A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

PHILOSOPHY

DECEMBER 2002

By

James P. Behuniak

Dissertation Committee:

Roger Ames, Chairperson
Eliot Deutsch
James Tiles
Edward Davis
Steve Odin
Joseph Grange
For my Family.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With support from the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Hawai‘i, the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University, and the Office of International Relations at Peking University, much of this work was completed as a Visiting Research Scholar at Peking University over the academic year 2001-2002. Peking University was an ideal place to work and I am very grateful for the support of these institutions.

I thank Roger Ames for several years of instruction, encouragement, generosity, and friendship, as well as for many hours of conversation. I also thank the Ames family, Roger, Bonney, and Austin, for their hospitality in Beijing.

I thank Geir Sigurdsson for being the best friend that a dissertation writer could ever hope for. Geir was also in Beijing and read and commented on the manuscript.

I thank my committee members for comments and recommendations submitted over the course of this work. I owe a lot to Jim Tiles for prompting me to think through the subtler components of my argument. I take full responsibility for any remaining weaknesses that carry over into this draft.

I thank my additional member, Joseph Grange, who has been a mentor and friend for many years. I am sure that if I had not taken Joe’s Metaphysics course twelve years ago, this dissertation would never have been written.

I thank my classmates and friends from Honolulu, the faculties of the Philosophy departments at the Universities of Hawai‘i and Southern Maine, and all my friends in Portland. I also thank Connie Zhu for years of patience and encouragement.

Finally, I thank my family. If Mencius teaches us anything, he teaches us the profound importance of family affection. I thank them for helping me realize concretely this Mencian teaching and for everything else that they have done for me. This work is dedicated to them.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation reinterprets the notion commonly translated as “human nature” (renxing) in the Mencius by appealing to philosophical assumptions common to Warring States thought. Taking advantage of recently unearthed archeological finds from the Mencian school, the argument is made that renxing in the Mencius is most adequately understood as a dynamic disposition shaped by cultural and historical conditions, not as an a-historical “nature” common to all humans at all times. The notion of “becoming human” in the Mencius that results from this re-reading brings the text as a whole into focus. The central themes of the Mencius – the role of family, personal growth, moral development, and human advancement - are each understood within the framework of this alternative reading.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ................................................................. iv
Abstract ................................................................. v
Preface ................................................................. viii

1. The Cosmological Background
   - Energy and Propensity ........................................ 1
   - Shape and Spontaneity ...................................... 6
   - Disposition and Spontaneity ................................. 11
   - Zhuangzi and Shape ....................................... 16
   - Characteristics of Chinese Cosmology .................. 19

2. The Role of Feeling
   - Feeling, Doctrine, and Dao .................................. 28
   - Feeling as Transactional .................................... 31
   - Aspiration and Courage .................................... 37
   - Inner/Outer and the Growth Model ....................... 42
   - Desire, Coherence, and Integration ...................... 47

3. Family and Moral Development
   - “Spontaneous” and “Technical” Approaches ............... 61
   - The Mohist Challenge ....................................... 64
   - Confucianism’s Normative Measure ....................... 67
   - Family as the Root .......................................... 74
   - Family and Extension ....................................... 80
TABLE OF CONTENTS

4. The Human Disposition

   Relationships and Disposition ........................................ 97
   The Human Disposition as Good .................................... 105
   The Four Sprouts and the Family ................................ 112
   The Satisfaction of Becoming Human ............................. 115
   The Value of the Person ............................................. 120

5. Advancing the Human Way

   The Constraints on Aspiration .................................... 133
   The Conditions for Political Legitimacy .......................... 141
   The Conditions for Human Achievement .......................... 144
   Human Virtue in the Sacrifices .................................. 146
   Aspiration and the Human Way .................................... 154

References ............................................................................. 171
When peace disintegrates into war, it is not unusual for literary efforts to reflect the breakdown of values and institutions that once distinguished a properly human existence from that of the animal. Mencius thought and wrote during the “Warring States” period in China, a period in which no single authority or common purpose united a belligerent mosaic of states on China’s eastern plains. Mencius lived in a time of great anxiety, violence, and appalling carnage. The literature of the period attests to these conditions. From the discourses on warfare circulated in popular military handbooks, to the songs of despair in the “Book of Songs” (Shijing), to the pacifist reflections in the Daodejing – thinkers in this period are coping with the realities of war and bloodshed. Amongst this period’s literary efforts, the Mencius provides a philosophical vision of what the human experience might become – a vision that asserts itself over-against the reality of what the human experience had become. The Mencian prescription is one among several, advocated in an age that would not allow philosophy the luxury of being a leisure-time pursuit.

Mencius is a Confucian thinker. He seeks to reinforce the teachings of Confucius and to some degree “naturalize” these teachings in a persuasive and communicable manner. His chosen metaphor is botanical. He speaks of the “four sprouts” (siduan) of human virtue, and likens the cultivation of the person to the growth of a tree. He speaks of “roots” (ben), “nourishment” (yang), “disposition” (xing), “life span” (sheng), “breaking through (the ground)” (da), and “fruition” (shi). The growth metaphor is the vehicle by which Mencius wishes to convey his vision of what it means to “become human.”

For one hoping to understand the Mencius, it is important to follow the botanical metaphor; but the hermeneutic circle is not tightened until one pauses to think through it. What does the metaphor mean to Mencius? In using botanical imagery, does Mencius
mean to suggest that becoming human is an end-driven process: simply a matter of “actualizing” a given, teleological potential? Does he mean to suggest that becoming human is a process like the pre-Darwinian way we as a tradition are given to think about the process of an acorn becoming an oak tree? Does he mean to say that humans possess a pre-determined, “natural” end that is antecedently given and unaffected by historical circumstances?

Many of the most qualified interpreters of classical Chinese thought have inclined towards such an understanding in treating what is commonly understood to be the notion of “human nature” (renxing) in the Mencius. Benjamin Schwartz understands xing to be “an innate tendency toward growth or development in a given, predetermined direction.”¹ Robert Eno considers “Heaven” (tian) itself a “teleological force” that engenders a good “nature” (xing) in human beings and thereby “indicates what man’s purpose, or ‘final cause,’ is to be.”² In the same teleological/theological vein, P.J. Ivanhoe submits that for Mencius, “to (follow) one’s nature (xing) is the way to both understand and fulfill heaven’s plan.”³ Tu Wei-ming leans towards a teleological reading when he considers “the Way” (dao) for the human being to be “nothing other than the actualization of true human nature (xing).”⁴ A.C. Graham, at one point in his career, considers xing to be a notion developed “on lines rather suggestive of Aristotelian teleology.”⁵ In any number of instances, it is “nature” with a predetermined end that serves as the default understanding of xing.

Xing, however, does not necessarily or explicitly mean “end-driven teleology” in the Mencius. In other words, the botanical model that here describes the process of becoming human does not necessarily mean to Mencius what it means to an Aristotelian.

By way of illustration, we might pay a visit to Mencius himself. Among the most remarkable botanical displays that I have ever seen lies within the walls of the sprawling Mencius Temple at Zouxian: Mencius’ hometown in Shandong, China.⁶ Mencius’ body is interred not far from this complex. The sprawling grounds are an apt tribute to Mencius;
for the site is a botanical wonder. It is also designed to make a point. Temple caretakers
still supplement with young saplings the ancient grove of trees that constitutes the heart
of the temple. The layout highlights the contrast between the fairly uniform younger
trees, strategically placed, and the magnificent formations that tower overhead. Mencius
maintained that every person could become a sage; and for those who visit his temple,
that doctrine is reinforced by the realization that any one of these young, non-descript
saplings can take on, or even surpass, the majesty of an elder.

One of these gigantic trees, just southwest of the main hall devoted to Mencius, is
particularly admirable. It is a towering tree whose thick, lumpy trunk rockets straight up
some twenty-five meters before supporting a number of horizontal limbs. Each limb has
smaller branches curling off on the most unusual trajectories. Each of these branches
trails off into thickets of tendrils reaching proudly skyward. Most remarkably, at the
center top of this tree, a yellowish, bulbous growth of heartwood emerges like a fantastic
sculpture - high on a pedestal, never to be touched. It is a breathtaking sight.

At the Mencius Temple, the uniqueness, the form, and the grandeur of each tree
are the results of botanical growth. And each tree is absolutely one of a kind. Indeed,
everything that grows is one of a kind: a singular expression of the drive of living things
to flourish in their habitats by making the most out of their conditions. In the world of
singular trees, regardless of species, the result is almost always some aesthetically im­
pressive expression of a living process - a process never, not anywhere, replicated.

In an age shaped by the logic of war, according to which one human casualty can
be substituted by another and another, why not appeal to the aesthetic dimensions of the
singular human life? Would it be somehow irresponsible to assume that Mencius' chosen metaphor embraces the notion of becoming a distinct human person? As readers,
must we restrict Mencius to the more generic aspects of his metaphor, those with which
we might easily identify correlates within our own tradition? Was he merely interested
in establishing "humans" as a natural kind, and then banally designating them uniformly
"good" (shan)? Are we to assume that Mencius was not so interested in the aesthetic qualities of the singular human life? Does the botanical imagery in the text work in any way to foreground the process of becoming distinctly human over the span of a life? Does the notion of xing allow the metaphor to work in this way?

These are largely hermeneutic questions, so I propose the following exercise: Before we think of the botanical metaphor in terms of end-driven teleology and equate xing with a uniform, predetermined "nature" on that basis, let us briefly attempt to locate this metaphor in its own context. We will ask some odd but important questions: What does the being of a tree mean to someone in classical China? What does a "kind" of tree mean? What does being a seedling mean? Any answer to these questions that we find in the classical Chinese tradition will more adequately inform our reading of the botanical metaphor in the Mencius. This will signal the degree to which that metaphor will tolerate a more aesthetic reading.

We can start with Mencius himself. He asks King Xiang directly, "Do you not understand the growth of young seedlings?" Mencius' own account of the botanical process is as follows:

Should there be drought in June or July, a seedling wilts. Then the sky condenses to produce clouds and it rains in torrents. Then, having been stimulated, the seedling opens out. When it does so, who can hold it back?

When Mencius describes growth, the stress is on the irrepresible process of emergence, a process stimulated by nourishing conditions. The seed is the beginning of an emergent process. Does the seed contain the "final cause" or "end" of that process? In its sole tribute to seeds, the Book of Songs relates only that seeds "contain life (huo) and, abundantly growing, break through the ground (da)." In the Zhuangzi, the "content" of a seed is described only as "the inchoate beginning of a process unfolding" (ji). In an episode with Liezi, Zhuangzi traces the career of a "seed" through various phases: from
its life as water plantain to its evolution into a human being. This is a process shaped by environmental conditions; it is not teleological. In the Chinese tradition, the seed is not described as containing its own teleological end; rather, the process itself would appear to determine its end, since not all seeds come to fruition. As Confucius laments:

So it is, there are seedlings that never come to flower. And so it is, there are flowers that never bear fruit.

Generally in this tradition, the mention of botanical growth in a literary context does not stress genetic traits that are simply “actualized” in the process of growth. One would assume that farmers in classical China were perfectly capable of distinguishing various species of seed, but this is beside the point. Mencius is not a farmer. Literary treatments tend to foreground the unique, emergent, context-bound traits of things that grow.

The “Small Preface” of the Book of Songs relates with somewhat more precision what the botanical process entails, and this description lends itself more to an aesthetic conceptualization of growth than a uniform, genetic one. This account comes in the form of commentary on three songs, each of which is missing from the received text. The commentary itself is philosophically interesting, however; these three songs are said to represent the following truisms about things that grow:

1. The ten thousand things attain the emergence (you) of their way (dao).
2. The ten thousand things attain the extremity of their magnitude (gaoda).
3. The life-span (sheng) of each one (ge) of the ten thousand things attains its own fittingness (yi).

This is not an account of what it means to become a “species” of thing, but rather an account of what it means to become a particular thing: a thing with its own “way,” its own “size,” and over the course of its life-span, its very own “fit.” This is not an account
of some generic kind of thing; this is an account of that admirable tree just southwest of the main hall of the Mencius Temple.

As we shall see, the vocabulary in the “Small Preface” corresponds rather closely with the vocabulary that Mencius uses to describe the process of becoming human. It is a process of emerging on a way (dao) over the span of a life (sheng), a process that seeks its optimal fit and its most “expansive” magnitude. The details of this process as they relate to becoming human will be explored in chapters to come.

Mencius clearly does, however, on at least one occasion, intend to classify humans as a sort (lei); this he does most explicitly when he compares humans to barley. But what does this classification mean? What is it to be a “sort” of plant or tree in classical China?

According to Confucius, one goes to the Book of Songs if one wishes to learn the names of various plants and trees. The student so inclined is well advised. The Book of Songs is classical China’s botanical compendium; there are dozens of references to specific kinds of plants and trees. The taxonomy that one finds in the Book of Songs, if it can be called a “taxonomy,” is unlike any formal “species” classification. Instead, there is a recurrent grammatical construction through which one might sort out plants and trees according to the places that “have” (you) them. The “taxonomy” is locative:

The south, we learn, “have” trees with curved drooping branches; the hills of the south “have” mulberry trees, medlar trees, kow trees, and the ti plant; the northern hills “have” willow trees, plum trees, yu trees, and the li plant. The valleys “have” motherwort. Mountains “have” lofty pines, thorny elms, bushy oaks, sparrow plums, mulberry trees, and varnish trees (which are also “had” on hillsides, along with turtle foot and thorn fern). The marshes “have” lotus flowers, rushes, water-polygonum, and valerian. The moor “has” creeping-grass. The wet lowlands “have” white elm, mulberry, chestnut, willow, carambola, and wild pear trees. The central plains “have”
pulse. In classical China, everything that grows does so in the environment that will "have" it. Everything that grows is located.

In the Chinese tradition, to consider the botanical product in abstraction from the location that nourishes it forfeits something of its defining characteristic. If Mencius considers humans to be a "sort" of thing that grows, we do well to locate where this growth is understood to take place. In a reference to becoming human, Mencius speaks of the trees that Ox Mountain ideally "has" (you). The question then becomes "What kind of environment is Ox Mountain?" What are the unique conditions that nourish humans as a sort? The argument here will be that Mencius means to classify humans by locating them in the family. It will be argued that those features that condition human growth are family-borne features, and humans are "rooted" in the family. Like everything else that grows in China, humans are nourished somewhere; so if the southern mountains "have" mulberry trees, it is suggested here that families "have" humans. This will be defended in pages to come.

Based on botanical thinking in the tradition, I am more inclined to think of xin in the Mencius as a novel process of emerging as something distinct - that is, in formative transaction with a set of specific conditions - rather than a process of simply "actualizing" a shared, predetermined end. As things stand, however, I am not obliged to base such an interpretation on conjecture. Documents recently unearthed from the Warring States period leave little doubt that, in the pre-Mencian period, xin was understood to emerge in formative transaction with conditions (ming). The title conferred upon the most important of these documents states as much: "Xing Arises from Conditions" (Xingzimingchu). Two versions of this document have been recovered. One was recovered in 1993 in a tomb at Guodian in Hubei province, and the second was found on the Hong Kong market in the spring of 1994. Although we are not certain of the latter's origin or dating, there is much similarity to the Guodian cache in physicality and content. This has prompted speculation that it comes from the same vicinity in
Hubei. In any case, the presence of two versions of this document, with little variation in content, suggests that it was a well-established and widely circulated work in the pre-Mencian period.

One cannot overstate the importance of this and other recent finds to our understanding of the Mencius. Important scholars such as Pang Pu and Li Xueqin have speculated that Disposition Arises from Conditions is part of a Zisizi collection similar to a Zhuangzi. Zisi, also known as Kongji, was a grandson of Confucius and a student of Zengzi. Zengzi lends his name to one of the “eight schools” of Confucianism that arose after the death of Confucius. The “Records of the Historian” (Shiji) attributes the Zhongyong to Zisi, and identifies Mencius as a student in this branch of Confucianism. Hence, the school of Zengzi is often called the “Si-Meng lineage” (Simengpai). While it is difficult to date the Zhongyong as a whole with any precision, it is plausible that the Mencius lies chronologically between the earlier Zisizi materials, which includes Disposition Arises from Conditions, and the later sections of the Zhongyong; sections that elaborate upon certain themes in the Mencius, specifically the notion of “integration” (cheng).

Whatever the precise chronological relationship between texts in the Si-Meng lineage, the interpreter of the Mencius is obliged to take into account the general themes of this school which do exhibit some degree of continuity. Generally, the Zhongyong, Disposition Arises from Conditions, and another Zisizi document, the Five Modes of Conduct (Wuxingpian) are each concerned with the kind of ethical development that turns virtue into personal character. Each text is interested in cultivating sagacity. Each text foregrounds the emotional dimension of becoming well integrated as a person. To read the Mencius as part of the Zisizi lineage is to put more stress on these dimensions of its thought. This will be done in the pages to come. The project ahead, then, has two objectives.
The first objective, as previewed above, is to reinstate the aesthetic dimensions of becoming human in the Mencius. On my reading, Mencius is not primarily interested in asserting the identity of "humans" as a generic species. He is more interested in the cultivation of particular people in particular families. The botanical metaphor, as I understand it, enables Mencius to foreground this project of personal growth.

The second objective is related to the first: it is to emphasize the role of emotion in Mencius' moral philosophy by distinguishing it clearly from the more doctrinaire form of thinking represented by the adversarial Mohist school. Mencius is not interested in the "one size fits all" approach to becoming human that is promoted in a technical, doctrinal morality. The priority that Mencius gives to feeling parallels the priority he gives to the development of distinct, well-integrated persons that are uniquely human rather than uniformly so.

These two objectives: that is, the reinstatement of the aesthetic and the emotional aspects of the Mencius, converge on a common theme. I maintain that, far from being merely the "actualization" of a predetermined end, the human experience for Mencius is largely underdetermined and requires the processes of each person becoming distinctly human in order to advance toward a self-consummation. To move from being an animal to "becoming human" is a project of extending sensibilities into a human world that is in the making, and of consolidating these sensibilities into habits and attitudes that come to distinguish humans from other animals, and also from one another. For Mencius, becoming human is literally the "fruit" (shi) of a process of growth; it is not a preordained end. Becoming human begins in one's own family: this is the "root" from which the process begins. The process then proceeds with the development of thoughts and feelings concomitant with these unique initial conditions; the "fruit" of becoming human is formed in this process. The "sprouts" of human virtue are the inchoate beginnings of this process unfolding. The end of this process is not determined at the outset in any instance. Becoming human, like becoming any botanical product, takes on a singular
character over the course of growth. Humans emerge in their own way, take on their own magnitudes, and find their own particular fit within their circumstances. This will be the reading presented here.

Sketch of the Argument

To those accustomed to a more generic reading of the Mencius, the argument ahead might be anticipated as radical. I feel, however, that mine is the more conservative reading. To read the notion of human development as end-driven in the Mencius is to present Mencius as a truly revolutionary theorist of "human nature" in classical China. I am not prepared or inclined to argue this kind of "radical" interpretation. My assessment is more modest. I maintain that Mencius is working within the parameters of certain commonly held assumptions: assumptions about growth, transformation, development, and about the behavior of "configurative energy" (qi).

In chapter one, I will attempt to locate the notion of xing within the framework of Warring States cosmology, which tacitly assumes the role of "configurative energy" in the kind of processes that interest Mencius. Rather than entailing the notion of a fixed "nature," I maintain that this cosmology more readily sponsors the notion of dynamic "dispositions" that "take shape" in transaction with formative conditions and issue into unique qualities over the span of their growth. If Mencius overrides assumptions such as these and proclaims a fixed, transcendent "nature," he goes against the grain of classical Chinese thinking. I claim that he does not.

In chapter two, I move to the notion of "feeling" (xin) in the Mencius. The Mencian notion of feeling is consistent with the assumptions of the cosmology explored in chapter one. I argue that "feeling" in the Mencius is most adequately understood as the terminal result of transactions conditioned by a "disposition" (xing) embedded in a world animated by "configurative energies." The role that feelings play in Mencius'
rejection of the Mohist doctrine of “impartial concern” (jianai) will be interpreted on this basis. According to Mencius, the Mohists locate appropriateness (yi) “outside” (wai) the circuit of felt experience. Mencius, in turn, situates the standard of appropriateness within the process of growth itself, a process that is nourished by qi energies. “Feeling” and “disposition” are both enlarged over the process of integrating (cheng) “inner” and “outer” in a manner context-dependent and fitting.

In chapter three, I move from feeling generally to the most important kind of feeling for Mencius: “family affection” (qin). For Mencius, human development is rooted in family affection. Becoming a human person in the Mencius is largely a process of preserving and extending family-borne feelings over the course of developing one’s personal character. The Mohists have a different approach towards moral development: they employ an external utilitarian standard that does not entail the integral growth of a person’s family-borne disposition. The Mencian and Mohist differ most sharply on this point.

In chapter four, the features of a properly “human” disposition are considered at greater length. As anticipated in chapter three, I argue that for Mencius the proclivity toward “human” virtues arises from family-borne conditions. This, however, is also associated with the historical work of sages. The “human” designation in the Mencius, as I understand it, is in large part a product of history: it consists of a range of “human relationships” (renlun) instituted by cultural heroes. These are the five relationships that first separated humans from other animals. These relationships, however, are not the “end” of human development; they are rather a dynamic place to begin the process of becoming human within one’s own relational context. Thus, as it stands in the Mencius, the four human virtues are not defined as fixed quantities. The development of the “four sprouts” (siduan) of virtue, in keeping with the botanical model, entails “extending” what it means to become human. I maintain that, for Mencius, the human experience is still in the making.
In chapter five, the notion of “becoming human” in the Mencius is located within the context of the “Si-Meng” lineage. The Disposition Arises from Conditions document asserts that “making the human way” (rendao) is an “art” (shu). Mencius shares this sensibility with the Zisizi authorship. He also provides a much more developed picture of how social, political, and economic conditions pose constraints upon the project of making the human way. The role of aspiration (zhi) will be considered in relation to these practical concerns. The notion of aspiration, along with the notions of “tian” and “ming” that are explored in this chapter, also suggest the more profound dimensions of Mencian thought. Human beings in this tradition, through the flourishing of associated humanity (ren), are responsible for bringing the human experience to fruition in the historical moment. “Becoming human” in the Mencius is truly a work in progress; and the results of that work, as Mencius sees it, can be as great as humans aspire to make them.

Methodology and Approach

Generally speaking, in a work on Chinese philosophy there are two criteria for adequacy in translation and interpretation. The first criterion measures the degree to which English renditions are consistent with the philosophical assumptions of Chinese thought in general. Chapter one will be concerned with sketching these assumptions as I feel they bear on the Mencius. As I have already said, I do not find the English term “nature” to be consistent with the assumptions of Warring States thought when the teleological dimension of that term is stressed. Hence, I develop “disposition” as an alternative translation of xing on the basis that this term is more consistent with the general assumptions that characterize ancient Chinese thought. In translating Chinese terms adequately, it is rarely as easy as presenting a single, isolated “argument” for a particular translation, and this leads to the second criterion.
The second criterion for adequacy in translation and interpretation measures the degree of coherence and consistency that can be brought to a text when it is focused through a particular vocabulary. Rather than a series of isolated “arguments” for each translation choice, what follows is an extended argument for the viability of the whole cluster of translations that I use to render the Mencius coherent. The key terms are relatively few and are translated here with some consistency. The following key terms might be considered at the outset; the adequacy of these translation choices will be reinforced over the course of this study:

**性** Xìng: “Disposition,” “to cultivate as disposition.”

As stated above, my intention is to present xìng in a manner that is more consistent with classical Chinese thought. The term is also used verbally in the Mencius; hence, “to cultivate as a disposition” is used on occasion.

**心** Xin: “Feeling,” “thoughts and feelings.”

In chapter two, it is argued that in the Mencius this term is most adequately understood as a function rather than an organ. While there is no sharp distinction between thoughts and feelings in xìng, Mencius intends to foreground feeling against a more technical mode of moral deliberation and reasoning. Hence, “feeling” is the translation favored here.
情 Qing:  "Emotional content."

This has been a difficult term to translate. The Guodian materials, however, do illuminate its meaning within the Si-Meng school and its relation to the notion of "disposition" (xing). The term qing, which is rarely used in the Mencius, refers to the "emotional content" that distinguishes humans from other animals. In large part, the term "feeling" (xin) does the work of qing in the Mencius.

誠 Cheng:  "Well integrated," "integration," "integrity."

This term is relatively underdeveloped in the Mencius, but it becomes important in the Si-Meng school as the central term in the Zhongyong. In the Mencius it exhibits a range of meaning, from the vernacular "genuine" or "true" to the more philosophically significant "integration" or "integrity." The latter, in the Mencius, involves feeling the world truly and adjusting one's habits of engagement accordingly. Cheng can be considered a normative measure for the project of personal growth that is presented in the Mencius.

德 De:  "Character," "force of character," "quality."

In both the Mencius and Zisizi materials such as the Five Modes of Conduct (Wuxingpian), de is understood as the "character" of a person. The notion of "character" embraces the notion of cultivating moral habits and attitudes in a disposition (xing), and thereby influencing others by the "force" of example. That character has an efficacious "quality" is an extension of this notion.
仁  Ren:  “Associated humanity.”

Ren is a virtue that extends directly from the family. “Humanity” is not a shared, essential attribute with which all “humans” are endowed, but rather a form of human experience that arises from the dynamics of associated life. Associated humanity, for Mencius, consummates in what is “human” (ren) and generates qualitatively “human feeling” (renxin). The term is also used in the Mencius to refer to an ideal government and society in which associated life is most robust.

義  Yi:  “Appropriateness.”

Yi is a sense that enables one to behave in a fitting manner. There is some debate in the Warring States period over the “internal” and “external” features of yi; this debate makes its presence felt in the Mencius. As I understand Mencius, he resists reducing yi to one or the other extreme. Yi is neither strictly “internal” nor “external,” but rather situated within an unbroken circuit of experience that precedes the distinction. In the Zhongyong, this notion becomes more explicitly identified with “integration” (cheng).

天  Tian:  Tian has no satisfactory correlate in English.

I allow associations to accumulate around the Chinese term, leaving it in most cases untranslated. Some associations are importantly different in the Mencius, however. Mencius disassociates tian from the more anthropomorphic “Heaven” of Mozi, which results in a more secular notion of “forces” in the Mencius. This
does not diminish the awe and respect that Mencius attaches to the term, however. Where I do translate or gloss tian, it is usually as "forces" or "the broadest set of interlocking patterns" within which events proceed.

**Ming**: "Conditions."

Ming, like tian, is a term that commands the respect of Confucians. The notion of ming is closely connected to tian. If tian are the "forces" that shape events in the world, ming are the "conditions" under which things proceed, conditions that those "forces" mandate. It is argued in chapter five that, in the Si-Meng school, the social dimension of "forces" and "conditions" become pronounced.

**Zhi**: "Aspiration."

This term plays an important role in what Mencius sees as the role of the "scholar-official" (shi) in advancing the human way; and the term is further illuminated in Disposition Arises from Conditions (Xingzimingchu). The nature of "aspiration" (zhi) as a psychophysical function related to "configurative energy" (qi) in the Mencius and elsewhere is difficult to reconstruct, although an attempt to do so is made in chapter two.

This is the set of key translations with which this study proceeds; and as with any set of translations, it involves some degree of compromise. If the following interpretation is both sensitive to its Chinese context and reasonably coherent (assuming that Mencius himself was), then the adequacy of the preceding vocabulary is recommended.
Of course, the hazard in translating and interpreting this text is that the coherence that I bring to it will be more the coherence between English words in my head and less the coherence between Chinese words in the Mencius. I consider this danger to be unavoidable no matter how careful one is. The risk of reading oneself into the tradition is significantly lessened, however, if the first criterion for adequacy in translation is taking seriously. In what follows, I will attempt to read the Mencius as a text in context. I have already attempted to exercise attention to context above, by considering the botanical metaphor in the classical Chinese world. I will continue to reflect on the broader context of Chinese thought in the pages to come, particularly in chapter one. And throughout this study I will reference a range of texts in the classical tradition - including those that Mencius himself reads and makes reference to.

