cannot do without clothing and food.⁵⁶

This passage explicitly equates the *qing* of human beings with the need for clothing and food, but it belies an even more abstract basic human disposition. Elsewhere, the authors say that,

人之情, 於利之中則爭取大焉, 於害之中則爭取小焉.

Essential human disposition, when surrounded by benefits, struggles to gain as much as possible, and when surrounded by harm, struggles to get as little as possible.⁵⁷

This characterization of *ren zhi qing* 人之情 is really not so far off from the previous definition of the simple need for food and clothing. After all, nourishment is the most basic benefit people

⁵⁵ 7/59/18-19, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 255.

⁵⁶ 9/81/14-15, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 337. 15/142/23 has a very similar statement.

⁵⁷ 16.36/157/20. Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 636. There are similar passages at 10/88/21 and 19/206/2.

seek to obtain, and cold the most basic harm they seek to avoid. This passage illustrates, however, the authors' belief that the basic thrust of *qing* as genuine dispositions to seek nourishment and avoid harm can be exaggerated and expanded to become struggling for as much gain and as little loss as possible.

This possibility for excess in basic desires is surely the reason why the authors say elsewhere that,

扶其情者害其神.

Those who cling to their emotions injure their spirit.⁵⁸

Fu 扶 in other contexts means “to aid, to support,” but in this passage it seems to indicate not only support, but also to encourage to grow more than is necessary or appropriate. *Qing* so exaggerated ceases to be genuine and in accord with Heavenly patterns—it ceases to be *qing* at all and becomes desire (*yu*). When desires gain ascendancy like this, a person no longer relies on the genuine impulses of *qing* to guide them and to find fulfillment, and instead looks to outside pleasures for satisfaction. These exterior indulgences injure one's spirit by causing precious *jingshen* to leak out and be squandered.

There is a passage in the *Yuan Dao* 原道 chapter that describes how hunting, music, dance, and similarly stimulating activities cause most people to become intoxicated and their spirits to become muddled. However,

聖人處之, 不足以營其精神, 亂其氣志, 使心怵然失其情性.

Sages experience these things but not so much as to dominate their Quintessential Spirit or to disrupt their vital energy and concentration or cause their minds to be enticed away from their genuine responses and nature.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ 14/138/18, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 559.

⁵⁹ 1/8/27-28, Major et al, *Huainanzi* 72, with my emendations.

This distraction from *qing* and *xing*, and the subsequent waste of *jingshen* and disruption of vital energy and concentration is the primary danger of indulging desires. It is what makes indulging external desires antithetical to the ethical project of self-cultivation found throughout the text. This leads us to the final aspect of the *Huainanzi*'s use of *qing* that I wish to address: *qing* as a subtle inner condition opposed to—but also connected to—exterior appearances.⁶⁰

V. *Qing* as subtle inner quality

In the previous sections there was an implicit sense that a person's *qing* is a subjective phenomenon, internal to the individual's mind. It has been clear throughout, however, that *qing* are responses stimulated by outer reality, and that they resonate with the conditions of that reality in such a way that actions directed by these impulses will be harmonious and appropriate to the situation. In this section, I will analyze some passages where the authors of the *Huainanzi* more fully develop these ideas and present *qing* as a subtle inner quality of a person that is manifested in the person's exterior appearance and actions. This sense of *qing*, therefore, maintains Graham's definition of something "genuine," as well as "the facts of a situation," because *qing* here are still the actual responses that constitute a person's interior situation. It likewise maintains Hansen's definition of 'reality impulses', but in these examples it will also be clear how *qing* covers semantic ground that could later support the meaning of feelings in a definite sense of emotion. Many of these examples could also correspond to Harbsmeier's personal and emotional senses of *qing*, as well as the metaphysical.

⁶⁰ I include the following instances of *qing* in the fourth category without including them in my discussion: 8/64/23, 10/88/21, 10/89/25, 10/93/13, 12/119/25, 13/127/10, 15/142/23, 19/206/2.

The interior impulses that make up one's *qing* are dynamic and spontaneously responsive to every outside stimulus, but the source of this dynamism is actually a peaceful inner equanimity.

