

Dasan's Moral Epistemology*

So-Yi CHUNG

Abstract

This article attempts to examine the moral epistemology of Dasan Jeong Yak-yong through analysis of his argument on goodness of human nature in his commentaries on Mengzi (Book of Mencius). Moral epistemology questions how our knowledge about morality is possible, and how we can justify moral beliefs. I attempt to describe Dasan along with some contemporary moral realists who accept our volitional activities such as desires and feelings to be reliable and justifiable bases of our moral knowledge. He connects the knowledge of goodness with the ability to have a feeling of pleasure upon seeing morally approvable situation. Dasan illustrates many concrete examples revealing apriority, objectivity, reliability, and the universality of moral emotions based on natural preference, which serves as a basis of moral judgment. Dasan's examples, arguments, and proofs can be used as basic counterarguments against those who dismiss the role of emotions and reject the objectivity of moral knowledge, such as non-cognitivists and ethical skeptics.

Keywords: Dasan, Jeong Yak-yong, moral epistemology, moral emotions, goodness of human nature, moral knowledge

* This article is a modified version of "Jeong Yak-yong-ui dodeok insingnon" (Dasan's Moral Epistemology), paper presented at the symposium "Philosophical Reflections on Dasan," co-hosted by Korea University, Sungkyunkwan University, and Chung-Ang University on September 22, 2012.

So-Yi CHUNG is a research professor at the Institute of Human, Environment, and Future at Inje University. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from Seoul National University in 2010. Her publications include "Kyonggi Southerners' Notion of Heaven and Its Influence on Tasan's Theory of Human Nature" (2011) and "Tasan on Righteousness and Profit: In Comparison to Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming" (2012). E-mail: soyichung@hotmail.com.

Introduction

This article attempts to examine and analyze the moral epistemology of Dasan Jeong Yak-yong (1762-1836). Moral epistemology is a subtopic of epistemology; just as epistemology is concerned with the justification of knowledge and beliefs, moral epistemology deals with the question of how to justify moral beliefs, or what is referred to as “moral fact” or “moral knowledge.”

Among thousands of articles concerning Dasan’s work and philosophy, few relate directly to the topic of epistemology. To begin with, epistemology itself is not easily applicable in the realm of Asian philosophy. In fact, while some scholars strongly argue that there is no epistemology in Asian—that is, Confucian—philosophy,¹ others argue that some aspects of Neo-Confucianism, such as the theory of *gezhi* 格致 (investigation of things; *gyeokchi* in Korean), make it the prototype of modern Chinese epistemology. Even if we narrow the scope to the more traditionally popular topic of “morality,” it is still hard to find lively discussions on moral perception or justification, since the utmost concern of Confucians lies in cultivating and practicing morality itself, not in its epistemic justification.

One interesting feature of Dasan’s ethical theories is that, unlike conventional approaches of describing moral beliefs by claiming moral authority, he attempts to *prove* moral beliefs, such as the innate goodness of human nature or how humans innately possess moral inclinations, by giving social or psychological evidence. Such a methodical, logical approach to what has traditionally been taken for granted has earned Dasan many titles, such as “logical positivist of Asian ethics,” “epitome of practical reason,” and “precursor of Korean modern philosophy.”² His reason for giving methodical proof of moral beliefs is, however, not only to demonstrate the validity or soundness of the claim, but also to persuade and urge scholars to apply such moral values and put them into concrete action.

1. See K. Lee (2010, 121-122). He writes that a purely epistemological interest or concern is hard to be found in Asian philosophy, unless it is related in one way or another to the questions of moral value and practice.

2. Refer to Keum (2001).

In order to analyze Dasan's epistemological approaches to moral beliefs, this article will first critically review previous research on so-called the *epistemology* of Dasan, arguing that they mainly limit their discussions within Dasan's theory of perception (*jigak* 知覺) or theory of investigation of things (*gyeokchi* 格致), which is ultimately related to his theory of personal cultivation (*suyang* 修養). Then, I will delineate the nature and objective of moral epistemology and introduce various forms of moral skepticism as its main counterargument. Next, I will examine modern theories that attempt to justify moral beliefs and compare them simultaneously with Dasan's arguments and approaches to moral justification. Finally, a discussion of the modern significance and value of Dasan's arguments will be provided.