In the end, the interpretation of ancient Chinese texts is a shared effort. We can only do our best, and then we rely on an informed and active community of readers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of what we have contributed. What follows is a proposal, and as such it is fallible. But it is nonetheless an argument.

This work has a two-fold purpose. The first purpose is to attempt to inform our reading of the Mencius with recent archeological finds and on that basis, to challenge a default reading that persists in spite of them. Our recovery of the Zisizi documents certainly justifies taking a fresh look at the Mencius. My purpose here is also to present a concise and hopefully accessible reading of the Mencius, one that I feel these new documents also justify. The Mencius is a difficult text, and at times it seems positively opaque; but its core message is not indecipherable. The wisdom of the Mencius, as I understand it, speaks quite audibly to the intelligent reader who has an interest in ordinary human occupations such as family and the cultivation of character. I hope for this work to communicate some part of that wisdom.
1 Schwartz (1985) p. 175.
2 Eno (1990) p. 121.
6 James Legge records a visit he paid to the Mencius Temple in 1873. See: Legge (1994) vol. 2, pg. 15.
7 Mencius 1A: 6
9 Zhuangzi 47/17/41. I here adopt Richard Rutt's nuanced translation of ji as "process unfolding" as it is used in the "Great Commentary" of the Yi Jing. See: Rutt (1996) p. 408.
11 Analects 9.22
13 Mencius 6A: 7
14 Analects 17.9
22 Mencius 6A: 8
24 For a discussion of the issues of dating and content in the Zhongyong. See: Tu (1989) pp. 5-21. I am inclined, along with others, to understand sections of the Zhongyong as elaborations upon the Mencius. Cite H&A discussion
25 Different versions of this document have been unearthed both on bamboo strip at Guodian in Hubei in 1993 and on silk at Mawangdui in Changxia in 1973. The bamboo manuscript dates from about 300 B.C. while the silk manuscript and an interlaced commentary date from 168 B.C.
CHAPTER ONE
THE COSMOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Energy and Propensity

The notion that qi or “configurative energy” animates the world is among the most common assumptions in Warring States literature. The language of qi serves as a sort of metaphysical vernacular throughout the period’s literature, and the Mencius is no exception. Exploring the notion of qi is one way of reconstructing the worldview from which Mencius thought and wrote.

The Zuozhuan teaches that there are six phases of qi that represent three sets of correlative qualities: yin/yang, wind/rain and darkness/light. The permutations of qi give rise to a wide variety of phenomena: the “five flavors,” the “five colors,” the “five modes of music,” and when out of balance, the “six illnesses.” As the qualities of taste, sight, and sound, qi represents the transaction between an organism and its environment. As health and spirit, qi represents the animating energies of the living body: the vitality derived from environing conditions that cause physical growth and sustain life. Qi concentrates in living things as a kind of vital fluid, and in the natural world as a kind of vapor; it constitutes both the emotional and the meteorological environment of life as the prevailing “atmosphere” or “weather.”

As a metaphysical notion qi presents a challenge; it defies any sharp form/matter distinction. Qi is not the inert material of a thing, for it is hylozoistic, dynamic, and identified with a variety of qualities. These qualities, however, do not correspond to the essential attributes of any discrete, distinguishable subject. The
qualities of qi can be designated correlatively as phases of yin and yang, but these designations correspond to no formal essence or nature. Yin and yang instead express the dynamic configurations of things themselves; things give rise to yin and yang. In the Daodejing we read:

The ten-thousand things shoulder yin and embrace yang; they are a blending of configurative energies into a harmony (he).

Things in a qi cosmology are fundamentally achievements of equilibrium or harmony (he). In this context, harmony describes the focusing of qi in particular configurations that consummate in qualitative relationships designated yin or yang. Such relational states do not entail a set of formal attributes; they are instead phases in the continuity (yi) of configurative energy in its qualitative transformations. As the Zhuangzi relates:

What makes something beautiful is its inscrutability and wonder, what makes something ugly is its foul stench and putrefaction. But the foul and putrid transform (hua) into the inscrutable and wondrous, and the inscrutable and wondrous transform into the foul and putrid. Thus it is said, "Throughout all the world is the continuity (yi) of configurative energy."

In a “configurative energy” cosmology, there is not a clear delineation between matter and form; there is only the continuity of qualitative, transforming energy (qi). The single category of qi accounts for continuity and, by virtue of its incessant configuration, quality as well.

Qi is understood to express a wide range of qualities; biological, emotional, meteorological, spiritual, and so on, according to how it is harnessed, blocked, released, or lost in its dynamic configurations. In a world animated by qi, any phenomena by virtue of its configuration spontaneously manifests a particular quality or
character. There is no productive distinction to be made between the form and function of such configurations. As Judith Farquhar observes:

Qi is both structural and functional, a unification of material and temporal forms that loses all coherence when reduced to one or the other "aspect."

There is also nothing that clearly corresponds to efficient or final causality in the functioning of "configurative energy." In the Zhuangzi, Ziqi is asked to discuss the "pipes of heaven" (tianlai) and relates the following:

The world emits a configurative energy that we'll call a "wind." If only it would not blow; but it does, and the myriad apertures begin to howl. Have you alone not heard their drawn out sounds?

Ziqi then describes the contours of the earth, which like "nostrils," "mouths" and "ears," are configured to give rise to perceptible qualities, the metaphor being various sounds. He continues:

The myriad sounds produced by the blowing are all distinct, for all the blowing does is elicit from the apertures themselves (ziqi) their own natural inclinations (ziqiu). Who would be the initiator of this?

According to Ziqi, everything derives by virtue of its "shape" a spontaneous propensity towards certain qualities in the incessant blow of qi. There is no antecedent force that determines the advent of these qualities in any given configuration, and there is nothing apart from the inclination of the configuration itself that determines the qualities of its own expression. There is neither efficient nor final causality clearly implicated in the "blow" of qi.

In place of efficient and final causality, there is an alternative notion of causality suggested in a qi cosmology. However elusive the notion, sensitive scholars
consistently detect its presence. It is suggested in what Tu Wei-ming calls the "continuous interaction" of tian and ren in the early Confucian tradition. It is also suggested in what Herbert Fingarette labels "magic" in the Analects. Fingarette senses, even in the Analects, the presence of a causal reasoning that differs considerably from efficient causality. Qi causality is also suggested, but never quite captured, whenever the word "organic" is used to distinguish a Chinese mode of thinking from dominant Western modes. The term "organic" calls attention to the interrelatedness of things, highlighting the absence of discrete objects in linear, causal relations in absolute space and time. If causality is not "linear" in this sense, then what is causality in the Chinese tradition?

The notion of causality operative in classical Chinese thought is difficult to articulate in the familiar terminology of cause and effect. Attempts to describe how Chinese causality differs from linear causality employ the language of "configuration," "resonance," and "propensity." Léon Vandermeersch, writing on the "Book of Changes" (Yijing) describes the Chinese notion of causality in the following language:

From one event to another, the relation revealed by the science of divination [in the Yijing] is not presented as a chain of intermediate causes and effects, but as a change in a diagrammatic configuration.

Carine Defoort suggests that, for the Chinese:

Events were not seen as caused by one powerful and preceding event but as woven in a network of inter-dependent nodes, a colossal pattern in which things reacted upon each other by a kind of mysterious resonance rather than mechanical impulsion.

François Jullien has perhaps developed the Chinese notion of causality most fully. He focuses on a single character: shi, which in various contexts admits translation as
"position," "power," "circumstances," and "propensity." Apart from its use in early militarist texts and its eventual adoption by Legalist thinkers, 

shi never became a highly developed philosophical topic in the tradition. The explanation for this, according to Jullien, is that "the intuition of [shi] is common enough in China that it fails to give rise to any abstract reflection," since "to Chinese, the idea of shi seems self-evident." Jullien penetrates an elusive subject matter, one he describes as "difficult to capture in discourse: namely, the kind of potential that originates not in human initiative but instead results from the very disposition of things."

This elusive kind of potential that Jullien locates involves notions of natural efficacy and tendency that rely on neither efficient nor final causality. Instead, shi represents the propensity of a situation or event to ripen into efficacy completely of itself. The notion of propensity (shi) is contrary to that of making something happen through any external form of causal force. Mencius relates an old adage of the Qi people, illustrating the notion:

One might be clever, but it's better to make use of propensity (shi). One might have a garden hoe, but it is better to wait for the season to arrive.

Propensity (shi) refers to the causal force that circumstances themselves implicate. It is the spontaneous efficacy of a given state or condition of things that relies on no discrete causal agent or principle. Jullien specifically presents the "logic" of shi as an alternative to the "extrinsic relatedness" of mechanistic causality and commensurate with the Chinese "indifference to any notion of a telos, (or) final end for things." Rather than rely on regressive, causal analysis or the projection of teleological ends, Chinese thinkers interpret reality in terms of the immediate dispositions of things that sponsor the spontaneous emergence of events with immediate qualitative character.

The notion that Jullien calls dispozif involves both configurative arrangement and spontaneous efficacy, notions that are consistent with a qi cosmology.
spontaneous efficacy arises according to the manner in which things are arranged is consistent with the idea that configurative energy disperses in always-qualitative concentrations throughout its field of deployment. In a world charged with configurative energy, every shift of position is a change in disposition and has an immediate, qualitative effect. Propensity is the causal mechanism whereby concentrations of qi, shored up in fluent configurations, punctuate as qualitative events. A qualitative event, in this respect, can be thought of as a process in which a "quality" (de), engendered within the field of becoming (dao), "takes shape" (xing) in transaction with conditions and culminates (cheng) through the force or propensity (shi) that these conditions implicate. The formula is presented in the Daodejing:

A process of becoming engenders them, a quality rears them, things shape them, and the propensity of circumstances complete them.

Events occur by virtue of the limits implicit in the conditions that sponsor their emergence. Emergence is a process of taking on shape; and shape entails a pervasive quality (de) that rears a trajectory towards completion (cheng). Understood discursively, his consummatory instance is itself among the conditions that define the next phase of formation. The process described here is seamless.

Shape and Spontaneity

Admittedly, the cosmological assumptions of the Warring States period are not easy to reconstruct. Extending this discussion to other texts, however, can grant further insight into the assumptions that underwrite the vocabulary of shape and configurative energy in this tradition. The "Book of Changes" (Yijing) is particularly helpful.

The Yijing is constructed around two hexagrams that symbolize the two salient traits of reality: "creativity" (qian) and "receptivity" (kun). "Creativity" is
identified with the incipience and continued novelty of a process as it “takes shape,” as well as the seamless continuity among the various phases of process itself:

Great indeed is the sublimity of the “creative” (qian) to which all things owe their beginning (shi) and which interconnects tian. Clouds move along and the rain spreads, and various things flow in shape (shunxing). 22

“Receptivity” represents the boundless potential for transformation; it cooperates with “creativity” in bringing about the conditions for momentarily definite, yet ever-transforming shapes. In the Wenyan (“Words of Wen”) commentary on the second hexagram, we read:

“Receptivity” is most pliant, but when considered in agitation (dong) it becomes firm (gang). It is in equilibrium (jing), and owing to unique qualities (de) it becomes definite (fang).23

“Quality,” as an aspect of “receptivity,” delimits events by focusing them within the limitless continuity of “creativity.” Qualities initiate and direct the trajectories of discursive events and remain, through various phases of consummation, their defining characteristics. Hall and Ames describe de as a “focus” that gathers momentum around itself in a “field.”24 Any particular “focus” becomes definite by construing an entire field from the time and location it sustains. Owing to agitation (dong), also an aspect of “receptivity,” the “focusing” that makes things definite is always discursive. The “creative” aspect of reality lends endless potential for novelty and growth. In the “Great Commentary” (Dazhuan) of the Yijing, as in the Daodejing,25 this process of growth, exhibiting both agitation and equilibrium, is described as opening and closing a gate:

(The early sages) called the closing of the gate receptivity, and the opening of the gate creativity.26
The passage continues by defining what it means to “endure through alteration” (tongbian) in those terms:

The alternation between closing and opening they called “alteration” (bian). The coming-and-going without limit (from one alteration, on to the next) they called “enduring through.”

The notion of alteration (bian) in the Dazhuan can be further understood as transformations in shape:

Transforming (hua) while cutting a shape (cai) is called “alteration.”

“Enduring through” (tong) in the same passage, relates the continuity exhibited by shapes-in-process as they move through alteration:

That there is extension (tui) while traveling along (xing) is called ‘enduring through’ (tong).

The notion of “enduring through alteration” (tongbian) in the “Great Commentary” reflects both the boundless novelty of an emergent process as well as the actual “shapes” attained in that process: both the limitless potential for growth and the delimiting constraint of shape are accounted for. The world of the Chinese thinker is one in which “taking shape” and “enduring through alteration” happen endlessly. These processes are simply called “events” (shi).

We learn more about this cosmology by considering the manner in which Zhuangzi makes sense of his wife’s death. At first he says he did not understand his loss. Eventually he peers back into her beginnings (shi) and uses this insight to make
sense of her demise. He finds that there was a time before the configurative energy, shape, and life-span (sheng) of his wife emerged from an amorphous (za) state, prior to her existence. Her existence, he comes to realize, was simply an alteration (bian) from some state that precluded her into that configurative energy (qi), shape (xing) and life-span (sheng) that was her. Her death is understood as a seamless return to that "formless" state from which she had originally emerged. Understanding this, Zhuangzi ceased mourning and began to celebrate her memory. Zhuangzi considers his wife not as a discrete entity now annihilated, but rather as a process that literally "took shape" over the course of a life-span (sheng), and now consummated, makes for a memorable experience.

Throughout the Zhuangzi, life is viewed as an alteration (bian): it is a "taking shape" from some previous phase while death is the perfectly natural transformation into something else. Things do not emerge from sheer nothingness nor disappear into sheer nothingness. There is no substantial generation or corruption. Life and death are simply alterations in functional arrangements of configurative energy: phases in the endless transformation from one shape into another. Given the fact that no shape is immutable in this cosmology, shape must be considered not as the fixed "nature" of a thing but rather as the momentary consummation of an on-going process - one that is, in itself, the dynamic starting-point for the next phase of transformation. Shape then is more like a "disposition" than a fixed "nature." By virtue of causal propensities, the "disposition" of any configuration issues spontaneously into features that both define and reconfigure the trajectory of its discursive formation.

We must give careful consideration to the notion of "spontaneity" that is being developed here, as it will often be appealed to in the coming discussion of the Mencius. "Spontaneity" does not mean "randomness," "haphazardness," or "unpredictability." The "spontaneous" qualities that arise from the propensity of a given disposition do not emerge randomly; they express the history and continuity of the
discursive formation of a particular disposition. Taking a step closer to Mencius, let us consider a botanical example. The young oak tree that stands near the baseball field in Deering Oaks Park in Portland, Maine will not “spontaneously” become a giraffe. There are certain “spontaneous” things, however, that we can expect from this oak tree: the turning of its leaves in autumn, the habit of its branches to reach for sunlight, the thickening of its bark, and so on.

One might take such “spontaneous” behaviors to illustrate this oak tree’s “formal” definition or “final cause.” To do so would be reasonable, but it would be to entirely miss the thrust of Warring States thought. The “spontaneous” behavior of this oak tree, from the perspective of the Warring States thinker, signals the seamless continuity of its emergence: not its “nature” or “final cause.” This oak tree is “disposed” to do such things by virtue of its history. In twenty years time, depending on conditions as yet undetermined, this oak tree might be flourishing magnificently in a form all its own, lying on its side providing shelter to a rat snake, or exhausting its fibers providing warmth to someone’s living room. In transaction with conditions, it may develop the “disposition” to perform these or any number of functions “spontaneously” so long as these functions retain continuity with its previous form and function. For the Chinese thinker, these potential scenarios are not “actualized” on account of something immutably “fixed.” It is instead the continuity of transactional formation within determinate conditions that enable forms to evolve and functions to be discharged “spontaneously” according to situations as they become configured.

This idea will be developed in pages to come. “Spontaneity” will be understood as the unmediated discharge of a function configured in a dynamic disposition. In the next chapter, I will discuss the Mencian notion of “feeling” (xin) along these lines. Dispositions themselves “arise from conditions,” such that they “take shape” discursively in transaction with conditions as they are met. This will also be developed, and in chapters three, four, and five I will treat the Mencian notion of “human disposition” (renxing) along these lines. For Mencius, dispositions can be
cultivated in such a way that they issue spontaneously into appropriate feelings and behaviors. This will be discussed presently.

Disposition and Spontaneity

A.C. Graham was the first to suggest the relevance of a notion of spontaneity to Chinese ethics generally: "Chinese ethical thinking starts from the spontaneity of inclination and the value of wisdom." Graham proceeds to discuss spontaneity in Chinese ethics in terms of a "quasi-syllogism" under which spontaneous approaches might be evaluated in practice. As Graham is well aware however, "spontaneity" precludes such discursive reasoning altogether. He writes:

No thinker in this tradition objectivises the spontaneous in man, as morally neutral inclination to be utilized or checked in the service of ends chosen independently...

He then asks himself frankly:

Is it a limitation of Chinese thought that it overlooked the approach which seems natural to ourselves? It may be profitable to ask the questions from the opposite direction. How did I as a Westerner get trapped into pretending that I can fully objectivise the spontaneous in myself, shrink myself into a point of rational Ego pursuing ends independent of my spontaneous goals, observing unmoved even my own emotions? What have I gained from following a line of thought which first detached supposedly rational ends from the goals of inclination, then failed to discover any rational grounds for them?

If the little oak tree in Portland, Maine could speak, it might pose the same questions to those strangers who ascribe its spontaneous behaviors to its "species," or to its teleological "end."
Graham is keen to point out that spontaneity in ethics is a theme across the spectrum of thinkers and schools in classical China. The notion of spontaneity will be used in chapter three to distinguish the Mencian approach to ethics from the more "technical" Mohist approach. There is some ground to cover, however, before we are clear about how the Mencian notion of "disposition" works to refute the Mohist by appeal to spontaneity.

From the standpoint of a Warring States cosmology, the notion of disposition (xing) is similar to that of "shape" in that each notion addresses the formal aspects of a qi configuration. Each is a concentration of configurative energy. Each is a dynamic state or condition that facilitates a spontaneous transaction with the world. And each, in turn, expresses the "quality" or "character" (de) of the things they individuate. Given the assumptions of a qi cosmology, both are process notions. Zhuangzi's wife took on shape over the course of a life (sheng); and as Graham points out, the notion of life-span (sheng) is closely connected to that of disposition (xing), the two terms being in some cases interchangeable.32

However, a disposition is not identical to a course of life. Graham traces the distinction between xing and sheng and determines that, by the time of the "Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü" (Liishichunqiu), the disposition of a thing is considered "its proper course of development during its process of sheng." Qi is linked to the normative dimension of disposition at this stage in the tradition. In a manner that has continued to inform Chinese understandings of health and illness, the Zuozhuan describes a human disposition as a configuration of the six qi, a functional disposition that one loses (shi) if the harmony it facilitates is upset:

\[
\text{In excess, (sensory qualities) confuse and disorder, and people lose their dispositions (xing).}^{34}
\]

Here, a disposition is presumed to condition the flow of configurative energies that account for vitality. Xing is a configuration that sponsors in some desirable way the
flow of these energies. As the passage suggests, transactional perturbations can alter a disposition. Any alteration of state or condition is understood to be an immediate alteration of energy. The result is qualitative and spontaneous; in this case, it is the difference between a state of health and a state of illness.

Health is a state that involves the spontaneous discharge of bodily functions that preserve the optimal vitality and integrity of an ongoing process. When the body is healthily disposed, a person feels great and can enjoy any number of things. If one is feeling ill, one cannot restore a healthy disposition by simply behaving as if one feels great – as if such behaviors themselves will somehow restore one’s health. Mencius thinks of the moral “disposition” in a similar manner. Just as a healthy bodily disposition affords vital energies, the cultivation of a moral disposition concentrates what Mencius calls “flood-like configurative energies” (haoran zhiqi). He explains how such experience is had:

It is born of accumulated appropriateness (yi). It cannot be had by anyone through sporadic appropriateness.³⁵

The kind of moral disposition that Mencius advocates cultivating can be termed “habitual.” Cultivating habit, in this sense, does not mean establishing a set of routines; instead, habit is the developed proclivity to transact with the world on a spontaneous level. Morality is not a series of randomly discharging acts; it is the integration of productive habits into one’s person. Productive habits are important to cultivate since they condition the manner in which an organism spontaneously acts upon and undergoes experience in the world. Habit conditions impulse, and as a mode of being is indistinguishable from the proclivities that arise from the propensity of a disposition (xing).

As Mencius suggests, genuine moral impulse has little to do with the sporadic performance of good deeds based on their stipulated goodness. Mencius subordinates any morality based on doctrines (yan) that stipulate what is appropriate
and advocates in their place a morality based on the spontaneous prompts of feeling (xin). Feeling for Mencius represents the structural interface of an integrated disposition. The Mencian project is one of preserving the incipient disposition to feel the world in a certain way and gradually shaping a better-integrated disposition by cultivating that initial disposition into productive habits of feeling. Forging such a disposition is likened to forging a path. As Mencius instructs Gaozi:

> If it is used, a trail through the mountains becomes a well-trammeled path in no time. If it is not used, it becomes choked with grass just as quickly. Right now your feelings (xin) are choked with grass.³⁶

To cultivate a moral disposition is to make moral behavior habitual, and hence: spontaneous. One's disposition then becomes inseparable from one's very identity (fen) as a person. According to Mencius, the identity of the exemplary person is composed of virtues cultivated into habitudes rooted in feeling. The more deeply integrated identity is with one's integral feeling, the less likely one is to radically alter one's personality when circumstances shift. Mencius says:

> What exemplary persons make their disposition (xing) does not increase if their activities become important in the world, nor diminish if they are relegated to live in poverty and obscurity. The reason is that their identity becomes established (fending). What exemplary persons make their disposition are the associated humanity (ren), appropriateness (yi), ritual propriety (li), and wisdom (zhi) that are rooted in their feelings (xin).

Mencius continues by describing the physical manifestations of one's disposition, indicating that the creation of identity implicates the whole person:

> This disposition generates a complexion as a matter of course, visible in the face, manifest in posture, and reaching throughout the body.³⁷
There is a symbiotic relationship in the Mencius between one’s bodily shape (xing) and one’s disposition (xin) as a person. Hence, Mencius implicates the former in the cultivation of the latter:

One is disposed towards bodily shape and complexion by tian, but only by becoming a sage is one able to go anywhere with that shape.\(^{38}\)

A related idea is expressed in the Zhongyong:

What tian conditions is a disposition (xing). To further one’s disposition is called the ‘most productive course’ (dao).\(^{39}\)

These two passages are similar both conceptually and linguistically. The choice of “further” for shuai and “going somewhere” for jian is intended to highlight the similarity. Shuai means to “follow” but it also means to “lead.” It means both here, just as jian means both to “follow” as well as to “tread forward.”\(^{40}\) The idea in both passages is that some initial “shape” or “disposition” is given, but one must “move it forward” in some way by doing the most one can with it. This results in the “most productive course” (dao). These notions will be further considered in pages to come.

Mencius employs the terminology of disposition to distinguish the Confucian attitude towards human development from other competing attitudes. Zhuangzi, using a different vocabulary, is also concerned with the implications of shape and spontaneity. Zhuangzi bypasses the notion of disposition (xin), however. Xing appears nowhere in the “Inner Chapters” of Zhuangzi; neither is it in Daodejing. Rather than focus on developing a moral disposition, these texts focus instead on the inherent uniqueness of the shape (xing) of things. From the standpoint of a qi cosmology, both the notion of shape (xing) and that of disposition (xin) can be understood as affective states in a world charged with configurative energy. Reading
the “Parity of Things” (Qiwulun) chapter of the Zhuangzi side-by-side with the Mencius suggests the functional similarity of these terms.

Zhuangzi and Shape

Zhuangzi appears to respond directly to a Mencian line of thinking in the “Parity of Things.” He agrees that lived configurations issue directly into spontaneous feeling (xin). He writes, “with a transformation of shape (xing), feeling transforms naturally.”

Zhuangzi does not, however, as Mencius does, advocate developing one’s shape into a putatively moral disposition (xing) by reinforcing certain habits of feeling; he advocates instead the abandonment of this project. His rationale:

If the idea is to follow one’s integral feeling (xin) as a guide, then who is without such a guide? Why must it be only those who understand the ongoing development of things and choose for themselves what to feel that have such a guide? Even the dull-witted have one.

Zhuangzi considers the conventionally “wise” no better than the purportedly “dull-witted.” These are, Zhuangzi would maintain, relative distinctions. He maintains that given the continuity and parity of all things, no lived configuration in the world grants one exclusive access to moral feeling (xin).

According to Zhuangzi, the error of the Confucian sages is that they seek to “rectify the shape (xing) of everything with their bowing and scraping to ritual forms and music.” And this encapsulates the Mencian project: Mencius wishes to “shape” a qualitatively human disposition (xing) through Confucian practice, Confucian education, and the extension of feeling. For Zhuangzi, however, it is wrong-headed to distinguish such human achievement from human failure when even “human shape” (renzhixing), in the span of “ten-thousand transformations” is not necessarily
preferable to other forms of existence. Zhuangzi asks the empty skull if it would like its "shape" restored to a living, human status, and the answer is unequivocal: "Never!" For Zhuangzi, each and every configuration of existence is utterly unique and self-justified. There is no standard by which the worth of various forms can be measured.

This explains why Zhuangzi's dialogues are populated with grotesque creatures, twisted trees, and disfigured criminals. Zhuangzi is keen to assert that these seemingly inferior or undesirable states of existence are all of commensurate importance and capable of contributing unique worth to the totality. Each shape is possessed of an inherent, distinct "quality" (de) irrespective of any perceived worthlessness. The images Zhuangzi uses to render his point are perfectly suited to frustrate the Mencian project. Mencius regularly employs woodworking metaphors in speaking of moral development, and refuses to surrender the "plumb-line" (shengmo). Zhuangzi in turn exalts a tree so gnarled that it "cannot center a plumb-line (shengmo)." The twisted tree is celebrated as useless to the carpenter, useless, that is, to anyone for whom trees represent something to develop.

In rejecting the idea of developing one's unique shape (xing) into a thus termed "moral" disposition (xing), Zhuangzi in effect downplays the importance of shape and elevates the notion of "quality" or "character" (de) in its place. This is most clearly expressed in the "Character Satisfies the Tally" (Dechongfu) chapter. The image that provides the title for this chapter appears in the Daodejing as well, where it is related to the impartiality of dao:

The sage holds the left half of the tally yet does not exact her due from others. A person of character (de) is in charge of the tally. A person without character is looking to collect on it. The course of tian is impartial; it invariably benefits all people.
Contributing character is compared to "holding a tally" but not collecting on it. In other words, where there is the contribution of character there is no debt or restitution. This does not mean, however, that there is nothing of value exchanged. Character "satisfies the tally" by contributing its worth irrespective of the measure implied in any external obligation to do so. There is no derivative, objectified standard that governs the exchange of values when character "satisfies the tally".

The implications are clear in the "Character Satisfies the Tally" chapter, wherein a parade of mutilated figures, each of whom would not be expected to have much worth by community standards, win people over by the force of their character and thereby make their unique contributions. Despite the bodily shape he is stuck with, one "lame hunchback without lips" manages to alter Duke Ling's standards of judgment by the force of his unique character. Zhuangzi comments:

Thus, to the extent that one's character (de) stands out, one's shape (xing) is disregarded. When people notice what is usually forgotten, and forget what is usually noticed, then this is genuine forgetting.

