

Mencius

Introduction

The *Mencius* (in Chinese, *Mengzi* 孟子, the book of Master Meng) may be the Classical Chinese philosophical text that most profoundly influenced traditional Chinese culture. Although never granted quite the explicit homage that was given to the *Analects*, among Confucian works, nor perhaps as personally popular as the two great Daoist texts, the *Dao de jing* and *Zhuangzi*, the ideas and arguments in the *Mencius* have a clarity and literary power that gave them extraordinary impact over time. Although the full force of that impact did not begin to reveal itself until the ninth century CE, ultimately the *Mencius* became the central canonical source for the animating ideas of the Neo-Confucian movement, which in its several forms dominated Chinese intellectual life from the thirteenth century through the nineteenth, and which has been in a period of revival in China for several decades.

Mencius's life

The text of the *Mencius* represents the first major textual defense of the Confucian faith by a follower of the Master. While there were other Confucians of the fourth century, Mencius's era, who developed significant doctrinal expansions, these did not exert a permanent influence on the contours of Confucianism; their works were largely lost and have only recently come to light through archaeological tomb excavations that uncovered manuscripts of their texts, written in ink on bamboo strips, the original medium in which all our texts evolved. Mencius's teachings, however, were successfully transmitted and profoundly influenced the ongoing development of Confucianism. For example, in the Classical era the third great Confucian master, Xunzi, articulated a number of his important ideas as refutations of the direction Mencius had taken, although both shared the goal of promoting the school of Confucius.

While other Confucians in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE generally composed texts that were not explicitly associated with them as authors, the *Mencius*

not only specifically attributes to Mencius the ideas and most of the speeches preserved in the text, it pictures Mencius as a forceful, colorful, and famous teacher and debater, eager to take on adversaries and correct others who hoped to defend Confucianism. He chose to address head on the important philosophical challenges that Mohism posed for Confucianism, as well as ideas that later came to be identified as part of the Daoist intellectual stream of the era. Although the way in which Mencius is referred to and described makes it unlikely that he had a personal hand in “writing” the book (though he may have consciously authored some of its statements in written form), it is clear that an historical Mencius is the force behind the text’s ideas and the manner in which they are expressed.

The name Mencius, like the name Confucius, is a Latinized version of a Chinese name. Mencius’s real name was Meng Ke 孟軻. His disciples referred to him as Master Meng, which in Chinese was “Mengzi,” turned into “Mencius” by European interpreters of Chinese culture two thousand years after his death.

We do not know Mencius’s dates with accuracy, but we do know that he was an old man at the time of his greatest life crisis, in 314, and we estimate his lifetime as falling in the period 380 to 300 BCE.

For about the first 60 years of his life, Mencius seems to have lived quietly, becoming the most renowned Confucian teacher of his age. Then, sometime before 320, he decided that the time was ripe to renew Confucius’s active effort to persuade the rulers of the increasingly miserable Warring States era to accept the Confucian Dao and reform the world, and, like Confucius, he began wandering from state to state, trying to find a ruler who would employ him and implement Confucian governance. About 314, he finally secured an appointment as a high advisor to the king of Qi, a strong state that occupied territory just to the east of Confucius’s homeland of Lu and Mencius’s own home, the small state of Zou. But, to his dismay, soon after the king showed this strong apparent interest in Confucianism, Qi launched a war to conquer another major state just to the north, Yan. Prior to launching the war, the king tricked Mencius into appearing to approve his aggressive attack, and Mencius concluded that his appointment was actually no more than a public relations ploy by Qi to justify its power play by claiming the endorsement of

the most famous Confucian sage. He resigned his position in despair and retired to his home state, where he lived the rest of his life as a teacher.

Although there are gaps in our chronology of Mencius's biography, there is no figure in Classical China about whom we know more and whom we know so intimately. Although we have a sense of the characters of many people in China's Classical era, and in some cases tales about them include colorful detail, many of those accounts were formulated decades or centuries after their lifetimes, and in many or most cases have the troublesome defect of being obviously fictional, often building dramatic episodes around a few core features associated with the historical person. But the *Mencius* is not only rich in detail, both the pattern of event and – more important – the consistent texture of Mencius's speech and behavior make it very difficult to doubt that, on the whole, we see here a portrait drawn from life by those who knew him well. Mencius's personality is a dominant factor in the *Mencius*, and the book shows is a brilliant, volatile, charismatic, irritating, self-righteous man, whose intellectual insights can be so keen that his influence is still felt in China today, and whose self-justifying rationalizations can be so intellectually facile as to undermine the integrity of his central philosophy. The contradictions in his person and lapses in his conduct signal that his textual persona was not an invention of others. We seem to be meeting a real man (real enough that some readers feel they would rather have met someone else!).

The translations that appear in this reading comprise roughly half of the full text. I have generally selected passages that relate to the themes we will stress in class, though I have also tried to supply material that illustrate the intellectual character of Mencius as a person, even when the passage topic may be tangential to our issues.

Mencius's major ideas

Mencius's book is much longer than the *Analects* and very rich in ideas. Among Mencius's most important expansions of the vision of Confucius were the following three doctrines:

1. *The goodness of human nature.* Daoists had attacked Confucius's stress on Humanity and Righteousness by claiming that these were not dispositions that people naturally possessed. Further, both Daoists and Mohists saw the

Confucian stress on Ritual as an attempt to shape human being in artificial and coercive ways. Mencius argued forcefully that all people do indeed have spontaneous ethical responses and that these prove that we are actually born with a moral sense. His most famous “proof” of this claimed that all of us would agree that if we were suddenly catch a glimpse of a child about to fall into a well and die, we would -- without any reflection whatever -- experience an instantaneous rush of fear and anxiety. Mencius interpreted this as the working of an innate moral sensitivity that was universal in all people. Building on this example, Mencius constructed a revised model of Confucian ideas of *ren*, righteousness (*yi*), and Ritual *li*, which cast all of them as elaborations of natural dispositions that all people possess from birth.

2. *Moral discipline as Heaven’s command.* Mencius wrote eloquently about the process of ethical training, and he pictured the self-cultivation of the *junzi* as a military-like process. Using analogies that he drew from practices of martial arts, Mencius pictured Confucian training as a prolonged discipline designed to detach disciples from self-regarding (selfish) impulses so that they can perfectly respond to the subtle moral instincts with which they, like all people, are born. For Mencius, these good aspects of our nature have been endowed within us by Tian, which he pictured as the creator of the human species. To follow Confucian discipline and achieve ethical selflessness in action is to follow the mandate that Tian conveyed to the human race at its birth. This was what the great sages of the past did when they brought order to the world and fashioned the patterns of civilization provide channels for us to fulfill our moral needs. Because human beings are, in a sense, born as both self-regarding animals and selfless sages, following Heaven’s command to become sages is not effortless, but requires the strict discipline of Confucian training.

3. *The sage as an independent creator of morality.* Elaborating the Confucian idea of timeliness in action, Mencius was very articulate in arguing that the *junzi* cannot be conceived as someone who always sticks to moral rules, but is actually the creator of moral rules. There are times when the sage does not keep his word and there are times when he violates ritual. Why? Because the ethical formulas behind these values only capture general truths, and cannot provide guidelines for the full range of real-life challenges that the *junzi* faces in action. For Mencius, the greatness of Confucius lay precisely in the fact that he followed no fixed rules. Instead, he had committed himself to the most intensive form of ethical training, which had cultivated within him so strong and supple a moral perspective that he could tailor each action to the specific context in which it was performed. In this sense, for Mencius, Confucius and sages like him, the experience of life is nothing but a process of detecting in the confusion of every day the specific moral opportunities that Tian provides, seizing them without hesitation, and pursuing them with perfect skill.

Mencius is also very famous for making the populist political claim that rulers are allowed by Heaven to occupy their positions *only* for the purpose of bringing comfort to the people at large, and not for their own benefit. In picturing rulers as the stewards of the people's interests, Mencius sanctioned rebellion against rulers who possess hereditary rights to rule. He even went so far as to justify the Zhou founders' revolt against the last king of the Shang Dynasty by saying that the Shang king's evil conduct had, in fact, already reduced him to the status of a commoner. "I have heard that the Zhou founders killed a commoner," he said, "I have never heard of them killing a king."

Mencius's main accomplishments

Mencius provides Confucianism with its first full theoretical formulas. Whereas the *Analects* supplied only disjointed aphorisms that later followers needed to string together into coherent doctrines themselves, Mencius *argues*, and in doing so he provided Confucians with important tools they could use to defend Confucianism against attacks from other schools. (There are even passages in the *Mencius* that portray Mencius coaching his students in how to win arguments against the enemies of his school.)

The theory of the goodness of human nature was an impressive accomplishment in its day, and even today people who do not find it persuasive but who are not used to philosophical argument may have difficulty in figuring out how to find its weak points. Despite the fact that it was famous in its day, however, the last great Classical Confucian, Xunzi, rejected Mencius's argument and devoted great effort to constructing a defense of Confucianism that could freed the school of dependence on it.

Mencius's elaboration of the role of timeliness in action and his claim that moral people have license to violate basic ethical formulas at the discretion of their virtuous trained instincts provided Confucians with a powerful means of defending themselves against enemies who charged them with inconsistency in action (something the Mohists proved very apt at doing). His book reinforces the Confucian claim that the ultimate location of ethical standards lies in a Heaven-based

perspective that sages share, rather than in any set of action formulas that could be the basis of a set of sacred rules.

However, Mencius's doctrine of timeliness also opened the door for future Confucian abuses. It encouraged Confucians to rationalize actions that seemed obviously motivated by selfishness or fear by constructing skewed interpretations to show why circumstances justified their conduct. (This sort of ethical reasoning is called "casuistry," and it is usually regarded negatively in all traditions.) Mencius was criticized in his day for attempts to explain away his own sometimes questionable conduct, and one of the most important attacks on him was that, unlike Confucius, Mencius's teachings sometimes seem the products of clever argumentation than clarity of vision.

MENCIUS

SELECTED PASSAGES

BOOK 1

The biographical elements of the *Mencius* – and there are more of these than in any other early Chinese text – are entirely related to Mencius’s career as a “wandering persuader” – a thinker who traveled among feudal courts seeking a ruler who would employ his political and ethical ideas and give Mencius some position of authority to implement them. Book 1 (both parts A and B), is generally taken to be a chronologically arranged set of snapshots of this endeavor.

The book opens with Mencius first meeting with King Hui of Liang (that is, the great state of Wei, whose capital was at Liang), who was the most powerful ruler of his day. The King was old when he met Mencius, about 325 B.C., but the King addresses Mencius as though he were older still, suggesting that at the start of his effort to travel in search of a ruler who would listen to his ideas, Mencius was already advanced in years.

(All of Book 1A is included here.)

1A.1 Mencius appeared in audience before King Hui of Liang. The King said, “Aged Sir, you have not regarded a thousand li* as too great a distance to travel here – surely it must be that you have come to profit (*li*) my state!”

Mencius replied, “Your Majesty, why must you speak of profit? Indeed, there is nothing but humanity (*ren*) and right (*yi*). If Your Majesty says, ‘Whereby may I profit my state?’ your grandees shall say, ‘Whereby may I profit my family?’ and your common people shall say, ‘Whereby may I profit myself?’ When those higher and lower compete with one another for profit, the state will be in danger. In a state of ten thousand war chariots, the man who assassinates the ruler will surely have a family estate of one thousand; in a state of one thousand war chariots, the man who assassinates the ruler will surely have a family estate of one hundred. Such men have a tenth share of the state’s force, and this is by no means a little. But if right is placed behind and profit before, they will never be satisfied unless they seize it all. Never has a man of humanity abandoned his parents, and never has a man of right put himself before his ruler.

“May Your Majesty simply speak of humanity and right. Why must you speak of profit?”

*The phrase “a thousand li” uses a traditional measure of distance equivalent to 1/3 of a mile. The word ‘li’ is not italicized to avoid confusion with *li* (ritual) and *li* (profit).

The King initial statement employs the term (*li* 利), which could be taken to mean either “benefit” or “profit.” This first passage of the *Mencius* takes it in the latter sense and thus initiates its portrait of Mencius with an anti-Mohist diatribe.

1A.2 Mencius appeared in audience before King Hui of Liang. The King was standing by a pond in his park land, looking at the deer and wild geese around it. “Do worthy men also delight in things such as this?” he asked.

Mencius replied, “Only when one is worthy may one delight in them; though the unworthy may possess them, they cannot take delight in them.

“The *Poetry* says:

The King began his Magic Tower,
 Planning it and spanning it,
 The people set themselves to work,
 In no time it was done!
 He started it with no great haste -
 The people simply came.
 The King was in his Magic Park,
 The deer and doe lay all around,
 The deer and doe all glistening sleek,
 The white birds gleaming bright.
 The King was at his Magic Pond,
 How full with leaping fish!

The King relied upon the labor of the people to build his tower and his pond, and the people took joyful delight in it. Hence they called his tower the Magic Tower and his pond the Magic Pond, delighting in the deer and fish that were there.

“The men of old shared their delight with the people – that is why they knew delight. But the ‘Oath of Tang’ says:

When shall this sun die
 That I may share death with you?

The people then so wished the ruler’s death.

“Though one may have towers, pools, birds and beasts, how can you enjoy them alone?”

The Poetry citation describes the relation of the sage Zhou ruler King Wen to his people. The ‘Oath of Tang’ quote pictures the people’s complaint under the tyrannical Jie, last king of the Xia Dynasty.

1A.3 King Hui of Liang said, “My attitude towards my state is simply to exhaust my every effort on its behalf. If the territories within the bend of the Yellow River encounter famine, I move people east of the River and grain to the west, and so also if the case is reversed. When I examine governance in neighboring states, none is as conscientious as mine. Yet the population of those states does not decrease and that of mine does not increase. Why is this so?”

Mencius replied, “Your Majesty loves war, so let me use an analogy from war to explain. Picture the drums beating your soldiers into battle – the swords of the armies have clashed! Suddenly, your men strip off their heavy armor and run, trailing their weapons behind them. Some run for a hundred paces, others stop after fifty. If the men who have run away only fifty paces began to laugh at those who have run a hundred, what would you think of them?”

“That they are wrong to do so! They haven’t run a hundred paces, but they’ve still run away.”

Mencius said, “If Your Majesty understands this, then you need not look for the population of your state to grow over those of your neighbors.

“If a state does not interfere with the people during the growing season, there will be more grain than the people can eat. If you regulate fishing nets so that fine-woven ones may not be used in the pools and ponds, there will be more fish than the people can eat. If you allow hatchets and axes to be used in the woods only in proper season, there will be more lumber than the people can use. When there is more grain and fish than the people can eat and more lumber than the people can use, the people can nourish their living and mourn their dead without regrets: this is the root of the Kingly Way.

“When on every five *mu* plot of land a mulberry tree is planted, those fifty and over are able to wear silk clothes. When chicken, pigs, and dogs are bred in a timely way, all who are seventy and over have meat to eat. If laborers in fields of a hundred *mu* are not taken from their fieldwork during growing season, then families with many mouths to feed will never go hungry. When the education given in village schools is extended by the example of behavior that is filial to parents and deferential to elders, then none with white hair will carry heavy loads along the roads. There has never been a ruler who did not rule as a True King when those seventy and older wore silk and ate meat, and when the people were never hungry or cold.

“But now, when food is plentiful, dogs and pigs eat the people’s food and none know to garner and store it; when food is scarce, people starve by the roadside and none know to open the storehouses and distribute grain. When men die, you say, ‘It is not I – it’s the weather’s fault!’ How is this different from running them through with a spear and saying, ‘It was not I – it’s the spear’s fault!’

“Once Your Majesty ceases to blame the weather, people will come to you from everywhere in the world.”

During the Warring States period, states competed more for labor power – population – than for territory, and this is the background of the King’s complaint.

A *mu* of land is a small plot, under a fifth of an acre, or the size of a large vegetable garden.

This passage conveys Mencius’s vision of rulership as responsibility, creating basic conditions of both welfare and morality. When Mencius relates clothing, silk, and lumber to “nourishing the living and mourning the dead,” he is speaking of feeding and clothing elderly parents and equipping them with wood coffins at their deaths. Prosperity creates the conditions for people to meet the demands of filiality without “regret” – that is, without feeling they have failed. The lord of such a state rules as a True King, rather than simply as the hereditary or military successor to the title.

1A.4 King Hui of Liang said, “I am most eager to receive instruction from you.”

Mencius replied, “Is there a difference between killing a man with a club or a sword?”

The King said, “None.”

“Is there a difference between killing him with a sword or with bad government?”

“None”

Mencius said, “There is fat meat in your kitchens and fat horses in your stables, but the people are pale with hunger and corpses lie in the wastelands. This is to lead beasts and devour people. People detest it even when beasts eat beasts. To be the father and mother of the people and yet, in your governance, to fall to leading beasts and devouring people – well, wherein then are you ‘the father and mother of the people?’ Confucius said, ‘May he who first fashioned figurines to be interred with the dead be

without descendants!’ He said this because these forms were made in the image of people and so used. What would he have said for one who led people to starvation and death?”

1A.5 King Hui of Liang said, “As you know well, Sir, there was no state so powerful as the old state of Jin [predecessor of Wei (Liang)]. But now, during my reign, we have been defeated by Qi in the east – my son and heir was killed in that war – and in the west, Qin has taken from us seven hundred square li of territory, while Chu has humbled us in the south. I am ashamed of this, and I wish to wash away this disgrace on behalf of those who have died. What should I do?”

Mencius replied, “One may reign as a True King from a territory as small as one hundred li square. If Your Majesty would only govern the people by means of policies according with humanity, being sparing in punishments, keeping taxes light, encouraging the people to plough deep and weed readily, then the young would have leisure to cultivate the virtues of filiality, deference towards elders, loyalty, faithfulness. At home, they would serve their parents and elder brothers, abroad they would serve their elders and superiors – such people could beat back the armor and swords of Qin and Chu armed with nothing but pikes.

“Other rulers commandeer the labor of the summer fieldwork so that people have no way to do their ploughing and weeding. Their parents freeze and starve, while brothers, wives, and children are forced to scatter. These rulers entrap their people till they sink and drown. If Your Majesty were to campaign against such rulers, what enemies could be your match? Thus it is said that ‘the man of humanity has no enemies’ – may Your Majesty never doubt it!”

1A.6 Mencius appeared in audience before King Xiang of Liang. When he emerged, he said to others, “When I first caught sight of him he did not have the look of a ruler of men, and when I approached closer I saw nothing in him to inspire awe. He began by asking me abruptly, ‘How can the world be put in good order?’

“I replied by saying, ‘It will be put in order through unity.’

“‘Who can unify it?’

“I said, ‘One who takes no pleasure in killing people.’

“‘Who can deliver it to him?’

“I said, ‘No one in the world would refuse to give it to him. Does Your Majesty know how rice plants grow? If there is a summer drought, the seedlings wither. But if clouds rise thick in the heavens and the rain pours down, the seedlings will suddenly swell upright – who could stop them? Now, in the world today there are no leaders who do not take pleasure in killing people. If there were such a one, the people of the world would all straighten their necks to gaze towards him. If he were truly such a man, the people would come to him just as water flows downwards – pouring down with such force, who could stop them?’”

King Xiang took the throne after his father King Hui’s death. This was Mencius’s first interview, and judging by the fact that the *Mencius* says nothing more about him, Mencius must left the state of Wei soon thereafter, eventually making his way to the state of Qi, where his career as a persuader reached its peak under King Xuan.

1A.7 King Xuan of Qi asked, “Will you teach me about the great hegemony, Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin?”

Mencius replied, “The disciples of Confucius did not speak of the affairs of these rulers, so later generations of followers had nothing to pass on. I have not learned of them. Failing in this, may I speak to you of True Kingship?”

“What sort of virtue must one have to rule as a True King?”