Indeed, it is by this very tranquility that one can maintain constant contact with one's *qing*:

人生而靜, 天之性也. 感而後動, 性之害也. 物至而神應, 知之動也. 知與物接, 而好憎生焉. 好憎成形, 而知誘於外, 不能反己, 而天理滅矣. 故達於道者, 不以人易天, 外與物化, 而內不失其情.

That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Stirring only after being stimulated, our nature is harmed. When things arise and the spirit responds, this is the activity of perception. When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, [one] cannot return to the self, and the heavenly patterns are destroyed. Thus, those who break through to the Way do not use the human to change the heavenly. Externally they transform together with things, but internally they do not lose [touch with] their genuine responses.⁶¹

Although cultivated people are internally tranquil, they are externally dynamic. This is really the crux of the *Huainanzi*'s argument about ideal ethical conduct. It is only by cultivating tranquility and sensitivity to the subtle reality of Heavenly patterns that one can effectively respond to situations in the world. The process is possible because internal spontaneous response leads to external action. As the authors say elsewhere:

情繫於中, 行形於外.

Qing are attached to one's center [i.e. the heart]; conduct is manifested on one's outside.⁶²

Qing, moreover, do not just *generally* lead to action, but rather they will *necessarily* lead to action unless otherwise impeded:

含而弗吐, 在情而不萌者, 未之聞也.

⁶¹ 1/2/14-6, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 53, with my emendations. Incidentally, this is the first appearance of *qing* in the text.

⁶² 10/83/7, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 353, with my emendation. The next part of this verse is a passage quoted above in support of the point that *qing* function as normative standards for conduct.

To hold something [noxious] in your mouth and not spit it out, or to have something in your *qing* and not let it blossom forth—these are things that have never been heard of.⁶³

This passage illustrates the necessity for *qing* to lead to action. Although all *qing* lead to actions, and actions motivated by *qing* are always appropriate to the situation, this does not mean that every action is appropriate because not every action is motivated purely by *qing*. As we have seen above, inauspicious action is the result of motivation by lusts and desires.

The *Huainanzi* often looks back to the reign of the ancient sage kings as a time when people were not yet corrupted by preconceived notions of wisdom and precedent and so lived more authentically and accorded with their natures and *qing*. Thus,

古者，民童蒙不知西東，貌不羨乎情，而言不溢乎行。

In antiquity, the people were naïve and ignorant, [and] they did not know west from east. The [expressions on] their faces did not exceed their *qing* [within], [and] their words did not outstrip their deeds.⁶⁴

This passage, which goes on to describe in more detail the ideal original community of mankind, emphasizes the outward results of people responding appropriately to their *qing* alone, without grasping and desire. It also functions on the understanding that one's interior *qing* will necessarily manifest accurately in outward gestures like speech and facial expressions.

Conversely, outward gestures can also betray one's lack of genuine motivation from *qing*:

號而哭，噉而哀，知聲動矣。容貌顏色，詘伸倨句，知情偽矣。故聖人栗栗乎其內，而至乎至極矣。

With howling or weeping, sighing and grieving, we recognize sounds [to which one is genuinely] moved. With bearing and visage, rouge and tint, and with bending and stretching, standing and crouching, we recognize *qing* that are feigned. Thus the sage trembles at what is within himself, and so attains to the highest ultimate.⁶⁵

⁶³ 10/88/13, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 373, with my emendation.

⁶⁴ 11/93/27-28, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 398.

⁶⁵ 10/87/19-21, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 370-371, with my emendations.

