

Introduction

Definition has a long and disputed history as a methodological device and philosophical problem for philosophizing in the shadow of the Greeks. As Chinese philosophy fell under that same shadow, definition assumed a similar role in the historiography of Chinese philosophy as well. In contemporary scholarship, “definition” has primarily been a key word for discussing the entries in the “Mohist Canons” as well as the second paragraph of *Xunzi* 22 “Correct Names”.¹ Especially the latter, which has been taken to formulate a theory of language that has no room for essences. It is sharpened to a fine point in Graham’s slogan that, unlike “Western philosophers”, “Chinese philosophers” do not ask “[...] ‘What is the truth?’ but ‘where is the Way?’, the way to order one’s state and conduct personal life” (Graham 1989, p. 3). In a more technical register, the definitions in these texts are said to be “nominal” as opposed to “real”. This is really where the contrast with “Western philosophers” lies; “Western philosophers” *look for* real definitions, the natural linguistic vehicles of essences; “Chinese philosophers” *express* nominal definitions. The terminology of real vs. nominal definitions is a shorthand for making claims about the semantics of the statements we identify as definitions. Nominal definitions are about words, and to the extent that truth is applicable to them, they are true in virtue of previous or subsequent use of the *definiendum*. Real definitions are about kinds of things, e.g. horse or courage, and are true if the *definiendum* is what it is claimed to be (Robinson 1950). Making sense of this distinction requires a great deal of highly specific work in metaphysics *and* philosophy of language. Vasilis Politis (2015) expresses doubts about whether Plato would have been able to make sense of the distinction, so perhaps

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1 On the former, see Graham (1978), and Schemmel & Boltz (2022). The “Correct Names” has been integrated into the broader discussion of *zheng ming* 正名 in early China, some relatively recent key instances: Hansen (1983), Hall & Ames (1987), Graham (1998), Harbsmeier (1998). For critical responses to the assumptions in this literature, see Geaney (2018), and Defoort (2022a and 2022b).

we should not be in a rush to impose the same distinction on *Xunzi*?²

In this paper, I will present an in-depth case study of a text that has not been a part of the definition-discussion, but by rights ought to have been, namely *Xunzi* 21 “Undoing Blindness³” *Jiebi* 解蔽 (UB). A part of what makes the text interesting is that it seems at odds with many of the above generalizations. To spell this out, I will follow a line of investigation suggested, but not pursued, by Thierry Lucas in his (2020) contribution on definition in pre-Qin texts to the *Dao Companion to Chinese Philosophy of Logic*. Lucas very helpfully dispenses with the terminology of nominal and real definitions, and proposes the “pragmatics of definition” as a line of inquiry. His way of spelling out that line of questioning is somewhat unsatisfactory, limiting himself to the question “what is the purpose of the definition?” His answer to that question is the truism that “In relation with the last question, it is good to remind the reader that pre-Qin thinkers were mainly motivated by ethical and political questions” (ibid., p. 236) What is important about pragmatic questions is that, if we ask the right ones, they enable us to get a three-dimensional picture of the philosophizing going on in a text.

How do we extend this list of pragmatic questions? Given the proud heritage of our use of “definition”, drawing on Plato might be in order: Definitions in Plato’s “early” dialogues are expected to come at the end of enquiry led forward by arguments, and before right action and true speech.⁴ They are furthermore explicitly tied to statements about knowledge; one becomes knowledgeable about a subject matter by knowing what it is (*ti esti*)⁵, and it is this that guarantees right action and speech relative to it. So, what forms of speech do(es) the definition(s) work in tandem with? What conceptual apparatus is put in place to help us interpret these expressions? Goldin’s (2005) observation that pre-Qin

2 I make no claims about authorship of the *Xunzi*, this name here denotes whoever is making the claims of which the text consists. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

3 Because we do not know where the *Xunzi*’s titles come from, I will not comment on the whole of it. *Bi*, translated throughout as “blindness”, occurs as a term in the text itself, discussed on p. 7.

4 An especially clear statement of this principle is found in *Charmides* 170–71.

5 It is important to note that scholars of Plato typically use this question to determine what they mean by “definition.” There is no such linguistic unity connecting, e.g., the “Mohist Canons” and the *Xunzi*. In the former, the passages that contemporary scholars call “definitions” are all of the form “N1 N2 也” whereas in the *Xunzi*, the “Correct Names” and UB in particular, the verb “to call” (*wei* 謂) is used. There are interesting questions to ask about the ease with which scholars identify statements as being “definitions.” An upshot of my procedure in this paper is that we clarify what it might mean to call a series of sentences in UB “definitions.”

texts tend to show a strong awareness of who is speaking and to whom they are speaking, easily encouraging further questions: Who is speaking? To whom? Who is to be the user of a definition? In what kind of situation?

As a schematic answer to these questions: In UB, I propose that we are at court. I mean this in the following way: The main characters of UB are the people who populate the court; the ruler, concubines, ministers, and so-called "guest advisors." We may put Xunzi in the latter group. The problem the text sets out to solve is the following: rulers and other nobles make decisions based on what they think the Way is, but they are wrong about it. This is a "text-immanent" claim about what the text "tells us" about itself, not about where or when it may have been presented. The main source of error is stated to be the guest advisors. These advisors offer statements of what the Way is – definitions. The text will give us an explicit statement about how the heart (*xin* 心) uses definitions to arrive at decisions: they successfully or unsuccessfully point one towards the Way. That is: the Way may be an object of knowledge (*zhi* 知) articulated in statements about what it is. It is an important part of UB's project to display the error of competing definitions. It then needs to be shown how Xunzi's account of the Way fares better. In both these tasks, images or models are used. One central image – blindness (*bi* 蔽) – is used to characterize error, while a competing image of scales (*xuan heng* 縣衡) is used to characterize success. This paper has three main parts, the first deals with how UB characterizes error. The second part is dedicated to explicating the text's path to success. In the third I take a broad view of how definitions have functioned in the text. Throughout the first part, my task is to clarify the following issue: the text uses a single image to describe what looks like a host of phenomena and there is a question, then, about how much theory can be extracted from that image. I focus on the extent to which the locus of error is linguistic. There is tension in the text between what I call its "diagnostic" ambition – diagnosing error in individual humans – and the fact that we are presented with teachings, which means statements that can be true or false. In the texts discussed in the first section, it is not a great challenge to resolve the tension: there is error in the thought and speech of the guest advisors; the error in speech is dangerous because it leads to error in thought and consequently, error in action by rulers and ministers. The solution comes in the form of a definition of the Way ascribed to Confucius: it is equilibrium (*heng* 衡). The text then makes a refinement: The definition is not meant to be used on its own or on one's own. Instead, its users should aspire to choose the right people and consult with them in such a way that they get the most out of everyone present. This requires that the rulers and ministers follow a series of rules for dealing with the things they are told.

A final preliminary: The chapter begins at 78/21/1⁶ with the statement of a problem, and proceeds methodically, with tight connections from paragraph to paragraph until 80/21/44, where the problem is declared to be solved. Accordingly, this is our main object of analysis, even though the chapter continues until 82/21/96.

1 Broken Clocks and Falsehood

UB begins in striking fashion, with a broad statement of purpose. The rest of the text is dedicated to first providing us with exemplars of the problem, exemplars who are free of the problem, and then a general solution to it. What is the problem and how is it presented?

T1

凡人之患，蔽於一曲，而闕於大理。治則復經，兩疑則⁷惑矣。天下無二道，聖人無兩心。今諸侯異政，百家異說，則必或是或非，或治或亂。亂國之君，亂家之人，此其誠心，莫不求正而以自為也。妒繆於道，而人誘其所迨也。私其所積，唯恐聞其惡也。倚其所私，以觀異術，唯恐聞其美也。是以與治雖走，而是已不輟也。豈不蔽於一曲，而失正求也哉！心不使焉，則白黑在前而目不見，雷鼓在側而耳不聞，況於使者乎？德⁸道之人，亂國之君非之上，亂家之人非之下，豈不哀哉！

Whenever⁹ nobles get into trouble, they are blinded by a single bend [*qu* 曲], and so in the dark about the greater pattern [*da li* 大理]. If they are ordered [*zhi* 治], they return to the guiding thread [*jing* 經]; divided and doubting, they will be confused. There are not two Ways under Heaven and the sage does not have a divided heart. Now, when the feudal lords differ with regard to their regulations and the hundred specialists differ with

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- 6 The *Xunzi* is quoted using page/chapter/line-numbers from Hung (1966), cited from Sturgeon (2023). This text has been checked against the text in Wang (1988).
 - 7 Yang Liang (in Wang (1988, p. 386) cites an edition that has 兩則疑惑 “if they are divided, they will be doubting and deluded.” The most obvious point in favour of this reading is that, in the subsequent sentence, it is a “divided heart” 兩心 that the sage does not have; not a divided and doubting heart. On the other hand, in this predictive conditional, it makes more sense to me that one goes from being divided and doubting, possibly *hendiadys*, to being confused. Or rather: 惑 seems to me a more extreme state than 疑.
 - 8 Reading “ability to obligate” *de* 德 as ‘get’ *de* 得.
 - 9 The reading here follows Harbsmeier (1981, pp. 155–156) on *fan*. As he observes, the scope of *fan* is never less than the topic of the sentence or subordinate clause which it precedes. In the present case, this is “nobles get into trouble” (人之患), a phrase to which the generalization expressed by *fan* applies. That is, “Whenever” or the clunkier “In general, when.”