Mencius said, “If one rules by protecting the people, none can stop him.”

“Could a man like me rule as a protector of the people?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know I could?”

Mencius said, “I heard from your courtier Hu He that when Your Majesty was sitting up in the great hall, an ox was dragged by in the court below, and that seeing it you asked, ‘Where are you taking that ox?’ Your courtiers told you that it was to be slaughtered and its blood used to anoint a newly cast bell, and you said, ‘Spare it. I can’t bear to see it whimpering like an innocent man being taken for execution.’ And when your courtiers asked whether you wished them not to consecrate the bell you said, ‘How can we do away with that? Use a sheep instead.’ I wonder whether the story is accurate.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Well then, your heart is sufficient for you to reign as a True King. The people all thought you spared the ox because you were stingy, but I understand that it was because you could not bear its distress.”

The King said, “That’s right. That’s just what they said. But even though Qi is not a big state, how could I begrudge sacrificing a single ox? It was that I couldn’t bear its whimpering like an innocent man being taken for execution, so I told them to substitute a sheep.”

“Your Majesty should not be surprised that the people took you to be stingy, since you substituted a smaller animal for a large one. How could they know? If your concern was that they were being executed despite their innocence, what difference would there be between an ox and a sheep?”

The King laughed. “Really, what was I thinking? I wasn’t thinking about the expense when I said to substitute a sheep, but it’s natural that the people said I was just being stingy.”

Mencius said, “There was no harm in what you did – it was the working of humanity (*ren*). You had seen the ox, but you had not seen the sheep. The way it works with the *junzi* is that if he has seen a bird or beast alive, he cannot watch it die; if he has heard its voice, he cannot bear to eat its flesh. This is why the *junzi* keeps his distance from the kitchen!”

The King was pleased. “The *Poetry* says,

The heart lies within another,
Yet it is I who takes its measure.

How perfectly this describes you, Sir! When I reflected on my actions, I could not grasp my own mind in this, but your words match perfectly with my feelings at the time. But now tell me how such feelings accord with one who rules as a True King.”

Mencius said, “If someone said to Your Majesty, ‘I have strength enough to lift half a ton, but not to lift a feather; vision clear enough to observe the tip of a hair but not a load of firewood,’ would you accept what he said?”

“No.”

“Well then, why would one accept that Your Majesty’s kindness could extend even to the birds and beasts, but its works could not extend to the people? If one cannot lift a feather it’s because he won’t use his strength; if one can’t see a cartload of firewood it’s because he won’t use his sight. If the people have no protector it’s because you are not using your kindness. Hence, Your Majesty does not rule as a True King only because you will not, not because you cannot.”

The King said, “How are being unwilling and unable truly different?”

“When it comes to picking up Mt. Tai and carrying it over Bohai Bay, if you tell someone, ‘I can’t do it,’ it’s because you truly are not able. When it comes to helping an elderly man crack his joints, if you tell someone, ‘I can’t do it,’ it means you’re unwilling to do it, not that you truly are not able. That Your Majesty does not rule as a True King is not a matter of carrying Mt. Tai over Bohai Bay, it is like being unwilling to help an old man crack his joints.”

Mencius continued, “Treat your aged kin as the elderly should be treated, and then extend that to the treatment of the aged kinsmen of others; treat your young kin as the young should be treated, and then extend it to the young children of others. If you do this, you will be able to govern the world as though you turned it in your palm. The *Poetry* says:

An exemplar in treating his wife,
And extending to his brothers,
Thus he ruled the family and the state.

What this is speaking of is taking one’s own heart and applying it in the treatment of others. If you extend your kindness it will be enough to protect all within the Four Seas of the world; if you don’t extend your kindness, you can’t even protect your wife and children. The reason that the ancients so far exceeded other men is none other than this: they excelled in extending what they did. Now, why is it that you are kind enough in your treatment of birds and beasts, but your works do not extend to the people?

“Only when you when you put a thing on a scale can you know how much it weighs; only after you measure something can you know how long it is. It is so with all things, and the heart more than others. I urge Your Majesty to measure your heart in this way!”

Mencius continued, “But perhaps Your Majesty’s heart is only content when you have mobilized your troops, imperiled your subjects, and incited the resentment of other lords. . . .”

“No,” said the King. “How could this bring me contentment? It is just that I wish to attain my great desire.”

“May I hear what this desire may be?”

The King smiled but did not speak.

Mencius said, “Is it that you lack rich foods that satisfy your palate, fine clothes that bring comfort to your body, colorful décor that can bring pleasure to your eyes, beautiful music to stimulate your ears, or court favorites to carry out your every order?”

Surely your royal officers could supply such wants – surely these are not what you mean.”

“No,” said the King. “It is not because of such things.”

“In that case, I can guess Your Majesty’s great desire. It is to broaden your territories, to have the rulers of Qin and Chu pay homage at your court, to stand at the center of the states and subdue the barbarians beyond the borders in all directions. But to pursue these ambitions by the means you now employ is like trying to catch fish by climbing a tree.”

The King said, “Is it as bad as that?”

“More likely worse! Climbing a tree in search of fish, though you’ll find no fish, no disaster will follow. Using your methods to seek your ambitions, if you exhaust your heart’s effort in the pursuit, disaster will surely follow.”

“May I hear more?”

Mencius said, “If the small state of Zou fought the great state of Chu, whom does Your Majesty think would prevail?”

“The men of Chu would prevail.”

“Precisely so. And this is because the small is inherently no match for the large, the few are no match for the many, and the weak are no match for the strong. Within all the Four Seas, there are only nine regions of a thousand square li each, and your state of Qi commands altogether only one of these. To subdue eight by means of one – how is this different from little Zou trying to be a match for Chu? Indeed, you must instead reexamine the root of the matter.

“If Your Majesty were now to proclaim policies that were governed by humanity, you would cause all the warriors in the world to wish they could attend Your Majesty at court, all the tillers in the world to wish they could till Your Majesty’s lands, all the merchants in the world to wish they could collect at Your Majesty’s markets, all the travelers in the world to wish they could walk Your Majesty’s roads. Everyone in the world who feels distress because of their rulers would wish to come denounce them before Your Majesty. If this were so, who could stop them?”

The King said, “I am slow witted – I can’t think through your strategy. I ask you, Sir, to assist me in my goals and instruct me in plain terms. Though I am not quick, please make the attempt.”

Mencius said, “Only a gentleman can maintain a constant heart without constant means. For the common people, if they have no constant means of support, they cannot sustain their hearts’ resolve. Without the constant resolve of the heart, they will slip into excesses and deviant behavior, stopping at nothing. Now to allow them to fall into criminal ways in this manner and only then to punish them is to entrap the people. Whenever has there been a man of humanity in authority who set traps for people?”

“The enlightened ruler regulates the people’s means of support, ensuring that these are sufficient for them to serve their parents and nurture their wives and children. Through good years, they will always have enough to eat their fill; in bad years, they will at least escape starvation. Then, when he guides them towards goodness, the people will find it no burden to follow.

“But now, regulation of the people’s means of support does not provide them goods sufficient to serve their parents or nurture their wives and children. They live through good years in bitterness and in bad years they cannot escape starvation. In this

way, they live in fear that nothing they can do will stave off death – where would they find the time to attend to matters of ritual *li* and right (*yi*)?

“If Your Majesty wishes to put these matters into practice, reexamine the root of the matter. When on every five *mu* plot of land a mulberry tree is planted, those fifty and over are able to wear silk clothes. When chicken, pigs, and dogs are bred in a timely way, all who are seventy and older have meat to eat. If laborers in fields of a hundred *mu* are not taken from their fieldwork during growing season, then even families with eight mouths to feed will never go hungry. When a ruler attends to the education given in village schools and sees that it is extended by the example of behavior that is filial to parents and deferential to elders, then none with white hair will carry heavy loads along the roads. There has never been a ruler who did not rule as a True King when the aged wore silk and ate meat, and when the people were never hungry or cold.”

1A.7 begins with the King asking about the first and greatest of the “hegemons,” an informal title granted to a handful of powerful state rulers during the Spring and Autumn period. These men, through a combination of military strength, skilled diplomacy, and at least a reputation for honor were acknowledged, each in his day, by many of the other great state rulers to be their overlords and the chief protectors of the near-powerless Eastern Zhou King. The Mencian school of Confucianism scorned these men as examples, because they relied on force and clever dealing rather than on the power of virtue and ethical governance, which Confucians believed not only to be the tools of an ideal ruler, but to have been shown effective during the early centuries of the Western Zhou. The rulers of those times, and legendary paragons such as Yao, Shun, and Yu long before, reigned as “True Kings”: leaders whose perfect power and governance was based on their exemplary morality and care for the people.

1B.1 Zhuang Bao went to see Mencius and said, “I had an audience with the King and he told me he loved music. I didn’t know how to respond. What is the significance of loving music?”

Mencius said, “If the King loves music deeply, then the state of Qi is not far from the mark!”

On another day, when Mencius was in audience with the King he said, “You told Zhuang Bao that you liked music. Is that really so?”

The King blushed. “I’m not capable of appreciating the music of the ancient kings, I just like common music.”

“If Your Majesty loves music deeply, then the state of Qi is not far from the mark! The music of today comes from the music of the past.”

“May I learn more of this?”

Mencius said, “Which gives more pleasure: enjoying music alone or enjoying it in the company of others?”

“In the company of others.”

“In the company of a few or in the company of many?”

“In the company of many.”

Mencius said, “Let me explain enjoyment to Your Majesty. Let’s say you are holding a musical performance, and when the people hear the sound of the bells and drums, pipes and flutes, they all raise their heads quickly with furrowed brows and say to one another, ‘How can our King enjoy music and allow us to come to such dire straits that fathers and sons are parted and do not see one another, and brothers, wives, and children are scattered?’ Or let’s say you go out for the hunt and when the people hear the

sound of chariots and horses and see your beautiful banners waving, they all raise their heads quickly with furrowed brows and say to one another, ‘How can our King enjoy hunting and allow us to come to such dire straits that fathers and sons are parted and do not see one another, and brothers, wives, and children are scattered?’ The cause of this would be none other than that one has failed to share one’s pleasures with the people.

“Now, let’s say you are holding a musical performance, and when the people hear the sound of the bells and drums, pipes and flutes, they all raise their heads happily and smiling say to one another, ‘Our King must surely be in good health. How ably the music is played!’ Or let’s say you go out for the hunt and when the people hear the sound of chariots and horses and see your beautiful banners waving, they all raise their heads happily and smiling say to one another, ‘Our King must surely be in good health. How ably the hunt is pursued!’ The cause of this would be none other than that one has shared one’s pleasures with the people.

“If Your Majesty would share with the people the pleasures you take, you would rule as a True King.”

1B.1 is a very clear example of Mencius’s political “populism,” which sees the ruler’s role not only as benefiting the people, but as being in a reciprocal relationship of caring with his subjects.

1B.2 King Xuan of Qi asked, “It is said that King Wen’s royal park was seventy li square. Is that so?”

Mencius replied, “It is reported so in the histories.”

“As big as that!”

“Yet the people felt it was small.”

“My park is only forty li square – why then do the people say it is large?”

Mencius said, “King Wen’s park of seventy li was open to woodcutters and to those who entered to catch pheasants and rabbits. He shared it with the people. Is it any wonder that they considered it small?”

“When I first came to the borders of your state, I inquired about its prohibitions before daring to enter. I was informed that there was a park forty li square on the outskirts of the capital, where the killing of a deer was treated as an offence comparable to killing a man. This park, then, is merely a forty square li trap in the midst of the state. Is it any wonder that the people consider it large?”

1B.3 King Xuan of Qi asked, “Do you have a formula for diplomacy with neighboring states?”

“Mencius replied, “I do. Only a man of humanity is able properly to put his large state at the service of a smaller one. In this way the Shang Dynasty founder Tang was able to serve the Ge people and King Wen of the Zhou was able to serve the Kunyi people. Only the wise man is able properly to put his small state in the service of a larger one. In this way the Zhou ancestral leader King Tai was able to serve the Xunyu people and Goujian, King of Yue, was able to serve Wu. Those who put the large in the service of the small are those who take joy in Tian (Heaven); those who put the small in the service of the large are those who act in awe of Tian. Those who take joy in Tian are the protectors of the world; those who act in awe of Tian are the protectors of their states. The *Poetry* says:

Act in awe of the majesty of Tian
And in this way protect it.”

The King said, “Your words are great! Yet I have a weakness. I have a love of valor.”

Mencius replied, “I beg that Your Majesty not be fond of petty valor. To stroke one’s sword hilt and glare, saying, ‘How dare that man oppose me!’ is the valor of the vulgar man, enough only to match a single enemy. Your Majesty, you need to go beyond this.

“The *Poetry* says:

The King blazed in anger
And set his troops in ranks
To stop the enemy’s march on Ju,
Deepen the blessings of the Zhou,
And answer the wish of the world.

And the *Documents* says: ‘Tian sent down the people of the world, and made for them a ruler and thereby a teacher, that he might assist the Lord on High in cherishing them. “In all the Four Quarters of the world, for the guilty and the innocent, the burden falls on me alone!” Who in the world dared cross his will?’

“When one man in the world bullied others, King Wu of the Zhou felt ashamed of it. This was the valor of King Wu – and indeed, in a single outburst of rage, he brought peace to the world. Now if you too would bring peace to the world in a single outburst of rage, the people will fear only that you are not fond of valor.”

....

1B.5 King Xuan of Qi asked, “I have been advised to tear down the Bright Hall. Should I do so or not?”

Mencius replied, “The Bright Hall is the seat of kingly governance. If Your Majesty wishes to practice the governance of a True King, you should not tear it down.”

“May I learn more of the governance of a True King?”

Mencius replied, “In past times, when King Wen ruled at the city of Qí, he took only one part in nine as a tax on those who tilled the land, and those who served his government inherited their stipends. At the border, goods in trade were inspected but no fees were levied, no restrictions were placed on the use of fish traps installed by dams and weirs, and penalties for those convicted of crimes never entailed their wives and children. Widows and widowers, orphans and the aged without children to support them, these classes of people without means or others to turn to were always given priority in the proclamations through which King Wen announced his humane (*ren*) policies. The *Poetry* says:

Well off are the wealthy,
Grieve for the forsaken.

The King said, “Well said!”

“If Your Majesty thinks well of the words, why do you not follow them?”

“I have a weakness. I have a love of wealth.”

Mencius said, “In past times, the old Zhou leader Gong Liu loved wealth as well. The *Poetry* tells of it:

Stocking and storing,
 Sealing up grain
 In sacks and in bags,
 Till harmony shone bright.
 Bows and arrows laid out,
 Spears, halberd, and axes,
 At last marching forth.

Not until those who remained at home could rely on full stores of grain and those who went to war carried with them sacks full of provisions did he march on campaign. If Your Majesty's love of wealth were only shared with the people, what hindrance could there be to ruling as a True King?"

The King said, "But I have another weakness. I have a love of women."

Mencius said, "In past times King Tai had a love of women – how he cherished his consort! The *Poetry* tells of it:

Danfu, the Old Duke,
 Galloped west at dawn,
 Along the western waters
 To the land below Mt. Qí,
 Lady Jiang by his side,
 In search of a new home.

And in those days, no young woman could complain she lacked a man and no young man lacked a wife. If Your Majesty's love of women were only shared with the people, what hindrance could there be to ruling as a True King?"

1B.6 Mencius addressed King Xuan of Qi. "Suppose a subject of Your Majesty entrusted his wife and children to a friend and traveled south to Chu, and when he returned, his friend had left his wife and child to suffer in cold and hunger. What should this man do?"

The King said, "Discard him as a friend."

"And what if the Master of the Guard could not keep order among his men, what then?"

"Dismiss him."

"And what if there were disorder within the borders of the state, what then?"

The King turned to his other courtiers and changed the subject.

1B.7 Mencius appeared in audience before King Xuan of Qi and said, "We don't call a state 'traditional' because its trees are tall and old; it is because its court ministers come from families that serve from generation to generation. Your Majesty has no intimate court ministers because those you appointed in the past have already disappeared who knows where."

The King said, "How could I have known they lacked talent when I appointed them?"

Mencius said, "A ruler promotes men on the basis of worth only when absolutely necessary. One must be so cautious when promoting the lowly over the exalted and the unfamiliar over the familiar! Even if all your close advisors say he is worthy, that's not

enough. Even if all the grandees of state say he's worthy, that's not enough. If all the people of the state say he's worthy, investigate, and if you find that he is indeed worthy, only then appoint him. On the other hand, even if all your close advisors say a minister in office is unworthy, that's not enough to dismiss him. Even if all the grandees of state say he is unworthy, that's not enough either. But if all the people of the state say he is unworthy, investigate, and if you find that he is indeed unworthy, only then dismiss him.

“Likewise, if all your close advisors say a man should be executed, that's not enough to kill him. Even if all the grandees of state say he should be executed, that's not enough either. But if all the people of the state say he should be executed, investigate, and if you find that he is indeed worthy of execution, only then kill him. This is why records of the past sometimes say, ‘The people of the state killed him.’

“Only in this way can you become father and mother to the people.”

Several important streams of Mencius's political thought flow into this passage. Unlike most thinkers of his day, Mencius was cautious about advocating merit-based government as opposed to hereditary succession to office. He had surely seen too many unscrupulous persuaders convince worm their way into the good graces of slow witted rulers. This most likely accounts for the finely balanced position he adopts – promote the worthy, but with great care. The form that care must take is in accord with Mencius's populist ideals, which privilege the judgment of the common people over the self-serving advice of courtiers. We see here also a suspicion of courtiers that is later echoed by thinkers in the Legalist tradition, such as Han Feizi. Indeed, the 4th century proto-Legalist Shen Buhai, who was senior to Mencius, seems to have focused many of his ideas of effective government on the problem of how rulers can handle the self-interested conduct of ministers, and Mencius's caution concerning ministerial personnel recommendations may reflect some form of intellectual influence from his predecessor.

1B.8 King Xuan of Qi asked, “Is it so that the Shang Dynasty founder Tang banished Jie, the last king of the Xia, and that King Wu of the Zhou killed Zhòu, the last king of the Shang?”

Mencius replied, “It is so recorded in the histories.”

“Is it permissible, then, for a subject to kill his ruling lord?”

Mencius said, “A man who plunders humanity is called a thief; a man who plunders right (*yì*) is called an outcast. I have heard of the execution of Outcast Zhòu; I have not heard of the execution of a ruling lord Zhòu.”

....

1B.10 The armies of Qi attacked the state of Yan and prevailed. King Xuan asked, “Some tell me to annex Yan, others say not to. For one state of ten thousand chariots to attack another and prevail within fifty days is something beyond the reach of human power. If I do not annex Yan, surely there will be some disaster sent by Tian. What is your view of annexation?”

“If the people of Yan will be pleased by your annexation, then do it. King Wu is an example of an ancient ruler who followed this course. If the people of Yan will not be pleased by your annexation, then don't do it. King Wen is an example of an ancient ruler who followed this course. When one state of ten thousand chariots attacks another and its armies are met by people bringing baskets of food and jugs of drink, how could it not be that the people are turning toward that state as men flee from flood or fire? But if the flood turns out to be deeper and the fire hotter, they will surely turn back round.”

Qi invaded Yan in 314 BCE, and, as the next passage makes clear, Qi did annex Yan. Qi occupied Yan for a number of years, inciting increasing resentment of Qi among the populace of Yan. In time, Qi's troops withdrew, having set up a puppet ruler, King Zhao, who, after the withdrawal of Qi's troops did all he could to seek revenge. Thirty years later, the armies of Yan invaded Qi and occupied the capital, forcing the King Xuan's successor into exile, where he died.

