

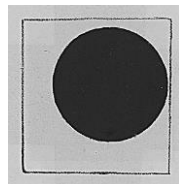
Xun Zi's theory of evil: A new perspective on human nature

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Introduction

The Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (8th–3rd century BCE) represent one of the most transformative eras in Chinese history, during which profound changes reshaped every aspect of social life. These transformations were largely driven by advances in productive forces, particularly the introduction of iron tools, which revolutionized agriculture and handicrafts. The transition from extensive to intensive farming, coupled with the separation of handicrafts from agriculture, signaled a new stage in the division of labor. At the same time, the weakening of the Zhou Dynasty's authority and the constant struggle among vassal states led to warfare, social disorder, and the decline of moral and ritual order. This turbulent context gave rise to a flourishing of intellectual activity, often described as the most prosperous period in the history of Chinese thought. Numerous philosophical schools emerged—Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, Legalism, the Yin-Yang school, among others—each seeking to provide solutions to the pressing questions of social stability and human destiny. Despite their diversity, these schools shared a common concern: the interpretation of human nature as the basis for restoring order and harmony.

Among these thinkers, Xunzi (310–238 BCE) occupies a distinctive position. Considered the most radical materialist in pre-Qin Confucianism, he rejected superstition and the determinism of the “Mandate of Heaven,” insisting instead that human destiny is shaped by reason and conscious action. Unlike Mencius, who emphasized the innate goodness of human nature, Xunzi argued that humans are born with desires that, if left unchecked, lead to disorder. Education, rites, and law, therefore, are indispensable in transforming human nature and maintaining social order. This pragmatic synthesis of morality and law profoundly influenced the Legalist tradition, particularly in the works of Han Feizi, and later informed the political thought of the Qin dynasty. The study of Xunzi's philosophy is significant for understanding both the internal dynamics of Confucianism and the broader intellectual landscape of early Chinese thought. While upholding Confucian virtues such as humanity, righteousness, and propriety, Xunzi simultaneously critiqued idealistic tendencies

Abstract

This study re-examines Xunzi's theory of evil in order to highlight its philosophical significance for understanding human nature. It raises the central hypothesis that Xunzi's conception of evil not only represents a distinctive and groundbreaking interpretation within Confucianism but also provides a theoretical basis for the later development of Legalist thought. The article first analyzes the essential arguments of Xunzi's theory, then contrasts it with major perspectives on human nature in both Eastern and Western traditions, thereby situating it within a broader intellectual context. Furthermore, the discussion considers the relevance of this theory to contemporary social challenges, particularly in relation to moral education, governance, and the cultivation of ethical behavior. Methodologically, the research draws on analytical, historical-logical, and comparative approaches to provide a comprehensive and critical understanding of Xunzi's contribution.

Keywords: Xunzi, theory of evil, human nature

within Confucianism and advanced a more materialist, law-oriented perspective. His worldview emphasized natural and social change, human self-cultivation, and the transformative power of education, thereby anticipating elements of dialectical thinking in ancient Chinese philosophy.

“Human nature” has long been a central theme in philosophical inquiry across both Eastern and Western traditions. In the East, and particularly within Confucianism, conceptions of human nature are closely intertwined with morality, social order, and education. While Confucius regarded human nature as inherently sincere, and Mencius emphasized its fundamental goodness, Xunzi advanced the contrasting view that human nature is inherently evil. These divergent perspectives profoundly shaped Chinese politics, education, and cultural life, and their influence extended widely across East Asia. In the West, the question of human nature has likewise occupied a prominent place in philosophical discourse. From the classical reflections of Plato and Aristotle to the modern theories of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, debates have centered on the relationship between nature and society, instinct and reason, and the individual and the community. The study of human nature thus constitutes a shared point of inquiry, revealing both universal concerns and culturally specific approaches in Eastern and Western thought. In the contemporary era, marked by the rapid transformations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and a growing crisis of human values, renewed attention to the question of human nature is particularly urgent. This study seeks to contribute to that discourse by re-examining Xunzi's theory of evil, offering a new perspective on its philosophical significance, and clarifying its implications for understanding and explaining the nature of humanity.

1. Research questions

This study is guided by three central research questions:

RQ1: What are the core principles of Xunzi's theory of evil?

RQ2: In what ways does this theory differ fundamentally from other humanistic conceptions of human nature?

RQ3: What are Xunzi's major contributions to philosophy and their relevance to contemporary society?

