Moral Emotions, Human Feelings, and Their Issuance: A Comparative Study of Ki Taesung, KobongAnd David Hume

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Abstract

When speaking of emotions in the context of Korean philosophy, it is impossible not to think of the Four–Seven debate from the mid-Chosŏn period (1392-1910). What are emotions and where do they come from? Both T'oegye (1501-1570) and Kobong's (1527-1572) debate gave rise to a new understanding of emotions in Korean Confucianism. In particular, Kobong's theories regarding the four sprouts and seven feelings, representing different aspects of the same mind, made a great contribution to this new scholarship. What made Kobong's part in the debate so interesting is his intricate psychological understanding of the issuance of moral and physical emotions. Kobong's early death meant that he hadn't the time to develop his ideas as much as he might have, and they exerted little influence outside of the realm of 'Korean' philosophy. Therefore, there have not been any comparisons between Kobong's theories and those of non-Korean philosophers. The scholar Xiusheng Liu found great similarities in his comparative study of the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) and Mencius (fourth century BCE). When reading his work, one will notice that it is not only Mencius that Hume shares similarities with, but also Kobong. This paper will examine the of Kobong as well as try to shed light on the similarities between Kobong and Hume.

Keywords: Emotions, feelings, moral philosophy, Kobong, David Hume

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Moral philosophy has always played a role in philosophical traditions throughout the ages in both the East and the West. Some of the earliest cases of moral philosophy in the Western civilization can be found among the Greek philosophers, where moral thinking centered around how to reach happiness in life, along with how to be a good person. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) followed in the philosophical traits of Socrates (ca. 470-399 BCE) and Plato (ca. 428/424 – 347/348 BCE).[1] He believed that virtues could be obtained through a constant form of practical reflection upon one's experiences, which meant one would be able to develop moral judgment through empirical learning.[2] Almost two thousand years later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) addressed the issue of moral wrongdoing and moral actions in general. Furthermore, Aquinas followed the Aristotelian route of connecting reason with moral actions.[3] Rationalist ideas were taken up by René Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704), which paved the way for rational moral philosophy taken up during the age of enlightenment.[4]

In East Asia, the earliest development of moral thought came with the rise of the Confucian tradition. Confucius (孔子, 551-479 BCE) promoted the moral virtues of filial piety (孝, C. *xiao*, K. *hyo*)[5] and brotherly love (悌, C. *ti*, K. *che*) in order to deal with the social chaos of his time.[6] Mencius (孟子, 372–289 BCE) further developed Confucius' moral ideas into a moral philosophy of human nature (性, C. *xing*, K. *sŏng*), considering one to be 'morally' endowed from birth.[7] Opposing Mencius, Xunzi (荀子 310-235 BCE.) went in another direction and developed his moral philosophy based on the notion that human nature was originally bad.[8] The Confucian tradition went through changes to deal with the rivaling philosophies of Daoism and Buddhism, which meant revising the moral issues of Classical Confucianism.[9] The great scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200) developed the theories of Mencius and ended up with a more sophisticated moral philosophy, and eventually his own school of thought.[10] The philosophy of Zhu Xi was influential in other parts of East Asia, including Korea, where the Korean scholars revised it according to their own particular interests, shaped by a different historical context.[11]

The common interest in moral philosophy often has led scholars to comparative studies, and especially comparative studies between philosophers East and West has found its way into the field of the comparative studies of philosophy. There have been comparisons made between Eastern and Western philosophical scholars, such as Confucius and Thomas Aquinas[12], Mencius and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)[13], and between Xunzi and Thomas

[1] Xiusheng Liu. *Mencius, Hume and the Foundation of Ethics* (Hampshire, 2003), 71-75.
[2] Manyul Im. "Emotional Control and Virtue in the "Mencius". *Philosophy East and West.* Vol 49:1. 1-27 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 1.
[3] Colleen McCluskey. *Thomas Aquinas on Moral Wrongdoing.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 8-10.
[4] Ronald S. Love. *The Enlightenment* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 29.
[5] Note: This paper will use both the Chinese and Korean transliteration of classical Chinese.
[6] Xinzhong Yao. *An Introduction to Confucianism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22-24.
[7] Yao. 2000. *An Introduction*, 75.
[8] Ibid., 80.
[9] Ibid., 91.
[10] Ibid., 108.
[11] Ibid., 115.
[12] Qi Zhao. "Relation-Centred Ethics in Confucius and Aquinas". *Asian Philosophy*. Vol. 23:3. 291-304 (London: Routledge, 2013).
[13] Ming-Huei Lee. "Confucianism, Kant, and Virtue Ethics", in *Confucianism, Its Roots and Global Significance*, edited by Jones, David. 92-101 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 92-101.

Hobbes (1588-1679).[14] David Hume (1711-1776) was first compared to Mencius in the article "Do Mencius and Hume Make the Same Ethical Mistake?" by Robert Boseley.[15] Xiusheng Liu compared Mencius and Hume in "Mencius, Hume, and Sensibility Theory".[16] This comparison between Hume and Mencius is compelling. However, there is another philosopher who also shares similarities with Hume - the Korean Neo-Confucian scholar Kobong Ki Taesung (高峰奇大升, 1527-1572).

The Korean philosopher Kobong and the Scottish Hume held a similar idea of how moral emotions and physical feelings are issued from the same mind, which is in contrast to the Korean philosopher T'oegye Yi Hwang (退溪李滉, 1501-1570) who believed that the four moral emotions and seven feelings are issued from two different states of mind.[17] Why and how did these two philosophers, who did not have any connection, arrive at a similar idea regarding the issuance of emotions and feelings?

This paper will focus on the similarities and differences between Kobong and David Hume's theories regarding the origin and issuance of morality and physical feelings. It will examine the theory structure of each philosopher, as well as give a brief insight into their historical contexts that might reveal why they developed their theories the way they did.