We know from other texts that the court of Qi claimed that Mencius had voiced support for the invasion of Qi, and given that the outcome was, in the long run, disastrous for Qi, the *Mencius* seems to make a concerted effort to explain that Mencius's advice did not support Qi's invasion, that what he actually said was not heeded, and that thus he was not implicated in this fiasco. The key passages in this regard are 2B.8-9.

1B.11 Having attacked Yan, the state of Qi annexed it. The rulers of the other states plotted ways to come to the rescue of Yan. King Xuan said, "Most of the lords of the states are plotting to attack me. What should I be doing to respond to this?"

Mencius replied, "I have heard of one who ruled over a state merely seventy li square rising to rule the world; Tang was such a man. I have never heard of one who ruled over a state a thousand li square fearing others. The *Documents* says: 'Tang's campaign of unity began against Ge.' The world then came to have faith in him: when he turned eastwards to campaign, the barbarians of the west complained; when he turned south to campaign, the barbarians of the north complained, saying, 'Why has he put us last?' The people looked towards him as men look towards storm clouds and rainbows during a drought. Those who went to market continued to go to market, and those who tilled the land continued to till, for he executed their rulers and comforted the people like the fall of timely rain. The people were so greatly pleased! The *Documents* says: 'We await our lord; when he comes, we shall spring back to life.'

"Now Yan was a state that treated its people with cruelty, and when Your Majesty sent your troops to campaign against it, the people of Yan met them like rescuers in times of flood or fire, bringing baskets of food and jugs of drink. How then could you have thought it proper to kill their elders, bind their youths in fetters, destroy their ancestral temples and carry off from them their precious vessels. The world was already in awe of the strength of Qi – and now your territories are doubled and you still fail to carry out humane (*ren*) governance. It is this that has mobilized the armies of the world. If Your Majesty will swiftly issue orders to release all captives old and young, leave all valuables where they were, and make plans with the people of Yan to set up a new ruler and withdraw your armies, there is time yet to stop the coming war."

....

1B.15 Duke Wen of Teng asked, "Teng is a small state. I have done all I can to serve my larger neighbors, but it seems there is no way for me to evade them. What should I do?"

Mencius replied, "In the past, the Zhou leader King Tai dwelt in Bin. The Di people encroached upon his lands. Though King Tai presented them with skins and silks, he could not evade them; though he presented them with horses and hounds, he could not evade them; though he presented them with pearls and jade, he could not evade them. Thereupon, he gathered his elders together and announced, 'What the Di people want is my land. I have heard it said that a *junzi* does not on account of the thing he relies on to nurture his people bring harm to them. What concern need you have that you be without a

ruler? I shall quit this place.’ So he left Bin and crossed the Liang Mountains, building a settlement beneath Mt. Qí, where he dwelt. The people of Bin said, ‘This is a man of humanity – we must not lose him!’ And they followed after him like people flocking to market.

“But others say that one’s land is a trust to be passed through the generations, and this is not one ruler’s prerogative to decide. One must defend it to the death.

“My Lord, you must choose between these two courses.”

Teng was a very small statelet, located just south of Lu. Mencius seems to have been well received there, and lectured to Duke Wen while he was still heir apparent. The main passages concerning Mencius’s relationship to the young duke appear in Book 3A.

1B.16 Duke Ping of Lu was about to leave his palace when one of his favorites, a man named Zang Cang, asked, “On other days when Your Highness has gone out, you have always told the court officers where you are going. Now your carriages are already yoked and ready to depart, but the officers do not know where you will be. May I inquire?”

The Duke said, “I am going to visit Mencius.”

Zang Cang said, “What’s this? Your Highness plans to debase himself by initiating acquaintance with a common fellow? You think him a worthy? The worthy are those from whom ritual and right flow, yet Mencius is a man who permitted the funeral of his mother to be more lavish than that he had earlier held for his father! I beg you not to go see him.”

“Alright,” said the Duke.

Mencius’s follower Yuezheng Ke appeared before the Duke. “Why did Your Highness fail to visit Meng Ke?”

“Someone told me that Mencius permitted the funeral of his mother to be more lavish than that he had earlier held for his father, that is why I did not go.”

Yuezheng Ke said, “What’s this? What Your Highness refers to as being more lavish, was simply a matter of Mencius earlier having been a common gentleman and later being a court grandee, was it not? The former case entails three burial tripods and the latter five.”

“No, I was referring to the beauty of the inner and outer coffins and of the grave clothes.”

“This was not a matter of lavishness. He was simply wealthier at the later time.”

Yuezheng Ke went to see Mencius. “I told the Duke about you and he was planning to come see you. But one of his favorites, a certain Zang Cang, obstructed him, and that is why he never came.”

Mencius said, “When things go forward it is because something causes them to do so; when they are halted it is because something drags them back. It is beyond a man’s power to make things go forward or stop. The fact that I did not encounter the ruler of Lu was the work of Tian. How could the son of some clansman of the Zangs prevent this encounter?”

This final passage of Book 1 is often taken to recount Mencius’s final lost opportunity – a chance to serve in the state of Lu, to which he retired after leaving Qi in protest of the outcome of the war in Yan. About Zang Cang, nothing more is known. Mencius’s invocation of Tian here closely parallels the invocation of “fate” (*ming*) that is put in the mouth of Confucius in *Analects* 14.36.

BOOK 2

The second book of the *Mencius* begins with long and detailed conversations between Mencius and a man named Gongsun Chou. Gongsun Chou is clearly identified as a native of the state of Qi, and when the book is viewed overall, it appears likely that the greater portion of it may have been assembled by Gongsun Chou himself, recording his knowledge of Mencius's speech and conduct while in Qi. Many of the characters we encounter as actors in Book 2 were presumably men of Qi or Mencius's followers there, and their identities are unknown outside the confines of the *Mencius*.

Qi was located in the northern region Shandong Peninsula, and Mencius's home state, Zou, was not far to the south. Judging by the contents of the book, Mencius seems likely to have twice journeyed to Qi to seek a career at court. All of Book 2A appears to picture Mencius during his first stay there, prior to the reign of King Xuan, who figures so much in Book 1, but at Book 2B.2-3, we see Mencius commit an offense of courtesy against the (unspecified) king of Qi, and it seems likely that this concluded his first visit. When the narrative is next explicit about Qi, at 2B.6, Mencius has just received high appointment as an advisor to King Xuan, about 315 B.C., and the remainder of the book focuses on the war with Yan and its aftermath, leading, at the close of the book, to Mencius's retirement from Qi.

Book 2 is most famous, however, not for its discussions of Mencius's political career, but for two major passages concerning human nature and self-cultivation: 2A.2, the longest passage in the entire text, and 2A.6, where Mencius gives his most persuasive argument that humans are by nature good.

As the book begins, Gongsun Chou asks Mencius whether he sees himself as able to restore to Qi the glory of its two most famous prime ministers of the past, the seventh century figure Guan Zhong, and Yanzi, who lived a century later. Mencius clarifies for him and for us that his aspirations go far beyond the type of state strength achieved by those men. He begins by speaking of how earlier Confucians, such as the son of Confucius's disciple Zengzi (Master Zeng, or Zeng Shen), regarded such accomplishments.

2A.1 Gongsun Chou asked, "If you, Sir, were able to command the course of Qi, would not achievements on a par with Guan Zhong and Yanzi be possible?"

Mencius said, "Really, you are such a native of Qi! All you know about are Guan Zhong and Yanzi. Someone once asked Zengzi's son Zeng Xi, 'Master, who is the worthier, you or Zilu?' Zeng Xi answered with furrowed brow, 'My father held Zilu in awe.' So his questioner said, 'Well then, what about you and Guan Zhong?' At this, Zeng Xi flushed with displeasure. 'How could you compare Guan Zhong and me? Guan Zhong gained such utter control of his lord and monopolized the reins of government for so long, yet his accomplishments were so base – why would you ever compare me to such a man?' Even Zeng Xi felt that Guan Zhong was beneath him, and now you wish to compare me to him."

"But Guan Zhong led his lord to rule as hegemon over the states, and Yanzi made his lord illustrious. Are these men unworthy of emulation?"

Mencius said, "To make the lord of Qi rule as a True King would be as easy as turning over one's hand."

"If this is so, then I'm more confused than ever. After all, King Wen, for all his great virtue, lived to be a hundred and had not yet brought the world under his rule. King Wu and the Duke of Zhou succeeded him – only then did their rule prevail. Now you speak of ruling as a True King as though it were a simple thing. Does that mean that King Wen is unworthy of emulation too?"

Mencius said, "How could we compare this situation to King Wen's? From the time when Tang founded the Shang Dynasty to the time of the Shang king Wuding, there

were six or seven kings who were sage worthies. The world had cleaved to the Shang for a long time, and what has long persisted is difficult to change. Wuding commanded the many lords at his court and presided over all the world as if he were turning it in his palm.

“The last ruler of the Shang, Zhòu, was not far removed in time from Wuding. The traditions inherited from his predecessors, their influence and good policies, were all still present. Moreover, his closest advisors, Weizi, Wei Zhong, Wangzi Bigan, Jizi, Jiao Ge – all were worthy men who assisted Zhòu and provided their support. It was for these reasons that it was only after many years that Zhòu lost his grip. Not a foot of territory was not his land, not a single man was not his subject – while King Wen was just rising to prominence from a territory only one hundred li square. This is why it was so difficult for him.

“The people of Qi have a saying:

Though you may be clever and wise,
The fortunes of circumstance are better to ride.
Though you may farm with the blade of a hoe,
The time of the season is what you must know.

It is the nature of the present time that makes True Kingship easy to attain.

“Even at the height of their powers, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou kings never held a territory of more than a thousand li under their direct control, and Qi is certainly as big as this. The crowing of farmyard cocks and the barking of family dogs can be heard everywhere within the state from border to border – Qi certainly has the necessary population. Without expanding its borders or adding new manpower, if state governance were to accord with policies of *ren*, no one could stop Qi’s lord from ruling all as a True King.

“Moreover, never has the world waited longer for a True King to arise, and never have the people suffered under tyranny more cruel than they do now. It is easy to provide food for the hungry and drink for the thirsty. Confucius said, ‘The influence of virtue spreads faster than an order sent through the stations of the post.’ In a time like the present, if a state of ten thousand chariots were to practice *ren* governance, the people would rejoice as though they had been released from the torture of being hung by their heels. With half the effort of the ancients, twice the achievements can be accomplished now. It is the times which make it so.”

2A.2

This important passage is of such length, interest, and complexity, that section titles have been added to the translation to help clarify the course of the argument.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: ATTAINING AN ‘UNMOVED MIND’

Gongsun Chou asked, “If you, Sir, were to receive a high post among the grandees of Qi and were able to implement your *dao*,* it would not be startling if the ruler were to rise to

*The term *dao* may denote the way of conduct advocated by a particular person or school, or the way a certain group normally behaves. When it is used to denote the course of action advocated by a speaker – the *dao*, from the speaker’s point of view – the term is rendered ‘Dao’.

the position of hegemon or even a true King. If this were to occur, would your heart be moved by this?"

"No," replied Mencius. "By the age of forty I had cultivated a heart that could not be moved."

"If that is so, then you, Sir, have exceeded the valor of the warrior Meng Ben by far!"

"That is not difficult," said Mencius. "Actually, the philosopher Gaozi attained an unmoving heart earlier than I."

"Is there a *dao* for achieving an unmoving heart?" asked Gongsun Chou.

"Yes," replied Mencius, "there is."

THE MARTIAL ARTS EXEMPLARS

Mencius continued. "The formula by which the warrior Bogong You nurtured his valor was this: 'I shall not allow my skin to recoil in the least or let my stare flinch. I shall consider the slightest touch of another to be as insulting as if he were whipping me publicly in a market or court. What I would not accept from a coarsely clad commoner, I will not accept from the ruler of a state of ten thousand chariots. I shall look upon stabbing a great ruler as though I were stabbing a coarsely clad commoner. I shall have no fear of patrician lords. Any insulting sound that reaches my ear I must return.'"

"The formula by which the warrior Mengshi She nurtured his valor was this: 'I shall regard defeat as the same as victory. To advance only after having measured the enemy or meet the enemy only after having plotted for victory shows fear of the enemy armies. How could I guarantee victory? All I can be assured of is that I will be fearless.'

"Mengshi She resembles Confucius's disciple Zengzi; Bogong You resembles Confucius's disciple Zixia. I do not know which type of valor is the finer, but Mengshi She was a man who preserved self-control.

"Once, Zengzi addressed a man named Zixiang thus: 'Do you delight in valor? I once heard from the Master about Great Valor. "If I search inwardly and find that I am not fully upright, though I face a mere coarsely clad commoner, I shall not threaten him. If I search inwardly and find that I am fully upright, though I face ten million men I will attack.'" The manner in which Mengshi She preserved his *qi* is not as fine as Zengzi's."

Zixia was a disciple of Confucius who was known for specializing in text study and focusing his own followers on the minor points of ritual as a discipline. Zengzi (Master Zeng) was a younger disciple who was known for his attention to capturing the ethical spirit of Confucius's *dao*, without such deep emphasis on textual and ritual study. Zengzi's influence during the Warring States era was particularly great, and Mencius was trained in his teaching tradition. He is generally authoritative when quoted in the *Mencius*. (Nothing further is known about the two martial arts exemplars mentioned here.)

FORMULAS USED BY GAOZI AND MENCIOUS

Gongsun Chou said, "May I inquire about the formulas that you and Gaozi used to attain an unmoving heart?"

Mencius replied, "Gaozi's rule was, 'If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart. If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in your heart, do not search for it in your *qi*.' I agree to the formula, 'If

you do not find it in the heart, do not search for it in the *qi*.' But it is unacceptable to say, 'If you do not find it in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart.'

"The will is the leader of the *qi*, and *qi* is something that fills the body. Wherever the will leads the *qi* follows. Thus there is a saying, 'Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.'"

Gongsun Chou said, "On the one hand you have said, 'Wherever the will leads the *qi* will follow.' But you have also said, 'Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.' Is there not an inconsistency?"

Mencius answered, "When the will is unified it moves the *qi*. But when the *qi* is unified, it can move the will. For example, when you see a man stumble or rush about, this is the action of his *qi*. In such cases, it has turned back upon the heart and moved it."

Gaozi was an older contemporary of Mencius, and he plays a major role in book 6A. Some interpreters take Gaozi to be a Mohist, but his ideas and the respect with which Mencius treats him here, even as he disagrees with him, suggests that Gaozi was a Confucian whose views differed from Mencius.

On the important concept of *qi*, consult the [Glossary](#). The term becomes central to this passage, one of the most philosophically fruitful in the *Mencius*. It plays no significant role elsewhere in the text.

THE FLOOD-LIKE *QI*

Gongsun Chou said, "May I presume to inquire how you, Sir, excel?"

"I can interpret what speech means," replied Mencius, "and I nurture well my flood-like *qi*."

Gongsun Chou asked, "What do you mean by 'flood-like *qi*'?"

"It is hard to describe," said Mencius. "This is a *qi* that is as great and hard as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never injures it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right (*yi*). It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away.

"This is why I say that Gaozi never really understood righteousness. He looked for it in external standards other than the heart. But your task must always be before you and you must not go making small adjustments. The task of nurturing this *qi* must never be forgotten by the heart, but you must not meddle and try to help it grow. Don't be like the simpleton from the state of Song.

"There was a man of Song who was concerned that the sprouts in his field were not growing well, so he went and tugged at each one. He went home utterly exhausted and said, 'Oh, I've made myself ill today! I've been out helping the sprouts to grow.' His sons rushed out to look and found the stalks all shriveled up.

"There are few in the world who do not 'help their sprouts grow.' There are those who do not 'weed' – they have simply given the whole task up as useless. But the ones who tug on the sprouts to help them grow – they are worse than useless, for they do harm!"

SPEECH AND SAGEHOOD

Gongsun Chou asked, “What do you mean when you say you can interpret what speech means?”

“When I hear biased speech, I can tell what has obscured the man’s understanding. When I hear excessive speech, I can tell what trap the man has fallen into. When I hear deviant speech, I can tell where the man has strayed. When I hear evasive speech, I can tell at what point the man has exhausted his reasons. When these defects are born in the mind they bring harm to self-governance, and when proclaimed as policies of state, they bring harm to its affairs.”

“Confucius’s disciples Zai Wo and Zigong excelled in the persuasive arts of speech, while Ran Niu, Minzi, and Yan Yuan excelled in expressing virtue in words. While Confucius excelled in both, he said, ‘I have no ability when it comes to the arts of speech.’ Thus you, Sir, must already have reached the level of a sage.”

Mencius said, “What sort of thing is that to say! Once, Zigong asked Confucius, ‘Are you a sage?’ and Confucius replied, ‘Sage? My abilities are not at that level. I’m just one who never tires of study or wearies of teaching.’ Zigong said, ‘To study without tiring is wisdom; to teach without wearying is *ren*. Both *ren* and wise, you, Master, are indeed a sage.’ Confucius was unwilling to accept the title of sage – what sort of thing is that to say of me?”

Gongsun Chou said, “I have heard it said that Confucius’s disciples Zixia, Ziyou, and Zizhang each was like the Master in one respect, while Ran Niu, Minzi, and Yan Yuan each resembled the Master in full, but at a lesser level. May I ask which of these fits you?”

“Let us put that aside for now.”

SAGES OF THE PAST AND CONFUCIUS

In this section, Confucius is compared to two ancient sages, Bo Yi and Yi Yin. Bo Yi, together with his brother, Shu Qi, was a late Shang Dynasty man of pure righteousness, who withdrew from society so as to keep a distance from the evil of the last Shang ruler. When King Wu conquered the Shang, he and his brother reappeared, but judging King Wu to be an imperfect ruler, they returned to their hermit lives and starved. Yi Yin was the prime minister and sagely advisor of Tang, the founding ruler of the Shang Dynasty.

“What would you say of the ancient men Bo Yi and Yi Yin?”

Mencius said, “They followed different *daos*. For Bo Yi, one should serve no man other than one’s ruler and rule over no people but those one had a right to rule; when order prevails in the world one should come forward; when chaos prevails withdraw. For Yi Yin, one may serve any ruler or rule any people; when order prevails in the world one should come forward; when chaos prevails, come forward as well. For Confucius, though, one should serve when one should serve and stop when one should stop, dally in a state when one should dally and depart quickly when one should depart quickly, all as circumstances require. These were all sages of old, and I have not yet been able to practice any of their *daos*. My wish, however, would be to emulate Confucius.”

“Were Bo Yi and Yi Yin in this way the equals of Confucius?”

“No. Since the birth of mankind, there has never been another like Confucius.”

“But did they share aspects in common with him?”

Mencius said, “Yes. Had any of them ruled over a territory one hundred li square, the lords of the states would have served him at his court, and he would have possessed all the world. Had any of them been offered the chance to gain the world merely by doing one unrighteous deed or killing one innocent person, he would not have done so. In this, they are alike.”

“May I ask in what respect they were different?”

“Confucius’s disciples Zai Wo, Zigong, and You Ruo all had intelligence enough to recognize a sage, and none would have been so base as to show a bias towards a man they loved. Zai Wo said, ‘In my view, the Master far surpasses Yao and Shun.’ Zigong said, ‘The Master sees the rituals of a state and from them knows the nature of its governance; he hears its music and from it knows its virtue; he looks back on a hundred generations of kings and appraises all of them such that no one can contradict him. Since the birth of mankind, there has never been another like the Master.’ You Ruo said, ‘It is not thus only with people. The unicorn is a beast like other beasts, the phoenix a bird like other birds, Mount Tai a hill like any mound, the Yellow River and the sea are bodies of water like the stream in a ditch, but all these stand out from their kind, far above the crowd. Since the birth of mankind, there has been nothing as outstanding as Confucius.’”

....