2. Research Method and Theoretical Basis

2.1. Research Methods

This study employs qualitative research methods, which are particularly well-suited for inquiries in the field of philosophy. Several specific approaches are utilized:

Analytical method: This approach is applied to examine key passages, arguments, and concepts in Xunzi's writings in order to reconstruct accurately the content and structure of his theory of evil. The analysis also situates the theory within the historical, cultural, and social context of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, while exploring its continuing significance for contemporary issues.

Historical-logical method: This method is used to investigate Xunzi's views within the intellectual climate of his time, enabling the identification of the internal logic of his thought and its historical development. By drawing on historical evidence, the study elucidates the dynamics of his philosophical contributions.

Comparative method: This approach involves contrasting Xunzi's theory of evil with other conceptions of human nature in both Eastern and Western traditions. Through this comparison, the study highlights similarities, differences, and the distinctive contributions of Xunzi's thought.

2.2. Theoretical Basis

Within the tradition of Eastern philosophy, the question of human nature has consistently been regarded as one of the most fundamental topics of inquiry (Fang, 1973; Huang & Westman, 2021; Liu, Zeng & Liu, 2023; Yuan, Chia & Gosling, 2023). It serves as the foundation for defining moral standards and social norms. In ancient Chinese philosophy, this issue occupied a central place. Confucius emphasized the human capacity for self-cultivation and moral development (Tan, 2021); Mencius

argued that humans are innately good and endowed with moral potential that requires nurturing (Meng & Zhong, 2025); whereas Xunzi contended that human beings are born with evil tendencies (Shi, 2025), driven by instinctive desires. According to Xunzi, only through education, rites, and laws can individuals overcome these desires and cultivate virtue. His views thus represent a more pragmatic and socially grounded approach, highlighting the role of institutions and environment in shaping human character.

In Western philosophy, the problem of human nature has also been a persistent and contested theme. Socrates held that moral improvement is achievable through knowledge and training (Benson, 2023). Plato stressed the role of education in enabling reason to govern desire (Kotsonis, 2021), while Aristotle viewed human nature as possessing the potential for goodness, which must be developed through habituation and discipline (Kraut, 2021). These classical views profoundly influenced later thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who asserted that humans are inherently selfish and competitive, living in a natural condition described as “a war of all against all” (Sasan, 2021; Schwartz & Kapust, 2022; Ishanch, 2023). In contrast, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) argued that primitive humans were originally good and lived in harmony with nature, but were corrupted by social institutions (Do, 2023; Coote, 2023; Savruk & Kenan, 2021; Isanbor, 2023). Despite their differing contexts, these theories all seek to explain the essence of human nature and its implications for morality and social order. Scholarship on Xunzi’s theory of evil has generally emphasized his claim that human nature is innately inclined toward selfish desires—such as greed, envy, lust, and the pursuit of personal gain—which, if left unchecked, inevitably lead to conflict and disorder (De Caro, 2022; Ting, 2024; Guo, 2024; Luo, 2023). In contrast to Mencius’ doctrine of innate goodness, Xunzi maintained that virtue is not an inborn quality but the result of sustained education, social learning, and discipline.

A significant body of research has also examined the role of ritual and law in Xunzi’s framework. Rites are conceptualized as systems of norms and practices that regulate social relations, preserve order, and guide individu-

als toward shared moral values (Jiang, 2022; Duan, 2025). However, Xunzi argued that rites alone are insufficient; the law is necessary to deter wrongdoing and ensure effective social governance (Wang, 2022; Hu, 2021). From this perspective, the transformation of human nature requires the integration of ritual, law, and education. Morality and order, therefore, are not natural givens but must be constructed and maintained through cultural institutions and social mechanisms.

In recent years, scholarship has increasingly adopted interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on philosophy, politics, and sociology to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of Xunzi’s theory of evil (De Caro, 2022; Shi, 2025; Baïke & Junwu, 2024). Such approaches not only deepen the theoretical analysis but also highlight the applicability of Xunzi’s thought to contemporary society. From the perspective of philosophical anthropology, the theory of evil is reinterpreted as an explanatory model of how human personality is shaped and transformed under the influence of social structures, value systems, and cultural environments. In this way, Xunzi’s theory is understood as both a product of its specific historical context and a philosophical account containing universal insights into the human condition.

Comparative research provides an opportunity to situate Xun Zi’s theory of evil within a broader intellectual framework by examining it alongside Western theories and contemporary perspectives on human nature and morality, including Hobbes’s egoism, Rousseau’s doctrine of innate goodness, Freud’s psychoanalysis, and insights from neuroscience and evolutionary psychology. Such comparisons not only elucidate theoretical convergences and divergences but also highlight the value of cross-cultural dialogue, demonstrating the potential of Xun Zi’s theory to contribute meaningfully to global philosophical and ethical discourses.