This passage points out some ways that genuine expressions of one's actual impulses may be recognized and some ways that one may spot a person merely trying to give the impression of being motivated by *qing* alone. The use of sound as the actualization of genuine impulses here is significant in that it reminds one of the idea of sympathetic resonance that lies at the heart of the *Huainanzi's* cosmology. Just as the outside conditions are the stimulus (*gan*) that produces a resonant response (*ying*) in the heart of the person (which results in *qing*), so the *qing* seem to produce a resonant response in the form of sounds like howling and wailing in grief. Thus:

強哭者雖病不哀，強親者雖笑不和。情發於中而聲應於外。

Though one who forces oneself to cry feels pain, he does not grieve;
though one who forces intimacy will laugh there is no harmony.
Qing issue forth within and sounds respond externally.⁶⁶

One of the main criticisms the authors of this text level against the society of their time is the insincerity and artifice they see as rampant in cultural and governmental institutions. They argue that such insincerity prevents ritual from functioning properly, and thus prevents society from being well ordered. The only solution is to adopt the methods of the text, cultivate oneself internally. Moreover, if the ruler in particular can do this successfully, then he can order society by according with natural patterns. The *Huainanzi's* treatment of *qing* as an internal stimulus that provokes an outer manifestation is another way that the authors of the text use the concept of *qing* to advance their vision for ideal ethical conduct.⁶⁷

Conclusion

According to the *Huainanzi*, the five thearchs and three kings,

抱大聖之心，以鏡萬物至情

⁶⁶ 11/96/21-22, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 406, with my emendations.

⁶⁷ I include the following instances of *qing* in the fifth category without including them in my discussion: 9/69/13, 9/81/8, 10/87/9, 10/87/11, 11/97/25, 11/98/1, 14/139/13, and 17.65/172/32.

embraced the great heart of a sage by mirroring the *qing* of the myriad things.⁶⁸

Just as things like mirrors, shadows, water, etc. are able to spontaneously respond to their environment and always correctly conform to it, the authors of the *Huainanzi* believe that humans have an authentic, original capacity for responding harmoniously to their environments. Because such responses are based on actual circumstances, they can circumvent the distortions in the mind caused by limited ways of thinking. Just what these responses will look like is, of course, determined by the underlying patterns in the universe and the particular conditions of a given situation. The actual responses that they generate in the heart-mind, or metaphorically in the surface of the mirror, constitute the *qing* of the person or thing. As in the passage quoted here, however, it is important to remember that in the *Huainanzi* *qing* counts as both the actual circumstances of a situation and all of the genuine responses engendered in all of individual things that are party to it. In fact, when we look at the situation as a whole, these two aspects are actually the same reality—they differ only in one's point of view.

According to the *Huainanzi* authors, any situation or set of facts in the world will engender a certain response in the heart-mind of a human. In most cases, the person's reaction, including both his resulting interior state and the actions he takes based upon it, will be determined by learned patterns of likes and dislikes or theoretical judgments of good and bad. There is, however, a sense in which any person's reactions are, at the deepest and most basic mental level, very simple responses (*ying*) to the stimulus (*gan*) of the outside situation. Most people have no idea that this is how their mind works in connection with the world. Sages, through inner cultivation practices that work to eliminate the tendency to respond according to external

⁶⁸ 11/99/16, Major et al, *Huainanzi*, 414, with my emendation. I did not include this passage in any of my five categories of *qing* because it would fit equally well, I think, in the first category as the actual constitution of the myriad things, and in the third category as their genuine responses.

influences, instead remain aware only of their *qing* and respond accordingly with actions that are authentic, spontaneous, effortless and harmonious.

The overall ethical program advocated in the *Huainanzi* seeks to recover this latent human ability to respond well to Heaven-born patterns that govern the operation of the cosmos. These Heavenly patterns form a “normative natural order,” manifested ultimately by the Dao, for which the authors advocate.⁶⁹ The various senses of *qing* in the text as the actual constitution of things, something which can and should be accorded with, genuine responses or impulses, basic needs and dispositions, and subtle inner realities which manifest externally, all contribute to the meta-ethical framework the authors use to articulate their claims in favor of early Daoist contemplative practices and the ethical expertise people may thereby acquire. The authors emphasize utilize these specific senses of *qing* from the more general semantic range of the term in early Chinese literature to develop a grammar for their ethics that would be intelligible and intellectually competitive at the time. The end result is a new or *renewed* investment of cosmic significance for *qing*, and a challenging claim about the context-specific, emergent nature of norms for ethical action.

⁶⁹ Harold Roth, “Nature and Self-Cultivation in *Huainanzi*’s ‘Original Way,’” in Marthe Chandler and Ronnie Littlejohn, eds. *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 275.

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