2A.6 Mencius said: All people possess within them a moral sense that cannot bear the suffering of others. The former kings had such a moral sense and thus they devised means of government that would not allow people to suffer. If a ruler were to employ the moral sense that makes human suffering unendurable in order to implement such humane government, he would find bringing the entire empire into order to be simple, as though he were turning the world in his hand.

Why do I say that all people possess within them a moral sense that cannot bear the suffering of others? Well, imagine now a person who all of a sudden sees a small child on the verge of falling down into a well. Any such person would experience a sudden sense of fright and dismay. This feeling would not be one that they summoned up in order to establish good relations with the child’s parents. They would not purposefully feel this way in order to win the praise of their friends and neighbors. Nor would they feel this way because the screams of the child would be unpleasant.

Now by imagining this situation we can see that one who lacked a sense of dismay in such a case could simply not be a person. And I could further show that anyone who lacked the moral sense of shame could not be a person; anyone who lacked a moral sense of deference could not be a person; anyone who lacked a moral sense of right and wrong could not be a person.

Now the sense of dismay on another’s behalf is the seed of *ren* planted within us, the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness (*yi*), the sense of deference is the seed of ritual *li*, and the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. Everyone possesses these four moral senses just as they possess their four limbs. For one to possess such moral senses and yet to claim that he cannot call them forth is to rob oneself; and for a person to claim that his ruler is incapable of such moral feelings is to rob his ruler.

As we possess these four senses within us, if only we realize that we need to extend and fulfill them then the force of these senses will burst through us like a wildfire

first catching or a spring first bursting forth through the ground. If a person can bring these impulses to fulfillment, they will be adequate to bring all the four quarters under his protection. But if a person fails to develop these senses, he will fail to protect even his own parents.

Although Mencius here identifies four innate moral senses, three of these are only claimed, not illustrated or proven to be universal and spontaneous within us. There is, however, a demonstration meant to persuade us that the seed of *ren* is universal and spontaneous, and therefore innate. It is important to think through this proof, as the interest of the *Mencius* as a serious philosophical work rests very largely on the intellectual quality of this proof, whether one regards it as valid or not. The significance of the child-by-the-well example has nothing to do with whether the imagined person – *any* person – would or would not save the child. The focus is entirely on whether any imaginable person would or would not – if presented the situation with no warning – experience “fright and dismay.” Mencius’s goal is to find a single, strong, non-self-regarding impulse that could plausibly be claimed to be both universal and unmediated by any cognitive act of reference to “external” moral standards. Any such component of our “natural” heart/mind will refute the Mohist claim that there is no Tian-endowed barrier to adopting the counter-intuitive, rational imperatives of universality and action choice by rational calculus.

....

One of the most unusual things about the *Mencius* is that it sometimes seems to show us Mencius in ways that appear to be unflattering. Traditionally, commentators have tried to find hidden messages that allow them to interpret these passages in a way that is sympathetic to Mencius, but it seems that the impulse of the original compilers in these cases was biographical – to record the real doings of the great man, rather than to idealize him. No passages raise these issues more than the following one, which appears to recount the circumstances surrounding the close of Mencius’s first stay in Qi.

2B.2 Mencius was about to go to the King’s court when an envoy from the King arrived and conveyed this message from the King: “I was planning to pay you a visit, but I am suffering from a chill and cannot risk being out in the air. However, I will hold court this morning, and I wonder whether I will be able to see you there?”

Mencius replied, “Unfortunately, I am ill. I am unable to go to court.”

The following day, Mencius went to pay the Dongguo family a condolence call. Gongsun Chou said, “Yesterday, you excused yourself on account of illness. Wouldn’t it be ill advised to go on a visit of condolence today?”

Mencius said, “Yesterday I was ill, today I’m well. Why should I pay the call?”

The King sent an envoy to ask after Mencius’s illness with a doctor to examine him.

Meng Zhongzi responded to their arrival by saying, “When His Majesty’s command was given yesterday, my Master was ill and unable to attend court. Today he has improved a bit and has hurried off to the court, but I’m not sure whether his strength will allow him to complete the journey.” He then dispatched several men to intercept Mencius on the road and implore him not to return home, but to rush to court.

In the end, Mencius was forced to seek refuge for the night with the family of Jing Chou. Jing Chou said to him, “The most important relationships a man must maintain are that between father and son within the family, and that between a ruler and subject beyond it. The keystone of the former is generosity, of the latter, respect. I have seen the

King show respect towards you; I have not observed you showing respect towards the King.”

Mencius said, “What sort of thing is that to say! No one else in Qi speaks to the King about *ren* and right. Could it be that they do not think these are worthy ideals? In their hearts they think, ‘How could he be worthy of being instructed in *ren* and righteousness.’ What disrespect could be greater than this? I would never presume to lay before the King any teaching that was not according to the *dao* of Yao and Shun – there is no one in Qi who shows the King more respect than I!”

Jing Chou said, “No, that’s not what I mean. According to the rites, ‘When one’s father summons, one should respond without even pausing to assent. When one’s ruler issues a summons, one responds without even waiting for one’s horse to be harnessed.’ You were preparing to go to court, but when the King’s summons came, you decided not to follow through. This would seem quite unlike what the rites prescribe.”

“How can you say such a thing?” said Mencius. “Zengzi said, ‘The rulers of Jin and Chu have wealth unequalled, but they may have it - I’ll take my *ren*. They may have their exalted rank, I’ll take my righteousness. In what way am I their inferior?’ Would Zengzi have said such a thing if it were not correct? This is one response to your point.

“Again, there are three things that the world exalts: rank, age, and virtue. At court, nothing is more important than rank, in one’s village it is age that is foremost, but for nurturing an era and sustaining the people, nothing surpasses virtue. How would it be right that the King, because he possesses one of these three, treats with condescension someone who possesses other two?”

“So you see, a ruler who will truly accomplish great things will always have subjects he does not summon – if he wishes to consult with them, he will go to them. If a ruler’s respect for virtue and joy in the Dao does not meet that standard, he is simply not a man to with whom one may plan great things. Tang was a student to Yi Yin first and only later did he relate to him as ruler to minister; that’s why he was able to become a True King without hard labor. Duke Huan of Qi was a student to Guan Zhong first and only later did he relate to him as ruler to minister; that’s why he was able to become a hegemon without hard labor. Today, the fact that in the world all the states are of equivalent size with the same poor level of virtue, so that none can prevail over any other, is simply due to rulers taking as ministers men whom they have taught, rather than men from whom they have learned. In the case of Tang and Yi Yin, Duke Huan and Guan Zhong, neither ruler dared to summon those ministers. Now, if Guan Zhong could not be summoned, how much less one who would not stoop to be a man like Guan Zhong?”

Clearly, Mencius was skilled at rationalizing his actions. Sometimes, it’s difficult to tell whether the authors of the text were simply trying to show how nimble he was at argument, or whether these rationalizations reflected a deeper philosophical commitment to flexible application of principles, which is the hallmark of Confucius as we see the *Mencius* portray him (for example, at the close of 2A.2). 2B.3 and 2B.5 make clear that this sort of issue was a major theme in Mencius’s life, at least in the eyes of the authors.

Note how certain historical figures used in argument here recur throughout the text. Yi Yin, minister to the Shang Dynasty founding king, Tang, and Guan Zhong, minister to the first of the “hegemons” of the Spring and Autumn period, Duke Huan of Qi, are men whose legends – as positive or negative examples – became part of the basic vocabulary of Confucians like Mencius, who aspired somehow to become ministers to the next “True King.”

2B.3 Chen Zhen said, “When you were in Qi, the King presented you with a hundred weight in gold and you refused to receive it. In Song you were presented with seventy weight and in Xue fifty, and those you accepted. If your past refusal was proper, then the later acceptances were not; if the acceptances were proper the refusal was not – Sir, you must acknowledge one or the other!”

Mencius said, “I was correct in all these cases. In Song, I was about to depart on a long journey, and travelers must be presented a provisioning gift. The message sent with the gold said it was a gift of provisions – why should I have refused it? In Xue I was forced to take precautions for my safety. The message sent with the gold said that the ruler had heard of this, and was therefore sending funds so I could arm myself – why should I have refused it? But in Qi there was no reason for the gift – to give someone a gift for no reason is to treat them as goods for sale. Whenever has there been a *junzi* for sale?”

....

2B.5 Mencius said to Chi Wa, “You resigned your post in Lingqiu in order to become Master of the Guard, and it seemed appropriate then, since you would not have opportunities to give advice to the King. But that was months ago. Could it be that no opportunity to give advice has arisen?”

Chi Wa remonstrated with the King, but the King refused his advice and Chi Wa had to resign his office and leave the court.

People in Qi began to say, “Mencius gave fine counsel to Chi Wa, but we seem to hear nothing of counsel he gives himself.”

Mencius’s disciple Gongduzi reported this to him. Mencius said, “I have heard that a man who holds office resigns it when he cannot fulfill his charge, and an advisor gives up his role when his words are ignored. I have neither office nor advisory responsibilities, so when it comes to whether I remain or leave, I have plenty of leeway to decide what’s best.”

....

The text now turns to the series of events that led up to Mencius’s later departure from Qi, after he had risen to a high advisory position. The reason Mencius resigned his post was the invasion of Yan, which we encountered in Book 1 (1B.10-11). Yan had become a target because its ruler, Zikuai, a hereditary monarch like all others, had ceded his throne to a minister, Zizhi, rather than to his son. Rulers elsewhere were outraged – their own legitimacy had been challenged – and Mencius, whose conservative views on this matter are clear from passage 1B.7, apparently agreed that this was simply a power play by an ambitious minister, hoodwinking a dimwitted lord. In the passage below, his views are solicited privately by a minister of Qi.

2B.8 Shen Tong asked Mencius in private confidence, “Do you think Yan ought to be attacked?”

Mencius said, “Yes. Zikuai had no authority to give Yan away, and Zizhi had no authority to receive it from Zikuai. Let’s say there was a gentleman here whom you liked; what if you, without consulting the King, privately granted to him your court rank and salary, and he accepted them without any commission from the King? What difference is there in the case of Yan?”

The armies of Qi attacked Yan, and someone said to Mencius, “Is it true that you urged Qi to attack Yan?”

“Never!” said Mencius. “Shen Tong asked whether Yan ought to be attacked and I said yes in response to his question. Then they went off and attacked Yan! If he had asked me, ‘Who should attack Yan?’ I would have replied, ‘He who acts as the agent of Tian should attack Yan.’

“Let’s say there were a murderer here, and someone asked, ‘Should this man be executed?’ I would say yes. If he asked, ‘Who should execute him?’ I would reply, ‘The Minister of the Guards should execute him.’

“As it is, this is simply one Yan attacking another Yan – why would I ever urge such a thing?”

....

The passages that end Book 2 all concern Mencius’s departure from Qi after the fiasco of the Yan invasion and the subsequent revolt of the people of Yan against Qi’s occupation army.

2B.12 As Mencius was departing from the state of Qi, a man called Yin Shi said, “If he didn’t realize that our King could never be a ruler like Tang or King Wu, then he is surely a very unperceptive man. If he did realize it and came to court anyway, then he’s just a fortune seeker. He traveled a thousand li to appear before the King; now that he’s met with no success he’s leaving, but he’s been on the road for three nights and has only just got past the town of Zhou. What’s the point of this dawdling? It seems most distasteful to me.”

Mencius’s disciple Gao reported this comment, and Mencius said, “What does this Yin Shi know of me? It was my wish to travel a thousand li to visit the King, but how could it be my wish to have met with no success? I simply have no alternative but to leave. To me, it feels all too fast that after three nights I’ve already left Zhou – the King might still change his ways! If he did, he would certainly call me back. Only after I’d passed Zhou and the King had sent no message pursuing me did I feel the true impulse to return home. And even so, how could I simply abandon the King? He is still capable of turning to goodness. If he would only use my counsels, it would not merely be the people of Qi to whom peace would come, it would be the entire world. And the King might still change his ways – I look for it every day! How could I behave like those petty courtiers who remonstrate with their rulers and, when their advice is not followed, stalk off frowning in anger and race all day to get as far away as possible before seeking an inn.”

When Yin Shi heard of this response he said, “I am a petty man indeed!”

2B.13 When Mencius was leaving Qi, Chong Yu accompanied him on the road and asked, “You are wearing an unhappy expression, Sir. Yet I have heard you say, ‘The *junzi* does not complain against Tian, nor does he blame men.’”

Mencius said, “That was one time, this is another. Every five hundred years a True King should arise, and in the interval there will always be ages famed for excellence. But since the time of the Zhou founders it has now been over seven hundred years. By the calendar calculation, it is overdue; considering what the times are like, the world is ready. But Tian does not yet wish to bring peace to the world. If it did, in this generation, who apart from me could it turn to? Why should I be unhappy?”

In the *Analects*, Confucius laments that he has failed to attract the recognition of a ruler that would employ him, but adds, “I do not complain against Tian, nor do I blame men.” Mencius seems to have passed this teaching on to disciples like Chong Yu, but now, he says that while it was appropriate for Confucius in his era, the times have changed.

2B.14 Mencius had left Qi and was dwelling in Xiu. Gongsun Chou asked, “Is it traditional practice to serve at court without accepting a stipend?”

“No,” said Mencius. “But when I had my first audience with the King at Chong, I determined as I retired from his presence that I would ultimately resign. Not wishing to appear to be changeable, I never accepted my stipend. Then the war began and it would not have been proper to ask leave to depart. It was never my intent to remain long in Qi.”

BOOK 3

3A.1 When Duke Wen of Teng was still only the heir apparent he traveled to the state of Chu. His route took him through Song, and there he visited with Mencius, who expounded to him the doctrine that humans are by nature good, his words everywhere referring to the sage kings Yao and Shun.

When the future duke returned from Chu, he visited Mencius again. Mencius said, “Do you doubt my words, Prince? There is only one Dao and no other. Cheng Gan once said of Duke Jing of Qi, ‘He is but a man, and I am a man as well. Why should I hold him in awe?’ Confucius’s disciple Yan Yuan said, ‘What sort of man was Shun? What sort of man am I? Any man who aspires to it can be like this.’ Zengzi’s pupil Gongming Yi said, ‘My teacher is King Wen, and how could I be misled by the Duke of Zhou?’

“Now Teng, if its territory were a square, would be about fifty li to a side. That’s big enough to be turned it into a state that exemplifies goodness. The *Documents* says, ‘If the medicine doesn’t make your head swim, your illness won’t be cured.’”

This is the sole mention by name of Mencius’s doctrine of the goodness of human nature outside the famous opening passages of Book 6A. Mencius’s counsel to the Duke of Teng is exceptional because, unlike the huge states of Wei (Liang) and Qi, and the midsize state of Song, in Teng Mencius was advising the ruler of a very small territory, a Chinese “dukedom” about the size of Bloomington, Indiana.

....

There are a number of passages in the *Mencius* in which the discussion goes into great depth concerning concrete economic and social policies. Although Mencius was an idealist in many ways, he understood what government policy-making was about, and that economics was at the basis of good planning. In discoursing on the very broad notion of “humane (*ren*) governance,” he could become very specific about practical policy measures. His counsels to Duke Teng include discussions of this nature, which the following passage illustrates. In it, the variety of technical terms and references to obscure figures from the past (none of which may be historically accurate) should not interfere with the main points concerning historical lessons in ideal governance.

3A.3 Duke Wen of Teng asked about governance.

Mencius said, “A ruler must not be slow in handling the business of the people. The *Poetry* says:

By day they gather up the reeds,
By night they weave them into ropes,
Rush up to repair the roof,
Then off to sow the seeds of grain.

The *dao* that pertains to the common people is that those who have a constant sufficiency of goods will have a constancy of mind, while those who lack a constancy of goods lack a constancy of mind. Without any constancy of mind, they will abandon themselves to strange behavior and excesses, there will be nothing they are unwilling to do. If you punish people only after they fall into crime in this way, then you have set a trap for your people. When has there ever been a man of *ren* on the throne who entrapped people in this way? Thus a worthy ruler will be reverent and thrifty, and will treat his subordinates with *li*. He will only take from his people what is prescribed in the codes of the state.

Yang Hu said, ‘One who pursues wealth will not be *ren*; one who pursues *ren* will not be wealthy.’

“During the Xia Dynasty era, families were each allotted fifty *mu* of land, and they were taxed by the *gong* system; during the Shang, families had seventy *mu* of land, and the tax system was called the *zhu*; Zhou Dynasty families had one hundred *mu* each, and were taxed according to the *che* system. Basically, all three systems were designed to tax at a rate of about one-tenth. The term *che* means ‘what is taken’; the term *zhu* means ‘what is lent.’ Longzi said, ‘In managing the land, no system was better than the *zhu* or worse than the *gong*.’ The *gong* system calculated a normal tax amount on the basis of an average over several years. In good years, when grain was so plentiful that people wasted it, the government could have taken more and the people would not have considered it harsh, but it took relatively little. In bad years, when food was so scarce that the people ate the husks which should have fertilized the fields, the government still insisted on its full quota. If the ruler, as father and mother of the people, exhausts the people so that they can’t care for aged parents no matter how hard they work, even as they pile on debt, until young and old alike tumble into the gutters to die, in what way is he the father and mother of the people? Teng has always practiced hereditary possession of income producing lands for its noble families. The *Poetry* says:

Rain on the lord’s shared fields,
And then reach to our private ones.

Only the *zhu* system involved designated common and private fields in this way. Looked at in this way, though, the Zhou in effect used the *zhu* too.

“You should establish schools to teach the people, calling them *xiang*, *xu*, *xue*, or *xiao*. *Xiang* means ‘nurture’; *xiao* means ‘teach’; *xu* were named for archery training. The Xia called schools *xiao*; the Shang called them *xu*; the Zhou called them *xiang*. All three eras used the term ‘study’ (*xue*). In all cases, the goal was to clarify the relationships of human society. When human relationships are clearly understood by those above, people are kind to those below them down to the lowest levels. Should a True King arise, he will surely take this principle as his model and you will become the teacher of a True King.

“The *Poetry* says:

Though the Zhou was an old state
Its mandate is new.

Here it refers to King Wen. If you try with all your might, you can surely make your state new.”

The Duke sent his minister Bi Zhan to ask about the “well-field system.”

“Well-field system”: It was believed that in the utopian past, land was divided into parcels of nine squares, in the pattern of the Chinese character for the word “well”: 井. The eight outer fields were assigned as private plots to eight families. The central field was “common” (or the “duke’s field”). The eight families worked it as their tax contribution to the ruler, as Mencius specifies below. The ruler often assigned its proceeds as a hereditary stipend to a specific noble family, or as a temporary stipend to a minister assigned to a specific functional role. The *Poetry* couplet above, speaking of shared and private fields, was generally understood to refer to this system, although it is not known whether such a system was ever actually practiced or was merely an ideal.

Mencius said, “Your ruler plans to implement humane governance and has selected you for this purpose. You must exert yourself! Humane governance always starts from the setting of land boundaries. If boundaries are not properly drawn, the division of land into nine-parcel “wells” will be uneven, and stipends of public field grain will be unequal. This is why despotic rulers and corrupt officers invariably disrupt field boundaries. Once the boundaries are settled, the divisions of fields and setting of stipends will be effortless.

“Now, Teng is a very small state, but it certainly must have both those who rule from court and those who live out on the land. Without rulers at court there would be no way to bring order to those on the land, and without those on the land there would be no way to sustain those who rule at court.

“I recommend that those living on the land be taxed at a rate of one ninth, in the manner of the *zhu*, while those who live within the walls of the capital should be taxed at a rate of one-tenth, and required to deliver their tax directly. From the highest ministers down, court officers should be provided fifty *mu* of land whose income will supply the costs of their ancestral sacrifices. For every additional adult male in the family line, another twenty-five *mu* of land should be assigned.

“In the burial of the dead or in moving one’s home, people should not be permitted to go beyond their home village. If those who together till a well field’s land befriend one another at home and abroad, look out for one another, and support one another in illness, the people will live in close comradeship.