regard to their accounts, some are sure to be right and some wrong; some orderly [*zhi* 治] and others disorderly [*luan* 亂]. Rulers of disordered states, nobles of disordered households, their commitment consists in this: none do not seek to be upright, but on this account they themselves bring about [the disorder].¹⁰ They jealously pine after the Way, and others make appealing what [the rulers and nobles] incline towards. [The rulers and nobles] regard what they accumulate as their own, and only fear to hear ill of it. They rely on what they consider their own when they assess [*guan* 觀] those who differ with regard to techniques [*yi shu* 異術], and so only fear to hear the praises of these other approaches. On account of this, they run away from orderliness [*zhi* 治], but deem right their not stopping. How is this not to be blinded by a single bend, but missing the well-aligned seeking? If the heart is not employed in this, one will not see the black and white before one's eyes, and one will not hear the thunder and drums to one's side, how much worse with those who do apply their hearts? Nobles who get a hold of the Way are frustrated above by rulers who disorder their states and below by nobles who disorder their households. Is this not distressing? (78/21/1–6)

This passage states the problem in a series of images, or at any rate a series of expressions that challenge our ability to make literal sense of them. What we can do is note to where things are located. For example, a series of things can come attached to nobles. That they are nobles and not simply humans becomes abundantly clear as the text proceeds. If the distress you encounter is brought about by your own cognitive failures, your life has to be in your own hands, which is not the case for all humans in early China. The reference to "life" here is mostly for the sake of idiom, but is not entirely inapt, because there is a temporal or narrative perspective in play in this passage and UB as a whole. In this context, blindness is a force that sets in motion a course of events which ends in an early death (cf. 79/21/10–11 & 79/21/17). Not being blinded can lead to a long, prosperous life, and being remembered in death (cf. 79/21/11–16, 79/21/18–21, 79/21/26–28).

10 The phrases 此其誠心，莫不求正而以自為也 bring all who interpret it to despair, but Hutton (2014) cannot be correct when he translates "all sincerely seek what they consider correct and put themselves into achieving it." He appears to treat 自 as the object of 以. I know of no other context where 自 does not modify the verb it precedes, so I find this implausible. We then need to hunt for objects. An unexpressed pronoun referring back as the object of 以 is common, giving "on account of [the preceding] V." The verbal phrase here is 自為, with an object-reading of 自 'make themselves' implausible. Hence, we need to look for what the subjects *themselves* do, as opposed to what others do. The salient feature of the subjects is that they are rulers of *disordered* states and nobles from *disordered* house, this is the thing we want to know about, and 為亂 "bring about disorder" is a current expression, so this seems to me a plausible reading.

What is important about both the temporal dimension – that we are talking about long-term courses of events – and the social dimension – that we are talking about rulers and nobles – is that these factors play into the nature of the general knowledge sought. We are not talking about knowledge that any human, insofar as they are human, will take an interest in, but knowledge administrators of humans, insofar as they are administrators of humans, will find of interest.

In the present passage, we start *in medias res*, where one can be *bi yu yi qu* 蔽於一曲 “blinded by a single corner”, and so *an yu da li* 關於大理 “in the dark about the greater pattern”. One can then *zhi* 治 “become orderly”, but also “cured” (the same can happen to states *guo* 國), which leads one to *fu jing* 復經 “return to the guiding thread”. But on the other hand, one can remain *liang yi* 兩疑 “divided and doubting”, which leads to the still worse *huo* 惑 “confusion”. Three parts of this story are expressly relational: blindness relates the nobles to one corner and, *eo ipso*, cuts them off from the greater pattern, and an aim is to return to the guiding thread *jing*. By contrast, the intransitive verbs – to be ordered, divided and doubting, and confused – suggest states of the rulers and nobles.

The statement that there is only one Way (*dao* 道) under Heaven and that the sage does not have a divided heart, or pair of hearts (*liang xin* 兩心) serves two functions. One is immediate: when states differ in how they are organized, and specialists differ in their teachings, at most one is right. Xunzi is more optimistic than we would be; some are sure to be right and some are sure to be wrong. The point is that there is a right way of going about organizing a state and a right teaching about the Way. In the longer course of the chapter, the Way’s unity and the sage’s heart’s unity both raise questions for later passages, where what is characteristic of both the sage’s heart and the Way is that they contain pairs. So, the unity in question will turn out to be a complex unity.

The central claim of the introductory paragraph is that the nobles of the day who preside over disordered states and households bring the disorder upon themselves. They do so by seeking to make themselves “aligned” or “correct” (*zheng* 正). They jealously pine after the Way. The text characterizes this as being an expression of their “commitment” (*cheng xin* 誠心). “Commitment” is more of an interpretation than a translation. *Cheng*, on its own, is often translated as “sincerity” and is usually a term with positive value attached to it. Sato (2003, pp. 304–313) characterizes *cheng* as an “ever-growing moral value”, by which it emerges that he means that *cheng* in several passages is connected with changes (*bian* 變) and transformations (*hua* 化) and making these go well. Here, however, it is clearly not an unqualified positive. I take it, in light of what follows, that it is the fact that the Way is the object of their pining which is given qualified praise, and that the problem consists in their being wrong about what it is. But perhaps Sato’s emphasis on change is nonetheless helpful. The passage describes a serious commitment to “the

Way", but also a problem of identifying the exact point of reference of that serious commitment. This makes it clear why calling something the Way is so central here (see below T3); what one identifies as the Way guides action and thus guides how one changes. It is important to note that being in error about what the Way is does not amount to an additional error beyond blindness. Rather, these are different expressions that emphasize different aspects of the same error.

These rulers and nobles are given a negative prognosis. They are described as ineluctably drawn to whatever they are blinded by and others, whether advisors or sycophantic ministers, make these things seem more appealing still. They furthermore use whatever they are blinded by to "assess" (*guan* 觀)¹¹ those who differ regarding technique (*yi shu* 異術). "Those who differ" of course means that the topic here is, in part, the ability to draw on what others have to say. Being unable to do that, they move further and further away from being ordered, i.e. the state the text identifies as ideal, but instead affirm (*shi* 是), i.e., deem as correct, their own moving further and further away from that state.

In this initial passage, the nobles that the passage describes have not completely gone down a bad path. This tells us something important about the addressees of this text, as well as the significance of the historical exemplars to which we will shortly turn. Nobles of this kind are the most likely addressees of the text, for it is they who are given tools for reflecting on their own situations. In T1, they are given the opportunity to think of themselves as very seriously pining for the Way but getting it wrong. What this means for the exemplars of bad rulers and ministers is that they serve to scare them; if they do not address this problem, they will have bad deaths. Of course, the same applies to the positive exemplars: they could be great, if only they solve these problems.

The heart of the problem is evidently a condition of the heart – blindness. Now, hearts, in the *Xunzi* at any rate, do not see. And things that blind one are not apt tools for looking at things. So, there must be something our translation is keeping from us. In pre-Qin literature, *bi* 蔽 can mean "shelter, cover", as in *Zuozhuan* Zhao 1: "Men build walls to prevent the approach of evil" (人之有牆，以蔽惡也) (Legge, 1991, p. 576). Or in Zhao 20, when a faithful minister gets between a spear-axe and his lord: "One of the Qis took the spear to strike Gong Meng, whom Zong Lu tried to cover with his back." (Legge, 1991, p. 681) (齊氏用戈擊公孟，宗魯以背蔽之 [...]), the point, in both cases, being that something gets in the way of invading armies, or of spears, making them miss their targets. This is worth mentioning because there is significant variety in the non-spatial uses of *bi* in pre-Qin literature. For example, in *Analec*s 2.2, a single saying

11 As well as "to look at," a connotation that is certainly not insignificant in a text where both error and success are characterised in highly visual terms.

“covers” the three hundred *Songs*: “The three hundred songs, if you were to summarize them in a single saying, it would be: ‘have no wicked thoughts’” (詩三百，一言以蔽之，曰『思無邪』) (Legge 1960a, p. 146). Or in 17.8, where there are six sayings with six “becloudings” *bi* attached to them, e.g.: “There is the love of being benevolent without the love of learning - the beclouding here leads to a foolish simplicity.” (好仁不好學，其蔽也愚) (Legge *ibid.* p. 322). In an obscure passage (6A15) from the *Mencius*, the senses are “covered” *bi* by things: “The senses of hearing and seeing do not think, and are obscured by external things. When one thing comes into contact with another, as a matter of course it leads it away.” (耳目之官不思，而蔽於物，物交物，則引之而已矣) (Legge 1960b, p. 418). There is, furthermore, the sense of someone intentionally keeping something hidden: “Where there is good, I dare not conceal it [...]” (有善不敢蔽) (Johnston 2010, pp. 158–159). I mention this variety to make it clear that there is not, on our evidence, an established metaphorical use of *bi* that this passage employs. Clarifying this enables us to notice that the following passage, in addition to bringing things thematically forward, also serves the purpose of disambiguation, where it is made clear that the things that lead to blindness resemble walls or backs in that they stand between one thing, the heart, and something else. We will capture this structure using the following convention: *x blinds y (person) to z*. That is, *x* prevents *y* from seeing *z*.