Various Theories of Epistemology

As previously explained, very few Asian philosophy articles focus directly on the topic of epistemology, let alone the epistemology of Dasan. The few articles that do attempt to deal with the topic are invariably about theories of perception or about various traditional Confucian approaches to conceiving the principle or nature of outer objects, called *gyeokchi*. Dasan used the term *ji* 知 (to know, perceive, sense, grasp, etc.) or *jigak* 知覺 (to know, perceive, sense, etc.) as a simple response to outer stimulus, or as a conscious process of fulfilling bodily desires, as he believed that "the cause of human conscious activities and pursuit of bodily desires is no different from that of animals."³ According to Dasan's philosophy, the terms that represent a more sophisticated and high-level consciousness of humans, such as reason, decision, and rationality, are *yeongmyeong* 靈明 (spiritual brightness), *yeongtong* 靈通 (spiritual penetration), or *yeongji* 靈知 (spiritual knowledge).⁴ These terms, however, are not confined to the realm of

3. "大抵人之所以知覺運動, 趨於食色者, 與禽獸毫無所異" (*Maengja youi* 孟子要義 [Essential Meanings in the *Book of Mencius*], bk. 2).

4. For further analysis on Dasan's notion of spirit or *yeong* 靈 (spirit), refer to Yi (2012).

rationality alone, since they connote not only the “mysterious conscious power that can investigate hexagrams in *Yijing* (Book of Changes) and count the numbers in calendars,”⁵ but also an emotional element like moral appetite that “likes virtue and feels ashamed of evil.”⁶ In other words, for Dasan, a pure consciousness devoid of moral judgment is a stimulus-response mechanism that humans and animals share in common. Perception alone, therefore, is far from the main subject that Dasan devoted his life to study. Jang (2004, 187) summarizes this point succinctly: “Ultimately, in Jeong Yak-yong’s epistemology a pure consciousness by itself cannot realize moral value; as long as it remains to be a theoretical consciousness, it cannot add any meaning or value [to human life].”

The above contrasts with the theory of knowledge or epistemology of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. Setting aside the common objective of Confucian scholars (i.e., realizing value through moral practice), their epistemology focuses more heavily on the question of consciousness itself, as evidenced by their theories of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 (approach to things and expansion of knowledge).⁷ Dasan’s interpretation of the same phrase in *Daxue* (The Great Learning) is, however, thoroughly centered on the notion of actual practice. For him, *gyeongmul* 格物 (approach to things) meant to know clearly that the central and the peripheral (*bonmal* 本末) exist in six things (*mul* 物)—intention (*ui* 意), mind-heart (*sim* 心), body (*sin* 身), family (*ga* 家), country (*guk* 國), and everything under Heaven (*cheonha* 天下); in the same vein, *chiji* 致知 (expansion of knowledge) meant to know that the end and the start (*jongsi* 終始) exist in six events (*yuksa* 六事)—sincerity (*seong* 誠), rectitude (*jeong* 正), cultivation (*su* 修), bringing to order (*je* 齊), governance (*chi* 治), and pacification (*pyeong* 平).⁸

5. “惟一大體之中，含生如草木，知覺如禽獸，又能窮易象算曆數而神妙靈通” (*Noneo gogumju* 論語古今註 [Ancient and Contemporary Commentaries on the *Analects of Confucius*], bk. 3).

6. For further analysis on Dasan’s notion of human nature as moral inclination, refer to Chung (2009).

7. For more information on those who argue against the possibility of epistemology in Asian philosophy, see M. Kim (2008) and Jang (2004, 188-191).

8. “極知其所先後則致知也，度物之有本末則格物也” (*Daehak gongui* 大學公議 [Impartial Discussion on *The Great Learning*]); “格物者，格物有本末之物，致知者，致知所先後之知也” (*Jachan myojimyeong* 自撰墓誌銘 [An Autobiographical Epitaph]).

Realization of “the central and the peripheral” in things or “the end and the start” in events does not, as a matter of course, stop at cognitive awakening. It is the realization and actualization through self-cultivation, which for Dasan is done not through introspection and meditation, but through the actual, concrete practices of serving people and serving Heaven. The moral virtues achieved through the course of one’s actions become the true meaning of events (Keum 2001, 42-44). In this sense, Dasan’s theory of *gyeokchi* cannot, even remotely, be regarded as a theory of knowledge; it is the theory of practice, practice, and practice.

As previously mentioned, past studies on the so-called *epistemology* of Dasan have mainly focused on his theory of perception or his theory of *gyeokchi*. Not surprisingly, the common conclusion was that, unlike other Confucian scholars ahead of his time, Dasan’s theory of knowledge is ultimately the theory that supports and urges our immediate and concrete practice of moral virtues.