“A well field measures one li square or nine hundred *mu*. The central plot is shared as ‘common’ land; the eight families each cultivate one of the outer hundred *mu* plots privately, and farm the common plot together. Only when the work on the common plot is done do they dare turn to their private duties. This is the distinctive character of the people who live on the land.

“All this is a broad overview. As for filling in the outlines, that must be up to your ruler and you.”

The text of the *Mencius* includes many passages designed to refute doctrines that challenged Confucians in Mencius’s time. These are often pictured as debates between Mencius and philosophical adversaries (astonishingly, Mencius wins time and again!). The following passage is the text’s extended argument against a minor school of thought that took as its inspiration legends of an ideal ruler and agricultural hero of the past, known as the Sublime Farmer. The passage that follows attacks the Mohists through a supposed debate between Mencius and a follower of that school.

3A.4 A man named Xu Xing came to Teng from Chu, preaching the doctrines of the Sublime Farmer. He marched through the court gate and announced to Duke Wen, “I, this distant stranger, have heard that Your Highness is practicing humane governance, and I wish to receive a dwelling place here that I may become one of your common subjects.”

Duke Wen provided him a place. His several dozen followers all wore clothes of coarse hemp and eked out a living by weaving sandals and mats.

A follower of Chen Liang named Chen Xiang came to Teng from Song with his brother Xin, both bearing ploughs upon their backs. Chen Xiang said, “I have heard that Your Highness is practicing the governance of sages. This makes you a sage as well, and it is my wish to become the common subject of a sage.”

Then Chen Xiang met Xu Xing and was delighted. He discarded all he had learned before and took Xu Xing as his teacher. When he met Mencius, he spoke to him of Xu Xing's teachings. "The lord of Teng is certainly a worthy ruler. Still, he has yet to hear the Dao. A true worthy tills the soil beside his people and cooks his own meals; it is thus that his state is brought into order. Now, Teng has granary stores and treasure vaults; this shows that the Duke treats his people with harshness in order to nurture his own person. How could this be worthy?"

Mencius said, "Does Xu Xing only eat what he himself has planted?"

"Yes."

"Does he only wear clothes that he himself has sewn?"

"No," said Chen Xiang. "He wears hemp."

"Does he wear a cap?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"It is of plain silk."

"He wove it himself?"

"No, he traded some grain as barter for it."

"Why doesn't Xu Xing weave it himself?"

"It would interfere with his farm work."

"Does he cook with pots and steamers and work his land with an iron ploughshare?"

"Yes."

"Does he make these himself?"

"No, he trades grain to get such things."

"Then to trade grain for implements cannot be treating the potter and smith with harshness, and when the potter and smith exchange their wares for grain, neither is that treating the farmer harshly. But why does not Xu Xing work as a potter and smith so that he will be able to get from within his own home everything that he needs? Why does he enter into this welter of exchanges with various craftsmen? Doesn't he begrudge all this bother?"

"No one," said Chen Xiang, "could undertake the work of all craftsmen and be a farmer besides!"

"Well, then, is ruling the world the only occupation that one can undertake while farming? There are affairs of great men and affairs of ordinary men! Moreover, if it were necessary for each individual first to make all the implements of his work before using them, it would simply march the world down the road to exhaustion.

"For this reason it is said, 'Some labor with their minds, some labor with their strength.' Those who labor with their minds bring order to those who labor with their strength, and those who labor with their strength are ordered by those who labor with their minds. Those who are put in order by others feed people, and those who order people are fed by others. This is a universal principle throughout the world.

"In the time of the sage king Yao, the world was not yet settled. The great flood raged across the land, inundating the world, plants grew thick and birds and beasts ranged and multiplied. At that time, the five grains did not yet ripen for harvest, and the birds and beasts infringed on human settlements, their tracks crossing in the midst of the central states. Yao alone brooded over this, and he raised up Shun to help him spread

order. Shun told Yi to be in charge of fire, and Yi lit fires in the mountains and marshes to burn out the birds and beasts, who fled into hiding. Yu dredged the nine river courses. He channeled the Ji and Ta Rivers into the sea; he unblocked the Rivers Ru and Han, and he guided the Huai and Si until they all poured into the Yangzi. Only then could the people of the central states gather enough food to eat. During those times, Yu spent eight years abroad in the land – three times he passed the gate of his home, but he never stepped inside. Though he wished to till the land, could he have done so?

“It was Prince Millet who taught the people the art of agriculture and how to plant the five types of grain. As the grains ripened, people bore more children.

“There is a *dao* that common people follow: if they have food enough to eat and clothes enough to wear, they sit in idleness and pursue no learning, little different from birds and beasts. Yao brooded over this as well, and he appointed Xie to be Minister of the People and teach them about proper human relationships – about affection between father and son, righteousness between ruler and minister, the proper divisions between husband and wife, the precedence of elder and younger, and the faithfulness of friends. Yao said, ‘Comfort their labor, draw them to come, straighten them upright, assist them with aid, make each gain the place proper to him, and then move them further through acts of virtue.’ The sage worries for his people like this – does he have spare time for farming?

“Yao took it upon himself to worry he would find no Shun, and Shun took it upon himself to worry he would find no ministers like Yu and Gaoyao. He who takes it upon himself to worry that his hundred *mu* of land is not well worked – that man is a farmer.

“A man who portions his wealth out among others is called generous; one who teaches others to be good is called conscientious; one who finds the right leader for the world is called *ren*. It is easy to turn the world over to someone else – to find the right man for it is what’s hard! Confucius said, ‘How grand was the rule of the Emperor Yao! Only Yao could emulate the grandeur of Tian. So boundless was he the people could find no name for him. What a ruler Shun was! Towering! He possessed all the world, but regarded none of it as his own.’ Yao and Shun possessed the world – how could it be that they did not put their minds to it? Rather, they didn’t put their minds to farming.

“I have heard the wisdom of using the culture of the central states to transform the barbarians; I have never heard the wisdom of transforming into barbarians. Your teacher, Chen Liang, came from Chu. He took pleasure in the *dao* of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius, so he traveled north to the central states. Even among the scholars of the north, there were none who could surpass him. We call men like him heroic gentlemen. You and your brother studied under him for dozens of years, but now that he’s dead, you turn your backs on him.

“When Confucius died, after they had observed the three-year mourning period, the disciples packed their bags to go to their homes. They all went to see Zigong, and facing one another, they all wailed until their voices gave out, only then did they depart. Zigong returned to the gravesite, where he built a hut and lived alone for three years more, only then departing for home. At another point, Zixia, Zizhang, and Ziyou felt that their comrade You Ruo resembled a sage, and they wished to serve him as they had Confucius. They pressed Zengzi to join them, but Zengzi said, ‘It is not right. As though washed by the Yangzi and Han Rivers, bleached by the autumn sun, how gleaming white – the Master cannot be surpassed.’

“How different from Zengzi you are! A shrike-tongued barbarian comes from the south opposing the Dao of the former kings, and you turn your back on your teacher to study with him. I’ve heard people speak of climbing out of a dark ravine up to the top of a tall tree, but never of descending from the treetops to be in a dark ravine. In the Poetry, the ‘Odes of Lu’ say:

He struck at the Rong and the Di tribes north,
Then south, to punish the Jing and the Shu.

The Duke of Zhou punished these people, now you want to learn from them – that’s a change for the worse, indeed!”

Chen Xiang said, “If we follow Xu Xing’s *dao*, market prices will be fixed and there will be no fraud in the state. Though you sent a mere boy to the market, no one would cheat him. When bolts of woven cloth and silk are sold in standard lengths, when raw hemp, flax, and silk are sold at standard weights, when the five grains are sold in standard measures, then prices will be unified. The same will be true for sandals, too.”

Mencius said, “That things are not all identical is in the nature of things. Some are half a dozen times more valuable than others, some a thousand times, and some a million. If you insist that they all be treated as equal, you will bring chaos to the world. If a sandal coarsely woven costs the same as one crafted with fine weave, who will ever make fine sandals again? To follow Xu Xing’s *dao* is to lead one another into fraud – how could one bring order to a state in this way?”

3A.5 A Mohist named Yi Zhi wished to visit Mencius, and asked an introduction from Mencius’s disciple Xu Bi. Mencius said, “I have long wished to meet him, but I am ill now. When I’m better, I’ll go pay him a visit. There’s no need for him to come here.”

But later, Yi Zhi pressed Xu Bi for an introduction once again. Mencius said, “I can see him now. If one is not straightforward, then the Dao will not become clear. I’ll straighten him out. I hear that Yi Zhi is a Mohist. Mohists make frugality in funerals part of their *dao*. Yi Zhi aspires to change the world in this way, and it must be that he believes frugal funerals to be honorable, yet he himself gave his parents lavish funerals – it would seem that he treated his parents dishonorably.”

Xu Bi reported this to Yi Zhi, who said, “The Confucian *dao* holds that the ancients prized acting towards others with as much care as one gives a newborn babe in arms. What would this mean? I believe it means loving all without distinction, beginning with one’s parents.”

Xu Bi reported this to Mencius, who said, “Does Yi Zhi truly believe that men can love their neighbors’ children as much as their brothers’? His argument actually relies on that special example picturing how we’d feel if we saw some innocent baby crawling to the edge of a well. When Tian gives birth to a thing, it gives it only one set of roots. Yi Zhi’s arguments seem to work because he gives them two roots.

“Most likely, in past ages men did not bury their parents, but simply consigned their bodies to an open ditch when they died. But some days later, passing by, they would have seen how the foxes had gnawed on the corpses and the flies sucked. Sweat would have stood out on their brows as they averted their eyes. Now that sweat was not conjured up for others to see – it would have been the feelings of their inmost hearts pouring forth on their faces. Then they would have returned to their homes to get shovels

and baskets to cover the corpses over. If burying them thus was truly the right thing, then when filial sons and men of *ren* bury their parents it is certainly in accord with the Dao.”

Xu Bi reported this answer to Yi Zhi, who stared blankly for a time and then said, “I have taken his point.”

There are important overlaps between 3A.5 and the “four seeds” argument in 2A.6. In both cases, a critical hypothetical test involves a baby, but in this case, it appears that the Mohist Yi Zhi had turned Mencius’s argument for the innateness of the sense of *ren* against the Confucians. Mencius seeks out a counter-argument that equally calls on us to confirm experiences of spontaneous emotion, but in a context that appears to narrow the strength of those emotions to those whom we love as family, thus parrying any Mohist claim that any such innate feelings of care can take all persons equally for their object. When Mencius says that Yi Zhi claims people have “two roots” he may mean that the Mohist claim that feelings for family can be felt towards strangers implies that people are equally rooted in the spontaneous reactions of their hearts and in the dictates of reason in their minds.

....

3B.4 Peng Geng asked, “You travel from state to state, living off their lords, trailed by dozens of carts and hundreds of followers. Isn’t this extravagant?”

Mencius said, “If it is not in accord with the Dao, one may not accept so much as a basket of rice. But if it is in accord with the Dao, one may follow the example of Shun, who accepted the world from Yao without it being considered extravagant – that is, unless you would consider it so.”

“No, but it is not right for a gentleman not to work for his support.”

“Would you not allow the exchange of goods among those of different occupations, so that the surplus of one supplies the deficiency of another? If you would allow it, then you would support carpenters and chariot makers. Now, let’s say we have a man here who is filial at home and deferential to elders abroad, who cultivates the Dao of the former kings for the benefit of students who may come to him. Yet you would not support such a man? How can you so revere the carpenter and chariot maker yet hold the man of *ren* and right in such low esteem?”

“The intent of the carpenter and chariot maker is to make a living. Does the *junzi* pursue the Dao with the intention of making a living by it?”

Mencius said, “What matter is his intention to you? If what he does is of service to you, you ought to provide him support in all appropriate instances. Do you provide support people for their intentions or for their work?”

“For their intentions!”

“Let’s say there’s a man here smashing your roof tiles as he throws paint on your walls. But his intention is that he will receive payment; would you provide it?”

“No.”

“Then you actually provide support for people because of their work, not because of their intentions.”

....

3B.6 When he was in Song, Mencius spoke with Dai Busheng. “Do you wish that your King will become good? Let me speak plainly. Suppose there were a grandee of Chu who

wanted his son to learn the language of Qi. Would he hire a man of Qi or a man of Chu to be his son's tutor?"

"He would have a man of Qi tutor his son."

"If a single man of Qi acted as his tutor, with a host of Chu men chattering in the language of Chu, though you beat the boy daily to make him speak in Qi it would be no use. But if you sent the boy off and had him live for several years in the neighborhoods of Qi, though you beat him daily you could not make him speak in Chu.

"Now, you tell me that Xue Juzhou is a good man and that you have placed him in the King's household. If everyone high and low, old and young in the King's household were like Xue Juzhou, with whom could the King join to do bad? But if all others high and low, old and young are not like Xue Juzhou, then through whom can the King do good? How can a single Xue Juzhou influence the King on his own?"

....

3B.8 When Mencius was in Song, Dai Yingzhi said to Mencius, "At the present time, we would not be able to abolish our customs and market taxes and rely solely on a tax of one in ten. How would it be if we simply reduce the current rates a bit and repeal those other taxes next year?"

Mencius said, "Let's say there were a man who stole one of his neighbor's chickens every day. If someone said to him, 'This is not how a *junzi* behaves!' and he replied, 'How would it be if I simply reduce my current rate a bit, steal a chicken every month instead, and then stop next year?"

"If you realize it is wrong, stop immediately. Why wait for next year?"

3B.9 Mencius's disciple Gongduzi said, "Master, outsiders all say you are fond of disputation. What do you say to that?"

Mencius said, "How could I be fond of disputation? I just have no choice. The world has existed for a long time, now in order, now in chaos. In the time of Yao, the waters ran awry and flooded the central states; eels and dragons dwelt there and the people had no security. The people in the lowlands nested their homes on stilts; the people in the highlands dwelt in caves. The *Documents* says: 'The deluge sounded an alarm for us,' thereby referring to this flood. Yao sent Yu to control it. Yu cut channels through the land to guide the waters to the sea and drove the eels and dragons away into the marshlands. The water that springs from the earth formed the Yangzi, Huai, Han, and Yellow Rivers. As the danger receded and the harm from beasts subsided, people were at last able to build their homes on level soil.

"But after the deaths of Yao and Shun the Dao of the sages declined and tyrants arose one after another. They leveled homes in order to create their pleasure ponds and the people had no place to rest. They took fields out of cultivation to create their pleasure parks and the people had no way to eat. And then there arose errant teachings and patterns of violent conduct. With the spread of parks, ponds, and lakes, wild birds and beasts returned, and by the time of the last Shang ruler Zhòu, the world was in chaos once again. The Duke of Zhou guided King Wu to execute Zhòu. He waged war against Yan for three years and punished its lord. He drove Fei Lian to the edge of the sea, and killed him there. Altogether, he annexed fifty states. He drove tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses,

and elephants to distant lands, and the people of the world were joyful. The *Documents* says, 'How gleaming, the plans of King Wen! And receiving them, King Wu's deeds shone bright. They enlighten and aid us of later days so we can keep to the upright without defect.'

"But each generation declined and the Dao fell towards obscurity; errant teachings and patterns of violent conduct arose once again, until there came to be subjects who murdered their lords and children who murdered their fathers. Confucius was alarmed, and he created the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which records the state of affairs from the view of the Son of Heaven. This is why Confucius said, 'It will be on the basis of the *Annals* that I am known; it will be on the basis of the *Annals* that I am vilified.'

"But no sage king has arisen. The lords of the states act with abandon and gentlemen in retirement proclaim deviant doctrines. The words of Yang Zhu and Mozi fill the world such that those who do not preach the doctrines of Yang Zhu preach those of Mozi. The maxim of the Yangists is 'Each for himself,' a world of men without rulers; the maxim of the Mohists is 'Universal love,' a world of men without fathers. To know no father and no ruler – this is to be nothing but a beast. Zengzi's pupil Gongming said, 'When a ruler has rich meats in his kitchens and stables of fat horses while his people have the look of hunger and the starving drop dead in the wilds, he rules the beasts and eats men.' If the *daos* of the Yangists and Mohists don't cease and the *dao* of Confucius is not clear to all, then deviant doctrines will deceive the people and *ren* and righteousness will be blocked. To block out *ren* and righteousness is to rule the beasts and eat men, and the people will take to eating one another.

"This is why I am alarmed, and why I defend the Dao of the past sages and confront Yangists and Mohists, driving out depraved speech so that errant doctrines will no longer flourish. 'When they flourish in one's heart, they infect one's acts, when they flourish in one's acts, they infect one's governance' – were a sage to arise once again, he would not change a single word of mine.

The influence of the Mohists on Mencius is clear in this passage. Not only does he announce that his mission is to counter their teachings, the entire passage is framed as a challenge to Mencius's penchant to *argue*, which is precisely what Mohism with its reliance on logical reasoning forced subsequent thinkers to do. Within the Confucian tradition, argument had not initially been the tool of wisdom; long practice in *li*, the most immediately available and diffuse expression of the "Dao of the former kings," was the route to understanding. Words were as much tools of deception as of enlightenment (as *Analects* passages such as 1.3 and 17.19 make clear). From the standpoint of other Ru within Mencius's tradition, he undoubtedly seemed to undercut authentic learning by relying so heavily on argument. Mencius here acknowledges the problem, but blames the intellectual environment, not what would appear to be his own garrulous tendencies.

The non-Mohist school of thought that Mencius points to here is not well understood. The philosopher Yang Zhu either did not author works himself or none has survived, and the fragmentary passages of his purported teachings are not entirely clear. Some interpretations picture his approach as a type of egoism, focusing on the value implications of his famous aphorism, "If I could benefit the world by plucking a single hair from my shin I would not do it!" This seems to have been an extreme anti-Mohist stance, denying the value of any degree of altruism or consideration of others in social action. Mencius seems to understand Yang Zhu in this way. A different construction of Yang Zhu's thought might suggest that his teaching celebrated the value of the physical body as a natural creation, seeing the generative process of the cosmos as in some sense sacred. Keeping one's body unharmed throughout life may have appeared to be an ethical imperative, and so plucking a shin hair would have been problematic, but this might not have applied to Salvation Army donations.

3B.10 Mencius's friend Kuang Zhang said, "How could anyone say that Chen Zhongzi isn't an incorruptible man? When he dwelt in Wuling, he was able to endure three days without food, though his ears grew deaf and his eyes grew blind. By a well there was a pear half eaten by maggots – he had to crawl to reach it, and only after three mouthfuls did his ears and eyes recover their sense."

Mencius said, "Among the gentlemen of Qi I most certainly consider Zhongzi the finest. But wherein can he be considered incorruptible? If one were to press Zhongzi's discipline to the limit, one could only live like an earthworm, eating parched soil above and drinking below in the spring of yellow earth's depths. Was it an incorruptible like the sage Bo Yi who built the home where Zhongzi lives, or was it a man like Robber Zhi? Was the millet than he ate grown by Bo Yi or Robber Zhi? We don't know."

Kuang Zhang said, "What does that matter? He himself wove sandals while his wife worked hemp to barter for their needs."

"Zhongzi came from an hereditary family of Qi nobility. His elder brother received an income of ten thousand measures from the fields of Ge, but he felt his brother's income was not righteously got and he would not be supported by it. He felt his brother's house was not righteously got and he would not live in it. He dwelt in Wuling, apart from his brother and mother. One day, he returned home for a visit and found that someone had presented his brother with a live goose. He furrowed his brow and said, 'What use is a honker like this?' On another day, his mother slaughtered the goose and served it to him to eat. Just then, his brother walked in and said, 'That's the "honker's" meat!' Zhongzi ran outside and vomited. What his mother served he would not eat, but he ate what his wife served him. He wouldn't live in his brother's home but he would still live in Wuling. We can certainly call him someone who followed principle to the limit, but anyone who wished to be like Zhongzi would have to be an earthworm to press his discipline to the limit."