T2

故為蔽：欲為蔽，惡為蔽，始為蔽，終為蔽，遠為蔽，近為蔽，博為蔽，淺為蔽，古為蔽，今為蔽。凡萬物異則莫不相為蔽，此心術之公患也。

These bring about blindness: desire brings about blindness, aversion brings about blindness, starting-points bring about blindness, ends bring about blindness, what is far brings about blindness, what is near brings about blindness, broad learning brings about blindness, shallow learning brings about blindness, the ancient brings about blindness, the current brings about blindness. In general, when the ten thousand things differ, none do not serve to block each other. This is the common problem of the techniques of the mind. (78/21/6-7)

That this is a problem for “the techniques of the heart”¹² suggests the following structure: something blinds the heart to something else. The principle articulated in the penul-

12 I shirk away from a full discussion of this fascinating expression, but a few remarks are in order: the collocation occurs a total of 13 times in the received pre-Qin corpus. Its main occurrence elsewhere in the *Xunzi* is 5 “Against Physiognomy” *Fei Xiang* 非相, where it arguably means “heart and technique” these being better indicators of someone’s auspiciousness than their physical appearance (cf. 12/5/2-5). It is nonetheless very tempting to see a connection with the two chapters of the *Guanzi* bearing the title “Techniques of the Heart”

timate sentence sounds exceedingly broad, as if there is no order among the items on this list – that for example the current can blind the heart to desire. But the items come in pairs: desire and aversion, starting points and ends, the far and the near, broad and shallow learning, the ancient and current. These are, throughout the *Xunzi*, pairs that need to be brought into balance (79/21/29) in order to deal with specific subject matters.¹³ In the *Xunzi*, these are factors that play a role in organizing governmental affairs; the passages I cite relate these items to everything from organizing state hierarchies, to structuring curricula, rituals, and ensuring that the ruler is kept well-informed in making decisions. What is important here is that these organizational activities are said to depend on the state of one's heart.

There is still the problem of adequately characterizing the nature of the error here. It is not as if broad learning is the sort of thing that stands up and gets in the way of shallow learning that is trying to get one's attention. Misdirected attention is arguably the best option here (Fraser 2011) because, evidently, the things that bring about blindness exert pull on those they blind, as we saw in T1. At the same time, the spatial imagery here is suggestive of seeing from a specific point of view; if one thing can get in the way of the other, one is standing in the wrong place to see them both. This is further emphasized by references to looking (*guan* 觀), both in characterizing failures (cf. T1 and T3 below) and success (cf. T4).

The turning point from failure to success consists in a rising tricolon of examples of people within three groups who in the past were blinded – rulers (*ren jun* 人君), ministers (*ren chen* 人臣), and guest advisors (*bin meng* 賓孟/萌) – as well as examples, and thus exemplars, within these groups of not being blinded. In T3, the guest advisors are singled out as being especially dangerous in this setting, it is said that “Within, they make themselves disordered; without, they make others confused. Those above [on account of

I & II. The former of these clearly shares some of UB's interests and preoccupations; it gives an account of the psychological forces within its addressees and how this affects decision making. It also gives an account of the Way, and both texts use the expressions “empty” (*xu* 虛) and “still” (*jing* 靜) to describe the best state of the heart. An important difference is that the “Techniques of the Heart” does not share UB's interest in the influence of teachings on decision making, as that text's own description of what the techniques of the heart involve says: “The [technique of the heart] lies in controlling the apertures through nonassertiveness.” (Rickett trans. altered 1998, p. 73).

13 Desire and aversion: 8/3/45–49, 26/9/15–19, 31/10/4–5. Starting-points and ends: 2/1/26, 28/9/63–69, 72/19/42–43. Near and far: 8/3/35, 13/5/32, 14/5/45–46, 28/9/55–57. Broad and shallow learning: 4/2/13–14, 14/5/49, 24/8/97. The ancient and the current: 13/5/32–14/5/36, 16/6/33–17/6/38, 24/8/97–98.

this] blind those below and those below blind those above.” (內以自亂，外以惑人，上以蔽下，下以蔽上). It is natural to read this as claiming that the guest advisors are the origins of the kinds of error described in rulers and ministers. It is important to note what the text is saying here: in each of these cases, the structure is *the very same* as the one described in T2. That is, the impact concubines have on rulers, power on ministers, and teachings on advisors is structurally the same, with one important exception, which we discuss below. In T1, we saw that, whatever the cause of one's blindness, others can deepen the blindness by making it appear more appealing. In the examples of blinded rulers this is quite literal. The examples use of a well-known *topos*: the bad last rulers of the legendary Xia dynasty and the Shang dynasty, Jie and Zhou. Both the things they are blinded by and blinded to are people. Specifically, they were blinded by concubines and ministers, causing them “not to know” (*bu zhi* 不知) their honorable ministers, Guan Longfeng and Wei Ziqi (78/21/7–9). We feel ill at ease at this translation, and for good reason: in all fuller versions of the story of Jie and Guan Longfeng, the latter was executed by Jie, and Wei Ziqi was Zhou's stepbrother. So, it was not that they did not know of them. But something further was missing, which we can spell out as “knowing or recognizing their value”. We nonetheless maintain this awkward translation in deference to the text's claim that the three kinds of cases it discusses all have the same structure. So, when we turn to the guest advisors below, the same construction “blinded by x, did not know y” is used again, but with abstract nouns as objects to the verbs instead of the names of humans. The failure to organize properly one's court had wide-reaching consequences: ministers stopped feeling fidelity to their rulers and began to look out only for themselves, the prominent families became resentful and unwilling to work, the able left their positions and went into hiding, and they lost both their territory and their ancestral temples as well as their lives (79/21/9–11).

As a summary of this situation, we are told that they themselves did not see where things were going, that no nobles remonstrated, and that this is the misfortune that comes from being blinded (79/21/11). There is a failure of foresight here and, by telling us of these historical rulers, Xunzi is enabling this foresight in the rulers he addresses. The expression “the misfortune that comes from being blinded and blocked” (*bi sai zhi hu* 蔽塞之禍) is used to describe what happens to ministers and guest advisors as well, but in the case of rulers there is a deeply practical interpretation of the expression available as well: rulers who do not maintain good relations with their ministers will be stuck in court with no channels through which to learn about what happens in their state; they will be blinded and blocked (48/12/96). This also points ahead to the solution. Rulers need to be good at choosing their ministers and heeding those ministers' advice.

The characterization of blindness amongst ministers mirrors in large part that of blindness amongst rulers, at least in outcomes. In the examples mentioned, Tang Yang, a minister from Song, and Xi Qi, a scion of the ducal house of Jin, are said to have been blinded by desiring power (*yu quan* 欲權) and desiring the state (*yu guo* 欲國) (79/21/16–17). Accordingly, the former had a capable minister (*xian xiang* 賢相) otherwise unknown to us called Dai Zi exiled, while the latter had his brother, heir apparent Shen Sheng, falsely accused of a crime. Both of them, we are told, were executed (79/21/17).

Importantly, both blinded rulers and ministers are provided with a counterweight in stories of rulers who were not blinded. Here, the examples are Cheng Tang, the first ruler of Shang, and King Wen, the first king of Zhou. These are said to have drawn lessons from the bad final rulers of the preceding ruling houses, to have ordered their own hearts, and to have been able to employ talented ministers (79/21/11–13). The outcomes of them doing so, in turn, were first that they were able to take over the territories of the Xia and Shang respectively, and second, the furthest reaches of those territories all sent them their treasures which provided them with all the pleasures of the senses, having their praises sung in life, and being mourned in death (79/21/12–14). In this scenario, the good rulers get all the things the bad rulers wanted – wine, women, and having their praises sung. Moreover, their territories were vast and dynasties long-lasting, a concern that will reemerge in T10. The ministers who were not blinded are divided into two groups: the first consisting of three ministers of Duke Huan of Qi – Bao Shu, Ning Qi, and Xi Peng who are praised for having supported Guan Zhong, another minister. The second group consists of the two ministers who supported the Duke of Zhou's regency when King Cheng was too young to serve, namely the Duke of Shao, and Lü Wang. What is emphasized regarding these ministers is that they were "humane and wise" (*ren zhi* 仁智) (assuming that the text's *zhi* 知 is an error). This expression, used here and again with respect to Confucius in 79/21/26, points to one of the outstanding difficulties of the UB. In the extensive modern discussions of virtue in Chinese philosophy, *ren* and *zhi* are amongst the key words as candidates for being "moral" virtues. In the description of ministers, however, it is hard to see that the achievement ascribed to them has any strong moral valency. What they are said to have done, immediately after being described as *ren zhi*, is to support Guan Zhong and the Duke of Zhou respectively. The story found in several Han-texts about Guan Zhong has him undergo a sequence of difficulties, throughout with the support of Bao Shu. This ultimately led to him becoming a minister in Qi, and one of the most influential statesmen in the Spring and Autumn period. The outcomes of these two acts of support were abundant salaries and reputations equal to those who they supported (79/21/18–20).