A review of prior scholarship reveals that most studies on Xun Zi’s theory of evil have concentrated primarily on ethical or political dimensions. These works largely emphasize the theory’s significance in establishing social order and guiding moral education, yet they tend to overlook its philosophical depth and its potential connections with other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and the

philosophy of education. Furthermore, the multidimensional comparison between Xun Zi's views and modern theories of human nature remains insufficiently developed, leaving the cross-cultural dialogue ambiguous. Importantly, the applicability of Xun Zi's theory to contemporary society has not been adequately addressed. This gap constitutes the focal point of the present study.

3. Research Content and Discussion

3.1. Research content

Xun Zi's Conception of Human Nature as Inherently Evil

In the tradition of Chinese philosophy, thought has always been closely connected with practical concerns; thus, the cultivation of human beings occupies a central position. From self-cultivation to the regulation of family and the governance of society, all matters are rooted in the education and transformation of human nature. Accordingly, the problem of human nature is not only fundamental to Chinese philosophy in general but also constitutes the core question of Confucian thought in particular.

During Xun Zi's era, at least four major positions on human nature circulated in intellectual discourse: (1) that human nature is good, (2) that it is evil, (3) that it can become either good or evil, and (4) that it is morally neutral. These positions are recorded in the *Mencius*, particularly in the "Gaozi" chapter. Through a critical engagement with these perspectives—most directly with Mencius's doctrine of innate goodness—Xun Zi constructed his own thesis on the inherent evil of human nature. In the *Xing e pian* (Chapter on Evil Nature), he unequivocally declared: "Human nature is inherently evil, and goodness is a human achievement."

This assertion constitutes the most significant divergence between Xun Zi and Mencius. For Xun Zi, the categories of benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*) are not natural givens but rather cultural and social constructs, created to regulate human behavior within communal life. Whereas natural categories precede human will and remain unaltered, social categories arise historically, shaped by human agency, and are

subject to transformation alongside changes in society. It is important to note that Xun Zi's notion of "evil" does not refer to transgressions in the legalistic or theological sense. Instead, it denotes the innate tendencies of human beings—greed, jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of comfort and pleasure. These impulses, while rooted in survival and self-preservation, if left unchecked, inevitably lead to conflict, disorder, and social disintegration. Thus, in opposition to Mencius, who affirmed the primacy of innate goodness, Xun Zi contended that evil is the natural condition of humanity, whereas goodness must be consciously cultivated. Nevertheless, Xun Zi did not hold that human beings are irredeemably dominated by evil. Within each person resides an element of goodness, embodied in the *xin* ("heart-mind"). The *xin* is innate, comprising not only perceptive and cognitive functions but also the capacities of deliberation (*lǚ*), choice (*zé*), and action (*néng*). Through the *xin*, individuals are capable of distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil, and exercising control over their desires.

Xun Zi illustrated this with the analogy of water: when still, water allows impurities to settle, rendering the surface clear and reflective; similarly, when the mind is tranquil, it mirrors the principles of all things. For him, the *xin* represents the sole inherently "good" faculty, embodying order and rectitude, and serving as the regulator of desires and the guardian against evil. Consequently, he emphasized the necessity of cultivating the *xin* through education, rites (*li*), law (*fa*), and social discipline. Xun Zi further articulated his view through analogies: just as bent wood requires heating and molding to be straightened, and a dull blade requires sharpening to be useful, so too must human beings undergo education to realize goodness. The cultivation of the *xin*—by developing consciousness, knowledge, and moral discernment—enables individuals to restrain excessive desires, distinguish between good and evil, and thereby foster harmony within themselves and in society. Desires such as gluttony, when guided by the properly trained *xin*, are moderated to avoid harmful excess. The *xin*, capable of rational consideration and choice, directs behavior toward what is beneficial for both the individual and the community, ensuring that indulgence does not devolve into disorder.

The Theoretical Foundations of Xun Zi's Doctrine of Evil Human Nature

The theoretical foundation of Xun Zi's doctrine derives from a realist stance shaped by his social experience during the Warring States period. This era was marked by the decline of the Zhou dynasty's ritual order, incessant warfare among feudal states, the fragmentation of political authority, and the collapse of traditional moral norms. Confronting this historical reality, Xun Zi concluded that reliance on human nature alone could not sustain a stable and harmonious social order.