BOOK 4

....

4A.4 Mencius said, “When those one loves do not respond with affection, reflect on your humanity (*ren*). When those one governs do not respond with order, reflect on your wisdom. When those one treats with ritual courtesy do not return it, reflect on your respectfulness. If in any action there is a failing, seek it out within yourself. When one’s person is correct, the world will turn to you. The *Poetry* says:

Long may he match the mandate,
Himself seeking many blessings.”

....

4A.6 Mencius said, “There is no difficulty in governing – do not offend the great clan houses. What the great houses admire all in the state will admire. What all in a state admire, the world will admire. In this way, the influence of one’s virtue will flow like a flood, streaming to the four seas.”

This appears to be a fragment of a larger discussion. The point must be one that was meant to be deployed in persuading a ruler of the ease of implementing the moral governance by adding a dose of realpolitik, something that Mencius was clearly willing to do, as the following passage illustrates.

4A.7 Mencius said, “When the Dao prevails in the world, those of little virtue serve those of great virtue, and those of little worthiness serve great worthies. When the Dao does not prevail, the small serve the large and the weak serve the strong. These two conditions are determined by Tian. Those who comply with Tian survive, those who act contrary to Tian perish.

“Duke Jing of Qi said, ‘Since we are unable to command, if we also refuse to accept commands our state will be cut down.’ Weeping, he sent his daughter off to become the wife of the lord of Wu. But now, small states take lessons from the large ones and feel it is shameful to accept commands from states greater than they – this is like the pupil feeling ashamed to accept the commands of the teacher. If they are ashamed, they should take lessons from King Wen. If the ruler of a large state were to take King Wen as his teacher he would govern the world within five years, while the ruler of a small state would govern the world in seven. The *Poetry* says:

The grandsons of the Shang
Number beyond all count;
Yet the Lord Above commands
Their service to the Zhou.
Now they serve the Zhou,
Tian’s mandate is not fixed;
Shang warriors quick and sharp,
Pour the wine at royal Zhou shrines.

Confucius said, ‘Against the humane (*ren*) man none can prevail by strength of numbers; were the ruler of a state to love humanity, none in the world could be his match.’ But to wish to have no match in the world by means other than humanity would be like refusing cooling water after grasping a scalding thing. The *Poetry* says:

Who, having gripped a scalding thing,
Would not thrust his hand in water?

....

4A.11 Mencius said, “The Dao is nearby, yet people seek it afar; the task is easy, yet people seek it in difficulty. Let all people treat their parents as parents and elders as elders and the world will be at peace.”

4A.12 Mencius said, “If a man in a subordinate position cannot gain the support of those above him he will not be able to govern people. There is a *dao* for gaining the support of superiors: if you are not trusted by your friends you will not gain the support of your superiors. There is a *dao* for becoming trusted by your friends: if you are unable to please your parents you will not be trusted by your friends. There is a *dao* for pleasing your parents: if you examine yourself and find you do not have integrity within you will not be able to please your parents. There is a *dao* for gaining integrity within: if you do not see the good clearly you will not have integrity within.

“This integrity is the Dao of Tian and aspiring to integrity is the Dao of man. There has never been a man who has thorough integrity yet has been unable to move others; there has never been a man without integrity who has been able to move others.”

The passage overlaps with the canonical text “The Doctrine of the Mean,” traditionally ascribed to Confucius’s grandson Zisi, but like a post-Mencian work. It lays great stress on “integrity” in dispositions and action, and links that ethical ideal to a cosmological portrait of a Tian-infused universe in which integrity is the basic generative force.

....

4A.15 Mencius said, “Nothing is better in examining a man than to observe the pupils of his eyes. They cannot conceal his faults. If he is upright within his breast then his eyes will be clear; if he is not, they will be murky. Listen to his speech, stare into his eyes – where can he hide?”

This passage echoes *Analects* 2.10. The Confucian school declined to lay stress on our experience of an internal life of the self, inaccessible to others. Viewing “human” components of man as nurtured through social learning (Mencius being the sole major advocate of any naturally intuitive values, and those present only embryonically), this approach pictures others as far more thoroughly “knowable” through action and expression than is common in Western views.

....

4A.17 Chunyu Kun said, “Is it true that according to *li*, men and women must not touch one another?”

“That is the *li*,” said Mencius.

“If your sister-in-law were drowning, would you extend her your hand?”

Mencius said, “A man who would not extend his hand to a drowning sister-in-law would be a wild beast. That men and women must not touch one another is *li*; extending one’s hand to a drowning sister-in-law is balancing circumstances.”

Chunyu Kun said, “Today, the world is drowning. Why do you, Sir, not extend your hand to it?”

“When the world is drowning, you extend the Dao to save it. When a sister-in-law is drowning you extend your hand – do you wish me to save the world with my hand?”

The Mencian doctrine of “balancing,” built on the analogy of a steelyard scale, is a version of the doctrine of Timeliness, which Mencius also invokes at many points. It stresses that moral rules must be applied through ethically trained judgment, not (as Mohists would have it, according to Confucians) so mechanically that they seem to endorse plainly counter-intuitive and utterly unacceptable choices. The most celebrated discussion of balancing appears at 6B.1.

4A.18 Gongsun Chou said, “Why should a *junzi* not be teacher to his own son?”

Mencius said, “Because of the nature of the circumstances it cannot work out. When one teaches, one must correct one’s pupil. When correction does not work, anger follows, and that elicits a hurtful response: ‘You teach by correcting me, but you yourself are not correct!’ So in the end, father and son hurt one another, and this is bad.

“In the past, men taught one another’s sons and father and son never rebuked one another. Rebuke leads to disaffection, and there is no misfortune so great as disaffection between father and son.”

....

4A.26 Mencius said, “There are three forms of unfiliality, and bearing no heirs is the worst. Shun married without telling his parents because he was afraid of leaving no heir. The *junzi* understands this as equivalent to telling his parents.”

The issues at stake here should be understood in the context more fully presented in 5A.2.

4A.27 Mencius said, “The substance of humanity (*ren*) is serving one’s parents; the substance of right is obeying one’s elders. The substance of wisdom is unswerving awareness of these two. The substance of *li* is the measured embellishment of these two. The substance of music is taking joy in these two, from which springs the joy of music. Once it springs forth, what can stop it? Unstoppable, all unaware one’s feet begin to prance and one’s hands begin to dance.”

....

4B.4 Mencius said, “When an innocent gentleman is executed, a grandee may depart the state. When innocent people are slaughtered, gentlemen may leave the state.”

4B.5 Mencius said, “When the ruler is humane (*ren*), none will fail to be humane. When a ruler is righteous (*yi*), none will fail to be righteous.”

4B.6 Mencius said, “Ritual *li* that are not legitimate *li*, righteous (*yi*) acts that are not legitimately right – the great man does not perform these.”

Once again we see rules subjugated to the judgment of the ethically perfected actor; 4B.11 is a further example, closely echoing *Analects* 4.10.

....

4B.8 Mencius said, “Only when there are things a man will not do is he capable of doing great things.”

....

4B.11 Mencius said, “A great man will not always keep his word, nor will he always see his action through. He follows only what is right.”

4B.12 Mencius said, “A great man is one who has not lost the heart of a new born babe.”

4B.13 Mencius said, “That a man has nurtured his parents does not signify him for great things. That he has also sent them off properly in death signifies him for great things.”

4B.14 Mencius said, “A *junzi* immerses his student deeply in the Dao because he wishes him to grasp it for himself. Once he has grasped it, he will dwell in it at ease; once he dwells in it at ease, he will draw deeply from it. Once he draws deeply from it, then as he takes it to himself he will encounter its source at his every left and right. Hence the *junzi* wishes him to grasp it for himself.”

The Confucian tradition stressed knowledge derived from the personal effort of self-cultivation. Although the school came to generate many texts, it consistently stressed the importance of learning directly from a master and from one’s own practice.

....

4B.19 Mencius said, “The difference between man and the beasts is extremely slight. The common person discards it; the *junzi* preserves it. Shun’s understanding of affairs and perceptiveness about human relationships was due to his proceeding from humanity and right, not a matter of applying humanity and right to his actions.”

Another example of Mencius’s rejection of the notion that morality is a mere application of rules.

....

4B.25 Mencius said, “If the great beauty Xi Shi were covered with filth people would hold their noses and pass her by. But though a man may be ugly, if he fasts and bathes he is fit to sacrifice to the Lord Above.”

4B.26 Mencius said, “When people speak of ‘nature,’ they refer only to our primitive being, and that is moved only by profit. What they dislike about intelligence is that it forces its way. If intelligence acted as Yu did in guiding the rivers, then they would not dislike it. When Yu guided the rivers, he followed their spontaneous courses. If

intelligence also followed its spontaneous course, it would be great wisdom indeed. Heaven is high and the stars are distant, but if we seek after their primitive being, we can predict the solstices for a thousand years.”

Yu, one of the three early Sage Kings, was also the hero of China’s “flood myth.” In early mythology, Yu was a demigod who, when China was covered by a great deluge, single handedly dredged the silt-clogged channels of the great rivers, and so drained the land. Later Confucian versions of the legend made him the Minister of Works under Emperor Shun, and cast him as the pioneering state director of hydraulic engineering. This complex passage may be paraphrased as follows:

When people talk about ‘human nature,’ they restrict the meaning of the term to our most primitive thoughts, and these are moved only by profit. They refuse to allow that intelligence is a part of the nature because they see it as a distorting, rather than a spontaneous force. But if intelligence were to act as Yu did when he dredged the rivers of China, then they could have no objection to including intelligence in their concept of the nature. When Yu dredged the rivers, he followed their spontaneous courses. If intelligence also followed its spontaneous course, it would be great wisdom indeed. Heaven is high and the stars are distant. But if we apply our intelligence in the study of their spontaneous courses, our intelligence can run ahead of their spontaneity without distortion, and the solstices of the next thousand years will merely verify our intelligence.

4B.27 Gong Hangzi lost his son, and the Marshall of the Right went to pay his respects. When he entered the gate some of those present went up to speak with him, while others went to speak with him after he took his seat. Mencius did not speak with him. The Marshall was displeased. “All the other gentlemen spoke with me,” he said, “only Mencius did not. This was a slight to me.”

Mencius heard of this and said, “According to ritual, one neither cuts across the place of others in order to engage in talk or ascends from one’s proper step to engage in bows. My desire was to act in accord with ritual. Marshall of the Right Zi’ao took me to be slighting him! Strange, is it not?”

The Marshall of the Right was Wang Huan (Wang Zi’ao), a man of whom Mencius deeply disapproved. Mencius is being disingenuous here – he has performed an insulting snub by electing to observe a ritual detail and now pretends innocence of the implications. The editors of the text clearly know Mencius was behaving badly and expect readers to become accomplices by enjoying his clever evasion. No other ancient Chinese text presents so rounded a portrait of character or presumes such complicit sympathy in its readers. Traditional commentary, however, was unprepared for the moral complexity of this portrait of Mencius and read the passage as a lesson on ritual proprieties.

....

4B.30 Gongduzi said, “Kuang Zhang is termed unfilial throughout the state, yet you, Master, travel in company with him and treat him with the forms of courtesy. May I ask why?”

Mencius said, “There are five types of behavior that the world commonly refers to as unfilial. To be physically lazy and ignore the welfare of one’s parents is the first. To gamble and drink, and so ignore the welfare of one’s parents is the second. To be greedy for wealth that one reserves for wife and children, and so ignore the welfare of one’s parents, is the third. To revel in sensual pleasures and bring shame upon one’s parents is

the fourth. To be enamored of bravado and brawls and so endanger one's parents is the fifth.

“Does any one of these apply to Kuang Zhang? In his case, the son reproached the father over an issue of moral conduct and now the two have broken off relations. Reproaches are appropriate between friends, but between father and son, they are great despoilers of love. Do you think Kuang Zhang does not wish to have a family, and be a husband with children? Yet because he offended his father and is banished from his presence, he has sent away his wife and children, to live out his days without their care and support. He reasoned that were he not to do so, his offense would be great indeed, and *that* is precisely what Kuang Zhang is all about.”

Mencius is celebrated at a number of points as a man who understands people and can “read” them through close observation and an understanding of how ethical ideals, human intentions, and practical circumstances affect real moral living (for example, 1A.7). In this passage, it seems at first as though Mencius will simply rationalize his friend's conduct by claiming that no explicit rules were broken – a type of self-serving reasoning that we see elsewhere when Mencius is in defensive mode (for example, 2B.2). But the passage goes on to the heart of the matter, Mencius's identification of the salient facts that truly reflect his friend's character, and it is that character that he approves, despite the undeniable evidence that Kuang Zhang failed as a filial son, and knows it.

4B.31 When Zengzi dwelt in Wucheng, there were bandit troops from Yue. “The bandits are coming!” cried someone. “Shouldn't we leave this place?” Zengzi said, “Do not allow people to lodge in our compound or to cut from our firewood groves.” As the bandit troops retreated, he said, “Repair our compound walls and roofs; we are going to return.” After the bandit troops had retreated, Zengzi returned. Some followers said, “The Master has been treated here with such loyalty and respect – perhaps it was not appropriate that when the bandits came he set an example for the people by being the first to leave, and then returned when they were gone.” Shenyu Xing said, “This is beyond your understanding. When there was a disturbance among the field workers in my family estate, none of the seventy men who were then followers of the Master became involved.”

When Zisi dwelt in Wei, there were bandit troops from Qi. “The bandits are coming!” cried someone. “Shouldn't we leave this place?” Zisi said. “Were I to leave, by whose side would our lord defend his state?”

Mencius commented: “Zengzi and Zisi followed an identical *dao*. Zengzi was a teacher in the one instance, and a clan leader in the other. Zisi was an officer and was of minor rank. Had Zengzi and Zisi exchanged places, they would have acted identically.”

An argument of how role and circumstance affect propriety in conduct.

4B.32 Chuzi, a man of Qi, told Mencius, “The King sent someone to spy on you, Sir, in order to learn whether you are after all different from other men.”

Mencius said, “How would I be different? Yao and Shun were the same as other men!”

BOOK 5

Much of Book 5 is devoted to discussions of history (most of which we would call legend), and the purpose of many passages is to illustrate Mencius deftly fielding challenges to the Confucian account of the past, which celebrated certain figures as models of sage perfection, often without fully reconciling this adoration with folkloric features of the legends – understood as accurate reports of historical fact – that contradicted the “lessons” these exemplary models were supposed to convey. Chief among these models are the “emperors” Yao, Shun, and Yu, as well as Confucius and Tian itself.

5A.1 The disciple Wan Zhang asked, “‘Shun went into the fields and cried out in tears to merciful Tian.’ Why did he ‘cry out in tears?’”

Mencius said, “He was crying his complaint and his yearning.”

Wan Zhang said, “They say, ‘If your parents love you, be joyful yet never be lax. If your parents hate you, work hard and never complain.’ Did Shun nevertheless complain?”

Mencius replied, “Gongming Gao’s disciple Chang Xi once asked, ‘I have understood your teaching about the text ‘Shun went into the fields,’ but I still don’t understand, ‘He cried out in tears to merciful Tian, to his parents.’ Gongming Gao said, ‘This is beyond your understanding.’ Gongming Gao did not believe that in his heart a filial son could be so complacent as think, ‘I’ll simply till the fields with all my might and fulfill my duties as a son, and if my parents show no love, what is that to me?’

“Yao, the emperor, sent his children, nine sons and two daughters, to serve Shun in the fields, together with a hundred officers and stores of sheep, cattle, and grain. Most of the world’s gentlemen submitted themselves to his service, and Yao was preparing to transfer control of the world to him. Yet because Shun had not found accord with his parents he felt like a homeless man with nowhere to turn. Anyone would wish to please the world’s gentlemen, but that was not enough to dispel his anxieties. Everyone desires wealth, but though he was wealthy with the riches of the world it was not enough to dispel his anxieties. Everyone desires sexual gratification, but though the emperor gave him his two daughters in marriage it was not enough to dispel his anxieties. Everyone desires high rank, but though he was honored as the Son of Heaven it was not enough to dispel his anxieties. None of these things could dispel his anxieties, only accord with his parents could do so.

“When we are young, we yearn for our parents. When we are old enough to have sexual desires, we yearn for youthful beauty. When we are old enough to have a family, we yearn for wife and children. When we are ready to take office, we yearn for a lord, and without a lord’s approval dissatisfaction burns within us. But the greatest filiality yearns for parents to the end of life. In Shun, I see a man who yearned for his parents even at fifty.”

5A.2 Wan Zhang said, “The *Poetry* says:

To take a bride what’s to be done?
Parents surely must be told.

If this were truly so, one could never behave like Shun. How can we explain that Shun took a wife without telling his parents?

Mencius said, “If he had told them, he would not have been able to take any wife. That male and female should love together is a fundamental human relationship. If he had told them, he would have had to discard this fundamental relationship, and he would have harbored bitterness against his parents. This is why he did not tell them.”

“I understand now why Shun did not tell his parents,” said Wan Zhang. “But why did Yao not tell them?”

“Yao also knew that if Shun’s parents were told Shun would not have been able to take a wife.”

Wan Zhang said, “Shun’s parents told him to repair the roof of their storehouse, and then his father set fire to the storehouse. They made him climb down to dredge the well and then covered up the well. His brother Xiang said, ‘The plans to kill my elder brother were all my doing. You, my parents, may have his cattle and sheep, and his stores of grain as well. But his halberd and spears shall be mine, his zither shall be mine, his bow shall be mine, and his two women shall tend to my bed.’ Then Xiang entered Shun’s household. Shun was on his bed, playing the zither. ‘I was just thinking of you!’ he said with chagrin. ‘I was thinking of my subjects,’ replied Shun. ‘Will you assist me in governing them?’ Now, am I wrong to think that Shun did not understand that Xiang was trying to murder him?”

Mencius said, “How could he not have known? But his brother’s cares were like his own, as his brother’s joys were like his own.”

“Well then, was Shun pretending to be pleased with Xiang?”

“No. Once there was a man who presented a live fish to Zichan, prime minister of Zheng. Zichan told the steward of his estate to raise it in his lake, but the steward cooked it instead, and then reported back, ‘When I first released it, it only stirred weakly, but after awhile it grew active and swam off.’ Zichan said, ‘It found its place! It found its place!’ When the steward emerged, he said, ‘Who says Zichan is wise? I’d already cooked the fish and eaten it and he cries, ‘It’s found its place!’”

“So you see, the *junzi* may be deceived by devices that follow the normal course of things, but he cannot be fooled by things that defy reason. Xiang appeared to Shun in the mode of a loving brother and Shun responded with pleasure in true accord with that spirit. What pretense was there in that?”

No historical exemplar other than Confucius is more exalted for Mencius than Shun, the paragon whose filiality under the most difficult circumstances constituted his sole credential for being awarded possession of the world as Yao’s successor. Rationalization of Shun’s colorful legend – details of which can be inferred from this passage – was clearly an important issue, and it led to some innovative creative strategies, some more literary than philosophical; perhaps the most inventive is 7A.35 below.

....

5A.5 Wan Zhang said, “Is it true that Yao gave the world to Shun?”

Mencius said, “No. The Son of Heaven cannot bestow the world upon anyone.”

“But then, if Shun possessed the world, who gave it to him?”

“Tian (Heaven) bestowed it upon him.”

“Was Tian’s presentation an order clearly stated?”

“No,” said Mencius. “Tian does not speak. It simply revealed it through action and event.”

“How did it do this?”