Moral Epistemology and Ethical Skepticism

Specific problems in moral epistemology that will be discussed, then, are different from other genres of psychological sciences and theories of perception. As previously stated, moral epistemology questions the justificatory arguments of *moral* knowledge (as a subcategory of epistemology that questions knowledge in general), asking how moral knowledge is possible.⁹ However, it does not answer questions such as: how we first come to recognize moral values, what organs of our body undertake the role of recognizing moral values, or how moral values are formed and developed. These would be questions for developmental psychology, neuro-sociobiology, metaphysics, or theology. Additionally, moral epistemology neither touches upon the structure and function of perception, nor

9. It is related to a cluster of problems, such as the question of whether we can come to an agreement over a moral problem despite different social values (sociological), whether a moral fact can be experienced just like a natural fact (ontological), and whether there is a scientific or *a priori* way or method to constitute a moral truth (methodological).

does it portray the subject and the goal of moral perception, as these are the problems of the theory of perception or *gyeokchi*. Moreover, the utilization and development of moral perception are the questions assigned to the theory of self-cultivation or moral practice.

Moral epistemology, then, is concerned with the justification of beliefs or arguments related to moral values, and how, through such a justificatory process, its truth is proven—specifically, the *moral* truth and fact.¹⁰ To illustrate, in order for claims such as “stealing is wrong,” “to act out of filial duty is virtuous,” or “human nature is good” to be proven as truthful or factual, criteria or a set of conditions must be established. Some scholars such as Yang (2005) and Han (2011) argue that moral epistemology is founded upon the premise of moral realism—more specifically, ethical naturalism. That is, one must accept, as a premise, that moral qualities or ethical characteristics can be determined as natural qualities, and such qualities can be perceived or grasped through experiential means. This is the crux of so-called “naturalized moral epistemology.”¹¹ The notion of “experiential means,” however, is not necessarily based on observation or perception. Many recent (as well as traditional) scholars take *feelings* as a strong basis of moral perception,¹² and desire is one of such bases (Lycan 1986). Whether it is sensory data or emotional/volitional mechanisms that are adopted as experiential means, moral qualities are able to be *experienced* and judgments can be made based on them. For example, one experiences feelings of disapproval and hatred when we see a group of teenagers playfully lighting a cat’s tail on fire and thereby judge the act as *wrong*. How, then, can our judgment that “it is wrong to set a fire on an animal for fun” be accepted as an objective moral *fact*? What standards and conditions must be met in order for moral judgment to be justified?

One of the main opponents to ethical naturalism, or naturalized moral epistemology, is moral or ethical skepticism. Moral skeptics argue that moral judgment cannot be accepted as knowledge, as moral judg-

10. See Walter (1996), Han (2011), and Yang (2005).

11. See Tolhurst (1990).

12. See Tolhurst (1990) and Lemos (1989).

ment is based mainly on subjective factors, such as feelings and desires. Therefore, moral judgment should not be conflated with factual judgment based on a more *general* perception, nor can it be objectively and logically justified.

There are many schools of ethical skepticism; the representative form is non-cognitivism, or moral linguistic skepticism (Walter 1996, 6-8). Non-cognitivists claim that moral judgment, such as “it is wrong to steal,” cannot be attributed as fact. It is wellknown that leading logical positivist, Alfred J. Ayer (1952), arguing against ethical naturalism, stated that moral judgments express only the sentiment of the speaker, which has no objective validity, making it impossible to logically dispute issues regarding moral value. A moral judgment or statement, such as “it is wrong to steal,” is simply an expression of the speaker’s intentional and propositional attitude, being above and beyond truth and falsity. In a similar vein, Richard M. Hare (1952) acknowledges that moral statements express sentiments and attitudes of the speaker in the most basic sense; however, his argument allowed for the notion that sentimental expression has the potential to be developed into a generalized normative proposition. Nonetheless, non-cognitivists such as Ayer and Hare are unrelenting regarding their position that moral beliefs and judgments are personal, subjective, and volitional attitudes that can never be regarded as fact or knowledge.

Another common threat to moral epistemology is *moral justification skepticism* (Walter 1996, 7-17), which, while acknowledging that we have moral beliefs, argues that it is hard, if not impossible, for our beliefs to be logically and objectively *justified*. Subsequently, because moral beliefs are not justifiable, they can never be considered as knowledge. Among numerous arguments supporting this position, it is important to first note “the reason based on inconsistency” (Lemos 2002, 480-481). This school of ethical skeptics disputes that, unlike our non-moral or value-neutral beliefs, ethical beliefs reveal many discrepancies among cultures, classes, periods, generations, etc. Moral beliefs towards slavery, monogamy, infanticide, and cruel punishment differ from period to period, and even within present societies, opinions differ on abortion, capital punishment, homosexual marriage, and euthanasia. According to moral skeptics, such inconsis-

tencies demonstrate that moral judgment cannot be counted as factual truth that overcomes social attitudes of a particular time and culture. Rather, they merely reflect the prevalent attitudes in society formed by cultural habituation and nurturance.¹³

Dasan's Proofs of Good Human Nature

Keeping in mind the scope of moral epistemological study and the two kinds of moral skepticism that are its main critics, we turn now to analyze Dasan's proof of good nature, uncovering his approach to moral facts. The fact that he attempted to provide proofs already indicates that he did not treat questions regarding moral values as metaphysical stipulation or based on naïve intuition, but rather considered the standards and conditions for moral beliefs to become accepted as objective truth.