In other words, it is in the interest of rulers and ministers alike to know the Way, and this is what UB seeks to expound, but not before showing how others fall short. This is important because the blindness of guest advisors is not limited to them in the way that the blindness of rulers and ministers is. Instead, it spreads to others through their teachings:

T3

墨子蔽於用而不知文。宋子蔽於欲而不知得。慎子蔽於法而不知賢。申子蔽於執而不知知。惠子蔽於辭而不知實。莊子蔽於天而不知人。故由用謂之道，盡利矣。由欲謂之道，盡嗛矣。由法謂之道，盡數矣。由執謂之道，盡便矣。由辭謂之道，盡論矣。由天謂之道，盡因矣。此數具者，皆道之一隅也。夫道者體常而盡變，一隅不足以舉之。曲知之人，觀於道之一隅，而未之能識也。故以為足而飾之，內以自亂，外以惑人，上以蔽下，下以蔽上，此蔽塞之禍也。¹⁴

[1] Mozi was blinded by use and did not know embellishment. Songzi was blinded by desire and did not know achieving [what one wants]. Shēnzi¹⁵ was blinded by law and did not know the able. Shēnzi was blinded by conditions and did not know knowledge. Huizi was blinded by sayings and did not know actualities. Zhuangzi was blinded by Heaven and did not know *ren*. [2] So, following use and calling it the Way makes everything a matter of benefit. Following desire and calling it the Way makes everything a matter of dissatisfaction¹⁶. Following the law and calling it the Way makes everything a matter of numbers. Following conditions and calling it the Way makes everything a

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- 14 It is difficult to know how far we should go in thinking that the UB's description of other advisors is informed by texts associated with the names mentioned. For example, as readers of the *Mozi*, we are tempted to see the reference here to "use" (*yong* 用) in light of the "use" from the "Moderation in use"-chapters (*jie yong* 節用) of that text. Similarly, when Songzi is described as blinded by desire, we naturally think the several criticisms of him in the *Xunzi* (64/17/50–54, 69/18/93–94, 69/18/99–102, 69/18/102, 69/18/112–115, 70/18/120–122) which ascribe the doctrine "make desires few" (*gua yu* 寡欲). At the same time, the UB's approach to criticizing these thinkers relies so little on exposition of their views that it is a difficult question whether we should "fill in" these references and how should translate these key words. In light of this, my translations of the topics of these doctrines are intentionally literal and fuzzy.
- 15 Shēn Dao 慎到 distinguished here through tone-marks from Shēn Buhai 申不害 in the next sentence.
- 16 Yang Liang says that 嗛 is the same as 慊, which he glosses as "satisfaction" (快意 *kuai yi*) (Wang, 1988, p. 393). This puts a fine point to one of the difficulties of interpreting this list: are the items of the form "盡 X 矣" meant to be positive 'they really get to the bottom of X' or negative, as I here assume? Put another way: are these expressions meant to faithfully

matter of convenience. Following sayings and calling the Way makes everything a matter of discussion. Following Heaven and calling it the Way makes everything a matter of reliance. [3] As for these several items, each is a single corner of the Way. The Way, however, embodies constancy and exhausts all changes, a single corner does not suffice to make it a topic of discussion. [4] People whose knowledge is confined to a bend [merely] look at one corner of the Way but are unable to recognize this. So, they take it to be sufficient and embellish it. Within, they make themselves disordered; without, they make others confused. Those above on account of this blind those below and those below blind those above. *This* is the misfortune of being blinded and blocked. (79/21/21–26)

There are four parts to this text. We are primarily interested in (1–3), but a brief remark about (4) is in order because it will help illuminate the rest. Consider Jie, mentioned above: the harmful influence of Jie was extensive, but it did not bring about more blindness. Instead, it mobilized everyone against Jie. The guest advisors, however, harm everyone. This is no doubt because they trafficked in teachings, and these travel both above and below, presumably meaning to rulers and ministers. In other words, (4) explicitly puts them and their teachings at the heart of political life. Dramatically, this is a turning point in the text. The addressees have been invited to think of themselves as pining for the Way. Here, we have a cornucopia of people claiming to provide it. Given the text's practice of balancing blinded with non-blinded members of the group, this also sets up the expectation that we will now be told about the properties of non-blinded advisors, and about the properties of a non-blinded account of the Way.

As a preliminary to our discussion of how these accounts of the Way are assessed, we may note that in (1) these teachings are associated with named individuals. This makes it unclear whether we are assessing teachings or the people who espouse them. In fact, (1) primarily presents diagnoses; the people who espoused these teachings were blinded by and to something. This means; they saw one thing, which prevented them from seeing another. In (2), these teachings come in language that suggests definitions, namely "to follow X and call it the Way". I have left it ambiguous whether it is the act of following or the item followed that is defined, but of course these are nearly equivalent. In Graham's broad contrast between "Western" and "Chinese" philosophers, the latter do not ask "[...] 'What is the truth?' but 'where is the Way?'; the way to order one's state and conduct personal life." (Graham 1989, p. 3).

represent the perspective of those who espouse these teachings? I find this implausible, but possible. In which case, Yang Liang is right that contentment is preferable.

But what about the other side of the contrast? Is truth a concern here? The text reports linguistically formulated teachings, so this not an inappropriate question. Fraser (2011) insists that the way in which the language of part and whole is used throughout the text precludes a concern with truth. By “language of part and whole” he means that e.g. law and people of ability are described as making up equally important parts of a single whole. According to Fraser, these corners of the Way are genuine enough corners in that they are not entirely wrong. While rhetoric is never “mere”, there is a question of whether Fraser might not be mistaking mere rhetoric for theory. Similarly, Perkins’ claim that these people are criticized for their faulty perception rather than judgement (Perkins 2015, p. 211) seems questionable. UB is centrally concerned with assessing people, and the image of blinded people offers a rhetorically effective way of saying that broken clocks tell the time correctly twice per day but are nonetheless poor timekeepers.

However, it seems obvious that had UB simply aimed at assessing claims, those reported in (2) would be deemed false. After all, it is clear that the Way is not identical with use or any of the others, so these claims are false. This is not a hypothetical flight of fancy. For example, *Xunzi* 18 “Correcting Discussions” *Zheng Lun* 正論 is entirely capable of deeming statements false and describing what shows them to be false, completely without casting aspersions on the people who maintain them. *Xunzi* 20 “On Music” *Yue Lun* 樂論 and 23 “Nature is Nasty” *Xing E* 性惡 do cast aspersions on Mozi and Mencius, but do so because the views they espouse are false (for further examples of an interest in assessing claims independently of people, see Harbsmeier 1998, pp. 193–209 and Lloyd 2004, pp. 52–63, McLeod 2016, pp. 1–42).

In (2), claims are assessed, but how? A sample: “Following desire and calling it the Way makes everything a matter of dissatisfaction.” (由欲謂之道，盡嘆矣). Is it assumed that the addressees of UB will find this disagreeable, or for that matter that they will agree that one is missing something by not knowing “achieving [what one wants]” (*de* 得)? But then we wonder whether it is because the unasserted claim “everything is a matter of dissatisfaction” is false or impractical. One of the models for asserting claims in the *Mozi*, the “three standards” (*san biao* 三表) of *Mozi* 56/35/6–10¹⁷, has as one of its standards the question of whether a teaching (*yan* 言) is useful (for a discussion of the passage, see Fraser 2016, pp. 62–69). So, truth was certainly not the only way to assess statements, and in the present passage we are simply not told one way or another.

The meatier thing we are offered is found in (3), which explains why we do not want to go with any of the options presented. It is meaty because it describes error in terms of the thing the claims are about: the Way. The Way has two features: it “embodies constancy”

17 Cited from Hung (1956b) in Sturgeon (2023).

(*ti chang* 體常) and "exhausts all changes" (*jin bian* 盡變). There are simple and complicated things to say about these expressions. In this section, we will stick to the simple thing: the Way is constant, but it is constant in a way that enables it to encompass all the items mentioned. And knowing the Way *implies* knowledge of all these things. The further implication is that a good guest advisor needs to know about all these things.

The expressions used in (2) are suggestive of definitions – that these people define the Way as some particular thing. The criticism that defining the Way in these ways makes *everything* a matter of one single thing suggests that these expressions play a role in a decision-procedure. But what kind? Are we considering an individual agent surveying a situation where action is required or something else entirely? In a sense, the answer is right there in the text: everything becomes a matter of that one thing, i.e., the Way.

That the Way is inapt for these sorts of definitions should not lead us to think that there is nothing to say about it, but rather that there is more involved than the text's advisors appreciate. Indeed, the expression used to describe what people who only know a corner cannot do indicates linguistic articulation. The text says that they cannot lift (*ju* 舉) the Way, which is to say raise it as a topic for discussion. The one advisor of the past who was not blinded, Confucius, is by contrast said to have lifted and used the Way (79/21/27) again suggesting that the Way does not defy articulation.

UB is an elegant piece of writing. Part of its elegance, in discussing failures, comes from its using one central image or model (blindness) to discuss what are apparently very diverse issues related to group epistemology: how dysfunctional group dynamics can vitiating developing good institutions, as well as how theoretical perspectives can negatively affect these processes. As we have seen, using this single image at times makes it hard to discern whether we are faced with points of substantial philosophy or mere rhetorical gymnastics. This is especially the case for the topic that interests us: the nature of the error as well as the activity of the guest advisors. It is after all through their teachings that these do their harm and, with respect to teachings, a psychological model for characterizing error in individuals is obviously the wrong tool for the job. So long as one sticks with the visual image of one thing standing in the way of another or one corner blocking out the whole, talk of parts and wholes is unproblematic. But trying to specify what is wrong with the guest advisors' statements in these terms is much more difficult. The text does not, for example, provide us with a notion of partial truth or partially correct assertions to go along with the image of partially seeing the Way. The closest we get to an assessment of what is wrong with these teachings is a mixed image: what these people "see" is only a corner of the Way, and corners are insufficient to make the Way a topic of discourse, which is to say give a full account of it.

In this section, we have made an assumption about how these definitions are to be used. Namely, that one uses any one of the items proposed as being “the Way” as a guide to determining which actions one needs perform. Clearly, the text does not treat it as one of its tasks to show in detail how other solutions fail on their own terms. But when we turn to Confucius’ definition of the Way, the text describes in greater detail when and how the definition has application. Namely, in choosing people and deliberating with them, and listening to what they have to say in a balanced way. What emerges from the discussion in the coming section is that the manner of exposition we have followed until this point, spelling out what someone is blinded by and what they are blinded to provides a model of the text’s solution.