What is "forgotten" here is shape itself: that which invites the Confucians to form their judgments about a properly "human" deportment. Zhuangzi identifies such standards with provincial distinctions, all of which form a seamless continuity (yi) one to the next.

The projects of Zhuangzi and Mencius differ in priority, but each share cosmological assumptions rooted in notions of "shape" and "configurative energy." Zhuangzi encourages one to think beyond the configurative limits of shape (xing) and ride through existence "with only the six qi as one's chariot." Mencius advocates shaping a disposition (xing) that configures the emergence of a morally nourishing "flood-like qi." There are cosmological assumptions that unite these thinkers within the context of Warring States thought. Establishing such a context by means of overview is an important preliminary step in understanding the Mencius.
Characteristics of Chinese Cosmology

In his 1935 article, "Exposition on the Unique Kind of Basic Spirit in Chinese Culture," Tang Junyi provides an overview of Chinese thinking that both summarizes and corroborates the assumptions here proposed. Tang Junyi identifies seven characteristic views that he feels underlie all Chinese thinking. Each of these views has some bearing on the matters we have considered in this chapter, and they assist in establishing parameters for our interpretation of the Mencius. The seven views are: that there are no substratum (wudingti), everything is two-way (wuwangbufu), having/not having and agitation/equilibrium are united (heyouwudongjing), one/many is inseparable (yiduobufen), determinism does not apply (feidingming), process is incessant (shengshengbuyi), and dispositions issue directly from the course of tian (xingjitiandao).53

If we take seriously the view that there is no substratum (wudingti), a host of substantive concepts are immediately disqualified from interpretive service. We are not entering a world of discrete things with simple location in space and time. The world of configurative energy is not populated with "things" but rather with events: states of becoming that resolve not in static substances, but in transformational processes. Bodies and forms are not fixed entities; they are dynamic states that configure an ever-transforming energy. Bodies convey the history of a functional transaction with the world, and this transaction is in turn formative. Hence, as Tang Junyi reconfirms, in the Chinese view, "function manifests form and form issues into function."54

This leads to the view that everything is two-way (wuwangbufu), which entails both the reciprocal nature of processional development and the non-linearity of the Chinese notion of causality. In the absence of discrete substances, form and quality are truly inseparable. Forms take shape within matrices that leave room for
the unique, qualitative expression of those forms to present themselves. As qualities emerge in the transaction between an organism and its environment, those qualities are not simply located but rather consequent of the reciprocal shaping of events. The mutual shaping of events precludes the notion of accidental qualities, simply located. Tang Junyi cites the Daodejing, which in stating that, "reversal is the movement of the dao,"? suggests that qualities phase into their contrary states on a continuum "shouldered" by the configuration of events.? To say that everything entails its opposite is not merely eulogistic; it is indicative of the fact that events emerge together and shape one another's qualitative dimensions.

This, in turn, leads to the view that having and not having are united (heyouwu). The cooperation of having (you) and not having (wu) is an aspect of form/function dynamics. Function (yong) is an operational limit enabled by what formation affords; yet this is also a consequence of what it lacks. In the Daodejing, it is what is not inside the jar (wu) that makes the form it has (you) potent and functional (yong).? Zhuangzi echoes this sensibility in suggesting that all positions entail function only in relation to space unoccupied:

One needs only space enough to plant one's feet, but if one were to dig away all the space that those feet did not occupy, to the depths of the Yellow Springs, would the space still have function (yong) for the person??

Function requires space and time with which to operate. Space and time, however, only describe a potential afforded when forms function in relation to one another. Ever-emergent forms interlace in delimiting their regions of functional operation and leave no gaps. Apart from form and function there is no spatial relation, and apart from formation and functioning, no temporal relation. The Newtonian model, wherein space and time are empty and bodies are full, is inverted in the Chinese world: space and time are full, and bodies continually empty into their successors.
This coalesces with the view that agitation and equilibrium are united (hedongjing). The dynamics of form and function involve adjustment to the emergent conditions under which shape is taken. Shape is always reshaping, and form is always reforming. The temporal sensitivity of the "Book of Changes" and its prognosticative function validates that, in the Chinese world, experience is regularly viewed as unbalanced and in need of adjustment. The pairing of creativity (qian) and receptivity (kun) underscores the notion that adjusted emergence entails both novelty and continuity. The novel perturbations that challenge equilibrium call for the seamless, novel reconstitution of form. The botanical imagery so ubiquitous in the Mencius reflects Mencius' own sensitivity to the lack of absolute discreteness between older and newer forms in the emergence of adjusted development. Growth is the balance of form and function, continually undergoing adjustment. The history of the equilibrium (jing) maintained over the course of growth is the same as the agitation (dong) that occasions those adjustments.

This brings us to the view that one/many are inseparable (yiduobufen). In presenting this idea, Tang Junyi cites two passages in the Daodejing, the first stating, "one brings about two, two brings about three, and three brings about ten-thousand things," and the second, "the ten-thousand things attain one and thereby come about."59 In articulating the view that there is no substratum, Tang Junyi appeals to the process corrective to substance ontology offered by Alfred North Whitehead.60 In the present context, it is also Whitehead who serves us well. Whitehead expresses the unity of the one and the many in the following formula: "the many become one and are increased by one."61 This account of creative advance, which for Whitehead is the "category of the ultimate," is consonant with the discursive process of "taking shape" in the Chinese world. Shape is a definite "one." All shapes, however, are temporary. Attaining "one" is a process of synthesis and integration: the "one" emerges from the coffers of the "many" and then returns to increase its bounty. Becoming "one" is an achievement of synthesis that entails some level of integration.
within the on-going process of the ten thousand things. Mencius displays sensitivity
to the dynamics of creative advance in the process of developing one's person (shen):
"The ten-thousand things are here in us," he says, "there is no greater joy than
inspecting one's person (shen) and finding it well-integrated (cheng)." The notion of
integration will be further explored in chapters to come.

The stress on creative advance leads to the view that determinism does not
apply (feidingming). The classical formulation of determinism entails necessity and
requires a linear, causal relationship; and such notions do not factor importantly in
the mainstream Chinese tradition. Determinism also entails that emergent events
are dictated by conditions. The idea that events are "shaped" by environing
conditions is an important component of Warring States cosmology. However, an
analysis of the formal constraints upon emergence will never deliver a complete
account of any actual occasion. Another description must take into account the self­
creativity that marks that particular occasion as a novel unity of antecedent factors in
the present moment. In a qi cosmology, the incessant "blow" of qi lends propensity
(shi) to configurations that ripen so-of-themselves (ziran). This moment of self­
expression implicates itself in all subsequent moments; hence, creativity in a Chinese
world is co-creativity. The two-way relationships that characterize this world ensure
that its future is an open prospect. The past does not become a future without the
present, and the present is an instance of sheer self-expression. This is what gives the
present an aura of unprecedence.

What renders all of these notions coherent is the view that process is
incessant (shengshengbuyi). Tang Junyi identifies this view as one that "Chinese
thinkers have unceasingly maintained." Certainly, the case for imputing a process
orientation to the Mencius is strengthened by the vast preponderance of process
commitments evident elsewhere in the tradition. The Zhuangzi and the "Book of
Changes" provide two dramatic examples of process thinking in Mencius' immediate
milieu. The process orientation in classical China is so pronounced, in fact, that the
burden of proof most fairly lies with those who would introduce non-processional notions as interpretive categories. By my lights, in a world animated by configurative energies, in which "things" are always dynamic and "forms" are ever in formation, the reduction of reality to "fixed" essences or ends is not a very feasible option. What is determinate in a process world must be accounted for in some other manner.

The notion of "disposition" (xing) accounts for the determinate structure of experience in a manner that does no violence to a process world-view. The seventh view that Tang Junyi considers, that dispositions issue directly from the course of tian (xingjitiandao), provides an account of structured emergence commensurate with a process cosmology. By saying that dispositions issue directly from tian, attention is called to the embeddedness of form in a Chinese world. When something "takes shape," it textures the on-going totality by sculpting out of its background conditions a unique, discursive inscape of concentrated energy (qi). This emergent form contributes something irreplaceable to the on-going totality, while remaining indelibly woven into its environment. There is no slippage between forms, functions, and evolving conditions. "Tian and dispositions match up," Tang Junyi submits.

The notion of "disposition" (xing) developed in these pages elides any metaphysical distinction between being and modality. Things are always already disposed; to be is to be disposed. Furthermore, a disposition is neither genetic nor teleological. Dispositions are proclivities made determinate by the inherited structures that brace their emergence, yet they are left open by virtue of the dynamics of self-expression, changes in conditions, and creative advance. Disposition, as Graham suggests, is a "spontaneous development in a certain direction rather than its origin or goal." Recalling the Zuozhuan example, a "proper" disposition is one that maximizes the integrated functioning of the on-going process it represents: in this instance, the human body. The human body grows; its forms and functions develop while its structure adjusts to countless factors in its environment. Its development is
measured by the degree of integration it manages to pattern over the course of its growth. To realize the optimal degree of integration is to enjoy a state of vitality and energy (qi). To lose that optimal disposition is to feel a life deteriorate. As Mencius extends these notions beyond the biological order, the growth model takes on a whole new dimension.


In Guanzi 4.12 we read, "Where there is qi there is life, where there is no qi, there is death. What lives does so by virtue of its qi." See: Rickett (1985) p. 216.

As when Mencius speaks of the effects of "calm morning qi" and "evening qi" on one's moral temperament. See: Mencius 6A: 8.

Daodejing 42.


Farquhar (1994) pg. 34


Joseph Needham was influential in the introduction of this terminology. See: Needham (1956) pp. 18-26.


Mencius 2A: 1

Mencius 7A: 36 suggests that even vernacular uses of this kind of terminology reflects the assumptions of a qi cosmology. Mencius, upon noting the haughty demeanor of an unfit royal son, notes succinctly: "He puts on airs (qi) because of his position" (juyiqi). Position, broadly construed, conditions the expression of qi. The young man's circumstances give him a particular disposition and hence, haughty affectations (qi).

Daodejing 51.


Daodejing 10.


This "formless" state must be understood as "formless" relative to the "shape" that is defined in terms of the "quality" (de) of Zhuangzi's wife. The only thing that does not have "form" in a Daoist cosmology is dao.


Ibid. pg. 387.

Graham (1990) p. 9, passim.

Ibid. p. 10. Italics added.


Mencius 2A: 2.

Mencius 7B: 21.

Mencius 7A: 21.

Mencius 7A:38.

Zhongyong 1.

The manner in which terms carry these dual connotations at once is a consequence of what Roger T. Ames has identified as the "priority of situation over agency" in classical Chinese thought. See: Lau and Ames (1998), 20-22. This characteristic carries over into modern Chinese. For instance, the phrase shangke means both "to attend class" and "to conduct class." Shangke is vague as to agency; it instead refers to a situation: holding class. There are numerous examples of the primacy of situation over agency in classical Chinese texts.


I owe the following insight to Hall and Ames. See: Hall and Ames (1994) pp. 63-64. On the notion of the "tally" as a sign of "potency" (de), see also: Lewis (1999) pg. 30.

Daodejing 79. My rendering accords with LaFargue's and Waley's translations, both of which render shan an active verb in this passage. See: LaFargue (1992) pg. 20 and Waley (1958) pg. 239.

Those with missing body parts are most likely criminals having suffered amputory punishment.
One of the earliest, explicit discussions of linear causality in China is that of Wang Chong (c. 27-100 AD), who provides an emphatic refutation of this notion. (See: Chan (1963) pp. 292-304). Evidence of such thinking does, however, appear much earlier in Mohist circles. A consideration of linear causality is found discussed in the Canons, where the distinction between a necessary and sufficient "cause" (gu) is clearly spelled out while more mainstream yin/yang or wuxing terminology is avoided. (See: Mojing A: 1). Also, the uniquely Mohist tendency to perceive the Confucian notion of ming as inexorably fixed indicates the presence of a deterministic form of causal reasoning. (See: Mozi, 35) Such notions are unorthodox, and perhaps explain why Mohism was in time marginalized as a counter-discourse. Interest in Mohist ideas proved short-lived in China, and its core texts failed to inspire a commentarial tradition.

The term “inscape” is borrowed third hand from Gerard Manley Hopkins, via the environmental cosmology of Joseph Grange. Grange employs the term to capture the manner in which value emerges in the coming-to-be of an “environmental event or process... absolutely unique in its concreteness.” See: Grange (1997) pp. 16-17.
CHAPTER TWO
THE ROLE OF FEELING

Feeling, Doctrine, and Dao

To understand the role of feeling (xin) in the Mencius we need to locate the term in various clusters. The term cluster: xin, yan, and dao, establishes the context in which xin is a polemic reaction to Mencius' non-Confucian interlocutors. In Confucian discourse, dao most often signifies the optimal course of affairs proceeding in a sociopolitical context. Precisely what this course entails becomes a matter for debate in Mencius' time. Mencius insists that the optimal course is not as difficult to advance as people think: "dao is near at hand, yet it is sought after as if it were far." The most productive course, Mencius says, "is like a great road, it is not difficult to realize; the problem with people is that they do not seek it out."

The principal obstacle to dao, according to Mencius, is the proliferation of philosophies that advocate alternative courses (dao). In this context, the term dao is understood as "teachings" as it refers to the "courses" advocated by these alternative schools. When Mencius speaks of the dao of the Mohists, for instance, he is referring to the "most productive course" according to the Mohist school of thought. The dao of a person or school is their proposed "way" of forging ahead in the world, a path of development reflected in whatever doctrines (yan) they formulate in its defense. In Mencius' day, dao and yan signify positions in a newly developed arena of disputation (bian).

While Mencius does engage in disputation, he does not do so with much enthusiasm. He is asked by Gongdu whether it is true, as rumor had it, that he
actually enjoys disputation: "I am not fond of it," Mencius replies, "but rather compelled to do it." By Mencius' own account, he enters into argument with reluctance, only to stave off the doctrinal threats mounted against Confucianism by the Yangist and Mohist schools. Not interested in argument for argument's sake, Mencius is critical of those who engage his rivals solely for the purpose of defeating them:

These days, those who argue with the Yangists and Mohists act like they're chasing a stray pig. It is not enough for them to return the pig to the sty; they have to go on to tie its feet up.

Mencius is opposed to the overall argumentative tone of his day. He laments the disastrous impact of staking out and defending inflexible doctrines and advocates a more flexible approach:

Yang holds to his egoism. If by plucking one hair from his body he could benefit the world he would not do it. Mozi holds to his concern for each. If by shaving his body from head to toe he could benefit the world he would do it. Zimo holds a balance. By doing so he is closer to the mark. Yet to hold that balance without weighing circumstances is no different than holding to one or the other extreme. The reason I am disgusted by holding to any single position is because it cripples the most productive course. One position is taken up and a hundred others go by the wayside.

Mencius, like Confucius before him, prefers not to cling dogmatically to a single position, and responds negatively to inflexibility. Mencius locates himself above the purveyors of doctrine. He stands apart and claims to command an understanding of all the various doctrines of his day and to have the unique ability to adjudicate between them. When it comes to his own doctrine, he appeals to feeling (xin). When describing the differences between Gaozi's orientation and his own, Mencius says:
Gaozi claims that what is unobtainable in doctrine (yan) cannot be expected from feeling (xin), and what is unobtainable though feeling can not be expected from configurative energy (qi). The idea that what is unobtainable through feeling can not be expected from configurative energy is acceptable. The idea that what is unobtainable through doctrine cannot be expected from feeling is unacceptable.13

Gaozi does not believe that feeling alone can provide the type of moral guidance that a rule-based doctrine provides. Mencius disagrees. Feeling, says Mencius, guides us more surely than doctrine in charting the most productive course. This is perhaps why Mencius felt dao was always so close at hand.

Mencius agrees with Gaozi, however, that configurative energy does not provide moral guidance. Qi is morally indeterminate if not referenced to some configuration.14 In stating that feeling provides normative insight where qi does not, Mencius is saying that feeling represents a certain quality of engagement (de) in the world. In other words, xin is the outcome of a disposition (xing). Doctrine, however, is at a remove even from feeling (xin). As a result, rule-based doctrine cannot be relied upon to satisfy the vicissitudes of a concrete situation. Mencius refers to one’s sudden “feeling of distress” (cayinzhixin) upon seeing a child about to fall into a well; the point there is that no mediate deliberation is involved in moral impulse.15 There are no calculations of benefit, no thoughts of personal advantage, and no projection of consequences.16 The feeling is spontaneous. Doctrine, according to Mencius, will only obscure the self-evident prompting of feeling in such a concrete context. So while Mencius on occasion calls his position a doctrine (yan), he simultaneously distances himself from the notion. Feeling for Mencius is not simply a doctrine; it represents something else.
Feeling as Transactional

Occurring only six times in the Analects, the term xin, commonly translated "heart/mind," is one that the Mencius, with one hundred and nineteen occurrences, develops into a major Confucian theme. The character itself descends from a drawing of the anatomical heart. As early as the Shijing ("Book of Poetry") however, the term is used in connection with a range of emotions and sentiments, usage that blurs any sharp distinction between the location, structure, and function of feeling. Treating the term simply as "feeling" rather than "heart/mind" avoids anatomical reification in translation, which often results in awkward and misleading connotations. For instance, in appealing to one's xinzhixin in the "Child at the Well" passage, Mencius is not making reference to a specific, anatomical organ that relays distress, but is rather reporting that such a situation results in a "feeling" of distress. It proves adequate to translate xin as "feeling" in most contexts. Dobson, Legge, and Chan each opt for this translation in crucial instances. We stay primarily with this translation.

As argued in chapter one, there is no sharp distinction between form and function in a qi cosmology; this is reason enough to be cautious about reifying xin. Mencius appears not to reify the notion; instead, he chooses to describe what xin is by describing what it does. On one occasion, he speaks of its "function" (guan). The function of xin, Mencius explains, is "thought" (si). It is the function of thought that distinguishes xin from the eyes and ears. Mencius explains:

The function of the eyes and ears does not involve thought; hence things mislead them. As things set into relation with one another, one lures the other away, that is all. The function of xin, however, is thought. In thought one achieves some engagement (de) with things. In the absence of thought one does not achieve engagement with things. These functions are what tian bequeaths to us.
The identification of *xin* with "thought" underscores the inseparability of feeling and thinking in this tradition. And "thought" is merely a generic label that covers various modes of thoughtful engagement: pondering, directing concern, imagining, reflecting, considering, and so forth. All of these functions are *si* and are not clearly distinguished in classical texts.

The *Shouwen* lexicon defines *si* as "a deep river gorge" (*xun*) and the Duan Yucai commentary offers the following explanation: "Deep passageways are generally called deep river gorges. That it is used to define *si* here is because thereby one can pass through things deeply." In the *Mencius*, *xin* would appear to entail some "depth" of engagement (*de*), such that the function of feeling denotes a greater degree of transaction with the world than do more passive functions like looking or hearing.

The idea is that, without "thoughtful" engagement, "looking" is not "seeing," and "hearing" is not "listening." The "Great Learning" (*Daxue*) identifies the latter, more active forms of engagement with feeling (*xin*). The opening passage of the text reads, "to cultivate the person, one first effects proper order at the level of feeling." The text then clarifies:

What is meant by "cultivating the person" lies in effecting proper order at the level of feeling. If the lived body is in anger or rage, then the proper order is not obtained. The same applies if the person is in fear or dread, affection or pleasure, melancholy or misery.

When feeling is not present, one looks but does not see, hears but does not listen, and eats but does not taste. What is entailed in cultivating the person lies in effecting proper order at the level of feeling.25

*xin* points toward a dynamic interface inseparable from the activity of the person. It is the terminal result of transactional engagement.

The idea that *si* is transactional rather than passive is also suggested in the *Analects*, where the notion of thought (*si*) is understood alongside learning (*xue*).
“Learning without thought leads to perplexity,” Confucius teaches, while “thought
without learning leads to peril.” Without an anchor in learning, one’s thoughts
might become irrelevant. Without thought, however, learning is merely the passive
exposure to curricula and does nothing but confuse. Confucius elsewhere warns
against thinking too much, to the detriment of learning, again rendering thought and
learning interdependent. Confucius’ point is that when genuine education takes
place, the activity of thought transacts with curricula; it is more than mere exposure.

In the Mencius, there is an analogous relationship between the function of
feeling and the things (wu) implicated in experience. In the absence of thought (si),
things tend to elude and mislead. In other words, just as passivity in education will
only leave one perplexed, becoming emotionally disengaged from one’s surround­nings
will only alienate and misdirect action. The function of “thought” denotes
involvement; and such a transaction points to xin. To focus overmuch on the
anatomy of xin clouds the attention that Mencius pays to its function in one of his
most important treatments of the term.

The world is transactionally engaged on many levels, one of the most
important of which is the physical. In presenting feeling as a source of moral
wisdom, Mencius intends to appeal to the empirical evidence of one’s physical
reactions, and these consummate in the body. The feelings of alarm and concern that
emerge upon suddenly spotting the child dangerously close to the well are visceral:
increased heart rate, heightened tension, and shortness of breath. The physical
dimension of feeling is illustrated throughout the Mencius. For the body to fall or
run, Mencius tells us, involves a reconfiguration of energy (qi) that registers directly
as feeling. Tears and perspiration are understood to flow directly from one’s
feelings through the face and eyes. There is no sharp distinction between feeling
and its physical manifestations.

Mencius notes that the Confucian virtues, which are rooted in one’s feelings,
find direct expression through the shape and complexion of the body itself. This
notion was touched upon in chapter one, where the following passage was considered:

What the exemplary person adopts as a disposition (xing) is associated with humanity, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. These are rooted in feeling (xin). The complexion that is borne of this is radiance in the face; it manifests itself in posture and extends to the four limbs. The four limbs do not speak words (yan), yet they are expressive.

The comportment of body is considered inseparable from character; for in Mencian circles, "whatever is present on the inside takes shape (xing) on the outside." The body is understood to express not only one's feeling but also one's character; particularly expressive in this regard, we learn, is the pupil of the eye.

In a qi cosmology, the body is a focus of energies that manifest qualities. According to Mencius, qi "fills the body (ti)." The Guanzi contains a nearly identical statement, only in the Guanzi "body" (ti) is replaced by "person" (shen), underscoring the overlap between body and personal character in a qi cosmology.

For Mencius, the notions of disposition and the person are closely related. He says that Yao and Shun adopted a disposition (xing) and Tang and King Wu later personified it. The difference between the two is not great. If dispositions give shape and content to one's feeling, the adoption of a disposition is inseparably linked to the character of one's person.

Since the human body is understood to be a configuration of qi, it is appropriate to revisit that vocabulary in order to understand further the relationship between body and feeling. Not long after Mencius, the notion of qi becomes implicated in "arousal/response" (ganying) thinking, a development that provides some insight into the notions of both causality and emotion in classical China. In a study of the Han text, Huainanzi, Charles LeBlanc describes ganying as "resonance," a notion according to which phenomena are considered to spontaneously "stimulate" and "respond" to one another in the context of an organic field of relations. As John
Major points out, such "resonance" is conveyed through qi. Resonance is a name for what occurs when two disparate things are correlative under a third category naming a quality that unifies the two. After enumerating various mutual responses that occur between natural and social phenomena, the Huainanzi reports:

These are indeed the evidences of the mutual influence of the marvelous qi. Hence, mountain clouds are prairie grass. River clouds are fish scales. Drought land clouds are blazing flames. Torrent clouds are billowy waters. Each thing is affected inasmuch as it resembles (partakes of) the shape and sort (of other things).

Certain phenomena, while disparate, resemble one another once cast in juxtaposition. Similarity is evoked seemingly out of nowhere, suggesting a mysterious and inexhaustible source out of which affective qualities emerge to unify disparate elements of experience. The resonance between "river clouds" and "fish scales" inaugurates a feeling not felt prior to the comparison being made. An emotional tone arises from the relation itself, and pervades that relation as a unifying quality. Cataloging the qualities that emerge through such relations and issue into an "arousal of mood" (xìng) becomes an important part of literary theory in the Chinese tradition.

John Henderson suggests that gányíng "appears to have been a later scholastic rationalization of resonant effects," tacitly presupposed much earlier in Chinese thinking. If Henderson is accurate in this assessment, gányíng might be considered a rationalization of the notion of causality spoken of as "propensity" in chapter one. In a world animated by qi, dispositions issue spontaneously into felt qualities by virtue of the propensity they have to configure its flow. This notion of "resonant effects" is broad enough to include the re-contextualization of affective words and images. Just as it is when it becomes implicated in gányíng thinking, qi in earlier periods involves the instant manifestation of a felt quality: something that arises directly from the deployment, configuration, or placement of phenomena in a dynamic field of relations.
There is room for misunderstanding, however, if an occurrence of ganying is equated with an occurrence of “stimulus” and “response.” Since ganying and its related, correlative mode of thinking is not grounded in a notion of causal relations in absolute space and time, it is inappropriate to think of ganying in terms of a discrete, passive object being aroused by an external object in a sequence that begins in stimulus and terminates in response. What LeBlanc, and Major, who follows Joseph Needham, refer to as the Chinese thinker’s “organic” view of nature precludes the possibility of positing stimulus and response as external relations between discrete entities in a mechanistic causal scenario. Stimulus and response are not metaphysically separable.

John Dewey offers a corrective to stimulus/response thinking in his article, “The Reflex-Arc Concept in Psychology,” a critique that illuminates what is at stake in raising this point. Dewey considers how the concept of the reflex arc imposes an analysis in which stimulus and response are separate and thereby obscures what is otherwise a coordination of ongoing activities. “The result,” says Dewey:

...is that the reflex arc idea leaves us with a disjointed psychology... (it fails) to see that the arc of which it talks is a virtual circuit, a continual reconstitution, it breaks continuity and leaves us with nothing but a series of jerks, the origin of each jerk to be found outside the process of experience itself, in either an external pressure of “environment,” or else in an unaccountable spontaneous variation from within the “soul” or the “organism.”

For Dewey, the relationship between organism and environment is such that the functions perceivable in the former amount to the ways in which the latter enter into its respective activities. “Stimulus” and “response” for Dewey are merely aspects of what is actually a transaction between an organism and its environment. To isolate and disjoin the two distorts the fact that both “in reality (are) always inside a coordination and have their significance purely from the part played in maintaining or reconstituting the coordination.”
The effects that arise from ganying are synchronic “resonances” rather than a sequence of disjointed “jerks.” According to ganying thinking, when things of a sort (lei) move or stir (dong) one another, efficacy between them is considered mutual (xiang). Huainanzi observes that “when meteors fall, the seas immediately swell.” The type of causal commonsense that sequences such occurrences into prior cause (meteor fall) and subsequent effect (sea swell) is not that of the Huainanzi. Things and events do not cause one another; they correlate with one another. In this manner, things and events are conceived as embedded in dynamic, relational matrices of mutual shaping and mutual coordination taking place on multiple levels simultaneously. In the configurations that result, the redeployment of any element is enough to “trigger” (ji) systemic alteration instantly. There is no absolute separation of cause and effect; instead, various phenomena index a whole situation as it manifests its unmediated causal propensity.

If one wishes to conceive of “feeling” in the Mencius along lines that lead eventually to ganying thinking in the Han, then Dewey’s transactional model is one to consider. Feeling points to a degree of involvement. The quality of experience, for Dewey, is the terminal result of transactional involvement. As such, it can be understood as the qualitative result of engagement (de) in the world. The transactional model furnishes an understanding of xin adequate to Mencius’ description. Xin is spontaneous feeling, inseparable from the disposition of the body itself. For Mencius, one might say, “experience is emotional,” as Dewey writes, “but there are no separate things called emotions in it.”