One may inquire into the relevance of this kind of philosophical comparative study: the relevance of this paper lies in the comparison itself. Comparative studies have been exercised in all fields of study from Natural Science to the Humanities.[18] Therefore, it is almost unescapable. In addition, the method of comparison helps scholars utilise and improve their understanding of certain objects of study. But comparison cannot be categorized as purely "scientific", and within humanities the method also consists of a great deal of interpretation. A study can reflect similar results on the surface, yet be very different in terms of symbolism or culture. Therefore, the importance of context plays a great part in the interpretation of the comparison, which sheds light on the *not so* obvious differences and similarities between the two compared subjects.[19]The comparative method then helps us in viewing the subjects of our study in a new light, and develops a new understanding. In this case, the goal of this study is to shed new light on the theories of Kobong and Hume, as well as, show that the question of morality has intrigued mankind despite time and continent.

The theories examined in this paper are the ones that Kobong proposed during the Four-Seven debate (四七續篇, C. *Siqi xupian* K. *Sach'il sokpyŏn* 1559-1566)[20] with T'oegye and those proposed by Hume in his *Enquiry* (1751) and *Natural History of Religion* (1757).[21] In the analysis of Kobong's theories, it is important to notice that the four sprouts (sometimes referred to as the four beginnings) are considered emotions since they are thought to be a part of the *dao*-mind (道心, C. *dao xin,* K. *tosim*) and are bestowed by heaven to us in our

[14] Sungmoon Kim. "From Desire to Civility: Is Xunzi a Hobbesian?" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy,* Vol 10:3. 293-309 (Springer, 2011), 291-309.
[15] Richard Bosley. "Do Mencius and Hume Make the Same Ethical Mistake?" *Philosophy East and West,* Vol. 28:01. 3-18 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988).
[16] Xiusheng Liu. "Mencius, Hume, and Sensibility Theory". *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 52:1. 75- 97 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).
[17] Edward Y.J Chung. *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye And Yi Yulgok – A Reappraisal of the "Four-Seven Thesis" and Its Implications for Self-Cultivation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 55.
[18] Paul Roscoe. "The Comparative Method", in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal. 25-46 (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 25.
[19] Roscoe. "The Comparative Method", 31-33.
[20] Bongrae Seok refers to this debate as 사단칠정논쟁/四端七情論爭, *Sadan ch'iljŏng nonjaeng,* in his article in this volume of IJAS 5.
[21] Peter K.Westergaard. *Kritik og tro – Hume, Kant, Nietzche, og Wittgenstein* (Copenhagen: Eksistensen, 2016), 11.

'original' nature. They work as instincts. The seven feelings, on the other hand, are triggered by external events and are thereby considered a part of the physical/human nature (人性, C. *ren xing*, K. *in sŏng*).[22]

Lastly, I would like to point out that I am well aware of the pitfalls of comparing a Korean philosopher with a Western one. Not only do they come from two completely different cultures, but they also use two different kinds of language. The Four-Seven debate was written in classical Chinese, which was a written language only in the Korean context of that time, leading to various options when translating, depending on each character's grammatical position, leaving much to the interpretation of the translator.[23] In order to deal with this issue in a broader manner, all quotations will be compared with the widely known translation of the Four-Seven Debate by Michael Kalton.[24]

Before moving onto the analysis of Kobong and Hume's theories, I will give a brief overview of the background from where their theories grew. Kobong's theories matured out of the controversial debate with T'oegye, and Hume's from the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment.

The Four-Seven Debate

The Korean Neo-Confucian tradition, which Kobong was a part of, grew out of the Chinese Neo-Confucianism of the Cheng-Zhu school. During the Chinese Song dynasty (860-1279) the Confucian tradition developed rapidly with various theories and ideas. Zhu Xi systematized the major theories including the theories of the Cheng brothers: Cheng Yi (程頤, 1033-1107) and Cheng Hao (程顥, 1032-1085).[25]The Cheng-Zhu school was introduced to Korea during the Koryŏ dynasty (高麗, 918-1392) where it co-existed with Buddhism until the following Chosŏn dynasty (朝鮮, 1392-1910) when it gained a more central place within Korean elitist scholarship. It was especially Zhu Xi's ideas on human nature that intrigued the Korean Confucian scholars, and which became a salient theme in Korean Neo-Confucianism.[26]

Prior to the debate in question, the Chosŏn scholars had been hit by internal turmoil when the two different scholarly factions of *Sarim* (士林) and *Hungu* (勳舊) ended up becoming political enemies, and tried to suppress each other in the fight for power. There were four instances of violent purges that happened before the *Sarim* faction was able to gain political power: in 1498, 1504, 1519, and 1545.[27] The purge of 1519 had a deep impact on Kobong's family and his upbringing. His uncle was executed for being part of the *Sarim* faction, so the family had to flee southwards into hiding.[28] Despite being members of the same faction, several prominent scholars, such as T'oegye and Kobong were able to keep

[22] This kind of distinction, between emotions and feelings, was similar to what was proposed by William James (1842-1901) in his article on emotions. See James, William. "What is Emotions". *Mind.* Vol. 9:34 (United Kingdom, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1884).
[23]Archie Barnes; Don Starr & Ormerod Graham. *Du's Handbook of Classical Chinese* (United Kingdom: Alcuin Academics, 2009), XIII-XV.
[24] Michael C. Kalton. *The Four-Seven Debate – An Annotatated Translation of The Most Famous Controversy In Korean Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: State University Of New York Press, 1994).
[25] Yao. *An Introduction,* 105.
[26] Kevin N. Cawley. *Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 64-65.
[27] Jae-eun Kang. *The Land of Scholars – Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism* (Seoul: Hangilsa Publishing Co. 2003), 261-264.
[28] Young-chan Choi. "Who is Gobong Gi Daesung", in *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung.* 9-16 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 9-10.

their scholarly position in the government after the last purge in 1545, with Kobong trying to recover the reputation of the faction. [29]