2 Balance, Brightness, and Clarity

In T3, the Way is described as having some very impressive qualities. It embodies constancy and exhausts all change. Furthermore, the Way encompasses the proposals of the other advisors, as well as the things to which each of these were blinded. It thus has unity, but a complex unity, one that far outruns the simple unity possessed by the corners. The proposals of the other advisors appear easy to use. For example, if the Way is use, we know to choose the option that aims at use. But they do not provide the rulers and ministers with what they want: the genuine article. Xunzi’s characterization of the shortcomings of other advisors, as well as his characterization of the Way means that his account must be more encompassing. But it is not immediately clear how Xunzi’s solution achieves this. Is it by providing another definition of the Way that avoids the shortcomings of the attempts of the other advisors or is it through something else entirely? Several scholars have taken the text’s characterization of the Way to suggest that it defies general articulation, as the most common reading of the most translated line of pre-Qin philosophy, *Daodejing* 1, has it: “A way that can be spoken of is not the eternal Way.” (道可道非常道) (Wagner 2003, pp. 119–120). For example, Hutton (2002), Fraser (2011), and King (2008) all use the language of agents in situations where choices need to be made and claim that, in these situations, there is something to say about what the Way is, but that there nonetheless is nothing general to say about it. King and Hutton in particular, emphasize that on the picture here presented, there is a right answer to the question “what should I do, here, now?” and in this sense, King ascribes to the text a position he calls “normative realism” (ibid., pp. 84–85) and Hutton speaks throughout of “moral knowledge”. There are, however, no general answers to the question “what ought one to do?”. In other words, there are no perfectly general rules for right conduct (King 2008, pp. 89–90). I think this line of interpretation owes to modern obsessions than to the interests of the text. To antic-

ipate: the text will provide us with no less than three rules for making decisions, albeit psychological rather than "moral" rules. The characterization of Confucius' success, as an articulator of the Way, points in two directions. On the one hand, Confucius studied (*xue* 學) various arts (*luan shu* 亂術), which, in an obscure sentence, "sufficed to make him or bring about the first kings" (足以為先王) (79/21/26–27). These formulations, which have brought to grief both the commentators in Wang (1988) and which I too despair of making straightforward sense of, may well, as Hutton says, suggest a process of piecing together the Way from disparate pieces (cf. Hutton 2002, p. 371). But the very next sentence, where Confucius is described as "getting" (*de* 得) the encompassing Way (*zhou dao* 周道) as well as "raising" (*ju* 舉) and using (*yong* 用) it (79/21/27), suggest the endeavor was a success. One of the most important senses of "raising" is "make the subject of discourse" and standing as this does in contrast to several faulty articulations of what the Way is, it can hardly mean anything else. However, the Way does defy *easy* articulation.

Fraser does not discuss the passage in T3, but in summarizing the texts we will presently turn to he claims that they do not propose a particular account of the Way or a decision-making procedure as such, but a change in attitude. Specifically, he claims that the text urges the addressees towards a balanced attitude (Fraser 2011, p. 141). In a sense, this is right, insofar as the text provides a series of rules for using its definition of the Way, and they are indeed aimed at maintaining an equilibrium between things, but specifically things one is told.

Before saying anything more about these different solutions, it is important that we have in hand the texts that they are discussing. Xunzi's answer to the implicit question "What is the Way?" comes in three distinct parts, the first (T4) of which presents Confucius', and so Xunzi's, answer to the question, the second (T6) deepens our grasp of the psychology that underlies both the successes and failures of the historical rulers and ministers. This happens above all through describing the connection between knowing the Way and choosing people (*qu ren* 取人). The conclusion of that section is that, if one follows the advice there presented, one will be on the way to being in order (*zhi* 治). This is what T1 described blinded people as moving further and further away from, so we are here clearly moving towards a solution. The third part (T7–9) describes a series of listening strategies that would enable one to use the abilities of the people chosen.

T4

聖人知心術之患，見蔽塞之禍，故無欲、無惡、無始、無終、無近、無遠、無博、無淺、無古、無今，兼陳萬物而中縣衡焉。是故眾異不得相蔽以亂其倫也。何謂衡？曰：道。

The sage knew the troubles of the techniques of the heart and saw the misfortunes that came from being blinded and blocked. So, he did not overemphasize desire or aversion, starting-points or ends, the near or the far, broad or shallow learning, the ancient or the current, he inclusively arranged the ten thousand things and balanced them on the suspended scales. For this reason, the many differences are unable to block each other out in such a way that they disorder their proper placement. What is meant by 'equilibrium'? I say: the Way. (79/21/28–30)

In T3's description of Confucius, his achievement was described, but his account of the Way was not. What we are here given is a narrative of what Confucius did as well as, at the end of the text, Confucius' definition of the Way: equilibrium. Hutton reads the passage differently, treating the answer at the end as the uncooperative statement that the Way is the standard one uses to weigh things. Accordingly, for Hutton, it becomes a question what kind of thing the Way is such that one can know it (Hutton 2002, p. 366). In dealing with this passage, several scholars think that it describes an agent surveying the situation in which they need to act, taking in all the particularities of the situation and somehow, weighing them. Hutton, King, and Fraser all read the text as presenting this picture, but only King makes an explicit attempt at interpreting T4 (ibid. pp. 89–90). This is an established use of weighing-images in early Chinese texts, but to see why that is not what we are presented with here, it is useful to contrast the present text with one, from *Xunzi* 3, "Not unrestrained" *Bu Gou* 不苟, that does use a weighing image in this way:

T5

欲惡取舍之權：見其可欲也，則必前後慮其可惡也者；見其可利也，則必前後慮其可害也者，而兼權之，孰計之，然後定其欲惡取舍。如是則常不失陷矣。凡人之患，偏傷之也。見其可欲也，則不慮其可惡也者；見其可利也，則不顧其可害也者。是以動則必陷，為則必辱，是偏傷之患也

The scales of desires, aversions, selecting, and abandoning: if you see something as desirable, you must consider front to back the undesirable aspects of it; if you see that something can be beneficial, you must front to back consider the aspects of it that can be harmful. Then you weigh them together, thoroughly reckoning them, and then you settle whether it is to be desired, detested, chosen or abandoned. If you do things like this, you will constantly avoid falling into traps. In general, when nobles end up in trouble, it is their leaning to the one side that harms them. If they see that something is desirable, they do not consider the aspects of it that are undesirable. If they see that something can be beneficial, but do not consider the ways in which it can be harmful. On account of this, when they move, they are sure to be trapped; when they do it, they

are sure to be disgraced. These are the troubles that come from being harmed by leaning to the one side. (8/3/45–49)

This text begins with an explicit reference to choice. The repeated references to seeing (*jian* 見), as well as the references to the outcomes of those choices, make it clear that this passage presents a device for making decisions in a particular situation. Weighing, here, is offered as a counterweight to piqued interest. The agent has seen something to be desirable or beneficial, and at this point they need to stop and consider whether there is not something undesirable or harmful about choosing it. If the harms outweigh the benefits, the thing needs to be rejected. This is not what T4 describes.

T4 describes the sage as having seen the misfortunes that come with being blinded and blocked and knowing the difficulties of the techniques of the heart. The obvious way of interpreting this is that Xunzi's Confucius "saw", in the same way we have, the awful things that happened to the historical rulers and ministers who were blinded. He clearly did not see what happened to the blinded advisors, all of whom are traditionally dated as later than Confucius. This is perhaps the reason why the list of five pairs of things that are brought forth as examples of causes of blindness in T2 and 4 does not match the items making up the teachings of the blinded advisors.

The situation the sage is surveying seems more general than the one surveyed by the addressee of T5. This is surely what it should be; at this point in the text, the addressees have been told that they are pining for the Way but are in the dark about it. They have been told horror stories about what happens to someone who is blinded to it, as well as stories of how well things go for rulers and ministers who are not blinded to the Way. In other words: what the addressees want is a general solution. They want something they can do that helps them avoid the bad outcomes and improves their chances at the good outcomes. The text does two things in this regard: on the one hand, the *Xunzi* contains definite teachings about the list of five pairs that can be used to shape policy and influence how one makes decisions in particular circumstances, as we said in our discussion of T2. On the other hand, the text goes on to clarify what rulers do and why they need the Way. To anticipate: rulers need to choose the right people to surround themselves with, the right ministers and advisors, and they need to arrive at decisions relying on these appointed officials (T6). One thing this should make clear is that no solution offered by this text is meant to work in the absence of its speaker, and so we can leave the issue of the *Xunzi's* teachings about these other issues to the side.

The other advisors' accounts of the Way seemed to offer individual items as objects of pursuit. What is appealing about these proposals is that they appear easy to use: one can determine government posts and fill them based on what will best speak to each of these individual things. What was unappealing about these proposals was they very obviously

excluded important things, and that they were sure ways to ruin. The challenge for Xunzi is to articulate an account that includes everything the others left out without becoming excessively complicated. A part of Xunzi's strategy is to narrow down the situation in which the ruler or minister needs to choose. The proposals of the other advisors, in principle, enable entirely autocratic rulers and lone ministers because all they need to do is go after the item they are treating as the Way. By contrast, what separated both non-blind rulers and their ministers was their ability to recognize the value of good ministers, which is to say servants for the latter and colleagues for the former. This is to say that non-blind rulers and ministers do not act alone.