What is likes and dislikes (*ho-o* 好惡)? Even a baby shows he is pleased upon being showered with praise, and even a child feels ashamed when he is being scolded. Because he knows the goodness (*seon* 善) of being precious and valuable [to bring happiness], he shows his pleased look [as a response] to praises; because he knows the evil (*ak* 惡) of being shameful, he feels ashamed of scolding [as a response].¹⁴

Although the above passage may allow other interpretations, one analysis would argue that for Dasan the ability to respond by showing an appropriate response or *feeling*, such as showing a pleased expression or a guilty look, indicates the *knowing* (*ji* 知) of moral values. We can infer, then, that Dasan grasps personal feelings and desires as the bases for value judgment.

Moral intuitionists argue that when moral judgments are self-evident or intuitively known, just as mathematical propositions like “two plus three equals three plus two,” no other inference is required. In particular,

13. Han (2004, 222-223) summarizes well this point.

14. “何謂好惡? 乳哺之兒, 聞讚譽而示悅, 孩提之童, 受罵詈而懷恥. 知善之可貴也, 故聞讚譽而示悅. 知惡之可愧也, 故受罵詈而懷恥也” (*Noneo gogeumju*, bk. 3).

sentimentalists, whether or not they believe in moral realism, claim that just as one can know that there is a stain on one's pants by seeing it, one can also know that stealing is wrong and shameful based on one's feelings of guilt and shame (Walter 1996, 25; Audi 1996, 101-136). Some modern thinkers have already argued that it is our emotion, not rationality, that judges the moral value of the situation at issue: according to David Hume, approval is a pleasure we *feel* by the sight of pleasure that others have given, and in the same sense, disapproval is a pain we *feel* by the sight of pain that others have induced. In this case, approval or disapproval is not necessarily a rational judgment but a moral sense.¹⁵ Slote (2004, 4) states that one thing we often forgo about moral judgment is "the idea that approval is pleasurable and disapproval is painful or unpleasant."

It is not, however, altogether evident whether Dasan is suggesting such a sentimentalist approach to moral knowledge. That is, while sentimentalists infer moral approval or disapproval based on one's moral sense of pleasure or disgust, in the passage above, Dasan suggests that because one knows and judges something to be good, he/she appropriately responds to it with pleasure, or approving emotion. It is therefore not very clear from this phrase whether there is a rational, cognitive process beforehand; at the very least, we can project that Dasan is relating the normative notion of moral approval with natural human feelings of liking and disliking, pleasure and pain.

It is, however, certain that in Dasan's moral theory, the feeling of approval or disapproval itself is a form of moral judgment. That is, it is not as capricious or random as many assume a typical *feeling* to be: it is not a purely subjective feeling that is limited by personal likes or dislikes. Rather, it indicates a standard of general or universal likes and dislikes. In order to argue the point that moral sense is basic and innate or that it is not the result of civic education but rather is ingrained in humans before the influence of cultural value or socialization, he deliberately uses the

15. Here, "moral sense" denotes the kind of approving or disapproving emotion, being the judgment of moral value.

examples of a *baby* and a *child*. Dasan's other proofs are concentrated on his arguments of the "inborn goodness of human nature." One of his representative arguments is featured in *Maengja youi* 孟子要義 (Essential Meanings in the *Book of Mencius*) as follows:

- (1) All humans cannot help but like money and sex (*jaesaek* 財色), let alone comfort and idleness (*anil* 安逸). Why, then, is there a claim that human nature is good? Mencius has proven the goodness of human nature through the example of Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, but I will prove the goodness of human nature through the example of Jie 桀 and Zhi 鯀.¹⁶
- (2) A burglar who has broken the walls might have felt light pleasure as he ran away with stolen goods. But the next day, upon seeing a man of integrity and uprightness, he cannot but feel ashamed. There is an old saying that even a thief can be turned into a good person. This is the proof of the goodness of human nature.¹⁷
- (3) Suppose there is an undutiful child in a village. When a stranger unknowingly praises him for being pious, he cannot but feel pleased. The reason for his pleasure is that he considers filial piety as something good. Suppose there is a lustful woman in a village. When a stranger unknowingly praises her for being pure and faithful, she cannot but feel pleased. The reason for her pleasure is that she considers chastity as something good.¹⁸
- (4) Upon seeing a loyal subject or a dutiful child, one highly approves of their virtue. This is the same for all in the country. Upon seeing a corrupt official, one strongly disapproves of their evil. This is the same for all in the country. This is the so-called goodness of human

16. “莫不好財色，人莫不好安逸。其謂之性善者何也。孟子以堯舜明性善，我則以桀鯀明性善” (*Maengja youi*, bk. 1).