The Four-Seven debate, which has been deemed the most important debate within Korean Neo-Confucianism by some scholars, was proof of the level of maturity that Korean Confucianism reached during the middle of the Chosŏn dynasty.[30] The arguments of the debate were taken up during two rounds of correspondences, with the first round between T'oegye Yi Hwang and Kobong Ki Taesung, who also instigated the debate. The second round was carried out by Yulgok Yi I (栗谷李珥, 1536-1584) and Ugye Sŏnghon (牛溪成渾, 1535-1598). Though T'oegye and Yulgok are typically the scholars associated with the debate, they never directly debated with each other.[31] The debate between T'oegye and Kobong took place between 1559 and 1566, and Yulgok and Ugye's debate took place between 1572 and 1573: Yulgok ended up taking up Kobong's points and Ugye T'oegye's.[32]

The theoretical foundation of the debate came from the Confucian canon as well as from the more metaphysical theories of Zhu Xi. The four sprouts (四端, C. *si duan*, K. *sadan*)[33] and seven feelings (七情, C. *qi qing*, K. *ch'iljŏng*)[34], which I will return to later, originated from famous passages in the canon, with the former from *Mencius* (孟子) and the latter from the *Book of Rites* (禮集, C. *Liji*, K. *ryejip*).[35] The four sprouts were described in the following terms linked to virtues: the feeling of commiseration is the sprout of benevolence (仁, C. *ren*, K. *in*), the feeling of shame and dislike is the sprout of righteousness (義, C. *yi*, K. *ŭi*), the feeling of modesty and compliance is the sprout of propriety (禮, C. *li*, K. r*ye*) and the feeling of approving and disapproving is the sprout of wisdom (智, C. *zhi*, K. *chi*).[36] Meanwhile, the seven feelings were described as joy (喜, C. *xi*, K. *hŭi*), anger (怒, C. *nu*, K. *no*), sadness (哀, C. *ai*, K. *ae*), fear (懼, C. *wei*, K. *ku*), love (愛, C. *ai*, K. *ae*), hate (惡, C. è, K. *ak*), and desire (欲, C. *yu*, K. *yok*).[37]

Combined with these passages were the theories of Zhu Xi regarding *Principle* (理, C. *li*, K. *li*) and the material force (氣, C. *qi*, K. *ki*,), which were believed to be the forces that constituted the world. *Principle* is the organisnig agent behind all the things of the universe, and the material force is the agent that materializes it. Zhu Xi links these metaphysical elements to human nature and believes that human nature consists of a heavenly nature directed by *Principle*, which becomes linked to the four sprouts, and a physical nature directed by the material force and the seven feelings.[38] It was the connections between *Principle* and the material force, and then the four and the seven that Kobong questioned later on.

The legacy of the debate, not only shaped the later works of T'oegye and Yulgok, but secured them spots among the great masters of Korean Neo-Confucianism. T'oegye founded

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[29] Kang. *The Land of Scholars*, 276-278.
[30] Cawley. *Religious and Philosophical Traditions*, 84- 85.
[31] Ibid., 86.
[32] Kalton. *The Four-Seven Debate*, XXIX-XXX.
[33] James Legge (trans). *The Works of Mencius.* (Clarendon Press: Oxford. 1861), available at*:* https://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i (accessed on 11/12/19).
[34] James Legge (trans). *Book of Rites*. Li Yun:18 (Clarendon Press: Oxford. 1885), available at*:* https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun (accessed on 11/12/19).
[35] Kang. *The Land of Scholars*, 282.
[36] Legge, James (trans) *The Works of Menicus*. 2A:6, available at:.https://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i (accessed on 11/12/19).
[37] Legge, James. *Book of Rites*. Li Yun:18, available at*:* https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun (accessed on 19/12/19).
[38] Yao. *An Introduction*, 106-107.

the Yŏngnam school (嶺南學派, K. *Yŏngnamhakp'a*), which emphasized the study of *Principle,* and Yulgok founded the Kiho school (畿湖學派, K. *Kihohakp'a*) where the emphasis of the study was placed on the material force.[39] Furthermore, the Four-Seven debate laid the foundation for other debates that played an important role in the later development of Korean Neo-Confucianism.[40]

Kobong Ki Taesung and the question of the issuance of morals

The Four-Seven debate started with Kobong being critical of his senior, T'oegye's commentary on another fellow scholar, Ch'uman's (秋巒, 1509-1561) 'Diagram of the Mandate of Heaven' (天命圖說, C. *Tian ming tu shuo,* K. *Ch'ŏnmyŏng tosŏl*).[41] The matter Kobong responded to, was the postulate that the four sprouts were issued from *Principle,* while the seven feelings were issued from the material force, which became the *Locus Classicus* of the debate. It was this dualist view that Kobong could not agree with.[42] When T'oegye heard about his junior's criticism, he wrote to Kobong and proposed a deeper discussion of the matter.[43]

Already in the first letter of response, Kobong clarifies his argument against T'oegye's suggested dualism. He proposed a more monistic view of how to interpret the four sprouts and the seven feelings. Kobong stated his first argument as follows:

> However, if we humbly inspect it, then the words of Zi Shi are speaking about it in the way of its entirety; and Mencius's discussion is speaking about it in the way of singling out [the good side]. For when the human mind is not yet aroused, then it is called the nature; when it has been aroused, then it is called feelings; then the nature does not have evil, and the feelings have good and evil, such is a concrete principle. However, between the discussions of Zi Shi and Mencius, they are not the same. Therefore, it only means that the four sprouts and the seven feelings are distinct, but it does not also mean that there are four sprouts outside of the seven feelings.[44]

By saying the four and seven are distinct and yet not necessarily stand-alone from each other, Kobong begins to build up his theory of how the mind (心, C. *xin*, K. *sim*) is a combined form of *Principle* and material force. It is in such a mind that the feelings, both heavenly and physical, manifest.[45] This way of viewing the four sprouts and the seven