Aspiration and Courage

It is difficult to come away from the Mencius with a complete and unambiguous account of its terminology. Mencius presents us with a psychology of aspiration (zhi), but the notion is only discussed sparingly and left opaque. When
Mencius discusses aspiration, however, it is often through a qi vocabulary. For instance, Mencius says:

Flowing water is such that it does not proceed unless it has filled all of the hollows. As for the exemplarary person's aspiration (zhi) to proceed along the most productive course (dao), these does not break forward without a pattern being brought to consummation.50

One cognate of zhang or "pattern" is zhang, which means "dam" or "dyke."50 Preserving the fluid metaphor in this passage, one might think of "bringing a pattern to consummation" (chengzhang) as analogous to what occurs when water breaks over a dam. Something fills up and spills forward; this is aspiration (zhi). In this instance, thinking of configurative energy (qi) as what "fills the hollows" accords with a discussion we find in the Zuozhuan, in which configurative energy is said to be what "fills out" (shi) one's aspiration.51 One might visualize the relationship between configurative energy and aspiration in the Mencius by picturing a fluid meniscus breaking forward over a containing shape, in this case the body itself. Hence:

As for aspiration, it is the leader of configurative energy (qi). Qi is what fills the body (ti).52 Aspiration arises where qi stops.53 Thus it is said: 'Manage your aspiration and do not abuse your qi.'54

Aspiration (zhi) is a cognate of zhi "to go forward" written with the heart radical.55 For Mencius, it is like a breaking meniscus of the qi that brims in the physical frame of the living body. Qi is something that shores up and spills over into intention, aim, ambition, and efficacy.56

That aspiration entails directing and discharging a mounting qi is suggested by the metaphor of "leading armies" that often attends the term.57 One manages and directs the configurative energy that issues from the body just as a field commander manages and directs his forces in battle. Keeping in mind the contemporaneous
militarist tradition, this has to do with managing the propensity (shì) of a disposition situated within a dynamic field of engagement. Aspiration is not an agency wholly separable from the world; it is rather the resultant propensity of one's disposition insofar as that disposition is located within the transactional circuit of engagement itself. Aspiration indicates the propensity to alter conditions through aiming the focus of configurative energies shored up in the body.

Archery is another metaphor associated with aspiration in the early literature. In the Confucian tradition, images of archery are suggestive of the kind of "propensity" here associated with a qi cosmology. Archery involves the unity of placement and execution. To hit the mark requires skill in positioning and power in discharge. Mencius likens skill in archery to wisdom (zhì), and strength in archery to sagehood (shèng). In hitting the mark, wisdom (zhì) involves skill at the commencement of an undertaking, and sagehood, the power that carries it through.

While Mencius does not utilize the archery metaphor explicitly in his discussion of aspiration, the elements of "position" and "discharge" are reflected in his treatment. Asked by Prince Dian what the affairs of the scholar-official (shì) are, Mencius answers simply, "aspiration." For the scholar-official, Mencius continues, this entails being "positioned" (jì) in associated humanity (rén) and "proceeding out" (yóu) in appropriateness (yì). The role of aspiration in charting the human "way" (dào) from its foundation in associated humanity will be explored in chapter five.

At this juncture, we remain focused on the manner in which the notions of "position" and "discharge" in the archery metaphor relate to associated humanity and appropriateness; and also, to courage. One is "positioned" in associated humanity insofar as it is the foundation upon which interpersonal experiences take shape. If one fails to effectively communicate one's concern for others (ài), one must turn to examine one's own associated humanity. When one is treated inconsiderately by others, it is also to one's associated humanity that one must turn. It is also the foundation to which one returns when one feels ashamed. It is in this context
that associated humanity is likened by Mencius to archery: “archers make sure their
stance is correct before letting the arrow fly; if they fail to hit the target, they do not
blame the winner, but rather turn to seek the reason in themselves.”

To think of aspiration in terms of the archery metaphor suggests that the
measure by which aspirations are “discharged” appropriately (yì) is a measure that
resides within associated life. If archers are firm in their stance, their arrows will hit
the mark. Likewise, having a solid grounding in associated humanity sanctions the
appropriateness of actions effected by the force of one’s aspiration in a social
context. Engendering hostility, shame, or inconsideration in the world indicates a
weakness in associated humanity – either in oneself or in another. In moments that
call for judgement as to which, one is first to consider the quality and sincerity of
one’s own relationships. Mencius says:

Exemplary persons differ from others in that they preserve their feelings
(cunxin). Exemplary persons preserve their feelings through associated
humanity (ren) and ritual propriety (li). The person of associated humanity
(ren) has concern (qì) for others. The person who has ritual propriety (li) has
respect for others. The person who has concern for others is consistently
shown concern; and the person who respects others is consistently shown
respect. In the event that someone treats her in an unacceptable manner, the
exemplary person will turn to herself and say: ‘I must be lacking in
associated humanity (ren) and be without ritual propriety (li); otherwise,
how could such things happen to me?’ If, upon self-reflection, she finds
herself established in human association (ren) and not lacking in ritual propriety (li),
and yet the unacceptable behavior continues, she will turn to
herself and say, ‘I must have failed to give this person my best (zhong).’ If,
upon self-reflection, she finds that she has given this person her best, and yet
the unacceptable behavior continues, she will conclude, ‘This is an
unrestrained person. As such, how can he be distinguished from an animal?
Why should I contend with an animal?’

For Mencius, the warrant to pass moral judgement on others is granted by preserving
moral feeling (xin); and moral feeling is preserved according to how integrally one is
disposed in relationships of concern and deference in a social framework. In appealing to feeling in moral judgement, Mencius is not appealing to some incorrigible, “inner” standard. He is instead appealing to a standard measured by the degree to which associated living enables one to adopt the feelings and concerns of others (shu). The moral sense is ultimately a social sense.

While associated humanity is something one “returns” to, appropriateness (yi), conversely, is spoken of as a road (lu) that one “proceeds out” (you) upon. The fortitude involved in persevering on this road accounts perhaps for the close association between appropriateness and the notion of courage (yong). Recall that Mencius says that the dispositions (xing) of those who have established identities do not shift as fortune changes. The issue of sustaining one’s ethical character despite a shift in fortune elsewhere occasions the discussion of “unagitated feeling” (budong-xin) and courage. Mencius is asked whether a powerful political appointment would agitate his feelings. He responds by saying that his feelings have not been agitated since the age of forty. A discussion of three types of courage ensues; each one is presented as a way (dao) of developing unagitated feeling.

The first form of courage is that of Beigong Yu. His courage entails never yielding to others, never accepting insults, and never allowing himself to be outstared. The second form of courage is that of Mengshi She. His entails going ahead without fear, not being deterred by circumstances, and accepting defeat as a victory. Mencius is uncertain which is the superior form of courage, but surmises that Mengshi She maintains a sense of what is important (yue). Mengshi She, Mencius says, retains command of his configurative energy (qi). His sense for what is important, however, is deemed inferior to that of Zengzi, who represents the third and greatest form of courage.

Zengzi heard of the greatest form of courage (dayong) from Confucius himself. This form of courage entails self-reflection (zifan). If upon self-reflection one finds oneself well integrated and attuned, then one can go forward against a multitude; however, if upon self-reflection one finds oneself maladjusted and out-of-
touch, then even a single, frail adversary will inspire fear. The form of courage attributed to Confucius maintains the unity of self and circumstance by reflecting on engagement in a transactional context. The greatest courage directs action in a manner appropriate (yi) given the integration of self and circumstance.72

The discussion of courage would appear to be related to a larger debate in the Mencius over the notions of internal and external factors in moral motivation and judgement. Beigong Yu represents a form of courage conditioned by external circumstance; his concern is with disgrace in the face of others. Mengshi She represents courage fueled by unbending internal conviction; external circumstances will have no bearing on his conduct. Each form of courage disconnects the transactional circuit of human engagement by introducing either an internal factor: resoluteness, or an external factor: conditioning. The inflexible posture of each form of courage results from the reduction of human conduct into one or the other category. By virtue of this reduction, both Beigong Yu and Mengshi She come across as obstinate rather than courageous. The Mencian notion of courage restores continuity between internal and external (nei/wai), something that Mencian notions consistently do.73

Inner/Outer and the Growth Model

In the midst of discussing configurative energy and aspiration, Mencius is asked abruptly to explain to his listeners how he surpasses Gaozi.74 Mencius replies, “I understand doctrines (yan) and am good at nourishing my ‘flood-like’ qi (haoranzhiqi).”75 No enthusiast of doctrine, when asked what he means by “understanding” them, Mencius proceeds to catalogue their various deficiencies:

From the biased ones, I understand the blindness. From the extravagant ones, I understand the catch. From the heretical ones, I understand the deviance. From the evasive ones, I understand the poverty.76
Of his other quality, his “flood-like” qi, he says:

It is hard to explain. It is a qi that is extremely vast and strong. Nourish it with genuineness and avoid injuring it and it will fill up the space between heaven and earth. It is a qi that is the counterpart of appropriateness and the most productive course (dao), without which it will be starved off. It is given life through a steady accumulation of appropriate behavior. It will not be acquired through a sporadic show of appropriate behavior. If one behaves below the standard of one’s feelings, this qi will be starved off. This is why I say that Gaozi has never understood appropriateness, since he makes it external (wai). 77

Mencius’ intention here is to legitimate Confucian ethics by connecting it, however obliquely, to the notion of qi, and to remind his audience that he does so in contrast to doctrines that rely on external (wai) factors. He assures his audience that a habit of appropriateness, if steadily cultivated, finds its sustenance on a cosmological rather than theoretical level. 78 The metaphor of “starving,” employed to illustrate his point, is botanical: Mencius is saying that only the securely rooted plant receives the requisite nourishment for growth. Before pursuing the botanical imagery further and locating the notion of “flood-like” qi within Mencian thought, we need to reconstruct the context.

One of the most discussed debates in the Mencius is that between Gaozi and Mencius over whether appropriateness is internal (nei) or external (wai). In the primary exchange on this issue, 77 Gaozi and Gongduzi, claim that appropriateness is external, while Mencius and Mengjizi resist the claim. There are a number of interpretations of what is at stake in this debate, and one would find it difficult to improve upon Kwong-loi Shun’s analysis of the viability of the most prominent ones. 80 My own interpretation accords with Shun’s; that is, the Mencian claim that appropriateness is not external amounts to a claim that one’s “recognition of what is yi derives from certain features” of feeling (xin) as opposed to “circumstances that obtain independently” of it. 81 Another way of saying this is that Mencius resists
locating the elements of appropriateness in a rule or principle-based ethic that
pursuits to trump feeling in a concrete context.

The argument goes as follows. Gaozi considers one’s respect for elders an
element of appropriateness and proceeds to abstract an independent class of things
that one deems fit for such respect; namely, those of old age. Gaozi considers this
classification an external (wai) factor; thus, what one considers appropriate is
externally determined by whatever goes into the definition of this class. Mencius’
response to Gaozi illustrates his preference to avoid such pan-contextual thinking.
He chides Gaozi by saying, in effect: “Does this categorical claim mean we have to
pay respect to old horses too?” Mencius is not interested in formulating ethical prin-
ciples based on class distinctions that in turn become standards that determine what
is appropriate in a concrete context. 82

Mencius does not here or elsewhere argue that appropriateness is internal
(nei) rather than external (wai). His main purpose, as D.C. Lau suggests, is only “to
show that his opponents failed to establish positively that yi is external (wai).”83 The
analogies that the Mencian side employs to counter the externalists; “In winter I
drink hot water, in summer, cold water,” and “I enjoy a well cooked roast regardless
of who cooks it,” hardly establish that anything is strictly internal.84 The point
Mencius is making is that an internal/external (nei/wai) dichotomy is, as Lau
suggests, “too simple for the statement or solution of the problem.”85 Hence, nei/wai
is never the language Mencius employs in articulating his own philosophy.

The vocabulary Mencius prefers is one of botanical growth and its related
imagery: water, roots, shoots, cultivation, nourishment, and the like. The botanical
metaphor is the vehicle Mencius chooses to describe the process of cultivating the
person:

As for a tong or zi tree a few spans thick, anyone caring to keep it alive will
know how to nourish it. When it comes to one’s person, however, they are at
a loss regarding how to nourish it. Is it that one’s concern for one’s person is
less than that for these two trees? This is a case of failing to think.86
In order to understand the Mencian position on personal cultivation within the framework of the internal/external (nei/wai) debate, we must pursue the botanical imagery. One element vital to growth is an ample source of water. Mencius discusses the virtues of spring-fed water over standing water in a language that alludes to configurative energy (qi):

Xuzi said, "More than once, Confucius expressed his veneration for water, saying 'Oh, water! Water!' What did he see in water?"

Mencius said, "Water from an ample source flows incessently day and night, breaks forward only after the hollows are filled, and then drains into the sea. Anything that is rooted to a source is like this. What Confucius saw in water is just this and nothing more. If a thing is not rooted to a source, it is like the rainwater that collects after downpours in May and June. It may fill the gutters, but if we stand and wait it will evaporate."

There are a number of points being made here. Keeping in mind previous discussions, let us assume that Mencius is talking about growing a person, a process that entails the development of a disposition (xing), and that he is recommending that this project be rooted in configurative energy (qi).

First, to recommend qi as a source of nourishment is to suggest one grow one's person with roots in feeling (xin). Recall that feeling is the qualitative result of a transaction with the world engaged through a disposition. Disposition is the coincidence of form and function in a world charged with qi. Mencius advocates remaining tapped into qi by not becoming alienated from the feelings that issue directly from one's disposition. Retaining and developing feeling amounts to retaining and developing a particular disposition.

Next, let us assume that the root (ben) spoken of here nourishes the growth of a disposition that configures a "flood-like" qi, and that in "filling out the hollows" of this disposition, this qi sustains and propels its growth. This would amount to
saying that there is a natural momentum to moral growth based in feeling. This momentum is what recommends feeling over doctrine as the source in which to root the moral growth of the person. Doctrine is at a remove from the prompts of feeling and as such is external \( (wai) \) to the process of generating habit in the deep sense.\(^9\) In the “Water, Water!” passage above, the image of standing water, stagnant and evaporating, is that of doctrine \( (yan) \) employed as the sole source of moral growth. Meanwhile, feeling \( (xin) \) is the incessant nourishment issuing from the spring-fed source: configurative energy \( (qi) \). So when Mencius speaks of “not behaving below the standard of feeling,” he is encouraging the cultivation of a constitutive habit of feeling that stabilizes the growth of a disposition rooted in that spring-fed source. Deepening the roots and broadening the span of a moral disposition configures a “flood-like” energy. This energy promotes growth that is “optimally vast” \( (zhida) \) and “optimally firm” \( (zhigang) \). The image of a flourishing tree comes directly to mind.

Lastly, let us address the apparent circularity of the Mencian project of “growing” a moral disposition. Mencius advocates drawing on feeling to nourish a disposition that itself facilitates feeling. This seeming paradox is resolved in the botanical model. Cultivating the person is likened to growing a tree. It involves an accretion of feeling and behavior that reinforces and enlarges a pattern of growth over the span of a life \( (sheng) \). Just as the extension of limbs and the habit of branches signals the uninterrupted development of a tree, the extension of feelings from their germinal states \( (duan) \) indicate the continuous self-emergence of a disposition \( (xing) \). What appears to be circularity is in fact the continuity of growth. Growth is a continually reconstituted propensity to emerge. When something grows, there is a seamless continuity between its more integrated form and the germinal state from which it arose.

The botanical model of moral development is fundamentally creative. That Mencius spurns fixed doctrine in personal development indicates that, for him, a moral disposition is precisely not the patterning of conduct in accordance with an
externally stipulated outline, schema, or design. Moral dispositions, like plants, must
develop of themselves: in their native environments, and at their own speeds, or else
they perish. The story of the man from Song who attempts to hasten the growth of
his plants by tugging at their stalks makes this point. Upon announcing this
undertaking to his family, the man’s son rushes out to the fields to find all of his
father’s plants have shriveled up. In other words, no desired standard of
development can be reached without a genuine process of maturation. One can not
simply adopt a standard of conduct, “impartial concern” for instance, and call that
one’s moral disposition. Just as a seedling will not mature into a tree without
incorporating into itself the requisite nourishment, a moral disposition will not
develop without the nourishing reinforcement of genuine feeling and habit.

The botanical model reduces the pertinence of external (wai) standards or
rules to the moral development of the person. In this way, the model serves to close
the nei/wai gap. In asserting feeling over rule-based doctrine, Mencius is not in turn
positing moral feeling as internal (nei), however. The nature of feeling has already
been presented in terms of a coordinated transaction between the organism and its
environment. To better understand how feeling works in relation to the nei/wai
debate, a fresh cluster of terms needs to be considered.

Desire, Coherence, and Integration

In the Mencius we encounter psychological reflections of a kind absent in
earlier texts such as the Analects. In the Xunzi these reflections reach a higher degree
of articulation. In the Xunzi, as in the “Outer Chapters” of the Zhuangzi, the Yijing
appendices, and the collected chapters of the “Classic of Ritual Propriety” (Liji), texts
most of which post-date the Mencius, such reflections are increasingly presented
through a vocabulary of “resonance” (ganying). Neither gan nor ying are employed
in any technical sense in the Mencius; similar discussions employ a more primitive
language of internal/external (nei/wai). In later texts that employ a ganying
vocabulary, internal/external distinctions sometimes emerge as the topic turns to "desire" (yu). We find this for instance in the "Discourse on Music" (Yueji) section of the "Classic of Ritual Propreity" (Liji), in a passage nearly identical to one that appears in the "Tracing Dao to its Source" (Yuandao) chapter of the Huainanzi. The following formula, which employs a Mencian vocabulary, apparently enjoyed wide circulation in the Han:

One is born in equilibrium (jing); this is one's disposition (xing) from tian. There is a response to things and an agitation (dong); this becomes the desires (yu) of one's disposition (xing). Things come along. More and more is experienced. Eventually likes and dislikes are shaped (xing). When likes and dislikes are not managed on the inside (nei) experience is led away by what is outside (wai). Being unable to restore oneself, the coherence (li) of tian is destroyed.43

According to this passage, one's disposition evolves over the course of experience.45 Desires and preferences become discursively shaped (xing) and this in turn forms one's transaction with the world. In the "Discourse on Music" (Yueji), to adjust oneself on the inside (nei) helps narrow an internal/external gap that emerges with an undue level of desire and preference. The goal of such adjustment is to "restore" the coherence and equilibrium of one's initial disposition.

The concern over desires in this passage echoes Mencius' own concern over the accumulation of desires. The best way to nurture (yang) one's feeling, Mencius says, is to make one's desires few. One thereby "maintains" (cun) that which is most important within the process of development.46 Maintaining one's feeling is a consistent theme in the Mencius.47 It is the maintainance of feeling that distinguishes the exemplary person (junzi) from all others.48 The "Discourse on Music" passage speaks not of maintaining (cun) but of restoring (fan). The main idea, however, is consistent: there is a correlation between undue desire and a rift in one's activities, purposes, and relations in the world. This rift is treated in the "Discourse on Music"
as an emergent inner/outer (nei/wai) distinction, one that is distinguished from an abated coherence.

It is difficult to establish precisely what “coherence” (li) means in this context, or in the Mencius. The Shouwen lexicon associates li with “dressing or polishing jade” and “the veins or striations within the jade.” The former activity is recognized as the art of bringing out the latter. In the “Book of Songs” (Shi ji), li is associated with dividing fields into smaller plots by paths and ditches; again this is a process of bringing out patterns inchoately resident in nature yet not fully capitalized upon. The idea that a disposition has an original li that is upset by agitation (dong) and restored by equilibrium (jing) is consistent with the process cosmology of “taking shape” (xing) in the “Great Commentary” of the Yijing. That undue “desire” for objects also disturbs the coherence of a developing disposition suggests the presence of an inchoate pattern at the incipience of the process that can be productively augmented so long as nothing “external” to its native proclivity is introduced. In the “Discourse on Music,” this pattern is something that one “restores” (fan) when cohesion is lost; in the Mencius, it is perhaps best understood as something that one “maintains” (run).

The translation of li as “coherence” is meant to capture a range of notions that seem to be at work here: notions such as pattern, unity, cohesion, integration, and form. The notion of coherence (li) is important to Mencius. He teaches that the feelings of humans are similar (tong) in that they find satisfaction in two things: coherence and appropriateness. But what does he mean? There is sufficient overlap in terminology between the Mencius and the “Discourse on Music” to justify using the latter as a template for approaching the question.

The course of forming a disposition begins, presumably with birth, in a state of cohesion and unity; the development of certain desires, over time, compromises this original cohesion. The result is a bifurcation of experience into “internal” nei and “external” wei factors that become implicated in the project of “restoring” the lost coherence.
In the Mencian botanical framework, personal growth rooted in feeling also maintains over the course development a kind of coherence: one between the self and its surroundings. In the process of moral growth, to lose the feeling that emerges in the transaction between the self and its surroundings by entertaining "external" standards of appropriateness is to disconnect, disintegrate, and ultimately perish. In the search for a standard of appropriateness, to disregard felt experience is to ignore the terminal qualities of engagement (de) that arise from the very fact that one's activities are rooted in the world. The standard of appropriate conduct is not located elsewhere, waiting to be discovered; it resides within the transactional circuit of experience itself. As always, Mencius avoids the term "internal" (nei) when he presents his position:

"By seeking it, it is obtained, and through neglecting it, it is lost." When this is so, seeking leads to obtaining, and we are seeking something that resides with us (zaiwo). "Seeking it entails a method (dao), and to obtain it is a matter of conditions (ming)." When this is so, seeking does not lead to obtaining, and we are seeking something that resides outside (zaiwai).

For Mencius, the standard of appropriateness is located within experience, in the feeling that arises directly with it. There is no "method" or doctrine that can direct one towards appropriate behavior in so broad a variety of circumstances as can feeling. As long as one retains "coherence" between self and surroundings, one has a moral compass in feeling. For Mencius, as for Confucius, the apex of personal development is to maintain a state wherein one may "give one's feelings free rein without overstepping the mark."

The question that now arises is this: if feeling is the standard of appropriateness, what is the standard of feeling? What measure resides within experience that indicates the grade of one's moral feeling? As noted earlier, Mencius advocates self-reflection (fanzi) in the face of social transgression. This is likened to the archer turning back to inspect her stance in the event of misfiring. As the base of one's
social sensibilities, associated humanity (ren) is the target of moral self-reflection. It is from here that interpersonal experiences take shape. If upon self-reflection one finds oneself sincere in one’s associated living, then one can trust one’s moral feelings and judgements. Establishing a strong sense of associated humanity involves achieving a self that is transparently integrated (cheng) with things and sensitive to the feelings and concerns of others (shu). Mencius explains:

Everything is here in us. There is no greater joy than inspecting one’s own person and finding it integrated (cheng). To conduct oneself in a way that shows persistent consideration of the standpoint of others (shu); this is the shortest route to associated humanity (ren).

Moral standards, for Mencius, arise from associated living: “everything is here in us.” It is the integration of self, other, and world that facilitates the moral wisdom to do what is appropriate (yi). The more deeply integrated one becomes, the more attuned one is to the standpoint of others: the only real factor in morality. So long as one remains socially robust, one cannot go far wrong morally in Mencius’ estimation.

The Zhongyong develops this idea in a way that accomplishes more explicitly Mencius’ objective; that is, to overcome the nei/wai distinction by locating the standard of appropriateness (yi) somewhere in the middle. Integration (cheng) is neither inner nor outer; it is instead a continually reconstituted synthesis. In the Zhongyong, this synthesis is the final cosmological fact:

Integration (cheng) is self-consummating. Its course is self-directing. Integration is the beginning and end of things. Without integration there would be nothing. This is why exemplary persons consider integration important. It does not just terminate with one’s own self-consummation; it is the means by which everything finds its consummation. Consummating oneself, this is associated humanity. Consummating things, this is wisdom (zhi). This is the character (de) of a disposition, the course (dao) integrating the internal (nei) and the external (wai). Thus whenever one applies it, it is fitting.
As presented in the *Zhongyong*, the notion of integration (*cheng*) restores coherence by closing the *nei*/*wai* gap, and in providing the measure for what is fitting (*yi*), it leads one directly to appropriateness (*yi*). This is the direction in which Mencius wishes to go. This passage also maintains the assumptions of a *qi* cosmology: culmination (*cheng*) is identified with the immediate, character (*de*) of a disposition. This disposition is fully embedded in the world; thus, it is reducible neither to internal (*nei*) nor external (*wai*) factors. The passage summarizes the more important philosophical assumptions tacit throughout the *Mencius*.

On the basis of the previous discussion, we can now attempt to locate the notion of "flood-like" *qi* in Mencius' thinking. Keeping in mind the transactional model of feeling and disposition, this energy, "extremely vast and firm, and filling the space between heaven and earth," configures itself in any disposition that is well integrated in the world. This energy is the "counterpart" to feelings that attune one to appropriateness (*yi*) and to the most productive course (*dao*), "without which, this energy will be starved off." Sustained through the steady accumulation of appropriate behavior, this energy will only fortify the genuine, habitual disposition (*xing*). Such a disposition maintains the "coherence" of experience in the uninterrupted circuit of self and world. "External" factors like doctrine and desire will only interrupt that circuit and retard the growth of a moral disposition; hence, the "flood-like" *qi* is disassociated from what is "external." Moral growth is growth that remains situated, and thus, integrated.
Confucius uses the term as such and repeatedly makes the point that when dao prevails in the land it is incumbent on the person to participate in its realization. See Analects 5.2, 5.21, 8.13, 14.1, 15.7.

Mencius 4A: 11.

Mencius 6B: 2.


Zhuangzi criticizes disputation (bian), and specifically, the polemic associations of dao and yan:

By what is dao obscured so that we have the distinction between "genuine" and "false"? By what are yan obscured so as to have the distinction between "correct" and "incorrect"? Can dao be tread, but somehow not here? Can yan be present, but somehow impermissable? Dao is obscured in such petty attainments. Yan is obscured in such flowery rhetoric. Thus we have the distinction of "correct" and "incorrect" among the Confucians and Mohists; and hence, what is "correct" for one of them is "incorrect" for the other and vice versa. If one wishes to correct their errors and deny them their corrections, nothing serves better than clarity. (Zhuangzi 4/2/24-27. Compare: Graham (2001) pg. 52).

Zhuangzi explains this "clarity" (ming) in terms of something he calls the "pivot of dao" (daoshu). Only from the pivot is one granted the clarity and flexibility to respond inexhaustibly to the verbal distinctions that fuel debate, distinctions that in fact form a "continuity" (yi) one to the next. Zhuangzi intends to remove the term dao from the arena of disputation (bian). There is no invariably right or wrong dao in Zhuangzi's view; no absolute "way" that transcends a given context. Dao is no longer forced to serve as a fixed philosophical position, as it is in the Mencius. Zhuangzi's dao, being beyond the kinds of distinctions that condition disputation (bian), does not allow itself to be distinguished. It has no corresponding doctrine (yan); for, "the greatest dao is impartial, and the greatest argument doesn't become doctrine." Since dao is something that defies all argument, "the dao that is shown through doctrine (yan) is not dao." (Zhuangzi 5/2/59-61. Compare: Graham (2001) pg. 57). Also compare: Daodejing 1.

Mencius 3B: 9.

Yangist thought centers on notions of life (sheng) and disposition (xing), and as Mencius presents it, jeopardizes political order. These issues are taken up in chapter
Mohist thought centers on notions of concern (ài) and social benefit (li), and as Mencius presents it, jeopardizes familial order. These issues are taken up in chapter three.

Mencius 7B: 26.

Mencius 7A: 26

See Analects 4.10 and 9.4.

See Analects 14.32. Also, compare Analects 4:10 with Mencius 4B: 11. Mencius 4A: 17 demonstrates Mencius' impatience with inflexible approaches to ritual propriety (li). See also Mencius 4 B: 6 and 6B: 12.

Mencius 2A: 2.

Ibid.

It is unfruitful to call qi moral or immoral. Only embedded configurations are subject to normative evaluation. Recall that the notion of a "vast, overflowing qi" is a moral energy nourished through a particular habit or disposition. Qi focused in a moral disposition (xing) expresses moral quality. Qi might also focus in formations of hatred, anger, or any other disposition. In the case of Mengshi She, Mencius says he holds on to a qi that fuels his spunk and conviction, but his is not great courage (dayung). Great courage requires being disposed to one's surroundings in a particular way. (Mencius 2A: 2). The topic of courage is discussed below.