Mencius said, “The Son of Tian may recommend a successor to Tian, but cannot make Tian bestow the world upon him. The lords of the states may recommend successors to the Son of Tian, but they cannot make him bestow their states upon them. Grandees may recommend successors to the lords of the states, but they cannot make their lords bestow their ranks upon them. Yao recommended Shun to Tian and Tian accepted him; he presented him to the people and the people accepted him. That is why we say Tian does not speak. It simply revealed it through action and event.”

“May I ask about the process whereby Shun was recommended to Tian and Tian accepted him, and by which Shun was presented to the people and the people accepted him?”

Mencius said, “He was tasked with conducting the sacrifices and all the spirits accepted the sacrifices; this constituted the acceptance of Tian. He was tasked with the management of affairs, and affairs were well ordered and the population content with them; this constituted the acceptance of the people. Tian gave the world to Shun and the people gave the world to Shun. This is why I say that the Son of Heaven cannot bestow the world upon anyone.

“Shun was able to be chief minister to Yao for twenty-eight years, and that is not something that could be accomplished through human agency alone – it was Tian’s doing. When Yao died and the three-year period of mourning came to an end, Shun went off south of Nanhe in order to leave the way open to Yao’s son. But the lords of the states did not attend the court of Yao’s son, and came instead to Shun; persons with disputes did not seek judgment from Yao’s son, but came instead to Shun; balladeers did not sing praises to Yao’s son, but sang instead of Shun. This is why I say it was the doing of Tian. Only afterwards did Shun return to the central states and mount the Son of Tian’s throne. Had he simply occupied Yao’s mansion and forced out Yao’s son, it would have been usurpation, not the gift of Tian. This is what the ‘Oath of Tai’ means when it says:

Tian sees through my people’s sight;
Tian hears through my people’s ears.

This passage preserves Tian as the ultimate source of the mandate to rule (the “Mandate of Heaven), but only by dissolving Tian into the action of the people of the state. Mencius is famous as a political philosopher because of his “populist” idea that the state is most fundamentally its people, rather than its ruler, a challenge to traditional notions that hereditary succession provided a sufficient “right to rule,” or that the people were the property of their lord. (See, for example, 7B.14.) This passage, weak as it may seem in terms of historical explanation, provides important grounding for Mencian populism.

5A.6 Wan Zhang asked, “There is a saying among men that when the throne reached Yu there was a decline in virtue, because he passed it on to his son rather than to a worthy man. Is this correct?”

Mencius said, “No, it is not. When Tian bestows the world to a worthy, then it is bestowed to a worthy; if Tian bestows it to a son, then it is bestowed to a son. Shun recommended Yu to Tian and after seventeen years, Shun died. Once the three-year period of mourning came to an end, Yu went off to Yangcheng in order to leave the way open for Shun’s son. But the people of the world followed Yu, just as they had followed Shun after Yao’s death, rather than Yao’s son.

“Yu recommended Yi to Tian, and seven years later, Yu died. Once the three-year period of mourning came to an end, Yi went off to the northern slope of Mount Ji in order to leave the way open for Yu’s son Qi. Those who attended court or who sought judgments in disputes went to Qi, not to Yi. ‘He is the son of our former lord,’ they said. Balladeers sang the praises of Qi rather than Yi. ‘He is the son of our former lord,’ they said. Yao’s son Danzhu was an unworthy man and likewise was the son of Shun. Shun had served as minister to Yao for many years, and so had Yu served Shun. Their beneficence to the people had persisted for a long time. Qi was a worthy man, well able to respect and continue the *dao* of Yu, while Yi had served Yu for only a few years, and his beneficence to the people had not yet been longstanding. As minister, the service of Yi was far different in length from that of Shun and Yu, and as for the worthiness of the rulers’ sons, this was Tian’s doing, not something brought about through human agency.

“That which is done through no man’s doing is Tian; that which comes about through no man’s agency is fate (*ming*).

“For a commoner to gain possession of the world, he must have the virtue of Shun and Yu, but he must also gain the recommendation of the Son of Heaven besides – this is why the world was not bestowed upon Confucius. For one who would gain possession of the world through inheritance, Tian will only dispossess him if he is a man as bad as the rulers Jie and Zhòu – this is why the world was not bestowed upon worthies like Yi, Yi Yin, and the Duke of Zhou.

“Yi Yin was chief minister to Tang and led him to rule as king over the world. When Tang died, his eldest son Taiding had died before succeeding him, and so his younger sons occupied the throne, Waibing ruling for two years and Zhongren for four. Then Taiding’s son Taijia inherited the succession, but he overturned the codes that Tang had established and Yi Yin banished him to Tong. After three years, Taijia repented of his errors. He reproached himself and reformed, and in Tong he became a man of humanity and right. He placed himself under Yi Yin’s tutelage for three years, and then returned to his throne at the capital of Bo.

“The case of the Duke of Zhou was similar to those of Yi, who served the founding of the Xia Dynasty, and Yi Yin who served the founding of the Shang Dynasty. Confucius said, ‘The ceding of the throne to worthies by Yao and Shun, and the succession of the throne by inheritance of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou, all reflect a single principle.’”

....

5B.1 Mencius said, “Bo Yi would not look at improper sights not listen to improper music. He would not serve a lord who was not his proper ruler; he would not direct a person who was not his proper subordinate. When there was order, he presented himself; when there was chaos, he absented himself. He could not bear to remain in any place where either government or population was perverse. He felt that to be together with common villagers was like sitting in mud and ashes wearing court robes and cap. During the rule of the tyrant Zhòu he withdrew to dwell on the shores of the Northern Sea, awaiting a day when the world would again be pure. Hence when they hear the themes of Bo Yi’s conduct, the avaricious man becomes incorruptible and the timorous man becomes steadfast.

Yi Yin said, ‘What lord may I not serve? What person may I not direct?’ Whether in times of order or chaos, he would present himself nevertheless, saying, ‘In giving birth to the people, Tian obliges those who first gain understanding to awaken those who gain understanding later, and those who awaken earlier must awaken the others. I am among those who have awakened first, and I will use this *dao* to awaken the people.’ He felt about the people of the world who had not enjoyed the benefits of Yao and Shun’s bounty as if he himself had shoved them into a ditch. Thus did he burden himself with the weight of the world.

“Liuxia Hui felt no disgrace in serving a corrupt lord and no office was so petty that he would decline to serve in it. When he took his place at court he never failed to call attention to worthy talent in others, and he always acted according to the Dao. When he was dismissed, he was never resentful; when he was in impoverished circumstances he was never anxious. When together with common villagers he was all at ease and could not tear himself away. ‘You are you and I am I. Though you may sit half clothed or naked by my side, what stain would that leave on me?’ Hence when they hear the themes of Liuxia Hui’s conduct, the narrow man becomes open minded and the miserly man becomes generous.

“When Confucius withdrew from the state of Qi, he rinsed his rice bowl and set right out. When he departed his home state of Lu, he said, ‘Go slow, go slow. It is my parents’ land I leave.’ When speed was appropriate he was fast, when delay was appropriate he was slow. Where it was appropriate to dwell apart he dwelt apart, where it was appropriate to serve he served.”

Mencius concluded, “Bo Yi was the sage of purity; Yi Yin was the sage of responsibility; Liuxia Hui was the sage of harmony; Confucius was the sage of timeliness. We call Confucius ‘the great coda.’ By this we mean that he is like the great musical climax, where the brass gongs peal and the jade chimes ring. The peal of the brass gongs signals the start of the culmination and the ring of the jade chimes brings the coda to its close. The start of the culmination is like the work of wisdom; the close of the coda is like the work of sagehood. Wisdom can be compared to craft and sagehood to strength. Like an arrow shot from beyond a hundred paces: that it reaches the target is a matter of strength; that it hits the bull’s eye is not a matter of strength.

This passage, which may be the most extensive celebration of the Confucian doctrine of Timeliness in classical texts, represents a major expansion and literary reworking of *Analects* 18.8.

....

5B.8 Mencius said to Wan Zhang, “In a village, become friends with the worthy men of the village; in a state, become friends with the worthy men of the state; in the world, become friends with the worthy men of the world. If there are not enough men in the world to take as friends, one may go back to make sense of the men of the past. Chant their poems, recite their books – can you fail to know them as men? By these means you will make sense of their generation. Such friends are the best.”

5B.9 King Xuan of Qi asked about ministers. Mencius said, “What type of ministers do you mean?”

The King said, “Are not all ministers alike?”

“No. There are ministers of the ruler’s family and ministers of other clans.”

“Let me ask about ministers of the ruler’s family.”

“When the ruler commits a grave error they remonstrate. If he should fail to listen and continue to repeat it, they will displace him.”

The King’s face grew flushed. Mencius said, “Your Majesty should not be upset. Since Your Majesty asked, I could not dare but answer directly.”

Once the King’s face grew calm he asked about ministers of other clans.

“When the ruler errs they remonstrate. If he should fail to listen and continue to repeat his error, they will resign.”

BOOK 6

The initial passages of Book 6 lay out Mencius's most famous doctrine: that humans are by nature good. Most of the passages pit Mencius against a thinker who is otherwise almost unknown, Gaozi, who held that humans were, by nature, neither good nor bad. It is not clear what tradition Gaozi belonged to, but in the two other texts that refer to him, he appears to be more a Confucian than anything else, and his doctrine that "*ren* is internal," which we first encountered in *Mencius* 2A.2, would seem to confirm that.

6A.1 Gaozi said, "Human nature is like the willow tree and right is like cups and bowls. Drawing humanity and right from human nature is like making cups and bowls from willow wood."

Mencius said, "Can you make cups and bowls from willow wood by following its natural grain or is it only after you have hacked the willow wood that you can make a cup or bowl? If you must hack the willow to make cups and bowls from it, must you hack people in order to make them humane and righteous? Your words will surely lead the people of the world to destroy humanity and right."

6A.2 Gaozi said, "The nature is like water swirling at a wellspring. If you dig a channel towards the east it will flow east; if you dig a channel towards the west it will flow west. Human nature makes no distinction between good and bad, just as water makes no distinction between east and west."

Mencius said, "It is true that water makes no distinction between east and west, but does it make no distinction between high and low? The good disposition of human nature is like water's tendency to flow down. There are no men innately bad, just as there is no water that does not flow down. Now, by splashing you can make water leap up higher than your forehead, and by applying force you can make it stay up on a mountain, but how could this be the nature of water? It is merely a result of circumstances. The fact that men can be made to act badly just shows that human nature is like this as well."

The first two passages of Book 6 show Gaozi arguing by analogy, and arguing very poorly. Mencius finds the weaknesses in the analogy with an ease likely not unrelated to the fact that his followers are the authors of the passages. It's good to bear in mind that these "debates" may only be artifacts of this text – no other source records a meeting between these two men.

6A.3 Gaozi said, "The term 'nature' simply means 'life'."

Mencius said, "Do you mean that 'nature' means 'life' as 'white' means 'white'?"
"Precisely."

"As the white of white feathers is the white of snow, and the white of snow is the white of white jade?"

"Yes."

"Then the nature of a hound would be the same as the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox would be the same as a man's?"

The Chinese characters involved here explain the passage. The term translated as "nature," was at one time a near homonym of the word for "life / to be born," and the two were written identically (生). (Today, both pronunciation and written forms are distinct.) Gaozi attempted to use this etymological fact to argue for a minimalist portrait of human nature; his misstep was in agreeing to the parallel with white, which was conceived as identical even when inhering in different types

of things. In these passages, we can see that the *Mencius* has learned much from the logical disputations that had followed the advent of Mohist thought.

6A.4 Gaozi said, “Appetites for food and sex are part of our nature. Humanity (*ren*) is internal rather than external; right (*yi*) is external rather than internal.”

Mencius said, “Why do you say humanity is internal and right external?”

Gaozi said, “If a man is my elder and I treat him as an elder, there is nothing of the elder about me. It is as if he were white and I treated him as white, I merely follow the external fact of his being white. This is why I treat it as external.”

“It is different than the case of white, where one treats a white horse as white in the same sense that one treats a white man as white. Would you say treating an elderly horse as an elder is no different from treating an elderly man as an elder? Moreover, would you say the elder is right or the man who treats the aged as elderly is right?”

Gaozi said, “I love my little brother; I don’t love the little brother of some fellow from Qin. In this case, I am the one who experiences the sense of pleasure and so I say this is an ‘internal’ matter. I treat elders from Chu as elders just as I treat elders from my home town as elders. In this case, I take the elders as the ones I must please, thus I say this is an ‘external’ matter.”

Mencius said, “I like the roast meat served by the man from Qin no differently from my own roast meat, thus one could make the same argument with regard to things. So would you say that my love of roast meat is external?”

Note that after its first sentence, this passage moves the argument from the goodness of human nature to the related one of the internality of right, or *yi*. Mencius’s reply to Gaozi’s first argument focuses on the locus of *yi* – whether an action’s property of rightness belongs to the object of the act or the actor. (There is a near parallel here to Socrates’ debate with Euthyphro about whether “loved by the gods” can be a definition of “holy.”) Mencius’s reply to the second argument is more difficult to understand, but more important. Since Mencius wishes ultimately to maintain that we each possess a “seed of *yi*” that allows us to *intuit* when actions are right or wrong, he counters Gaozi’s point that our feelings for the object of an act of *yi* are irrelevant to its rightness by suggesting that the relevant feelings are towards *yi* itself – the satisfaction of right action, which, like satisfaction in roast meat, is not concerned with how one feels about the individuals involved.

Note also that in his disavowal of love for “the little brother of some fellow from Qin,” Gaozi is aligned with Mencius in rejecting the universal love criterion of Mohism.

6A.5 Meng Jizi asked Mencius’s disciple Gongduzi, “What do you mean by saying that right is internal?”

Gongduzi said, “My acts are guided by my sense of respect, so we say right is internal.”

“If a villager happens to be a year older than your elder brother, to whom do you pay higher respect?”

“I respect my brother.”

“In serving wine, whom do you serve first?”

“I serve the villager first.”

“The one you respect more, but the other you serve as elder, so after all, the matter of right is external; it does not come from within you.”

Gongduzi had no answer and reported this to Mencius.

Mencius said, “Ask whether he respects his uncle or his younger brother more; he’ll say, ‘I respect my uncle.’ Say, ‘When your younger brother is playing the ritual role of the dead spirit, whom do you respect more?’ He’ll say, ‘I respect my younger brother.’ Say, ‘Where did your greater respect for your uncle go?’ He’ll say, ‘It is because of the role my brother is playing.’ You say too, ‘So it is in my case to – I have abiding respect for my brother, but I momentarily pay respect to the villager.’”

When Meng Jizi encountered this approach he said, “When I pay respect to my uncle, that is respect; when I pay it to my brother, that is respect. After all, it’s external, not internal.”

Gongduzi said, “In winter we drink hot water and in summer we drink cold water. Are appetites for food and drink therefore external?”

The problem again is an issue of whether we act in accord with right because we *feel* the imperative or because we know the imperative. Mencius here seems to suggest that the feelings are spontaneously present, but we use knowledge to guide them and motivate action. Just as in the case of what temperature water we drink, external circumstances affect our actions, but that may be because they affect our feelings, not because we distort or deny our feelings to respond rightly.

The following three passages are among the most famous in the *Mencius*. 6A.6 lays out the core of the doctrine of the good nature most extensively, in parallel with 2A.6. 6A.7 and 8 elaborate analogies with a high level of literary, and are clearly designed not only to persuade readers but to move them.

6A.6 Gongduzi said, “Gaozi says that human nature is neither good nor bad. Others say human nature is such that people can become good or become bad, and that this is why when the sage Kings Wen and Wu arose the people loved to be good, and when the tyrannical Kings You and Li arose people loved to be violent. Still others say there are people whose nature is good and people whose nature is bad, and that is why there could be a bad man like Shun’s brother Xiang living under Yao’s sagely rule, why Shun could be a sage even though his father was a bad man like Gusou, and why Weizi Qi and Prince Bigan could be outstanding, though Zhòu was their brother’s son and their ruler as well. Now you say human nature is good – is everyone else wrong?”

Mencius said, “What I mean by saying it is good is that there is that in our nature which is spontaneously part of us and can become good. The fact that we can become bad is not a defect in our natural endowment. All men possess a sense of commiseration; all men possess a sense of shame; all men possess a sense of reverence; all men possess a sense of right and wrong. The sense of commiseration is the seed of humanity (*ren*); the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness (*yi*); the sense of respect is the seed of propriety (*li*); the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. Thus humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to us from outside. We possess them inherently; it’s just that we do not focus our minds on them. This is the meaning of the saying, ‘Seek for it and you will get it; let it go and you will lose it.’ The reason why some men are twice as good as others – or five or countless times better – is simply that some men do not exhaust their endowment to the full. The *Poetry* says:

Tian gave birth to the teeming people,
For every thing there is a norm.
The constant for people, in their grasp,
Is love of beautiful virtue’s form.

Confucius said, ‘The man who wrote this poem certainly understood the Dao!’

“Thus for every type of thing there is a norm; that is why the constant that lies within people’s grasp is inherently a love of beautiful virtue.”

6A.7 Mencius said, “In years when the harvests have been good, most young men are lazy; in years when the harvests fail most are vicious. This is not a matter of Tian endowing men differently; it is whether or not circumstances have entrapped their hearts.

“Take barley for comparison. If you broadcast the grains and rake the soil over them, and if the soil and planting times are comparable for all, they will all shoot up and ripen by the summer solstice. If there are differences it is because of differences in the fertility of the soil, or in the nourishment of rain and dew, or in the labor of the farmer. Thus things that are alike in kind resemble one another in all respects – why would we suspect it to be any different with people?

“The sage and I are of the same kind, and as Longzi said, ‘Even though a man may weave a sandal for a foot he’s never seen, I know he won’t weave a basket!’ Sandals are all more or less alike because all feet in the world are similar.

“The responses of our mouths to flavors are similar in this way. The famous chef Yi Ya was first to grasp what our mouths took pleasure in. If the response of our mouths to flavor differed by nature from those of other people in the way that they do from other kinds, such as dogs and horses, how could it be that everyone in the world follows the recipes of Yi Ya? When it comes to flavor, everyone in the world wishes to cook like Yi Ya because we all have similar tastes. And so it is too with our ears. When it comes to music, everyone in the world wishes to be like Music Master Kuang because we all have similar hearing. And so it is too with our eyes. All the world knows that Zidu is supremely handsome; anyone who doesn’t is blind.

“So I say, our mouths all share similar tastes when it comes to flavor, our ears all share similar pleasures in listening when it comes to sound, our eyes all share similar standards of beauty when it comes to looks. How could it be that our hearts alone are different? What quality do we share in our hearts? It is the sense of what is proper and right. It is the sage that was first to grasp what our hearts all took pleasure in. And in this way, what is proper and right pleases my heart in just the way that meats please my mouth.”

6A.8 Mencius said, “There was once a time when the woods of Ox Mountain were lovely. But because they lie close beside the capital of a great state, the ax and adze hack away at them – could they remain lovely long? By dawn and evening they are nourished by the rains and the dew, and surely there is no lack of shoots that spring up. But then cattle and sheep follow and graze, and thus it remains barren. When people observe how it is barren, they assume it could never have been covered with lumber, but how could that possibly be the nature of a mountain?

“And could what exists within people possibly be without humanity and righteousness? That a man may have let go of his original heart is indeed like the hacking of ax and adze on the mountain’s woods – morning after morning, how can its beauty remain? Despite the rest such a man may get between day and night, and the restorative *qi* that the morning brings, the things he does day after day destroy these effects, and in time little will he resemble other men in what he likes and hates. When this destruction is

repeated, the *qi* he stores up each night will not be enough to preserve what was originally in him, and when the night *qi* can no longer preserve that, he is not far from a beast. Others see that he has become a beast and they assume he never possessed a human endowment, but how could that possibly be the nature of a person?