[39] Kang. *The Land of Scholars,* 281.
[40] Philip J. Ivanhoe. *Three Streams: Confucian Reflection on Learning and the Moral Heart-Mind in China, Korea, and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2016), 88-89.
[41] Chung. *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye And Yi Yulgok,* 53.
[42] Kang. *The Land of Scholars,* 282.
[四端理之發,七情氣之發] Translation is my own.
[43] Kalton. *The Four-Seven Debate, XXIX.*
[44] 四七理氣往復書 (1559-1566) Kobong's first letter (A1b) [然竊嘗攷之, 子思之言, 所謂道其全者; 而孟子之論, 所謂剔撥出來者也. 蓋人心未發, 則謂之性; 已發, 則謂之情, 而性則無不善, 情則有善惡, 此乃固然之理也. 但子思孟子所就以言之者, 不同. 故有四端七情之別耳, 非七情之外復有四端也.] Translation by Ngo Dang Toan and Maria Hasfeldt (2016).
[45] Euidong Hwang." Gobong understands on the world and a human being" [sic] *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung.* 17-34 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 25-26.

feelings, as well as the *Principle* and the material force, were very much different from the common belief in Korean Neo-Confucianism, where these elements were all seen in a dualist relationship, and the mind was not a combined/whole nature, but rather divided into heavenly and human nature.[46] Hence, Kobong understood that in Chinese Confucianism the four and the seven were viewed as an extension of each other, with the four sprouts as 'original/inherent' good, and the seven as the more unstable aspects of the moral mind, that could potentially be good, *but* also evil.[47] As seen above, it is very much this notion that Kobong uses as his main argument in his critique of T'oegyes stark division of the emotions and feelings. In the case of moral emotions, Kobong agreed with T'oegye that the four sprouts were morally distinctive, but were still a subset of the seven feelings. They could be categorized as such due to their "suddenness", as Philip J. Ivanhoe calls it.[48] This form of "suddenness" is presented by Mencius in the story of the child falling into a well.[49]

Another point in the discussion regarding the relationship between the four and the seven was the machinations of *Principle* and the material force. T'oegye believed the four sprouts to be purely a result of *Principle*, and the seven feelings a manifestation of the material force, so that when *Principle* was in operation, the material force would simply follow accordingly.[50] Kobong insisted that the material force also manifested itself, not only in regards to the seven feelings, but also with the four sprouts since they were combined.[51]

Despite T'oegye acknowledging Kobong's stand on the connection of the four and seven, and the working of *Principle* and the material force, Kobong wanted to make his argument stronger and proposed the possibility of the four emotions to be in disharmony (不中節, C. *bu zhong jie*, K. *p'ujungchŏl,*).[52]This was stated in reference to the first part of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸, C. *Zhong yong*, K. *Chungyong*), which stated: "Zi Shi said: "When the joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are not yet aroused, it is called equilibrium; when they have been aroused and are in control, it is called harmony."[53] According to Kobong, if the four and seven all were part of the combination of *Principle* and the material force, the four like the seven would have states of equilibrium and harmony. Thus, it was possible for the four sprouts to be in disharmony if not cultivated and controlled.[54] In the postscript of his second letter to T'oegye he explains:

> And yet, how is it possible for the four sprouts all to be good without exception? This is exactly the issue that those who study should make an exact examination of. If one does not distinguish between what is true and false, and only considers them to be good without exception, then the problem of recognizing people's desires as Heavenly *Principle*, would become

[46] Kalton. *The Four-Seven Debate*, 4.
[47] Weon-ki Yoo. "The problem of the Sadanpujungjŏ 四端不中節 in the Four-Seven Debate". *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 66.3. 805-817 (Hawai'I:University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 808. Also see Cawley, *Religious and Philosophical Traditions*, 86-87.
[48] Ivanhoe. *Three Stream*, 80.
[49] Legge. *The Works of Mencius*. 2A:6, available at: https://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i (accessed on 19/12/19).
[50] Philip J. Ivanhoe. "The Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Four-Seven Debate" *Philosophy East and West*.Vol. 65.2. 401-429 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 408-409
[51] Hwang." Gobong understands on the world and a human being" [sic], 25-27.
[52] Ivanhoe. "The Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Four-Seven Debate", 408.
[53] 四七理氣往復書 (1559-1566) Kobong's first letter (A1b) [子思曰, "喜怒哀樂之未發, 謂之中; 發而皆中節, 謂之和.] Translation by Ngo Dang Toan and Maria Hasfeldt (2016).
[54] Kyunho Kim. "Gobong's Theory on the moral Self-cultivation", in *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung*. 35-74 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 50.

> indescribable. What do you think? Thus, what I have presented earlier came from the notion that each of the four sprouts is a matter of *Principle,* and because of that, good. But now, I am speaking of the issuance of the four sprouts that also can be in disharmony. These words may contradict each other, I can imagine that (you) Sir, would find it strange.[55]

By this point, Kobong not only challenged T'oegye's way of understanding the origin and characteristics of the moral emotions but also challenged the general Confucian view of the four sprouts being originally good since they were heavenly endowed and part of nature: bestowed by Heaven (天, C. *tian,* K. *ch'ŏn*), as Mencius had stated it.[56] The reason for this proposal has its roots in how Kobong perceived reality. He believed that Mencius' claim on how to cultivate the four sprouts and the path to sagehood did not reflect what he saw in the actions of regular people. Furthermore, he noted that there had been very few sages throughout history compared to regular people![57]In sum, Kobong believed that the four moral inclinations could be obstructed by external feelings and hindered. It is important to note that, he did not say that they could become evil, rather than their "suddenness" could be blocked before being issued.[58] T'oegye never accepted this proposal, not because what Kobong proposed was wrong, but rather because of their understanding of the terms K. *chongchŏl* and K. *puchungchŏl* (中節, C. *zhong jie* / 不中節, C. *bu Zhong jie*). According to Woen-ki Yoo, the two scholars understood these characters differently, and therefore could not settle this matter. For T'oegye it meant equilibrium and non-equilibrium, as for Kobong, it was interpreted as harmony and disharmony before arousal. Furthermore, it was not just the readings of the characters and understanding of the metaphysical elements that made this controversy so extensive and hard to settle. Yoo adds to the matter:

> Moreover, the discrepancy between Kobong and T'oegye is due to their different understanding of existence in reality and existence in thought. Kobong does not distinguish between them. In other words, he believes that what applies to existence in reality also applies to existence in thought.[59]

Kobong's understanding of reality and thought might have been a result of his own experience with Confucian ideals. Kobong faced a real struggle when it came to self-cultivation and the search for sagehood. He had a hard and tragic upbringing and was known to be rough, and to have a very strong personality. Among his contemporary peers and seniors, he was known to be of 'immature' moral nature. Despite Kobong's talents with a pen and intellect, he had a problem with alcohol, which T'oegye often urged him to put under control.[60] Due to Kobong's family falling victim to the literati purges, he had to grow up

[55] 四七理氣往復書 (1559-1566) Kobong's second letter (A25b-A26a) [又烏可以爲四端無不善耶? 此正學者精察之地, 若不分眞妄而但以爲無不善, 則其認人欲而作天理者, 必有不可勝言者, 如何如何? 然大升前[前一本作從]來所陳皆以四端爲理爲善, 而今又以爲四端之發亦有不中節者, 其語自相矛盾, 想先生更以爲怪也.] Translation by Ngo Dang Toan and Maria Hasfeldt (2016).

[56] Yoo. "The problem of the Sadanpujungjŏ 四端不中節 in the Four-Seven Debate", 811-812.

[57] Ivanhoe. "The Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Four-Seven Debate", 409.

[58] Kalton. .*The Four-Seven Debate,* 82.

[59] Yoo. "The problem of the Sadanpujungjŏ 四端不中節 in the Four-Seven Debate", 812.

[60] Kim. "Gobong's Theory on the moral Self-cultivation", 39-4.

under harsh circumstances, but overcame those issues in the end.[61] All of Kobong's shortcomings led his colleagues to see him as unfit for office, however, he was offered several positions in the government on the recommendation of T'oegye.[62] Kobong was a very rational thinker and viewed reality likewise. Reality was to be perceived as it was felt. The dualist way of viewing the world was not what he experienced. He saw it as one thing, where all feelings and moral emotions were entangled in one big bundle.[63] His struggle with orthodox self-cultivation was a reflection of it. The strategy for self-cultivation of his time did not, in his opinion, reflect reality and he deemed it not fit for the common man.[64]

At the end of the debate, Kobong wrote T'oegye a general summary of the issue they had debated over the previous seven years. In the letter, he wrote that he had reflected on the issues and largely agreed with T'oegye's views.[65] It is believed by some scholars that even though Kobong ended up agreeing with T'oegye to a large degree, he never changed the core of his theories.[66] Yet, others believe that he agreed with T'oegye in the end, and a proof of that is the similarities between Kobong's last viewpoints of the debate and the view T'oegye presented in his magnum opus the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* (聖學十圖, C. *Sheng xue shi tu*, K. *Sŏnghak sipto*).[67] However, this is still debated until the present.

Kobong died at only 45 years of age, and throughout his short career, he developed very unique theories and raised critical questions regarding vague, ambiguous points in the theories of the Neo-Confucian school. Kobong is often described as being stuck in the shadow of T'oegye during the debate, but on the contrary, I believe, he has been lost in the shadow of Yulgok who took up Kobong's points and continued the debate with Ugye, a few years after the passing of both T'oegye and Kobong. Yulgok developed Kobong's theories and established the Kiho branch on top of that.[68] Kobong's role as a bridge between T'oegye and Yulgok provided the opportunity for the division of the schools, which makes him integral to the understanding of the development of the Neo-Confucian tradition in Korea.[69]

The British Enlightenment

During the middle of the eighteenth-century, Scotland joined the rest of Great Britain in the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. Being a new asset to the British empire, Scotland had to accept the new political system and had to redefine its identity. The Scottish movement of the Enlightenment became a part of this redefined identity.[70] In Scotland, the intellectual movements took place at the university and other institutions, which was the crucial thing that set it apart from the English Enlightenment. The English enlightenment was much more an urban movement, where the literati met at the London coffee houses to

[61] Namyuk Cho. "Gobong's Perception of Reality and Political Philosophy", in *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung.* 189-218 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 190-191.
[62] Shinhwan Kwak. "Gobong's Academic Characteristics and Position Within the History of Joseon Confucanism", in *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung.* 109-144 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 137-138.
[63] Yoo. "The problem of the Sadanpujungjŏ 四端不中節 in the Four-Seven Debate", 81.
[64] Kim. "Gobong's Theory on the moral Self-cultivation", 70.
[65] Michael C. Kalton. *The Four-Seven*, 101.
[66] Ibid., 108.
[67] Kyoonseop Park. "Gobong Gi Daeseung's Philosophy on Education", in *Research on Gobong Gi Daesung.* 169-187 (Daejŏn: Ehwa Press Co. 2012), 185-187
[68] Chung. *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye And Yi,* 187.
[69] Kwak. "Gobong's Academic Characteristics and Position Within the History of Joseon Confucanism", 141.
[70]Alexander Broadie. *The Scottish Enlightenment – The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2007), 17-18.

share their thoughts and opinions.[71] At the same time in Scotland, the literati community flourished among the aristocratic and bourgeoise class and these social circles produced several prominent writers, with David Hume as one of the most famous.[72]