In contrast to Mencius—who maintained that every individual is endowed at birth with the “four sprouts” (*si duan*) of benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), and wisdom (*zhi*) as innate seeds of goodness—Xun Zi contended that human beings do not naturally incline toward virtue. He likened human nature to crooked wood, which requires the craftsman's intervention to be straightened; likewise, moral character requires the transformative force of education and social discipline. This metaphor underscores his realist conviction that goodness is not an innate endowment but a product of deliberate cultivation.

From his premise of innate evil, Xun Zi deduced the necessity of systematic and institutional mechanisms to transform human nature. He emphasized three pillars essential to the governance of a state: education, rites, and law. Among these, education held primacy, serving as the means by which individuals could discern right from wrong, internalize moral distinctions, and assume their responsibilities within the community. For Xun Zi, education extended beyond the transmission of knowledge; it constituted a process of cultivating personality and shaping conduct in accordance with ethical norms. At the same time, Xun Zi inherited and developed Confucius's doctrine of *li* (rites), but situated it within the concrete realities of his age. He interpreted rites not merely as ceremonial observances, but as a comprehensive system of norms, codes of conduct, and value standards that regulate social relations. Functioning both as a regulator of interpersonal relationships and as a boundary restraining excessive desires, rites provided individuals with the means to moderate instinctual impulses

and to orient their behavior toward the common good. Nevertheless, Xun Zi recognized that neither education nor rites alone could fully prevent transgressions. Consequently, he incorporated the element of law (*fa*), understood as coercive authority backed by sanctions, to ensure compliance with ethical and social standards. Whereas rites work through moral suasion and self-cultivation, law guarantees order through the institutional power of the state. This emphasis aligns Xun Zi's thought in part with Legalist doctrines, a connection further reinforced by the fact that his disciples Han Fei and Li Si became influential figures in the development of Legalism.

The distinctive feature of Xun Zi's theory lies in its systematic integration of education, rites, and law into a coherent model of human transformation. While affirming that human beings are born with evil dispositions, Xun Zi maintained that through properly designed social institutions this nature could be redirected toward goodness. His position therefore avoids the extremes of pessimism, articulating instead a pragmatic vision that emphasizes the plasticity of human character under cultural, educational, and political conditions.

Philosophically, Xun Zi's doctrine stands apart from earlier Confucian thinkers and anticipates later institutional approaches to ethics and governance. Whereas Mencius asserted that education should nurture the innate “four sprouts” of goodness—compassion (*ren*), shame (*yi*), humility (*li*), and the sense of right and wrong (*zhi*)—Xun Zi denied the presence of such moral seeds. For him, human beings are born only with unregulated desires that, if unchecked, lead to disorder. The task of education, therefore, is not the cultivation of innate virtue but the imposition of discipline and transformation through external structures. This divergence created two contrasting currents within Confucianism: Mencius's optimistic reliance on the unfolding of internal moral potential, and Xun Zi's realist insistence on the shaping force of external institutions. Taken together, these two perspectives define one of the central debates in the history of Confucian moral philosophy.

Comparative Perspectives: Xun Zi, Aristotle, and Plato on Human Nature

A comparison between Aristotle's and Xun Zi's conceptions of human nature reveals both convergences and divergences in their starting assumptions and ultimate aims. Both thinkers place strong emphasis on the role of reason and education; however, their philosophical orientations differ. Aristotle characterizes human beings as "rational animals," whose nature is neither innately good nor evil. What defines humanity, for him, is the potential of reason—the faculty that enables individuals to discern, deliberate, and choose the right course of action. The realization of human potential lies in the cultivation of virtue through rational practice, which in turn leads to *eudaimonia* (true happiness or flourishing). Importantly, Aristotle maintains that virtue can only be perfected within the framework of a political community, since moral qualities are fully expressed in social life. In contrast, Xun Zi begins from the premise that "human nature is inherently evil." By this, he refers to natural inclinations such as selfishness, greed, and unchecked desires, which, if left unregulated, inevitably give rise to disorder and conflict. Yet, unlike a purely pessimistic view, Xun Zi acknowledges the existence of the "heart" (*xin*)—the cognitive and moral faculty that allows human beings to reason, evaluate, and exercise judgment. For him, this rational capacity provides the basis for transformation, provided that it is cultivated through education. Consequently, he emphasizes the institutional role of education, ritual (*li*), and law (*fa*) as indispensable instruments for reshaping human dispositions, curbing excesses, and maintaining a durable social order. Whereas Aristotle orients education toward the realization of individual flourishing and the attainment of personal excellence, Xun Zi prioritizes the improvement of human nature as a means to secure collective harmony and political stability.