This means that the ruler does not need a definite account of the topics of political decisions; he rather needs to be told how to deal with such accounts and the people who espouse them. A salient feature of things that cause blindness throughout the text is that they come in pairs, whether these be concubines and ministers, ambitions and colleagues, or accounts of the Way and what they exclude. As Vankeerberghen (2005, pp. 48–53) explains, simple balances are the kinds of scales that are the most prominent in the archaeological records of the Warring States period, and these provide a fitting image for thinking of things that come in pairs. Images require interpretation, however. My contention is that T6 provides a context for interpreting the image, and T7 provides the interpretation. The text describes three basic activities of the heart where there are two things involved and gives advice about how to avoid these two things outweighing each other, specifically in the context of conferring with ministers and advisors. That is, the definition of the Way Confucius offers us functions primarily as a means for deciding how one should organize group deliberation, not for deciding what to do as such.

Reading of these passages as deeply concerned with a small group of nobles organizing their discussions, clashes with the literature we complained about at the beginning of this section where these passages are seen as providing an account of moral motivation, moral epistemology, and intellectual virtues in a perfectly general way. That is, they take the text to be addressed to human individuals like us who want to live well, and who are interested in what a Confucian account of living well will look like. To anticipate what we will say later in this section: A part of the reason for insisting on a reading that emphasizes the specific political situation this text is addressing is that all of these texts are heading in the direction of T10. That passage is a hymnic closure that celebrates the achievements someone who follows the advice given in the text can have. Those achievements do not make any sense as aspirations of the human agents of modern moral philosophy. More to the point, T6, to which we now turn, describes the connection between choosing people and knowing the Way. These are the key areas of error in the first section of this paper. So, plausibly, we are now given a more abstract account of how to avoid the problems and

achieve the successes described in those earlier passages.

We now turn to what are arguably some of the knottiest texts of the whole of the *Xunzi*.

T6

故心不可以不知道；心不知道，則不可道，而可非道。人孰欲得恣，而守其所不可，以禁其所可？以其不可道之心取人，則必合於不道人，而不合於道人。以其不可道之心與不道人論道人，亂之本也。夫何以知？曰：心知道，然後可道；可道然後守道以禁非道。以其可道之心取人，則合於道人，而不合於不道之人矣。以其可道之心與道人論非道，治之要也。何患不知？故治之要在於知道。

Surely, the heart cannot not know the Way; if the heart does not know the Way, it will not approve of the Way, but approve what is not the Way. Who would wish to be given license and preserve what they do not approve of, and drive out what they do approve of? If one chooses people using a heart that does not approve of the Way, one will join up with people [who do not approve of] Way, and not join up with people who [approve of] the Way. Using a heart that does not approve of the Way to array people who support the Way is the foundation of disorder. What then if one does know it? I say: When the heart knows the Way, it will thereafter approve of the Way. After it approves of the Way, it will preserve the Way in order to drive out what is not the Way. If one uses a heart that knows the Way to choose people, one will join up with people who [approve of] the Way and not join up with people who [do not approve of] the Way. Using a heart that approves of the Way to array people who [do not approve of the] Way with people [who approve of it] is the [most important means] to becoming ordered. Why worry about not knowing? So the [most important means] to becoming ordered lies in knowing the Way. (79/21/30–80/21/34)

Beginning from the end, this text tells us why it is important to know the Way: it is the most important thing to becoming ordered (*zhi* 治). As we said initially, this word can be applied to people and states, and an ordered state depends upon the ordered hearts of the text's addressees. The most important means to becoming ordered is arraying (*lun* 倫) people who are against the Way with people who support it. That is, one is to collaborate with people whose hearts know the Way to array people whose hearts do not know the Way. The broad idea, in other words, is that it is important to choose people (*qu ren* 取人) for the tasks for which they are appropriate. In pre-Qin texts, this expression is rare, but it is clear that we are dealing with administration here, not choosing the people in our lives (*pace* Shen 2016).

In the sentence "Choosing people using a heart that approves of the Way" as well its negated counterpart, the text makes it clear that both the chooser and the chosen have hearts that do or do not approve the Way. Knowing the Way matters because of this

passage's model of motivation: if the heart knows the Way, it will approve (*ke* 可) of it, and that approval in turn leads to preservation (*shou* 守) of it. There has been some discussion about what kind of force approval is (cf. Sung 2012 and Hutton 2016, both with reference to the long discussion of desire and approval in *Xunzi* 22 "Correct Names" *Zhengming* 正名 rather than this passage). But the present passage tells us what we need to know for present purposes. Namely, that approval motivates preserving the Way and driving out (*jìn* 禁) what is not the Way.

The distinction between "Way-people" (*dao ren* 道人), "not Way-people" (*bu dao ren* 不道人), and "non-Way" (*fei dao* 非道), which we gloss as "people who approve of the Way" and "people who do not approve of the Way", is not, I take it, a moral one. Rather, it is between people who are fit for taking part in administration and people who are not. A later passage in the UB describes farmers, traders, and craftsmen as intimately familiar (精 *jīng*) with fields, markets, and tools respectively, but that does not enable them to oversee these things. That task falls to the "gentleman" (*jūn zǐ* 君子) who is intimately familiar with the Way (cf. 80/21/50–52).

It is important to note, as King does, that choosing people and arraying still others are the main forms of action the addressee of this text is asked to undertake. That the most important action undertaken by a ruler is choosing the right people for the right tasks is a persistent theme in the *Xunzi*, and we should allow the text's emphasis on this deliberative context to shape our interpretation of the text's account of knowing the Way.

The great difficulty about T4, 6, and 7 is tying together the three steps represented by them as well as explaining what each of them does. A challenge in the present text is that it is easy to mechanically translate the sentence-initial particle *gu* 故 as "therefore", unlike our "surely". The former makes it appear as if the heart's obligation to know the Way is a conclusion from the description of the sage and the Way as equilibrium from T4, but this obligation turns out to be the conclusion of the present passage; the heart cannot not know the Way, because if it does not, one will choose the wrong people for the wrong jobs and disorder will ensue. Conversely, if the heart does know the Way, one will choose the right people for the right jobs, and order will ensue.

T7 presents our reading with an apparent problem. It raises the question of how the heart knows the Way. But if T4 presents us with a definition of the Way, we might think, the mechanics of knowing the Way are uninteresting. We know that it is equilibrium and that should be all that counts. The apparent problem can be resolved: T4 tells us what the Way is, T5 tells us where that knowledge should be used, and T7 to which we now turn, tells us how to use that account when we choose the right people for the right tasks.

We must bear the context of choosing and organizing tasks for people in mind when we turn to T7. If this is the situation where what we are told next is important, we need to see how it is relevant to that situation.

T7

人何以知道？曰：心。心何以知？曰：虛壹而靜。心未嘗不臧也，然而有所謂虛；心未嘗不兩也，然而有所謂壹；心未嘗不動也，然而有所謂靜。人生而有知，知而有志；志也者，臧也；然而有所謂虛；不以所已臧害所將受謂之虛。

What do nobles use to know the Way? I say: The heart. How does the heart know it? I say: Through being empty, unified, and still. The heart always stores, nonetheless there is something called 'being empty'. The heart is always divided, nonetheless, there is something called 'being unified'. The heart always moves, nonetheless there is something called 'being still'. Humans [*ren*]¹⁸ are born and are able to know, they know [something] and are able to remember. As for remembering, it is to store. Nonetheless, there is something called 'being empty'; not using what one has already stored to harm what one will receive, this is called 'being empty'. (80/21/34–37)

On the interpretation we are here pursuing, this is a guide for using the definition "the Way is equilibrium". The important thing for the addressee of the text is their own heart. The heart needs to be empty (*xu* 虛), unified (*yi* 壹), and still (*jing* 靜). These are all described, or defined, as activities; activities that contrast with what the heart normally does. Each of these three involve bringing two items into balance, respectively, what is remembered and what is to be learnt, two things concurrently known, and oneself and what is to be known. These activities, being empty, unified, and still, as we interpret them, recall without repeating the three features of the Way – being single, rather than a multiplicity, embodying constancy, and exhausting change. That is, we are shown the path to achieving the likeness between the heart of the sage and the Way asserted in T1.

The ordinary activities are storing (*cang* 藏), being divided (*liang* 兩), and moving (*dong* 動). They are contrasted with and used to explain what emptiness, unity, and stillness are. In order for us to properly understand how these are explained, we need to

18 I have tentatively translated *ren* 人 in this passage as "humans" because it only occurs in one of these descriptions of 'business as usual', that is, of something that goes on from the point at which the subjects are born, namely to store, be divided, and move. It is by doing something that runs contrary to these things that one achieves something extraordinary, something that makes one a good ruler or minister. Placing this against something that is so basic that it is shared amongst all humans seems to me the more plausible reading.

notice the structure of the characterizations of each of them: a description is given of the basic activity, which is countered by a description of something it is constitutive of being empty, unified, or still not to do. The former seem to me to be meant as easily comprehensible statements of things that are familiar because they are basic. By contrast, the descriptions of what one needs to avoid in order to be empty, unified, and still problematize these familiar activities by indicating how these basic activities of hearts can cause trouble. All of these are explicated in terms of *zhi* 知, a character I have, throughout, translated as “know”. But in the above paragraph, it is possible that different achievements are expressed using this character. The aim of this passage is to teach us how to “know the Way” (*zhi dao* 知道), a transitive verb which expresses something it is difficult to do, but difficult arguably because the object of knowledge is the Way. At the same time, there is something called *zhi* that is a capacity humans have when they are born, that can be activated in their knowing something, and which then leads to memory, which is what is meant by storing. Note here that the technical terms we use here, “capacity” and “activation”, translate a distinction that is much less explicit. Namely the distinction between the verb-object-phrase *you zhi* 有知 lit. “have knowing”, and the verb on its own. Both Hutton (2014) and Knoblock (1994) translate *zhi dao* as “know the Way”, and the latter two *zhi* as “awareness”, and in light of the latter two’s status as basic, this is certainly the correct *interpretation*. But it is surely no accident that a passage about how one is to know *zhi* the Way uses that same word to characterize both the hindrances and resources for achieving that goal. In my translation and discussion, I follow the text’s terminological unity. It is nonetheless worth keeping in mind that where the text talks about one thing, we might wish to speak of several.