The Enlightenment had its birth in Britain, and quickly moved to France and then to the rest of Europe. The main interest of the British movement was natural law, how the human being placed itself in the world, and reason. Moreover, at least in the British empire, the literati enjoyed free speech, openly questioning religion, the traditional institutions, and morals.[73] The Scots also enjoyed this freedom of speech, which resulted in philosophies that concerned everything from morality to the economy. Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and Hume were the most internationally read. Despite the Scots being part of an international community of enlightening literati, the movement also embodied their own national characteristics.[74] The urge to take part in the intellectual movement and contribute to high culture came from the experience of losing the royal court and the Scottish position in the English parliament, not to mention the poor economy Scotland had been left with after the failure of setting up a colony in Panama.[75] Scotland used the enlightenment to boost its national identity, as well as to show the international community what they believed was *to be Scottish*.[76] But at the same time, the literati, including Hume, were very much conscious about writing in 'correct' and 'proper' English, in order to be able to publish outside of Scotland.[77]

Philosophy of reason played a big role during the British Enlightenment. The literati called themselves *philosophes*, the French for philosophers, and it became a synonym for the members of the movement.[78] John Locke (1632-1704) and Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) in the century prior had laid the foundation for the skeptical and empirical philosophy that dominated the eighteenth century. Newton's scientific and philosophical approach to natural law and the human mind started a new way of viewing the human being. Locke was inspired by his peer, and developed his own theories regarding human nature and the psyche.[79] Locke implied that human nature was born originally as a blank slate (*Tabula Rasa*), and therefore humans had the possibility to improve their own condition, which was a stark contrast to the Christian notion of being born innately flawed.[80] This type of thinking appealed to the *philosophes,* who took it further, and developed a type of philosophy that rejected the Christian religion, and sought out to observe the natural world and the human being's place in it.[81] Furthermore, another factor that influenced the *philosophes* was the maritime trade of the period: the access to travel literature gave them the chance to gain knowledge of non-Western cultures and philosophies. Chinese travel literature and philosophical texts were favored.[82] In his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" from *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Hume showed that he was well-read in such texts by referring to the Confucian tradition and Confucius (551 BCE - 479 BCE) himself. [83] Combined with the insight of new

[71] BBC. *In Our Time – The British Enlightenment.* (9:30-10:40. 2001),
available at*:* https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p005479m. (accessed on 17/12/19)
[72] Broadie. *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 19-20.
[73] Love. *The Enlightenment*, 2-4.
[74] Broadie. *The Scottish*, 37-39.
[75] Ibid., 27.
[76] Ibid., 37.
[77] Richard B. Sher. *The Enlightenment & the Book - Scottish authors & their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, & America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 52.
[78] Love. 2008. *The Enlightenment*, 25.
[79] Ibid., 27.
[80] Ibid., 31-32.
[81] Ibid., 35-36.
[82] Ibid., 12-14.
[83] Westergaard. *Kritik og tro*, 23, 31, 113.

cultures and philosophies, and the early empiricism of Locke, a new epistemological and skeptical philosophy of reason was born.[84]

David Hume and innate benevolence

Like Kobong, the Scottish philosopher David Hume presented new theories regarding the human psyche, the self, and religion. He based his theories upon empirical knowledge and stayed away from metaphysics since it was not based on rationality.[85] Throughout his career, Hume wrote extensive works in which he explored and revised his theories. With his great interest in human nature, he also developed theories regarding morality and human sentiment.[86]

Unlike Kobong, who was able to present his main theories within one debate, Hume's theories are scattered around in his various works. Finding his structure has proven to be a difficult task. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, a comparison between Hume and Mencius already has been done. I will start my analysis of Hume's theories in the same place where I started with Kobong - the Mencian idea of the four sprouts. They are what Hume, like Mencius, believed the human being is born with.[87]

Hume's understanding of feelings and emotion starts with the emotion of benevolence. He believed that like the four sprouts, benevolence was one of the fundamental parts of our nature and was innate. From this emotion, the moral sentiment would rise. The notion of approval and disapproval were some of the sentiments that could stir moral emotions within the human being.[88] The moral emotions were something the human being felt, and were issued from how the mind dealt with the different impressions and reflections it experienced. Hume calls these *impressions of reflections*. The impressions would be experienced through the physical senses and feelings, which then would grow as an idea within the mind and then develop into a reflection upon how other people would feel in the same situation.[89] In line with Kobong, Hume believed the human mind consisted of one single entity. Even though the moral emotion of benevolence also has another status compared to physical feelings, yet, it is still an emotion that comes from human nature. Showing benevolence "universally expresses the highest merit, which *human nature* is capable of attaining."[90]According to Liu, Hume believed that benevolence was the unifying factor of the human mind, since all other feelings and impressions would gather in a bundle around this moral emotion.[91]

The physical feelings were driven by passions or impulses stirred by external events. Among these physical feelings were joy, happiness, sorrow, and suffering, which hold some similarities with the Confucian seven feelings.[92] Passions were considered selfish and were a counterpoint to the moral virtues of benevolence and sympathy that were considered social dispositions.[93]These selfish passions were considered to make all our actions motivated by

[84] Love. *The Enlightenment*, 37-28, 43-44.
[85] Liu. *Mencius, Hume*, 75.
[86] J.C.A. Gaskin. *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978), 2.
[87] David Hume. *Enquiries: Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning The Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Shelby-Bigge (United Kingdom: Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1951), 176.
[88] Maria Hasfeldt. *Godhjertethed: Et komparativt studie i Hume og Mencius' moralfilosofi,* (Denmark, University of Copenhagen, 2019), 5.
[89] Liu. *Mencius, Hume*, 24-25.
[90] Hume. *Enquiries*, 176.
[91] Liu. *Mencius, Hume*, 100.
[92] Hume. *Enquiries*, 220.
[93] Ibid., 281.

feelings, and often the mind would not realize we had a certain feeling before one was in the middle of the action itself. However, Hume also discussed the possibility of the mind working on its own without external influence, which could result in pure thoughts and feelings.[94] These pure instinctive feelings share characteristics with the working of the four sprouts and *Principle*. Yet, the mind only has the possibility to act like that and does not necessarily do it all the time. Furthermore, the feeling of benevolence one might experience can be different in intensity towards other individuals. As Liu puts it: "For example, one may find herself often extending sympathy to her friend but not quite as often to a stranger."[95] One of the reasons for this kind of graded benevolence was due to the fact that all humans felt and experienced things differently, and that makes the manifestation of benevolence unique to each person.[96]

Hume believed that, even though all humans reacted differently towards their physical feelings and moral inclination, we all had the capacity to develop and control our feelings and emotions, and this would not only be a source for happiness, but also help one to contribute to society.[97] When feelings are controlled, the social virtue of benevolence can then extend beyond the selfish feelings, and lead to the graded extension of the benevolence of regular humans.