17. “穿窬之盜，負賊而走，欣然善也。明日適其鄰，見廉士之行，未嘗不油然而作。古所謂梁上君子，可與為善，此性善之明驗也” (*Maengja youi*, bk. 1).

18. “里有不孝子，不知者譽之為孝則悅。彼其心以孝為善故悅也。里有奸淫婦，不知者譽之為貞則悅。彼其心以貞為善故悅也” (*Maengja youi*, bk. 1).

nature. This is the proof through the discernment of right and wrong (*sibi ji sim* 是非之心).¹⁹

In numerous works,²⁰ Dasan attempts to prove the goodness of human nature. From the start, he directly addresses that he is disputing Xunzi's theory of evilness (that is, corruptibility) of human nature and presents unique evidence supporting the Mencian argument on the goodness of human nature. Since the notion of human nature can be considered a metaphysical hypothesis, some scholars object that the proposition "human nature is good" should be treated differently from other propositions that express moral beliefs and judgments, such as "stealing is wrong" or "serving one's parents well is praiseworthy." Dasan, however, has already turned the metaphysical term "human nature" into a more concrete, experiential notion of inclination (*giho* 嗜好) that likes good and dislikes evil. The proof should then focus on whether humans have such a tendency that they cannot help but feel pleasure and emotionally express approval of a virtuous action. As described above, in all of Dasan's proofs, the very expressions of approval and disapproval through emotional pleasure and pain demonstrate the knowledge of good and evil.

Non-cognitivists, as previously discussed, argue that our moral beliefs and judgments cannot be considered *truth*, since they are merely the expression of one's subjective likes and dislikes, or the normative expression that urges others to act in a certain way. They contend that the belief that "a married woman flirting is wrong" is not a factual statement since it actually means, "I personally hate if a married woman flirt" or "Don't flirt!" Therefore, it does not describe a truth, but rather one's subjective attitude on the issue. Dasan, on the other hand, points out that the disapproving feeling or hatred reveals that there is an inherently wrong quality in the act of married woman's flirting. It is readily accepted that one's disapproval or dislike is not independent of one's moral judgment, even if it is a rational,

19. "見忠臣孝子則美之爲善也，與國人同，見貪官污吏則疾之爲惡也，與國人同。此所謂性善也。此以是非之心明性善" (*Maengja youi*, bk. 1).

20. Most notably, Dasan's *Maengja youi* and *Noneo gogumju* feature this kind of argument.

perceptual, and inferential judgment. Dasan goes one step further, arguing that disapproval itself *is* a judgment.

Dasan's proof that humans have a moral inclination towards goodness and virtue indicates that there is an innate mechanism in humans that grasps and recognizes *good* and *bad* in actions. Ultimately, it boils down to the claim that "humans are naturally inclined towards goodness; therefore, their nature is good."

Dasan's attempt to prove the goodness of human nature also disputes the arguments of moral skeptics in other ways. Although non-cognitivists claim that moral judgments are merely subjective likes and dislikes that cannot be justified objectively, it is still customary that we do argue regarding the truth or falsity of moral judgments, and no matter what kind of metaethical perspective one actually supports, certain moral judgments can be inferred to be *better* or *worse* by looking at its inferential process.²¹ In passage 1, Dasan offers his arguments for the goodness of human nature as an opposing view to Xunzi's thesis of evilness of human nature. Those who argue the innate *evil* of human nature point to humans' inclination towards *dangerous* or *sinful* desires, such as those for money and sex, or comfort and idleness. Dasan declares, however, that he can present a *better* or *more persuasive* case to refute Xunzi's thesis. Mencius presented the case of Yao and Shun, the ancient sage-kings who governed the world in peace, but his argument had problems, according to Dasan. First, a few sages born to be virtuous can act virtuously, but they are only exceptional; there are more *normal* or *evil* people who are easily and readily tempted by material desires. Second, after Mencius, there emerged various arguments about human nature—"nature being neither good nor bad" (*seongmu seonak seol* 性無善惡說), "three degrees of human nature" (*seong sam-pum seol* 性三品說), "original evil of human nature" (*seongak seol* 性惡說), etc.—which exhibit the insufficiency of the Mencian argument. In order to ascertain that the goodness of human nature is not limited to an exceptional group of people, Dasan gives the rather extreme example of Jie and

21. Refer to Han (2004, 221).

Zhi, a famous bandit and a thief, arguing that all people, including famous *evil* men, have a basic good nature, or the natural tendency to prefer what is morally virtuous over what is not.