To suggest that qi is morally neutral is not to suggest that it is a propertyless substratum. There is no "qi itself" that is propertyless. In Chapter One, configurative energy was discussed in terms of the inseparability of formation and function. Disposition (xing) and shape (xing) address determinate limits or forms, while qi, in this context, represents unlimited qualitative transformation. This distinction between form and quality is derivative, however, not essential.


Cf. Mencius 5B: 3. True friendship is also unmediated by such considerations.

Analects 2.4, 6.7, 14.39, 17.22 and 20.1 (twice).

Karlgren (1957) p. 176-177.


Mencius 2A: 6

Xin covers not only human emotion but also a range of cognitive functions. "Feeling" can be considered shorthand for "thoughts and feelings," which on occasion strikes me as a better translation. This is not a tradition that makes a sharp distinction between feeling and thought. I use "feeling" primarily, as I think it best captures the aspect of xin that Mencius most often intends to foreground.
Guan means, according to Bernard Karlgren, "function" or "to function." See: Karlgren (1957) p. 62. The other common meaning of this term is "office" or "office holder," as in the function of a particular office or its "functionary."

Mencius 6A. 15.

Daxue ch. 7.

Analects 2.15.

Analects 15.31.

Mencius 2A: 2.

Mencius 3A: 5.

Xing is used as a verb here, thus "cultivates as a disposition."

Mencius 7A: 21. The language here would tolerate the alternative reading, "the physical body is not a doctrine (yan), but it instructs." I am not wholly convinced that this is Mencius' intened meaning here, but a critique of doctrine (yan) is no doubt within scope.

Mencius 6B: 6. Cf. “The Great Learning” (Daxue) 6. 2. “Whatever is genuinely focused at the center is sure to take shape on the outside. Thus, exemplary persons are ever watchful of their uniqueness.”

Mencius 4A: 15.

Mencius 2A: 2

Guanzi Ch. 37, 13.4 b

Mencius 7A: 30. Both xing and shen, are used verbally in this passage. Cf. Mencius 7B: 33.


LeBlanc (1985) pg. 118.


Confucius’ use of poetic imagery is suggestive in this regard. In Analects 17.9, Confucius lists “arousal” (xing) as one of the important merits of the Songs; and in Analects 13.5, the idea that poetic images can be introduced in a diplomatic environment in order to affect mutual agreement is suggested.


Ibid.

Huainanzi 3:3b:11.


52 This character consists of two parts: "skeletal frame" (gu) and "ritual vessel" (li), both of which suggest a containing shape.
53 Cf. Lau (1970) p. 77. An alternative translation might be: "Where intention is reached, configurative energy is next below."
54 Mencius 2A: 2.
55 Graham (1989) p. 27.
56 Mark Lewis understands zhi to mean, in major Confucian texts, "the thrust of a person's being." There are other applicable meanings of zhi in the tradition, however. The term plays an important role in poetry, which "expresses aspiration." See Lewis (1999) pg. 162.
59 Mencius 5B: 1.
60 Mencius 7A: 33.
61 Mencius 4A: 4
62 Mencius 4B: 28.
64 The connection between aspiration, self-appraisal, and one's core relationships is also evidenced in the Zouzhuan. Zhongni, commenting on the disgrace of King Ling, submits: "This is ancient: that having aspiration, mastering oneself, and returning (fu) to ritual propriety and associated humanity is to be true as a person and good." See: Legge (1961) v. 5, pp. 638, 641.
65 Mencius 4B: 28.
66 Mencius 5B: 7, 6A: 11; cf. 2A: 7.
67 The two notions are also related in the Analects. See: Analects 2.24 and 17.23.
69 Mencius 2A: 2.
70 Recall that when Confucius reached forty he was "no longer of two minds." (Analects 2.4) Mencius adds here that Gaozi, by holding to a doctrine (yan), achieved such a condition at an even earlier age; hence, the state of unagitated feeling (budongxin) is attainable by holding to a doctrine. Below we consider further why Mencius felt this to be inadequate.
71 There are various interpretations of yue in this passage. For a survey of various glosses, see: Shun (1997) pp. 73-74. Zhaoji understands yue as what is important or essential. Zhuxi, noting that yue is applied in two contrasted contexts in this passage,
suggests that yue does not refer to a specific thing that one holds to. Interpreting yue as “a sense of what is important” seems to allow the requisite flexibility.

72 I appeal to Mencius 4B: 28 in glossing suo in this passage as “well integrated and attuned.” The targets of “self-reflection” (zifan) in 4B: 28 are humanity (ren), ritual propriety (li), and doing one’s utmost (zhong). These are relational notions, referencing one’s degree of integration with others and one’s attunement to their needs. In referring suo ultimately to appropriateness (yi), I appeal to the close connection between courage (yung) and appropriateness (yi) in the Analects. See: Analects 2:24 and 17:23. There are other glosses of suo in this passage, among them to be “straight,” to have “poise,” and to be “bound tight.” See: Shun (1997) p. 73, 244 f. 29.

73 In the Zhongyong, courage (yung) is said to be close to shame. In regulating a person’s conduct, shame also defies any sharp distinction between internal motivation and external conditioning. See: Zhongyong 20. Lau surmises that there is a break in this section. See: Lau (1970) p. 77.

75 Mencius 2A: 2.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
79 Mencius 6A: 4-5.
80 Shun (1997) pp. 94-112. The Mohists will be discussed in chapter three.
81 ibid. pg. 111.
82 This kind of episode locates Mencius within a tradition diverse enough to include his contemporary, Zhuangzi. While Mencius and Zhuangzi differ in many respects, they are equally resistant to any move to de-contextualize in philosophical discourse. Consider Zhuangzi and Huishi strolling across the Hao River Bridge:

Zhuangzi said, "The minnows swim out and about as they please - this is the way they enjoy themselves."

Huishi replied, "You are not a fish - how do you know what they enjoy?"

Zhuangzi said, "You are not me - how do you know that I don't know what is enjoyable for the fish?"

Huishi said, "I am not you, so I certainly don't know what you know; but by the same token it follows: since you are certainly not the fish, you don't know what is enjoyment for the fish either."

Zhuangzi said, "Let's go back to your basic question. When you asked, 'How do you know what the fish enjoy?' you already knew that I
know what the fish enjoy, or you wouldn't have asked me. I know it from here - above the river Hao." \(\text{Zhuangzi 45/17/87-91. Compare Graham (2001) pg. 123).}\)

Huishi hopes to determine the veracity of Zhuangzi's claim by fashioning a standard that transcends two contexts. Zhuangzi resists such a move and directs the conversation back to the context that first occasioned it.

In Mencius' engagement with Gaozi the pattern is similar. There is also a difference, however. Mencius does not reject pan-contextual standards altogether; he only limits their scope. Consider the passage:

Gaozi said: "That man there is old, and I treat him as elder. He owes nothing of his elderliness to me, just as in treating him as white because he is white I only do so because of his Whiteness which is external to me. That is why I call (appropriateness) external."

Mencius said: "The case of appropriateness is different than that of Whiteness. "Treating as white" is the same whether one is treating a horse as white or a man as white. But I wonder if you would think that "deference to age" is the same whether one is treating a horse as old or a man as elder?"

Mencius does not deny that the category "Whiteness" applies across contexts. The exact status of "Whiteness" as a pan-contextual standard, however, concerns him neither here nor elsewhere. His primary interest is ethical, and he is insisting that such externalized (wai) standards have little relevance to developing a disposition sensitive to what is morally appropriate (yi).

86 Mencius 6A: 4, 6A: 5.
88 Mencius 6A: 13.
90 Mencius 6B: 18.
91 This is not to say that doctrine (yan) makes no contribution whatsoever to the moral development of the person (shen); it may, and Mencius allows this. The point however is that doctrine (yan) so used is appurtenant only to the person (shen). It may not be employed as a standard by which to measure the moral development of others. Consider Mencius 7B: 32:
Mencius said: A doctrine (yan) close at hand, pointing the way for extension, is a productive (shan) doctrine. A course that maintains a sense of what is important (yue), giving it broad application, is a productive course (dao). The doctrines (yan) of exemplary persons (junzi) may never fall below the sash of their robes, yet the most productive course (dao) is contained therein. Exemplary persons tend to the cultivation of their persons (shen), and this brings order to the world. The problem with people is that they depart their own gardens to weed the gardens of others. They make demands upon others while allowing themselves to be frivolous.

The point is not that doctrine (yan) is useless in the moral development of the person (shen). The point is that unless one appropriates doctrine (yan) at the level of genuine feeling (xin) it is not contributing to the growth of the person (shen). It is the person (shen) that brings order to the world, not the doctrine (yan).

Doctrine, however, can contribute. Even Shun, in separating himself from the birds and beasts, is reported to have responded powerfully to the productive (shan) words (yan) and behaviors (xing) that he saw and heard. Mencius likens his response to “water breaching the dams of the Yangzi or the Yellow River.” (Mencius 7A: 16) In this context, the momentum of Shun’s response at an emotional level was vital to his development, and only secondarily was the word or doctrine (yan) that initiated it.

90 Mencius 2A: 2.
91 For example: Xunzi 22.1a.
92 We find this also in the Guanzi and Mozi. See: Guanzi 2/16.2-3; Mozi 43/88-90. See also: Shun (1997) pp. 99-100.
95 Hence, one must guard against committing the genetic fallacy in interpreting xing. The same theme is found in the Disposition Arises from Conditions document from Guodian, which will be examined in chapter five.
96 Mencius 7B: 35. This passage does not employ the term “inner” (nei). “Within” is derived from the particle yan. Lau derives “within oneself” from yan, but it is unclear what completes the preposition. See: Lau (1970) pp. 201-202. I would complete the preposition with “within the process of development,” since that seems to be in keeping with the theme of the Mencius.
97 Mencius 6A: 8; 7A: 1; 7B: 35.
98 Mencius 4B: 28

See discussion chapter one, and Tang Junyi’s treatment of the theme.

Mencius 6A: 7.

Mencius does not use the term “coherence” (rú) regularly. However, he does liken the sagacity of Confucius to the “coherence” of an orchestra piece in Mencius 5B: 1.

Cf. Mencius 6A: 6, where this portion is repeated.

Mencius 7A: 3.

Analects 2.4.

Mencius 2A: 7.

Mencius 7A: 4.

Zhongyong Ch. 25.

These two terms, “fitting” (yì) and “appropriate” (yì) are cognates and closely related. The latter is defined in terms of the former in Zhongyong 20.

Why, then, is integration (cheng) not discussed more often in the Mencius, and why is the notion of feeling (xin) entirely absent from the Zhongyong? Most occasions of cheng in the Mencius are of typical vernacular usage, translatable as “genuine” (Mencius 1A: 7), “indeed” (Mencius 3A: 2), “sincere” (Mencius 3A: 5), and “authentic” (Mencius 2A: 1). There are instances in which the term is important however, and these will be treated in chapters to come. Of the two philosophically significant occurrences of cheng in the Mencius, one overlaps with the Zhongyong, a fact that does not tell us much about the relation between the two texts. The overlapping passages are Mencius 4A: 12 and portions of Zhongyong 20. One might take this overlap as an indication that, as Tu Wei-ming maintains, much of the Zhongyong is in fact premised on Mencian assumptions. (See: Tu (1989) pp. 72-73).

On the other hand, one may, as Kwong-loi Shun does in his treatment of the Mencius, purposely “defer discussing the notion of cheng (in the Mencius)... because there is insufficient textual basis for reconstructing Mencius' views on cheng and because of (this parallel) with the Zhongyong.” (See: Shun (1997) pg. 235 n. 1. Italics mine). It is difficult to determine with any precision the relation between these two texts on the basis of cheng. Hall and Ames raise the possibility that a significant portion of the Zhongyong is a gloss on Mencius 4A: 12. (See: Hall and Ames (2001) pg. 131-137.). While the connection between these texts is obscure, the two are certainly bridged by the broader philosophical assumptions that they share within the framework of the Zi-Meng lineage.

Mencius 2A: 2

Ibid.
"Spontaneous" and "Technical" Approaches

We saw in chapter two that Mencius prioritizes feeling (xin) over doctrine (yin) in his debates with the Mohists. The Mencian position on the role of feeling in morality is formulated within the on-going debate over the internal and external (nei/wai) dimensions of appropriateness. Mencius claims that Gaozi does not understand appropriateness because he renders it "external." In response to this position, Mencius does not render appropriateness "internal," but rather, through the category of "feeling" (xin), situates appropriateness within the transactional circuit of engagement (de) in the world. Mencius thus begins to formulate the notion of "integration" (cheng), a notion that reaches its philosophical maturity in the Zhong-yong.

In this chapter, we examine the Mohist challenge in greater depth and develop the Mencian counter-position more fully. We will see that, for Mencius, it is morality rooted in family affection (qin) and filial piety (xiao) that provides the alternative to the principle-based, doctrinaire morality proposed by the Mohist school. Mencius' emphasis on family is consistent with his emphasis on feeling. Mencius identifies family-borne feeling as the source of moral feeling in general, and in keeping with the botanical model, considers family experience the "root" (ben) of well-integrated moral growth.

It is helpful at this juncture to consider Mencian thinking within the broader context of Warring States philosophy. There is a pervasive fault line that defines points of contention between various schools in this period. This fault line separates
the more “spontaneous” and the more “technical” approaches to morality and political practice. Mention was already made in chapter one of the role of spontaneity in Chinese ethics generally, as developed in A.C. Graham’s work and as it relates to the notion of disposition (xing) developed here. Contentions that define schools in this period can be understood in terms of where thinkers locate themselves and their adversaries along the rift that separates the more “spontaneous” from the more “technical” approaches.

For instance, the author of the received Daodejing associates the Confucian virtues of wisdom, associated humanity, and appropriateness with a remedial, “technical” morality that surfaces only when the more “spontaneous” way is eclipsed. In a similar yet more satirical vein, the Zhuangzi routinely presents Confucian practice as programmatic and officious. The error of the Confucians is that they seek to “rectify the shape (xing) of things with their bowing and scraping to ritual and music.” In the Zhuangzi, ritual form is regarded as something forced upon more “spontaneous” kinds of expression. Thinkers we conventionally label “Daoist” see themselves as garrisoned on the “spontaneity” side of the fault line against the more “technical” Confucians.

Confucians, however, are equally critical of “technical” approaches to morality and politics, and see themselves as defenders of “spontaneity” against Legalist tendencies. This friction traces back to the Analects. Confucius is keen to distinguish ritual (li) from punishment (xing) as a method of maintaining social order. Confucians regard laws (fa) and punishments as inflexible tools that impose order at the expense of more participatory, self-determinative forms of order. Ritual, according to the Confucian, enables a more “spontaneous” moral and political order to emerge by creating avenues for productive self-expression. Whereas in a law-based society socially undesirable elements are simply punished, in a ritual-based society ritual shapes behavioral dispositions that preclude the emergence of socially undesirable elements from the outset, resulting in a “spontaneous” form of behavior. Hence:
The instructive, transforming influence of ritual is subtle. It stops depravity before it has even "taken shape" (xing). It allows people to advance productively on a daily basis and remain far from blame without them even realizing it.⁷

Rather than resort to the "technical" apparatus of law and punishment, the Confucians entrust moral and political order to the kind of social intelligence that emerges without coercion in associated life. Generally, Confucians see themselves on the creative, "spontaneous" side of the fault line when it comes to the ritual/law distinction.⁸

In prioritizing feeling over doctrine, Mencius positions himself on the "spontaneous" side of this pervasive divide. Mencius defends the "spontaneous" prompting of feeling; and in so doing, he positions himself against more "technical" moralities. He associates "doctrines" of human disposition (xing) with attempts to "bring something about" (gu) through forced reasoning, while Mencius himself "does not impose anything" (wushi) on human tendencies.⁹ The "spontaneity" of Mencius is reflected in his understanding of the emergent, human disposition, and further in the botanical model he employs in his treatment of moral growth. These aspects of Mencian thought will be the focus over the course of this chapter and the next.

It is important to make this distinction between the "spontaneous" and "technical" orientations in Chinese thought. Thinkers often use a similar vocabulary to make different points. Without a general idea about how thinkers differ, one risks equating ideas that are, in some instances, quite distinct. For example, Confucians, Mohists, and Legalists each use the term fa to speak of "laws," "standards," or "models." For the Legalist, fa is a "law" that regulates human behavior under threat of punishment (xing).¹⁰ For the Mohist, fa is used as a technical term that designates a normative "standard" endorsed by an anthropomorphic "Heaven" (tian) and is either instantiated in a particular instance or to be applied in practical reasoning.¹¹ In
virtually every case, however, when Mencius uses the term fa, it is understood as a "model" embodied in a particular person like Shun or King Wen, without reference to either law or deity. "Models" (fa) in the Mencius evoke participation in a norm inspired by the achievements of particular persons. Models are neither applied, like the laws of the Legalists, nor instantiated, like Mozi's universal standards; rather, models arouse (xing) others to embody a norm (jing) in their own contexts under the influence of the sage's force of character. Those who employ "laws" and abstract "standards" are what I would term more "technical" thinkers; they lean more heavily toward abstract conceptions of what is good. Those who use "models" rely more heavily on the "spontaneous" response elicited by human exemplars in a concrete instance; they are not given to generate abstract conceptions of the good later to be "applied" by either fiat or practical reason. The manner in which fa is used signals important differences in normative thinking in these three schools.

As we will see, family affection and filial piety play a central role in giving Mencian philosophy its "spontaneous" alignment. Family, for Mencius as for other Confucians, is the model of an unforced, harmonious order. The importance of family in Mencian moral thought cannot be overstated. Family-borne feelings are the kind of feelings Mencius has in mind when he speaks of spontaneous, moral feelings. Hence, as Mencius surveys his adversaries and finds that the "technical" morality of the Mohists poses the greatest threat to the family, he attacks the school. Any threat to the family is considered a threat to Mencian thought as a whole.

The Mohist Challenge

Mozi is notably the first historical figure in China to self-consciously establish standards of evidence and argument in philosophical discourse. In evaluating the rival doctrines of his day, however, practical utility is the principal criterion. Mozi said:
Doctrines that allow for translation into conduct should be advocated. Doctrines that do not should not be advocated. To advocate doctrines that do not allow translation into conduct is to wear out one's mouth.

Mozi's own doctrines are guided by a version of the utilitarian principle. He claims that those doctrines and practices that "benefit" (利) the world ought to be affirmed, and those that harm the world, avoided. What Mozi does with his standard of benefit is more interesting than its precise formulation, which is wanting. He puts it to work in criticizing the institutions and practices of his day. He condemns offensive warfare and improvident government expenditure. He denounces the funding of royal extravagance through taxation and argues that public emoluments be awarded solely by merit. His interest in social welfare places him squarely with the poor; he repeatedly calls attention to the conditions under which the less fortunate majority is condemned to live.

His most vigorous assaults are against the Confucians. He rails against the allocation of state funds for extravagant Confucian rituals: specifically, elaborate funerals and expensive musical performances. He laments the growing secular attitude towards the spirit world that he relates with the Ruist movement, and denounces what he considers their fatalistic understanding of "circumstance" (命). His most potent critique against the Confucians, however, is against the "partiality" (私) of their notion of family affection (亲). The "partiality" that Mozi objects to is the devotion to family and deference to character that underwrites the Confucian notion of ritual propriety. Mozi considers Confucian ritual propriety to consist of irrelevant rules of conduct the practicality of which go unexamined. Mozi's formulation of the doctrine of "impartial concern" (兼爱) is a direct response to this Confucian institution, and according to Mencius, it is the principal threat of Mohist thinking.

Mozi's argument for the doctrine of impartial concern stems from his standard of benefit. Mozi surveys the calamities of his day, among them, warfare, deception, robbery, and oppression, and asks from what kind of disposition they
arise. They arise, he says, from a disposition to injure. If one were to ask whether those who injure are of a partial (bie) or an impartial (jian) disposition in their concern for others, the answer is clearly the former. Thus says Mozi, being of a partial disposition in one's concern is not beneficial (li). Hence, partiality of concern should be abandoned and impartiality adopted. 25

Mozi appeals to the impartiality of tian to bolster support for the standard of benefit, but tian does not underwrite the doctrine of impartial concern. Mozi does not conflate standard (fa) and doctrine (yan); he considers the doctrine of impartial concern preferable based on the standard of benefit. He acknowledges that impartial concern is not the accustomed disposition of a person; it is instead a doctrine that must be self-consciously accepted and put into practice (xing). All that remains, then, is for Mozi is to persuade his audience that impartial concern is indeed a serviceable doctrine, that is, one that satisfies his own criterion of practicality.

The practicality of a doctrine hinges on its ability to translate into practice. Mozi begins his defense of the practicality of impartial concern by arguing that people readily affirm that it is, in fact, a preferable practice. Mozi considers this an empirical question. He fashions a hypothetical scenario in which one is forced to entrust the well being of one's family members either to one who exhibits an impartial (jian) disposition or one who does not (feijian). All but the fool, says Mozi, would choose the latter. He introduces a theory/practice (yan/xing) distinction to criticize those who under such a hypothetical scenario would in practice (xing) affirm impartial concern but in theory (yan) deny it.

Given that people readily affirm that impartiality is preferable, and assuming that people should wish to adopt what is preferable, Mozi next considers whether or not impartial concern is within the capacity of people to adopt. This is addressed by historical example. Mozi argues that six former sage-kings exhibited impartial concern, and hence it is possible for any person to do so. If impartial concern towards others is both preferable and achievable, then it is certainly something that can translate into practice.
Mozi's argument for the practicality of impartial concern is sensible; he acknowledges people's reluctance to move beyond their family preference and adopt the doctrine of impartial concern in practice. Mozi ultimately appeals to the standard of benefit and admonishes willingness. Knowing that one has partial feelings towards one's own family, Mozi cleverly appeals to this fact in arguing for the adoption of impartial concern. He assures his audience that impartiality will in fact reinforce the well being of one's family by securing it under the stanchions of a more general social practice. Concern for one's family naturally entails the desire to have others treat them well. The best way to secure this, Mozi argues, is to show impartial concern for the family members of others, who will then in turn show concern (ai) for one's own. Impartial concern thereby benefits (li) all involved.

Mozi' presentation of his doctrine of impartial concern is coherent and logically defensible, merits not overlooked by Mozi himself. Mozi said:

My doctrine is sufficient. To cast aside my doctrine and go on thinking is like casting aside the bounty while continuing to harvest the grain. To take one's own doctrine and refute mine is like throwing an egg against a rock. All the eggs in the world will be used up and the rock will go unscathed.

Confucianism's Normative Measure

Like Mozi, Mencius is sanguine with the merit of his own thought. Mencius' attitude, however, is different from that of Mozi. Mencius trusts that his way (dao) will naturally attract those with kindred thoughts and feelings. He does not intend to pursue adherents with the tools of logical persuasion, as does Mozi. He explains:

In forwarding my course of study, I do not go after those who leave, and I do not refuse those who come. As long as people come aboard with optimal feeling (xin), I simply accept them.
The stress on feeling is what distinguishes the Mencian program from that of the Mohist. For Mencius, if a moral teaching is not rooted in feeling, then it stands little chance of developing genuine, moral habits and attitudes. Mozi's project is admittedly not rooted in the feelings of the average person. His course must be argued for, accepted, and put into practice – and this is supposed to result in moral people. Mencius defines himself against such "technical" projects. For Mencius, one cannot change what people do without changing their dispositions. The goal for Mencius is to cultivate people who are "spontaneously" moral by virtue of the habits and attitudes that define their characters.

As presented in chapter two, the Mencian resolution to the nei/wai debate is reflected in the notion of integration (cheng). To develop one's moral sensibilities requires preserving the root of feeling that locates one integrally in the world and in associated life (ren). For Mencius, when one gives favor to standards "external" to such everyday experience, one is uprooted from one's ground in feeling and one's moral growth is retarded. Conversely, associated humanity and appropriateness ally themselves with becoming integrated and developing a disposition (xing) that issues spontaneously into moral sensibility and behavior. In doing so, associated humanity and appropriateness present an alternative to Mozi's standard of benefit; or so it is suggested in the opening passage of the Mencius, and elsewhere. Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang:

"Sir," said the King, "you have come all this way, thinking nothing of the distance; surely you have some way to benefit (li) my state."

Mencius answered: "Why must you mention benefit? All I bring you is associated humanity (ren) and appropriateness (yi). If a King asks, 'How can I benefit my state?' and a counselor asks, 'How can I benefit my family?' and officials and commoners asks, 'How can I benefit my person?' those of all ranks will be trying to benefit at the expense of others and the state will be in peril...

"No one of associated humanity ever abandoned family affection (qin), and no one of appropriate conduct ever puts the interests of his prince
last. Now you see what I mean, “associated humanity and appropriateness account for everything; why must you mention benefit?”

To Confucius, benefit usually suggests benefit to one’s own person: “the exemplary person understands what is appropriate (yi), whereas the petty person understands only what is of “personal advantage” (li). Mencius retains this pejorative association of li with self-interest. Mencius likens the person whose actions are consistently driven by benefit to the most selfish person of all: Robber Chi. In contrast to Robber Chi, Mencius distinguishes Shun, whose actions were consistently driven not by benefit but by what was productive or good (shan). As A.C Graham suggests, Mencius comes to associate the term li so closely with self-interest that “one can hardly translate him coherently without switching the English equivalent to ‘profit’.”

Confucians have no inherent problem with the idea of benefit (li). Both Confucius and Mencius use the term in a positive sense on occasion in connection with benefiting the people. The problem that Mencius has with Mohism lies in the tension between associated humanity and appropriateness (renyi) and benefit (li) as sources by which to generate norms of behavior. Mencius feels that there is a substantial difference between being motivated (yue) by calculations of benefit and harm, which he apparently feels can be nothing but self-interested, and being motivated by associated humanity and appropriateness. The former is “technical” and does not lend itself to the cultivation of a disposition, whereas actions that proceed from the latter arise from one’s integral involvement in associated life (ren) and one’s feelings for what is appropriate (yi) in the concrete instance: inclinations solidified in a disposition. The normative measure that renders benefit obsolete for Mencius is one resident in concrete instances of associated life.

The Confucian normative measure suggests itself in this cluster of terms: associated humanity, appropriateness, and the productive or good. Since essentialist assumptions are not prevalent in the Chinese tradition, we understand shan as
“good” with due qualification. Shan is fundamentally relational; it is first and foremost a “good at,” “good for” or “good in.” Only derivatively does shan become an abstract concept. As A.C. Graham maintains, however, shan in particular lends support to the claim that in the classical Chinese language, “the absence of terminations to mark abstract nouns interferes with forming an abstract concept.”

According to Graham, moral terms such as shan are not designated constants (chang) in the Chinese tradition; they are instead located through directive concepts such as dao. Moral terms are relational and situational. The “Documents” (Shujing) corroborates Graham’s claim:

Virtue (de) has no constant (chang) model; it is oriented towards what is good (shan). What is good has no constant orientation; it accords with what is adequate in a single instance (xieyukeyi).

Given the non-essentialist character of shan, Graham understands it “not as a quality but as a way of behaving.” This way of behaving is one that contributes productively in a concrete instance.

Asked to explain shan, Mencius replies, “it is what is desirable.” The Shouwen lexicon, stressing the aesthetic dimension of shan, glosses it as “synonymous with what is appropriate/fitting (yi) and beautiful (mei).” Mencius further relates that Shun adopted from others anything that was shan; concluding:

To adopt from others that which can be rendered productive (shan) is to help them be productive, and there is nothing more important to an exemplary person than helping others to be productive.

Something that is shan contributes itself productively to a greater whole. Such a whole can be considered an aesthetic achievement: that is, an integration of disparate elements in a manner both “beautiful” and “fitting” in a specific context. In this respect, shan dovetails with the notion of harmony (he), the normative measure that
underwrites associated humanity and appropriateness and renders the Confucian program coherent.