But the important question is where and how memory can cause troubles. The text describes being empty as “[...] not using what one has already stored to harm what one will receive [...]”. There are three important things to notice here: while the word *shou* 受 is a fairly neutral word for receiving or accepting something, it appears to have a specialized use related to discussions at court. For example, at 3/2/3 remonstrance (*jian* 諫) is received, as are accounts (*shuo* 說) in 14/5/51–52 and 16/6/13, the word is otherwise not used in contexts relevant to knowledge. Given that T7 follows and is meant to explain the sparse description of deliberating in a group in T6, it is reasonable to suppose that advisory speech is the general category of things that are to be received here. The other thing to notice is that there is a strongly emphasized diachronic perspective here. In a sense this is obvious, given that memory is in play, but in the text cited at the beginning of this paragraph, there is a forceful contrast between two items: what one already (*yi* 已) has stored and what one will (*jiang* 將) receive which adds emphasis to this point. If we are in a deliberative context, this amounts to a contrast between what one has been told

and what one will be told. But in light of what we will say shortly about being unified, this temporal contrast must be between court sessions. Lastly, there is the issue of harming (*hai* 害). Clearly, this is something that, if one does it, will bring about blindness. In T1, a part of the problem with blindness is described as their "[regarding] what they accumulate as their own" (*si qi suo ji* 私其所積) and using it to assess differing approaches. The description of Confucius at 79/21/27, describes him as not being blinded by what he had accumulated. The aim here is to get the ruler to avoid the latter and aspire to the former. This, again, makes it clear how equilibrium simply is not on the same level as the teachings of the other advisors; they are meant to guide action and policy in a general way, whereas Confucius' Way guides one's use of such guidance. In the present case, the encouragement is surely to keep separate what one has learnt and what one is about to learn, so that any shortcomings in the former can be revealed through the addition of the latter.

T8

心生而有知，知而有異；異也者，同時兼知之；同時兼知之，兩也；然而有所謂一¹⁹；不以夫一害此一謂之壹。

The heart is born and has knowing, it knows and has distinguishing. As for distinguishing, it is to know several things together at the same time; knowing several things together at the same time is to be divided. Nonetheless, there is something called 'being unified'. To not use this one harm that one, this is called 'being unified'. (80/21/37–38)

Where storing and emptiness are characterized by having a diachronic profile – they are concerned with how one deals with how one relates what has already been learnt with what one will learn – dividedness and unity are characterized by synchrony. The text says that when something is known, there is distinguishing (*yi* 異), and distinguishing, we are told, is to know several things together at the same time (*tong shi jian zhi zhi* 同時兼知之). This is what being divided (*liang* 兩) means. Here some care must be taken. Harbsmeier (1995, pp. 49–52) argues *contra* Marcel Granet that an abstract notion of time, unmoored from ritual calendars, reigns, or seasons, was not only to be found in early China, it was prevalent. We may grant this, this is at any rate not the place to dispute it, and still feel unsure about what it means for things to happen at the same time. Indeed, the only place where Harbsmeier reaches for the notion of a point in time is in glossing a passage on fortuitous occasions (*ibid.*, p. 52), where he draws an analogy with for the Greek notion of *kairos*. But, as Harbsmeier also observes, what is involved in this is not

19 Reading 壹 for 一.

quite an, in his words, abstract notion of time nor quite a fixed point in time. The expression here translated as “at the same time” (*tong shi* 同時) occurs only in two other places in the whole of pre-Qin literature, both texts discussing living or not living at the same time as someone (cf. *Mozi* 26/16/49²⁰, and *Zhuangzi* 83/29/79²¹), something very different from what discuss 8 discusses on any reading. So, this is a passage where one must contribute a great deal as a reader to even make some cursory sense of it. How we imagine time to play into things affects how we interpret the advice. When Perkins discusses this passage, for example, he takes it to be talking about anyone anywhere surveying a scene, aspiring that no “[...] aspect of experience does not conceal others [...]” (Perkins 2015, p. 211). For Perkins, the contemporaneity in question is perhaps related to the “*kairological*” notion mentioned above; on some occasion, one takes things in and none of them blocks each other. But no notion so bare as “aspects of experience” has played a role in the text thus far and it is difficult to connect Perkins’ description with any other parts of the account of blindness than the account of blinded rulers, whose sources of blindness were “aspects of experience”, viz. people. For Tang Siufu (Tang, 2016, pp. 115–116) the passage is concerned with someone looking within, surveying the items known to them, and forging a unity from them. That is, the contemporaneity is of a freer kind because, evidently, all the knowing involved is of things stored. On the one hand, Tang’s reading seems as if it can be onto the description of Confucius’s activities in T4, with the key difference that while Confucius ordered and placed the scales between all of the ten thousand things, Tang’s agent merely orders what they know.

Considering the text’s concerns thus far, there are two main options for interpreting the key expression “To not use this one harm that one [...]” (*bu yi fu yi hai ci yi* 不以夫一害此一). What Tang describes seems to apply to the following situation: When someone has espoused, e.g., Mozi’s teaching that the Way is use, one does not let that harm one’s knowledge of the value of embellishment (*wen* 文). But, given that this is proposed as being helpful in the kind of group deliberation described in T6, the following seems like it might just as well be an option: At a deliberative session with one’s chosen ministers and advisors – the “time”, or rather occasion in question – with several speakers, one listens to each of them intently, not letting the account, report, or criticism of one influence how one judges another.

What is appealing about Tang’s suggestion, as chastened by the text, is that it does not require us to be very specific about the notion of two instances of knowing sharing a time; it is all stored, after all. And we can see organizing what one has stored as supporting the

20 Cited from Hung (1956b) in Sturgeon (2023).

21 Quoted from Hung (1956a) in Sturgeon (2023).

aspiration to be empty: because having a thorough grasp on what one has stored could prevent it from interfering with what one is about to learn.

The second option involves the greatest interpretive leap, but also clarifies the most. A part of the difficulty in interpreting this passage is its slight air of paradox. By this I mean the following: knowing several things together at the same time does not sound obviously bad, and someone who does this seems to be unifying rather than dividing. By contrast, not allowing two things to harm each other sounds decidedly like keeping things separate. Indeed, our preference for the translations "divided" and "united" is entirely dependent on the connection between the two words *liang* 兩 and *yi* 壹 and numerals. The latter can just as well mean "concentration". If the thought is that one listens to one advisor and then another on the same occasion, one is able to draw on what is good about both, something the text has throughout been training us to do.

T9

心臥則夢，偷則自行，使之則謀；故心未嘗不動也；然而有所謂靜；不以夢劇亂知謂之靜。未得道而求道者，謂之虛壹而靜。

If the heart sleeps, it dreams; if it is not employed it moves itself; if one employs it, it deliberates. So, the heart is always moving. Nonetheless, there is something called 'being still'. To not disturb one's knowing on account of fantasies or difficulties, this is called 'being still'. For someone who has not got the Way but who seeks it, I would tell them to be empty, unified, and still. (80/21/38–39)

The characterization of the heart being in motion describes three situations: while sleeping, while not employed, and while employed, the heart moves; it dreams, it moves itself, and deliberates. The expression used of the movements that cause problems, *meng ju* 夢劇, which I have translated "fantasies or difficulties" is a *hapax legomenon*, not just in the *Xunzi*, but in all pre-Qin texts. *Meng* can of course mean "dreams", as it does in the preceding sentence. I follow Yang Liang (in Wang (1988, p. 396) and Eifring (2019, p. 196) in translating it as "fantasy", because we are talking about a movement of the heart that causes problems to someone seeking to know, and so "dreams" seems a poor match. Whatever these movements are, they are apt to bring disorder (*luan* 亂) to knowing. This means: if the faculty one uses to listen to advice is disordered, one presumably does poorly, and if the process of coming to know is disordered, it is presumably foiled.

T7 as a whole is full of provocatively paradoxical statements; the heart is always storing, divided, and moving, and one should aspire for it to be empty, unified, and still. But there is no indication that the storing, dividedness, and movement cease when one achieves these things. There are furthermore no indications of what the relationships between the several items used in this section are. For example, is storing a movement? What

about knowing? The expectation seems rather to be that one should accept what one is given. The previous pieces of advice were framed as being conflicts between knowing and knowing – across time or contemporaneously. Talking about movement and stillness, the text sets up a conflict between knowing and something other than knowledge: fantasies and disturbances. Another way of putting this is: between the heart's own activities.

Throughout this discussion, I have called the descriptions of emptiness, unity, and stillness “advice”. Specifically, advice for how to draw on one's ministers and advisors which in turn enables also the ruler to get (*de* 得) the Way. There is a tradition of using more charged terms to describe these three, however. Several scholars have reached for words like “states” (e.g. Hutton 2016, p. 224), “qualities” (e.g. Kjellberg 2016, p. 378), and “capacities” (e.g. Berthrong 2016, p. 337) to describe them. I do not wish to quibble here over metaphysical or other theoretical ballast carried by these terms, but focusing on the stative verbs (“empty”, “unified”, “still”) instead of the longer descriptions obscures the purpose of these texts. The fact that we are dealing with advice to do something, i.e., to follow the instructions attached to each of these words, and that group deliberation is what this is in service of, becomes even clearer when we turn to the final paragraph. This text celebrates the achievements of someone who manages to be empty, unified, and still.