> Upon the whole, then, it seems undeniable, that nothing can bestow more merit on any human creature than the sentiment of benevolence in an eminent degree; and that a part, at least, of its merit arises from the tendency to promote the interest of our species, and bestow happiness on human society.[98]

Hume believed that if man could have full control over his feelings and moral emotions, he would be able to freely choose the foundations of his happiness, which in the mind of Hume was in the demonstration of benevolence, good-will, and kindness to his society. Even though everyone had strong feelings like jealousy, man should make an effort to stay on the path of virtue.[99] Like the Confucian scholars, such as Mencius and Kobong, he was aware of the need for self-cultivation.[100]

> It appears also, that, in our general approbation of character and manners, the useful tendency of the social virtues moves us not by any regards to self-interest, but has an influence much more universal and extensive. It appears that a tendency to public good, and to the promoting of peace and harmony, and order in society, does always, by affecting by the benevolent principles of our frame, engage us on the side of the social virtues.[101]

It was when cultivating oneself that one would feel an even greater need to do public good, benevolence would not only be issued by instincts, but would also be performed as a

[94] Oliver Sensen. "Kant and Hume on Feelings in Moral Philosophy". In *Kant and the Scottish Enlightenment,* edited by Elizabeth Robinson & Chris W. Surprenant. 25-141 (U.S.A, New York: Routledge, 2017), 131-132.
[95] Liu. *Mencius, Hume,* 104.
[96] Ibid., 102.
[97] Hasfeldt. *Godhjertethed,* 6.
[98] Hume. *Enquiries,* 181.
[99] Ibid., 281-282.
[100] Ibid., 219.
[101] Hume. *Enquiries,* 231. Hasfeldt. *Godhjertethed,* 7.

conscious act. Self-cultivation, however, was not a one-time-only event, it was an ongoing process that came from our empirical knowledge and experiences. "Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where our sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable."[102] Like when you learn a language and by trying you learn how to correct the grammatical or phonetic mistakes, one had to be able to correct one's sentiments through experience, but Hume was clearly aware that it was hard work and took a lot of patience. Here he introduces the corrective role of reason. Reason itself was not a part of one's morality, rather it guided the human mind and feelings in the proper direction when needed.[103] It corrected the inequalities of morality and the passions. These inequalities could block the proper moral emotions and let the passions run amok.[104] According to Liu, Hume's use of reasoning as a corrective tool can prove to be a bit vague, which might be a result of Hume never actually giving proper guidelines for how to go about self-cultivation. The only thing he states in his works is this regard, is that reason plays the correcting role.[105]

The Confucian scholars believed that self-cultivation was a necessity in order to prevent the seven feelings from falling to the side of evil. Hume never directly talked about evil, but rather discusses something he called "moral turpitude."[106] This moral turpitude was a possibility in all human beings and if the selfish feelings and desires were allowed to run wild, they would obscure the distinction between moral good and evil.[107] Another thing, he felt, that could block the moral qualities of human beings was religion. Hume was highly critical of religion and dedicated a whole section on how religion had a bad influence on moral emotions in his work *Natural History of Religion.*[108] He underscored that religion was pure superstition and burdensome, and that the practice of religion took up so much more energy than moral practice, which would also diverge man away from the path of virtue.[109]

Hume's idea can be linked with those of John Locke (1632-1704).[110] He marked himself as a formidable philosopher and critic of religion, and the harbinger of the Copernican turn within religious philosophy a few years before Kant fully developed it.[111]As a young adult, he began to read the works of John Locke, which were the trend during the early eighteenth century.[112] Hume took a large interest in Locke's theories and from there began to develop further the skeptical philosophy of Locke. He finalised the rejection of metaphysics that Locke started during his lifetime and from there began developing his own empiricism regarding the human psyche.[113] Furthermore, Hume took inspiration from Hutcheson's moral sense theory. Like Hume, Hutcheson believed that the senses had a constant influence on the human mind, and that reason was a part of morality.[114] From the influence of Locke and Hutcheson, Hume was able to form very controversial and visionary philosophies, not only regarding morality and the human mind, but also on various other

[102] David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature,* edited by David Fate Norton & Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 582.
[103] Liu. *Mencius, Hume,* 105.
[104] Ibid., 30.
[105] Ibid., 31.
[106] Hume. *Enquiries,*100-101.
[107] Ibid., 225-226.
[108] Hume. 1757. *Natural History of Religion,* edited by A. Wayne Colver (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976).
[109] Hume. *Natural History of Religion,* 86-88.
[110] Thomas Krogh. *Empirisme og Kapitalisme* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1978), 8.
[111] Westergaard. *Kritik og tro,* 7-9.
[112] David O'Connor. *Hume on Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.
[113] Krogh. *Empirisme og Kapitalisme,* 196-197.
[114] Ibid., 182-183.

topics such as religion.[115] In line with Kobong, Hume made a name for himself due to his original thinking and his constant observation of the natural world. According to O'Connor, Hume believed that it was impossible to provide "good evidence for our basic beliefs about the world or for our system of such beliefs, but that does not mean that we should or, for that matter, could abandon them."[116] This position is what made Hume stand out from his peers as well as laying the foundation for his critical philosophy of religion.