Harmony is the aim of the Confucian. It entails the achievement of an optimally functioning, optimally rich order within a concrete situation, one that most fully expresses the worth of its particular constituents. Harmony can be measured according to how well it promotes that which is most particular about what is harmonized.\(^4\) Harmony is best illustrated through its association with soup. The "Book of Songs" (Shijing) and the "Documents" (Shujing) provide evidence of this association,\(^4\) but the Zuozhuan does so most vividly:

Harmony is similar to soup. Soup is made by adding various kinds of seasoning to water and then cooking fish and meat in it. One mixes them all together and adjusts the flavor by adding whatever is deficient and reducing whatever is in excess. It is only by mixing together ingredients of different flavors that one is able to create a balanced, harmonized taste.\(^5\)

The harmony of flavorful soup is constituted by its ratio of ingredients: not too much salt, not too much cabbage - just right. The result is a good pot of soup. The harmony of the soup is measured by the degree to which it succeeds in incorporating its particular ingredients in a productive way. Black pepper is wonderful in soup, but one does not therefore add all the black pepper at one's disposal. That would disrupt the contributions of the other ingredients and result in disharmony. The more harmonious a recipe is, the better its ingredients are allowed to express their particular worth through that recipe.

Confucius says that when a state is in harmony, "population is not an issue."\(^6\) If people can find meaningful, productive "identities" (fen) in a particular state, underpopulation will not be a concern. Likewise, if that state successfully incorporates the contribution of each of its various members, overpopulation will not be a problem either. A harmonious political order is one that incorporates its
 constituents such that each one’s particular qualities appreciate by virtue of the order, just as the quality of a peppercorn is accentuated in a spoonful of good soup.

For Confucians, harmony is a good; there is no gainsaying this. Harmony itself has worth. It is the value added in an achievement of increased togetherness. Of significance to the rejection of Mozi’s doctrine of impartial concern is the fact that, according a Confucian, the goal of forging productive togetherness is not furthered by reducing what is different to what is the same (tong). The goal instead is to achieve a novel order that accentuates the distinct characteristics of each and every constituent. In the “Sayings of the States” (Guoyu) the preference for harmony over sameness is expressed in the following terms: “harmony produces something new, sameness does not produce anything new.” Confucius also warns against resorting to a mundane sameness over harmony. Confucians pursue the antithesis of uniformity: the idea is to create soup, not gruel. The Confucian attitude towards the preference for sameness (tong) over harmony is reflected in a cognate term, “stupidity” (tong): a trait among some that Confucius claims “not to understand.”

Harmony entails both the achievement of a good (shan) order and the satisfaction of meaningful participation in that order. Soup is one illustration of this notion, and family and music making are two others. The song, “Dried Leaves” in the “Book of Songs” (Shijing) depicts both music making and family in terms of harmony:

Oh uncles, oh uncles. Lead in the singing.
Young men join in the harmony (he).

Oh uncles, oh uncles. Lead in the singing.
Young men bring it to a close.

The continuity of a family, like that of a song, is an aesthetic continuity that emerges discursively over the process of blending unique voices into a coherent whole. It is
said of Confucius that before singing in a group he would always ask to hear the song again before joining in. In this instance, the satisfaction of productively contributing oneself to a harmony in progress is measured against the shame of disrupting something that was otherwise going well (shan). Participation in a harmony entails distinguishing oneself in a productive, meaningful way. This is important in a family just as in a musical ensemble.

John Dewey surmises that it is "the deepest urge of every human being to feel that he does count for something with other human beings and receives recognition from them as counting for something." This deep, human urge is what recommends the Confucian program. What Confucians have to offer is the satisfaction of having a distinct, meaningful identity or share (fen) in a social environment patterned through ritual form, expressed in associated humanity, and generative of appropriate conduct. In substituting Confucian virtues for the Mohist standard of benefit, Mencius is recommending the recovery of harmony as a normative measure.

In the Analects, Master You identifies the achievement of harmony as the most valuable function of ritual; however, he goes on to warn that in troubled times achieving an effete harmony for its own sake is not going to work. Mozi lived in troubled times, and Master You would no doubt find his critique of the Ruists particularly damning:

The Ruists corrupt people with their elaborate rituals and music and deceive their parents with their lengthy mourning and pretended grief. They propose inert conditions, ignore poverty, and position themselves arrogantly. They turn their backs on what is fundamental, avoid work, and find contentment in idleness and pride...
When better people laugh at them, they respond in anger, "What do you fools know about being Confucian?"

If there is merit to Mozi's account, then the Confucians of his day were failing to live up to the normative measure of harmony. Particularly damning is the accusation
that the three-year mourning period had become a hollow convention. Confucius well understood that the danger of a ritual-based society was the imbalance of form over function. The point of ritual is not merely in its form: "In talking time and again about ritual propriety, how can I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk?" The point of ritual is to effect a harmonious social order that delineates, supports, and ennobles the human experience. If the Ru were failing at this, then they were failing to be good Confucians.

Considering others and expressing genuine emotion are at the core of Confucianism. The "one thread" of the Confucian course (dao) is to cultivate a disposition that "puts oneself in another's place" (shu) and "gives one's all" (zhong) to the ritual forms that express one's person. If this thread is severed in the Confucians of Mozi's day, then his popularity is not surprising. The Mohist course attempts to effect moral and social order by appeal to a doctrine based on a normative standard of benefit. Mozi's remedy for the social ills of his day is creditable. Mencius' counter-response to both the form and the content of the Mohist remedy, however, is consistent with the alternative normative measure that consistently guides the Confucian project. In seeking to effect moral and social order, Mencius does what the measure of harmony entails; he returns to the primary ingredients. He begins with the family, the context within which one most readily contributes oneself, and seeks to reestablish moral and social order from there.

Family as the Root

As argued in chapter two, Mencius maintains that personal growth is only genuinely effected when feelings are well-rooted (ben). Mencius understands ben in the same manner as the author of the "Great Learning" (Daxue). Both are expressly concerned with the roots of well-ordered empires, states, families, and persons. In both the Mencius and the "Great Learning," the root of social, political, and familial order is always the well-ordered person (shen) from whom that order emerges and in
Mencius is recommending the establishment of order without recourse to stipulated "doctrines" (yans) of the good. Good moral and social order emerges instead from the concretely felt transactions among particular, constituent elements making of a moral and social world.

For the Confucian, ordering a world is not an exercise in putting a doctrine into practice. Instead, a world is established through the patterns of deference that emerge through associated living (ren) itself. Hence the locus and root metaphor of social order is the family (jia); for it is in the family that the feeling of deference within associated life initially emerges. The instructions that Eyin gives the new king Tang of Shang in the Documents illustrates how social order is initiated in the Confucian world:

To establish concern (ai), have affection for your intimates (qin). To establish deference, have respect for your elders. The process commences with the family and state, and consummates with the entire empire.

The appeal to family feeling in effecting order on a broader, sociopolitical scale (cheng) finds expression in the Analects:

Someone asked Confucius, "Why are you not employed in effecting sociopolitical order (cheng)?" The Master replied, "The Documents says: ‘Merely in being filial (xiao) with your parents and being amicable with your brothers is to carry out the work of effecting sociopolitical order (cheng).’ In doing this I am effecting sociopolitical order. Why must I be ‘employed’ in effecting sociopolitical order?"

Mencius, like other Confucians, regards family as the native soil from which a productive social, political, and moral order grows. As a corollary, the Mencian notion of personal cultivation entails that feeling remain rooted in that soil;
accordingly, family affection (qin) becomes particularly important to one’s moral development.

The most sunken root of moral development is something Mencius considers unlearned (buxue): that is, the natural affection that a child has for her parents. It is from here that all moral order extends (da). Mencius explains:

What people are able to do without learning is what they can truly do; what they can realize without having to think about it is what they truly come to realize. There are no young children who do not realize a love for their parents, and when they grow up, none will fail to realize a respect for their elder brothers. Loving one’s parent is associated humanity (ren), and loving one’s elders is appropriateness (yi). All that remains is to extend (da) this to the whole world.68

The Mencian position on the root of moral development is echoed in the “Classic of Filial Piety” (Xiaoqing). In this text, the unqualified fact of physical inheritance is held to engender the incipient affection that a child has for his parents. This instinctive affection grows into a sense of social responsibility, and culminates in the full-fledged person. Explaining to Zengzi what enabled the ancients to bring about social harmony (he), Confucius submits:

It was filial piety, the root (ben) of character (de) and the source from which instruction (jiao) emerges. Sit down, and I will explain for you. Of a person’s body, every speck of hair and molecule of skin is received from the parents. One would never presume to cause them harm; this is the commencement of filial piety. To establish one’s person by proceeding on the most productive course and to have one’s reputation celebrated by future generations, bringing honor to one’s parents; this is the conclusion of filial piety. It commences with service to family members, proceeds through service to the ruler, and concludes in the establishment of one’s person.69

The establishment of one’s person (shen) commences with filial piety; and this begins with unadulterated affection of child for parent. The root of moral development, for
Mencius as well as for the author of the “Classic of Filial Piety,” is a form of spontaneous feeling indicative of the earliest stages of life. Mencius maintains that a person of magnitude (da) never loses this child-like quality of feeling (xin).\textsuperscript{70} In the well-developed moral person, the root of family affection and the spontaneous form of feeling such affection represents are continually preserved.

The Mencian position on moral cultivation is reinforced in the “Two Roots or One” exchange with Yizhi.\textsuperscript{71} Yizhi is a proponent of the Mohist doctrine of impartial concern; hence, he endorses the notion that there should be no gradation in one’s concern (ai) for other people. Yizhi wishes to concede, however, that the principle of impartial concern emerges initially from family affection (shiyouqinshi).\textsuperscript{72} Mencius, in turn, accuses Yizhi of positing “two roots” (erben), whereas, according to Mencius, “tian produces things with only one root (yiben).”

That tian produces things with only one root simply means that the emergence and maturation of any order takes place in a specific location or context. This context is the place from which its nourishment comes forth. To remove an emergent event from its context is to immediately devitalize it. What is deemed fundamental to any maturing process is the root that initiates and sustains its development. Just as sociopolitical order (cheng) is an achievement rooted in concrete relationships, moral order is an achievement rooted in the concrete feeling (xin) of family affection (qi).

For the process of moral growth to flourish, feeling as root must be maintained (cun). Moral development, like any emergent growth, must remain grounded where its initial nourishment is elicited: in this case, in the family. To uproot an emergent order from its source is to instantly devitalize its growth and endanger its very development. As long as the family context remains secure and nourishing, and adverse circumstances do not intervene, what grows therefrom will reach its optimal trajectory. Such development is always site-specific. Just as it is difficult to replant a thriving tree, it is difficult to abstract and relocate the moral
qualities of a developing person since these qualities emerge through the particular affection (qin) of real families; nowhere else.

In the episode with Yizhi, Mencius is saying that moral sensibilities cannot be rooted twice: once in one's family, and once again in the principle of impartial concern. Human moral sensibilities can have only "one root" or context, and that is the family. The fact that one loves one's own nephew more than a neighbor's child is presented as empirical evidence that human concern is fundamentally rooted in the family and not elsewhere. Affection (ai) comes out from (you) one's family not only initially (shi), as Yizhi concedes, but fundamentally (ben) as well. Hence, while one's interests and affections expand over the course of a lifetime, one will not lose special concern for one's family if he or she remains well grounded. Accordingly, Mencius twice lauds Shun for having been fifty years old and still devoted to his parents.73

Being rooted in affection for one's family and in deference to one's elders both initially and over the course of a lifetime is absolutely central to Mencius' moral thinking.74 When Mencius says that each person is able to become a Shun, he is saying that the sage's "most productive course" (dao) is one that can be cultivated in one's native context through filiality (xiao) and fraternity (di) alone.75 In other words, there are no abstract principles or doctrines that inform one's moral development outside of the context from which its incipient nourishment came forth. It is filiality and fraternity at home, and nothing else, that brings human virtues to fruition (shi).76

As Mencius says:

Serving one's parent is bringing associated humanity to fruition. Respecting one's elder brothers is bringing appropriateness to fruition. Understanding the two and not leaving them is bringing wisdom to fruition. Ordering and embellishing the two is bringing ritual propriety to fruition. Finding joy in and delighting in the two is bringing enjoyment of music (yue) to fruition.77
Mencius considers the Confucian virtues to be the fruit of one's particular family relationships. Hence, no stipulated order is introduced to define the emergence of these virtues "outside" (wai) the context in which one is most intimately involved.

Confucius states explicitly that one's associated humanity is rooted in one's family relationships:

Exemplary persons concentrate on the root; the root having been established, the most productive course will grow therefrom. As for one's filial and fraternal responsibility, this is surely the root of one's associated humanity.78

Characteristically, Mencius employs botanical imagery to emphasize the notion that associated humanity is something grown, not given:

The five grains are the most beautiful of plants. Yet, if they are not allowed to ripen they are worse than the wild varieties. As for associated humanity, the point is also to see that it ripens.79

The manner in which one's immediate family relations ripen into a broader sense of associated humanity is bound to be unique in every case. Shun being the model, one remains rooted in one's own circumstances.80 Shun's moral growth came not by leapfrogging over his family to embrace some doctrine, nor were his affections attributable to the operations of some abstract principle in his heart. Instead, he extended the feelings that located him in his particular context and thereby became a Shun. Mencius stresses that there is nothing special about Shun.81 Everyone can become an exemplary person (junzi) within his or her own context, and chart the "most productive course" (dao) by consummating him or herself (zide).82 So rather than consult the pedagogues of doctrine, Mencius instructs one to go home, and "you will have many teachers."83
Family and Extension

While teachers are found at home, the type of moral education one receives from one's family differs considerably from what might normally be understood as moral instruction. In fact, Mencius suggests that the home is no venue for instruction (jiao) at all:

Gongsun Chou asked, "Why does an exemplary person not instruct (jiao) his own children?" Mencius replied, "That arrangement won't work. An instructor must resort to correction; and when that doesn't work, one ends up losing one's temper. When this happens, father and son will hurt one another: 'You instruct me by correction, but you yourself are not correct.' In this way father and son hurt one another. For father and son to hurt one another is unproductive. In ancient times, people instructed one another's sons. Father and son should not demand goodness (shan) from one another. To do so only estranges them. There is nothing worse than estrangement between father and son."84

In a Confucian world, the demand made upon instructors that they "live up to their word" (xin) is properly reserved for friends (you) rather than family members. Confucius establishes the relationship between living up to one's word and friendship on numerous occasions.85 The friends one keeps become one's moral instructors by default; accordingly, Confucius advises one to retain as friends only those who reinforce the level of one's own conduct.86 As for family members, it is the preservation of loving affection that is paramount. While one may gently remonstrate (jian) with one's parents, the point is to maintain the integrity of the intimate relationship:

In serving your parents, remonstrate with them gently. Upon seeing that they do not follow your suggestions, remain respectful and do not behave otherwise. However unbearable, have no resentment.85
Moral disapprobation does not belong in the family. As Mencius cautions, "it is the way (dao) of friends to demand goodness (shan) from each other; for a father and son to do so will seriously compromise the love between them."81

Mencius' concern with shielding family relationships from moral remonstrance reflects an important dimension of his philosophy. Just as moral sensibilities are rooted in the "spring-fed" sources of feeling and family affection rather than hard-and-fast doctrine, the vicissitudes of integral relationships will trump social rules or mores if the latter are too stringent to accommodate the emergent demands of associated living. One aspect of the botanical model that has yet to be fully exploited is the considerable suppleness it entails. Stipulated patterns of development or conduct devitalize the life process (sheng).80 The flexibility that is required for sustained growth entails being rooted in a fluid source and adapting to demands in an ever-changing environment. To surrender either root or pliancy jeopardizes the extendibility (da) of growth. Since moral sensibilities are both "rooted" in and "extended" from the family, these relationships in particular must be protected from the suffocation of rules and standards. Hence, when Confucius is told of a "true" (zhen) person from a neighboring village who turned his father over to the authorities for stealing a sheep, he replies that in his village a "true" son would cover for his father.82 Again, nothing should be done to compromise the family relationship.83

The care with which Mencius precludes "instruction" (jiao) from family life reflects his interest in the evolving phraseology of education. He explains that "learning" (xue) in the Xia dynasty fell under the rubric of "instruction" (jiao); in the Yin, it was "archery" (xu); and in the Zhou, "nourishment" (yang). Each of these, he explains, serves to elucidate (ming) human relationships (renlun).82 Mencius appears, however, to understand instruction to mean a more disciplined program of moral reproach and correction. His reluctance to relegate it to the home might be explained in part by his conviction that such instruction is the state's responsibility through the village school system.83 Mencius considers vigorous state support of
Mencius certainly does not consider formal instruction to be among his own vocations, as he says:

There are many methods of instruction (jiao). My disdain with offering instruction is itself one way of offering instruction.⁹⁶

Turning to what takes place within the home, Mencius uses not the language of instruction but rather, the language of nourishment (yang):

Those who are on the mark nourish (yang) those who are not. Those who are capable nourish those who are not. This is why people are glad to have good fathers and brothers.⁹⁶

Employing the language of nourishment in this context is consistent with the belief that moral education is a process of growth integrally rooted in the family.⁹⁷

As the family nourishes the growth of one’s person (shen), one must not only maintain the root of affection for one’s parents, but also monitor one’s personal character as it extends beyond that affection. Character can be lost (shi) along the way. As Mencius says:

What is the most important thing to take care of? Parental affection (qing). What is the most important thing to monitor? Character (shen). I have heard of people not losing their character and taking care of parental affection, but I have not heard of people who have lost their character being able to do so. There are many things to take care of, but parental affection is the most fundamental (ben). There are many things to monitor, but character is the most fundamental.⁹⁶

As one’s personal character takes shape beyond the unlearned affection of early childhood, it is possible to lose the root of its moral growth. This root must be maintained as one extends one’s natural affections beyond the family realm.
The notion of "extension" is an important one in the Mencius and is reflected in a number of ways. Among the terms Mencius employs in his presentation is the term tuī, which means "to push" or "to extend." The extension of one's sensibilities entails the growth of a disposition that registers concern within various realms of felt transaction, including both the human and the non-human worlds. While tutoring King Xuan on becoming kingly, Mencius notes that he was once disposed to grudge or show concern (ai) for an ox being led to sacrificial slaughter. In aspiring to true kingship, all that remains is for Xuan to extend this kindness (tuien) by making his feeling reach (ji) beyond those parameters. The notion that concern has "reach" underscores the fact that concern is distributed concentrically and to an evolving extent. Mencius says that it is persons of associated humanity who extend the reach (ji) of their concern from those they care for to those they do not.

Mencius appeals to the fact that King Xuan could not bear (ren) to see the suffering of the ox. Mencius contends that every person has that which he or she cannot bear. The development of moral character involves "drawing out" or "extending" (da) the feelings that attend the spontaneous revulsion toward that which one cannot bear. Mencius explains:

Everyone has things they cannot bear. To extend (da) this revulsion into the realm of what they can bear is associated humanity. Everyone has things they are unwilling to do. To extend this aversion into the realm of what they are willing to do is appropriateness. If a person is able to bring to full expression (chong) the feeling (xin) of aversion towards injuring others, there will be an overabundance of associated humanity. If a person can bring to full expression the feeling of contempt for boring holes and scaling walls, there will be an overabundance of appropriateness.

To understand Mencius' point it is important here to retain the botanical model. The term da suggests "breaking through" as when grains sprout from the earth. Mencius is not talking about "applying" one's feeling pan-contextually as one might a "technical" rule or principle. The extension of feeling is an integral expression of
the growth of one’s disposition (xing). This growth is registered not as the mental affirmation and application of a rule or doctrine, as morality is for Mozi, but rather as the emergence of auto-generative, psychosomatic reactions within a widening realm of felt experience.

Mencius suggests that such spontaneous reactions historically gave rise to customs and behaviors later formalized into articles of ritual propriety. He offers burial rites as an example:

One would presume that in past generations there were instances of people not burying their parents. When parents died, they were tossed in the gullies. One day their children passed by their bodies, eaten away by wild animals and devoured by insects. The children broke into a sweat and turned away, unable to bear the sight. This sweat was not merely sweat for others to see; instead it broke through from their feelings (zhongxinda), manifesting itself in their faces and eyes. They immediately went home for baskets and spades and covered their parents over. It was genuinely (cheng) right for them to cover the bodies of their parents over; hence, for filial children and those of associated humanity to do likewise must be the most productive course. 106

The extension of moral sentiment entails a concomitant disposition to spontaneously behave in a certain way. One becomes disposed to behave in ways commensurate with the enlargement of one’s sensibilities as one encounters in the world that which he or she cannot bear. For Mencius, this is the most “genuinely integrated” (cheng) form of moral behavior. 107 In chapter five, the emergence of proper burial rites for parents will be used to illustrate the well-integrated growth of human experience more generally.

Burton Watson suggests that Mohist philosophy “held little attraction for the men of an urbane and aesthetic-minded society.” 108 Watson’s appraisal might be better formulated by considering what it means to be aesthetically minded in a Chinese world. Being so minded involves eschewing external principles in the construal of order in favor of focusing on the particularity of an order as it emerges.
from its own set of factors or constituents. In keeping with the normative measure of harmony, the aestheticism operative here is one sensitive to the emergence of orders that are intrinsically fitting (yi) rather than coercively imposed. The growth of an empire, state, family, or person must proceed from the root soil. The courses of such orders emerge spontaneously from what is so-of-itself (ziran). Order is not forced when feeling is its root. As the “Classic of Filial Piety” says, to govern the emergence of social order by maintaining its root in family feeling is to be uncoercive: “effective without being strict.”

Feeling is the root of all human virtue for Mencius. Human virtue emerges (you) as the fruit of concrete, felt experiences; it does not emerge from anything outside of human experience. As Mencius says:

Associated humanity, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom do not emerge from the outside (wai) to refine us. They are us (woye).

Accordingly, Mencius disapproves of the kind of practical reason suggested in the “technical” Mohist ethic. In an allusion to the uniquely Mohist distinction between theory and practice, Mencius states that sagely morality is not evaluated in such terms:

Shun was clear (ming) on the basic things and he understood human relationships. His associated humanity and appropriateness emerged (you) in due course; he did not put associated humanity and appropriateness into practice (xing).

Appropriateness and ritual propriety are likened to the road (lu) and the door (men), respectively, wherefrom the virtues of the exemplary person emerge (you) and come out (chu). There is no outside (wai) source that serves as a universal “standard” (fa); instead, there are only exemplary human “models” (fa). Mencius puts it
succinctly: "Ritual propriety and appropriateness emerge by coming out of the person of quality" (liyiyouxianzhechu).\textsuperscript{115}

In lauding the achievements of Shun, Mencius alludes to the Songs: "Ever filial, his filial piety made him a pattern to imitate (ze)."\textsuperscript{116} In the case of Shun, it was the preservation of family affection and filial piety that facilitated the emergence of his moral person. Such persons emerge to inspire others to cultivate their own persons within their own family contexts. The sage serving as model for the moral development of others does more to inspire that development than do doctrines. As Mencius reflects:

When Confucius ascended the Eastern Mountain, he felt that his state of Lu was small. When he ascended Mount Tai, he felt that the empire itself was small. Likewise, for one who has seen the ocean, it is difficult to appreciate mere water; and for someone who has been around a sage, it is difficult to appreciate doctrines (yan).\textsuperscript{117}

Mozi also appeals to the sage as an exemplar of conduct, yet the morality (yi) of the sage is ultimately the expression of a universal standard (fa) located "outside" everyday experience:

If the kings, ministers, and exemplary persons of the world really wish to pursue the most productive course (dao) in benefiting the people, ascertaining the root of associated humanity and appropriateness is fundamental. The intent of tian must be accorded with (shun). To accord with the intent of tian is the standard of morality (yi).\textsuperscript{118}

Such top-down moral thinking is anathema to the aesthetic sensibilities of Confucians and the antithesis of the normative measure of harmony. The Mohist orientation lends itself to theorizing the proper level of concern (ai) one ought to feel. This is based not on the spontaneous growth of one's moral sensibilities, but rather on a standard rationally affirmed.
1 Mencius 2A: 2
2 See: Zhongyong 25, passim.
3 Page numbers.
4 Daodejing 18, 19. The Zhujianlaozi (Bamboo Strip Laozi) unearthed at Guodian is free of these overt Confucian terms in its version of chapter 19. This calls into question the degree of anti-Confucian sentiment in the Zhujianlaozi. Robert G. Henricks discusses the implications of the Guodian substitutions in his study of the strips. See: Henricks (2000) pp. 12-15. Henricks notes that the Guodian collection is largely made up of Confucian materials, so perhaps the text was cleansed for a Confucian readership. His own conclusion is that Zhujianlaozi chapter 19 is indeed “anti-Confucian” in tone but not yet “anti-Mencian” in content. This would further suggest that the Guodian writings pre-date the Mencius.
6 Analects 2.3
7 Liji Book 26.
8 The case of the Confucian Xunzi is more complex. Clearly, distrust in the “spontaneous” tendencies of people would incline one more toward the “technical” side of the fault line. Xunzi distrusts human tendencies; accordingly, he transforms ritual into a more instrumental notion. Ritual for Mencius and Confucius, however, is not instrumental as a “means to an end.” This will be argued in chapter four. It should be noted that technical-leaning Xunzi was the teacher of Hanfeizi, the most proficient and influential exponent of Legalism in the classical period.
9 Mencius 4B: 26.
10 There are various interpretations of the “five punishments,” but the common set are tattooing, cutting off the nose, cutting off the feet, castration, and death. Graham has an interesting discussion of the term fa in the Legalist tradition. See: Graham (1989) pp. 273-278.
11 Even as Mozi speaks of the sages as exemplars of what is right (yi), it is always with reference to their embodiment of the “standard” (fa) of Heaven (tian), which Mozi calls “the clearest (ming) standard in the world.” See: Mozi Bk. 26.
12 See: Mencius 2A: 1, where King Wen is a “model” (fa). In Mencius 3A: 3, the ruler who has robust “human relationships” (renlun) will be a “model” (fa) and tutor to an upcoming king. In Mencius 4A: 1, rulers are admonished to leave a “model” (fa) for posterity by cultivating their personal characters. In Mencius 4A: 2, Yao and Shun are “models” (fa), as they are in Mencius 7B: 33.
There is only one remaining occurrence of fa in the Mencius, and it pertains to
“law.” In Mencius 6B: 15, Mencius suggests that a state without “legal families”
(fajia), or perhaps “legal councillors,” is sure to fall. Fajia are grouped with
stimulating scholar-officials (shi) and outside military adversaries as impetuses to
toughen the ruler’s countenance and challenge his resolve.

13 Mencius 7B: 37 defines the “way” (dao) of Yao and Shun as a “norm” (jing), and
asserts that once the norm is established, it will arouse (xing) common people (ming).

14 For more on Mozi’s standards of evidence see: Graham (1989) p. 36-41.

15 Mozi 46.

16 Mozi’s utilitarianism does not elaborate on the criteria for “benefit” (li). As A.C.
Graham observes, “this is a utilitarianism that never raises the question, ‘Useful for
what?’” See: Graham (1989) pg. 40. There is no equation of benefit with either
pleasure or happiness. As Chad Hansen notes, Mozi “takes it for granted that we
obviously know what benefiting people is.” See: Hansen (1992) pg. 117. Mozi cites as
support for this standard (fa) the impartiality of “Heaven” (tian) itself. He claims
that tian benefits “each without distinction” (jian); so in following the standard of
benefit, one accords with the way of tian. The argument he makes that tian concerns
itself with the benefit of humankind amounts to an argument by design and is
circular. In Mozi 27, he claims that tian set forth the sun and moon, the seasons, the
grains, and so on, to ensure the comfort and prosperity of the human race. The
evidence for this, it would seem, is the comfort and prosperity of the human race.

