

## Lecture 9

### Mencius

## Mencius

- aka Mengzi
- lived 371 – 289 BCE
  - born about 100 years after Confucius dies
- provides Confucianism with a broader philosophical perspective
  - gives structure to Confucius's ideas
  - adds important assumptions



## The Role of Education

- Confucius emphasizes the importance of proper education as the foundation of an orderly society
- Mencius raises a question about the role of education:
  - Does education nurture what is already in the child?
  - Or does it instill into the child what is not there by nature?

## Mencius on Inherent Goodness

1. All humans have a natural proclivity towards benevolence and altruistic acts.
2. And all humans feel good upon doing something that is morally good.
3. The best explanation of these facts is that ...

Human nature's being good is like water's tending downward. There is no human who does not tend toward goodness. There is no water that does not tend downward.

- Mencius 6A2

## Mencius's First Contribution

- Mencius concludes that ...
  - Confucius only claimed that we have the *potential* for goodness
- *Hence*, the role of education is to nurture our inherent tendencies – so they do not wither.
- *Thus*, one should act according to the Confucian virtues, because ...

## The Four Roots

- Mencius argues that the Confucian virtues are rooted in ...
  - This is a natural corollary to his thesis about innate goodness
- He identifies four Confucian virtues: ren, yi, li, and zhi
  - The feeling that generates each virtue is called the "root" or "seed" of that virtue.
- **Ren** (humane-ness) is rooted in ...
  - example of child in well
- **Yi** (righteousness) is rooted in ...
  - example of robber

## The Four Roots

- Li (propriety) is rooted in ...
  - example of children and parents
  - example of body in ditch



## The Four Roots

- Zhi is rooted in ...
  - zhi = wisdom, good judgment
  - zhi allows one to know the right way to act in different circumstances
  - example of dog kickers



*The Character:* The top two characters are "knowledge", the bottom character is "speak". "speak knowledge". The top left character is "arrow-like": it is a symbol like "彳" that is a pictograph of roots descending into the earth, crossed with marks to symbolize arrows and flight. The top right is a pictogram for "mouth". The bottom character is the pictogram for mouth cut through by a line, to represent exhaling: "mouth exhaling".

## The Four Roots

- The four roots are the foundation of our capacity to act morally
- Mencius treats these roots as the "essence" of being human
  - Someone who lacks these feelings is not human

If one is without the heart of compassion, one is not a human.  
 If one is without the heart of disdain, one is not a human.  
 If one is without the heart of deference, one is not a human.  
 If one is without the heart of approval and disapproval, one is not human.

– Mencius 2A6

## Mencius's Second Contribution

- One can cultivate the virtues by training the appropriate feelings

By striking water and making it leap up, you can cause it to go past your forehead. If you guide it by damming it, you can cause it to remain on a mountaintop.

– Mencius 6A2

Those who follow the greater qualities in their nature become great men and those who follow the smaller qualities in their nature become small men. ...If we first build up the nobler part of our nature, then the inferior part cannot overcome it. It is simply this that makes a man great.

– Mencius 6A15

## Mencius's Second Contribution

- The virtues must be nourished or else they wither away
  - music, education, exposure to one's culture
- Evil is due, in part, to ...
- And it is due, in part, to ...

Once the trees have been hewed with axes and hatchets, is the mountain no longer beautiful? And if the trees are cut down day after day, can a mountain retain its beauty? ... [With] proper nourishment and care everything grows, without proper nourishment and care everything decays.

– Mencius 6A8

## Mencius's Third Contribution

- Mencius connects being virtuous with having qi (2A2)
  - qi = vital energy
  - more virtue → better regulation of body and mind → more ability to be calm and resolute → better able to channel one's qi



## Justification of Revolution

- Mencius develops the idea of the **rectification of names**, as it pertains to politics (1B8)
  - It is forbidden to rebel against a ruler
  - But a person can forfeit their role as ruler through ...
  - And it is permissible to rebel against a "ruler" who is not a ruler

## Tianming

天命

- **tianming** = mandate of heaven
  - the law given by nature's master blueprint for how things should be and how one should act
  - authorizes a ruler to rule and demands that subjects obey

*The Character: The top is "tian". On the bottom, the left box symbolizes "verbal" -- pictograph of a mouth. The hut part and right exaggerated-gamma symbolize "decree": the "hut" represents "join", the "gamma" represents a seal (as in a seal on a document).*

## Mencius's Fourth Contribution

- Mencius identifies the mandate of heaven with ...
  - the people's acceptance of a ruler's conduct legitimizes his rule
  - people will only accept rulers with good moral character

It was Heaven that gave the empire to him. It was the people that gave the empire to him. Therefore, I said, "The emperor cannot give the empire to another person."  
- Mencius  
5A15

## Mencius's Fifth Contribution

- Mencius elaborates on Confucius's advice to rulers
  - stay in touch with the people and their problems (1A7)
  - ensure economic well-being for all (1A7)
  - make sure others have what you have (1B5)
  - stay mindful of the practical consequences of one's actions (4B2)

## Reminder

- Midterm 2** on February 15
- covers Buddhism and Confucianism
  - *not* comprehensive