Similarities and differences

With more than 150 years and a continent separating these two scholars, the similarities in their theories concerning moral emotions and physical feelings are very intriguing. It is not surprising that Hume would have similarities with the theories proposed in the Four-Seven debate due to his similarities with the moral philosophy of Mencius. What is surprising, however, is the similarities he has with Kobong and not T'oegye, who was more orthodox in his Confucian thinking. In order to show the similarities and differences between Hume and Kobong, I will compare their theories on moral emotions, physical feelings, self-cultivation, and context.

Both scholars agree on human nature having the innate capacity to become moral, as we have just seen: it was the inclination of benevolence for Hume and the four sprouts for Kobong. These sprouts were first introduced in *The Mencius*, which was a main text emphasised in the Neo-Confucian tradition Kobong belonged to.[117] I have earlier argued that there is a possibility that Hume may even have read parts or all of *The Mencius*, considering that he had knowledge of travel journals and philosophical texts from China which were circling Europe during the period of Enlightenment.[118] Meanwhile, Kobong argues that the human mind is a single entity composed of *Principle* and the material force, as well as the four and the seven! They are all interdependent and cannot be without each other. The four and the seven interact with each other within the same mind, and they can all be good and/or bad. Hume, in line with Kobong, believes the moral emotion has a special status because it is inborn and therefore also central to the human mind. Hume proposes that physical feelings or passions are stirred by external things and motivate our actions, which sounds similar to the material force and external stimuli having a say in the arousal of the four sprouts and the seven feelings. Because of this, the four and the seven can be in disharmony and be blocked or aroused unevenly, which leads to not acting morally or being swayed by physical feelings. Hume is aware of this issue too, and proposes that reason is a correcting agent that helps the human mind to deal with the possible disharmony of emotions and passions.

In order for human beings to deal with the possibility of disharmony and inequality, both scholars argue that self-cultivation is a necessity. As we have seen above, self-cultivation is an on-going process that requires hard work. Kobong believed that the methods of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation did not suit the common person, and considered other methods that would be more beneficial. Hume, on the other hand, stressed the necessity for self-cultivation, but never gave distinct guidelines for it, besides focusing on one's reasoning.

The matter regarding good and evil among the emotions and feelings of the human mind were not necessarily different between Hume and Kobong. Rather, Hume never talked about the possibility of passions that could become evil or good. However, he did discuss how the mind could produce pure thoughts and feelings. But, would these "pure thoughts" be considered as purely good? I would suggest that Hume has a similar view to Kobong's,

[115] Ibid., 198-199.
[116] O'Connor. *Hume on Religion*, 12.
[117] Yao. *An Introduction*, 118-119.
[118] Hasfeldt. *Godhjertethed,* 15-16.

that when the benevolent feeling is issued before thinking or action, it seems to embody the same "suddenness" as we see in Kobong's discussions on the sprouts that Ivanhoe refers to, mentioned previously, since it seems to overrule the passions in the heat of the moment. Oliver Sensen also discusses this, drawing on the famous passage from *The Mencius*: "Imagine you see a child falling into a pool. Your only thought might be: "she needs help." But even if you jump immediately to save the child, you would later admit that there was the feeling of panic, although it was not in your mind at the time."[119] This reading by Sensen could, to some degree, resonate with Hume's understanding of immediate benevolence, which is similar to the sudden issuance of the sprouts, considered purely good by Mencius, T'oegye, and Kobong. In Kobong's view, evil plays a lesser part in his theories because he saw it differently than many Confucians of his time. He saw it more as an imbalance or disturbance in the mind, which blocked the equilibrium and harmony in the four and the seven.[120]In line with Kobong, Hume did not directly talk about good and evil. Like the Confucian scholars, he believed evil was a part of human nature and was attached to the physical feelings and selfish desires. They could gain so much power that man would have his benevolent nature blocked. However, what sets Hume apart from Kobong are his theories regarding religion and morality. Hume's cogitation regarding religion as a factor that pollutes moral sentiment takes the moral question to another level, and was a part of a greater trend of his time. The question about religion and morals was never addressed in the Four-Seven debate since it was not an issue in the Neo-Confucian tradition.

The backgrounds of Kobong and Hume were very different. Kobong had to deal with a harsh childhood and political turmoil, while Hume grew up in an age where everything was changing, prompting questions to be asked. However, it is still interesting how both of them were concerned with some of the same questions regarding morality and human nature. They were both very rational and only believed in what they perceived as reality, which might have been due to their upbringings and historical contexts. Together they were concerned with empirical knowledge and based their theories upon their own experiences as well as what they observed in the society around them. Despite Kobong's life being short, he and Hume both produced some of the cutting edge theories of their time and became the bridges between old and new schools of thought: Kobong in proposing monistic ideas to the traditional dualist understanding of moral nature, feelings and metaphysics, as well as taking part in some of the most important debates for the development of Korean Neo-Confucianism;[121] and Hume in creating the foundation for the Copernican turn, which Kant fully developed with Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Wittgenstein (1889-1951) following after.[122]

Concluding remarks

I have now argued that Ki Taesung Kobong and David Hume hold a lot of similarities in their theories upon morality and feelings. This paper is only meant to examine the tip of the iceberg and is nowhere near a complete study. Much more could be included in a future study of their extensive theories, such as Hume's theories regarding the human self and Kobong's idea of Heavenly nature and Heaven itself.

But what can we take from this paper? There are clearly more philosophers, East and West, who share similar views despite being from different time periods and cultural

[119] Sensen. "Kant and Hume on Feelings in Moral Philosophy", 131.
[120] Kim. "Gobong's Theory on the moral Self-cultivation", 50.
[121] Chung. *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye And Yi Yulgok*, 53.
[122] Westergaard. *Kritik og tro*, 8.

backgrounds. I would suggest that these kinds of comparative studies can help in investigating how East Asian philosophy might have influenced the Age of Enlightenment much more than previously assumed. Furthermore, as stated at the start of this paper, the comparison of Kobong and Hume also opens the opportunity to view each of them in a new, much more nuanced light.

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(退溪李滉, 高峰奇大升. [四七理氣往復書]. 1559-1566.)