17 Mozi 17-19 passim, and 20-22 passim, respectively.

18 Mozi 6 passim, and 8-10 passim, respectively.

19 Mozi 23-25 passim, and 32-34 passim, respectively.

20 Mozi 29-31 passim.

21 Mozi 35-37, passim.

22 Mozi 39 passim.

23 Confucians consider family affection and deference to superior character to give

24 Mozi 39.


26 Why else would one not entrust them to the partial caretaker?

27 The idea that one’s behavior towards the families of others conditions the well
being of one’s own dawns on Mencius, too. As recorded in Mencius 7B: 7:

Mencius said, “It has recently occurred to me how serious it is to kill the
intimates of another person. If you kill a person’s father, that person will kill
your father; if you kill a person's son, that person will kill your son. While
this is not to kill them yourself, it is only a step removed."

28 Mozi, Bk. 47.
29 Mencius 7B: 30; cf. 7B: 26.
30 Mencius 1A: 1. See also Mencius 6B: 4. Here too ren and yi are presented as an
alternative to li.
32 One might ask if Mencius is fair to Mozi in doing so. It does appear that in Mozi's
argument for "impartial concern" there is an appeal to self-interest underlying this
otherwise philanthropic doctrine. On the other hand, to reduce Mozi's broader
interest in social welfare to motivations of self-interest, in my estimation, leaves Mozi
short-changed. The issue really hinges on Mencius' insistence that moral motivation
arise not from "technical" calculations but rather from the "spontaneous" inclinations
of a genuine disposition. This idea is further developed below.
33 Mencius 7A: 25.
34 Graham (1989) pg. 41.
40 Mencius 7B: 25. This is what Graham calls a "loose" definition. See: Graham (1989)
pp. 146-147.
41 Cf. Analects 3.25 where music is discussed in terms of beauty (mei) and goodness
shan.
43 David L. Hall is perhaps the thinker on Chinese philosophy who is most sensitive
to particularity in the aesthetic order. He writes, "The aesthetic perspective is one
which concentrates, no matter how extensive the context, upon the harmony of
44 In the Songs, the harmonious soup is that which is "carefully prepared and
balanced (ping)." See: Legge (1994) v. 4, pg. 634. The Documents also describes soup
as he. See: Legge (1994) v. 3, pg. 260.
46 Analects 16.1.
47 Guoyu 16.
48 Analects 1.12. 13.23.
It is sung in praise of the relationship among brothers and pays homage to the harmony of family itself:

Dishes may be abundant. And wine consumed to the limit.
But when brothers are in attendance.
This is harmony, joy, and happiness.

Happy union of wife and children. It is the melody of lutes.
But when brothers are joined.
The harmony and joy are profound.

It is fitting (yi) to have a home and a family.
It is a joy to have a wife and children.
As soon as one considers it, it is just as soon the case.

Confucius says that exemplary persons are not mere vessels, meaning that they are not merely taking on the form of a ritual but actually expressing themselves through it. See: Analects 2:12 and 5.4. cf. Analects 3.4.

The term “Ruist” designates those who live a fully ritualized life in the spirit of Confucius, but in a manner that simply being a follower of Confucius does not convey. Robert Eno has developed this term in his work. See Eno (xx) pp. xx. The term “Confucian” might be substituted, but the group that Mozi targets in his chapter “Against Confucians” (feiri) are the Ruists (ru). See Mozi Bk. 39. In keeping with convention, I will regularly translate ru as “Confucian” unless context recommends otherwise.

Confucius says that exemplary persons are not mere vessels, meaning that they are not merely taking on the form of a ritual but actually expressing themselves through it. See: Analects 2:12 and 5.4. cf. Analects 3.4.

The “delimiting,” “supporting,” and “ennobling” functions of li are inspired by A.S. Cua. See: Cua (1989) pp. 209-235. In chapter five I treat in more detail the manner in which these functions work in a Mencian context.
Chad Hansen claims that the Confucian resistance to address standards (fa) reveals that they fail to understand normative theory when faced with it. He further asserts that the Confucian critique of the doctrine of impartial concern elides consideration of the standard of benefit that underwrites it. Hansen writes:

The Confucian tendency to focus on (the doctrine of impartial concern) instead of (the standard of benefit) reflects a characteristic Confucian confusion. Confucians systematically confuse moral psychology with normative ethics...

By focusing on (the doctrine of impartial concern) Confucian critics of Mozi shift the spotlight from normative ethics to descriptive sociology, where they feel on stronger grounds. They word the dispute in descriptive terms: “are humans naturally partial or naturally universal?” Confucians can certainly point to the natural family partiality of our emotions. They assume that in doing so they are refuting Mozi. In fact, this is simply to miss the point of normative theory. See: Hansen (1992) pg. 129.

As for the Confucian failure to focus on the Mohist standard of benefit, Mencius, at least, spotlights that in the very first exchange of his text, and elsewhere. On my reading, Mencius knows what he is doing in refuting the doctrine of impartial concern and he does not miss the point of normative theory in doing so. An argument can certainly be made that Mencius misrepresents the Mohist standard of “benefit” by identifying the term, as Confucius does, with self-interest. There is a normative dimension to Confucianism itself, however; Hansen does not, to my knowledge, closely consider the notion of harmony (he) in his work. In any case, the argument can be made that Mozi is not particularly strong at establishing the basis for a normative theory himself.

Accordingly, the translation of ben will here oscillate between “fundamental,” “root,” and “ground” in order to accommodate its seamless range of meaning. “Fundamental” in this context should not be confused with “inalienable,” for what is ben can certainly be lost (shi).

Compare Mencius 4A: 5, 4A: 12, and 4A: 19 with Daxue, ch. 1.


Aspects of the doctrine of impartial concern underwritten by the standard of benefit, such as utilitarianism, could be considered under the rubric of the “aesthetic” order of his work.
This is not Mozi's position, as I understand it. Mencius 5A: 1; 6B: 3. Cf. 4A: 28.

Mencius 4A: 11

Mencius 6B: 2

See: Karlsgren, GSR 398. It is important to maintain the growth metaphor in translating *shi*. *Shi* can also be understood more generically as "providing substance" to something. Its botanical associations, however, are well established. In a manner similar to the *Zuozhuan* and *Shujing*, Mencius uses *shi* elsewhere to refer to the "fruit" of a plum tree (Mencius 3B: 10). Human virtue, like fruit, is something grown. The family is the soil in which human virtue grows.


Analects 1.2

Mencius 6A: 19.

Shun's family life, as it turns out, was far from ideal. Shun was a common man who "rose from the fields" (Mencius 6B: 15). Shun rose to imperial power on Yao's recommendation, and, more importantly, by the propensity of *tian* and the people (Mencius 5B: 3). Shun's family objected, and he subsequently hid from them his royal marriage. Shun's father, who was blind, plotted against his son's life. Sending him out to repair a barn, the father removed the ladder and set the building on fire. Shun survived, only to have his brother make an attempt on his life. Shun was sent out to dredge a well, and his brother blocked the well over him. (Mencius 5A: 2). Despite these outrageous attempts on his life, Shun harbored no ill will against his brother (Mencius 5A: 3) nor against his parents (Mencius 5A: 4). Shun's narrative certainly makes his filial piety all the more remarkable. To modern ears, it is rather fantastic. This does not detract, however, from the ideal that Mencius locates in Shun. For a more detailed account of Shun's life, see: Lau (1970) pp. 225-227.

Mencius 4B: 32, 6B: 2.

Mencius 4B: 14.

Mencius 6B: 2.

Mencius 4A: 18. Mencius' claim that the ancients did not engage in the instruction (*jiao*) of family members is not consistently borne out in the literature. The "Great Learning" (*Daxue*) suggests that if one is unable to instruct one's own family (*jia*), then one is unable to instruct others. (*Daxue* 15. 1) Mencius removes instruction
from the home, and in doing so he is not precluding filial piety from the content of instruction. When King Xuan of Qi proposes shortening the period of mourning for one's parents, Mencius suggests that he be instructed (jiao) in filial and fraternal responsibility. (Mencius 7A: 39) The Mencian ideal, however, would be to have such sensibilities nourished by the unlearned feeling of family affection (qin). King Xuan has perhaps lost the "unlearned" root of his moral sensibilities; hence, he now requires such instruction. Mencius 7A: 40 provides a positive account of instruction (jiao), however, that does not include the elements of filial piety. Mencius says:

The exemplary person instructs in five ways. The first is by having a transforming influence like a timely rain. The second is by bringing about the culmination of efficacious virtue. The third is by helping to extend abilities. The fourth is by responding to questions. The fifth is by offering private assistance in refining gracefulness. These are the five ways in which the exemplary person offers instruction.

These five modes of instruction are apparently, according to Mencius, most effectively administered outside of the home.

86 Analects 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 5.26.
88 Analects 1.8.
87 Analects 4.18. Along these lines, we find a fuller treatment of remonstrance (jian) and filial restraint in the "Patterns of Family" (Neize) chapter of the Liji. See: Liji 12.15. However, in the Xiaojing, remonstrance in the form of "contention" (zheng) with respect to the behavior of one's father is endorsed. See: Xiaojing 4/15/3-7.
88 Mencius 4B: 30
89 Cf. Daodejing 76.
90 Analects 13.18.
91 This is endorsed with the aim of facilitating a more self-generative social order that remains rooted in the family and is thereby governed by shame. But what of the poor fellow who loses his sheep? The point is often made that classical Chinese thought does not supplement family-based order with a sufficiently clear notion of commonwealth. With this I agree. Chinese culture has traditionally been plagued by the consequences of this imbalance. Anyone familiar with China knows that "personal connections" (guanxi) trump any nominal standard or regulation. With China's ascension into the World Trade Organization, economic and legal restructuring is under way, and it is no surprise that these new, binding standards are everywhere in tension with "homegrown" corruption, nepotism, and graft. It is a deeply set problem. I believe that Confucianism is dynamic enough to generate a
stronger notion of commonwealth, and that it should. Mencius would caution that a genuine disposition toward the common good is not something that can be established by logical argument or enforced by rule of law; rather, it must evolve and grow from genuine feeling. This is the Mencian ideal. Mencius in this way, I believe, strongly supports "extending" concern (ai) towards others beyond the family.

92 Mencius 3A: 3.
93 Mencius 1A: 3.
94 Mencius 7A: 14.
95 Mencius 6B: 16.
96 Mencius 4B: 7.

Hall and Ames explore the notion of instruction (jiao) in the Zhongyong in a manner that elucidates an interesting dimension of this notion that also applies to the Mencius. Like in the Zhongyong, the Mencian notion of moral education, with a stress on extension, nourishment (yang), and the individualized nature of moral upbringing, captures the important etymological components of the English word "education". The word has two principal roots: educare and educere. Educare means “to cultivate, to rear, to bring up”; while educere means, “to evoke, to lead forth, to draw out.” Mencius’ notion of moral education is an educare in that it involves cultivation through relationships that provide nourishment for growth. Family ties furnish a stable, sustainable environment for moral development and continue to rear the moral individual as long as their integrity is maintained. The Mencian notion is also an educere in that the individual genuinely emerges into a moral world that he or she can advance by “extending” the sensibilities reared by his or her fundamental relationships. Both the formal and creative components of “education” are satisfied in the Mencian notion of moral learning. (Cf. Hall and Ames (2001) pp. 50-51, 66-67).

97 Mencius 4A: 19.
98 Mencius 1A: 7.

In discussing the King Xuan episode, Kwong-Loi Shun notes that there is some uncertainty over whether Mencius is encouraging the king to extend his actions or extend his concern (ai). Such ambiguity speaks to the fact that dispositions (xing) entail both feelings (xin) and the concomitant proclivity to act on those feelings. See: Shun (1997) pp. 143-144.

99 Mencius 7B: 1. Mozi, of course, advocates doing the same in his doctrine of impartial concern. The crucial difference is that Mencius endorses doing so not by accepting a doctrine, but rather by developing the disposition to do so.

100 The Mencian attitude towards “bearable” suffering in the non-human world is one that can be further reconstructed. He suggests that one can and ought to regulate the
extension of one's sensibilities towards animals. Allowing that once a living animal is seen one cannot bear to see it killed, and once its painful cries are heard one cannot bear to eat its meat, Mencius recommends that “the exemplary person stay away from the kitchen.” (Mencius 1A: 7) Mencius apparently feels that there is a proper measure of empathy that ought to be maintained toward animals, and over-exposure to their suffering would complicate that measure. In suggesting the proper parameters of one's graded sensibilities, Mencius locates one's proper feeling toward the non-human world:

Exemplary persons grudge and show concern (ai) for living things, but they do not enter into associated humanity with them. They enter into associated humanity with the people (ming), but they do not feel family affection (qin) for them. They feel family affection for their family members, but only associated humanity for the people (ren). They show associated humanity for the people, but are only sparing and concerned (ai) with living creatures. (Mencius 7A: 45)

One might challenge Mencius' prescription and still remain a Mencian. For instance, it is the prerogative of groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to bring the “unbearable” kitchens and slaughter houses into our living rooms with the aim of arousing our sensibilities and hence, changing our dispositions toward eating meat. If PETA is successful in their aspirations (zhi), the day will come when it is considered inhumane to treat animals as factory food. In chapter five, the relation between human aspiration (zhi) and the evolving “human way” (rendao) is discussed at greater length.

103 Cf. Mencius 3B: 3. “Boring holes and scaling walls” represents all forms of dishonest, illicit, or duplicitous behavior.

104 Mencius 7B: 31.

105 Karlgren (1957) pg. 86.

106 Mencius 3A: 5.

107 In this instance, we begin to see the development of cheng from its more vernacular meaning of “genuine” to its more philosophical meaning of “integration.”

108 Watson (1963) p. 13. It is commonly held that the Mohist movement arose from the lower echelons of society, from those without access to the remnant high culture of the Zhou, which the Confucians sought to revitalize. See: Graham (1989) p. 34.

109 See note xx.

110 Cf. Daodejing 25.

111 Xiaojing 2/9/28.
113 Mencius 4B: 19.
114 Mencius 5B: 7.
115 Mencius 1B: 16.
118 Mozi 27.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE HUMAN DISPOSITION

Relationships and Disposition

As suggested in chapter three, preserving the kind and quality of feeling generated in the family and expressed through filial piety (xiao) is profoundly important in the Confucian world. Confucius considers filial piety to be the root from which the Confucian way (dao) emerges. Similarly, the *Classic of Filial Piety*, which asserts that the way of parent and child is the “natural disposition” (tianxing) of the human experience, considers filial piety to be the root of excellence in character and the source of all Confucian teaching. In the *Zhongyong*, tributes to great Confucian exemplars commence in recognition of their filial piety. And with the ascendancy of Confucianism in the Han, the epitaph xiao is added to the posthumous title of every emperor. The importance of family in this tradition cannot be overstated. In a Confucian world, all qualitatively human relationships (renlun) are derivations of family relationships. In the absence of family, one has little claim on the designation “human.”

Mencius is both heir and progenitor to this profoundly family-centric way of thinking. For Mencius, as we have seen, the cultivation of character is a process rooted in feelings of family affection. It is also family affection that serves as a necessary condition in qualifying one as human. On this point, Mencius is unequivocal: “if one is not engaged (de) in family affection, one cannot be called human (ren).” It is plausible that the Mencian notion of human disposition (renxing) is a corollary to this assertion. For
Mencius, the giving and receiving of family affection is an essential component of the human experience: it is from associated living in the family that all qualitatively "human" sensibilities stem. Being born into a caring family "disposes" one towards feelings of family affection; and it is the proclivity of this initial, "human" disposition to "extend" one's family-borne sensibilities into the world and become increasingly "human" along Confucian lines.

This interpretation of human disposition raises a much-debated question in Mencian studies. Is the Mencian notion genetic or cultural? Mencius describes family affection as something "unlearned" (buxue), and maintains that the "capacity" (cai) to become human is something "conferred by tian." Interpreted genetically, these statements are considered as evidence of Mencius' belief in innate, human characteristics biologically given prior to any social conditioning or contact. Such a reading, however, would be in tension with the assumptions of a qi cosmology. In a qi cosmology, formation and function are inseparable within the process of structured emergence, such that, as Tang Junyi puts it, dispositions (xing) "match up" with the on-going process of tian (tiandao). If we preserve the kind of transactional model that is more consistent with this cosmology, then social and cultural circumstances become factors in the shaping of "unlearned" responses "conferred" by tian. If structural emergence is understood as the process of "taking shape" within the layered patterns and processes that are tian, then the given conditions that sponsor emergence factor into emergent formations and their concomitant functions. Such an understanding would give more weight to the social and cultural aspects of the human disposition; and in addition to being more adequate to Warring Staes cosmology, better fit the account of human emergence that Mencius presents in his telling of the Chanxiang episode.

The Chanxiang episode involves Xuxing, an uncouth southerner from Chu and follower of the egalitarian, agrarian-based Shenneng ideal. Xuxing settled in Tang and began to attract local followers. One of these adherents was Chanxiang. Chanxiang had
formerly been educated under Chenliang, originally a southerner like Xuxing, although one who had come north to be educated in "the most productive course" (dao) established by the Confucians. Chanxiang, in transferring his allegiance from the refined, northern-educated Chenliang to the southerner, Xuxing, was abandoning the Confucian course and returning to an agrarian ideology associated with southerners.

Mencius, while arguing with Chanxiang over the merit of Shenneng ideology, volunteers a lesson in cultural history. He relates how, before Xie was appointed minister of education under Yao, the Chinese people existed only at the level of material subsistence. This, Mencius says, was "the most productive course (dao) that they had." He continues to relate how, "being well-fed and warmly-clothed but dwelling idle without education, they were 'close' (jin) to birds and beasts." Mencius explains that once Xie was appointed minister, he proceeded to teach the people "human relationships" (renlun): affection between father and son, appropriateness between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, respect of the old by the young, and faithfulness between friends. In the account given in the Documents, we learn that Xie's establishment of human relationships was initiated because, without them, people were "not intimate" (buqin). In Mencius' telling, it was Xie's establishment of the human relationships that enabled the Chinese people to "consummate themselves" (zide).

After recalling the historical establishment of human relationships, Mencius echoes Confucius' praise of Yao, adding that Yao patterned himself after (ze) tan in his accomplishments. In the Analects, Confucius' praise reads in part: "How great was Yao as ruler! How majestic his accomplishments, and how brilliant his cultural achievements!" Mencius is matter-of-fact about the superior achievements of Confucian-based Chinese civilization: "I've heard of Chinese civilization converting barbarians," he says, "but I've never heard of converting back to barbarian!" Mencius cannot accept the fact that Chanxiang would abandon Confucianism and follow the likes of Xuxing, a "twittering-tongued barbarian from the south, whose most productive course is not that of the
ancient kings." Mencius lodges his disapproval with a striking image: "I have heard of emerging from a dark ravine to settle in a lofty tree, but I've never heard of descending from a lofty tree to settle in a dark ravine."

Mencius' treatment of Chenxiang is telling. If a human disposition is something that Mencius considers "good" (shan), then in labeling Chenxiang's conversion back to "barbarian" ways "not good" (bushan), he is suggesting that, in abandoning the human relationships established by Xie, Chenxiang is less than human. That non-Confucian instruction fails to distinguish "human" experience and leaves people closer to animals is always Mencius' position. His main objection to the teachings of the Yangist and Mohist schools is that each undermines one of the human relationships that distinguish the Chinese from animals. He objects to Mohism on the basis that it fails to acknowledge fathers and to Yangism on the basis that it fails to acknowledge rulers; and "without rulers and fathers, we are animals." 18 Mencius' point throughout is that those who are not proceeding on the course established by Xie have lost their human dispositions. They are closer to animals.

The distinction between humans and animals is one Mencius describes as "slight" (xi). He explains that the common person loses this distinguishing feature while the exemplary person like Shun, who "has insight into human relationships," preserves it. 19 The five human relationships, which include the putatively "unlearned" feeling of family affection (qin), is that feature that distinguishes humans from birds and beasts. This distinguishing feature does not appear to be strictly genetic for Mencius; instead, it traces back historically to Xie's reforms, which under the wisdom of Yao were patterned after tian. The Chenxiang episode would suggest that the human disposition, if understood in terms of germinal, moral sensibilities rooted in one's family upbringing, is more a historical, genealogical inheritance than a genetic or biological one. 20

As Mencius sees it, people are born into a world in which institutions like family affection have a history. If the human disposition emerges with moral sensibilities and
habits shaped by such institutions, then the human disposition also has a history. And history is something always being made. If the sages, who are of the same sort (le) as any other person, can pattern themselves after tian and contribute to the extension of the human disposition, then any other person can as well. One is not only shaped by the institutions that one is born into; one can also contribute to the process of reshaping them. As Mencius says: "in building high, one takes advantage of existing hills." The person is both beneficiary and contributor to the structures established by one's predecessors. Just as one's disposition "extends" over the span of one's life (sheng), the collective, human experience, over time, can be "extended" by the work of sages. The work of the sage is not at an end. Mencius eagerly awaits the emergence of new sages, and considers their arrival "overdue." We can safely assume that, prior to the cultural achievements of Yao and Xie, Mencius considered people "close" to animals in disposition (xing), since the word that Mencius uses in this context, "close" (jin), is the word Confucius himself uses to define xing. Confucius says, "In disposition we are close (jin), and by habit and experience (xi) we are distanced." Confucius employs the language of proximity and distance in a manner reminiscent of an episode in the Documents involving Taijia, son and successor of Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty. Here too, disposition is how people are initially "close" and habit and experience is what introduces "distance."

The Documents relates that Yiyin, a minister to Taijia, decided to strategically relocate the palace of his wayward king in order to rehabilitate his ethical disposition (xing) which had been completely altered by poor ethical habits (xi). Yiyin declares:

Now this is inappropriate behavior, and by habit has become established as his disposition (xing). I cannot remain "close by" what I do not accord with. I will build a palace in Tong, where Taijia will be "intimately connected to" the former Kings. This instruction will prevent him from wandering astray in life.
Tiajia's bad habits lead him so far astray that he develops a completely new disposition, one out of accord with the disposition of those he was once in "close" proximity to. Yiyin's solution is to locate him even "closer" to the cultural and historical source of the disposition he left behind. Tiajia's moral disposition is treated as a cultural product rather than as anything genetic. Mencius is clearly fond of the Tiajia story. In recollecting it, he relates how Tiajia was successfully rehabilitated by the relocation initiated by Yiyin, and how the minister acted out of noble intent in banishing the king. Mencius himself prescribes a similar program for King Yen of Sung.

Read against the story of Tiajia, Confucius can be understood as saying that disposition is how "we" are close: an observation of the fact that groups having achieved some level of common practice and like-mindedness share certain tendencies and dispositions. Mencius suggests the same in his telling of the Chanxiang episode. Confucius, however, is not presenting a position on the "goodness" of a disposition, for beyond his brief observation of its relationship to habit, it is recorded that Confucius did not discuss the topic. From what Confucius does offer, we can surmise that he, like Mencius, is not presenting a strictly biological or genetic account of disposition. Confucius realizes that dispositions are culturally malleable: those who begin "close" in their culturally disposed tendencies may, like Tiajia, become distanced from one another through the undergoing of experience and the formation of habit.

In the Mozi, we see just how far groups of people diverge by virtue of their cultural habits. Mozi presents a series of ethnographies intended to illustrate the degree to and frequency with which habit (sh) replaces appropriate behavior (yi) and becomes customary (shu). Mozi's examples are intended to shock. East of Yue, people once chopped up and ate their first born sons in order to benefit their next born. South of Chu, there are a people who scrape the flesh off the bones of their dead parents, and once they have buried the bones, feel they have "completed the actions of filial offspring." Mozi calls into question the associated humanity of such people:
Leaders regard these customs as the affairs of governing state, and the people regard them as acceptable procedure; they are performed without cessation and adopted without discrimination or choice. Yet how could it be that they actually represent the most productive course with regards to associated humanity and appropriateness? What we have here are people instituting habitual practices and deeming appropriate their vulgar customs.\textsuperscript{32}

Mozi would have custom established on the basis of his utilitarian principle. While he never explicitly links the notion of custom (\textit{su}) to Confucian ritual (\textit{li}), he likely means to suggest that Confucian ritual is equally indiscriminate and established without utilitarian evaluation.\textsuperscript{33}

Mencius, however, is equally critical of people's tendency to behave indiscriminately and form habits (\textit{xì}) without reflection. As he says:

\begin{quote}
The multitudes do not understand what they practice, and form habits without their noticing it. Their entire persons emerge without any realization of the course (\textit{dào}) they are on.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

The Mencian prescription for this malady differs from that of the Mohist. Rather than guide social practice according to the normative standard of benefit (\textit{li}), Mencius proceeds in deference to appropriateness (\textit{yi}): the "fittingness" that calls to mind the normative measure of harmony (\textit{hé}). He stresses family affection and filial piety with the aim of eliciting moral, social, and political practices that correlate with the harmony of the family institution established by Xie. The identification of family affection with a qualitatively "human" existence is an endorsement of the Confucian way. The ancient sages, in establishing the five human relationships, began with family affection; and for Mencius, this has been the foundation of "human" experience ever since.
From Mencius' Confucian perspective, the family-borne disposition is morally and socially good: taking shape in family affection conditions an initial disposition the proclivity of which is to develop more robust human relationships (ren) and more refined moral sensibilities (yi). That such a human disposition does not reduce to biological functions: “eating and reproduction” (shise), for instance, is a point that Mencius wishes to make clear:

Gaozi said: “Disposition is the biological life process (sheng).”
Mencius said: “To say that disposition is the biological life process: is this like saying white is white?”
“Yes.”
“And the whiteness of white feathers is like the whiteness of white snow, and the whiteness of white snow is like the whiteness of white jade.”
“Yes.”
“Then is the disposition of a dog like the disposition of an ox, and the disposition of an ox like the disposition of a human?”

Kwong-Loi Shun's meticulous philosophical and linguistic analysis of this passage yields the following submission:

(Mencius) wanted to redirect attention to a way of viewing xing that does not emphasize the biological. Instead, as seen from his query that ended the debate, he viewed the xing of human beings as something that distinguishes them from other animals, rather than as biological tendencies common to all.

This distinguishing feature is cultural. It is “human relationships” that make “human” dispositions possible, not anything strictly biological. Before the advent of human relationships, all beings were more or less animals. Thanks to the family-related institutions established by Xie, becoming “human” is now a “capacity” that people have from birth. If one neglects the cultivation and extension of this capacity over the course
of one's life, then one is an animal. Confucians, remaining family-centric, identify themselves with the "human" side of the distinction and thus strive to maintain it. As Confucius says, "I cannot go congregating with birds and beasts; for if I am not a member in the human world, then who am I?" 9

The Human Disposition as Good

Mencius is recognized for his optimistic assertion that the human disposition is "productive" or "good" (shan). Confronted with alternative notions, he explains his position as follows:

As far as one's "emotional content" (qing) is concerned, one is capable of becoming good (shan). This is what I mean by "good." As for those who are unproductive (bushan), this is not the fault of their "capacity" (cai). 40

In coming to understand the Mencian position, we now benefit from a document recently unearthed at Guodian and given the title, Disposition Arises from Conditions (Xingzimingchu). It deals extensively with the notions of "emotional content" (qing) and disposition.

The first thing to note about Disposition Arises from Conditions is that it locates emotional content (qing) within a disposition (xing) not as an essential attribute, but as a product of experience. The text begins:

Generally, while people have a disposition (xing), their feelings (xin) have no fixed purposes (zhi). These wait upon things and events, and only then arise. They wait upon an inclination, and only then enter into action. They wait upon the formation of habit, and only then become fixed. The energies (qi) of pleasure, anger, grief, and sadness are a matter of disposition. When they come to be externally manifest, things and events have activated them. Dispositions arise
from conditions. Conditions are conferred by tian. The proper course (dao) has its beginning in emotional content (qing). Emotional content arises from a disposition. In the beginning stage, it is close to emotional content; and in the concluding stage, it is close to appropriateness. Those who understand emotional content are able to discharge it; those who understand appropriateness are able to incorporate it. Predilection itself is disposition. Likes and dislikes are a matter of things and events. Productiveness (shan) itself is disposition. Being productive or unproductive is a matter of the propensity of circumstances (shi).