In passage 2, Dasan illustrates the cases in which one's likes and dislikes remain objective, even when one's mental state or actions run contrary to the aroused emotion. One virtuous trait of emotion is that it cannot be used in self-rationalization. Moral skeptics often worry about and doubt the objectivity of sensation since it is only *personal* and *subjective*, but on the contrary, as Dasan illustrates, one would not feel happy—at least not continually—when one does something that he would normally disapprove of others doing. In other words, making excuses and self-rationalization is not the natural flow of moral emotion. In *Maengja youi*, Dasan describes cases of the recognition of one's wrongdoing.

A bandit comes back home with stolen goods, saying to his son, “what has happened today couldn't be helped.” Isn't this a sign of good human nature? A licentious man and a lustful woman flirt around, saying, “Heaven will punish us for what we have done today.” Isn't this a sign of good human nature?²²

The guilty feeling or conscience felt by the thief and the licentious as described above, or the repentance of a sinner, all these demonstrate the fundamental recognition of moral values, regardless of the acts one is actually engaged in. Human rationality often works in a self-deceptive way, weaving strands of excuses for one's wrongdoings and rationalizing one's mistakes: when I flirt, it is an act of romantic bravery, but when others do the same, it is adultery. Self-deception is frequently the result of justificatory reasoning and a self-defense mechanism. Human emotions, which naturally flow without any deliberate intention, are therefore more *truthful* and *trustworthy*, since one *cannot help* them from arising. Setting aside whether all the bandits and rascals keep their conscience intact in

22. “穿窬之盜，負其贓而歸。諄諄然語其子曰：‘今日之事，迫不得已。’非性善之驗乎！姦夫淫婦，昵昵然相與語曰：‘吾曹之事獲罪於天。’非性善之驗乎！” (*Maengja youi*, bk. 2).

real life,²³ Dasan expresses a strong belief in a constant preference towards morally praiseworthy acts, no matter what acts one actually performs or what situation one actually faces.

In passage 3, Dasan goes further to prove that even when the inference proves to be *wrong*, the objectivity of preference is constant. His examples of one mistaking a disobedient child for a devoted child, praising a lustful woman as chaste, and calling a corrupt official loyal and upright illustrate this: the subjects in these examples cannot help feeling pleased, even if they are fully aware of the mistaken inference. Praising the disobedient, undutiful child is not based on a factual inference. The reference is incorrect, making the deduction faulty. Therefore, being based on a correct inference is not a necessary condition for one to like or respond with pleasure to praise. Then, what does that tell us about the reliability of our emotion? Are we no longer able to trust our moral emotion because of its fallibility? In fact, even our perceptual knowledge, or beliefs based on observation, is open to such unreliability.²⁴ A stick in a glass cup always looks bent, even when we are in a state of full awareness that it is straight, our eyes unfailingly send the crooked image to our senses. An object is observed to split into two as we slowly press one eye with our finger, and an oasis seems to appear on a road in hot weather. Such inconsistency, however, can be explained through physical or pharmaceutical sciences, thus securing objectivity and reliability of the sense data, or the perceptual information through our five sense organs. In this vein, it is argued that people cannot help but feel pleasure, even in full awareness that there must be a mistake in the inferring process. Such a reaction reveals not the unreliability of emotions, but the fact that the emotional mechanism that responds favorably to the stimulation of praise—one feels approval upon experiencing

23. It could be argued that it is not the actual fact that Dasan points to, but rather a wishful thinking. What if the thieves and bandits adopt another kind of moral system such as Nietzsche's, in which stealing and flirting is one way of actualizing one's freedom and retaining power? Would a Nietzschean, then, would support these actions as *good*, while a normal people would still consider them *bad*, and feel no shame, guilt, or repentance whatsoever? As a response, refer to Slotte's (2004, 6-8) argument.

24. For more on the unreliability or inconsistency of moral judgment, see Han (2011, 223).

social approval—is unfailing. In this sense, our emotional mechanisms are as reliable as the data received from our five senses.