T10

虛壹而靜，謂之大清明。萬物莫形而不見，莫見而不論，²²莫論而失位。坐於室而見四海，處於今而論久遠。疏觀萬物而知其情，參稽治亂而通其度，經緯天地而材官萬物，制割大理而宇宙裡矣。恢恢廣廣，孰知其極？畢畢廣廣，孰知其德？涓涓紛紛，孰知其形？明參日月，大滿八極，夫是之謂大人。夫惡有蔽矣哉！ Empty, unified, and quiet, we call this the great clarity and brightness. [For someone like this] the ten thousand things, when they take shape, none are not seen; when seen, none are not arrayed; when arrayed, none lose/neglect their position. [Someone greatly clear and bright] is seated in their hall yet sees the four seas; is located in the present, but arrays what is far in time and place. He takes a broad look at the ten thousand things and knows what is happening amongst them; inquires into order and disorder and ascertains their measure; takes Heaven and Earth as warp and weft and assessing the capacities of the ten thousand things and assigns offices to them; he cuts out the great pattern making time and space ordered. Vast indeed, who knows his extent? Very vast indeed! Who knows his power to obligate?²³ Bubbling and boiling, who knows his shape? Matching the sun and moon in brightness, filling

22 Reading “array, bring into order” *lun* 倫 for “discuss” *lun* 論 throughout.

23 This translation of *de* 德 follows Gassmann (2011). Given that the word only occurs here, I cannot justify an extensive discussion of it.

the eight directions in greatness. This indeed is called the great man. What blindness could he have? (80/21/41–44)

Clearly, this text makes no reference to a well-functioning government, but what does it talk about? It describes someone who is clearly very impressive, but hardly any of these impressive feats can be literally true of any human individual. A possible interpretation of the vast sight – sees everything, everywhere – and vast power – arrays everything, everywhere, for the long haul – is that one should aspire to becoming a god. In a sense, this is right, but we must then remember what it means, in other early Chinese texts, to become a god: it is to become an ancestor. As Michael Puett shows, Xunzi was a complicated inheritor of this tradition, less interested in the spirits themselves and more interested in the good brought about by practices widely thought to put one in touch with spirits and Heaven (Puett 2002, pp. 145–200). But the quasi-hymnic language of this passage shows that he was also very capable of speaking in a way that calls to mind the extensive knowledge ghosts and spirits were thought to possess, as well as the far-reaching scope generally ascribed to Heaven (cf. Puett (ibid.) and Goldin 2015). If one reads the passage in isolation, it is perhaps possible to think that this is a description of the kind of effortless action that one perhaps expects of early Chinese sages (cf. Slingerland 2003). There are two reasons to reject such a reading taking into account our discussion of T6 where choosing people was at the center of things, it would be unexpected if an impressive lone individual were to appear. Moreover, the explicitly administrative vocabulary used in the passage, e.g., arraying the ten thousand things, is more easily understood as something that happens under the ruler's authority, like farmers dividing up (*fen* 分) fields to plough, traders dividing up wares to sell, as well as officials dividing up tasks and attending to them (cf. 41/11/97–98). Sitting within one's halls and "seeing" all within the four seas can just mean that one is a ruler who has reliable ministers and advisors at his side, and so has knowledge of the changes (*bian* 變) that occur under Heaven and the affairs within the borders. These happen outside the walls of the court, so it cannot be that the ruler literally sees them (48/12/94–100). Arraying what is far in time and in space suggests a reign of great extent and duration, which will ensure that one's ancestral temple will stand for a long time. Assessing the capacities of the ten thousand things and assigning offices to take care of them is something one does to ensure that nobles and the people are fed in the long term (cf. 16/6/18, 20/8/13). Doing this brings in wares from far away and ties all under Heaven together (cf. 28/9/54–57).

If the descriptions of the impressive feats of someone who is greatly clear and bright suggest a spirit, the repeated descriptions of his vastness, the repeated insistence that his full extent, power to obligate, and shape are not known to anyone, and the statements that his brightness matches that of the sun and the moon and that he fills all directions

all suggest something like a cosmic force. These cosmic embellishments emphasize how impressive a ruler can be, if only he could choose the right people, and get his heart in order so as to use these people properly. Doing so would, as the final sentence declares, solve the problem from which we began: there would be no blindness under these circumstances. That this is the solution should, in a sense, be obvious: the founding rulers of the past did exactly this; they set their hearts in order and were able to use their best ministers, they lived in luxury, were grieved when they died, and we talk about them still. And this is something the definition of the Way as “equilibrium”, in collaboration with the text’s presentation of historical exemplars and teachings persuades us of and shows us a way to achieve. Let us turn now to collecting some observations about how it happened.

3 Definition in the UB – Taking Stock

We began with a series of questions about the pragmatics of definitions. For what purposes are they used? Who uses them? In conjunction with what kinds of speech? In terms of which concepts are we asked to think about these expressions? The question of who uses definitions offers a convenient structure for discussing the rest. We can identify several users: 1. Xunzi, as speaker of UB, 2. nobles, and 3. other guest advisors. These three personal dimensions are closely interrelated. Most notably: describing Xunzi’s uses is in large part describing the structure of the text as a whole, and what the text says about nobles and advisors very clearly provide both content and structure to the text. Most basically: nobles are said to pine after the Way and make decisions based on accounts of what the Way is. Guest advisors are said to provide such accounts. Xunzi’s use of definitions is of course a species of the advisor-usage, but, unlike other guest advisors who only make a brief appearance in T1 and make up the meat of T3, it is Xunzi’s version of being a guest advisor that provides the context for these other uses. The broadest way in which we can characterize Xunzi’s uses of definitions is to notice that the pining and ignorance described in T1 structure the text as a whole; the passages covered in section 1 by turns show us how bad being blinded is, how good it is to not be blinded, and how dangerous it is when people who are blinded give accounts of what the Way is. At the end of section 1, we began learning about the unusual entity, the Way, which the nobles want to know about, and the guest advisors attempt to discuss. In section 2, we are given the full account and when that is done, the text ends. Knowledge, both as something that guides action and enables teaching, is one central conceptual lens through which we need to see definitions. Knowledge of the Way is what the text’s definitions are meant to convey, what Xunzi’s definition, *ex hypothesi*, manages to convey.

A more fine-grained specification of Xunzi's use of definition can be made by attending to the relationship between the characterization of blindness as "seeing" only one of two things that together make up a whole, and the definition of the Way as equilibrium, fleshed out, in part, as the ability to "see" wholes constituted of pairs. Throughout section 1, we are shown things that come in pairs, and unlike the blinded exemplars, we "see" both parts of each pair together. It is difficult to say exactly which paired structures we should take to be significant. Clearly, the items that block, whether these are people or teachings, are important; we see both what blinds and what they blind to or block. But what about the paired examples – the good and the bad? Should they too be seen in this light? I think they should; we are invited to do what the negative examples of rulers and ministers could not do, but the positive examples could. Namely, to know the both positive and negative value of earlier examples. In reading and following the exposition in the texts discussed in section 1, we are made to take part in the definition Xunzi offers. Under this heading, we can also note that presenting the diverse thinkers collected in T3 as all engaged in the same project and offering competing accounts of the Way, allows them to be collected and summarily rejected.

In the texts discussed in section 2, Xunzi's definition of the Way was accompanied by an account of the situation in which it should be used (T6), group deliberation, and an account, in psychological terms, of how one should conduct oneself in those situations in such a way as to be compliant with the definition (T7–9). This also fleshes out our picture of how nobles ought to use the definition of the Way. Furthermore, T7–9 provide us with a key to interpreting what has happened to us in the texts discussed in section 1.

At the same time, the text shows no interest in zeroing in on the issue of definition. While blinded accounts of the Way are singled out in T3 as more problematic than blinded action by rulers and ministers, these blinded accounts are nonetheless subsumed under the broader category of blindness, viz, "x blinds y to z". This model which emphasizes that x and z together make up a whole, is at odds with what the text seems to want to say about these accounts: namely, that they are false. But T3's description of the Way makes it clear that they must be false. Following up on Socrates' description of himself as a midwife in the *Theaetetus*, Catherine Rowett describes the Heraclitan metaphysics developed in *Theaetetus* 151e–160e as a "post-natal support package" for Theaetetus' proposed definition "knowledge is perception" (Rowett 2018, p. 171ff). The idea being that a world where all facts are fundamentally relational is one where such a definition of knowledge could thrive. In UB, the definition of the Way comes with an account of how to choose people, which in turn is rooted in an account of how to conduct oneself psychologically, which enables choosing the right people.

In sum, in the UB, rulers and ministers want definitions of the Way to make good decisions; advisors provide definitions of the Way to facilitate this, but the text does not spend time making it clear what *use*, by either a ruler or minister, of these other definitions would involve. Confucius' definition of the Way, however, is used to motivate a specific way of engaging in deliberation between rulers, ministers, and advisors, and, as we have seen, we are given descriptions of both the process and outcome of this form of deliberation. Lastly, Xunzi uses attempted definitions of the Way to succinctly summarize the teachings of other advisors, and so to set the teaching he is transmitting, which he ascribes to Confucius, apart from the rest. That definition, in turn, is used to structure the piece as a whole in a way that provides a model for the form of deliberation the text is espousing, in turn training the reader in that form of deliberation.

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