A comparison with Plato further clarifies the distinctive character of Xun Zi's thought. Plato's conception of human nature is grounded in his metaphysics of the **soul**, which he holds to be immortal, preexistent, and the determinant of all values and behaviors. The soul consists of three parts—reason, spirit, and desire—with the dominance of one over the others shaping

personality and conduct. For Plato, reason must rule, guiding the soul toward knowledge, virtue, and ultimately liberation from the material world. The telos of human life, in his view, is the return of the soul to the realm of Ideas, where truth, goodness, and beauty exist in their pure forms. Education thus serves to purify the soul, cultivate virtue, and prepare individuals—particularly the ruling class of the "ideal state"—to embody wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. By contrast, Xun Zi begins from a diametrically opposed premise: human beings are born with evil tendencies, not with the seeds of virtue. Nonetheless, he insists that goodness can be attained through the structured processes of education: ritual and law. For him, moral improvement is not an inner recollection or unfolding of the soul's rational essence, but a practical outcome of social cultivation and institutional regulation. The aim of education is not only to refine the individual but more importantly to preserve social harmony and prevent disorder. Thus, while Plato emphasizes the transcendence of the soul and the pursuit of ultimate happiness through knowledge, Xun Zi underscores the pragmatic reform of human nature for the sake of political order and communal stability.

Taken together, these comparative perspectives demonstrate that, despite their distinct cultural and historical contexts, Aristotle, Plato, and Xun Zi converge in their search for an ideal model of human life and society. Aristotle highlights the teleological realization of human flourishing through reason; Plato stresses the metaphysical perfection of the soul; and Xun Zi underscores the institutional transformation of human nature. In this light, Xun Zi's doctrine stands out as a distinctive synthesis of Confucian moral cultivation and Legalist emphasis on regulation, balancing education and coercion as complementary means of shaping human conduct. Such an approach not only enriches our understanding of classical Chinese philosophy but also contributes to broader cross-cultural dialogues on human nature, morality, and the foundations of social order.

Unlike most previous studies, which have primarily examined the theory of evil from the perspectives of intellectual history or traditional ethics, this study adopts an interdis-

ciplinary approach that integrates philosophy, psychology, and sociology. By situating Xun Zi's theory in dialogue with modern psychological frameworks, the research reinterprets classical arguments through the conceptual vocabulary of contemporary science, thereby broadening the scope of academic exchange between Eastern and Western traditions.

This investigation goes beyond a mere reconstruction of the theory of evil within the context of the Warring States period. It further explores its relevance to contemporary issues, such as moral crises, the rise of deviant behavior, and the demand for comprehensive education. In doing so, the study demonstrates that the theory of evil should not be regarded solely as a historical product, but also as a meaningful reference point for educational policy and social governance.

The originality of this research also lies in its systematic comparison of Xun Zi's theory of evil with the philosophical perspectives of Confucius, Mencius, Aristotle, and Plato. Such a comparative approach not only elucidates their convergences and divergences but also highlights the universal significance and potential applicability of Xun Zi's thought across diverse cultural contexts. By analyzing the theory of evil in relation to both Eastern and Western traditions, the study positions Xun Zi not merely as a Confucian thinker of the Warring States era, but as a philosopher capable of contributing to global philosophical dialogue.

3.2. Discussion

Xun Zi's conception of human nature as fundamentally inclined toward evil presents a more realistic framework than competing perspectives that posit inherent goodness or neutrality. By acknowledging the inevitability of negative desires and tendencies within human beings, Xun Zi established a foundation for a balanced understanding of human potential. His account highlights the dual capacity of individuals: on the one hand, to cultivate morality and contribute positively to society, and on the other, to generate disorder and disruption. Rather than placing absolute confidence in an innate goodness or depending exclusively on coercive power, Xun Zi advanced a model that integrates cultural education with legal regulation. This

framework reflects a pragmatic, though not pessimistic, orientation toward human nature, recognizing both its malleability and the necessity of guidance.