Finally, in passage 4, Dasan argues that the human emotion of liking a dutiful child and hating a corrupt official is the “same for every person in the country,” illuminating the fact that likes and dislikes are above and beyond personal preferences but are universal. Yi Byeong-hyu (1710-1776; pen name: Jeongsan 貞山), a senior scholar of the same school, pointed out that people will inevitably feel moved by the story of Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, although it is a story of those who lived in a different country in a distant historical period.²⁵ Here, he argues that people’s moral judgments, through feeling of approval or disapproval, transcend differences of time, place, and culture. In this point, he agrees with Dasan regarding the universality of human moral emotion.

Conclusion

Moral epistemology turns the epistemological question on moral values, asking whether moral knowledge or fact is possible and explaining how moral beliefs are justified. Moral intuitionists who assert that moral knowledge is possible claim that just as general facts are presented to us as evident (e.g., “There is a stain on my pants!”), moral facts can also be obvious (e.g., “Setting a fire on a cat for fun is wrong!”), requiring no further inference. While some argue that moral judgment and knowledge are based on emotions, volitions, inclinations, or desires, proponents of the objectivity of moral knowledge contend that such emotive sources for moral judgment are as reliable and universal as resources gained from perception and observation.

Moral skeptics, wholly doubting the validity of moral knowledge, insist that value judgments only represent personal likes and dislikes since

25. “余觀天下之人有同情焉。夫好善而惡惡，蓋天下之同情也。若無一箇元本子如此，天下之情，何以盡同也。... 若在千載之前而利害毀譽不與己相涉，則聞伯夷之風者，莫不敬慕稱歎，聞盜跖之行者，莫不扼腕怒詆。於此，蓋可驗其同然矣” (*Jeongsanjip* 貞山集 [The Collected Works of Jeongsan Yi Byeong-hyu]).

what is accepted and judged as moral in one culture in a certain period of history is subject to change and is also susceptible to criticism from another culture in a different time period. Thus, it is not possible to consider moral judgment (e.g., “Any form of marriage other than heterosexual monogamy is wrong!”) as moral fact or moral knowledge. For moral skeptics, at best, moral judgment is an expression of personal preference or a prescriptive statement.

For Dasan, however, personal preference towards a certain moral value stood for more than a capricious, whimsical feeling. Rather, it is a reliable sign that the person is equipped with the full knowledge of the moral values that society endorses. Dasan’s explanation for moral emotions can be summarized into following four points:

1. Our moral sense or inclinations towards ethical virtue is not the result of socialization or nurture, but rather an innate mechanism or trait. Human preference towards moral virtue is, hence, not inconsistent among different cultures and periods.²⁶
2. Unlike rationality (*saryeo* 思慮) or intention (*ui* 意), which is often used in self-deception and excuses, moral emotions and preferences are consistent, even when the preference cannot justify what one has done or is doing at present. In this sense, moral emotions contain a certain degree of objectivity.
3. Even when there is a mistake in inference or in reference-fixing, emotions of approval and disapproval do not change accordingly. Just as our five sense organs are prone to mistakes but still considered as a reliable means of gaining objective knowledge, our moral emotions work in the same consistent and reliable way.
4. People show the same kind of moral preferences, which sometimes transcend time, place, age, and culture.

26. Although it may sound naïve, Dasan’s stance is only applicable to the broad, far-reaching consistency among cultures and periods. As for the existing inconsistencies presented in passage 2, he would argue that there are more basic and coherent underlying assumptions in bringing out such institutional or normative devices; namely, that they are merely different approaches to realizing the same moral value.

Throughout his works, Dasan illustrates many concrete examples revealing apriority, objectivity, reliability, and the universality of moral judgment, based on the notion of natural preferences. For now, his examples, arguments, and proofs can be used as a basic counterargument against those who dismiss the role of emotions and reject the objectivity of moral knowledge, such as non-cognitivists and ethical skeptics. For future studies, Dasan's possible responses to other kinds of moral skepticism and to recent development of moral psychology would be another topic worthy of close examination.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

- Jeong, Yak-yong. n.d. *Yeoyudang jeonso* 與猶堂全書 (Complete Works of Yeoyudang Jeong Yak-yong).
- _____. 1813. *Noneo gogumju* 論語古今註 (Ancient and Contemporary Commentaries on the *Analects of Confucius*).
- _____. 1814. *Maengja youi* 孟子要義 (Essential Meanings in the *Book of Meancius*).
- _____. 1822. *Jachan myojimyeong* 自選墓誌銘 (An Autobiographical Epitaph).
- Yi, Byeong-hyu. n.d. *Jeongsanjip* 貞山集 (Collected Works of Jeongsan Yi Byeong-hyu).