“There is nothing that does not grow when it receives its proper nourishment, and there is nothing that does not shrivel when it loses that which it was nourished by. Confucius said, ‘Grasp it and you will preserve it; let it go and it will vanish; when it comes and where it goes, no one knows.’ Was it not the heart that he meant?”

....

6A.10 Mencius said, “I love to eat fish; I also love to eat bear paws. If I can’t have both, I’ll forego the fish and eat the bear paws. I love life; I also love right. If I can’t have both, I will forego life and choose to do right. Life is truly something I love, it’s just that there is something else I love more, and so I can’t hold on to life by devious means. And death is truly something I hate, it’s just that there is something I hate more than death, and so there are dangers I will not avoid.

“If a man loves nothing more than life, then won’t he use whatever means are required to hold onto it? If a man hates nothing more than death, then won’t he use whatever means are required to avoid danger? Yet there are things men won’t do in order to avoid danger and live, and from this we know that there are things men love more than life and hate more than death. It’s not just worthy men who have such feelings, all men have them; worthies are simply those who do not lose them.

“Let’s say that a dishful of rice and a bowlful of porridge are the difference between life and death. If you offer them with a curse, no traveler would accept them, and if you trampled on them first, even a beggar would refuse. But when it comes to accepting a court stipend of ten thousand measures of grain, people accept it with no question of propriety and right (*li-yi*). What will such a stipend provide for me? A beautiful home, the attentions of a wife and concubines, the gratitude of needy acquaintances whose pleas I heed? A moment ago, I refused rice and porridge that meant life or death because it was not proper to accept, but now I’ll do anything for a beautiful home, the attentions of a wife and concubines, or the gratitude of needy acquaintances whose pleas I heed. Is there no end to what I would do? This is called losing one’s original heart.”

6A.11 Humanity (*ren*) is the heart of man, and right (*yi*) is man’s path. How woeful it is when a man turns from his road and does not follow it, and lets his heart go without realizing he needs to find it. When people let their chickens and dogs roam away they know to go find them, but when their heart has wandered off it is different. The *dao* of learning is none other than this: it is a search for one’s lost heart.

....

6A.14 Mencius said, “People love all parts of their bodies, and they nurture them all together. There’s not an inch of a person’s skin he does not love, nor an inch he does not nurture. When considering the different value of the parts of the body, there is no standard other than to consider their relation to the person himself. The body has parts

that are of different value, and greater and lesser parts. One should not harm a greater part for the sake of a smaller, or a more valuable part for the sake of one of lesser worth. Those who nurture the smaller parts become small men; those who nurture the greater parts become great men.

“Let’s say a gardener cut down fine phoenix and catalpa trees and nurtured common jujubes; we’d say he was a worthless gardener. A man who nurtured his finger while allowing his shoulder and back to degenerate without being aware of it would be called deranged. Those who care only about food and drink are despised because they nurture the small and lose the large. If a man could care only for food and drink and not lose something important, then the mouth and belly would indeed be far more than simply a patch of our flesh.”

The importance of this passage is primarily to set the analogy that governs the next.

6A.15 Gongduzi asked, “We are all equally men, yet some are great men and others small men. Why is this?”

Mencius said, “Those who follow their greater body become great men, those who follow their lesser body become small men.”

“We are all equally men, why do some follow their greater bodies while others follow their smaller?”

Mencius said, “The ears and eyes are organs that do not think; their perception is veiled by things. In this way, one thing encountering another, there is simply a force of attraction. The mind is an organ that thinks. If you think you’ll grasp, if you don’t you won’t. This is a potential endowed in us by Tian. Once a man chooses to stand by his greater parts, his lesser parts cannot seize him. Being a great man is no more than this.

6A.16 Mencius said, “There are offices that are bestowed by Tian and offices that are bestowed by men. Humanity, righteousness, loyalty, faithfulness, the untiring love of goodness – these are offices bestowed by Tian. Duke, minister, grandee – these are offices bestowed by men. Men of old cultivated their Tian-bestowed offices, and human offices followed. Men today cultivate their Tian-bestowed offices in order to exact from other men an office, and once they have it, they cast away their Tian-bestowed offices. There are no men more deluded than these. In the end, they will surely perish.”

....

6B.1 A man from Ren asked Mencius’s disciple Wuluzi, “Which is more important, the *li* or food?”

“*Li* is more important,” said Wuluzi.

“Which is more important, sex or *li*?”

“*Li* is more important.”

“What if you would starve to death if you insisted on *li*, but you could get food if you didn’t. Would you still have to abide by *li*? What if by skipping the ritual groom’s visit to receive the bride you could take a wife, but otherwise you could not? Would you still insist on the groom’s ritual visit?”

Wuluzi was unable to reply, and the next day he went to Zou to consult with Mencius.

Mencius said, “What’s difficult about this? And inch long wood chip could measure higher than a building if we hold its tip up above and ignore the difference in what is below. When we say that gold is heavier than feathers, we don’t mean a buckle’s worth of gold and a cartload of feathers. If you compare the extremity of need for food with a minor ritual, it’s not just food that can seem more weighty. If you compare the extremity of need for joining of the sexes with a minor ritual, it’s not just sex that can seem more weighty.

“Go back and respond to him like this: ‘What if you could get food you need only by twisting your elder brother’s arm – would you twist it? What if you could get a wife only by climbing over your neighbor’s east wall and dragging his daughter off – would you do it?’”

....

6B.4 Song Keng was on his way to Chu. Mencius encountered him at Shiqiu and asked, “Where are you going, Sir?”

Song Keng said, “I have been told that the armies of Qin and Chu have gone to war, and I shall visit the King of Chu and persuade him to call it off. If the King of Chu does not appreciate my argument, I will visit the King of Qin and persuade him likewise. Between the two I shall surely encounter success.”

“I shall not presume to ask in detail, but I would like to hear the main gist of your argument.”

Song Keng said, “I will explain that there is no profit (*li*) in it.”

Mencius said, “Your intentions are certainly lofty, but your formula is unacceptable. If you persuade these kings on the grounds of profit and they call off their armies on the grounds of profit, all the men in the armies, pleased with war’s end, will favor profit. If subjects cherish profit in service to their masters, if sons cherish profit in service to their fathers, if juniors cherish profit in service to their seniors, then the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, elder and younger will ultimately be drained of humanity and right, all engaging one another solely through a love of profit. Never has the ruler of such a state survived.

“Sir, you should persuade these kings by arguments of humanity and right, for if they call off their armies on the grounds of humanity and right, then all the men in the armies, pleased with war’s end, will favor humanity and right. If subjects cherish humanity and right in service to their masters, if sons cherish humanity and right in service to their fathers, if juniors cherish humanity and right in service to their seniors, then the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, elder and younger will ultimately be drained of profit seeking, all engaging one another solely through a love of humanity and right. Never has the ruler of such a state failed to rule as a True King. Why must you speak of profit?”

Although there is disagreement about the intellectual affiliations of Song Keng historically, he is clearly presented here as a Mohist, setting off in an effort to prevent aggressive war. By “profit,” he means welfare to the state, but as in 1A.1, Mencius insists on interpreting the term pejoratively, in accord with Confucian understanding.

....

6B.10 Bo Gui, Prime Minister of Wei, said, “I would like to reduce the rate of taxation to one part in twenty. How would that be?”

Mencius said, “The *dao* that you would follow by doing this would be that of the barbarian Mo people. In a state of ten thousand households, how would it be if there were only one potter?”

“That would not work. There would be too few utensils.”

“In the land of the Mo, the five grains do not grow, all that grows is millet. They have no walled towns or household compounds, no ancestral temples or rituals of sacrifice, no diplomatic encounters with exchanges of gifts and banquets, and they lack the many offices of state and ceremony. This is why they are able to tax at a rate of one part in twenty. Now if the central states were in this way to discard the relationships among people and the offices of ruler and subject, would that be acceptable? It is impossible to maintain a state if even potters are insufficient in number – how much more so with gentlemen in authority?

“Those who wish to tax at rates lighter than set by the *dao* of Yao and Shun are simply greater or lesser barbarians like the Mo. Those who wish to tax at rates heavier than set by the *dao* of Yao and Shun are simply greater or lesser tyrants like Jie.”

.....

BOOK 7

7A.1 Mencius said, “He who exhausts his mind knows his nature; to know one’s nature is to know Tian. The way to serve Tian is to preserve the mind and nourish the nature. The way to stand waiting for Tian’s commands (*ming*) is this: never waver for fear of death, just cultivate your self and await them.”

The initial passages of Book 7 are concerned with the term *ming* (命), which can, according to contexts, be translated as “command (or decree / mandate),” “fate,” or “destiny.” The differences in translation choices are significant. “Fate” implies outcomes over which humans have no agential control (see the use of *ming* in 5A.6). But “decrees” or “commands” may be disobeyed. “Fate” points towards limits on one’s power to reach a goal; “destiny” points towards forces that reinforce one’s ability to reach a goal. In this passage, a *ming* is an imperative to act conveyed by Tian in the form of a practical opportunity; it is up to us to follow the imperative and seize the opportunity, and our responsibility if we fail to.

The Mohists attacked the Confucians as “fatalists,” propagating a doctrine of *ming* that discouraged moral action by denying the efficacy of human agency. There was a basis in this, as these passages may suggest on first reading, and some passages in the *Analects*, such as 14.36, may have provided additional Mohist ammunition. But 7A.1-3 actually make clear that for Mencius, at least, however *ming* was conceived, human agency was essential for its realization. Some events are indeed beyond our control, but that does not imply that none are or that those under our control are not critical for us and, perhaps, for the realization of the Dao in the world.

7A.2 Mencius said, “Everything is decreed (*ming*): obey by receiving those commands proper to you. Thus, those who know their commands do not stand beneath high walls. A man’s proper command is to follow the Way to the end and die. To die in shackles cannot be a man’s proper command.”

7A.3 Mencius said, “‘Strive for it and get it; let it go and lose it’: in this saying, striving helps to get it, because what I strive for lies within me. ‘There is a way to strive for it; getting it lies with *ming*’: here striving does not help to get it, because what I strive for lies outside of me.”

7A.4 Mencius said, “The world of things is complete in me; to reflect upon oneself and find perfect integrity: there is no joy greater than this!”

....

7A.10 Mencius said, “Those who make the effort only when there is a King Wen are ordinary men. Outstanding men make the effort even without a King Wen”

....

7A.14 Mencius said, “Humane (*ren*) words do not penetrate people as deeply as the sounds of human music, and good governance does not captivate the people as readily as good teachings. With good governance people will look upon the ruler with fearful awe; with good teachings he will be beloved. Good governance will control the wealth of the people; good teachings will gain their hearts.”

7A.15 Mencius said, “Those things that people can do without studying comprise their inherent abilities, and that which they know without reflection is known inherently. No toddler does not know to love his parents, and when they grow older, none does not know to respect his elders. Love of parents is humanity (*ren*); respect for elders is right (*yi*). All that need be done is to extend them throughout the world.”

....

7A.17 Mencius said, “Don’t do what others will not do; don’t wish for what others do not wish for. That’s all there is to it.”

7A.18 Mencius said, “Those who possess virtue, intelligence, skill, and understanding often do so as a consequence of adversity. Subjects who have lost their lord’s favor and children of concubines – such men keep their hearts under tight control and anticipate dangers in advance, hence they often succeed.”

....

7A.21 Mencius said, “To possess broad lands and a populous state – these are things the *junzi* desires, but his joys do not lie therein. To stand at the center of the world and bring peace to all within the four seas – this is what the *junzi* takes joy in, but his nature does not lie therein. What the *junzi* takes as his nature is not increased by great accomplishments nor decreased by impoverishment in failure. This is because it is his fixed allotment. What the *junzi* takes as his nature are humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Rooted in his heart, they bloom richly in his visage, course down his back and through his four limbs – he moves unspeaking and is understood.”

....

7A.25 Mencius said, The man who rises at cockcrow and sets off to do good all day is a follower of the sage king Shun; the man who rises at cockcrow and sets of to pursue profit all day is a follower of the bandit Zhi. If you wish to know the difference between Shun and Zhi, there is nothing but this: the difference between good and profit.”

7A.26 Mencius said, “Yang Zhu’s motto is ‘act for oneself.’ If he could profit the world by plucking out a single hair he would not do it. For Mozi the motto is ‘universal love.’ If it would profit the world, he would scratch his head bald and walk his heels off. Zimo advocates holding to a middle course. Holding to the middle comes near to it, but if you insist on holding to the middle without considering the balance of circumstances it is really no different from grasping one extreme. What is detestable about grasping one extreme is that it cuts down the Dao, raising up a single part and casting of hundreds.

On Yang Zhu, see 3B.9.

....

7A.31 Gongsun Chou said, “Yi Yin said, ‘I will not consort with one who is obdurate!’ He banished his ruler Tang’s son Taijia to Tong and the people were very pleased. When Taijia became worthy, Yi Yin brought him back the people were very pleased. If a worthy man were minister to a ruler who was unworthy, might he properly banish him in this way?”

Mencius said, “If he had the integrity of Yi Yin, then he might; if he did not have the integrity of Yi Yin, then this would be usurpation.”

....

7A.35 Tao Ying asked, “When Shun was Son of Heaven and Gaoyao was Minister of Crime, had Shun’s father Gusou killed a man, what would have been done?”

Mencius answered, “Gusou would have been apprehended, that’s all.”

“Then, Shun would not have prevented it?”

“How could he have prevented it? It would have been Gaoyao’s mandate.”

“Well then, what would Shun have done?”

Mencius replied, “Shun would have viewed casting off the empire like casting off a worn out shoe. He would secretly have borne his father on his back and fled until he came to dwell by the shores of the sea. There he would have lived in joyful contentment, having forgotten the empire.”

7A.36 Mencius traveled from Fan to Qi. Gazing at the heir apparent in Qi he sighed. “How crucial is one’s home environment! The environment of one’s home alters one’s *qi*, and the nurturance one receives there alters one’s body. Aren’t we all the children of people? This prince has a home, horse and chariot, and clothes, much like other people – yet look at him! It is his home environment that makes the difference. How much more the difference would be if he lived in the broadest dwelling in the world!

“The lord of Lu traveled to Song and called out at the Dieze city gate. The gateman said, ‘This is not my lord; why does his tone sound so much like my lord’s?’ There was no other reason: their home environments were similar.”

....

7A.38 Mencius said, “A man’s looks and figure are Tian-endowed nature, but only after becoming a Sage does a man know how to move his figure.”

....

7B.1 Mencius said, “How inhumane King Hui of Liang was! The humane man extends his love from those he cherishes out towards those he does not, while the inhumane man extends from those he does not cherish to those he does.”

Gongsun Chou asked, “What are you speaking of?”

Mencius said, “King Hui of Liang sent his people off to war where they would be cut to pulp, all for the sake of territory. After his great defeat, he wanted to go to war once again. This time, fearing he would not be able to prevail, he drove his best loved

young warriors onto the battlefield, where they were sacrificed on his behalf. This is what I mean by extending from those one does not cherish to those one does.”

7B.2 Mencius said, “The *Spring and Autumn Annals* records no righteous wars, although it does indicate that some wars were fought on better grounds than others. A campaign fought to set things right is waged by one in higher authority against a subordinate one. Peers do not fight one another to set things right.”

....

7B.5 Mencius said, “A carpenter or a wheelwright can give a man a t-square or compass, he cannot make him skillful.”

....

7B.14 Mencius said, “The people are most important; the state altars to the spirits of earth and grain come next and the ruler last of all. For this reason, any man who gains the support of the great mass of people reigns as the Son of Heaven. Those who gain the confidence of the Son of Heaven become the lords of states, and those who gain their confidence become grandees. When the lord of a state endangers its altars, he should be replaced. When fat animals have been offered in sacrifice, the grain offerings have been pure, the ceremonies performed on schedule, yet drought or floods ensue, then the altars should be replaced.”

....

7B.16 Mencius said, “‘Humanity’ (*ren* 仁) means ‘human’ (*ren* 人). When these two are conjoined you have the Dao.”

This famous punning passage plays on the fact that the term *ren* (humanity) is derived from the term for person, as reflected in both spoken sound and written character, “Conjoined” they become the humane person – the person who embodies the Confucian Dao.

....

7B.23 There was famine in Qi. Chen Zhen said, “The people of the state all believe that you will bring about a second distribution from the Tang granary, Master. But isn’t such a distribution unlikely?”

Mencius replied, “This would be like Feng Fu. In Jin there was once a certain Feng Fu, who excelled at wrestling tigers. Later he became a model gentleman. But one day, upon traveling in the countryside, he came upon a crowd that had pursued a tiger and penned it against a hillside, where no one dared attack it. Seeing Feng Fu, the crowd rushed to meet him. Feng Fu rolled up his sleeves and dismounted his carriage. The people were all delighted, but the gentlemen present laughed.”

7B.24 Mencius said, “The response of the mouth to flavor, of the eye to beauty, of the ear to music, of the nose to fragrance, of the body to ease: these belong to the nature. But they are inescapable (*ming*), and the *junzi* does not speak of them as the nature. The

response of the sense of *ren* to one's father or son, of the sense of right to one's lord or minister, of the sense of ritual to one's host or guest, of the sense of wisdom to able men, of the Sage person to the Way of Tian: these are inescapable. But they belong to our nature, and the *junzi* does not speak of them as *ming*."

Here, Mencius carefully parses those respects in which *ming* and *xing* (our human nature) represent moral or amoral forces that may be under our control or not. Counter to the Mohist portrait of Confucian fatalism, Mencius assigns those aspects of our persons that intrinsically moral to the realm of our agency, while assigning amoral aspects, our physical endowments, to *ming*, which here means something quite close to "fate."

....

7B.26 Mencius said, "Those who desert the Mohists inevitably flee to the school of Yang Zhu, and those who desert Yang's school inevitably come to the school of Confucius. When they come, we should simply accept them. Debating with the followers of Yang Zhu and Mozi today is like chasing after pigs that have been allowed to run loose. Once they have returned to the pen, we must still treat them well."

....

7B.33 Mencius said, "For Yao and Shun is was simply their nature. For Tang and King Wu, they returned to it. Every motion, every stance precise in *li* as one goes round: this is the acme of full virtue. One does not wail for the dead in order to make a show to the living; one does not keep unswervingly to virtue in order to seek appointment; one does not invariably keep one's word in order to gain a reputation for upright action. The *junzi* simply acts as an exemplar as he awaits his command (*ming*)."

....

7B.35 Mencius said, "In nurturing the heart, nothing is better than to reduce one's desires. When a man has few desires, though there may be qualities he has not preserved intact, they will be few. As for a man of many desires, though there may be qualities that he has preserved intact, they will be few."

....

7B.38 Mencius said, "From the time of Yao and Shun to the time of Tang it was over five hundred years. Men like Yu and Gaoyao saw Yao and Shun with their own eyes, while men like Tang only heard about them. From the time of Tang to the time of King Wen it was over five hundred years. Men like Yi Yin and Lai Zhu saw Tang with their own eyes, while men like King Wen only heard about them. From the time of King Wen to the time of Confucius it was over five hundred years. Men like Grand Duke Wang and Sanyi Sheng saw King Wen with their own eyes, while men like Confucius only heard about him.

"From the time of Confucius to the present it is only a century and over – we are still not far from the time of the sage, and we are dwelling so near to his homeland. Yet if there is no one to follow him, well then, there is simply no one to follow him."

This melancholy conclusion closes the *Mencius*. It returns to the themes of Books 1-3, which focus so closely on Mencius's quest to turn the chaos of his times into moral opportunity and change the world. It should be read with 2A.1, where Mencius explains his interpretation of historical timing and his reasons for calculating that the extremity of the time should not be understood as cause for withdrawal, but as a call for engagement. The situation was different than it had been in the age of Confucius: as he says in 2B.13, "that was one time, this is another." But as we have seen, events did not bear out his optimism, and the shrug of sadness that closes this passage is a fitting end to Mencius's book.