A central contribution of Xun Zi's thought lies in his assertion that sustainable social order cannot rest solely upon either individual moral self-discipline or state-imposed coercion. He emphasized that education is indispensable for shaping personality and fostering moral consciousness, while law functions as a binding mechanism that enforces standards of conduct. The interaction of these two elements creates a dual system: education directs individuals toward virtuous behavior, and legal sanction restrains transgressions that exceed normative boundaries. From the standpoint of political and moral philosophy, this dual mechanism represents a theoretical model of enduring value, insofar as it illustrates the necessity of balancing "soft" instruments of governance (education, ritual) with "hard" instruments (law, sanctions).

The relevance of Xun Zi's model extends beyond its historical context. In contemporary societies, where ethical dilemmas and legal complexities are closely intertwined, his insistence on the complementarity of education and law remains highly pertinent. Moreover, his theory of evil nature underscores the transformative role of education: its purpose is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of moral character, the regulation of behavior, and the strengthening of social responsibility. In the context of globalization and the rapid diffusion of information—conditions under which young people are particularly susceptible to negative influences—Xun Zi's thought provides an important reminder. Moral education, life skills, and reflective capacities should be developed in parallel with intellectual training, ensuring that education fulfills both cognitive and ethical functions in preparing individuals for responsible participation in society.

Xun Zi's perspective underscores the necessity of harmonizing law and morality in the preservation of social order. In contemporary society, persistent issues such as legal violations, corruption, and social violence highlight the imperative of establishing a transparent and rigorous legal framework that is simultaneously connected to cultural and ethical standards. The

integration of “rite” (*li*) and “law” (*fa*) in Xun Zi’s thought provides a valuable foundation for constructing legal policies that are not only coercive but also educational, thereby fostering sustainable patterns of civic behavior. In the face of widespread moral decline and the growing prevalence of individualistic and utilitarian tendencies, Xun Zi’s theory of human evil serves as a reminder that such phenomena are not novel, but rather enduring manifestations of human nature when left unguided. His proposed solution—developing a robust educational system in conjunction with strict legal measures—retains contemporary relevance as a strategy for shaping and regulating social conduct. Moreover, applying Xun Zi’s theory of evil in comparative dialogue with Western traditions enables scholars to broaden their analytical perspectives and deepen international academic exchange. Such efforts not only introduce Eastern thought to a wider audience, but also reveal points of convergence and divergence that may enrich theoretical discourse on human nature, ethics, and governance.

Despite its significant philosophical and practical implications, Xun Zi’s theory of evil is not without limitations when situated within the modern context. His assertion that human beings are innately evil risks undermining confidence in the potential for intrinsic moral awareness and self-cultivation, thereby constraining creative thinking and social trust. Furthermore, his strong emphasis on rituals, laws, and state-administered education carries the potential danger of legitimizing centralized authority while neglecting individual freedom and autonomy. Although Xun Zi’s framework of ritual and law provides a viable mechanism for ensuring order, it does not sufficiently address the reconciliation between individual interests and collective well-being in societies characterized by plural values and diverse aspirations.

Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Xun Zi’s theory of evil, situating it within the historical and socio-political context of the Warring States period and examining it in dialogue with Eastern and Western theories of human nature. From a real-

ist standpoint, Xun Zi contended that human beings are born with negative desires and inclinations, and that goodness is not an innate quality but rather the outcome of education, the cultivation of ritual propriety, and the enforcement of law. His doctrine not only reflects a profound and pragmatic understanding of human nature but also advances a systematic model of transformation, integrating educational, cultural, and institutional mechanisms. The distinctive contribution of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which compares Xun Zi’s thought with the philosophies of Confucius, Mencius, Aristotle, and Plato. Such comparisons demonstrate the multidimensional character of debates on human nature and affirm the enduring relevance of Xun Zi’s ideas in cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

In today’s context, marked by global challenges concerning morality, governance, and education, Xun Zi’s theory of evil retains significant relevance. It underscores that the cultivation of human beings and the maintenance of social order cannot depend solely on an optimistic belief in innate goodness or on coercive authority alone. Rather, these aims require a comprehensive mechanism that harmoniously combines personality development, moral education, and legal enforcement. By reinterpreting Xun Zi’s thought in light of contemporary issues, this study contributes not only to a deeper understanding of an important intellectual legacy of early Chinese philosophy but also to its potential application in shaping modern educational, legal, and human development policies.

The findings of this research further suggest promising directions for continued inquiry. Future studies may investigate more deeply the influence of Xun Zi’s evil nature theory on the formation and evolution of other philosophical traditions, particularly Legalism. Additionally, drawing upon Xun Zi’s principles, subsequent research could propose a more comprehensive model of education that emphasizes both the cultivation of moral character and the maintenance of social order through institutional discipline.

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