Secondary Sources

- Audi, Robert. 1996. "Intuitionism, Pluralism, and the Foundations of Ethics." In *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ayer, Alfred J. 1952. *Language, Truth and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Chung, So-Yi. 2009. "Jeong Yak-yong-ui seong gihoseol: yullijeok jayeonjuui-ui sigak-e ipgak-hayeo" (Jeong Yak-yong's Theory of Human Nature with Moral Inclinations: Based on the Moral Naturalism). *Dongbang hakji* (Journal of Korean Studies) 147: 449-488.
- Copp, David. 1996. "Moral Knowledge in Society-Centered Moral Theory." In

- Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Donohue, Laura, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. 1990. "20 Years of Moral Epistemology: A Bibliography." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29: 217-229.
- Han, Sang Ki. 2004. "Jayeonhwadoen insingnon-gwa insingnon-ui jayulseong" (Naturalized Epistemology and the Autonomy of Epistemology). *Beomhan cheolhak* (Pan-Korean Philosophy) 35: 29-59.
- . 2011. "Dodeok insingnon-gwa yullijeok hoeuijuui" (Moral Epistemology and Ethical Skepticism). *Dongseo cheolhak yeongu* (Studies in Philosophy East-West) 62: 211-228.
- Hare, Richard M. 1952. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jang, Bok-dong. 2004. "Jeong Yak-yong-ui insingnon-gwa silcheon yulli" (Jeong Yak-yong's Epistemology and Practical Ethics). *Dongseo cheolhak yeongu* (Studies in Philosophy East-West) 32: 187-206.
- Jeon, Byong-wook. 2010. "Dasan-ui mibalseol-gwa sindok-ui suyangnon" (Dasan's Theory of Unaroused Mind and Discussion on Cultivation through Self-Reflection). *Cheolhak yeongu* (Journal of Korean Philosophical Society) 40: 163-214.
- Jung, Woo Jin. 2011. "Gamjeong: gameung-ui inji" (Emotion: The Cognition of Responsiveness). *Dongseo cheolhak yeongu* (Studies in Philosophy East-West) 59: 193-214.
- Keum, Jang-tae. 2001. *Dasan silhak tamgu* (An Investigation of Dasan's Practical Learning). Seoul: Sohaksa.
- Kim, Myeong-seok. 2008. "Noneo-ui jeong gaenyeom-eul eotteoke ihaehal-geosinga" (How to Understand the Concept of Emotion in the *Analects of Confucius*). *Dongyang cheolhak* (Journal of Asian Philosophy in Korea) 29.
- Kim, Woo-hyeong. 2005. *Juhi cheolhak-ui insingnon* (Epistemology in Zhu Xi's Philosophy). Seoul: Simsan.
- Lee, Kwangho. 2010. "Geuksim yeongi-reul tonghaeseo bon yuhak-ui silcheon insingnon" (Practical Epistemology of Confucianism: From the Perspective of Furthering the Depth and Cultivating the Subtle). *Dongyang cheolhak yeongu* (Journal of Eastern Philosophy) 33: 121-143.
- Lee, Zi On. 2001. "Toegye insingnon-ui hyeondaejeok uimi yeongu" (A Study on the Contemporary Meaning of Toegye's Epistemology). *Dongyang cheolhak yeongu* (Journal of Eastern Philosophy) 26: 33-61.
- Lemos, Noah M. 1989. "Warrant, Emotion and Value." *Philosophical Studies* 57: 175-192.

- . 2002. "Epistemology and Ethics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, edited by Paul K. Moser. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lycan, William G. 1986. "Moral Facts and Moral Knowledge." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24: 79-94.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 1996. "Moral Skepticism and Justification." In *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Slote, Michael. 2004. "Moral Sentimentalism." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4: 3-14.
- Torhurst, William. 1990. "On the Epistemic Value of Moral Knowledge." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29: 67-87.
- Yang, Sunny. 2005. "Jayeonhwadoen dodeok insingnon: jayeonhwadoen insingnon-ui gyuje-reul ttareuneun yullijeok jayeonjuui" (Moral Epistemology Naturalized: Ethical Naturalism within the Structures of Naturalized Epistemology). *Cheolhak* (Philosophy) 84: 205-235.
- . 2009. "The Appropriateness of Moral Emotion and Human Sentimentalism." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 43: 67-81.
- Yi, Sook-hee. 2012. "Chǒng Yag-yong's 'One and Only Mind': In Comparison to B. Lonergan's Cognitive Process." *Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture* 18: 49-76.
- Yoo, Hee Sung. 2009. "Sunja-ui insingnon: Mou Zongsan-ui gyeonhae-reul jungsim-euro" (Epistemology of Xunzi: With a Focus on the Account of Mou Zongsan). *Dongyang cheolhak yeongu* (Journal of Eastern Philosophy) 58: 111-140.