In “Disposition Arises from Conditions,” disposition (xing) names the potential to shape predilections, purposes, and proclivities in transaction with things and events through actions and habits, and in relation to the propensity of circumstances. Apart from such doing and undergoing in the world, disposition (xing) and feeling (xin) are empty notions. They are “mute.” The text explains:

Generally, when dispositions are under consideration, things and events are activating them. Metal and stone have a sound, but if they are not struck they will not ring out. So, although people have dispositions and feelings, in the absence of things and events to activate them, they would not arise.

Dispositions can only be considered as embedded in the world. They can only be considered in transaction. They have no inherent “nature” that is formed prior to transactional engagement in the world. Once a process is engaged, an initial disposition obtains. This initial disposition is then “grown” over the course of experience. The text explains:

Generally, dispositions have things that agitate them, things that challenge them, things that cooperate with them, things that discipline them, things that produce them, things that nourish them, and things that grow them.
Generally, things and events agitate dispositions, inclinations challenge them, things already brought about cooperate with them, appropriateness disciplines them, the propensity of circumstance produces them, habits nourish them, and the process itself (dao) grows them.45

With Disposition Arises from Conditions in hand, little doubt remains that disposition (xing) is a dynamic, transactional, process-oriented notion in the Warring States period.

But what is "emotional content" in this text, and how does it assist us in understanding the Mencian notion of a "good" human disposition? As Disposition Arises from Conditions suggests, "emotional content arises from disposition." The presentation of pleasure, anger, grief, and sadness as qi energy configured in a disposition is consistent with our previous discussion of the transactional nature of feeling (xin) in chapter two. Qing as a neutral term appears to be the most inclusive manner by which to refer to the terminal result of the transactions that issue into these various emotional states. These transactions are conditioned by a disposition; hence, emotional content itself "arises" from a disposition. The question to be asked of Mencius can be framed as follows: what is the distinguishing "emotional content" (qing) that "arises" from a "human" disposition?

In Disposition Arises from Conditions, dispositions are presented in terms that resonate with the Mencius and other writings in the Si-Meng school: they arise from "conditions" (ming) that are "conferred by tian." This is to say that dispositions take shape within on-going processes, and "grow" over the course of adjustment to those processes. Just to be disposed is to have predilection; but the things and events that are experienced must be factored in before predilection becomes actual likes and dislikes. Similarly, just to be disposed is to have some degree of goodness (shan); but only when the propensity of a set of circumstances (shi) is factored in can a disposition become productive or unproductive. Mencius explains that as far as one's "emotional content" is concerned, one is capable of becoming good (shan). This, he says, is what he means by
“good.” With Disposition Arises from Conditions as our guide, we know better what to look for in filling out his position.

First, if Mencius is talking about an “emotional content,” he is also talking about a disposition that facilitates it. Second, if Mencius is talking about a disposition, he is talking about a set of conditions that sponsor it. Third, if Mencius is talking about a “good” disposition, he is talking about the propensity of the set of circumstances that make it so. In keeping with the causal framework of a qi cosmology, all four elements: “conditions” (ming), “disposition” (xing), “propensity” (shi), and “emotional content” (qing), work together, so we are not looking for disparate explanations. The family-borne “human” disposition is shaped by conditions (ming) that are established by the sages, and are to this extent “conferred by tian” in the Mencian framework. The family-borne “human” disposition is also conducive to what is good (shan) by virtue of the propensity (shi) of things as Mencius understands them. Hence, the “unlearned” feeling of family affection (qin), under these circumstances, would be the most likely candidate for the “emotional content” (qing) that Mencius has in mind.

Mencius does not use the term “emotional content” very often. The term “feeling” (xin) does most of its work. One important occurrence of “emotional content” is in the “Ox Mountain” passage. The passage can be understood within the framework of the botanical model, and helps us establish the link between “emotional content,” understood as family affection - the “root” of moral development, and the “capacity” (cai) that Mencius refers to in his description of the human disposition as “good.” Mencius says:

The trees on Ox Mountain are no longer beautiful. The mountain lies on the outskirts of a large state: its trees are chopped down with axes, so how can they become beautiful? Given a regular hiatus, and the nourishment of the rain and dew, there is no lack of new shoots emerging; but then the cattle and sheep come to graze upon the mountain. This is why the mountain looks so bald. Seeing
only its baldness, people think Ox Mountain never had any "wood stuff" (cai). But how can this be the disposition (xing) of a mountain?

And so with humans: how can they be without the feeling of associated humanity and appropriateness? The case of losing this good, fertile feeling is like that of denuding trees with the axe. When these are chopped day after day, how can they become beautiful? Even given a regular hiatus and the energies (qi) of a calm morning, the predilections that resemble closely (jin) those of humans become very few. What is done over the course of the day has a constricting effect and they perish. If this constriction takes place repeatedly, then even the energies (qi) of the night will not be enough to preserve these predilections. If the energies of the night are not enough to preserve them, then one is not far from an animal. When humans see such an animal, they will think that it never had capacity (cai). But how can this represent the emotional content (qing) of a human? Hence, anything that receives nourishment will grow; and anything deprived of nourishment will wither away. Confucius said, "Hold it and it is preserved, let it go and it perishes. It comes and goes at irregular periods and no one knows its direction." It is perhaps to feeling that he refers?

As the "Ox Mountain" passage suggests, the "capacity" to become human can be understood in botanical terms. The term "capacity" (cai) overlaps phonetically with the notion of "wood stuff" (cai), which is also understood as the "quality" or "disposition" of an organic material. Kwong-Loi Shun argues that the "capacity" to become human in the Mencius refers ultimately to the "four sprouts" (siduan) of human virtue. It has already been suggested, and will be further argued below, that these capacities are "rooted" in the family affection. Hence, just as the "wood stuff" of Ox Mountain is rooted in mountain soil, the disposition of which is to produce beautiful trees, the "capacity" to remain "close" to humans is rooted in family affection and its related states of feeling (xin), the disposition of which is to produce beautiful persons. We see once again, in the "Ox Mountain" passage, that it is daily "habit" that gradually overwhelms one's family-
borne disposition and results in behavioral tendencies that are no longer "close" to those that are considered distinctly human.

That developing one's human "capacity" along Confucian lines inflicts no violence upon the initial disposition of the human "wood stuff" is a point Mencius is keen to make in his debates with Gaozi:

Gaozi said: “Disposition is like the willow tree. Appropriateness is like a cup or bowl. To take a human disposition and make associated humanity and appropriateness is like making a cup or bowl from the willow tree.”

Mencius responded: “Can you make cups and bowls in accord with the disposition of the willow tree, or must you mutilate the willow tree in order to make cups and bowls? If you must mutilate the willow tree in order to make cups and bowls, then must you mutilate people in order to make them persons of associated humanity and appropriateness? In bringing disaster upon associated humanity and appropriateness, it will certainly be this doctrine (yan) of your that the world will be following.”

The family-borne "human" disposition is one that has a tendency toward Confucian development just as water tends to flow downward. One born in family affection need not be forced to create oneself in a Confucian direction.

There is another level of significance to the "Willow Tree" passage. In likening Confucian virtues to objects "made" from a resistant, raw material, Gaozi substitutes a production metaphor for the process-oriented botanical model. According to Mencius, such separation of ends from means is a property of doctrine (yan), and he does not allow Gaozi's "willow tree" example to pass without the derogatory classification of this approach to human realization as doctrinaire. The Yangists and Mohists are associated with doctrines that attempt to force upon human development some end-driven result
for the sake of (wei) some standard of benefit (li). Mencius rejects the imposition of fixed ends upon the creative process of human development along with any doctrine formulated to endorse them. He recommends not imposing anything on human development, and seeks instead to "bring about" only that which will emerge out of the human disposition's own natural proclivities. He explains his position as follows:

The world's doctrines (yan) about disposition (xing) are simply designed to bring something about (gu). Those who would bring something about consider benefit (li) to be fundamental. What is objectionable in such clever people is their forced reasoning. If the clever were only to act as Yu did in guiding the floodwater, then there would be nothing objectionable in their cleverness. Yu guided the floodwater by not imposing anything on it (wushi). When clever people also proceed without imposing anything, this is great cleverness indeed. While the heavens are high and the stars are distant; if only one seeks what comes about (gu) in this way, one can calculate the solstices of a thousand years without leaving one's seat.

The movement of celestial objects is conditioned in such a manner that their trajectories are open to forecast by the astute, empirically-minded observer. Mencius maintains that the conditions of human emergence can also be a matter of forecast to the empirical observer. For Mencius, human emergence is initially conditioned by family experience. Accordingly, Mencius forecasts a Confucian direction of development that he alleges will proceed unforced from these initial conditions.

Below, we consider the process of "bringing to fruition" (shi) the human virtues. We shall see that, while Mencius forecasts the direction of human development in the form of the "four sprouts," he is not establishing their end results. In keeping with the botanical model, the end products of these virtues emerge over the course of their well-integrated (cheng) growth and unforced maturation. Mencius is a thinker with a process orientation. He does not establish fixed ends antecedent to the process of development.
This feature distinguishes Mencius from his principal adversaries: the Mohists and Yangists.

The Four Sprouts and the Family

That humans have certain “shared” traits is an important theme in the Mencius. We find the most substantive discussion of this theme in two passages: the “Child at the Well” passage, in which Mencius outlines the four sprouts of human virtue, and the “Barley” passage, in which Mencius likens the process of becoming human to that of growing fairly uniform rows of barley. In order to understand these passages in context, we must bear in mind the principal themes discussed thus far. In the sections that follow, we will revisit the nei/wai debate, the notion of harmony, configurative energies (qi), and the botanical model. It will be argued that the common traits that Mencius attributes to humans as a “sort” (lei) in fact serve to reinforce the creative, particularistic notion of human development that he traces back to the family institution.

In the “Child at the Well” passage, Mencius presents the cultivation of one’s human disposition as contingent upon the proper extension of feelings from what he refers to as their “sprouts” (duan). The “Child at the Well” passage is best considered in its entirety. Mencius says:

Each and every human (ren) has feelings (xin) sensitive to the suffering of others. The former kings had such feelings, and these were manifested in their compassionate governing. Putting such feelings to work in governing, they ordered the world as easily as turning it in their palms.

As for each human having feelings sensitive to the suffering of others, suppose a person suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well. Each would feel empathy for the child – not in order to gain the favor of the child’s parents, nor to win the praise of villagers and friends, nor out of concern for a potentially blemished reputation.
From this we observe the following: without such a feeling of commiseration one is not human, without a feeling of shame one is not human, without a feeling of deference one is not human, and without a feeling of discrimination one is not human. A feeling of empathy is associated humanity (ren) in its germinal state. A feeling of shame is appropriateness (yi) in its germinal state. A feeling of deference is ritual propriety (li) in its germinal state. A feeling of discrimination is wisdom (zhi) in its germinal state.

People (ren) have these four sprouts just as they have four limbs. For one to possess these four sprouts yet consider oneself incapable of developing them is self-mutilation; for one to consider the ruler incapable of doing so is to mutilate the ruler.

For anyone having these four sprouts in him or herself, to realize their enlargement and bring them to “fullness” (chong) is like having a fire catch or a spring break through. If these germinal beginnings are brought to fullness, one might safeguard the whole empire; if they are not, one might not even tend to one’s own parents.

In fitting this passage into the Mencian framework, it is necessary first to establish the “roots” of the sprouts that distinguish humans from other sorts of creatures. Given that the root of moral development ultimately lies in family affection, the most plausible assumption is that the sprouts of feeling are rooted in family affection as well. In the “Child at the Well” passage, “not tending to one’s parents” appears to be just as much a threshold for calling someone “human” as does empathy for the child in danger. We have already seen that if one fails in maintaining one’s family affection, one can no longer be called “human.” Mencius, however, does not identify family affection as a “sprout.” It is more likely that family affection is the “soil” from which the “four sprouts” emerge. Hence, if one becomes inhumane to such a degree that one cannot even “care for one’s own parents,” then one’s “four sprouts” wilt in the process.

To assume that these four “human” sensibilities are rooted in some source outside (wai) the family would violate the core of Mencius’ position. This is a position reinforced in the “Two Roots or One” episode with Yizhi. Mencius here maintains that
moral growth is rooted not in doctrine but in family affection. Mencius is not alone in maintaining his family-centric position; the *Xiaojing* concurs. In the *Xiaojing*, the “human” disposition traces back to the earliest stages of childhood:

In the efficacious virtue of the sage, what was there besides filial piety? Family affection originates at the parent’s knee; thereby veneration for one’s parents is nourished on a daily basis. The sage proceeds from veneration to the instruction of respect, and proceeds from family affection to the instruction of concern. Sagely instruction is comprehensive without being severe, and sagely government is effective without being strict. They proceed from the root.

The way (dao) of a father and his son is a “natural” (tian) disposition (xing); and this is also appropriateness (yi) between ruler and subject. This originates from one’s parents. There is no greater gift.57

Moral development in this tradition traces back to the affections that one is disposed to share with one’s parents in the earliest stages of life. Moral sensibilities then “extend” in the form of a disposition to feel and act in a qualitatively “human” way as one’s person takes shape. In keeping with the major premise of this tradition, the four sprouts that grant one the capacity to become increasingly human are most adequately understood as extensions of the “unlearned” sensibilities rooted in one’s family upbringing. Initially, to be human is to “take shape” in an environment of family affection. It would be difficult to imagine Mencius appealing to the “four sprouts” of someone who did not.

There is further evidence that the four sprouts are rooted in family experience in Mencius’ description of the virtues into which the four sprouts develop. Recall that the “fruit” (shi) of each sprout is developed entirely in terms of family relationships and their embellishments:

Serving one’s parent is bringing associated humanity to fruition. Respecting one’s elder brothers is bringing appropriateness to fruition. Understanding the
two and not leaving them is bringing wisdom to fruition. Ordering and embellishing the two is bringing ritual propriety to fruition.\textsuperscript{38}

Given that the "fruit" of each human virtue matures in a family context, the "fullness" of the four sprouts spoken of in the "Child at the Well" passage can be understood as the unique achievements of persons, like Shun, who have remained consistently rooted therein. Giving "fullness" (chóng) to something is to be understood as "bringing it to fruition" (shì). Together, chóng and shì take on the verb/compliment form in the Mencius.\textsuperscript{39} Hence, the cultivation of what is human, from its germinal state to its achieved form, is a process located in the family context – beginning to end. Humans are creatures who initially emerge from families and sustain that root in cultivating their distinct persons. Shun was such a person, and the sage and we are of the same sort.\textsuperscript{40}

The Satisfaction of Becoming Human

Locating the project of becoming human in the family highlights the personalized, non-programmatic nature of this process. Recall the polemic context: Mencius' rejection of the Mohist doctrine of concern for each (jianai) is based on the contention that no order is to be imposed on human virtues outside (wai) the process of "bringing these to fruition" (shì) in one's own concrete relationships. The image of the four sprouts, in keeping with the botanical imagery throughout the Mencius, is designed to foreground the creative dimension of growth. As the man from Song learned, things that grow do so in their native environments, at their own speeds, or else they perish.\textsuperscript{61} The point here is that one cannot force a strict pattern upon growth. Pattern must emerge within the process of maturation; it must "take shape" in transaction with its environment.
Hence, in emerging from particular families and "extending" their sensibilities into the world, individual persons "bring to fruition" to what it means to become human. The "human" itself takes shape. There is no strict blueprint by which to govern this process; it is governed instead by allowing the novel development of social patterns that emerge from an extended form of interpersonal feeling that originates with family affection. The *Xiaoqings* maintains that the ancient sages "governed" society in such a non-coercive manner and in so doing were "effective without being strict."62 The *Mencius* can also be understood as an endorsement of such non-coercive governing. Institutions such as burial rites, relationships such as those between ruler and subject, customs such as dietary habits, even ethical standards such as those governing the proper treatment of animals, will arise and transform of themselves with the "extension" of human sensibilities and the emergent demands of associated living.63

The importance of associated humanity (*ren*) in Mencius' thinking thus becomes understandable. Associated humanity grows initially from the family.64 To lose family feeling, and by extension one's associated humanity, amounts to forfeiting participation in the novel construction of an emergent human world. Outside the circle of associated humanity lies the perverse world of animals; within, reside the emergent standards of human morality and feeling. As Mencius puts it, "associated humanity is human feeling (*renxin*)."65 There is no sharp distinction between the process of associated living and the "human" sensibilities that emerge over its course. Hence, for Mencius, the Confucian way (*dao*) amounts to "associated humanity coming together (*he*) in what is human (*ren*)."66 The substance of what it means to be "human" emerges in the process of associated living. So, while one remains nominally "human" when a distressed child elicits a certain response, this "capacity" or "ability" (cai) to respond is also a "responsibility" to further develop these feelings and participate in the process of determining what "being human" means.
While becoming human is a creative process, given the initial conditions of being born into family affection this is not a haphazard development. Becoming increasingly human and "giving fruit" to the human virtues is fueled by a spontaneous, creative energy and generative of deep satisfaction. Mencius makes reference to this on two occasions. First, in the "Child at the Well" passage, he speaks of an unstoppable momentum that attends the process of "bringing to fullness" (chong) one's capacity to become human. He likens this to "a fire catching or a spring breaking through." Later, when discussing the complimentary notion of "bringing to fruition" (shi) to one's inchoate human qualities, Mencius describes the unstoppable creative energy this generates:

When joy arises how can it be stopped? Being unstoppable, one dances it with one's feet and waves it with one's arms without being aware.

The spontaneous energy and felt satisfaction that Mencius presents as part of cultivating one's human capacities from their family origin traces back to his resolution to the nei/wai debate, and ultimately to his grounding in a qi cosmology.

The feelings that make one human are rooted in the love one shares with one's parents; the "four sprouts" are, by association, also forms of immediate feeling that indicate a disposition that is humanly configured, integrating well (cheng), and that preserves its original coherence (li). Recall that if a behavioral disposition remains well-integrated as it grows in its broader constitutive habits, it configures a vast, overflowing qi that Mencius describes as "optimally vast" (zhida) and "optimally firm" (zhigang). By integrating well and preserving coherence over the course of developing as a person, one maximizes in breadth and depth the circuit of one's experience. Mencius resolves the nei/wai debate by appeal to the transactional nature of well-integrated growth. The vast, overflowing qi is the qualitative result of a life configured so as to optimize the felt
satisfaction of integrating well into one's surroundings. Maintaining such integrity over
the course of personal development maximizes one's life force (qi).

In the Confucian tradition, the kind of satisfaction associated with the normative
measure of harmony is illustrated in aesthetic terms: culinary and musical. Mencius uses
the same illustrations in describing the pleasure that humans feel in sustaining coherence
(li) and fitting in appropriately (yi) as they cultivate their incipient human capacities.
This pleasure also speaks to the manner in which humans are similar as a sort. We turn
now to the “Barley” passage:

In good years, the young are largely reliable. In bad years, the young are largely
impetuous. It is not that the capacity (cai) conferred by tian is radically different.
The difference comes about as a result of their feelings (xin) being blocked.

Consider barley. Allow that we sow barley seeds and cover them with
soil. The earth is the same, and the season they are sowed likewise the same.
The plants shoot forth, and by summer solstice, each and every one is ripe.
While there are dissimilarities, this is due to the various richness of the soil, the
nourishment of the rains and moisture, and the disparity of personal attention.

Hence, generally, things of the same sort (lei) each resemble one
another. Why should humans alone be an exception to this? The sage and we
are of the same sort. Thus Longzi said, “In making a shoe for a foot one hasn’t
known, we know one will not produce a basket.” Shoes resemble one another
since feet throughout the world are similar.

So it is with taste in food. Palates are similar in their preferences. Yiya
was the first to apprehend the preferences of our palates. Were it the case that
the disposition (xing) of palatal preferences differed in humans in the manner
that dogs and horses are of different sorts than we, then how could it be that each
and every palate in the world pursues the preferences of Yiya? When it comes to
taste in food, the fact that the world looks to Yiya shows that all the palates in the
world resemble one another....

[This is followed by similar examples using music and physical beauty.]
When it comes to feeling, is it this alone in which nothing is commonly so? What is it to feeling that is commonly so? It is coherence (理) and appropriateness (义). The sage was the first to apprehend what in our feelings is commonly so. Hence, coherence and appropriateness bring pleasure to our feeling just as meats bring pleasure to our palates.71

The pleasure of becoming human, like all Confucian pleasures, is ultimately based on the normative measure of harmony (和). The pleasure that comes with cultivating associated humanity (仁) and appropriate conduct (义) is had over the course of meaningfully participating in a world beyond oneself; it is the satisfaction of contributing what one has to offer to an on-going totality. By preserving integrity (诚), which is something that cannot be reduced to either "inner" or "outer," one is "intensively" involved and "giving one's all" (忠), and simultaneously "extensively" involved and "putting oneself in another's place" (恕). The exemplary person is both integrally present in the world and sensitive to its other participants. In sustaining the coherence and integrity of one's human disposition over the course of extending oneself beyond the family, both the depth and the width of one's participation in the world is augmented. In terms of harmony, one adds an appreciable measure of uniqueness to the "soup" while allowing the excellence of others also to be expressed, thus making for the richest experience.

We can now summarize what Mencius considers all people to share. First, Mencius considers people to have the "capacity" to become increasingly human. This capacity we can identify as the four sprouts of human virtue that trace back to being born and nourished in family affection. This capacity is "conferred by 天," which in this context can be understood as the history, experience, culture, and general processes that shape one's emergence into the world. This original disposition, formed through family affection, is one that over the course of life (生) has the proclivity to extend in ways that correspond with traditional Confucian virtues. This disposition is deemed "human" and is something that humans initially share.
Second, people share an inherent pleasure in sustaining coherence (理) while fitting themselves appropriately (宜) into the world over the course of developing their initial, human dispositions. Recall that the coherence of one's disposition is linked to its integration (成): its propensity to feel and act with spontaneous appropriateness (宜). Integrity is upset by desire (欲) and doctrine (言), each of which mediate experience and compromise the integration of growth. To preserve and extend one's integral feelings over the course of becoming a person is something that, according to Mencius, each and every human will find pleasure in.72

The Value of the Person

The notion that becoming human for Mencius is more than just a biological process is also reflected in the “Fish or Bear’s Paw” passage. The human life is not one that is merely “lived,” the human life is one that is “lived with self-respect.” Mencius explains:

Fish I want. Bear’s paw I also want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take the bear’s paw. Life I want. Appropriateness I also want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take appropriateness. While life is what I want, there is something I want more than life. Hence, I will not cling to life at all costs...

There are things one wants more than life, and things one loathes more than death. It is not the person of quality (贤) alone that has this feeling (心); each and every human has it. It is just that the person of quality never forfeits it.73

The self-respect of a person can be understood in terms of that person’s “value” (贵); but just as not all humans maintain their self-respect, not all humans realize their own value. Mencius explains:
The desire for value (gui) is a feeling similar (tong) in humans. In fact, every human has value in him or herself; it is just that this has never been reflected on. What people value is not truly valuable. What Zhaomeng finds value in, Zhaomeng can also depreciate.\textsuperscript{76}

The Songs say: “Having intoxicated us with wine, having filled us with character (de)...”

This illustrates that, having been satisfied with associated humanity (ren) and appropriateness (yi), one does not long after the exquisite foods that others enjoy. Being worthy of esteem and widely appreciated exhibits itself in one’s person (shen), such that one does not long after the exquisite trappings of others.\textsuperscript{78}

When it comes to locating the “value” and “self-respect” of a person, Mencius does not appeal to common traits; he is more interested in the end products of those who develop a worthy character: those persons of “quality.”

In the “Barley” passage, as in the “Child at the Well” passage, Mencius gives a nod in the direction of shared human traits. His main objective in doing so is to defend Confucianism against its adversaries. He is interested in “grounding” Confucian practice in the historical era of the sages: the era that gave rise to the human experience itself.\textsuperscript{76}

The sages established human relationships as the foundation of human experience, and understood what was pleasurable in that experience. Mencius would like to make it appear that Mohists and Yangists, so far removed from such experience, are neither Chinese nor human. The presentation of “shared” human traits is largely a polemical device that serves this purpose. One wonders if Mencius would ever formulate such notions without the prompting of adversaries. Such polemical exigency aside, Mencius has a genuine philosophical interest in the novel contributions that individual persons make to human experience over the course of its emergence. He is interested, and without provocation, in the development of distinct, personal character.
Mencius understands that “shared” traits are not enough to secure the value of human individuals. He relates the following:

“Since Zengxi was fond of jujubes, Zengzi, his son, could not bear to eat them.”

Gong Sunchou asked, “Which is more delicious, roasted meat or jujubes?”

Mencius replied, “Roasted meat, of course.”

“So, why was it that Zengzi ate roasted meat but did not eat jujubes?”

“Roasted meat is a common (tong) taste, but jujubes are a particular (du) taste. We avoid the use of another’s given name, but we do not avoid the use of one’s family name. The family name is what is common; the given name is what is particular.”

The significance of this passage becomes clear once we consider the role of names in the Chinese world. The sensitivity to names speaks both to the continuity and the particularity that characterizes emergent persons. In this respect, one’s given name (ming) does not merely signify one’s existence; names confer distinction in the form of one’s “reputation.” Given names, we learn in the Zuozhuan, “cannot be loaned to others” since “they are used to generate one’s credibility.” Zengzi cannot adopt the unique characteristics that distinguish his father just as he cannot adopt his given name, which itself serves as “claim” to an achieved distinction. Zengzi must distinguish his own “name” and establish his own reputation, a prospect that Confucius holds to be of the highest importance.

Mencius does maintain that humans are similar in that they come from families and find satisfaction in the development of their self-worth. The “value” of humans, however, is based more on the particularistic, achievement end of human development than on the “shared” nature of these base characteristics. In the “Jujube” passage, the sorts of things that humans share: like pleasure in roasted meat or a surname (xing), provide insufficient content to distinguish one person from another. Similarly, the
virtues that distinguish humans from non-humans are content-poor without being "filled out" (shì) in the creative emergence of the particular person. Mencius is more interested in the process of human cultivation than he is in base characteristics. When he remarks that "the glorious phoenix is the same sort (lei) of thing as any bird, and the mighty ocean the same sort of thing that runs in the gutter," he is not exalting "shared" traits but rather celebrating the achievement of distinction.

For Mencius, the creation of distinct character over the course of a life is what really brings each and every human satisfaction. If this satisfaction is as common to us as the pleasures of the palate, then this only means that the creative possibilities of becoming human are as wide as the parameters of the "delicious." What is important for Mencius is that some people are "twice, five times, or countless times" better at developing their human capacity than are others. This qualitative disparity among humans is due to the relative inability of some to be productive in "getting the most" (jì) out of the capacities furnished through their initial, family-borne dispositions.

Mencius insists that to become sage-like one must "go somewhere" (jiàn) with one's disposition. This is done by "pursuing" (cōng) either its lesser or greater components (ti), and with qualitatively different results. While those who succeed in maintaining a human status do so equally in some banal, general sense, this is not as important as how some humans distinguish themselves in a more concrete sense. As Gong Duzi inquires of Mencius:

"While equally human, some become greater humans than others, how is this?"
Mencius replied, "Those who pursue the greater component become the greater humans, those who pursue the lesser components become the lesser humans."

The greater (dà) component is the function of feeling (xíng), the root of one's emergence as a "home-grown" human person with distinct moral character. The lesser (xiǎo)
components include the sensory functions and members of the physical body that have a different "value" and ought not to rank higher than feeling in priority for nourishment and cultivation. The function of feeling, rather than the physical body, is the locus of the capacities (cai) that enable one to cultivate oneself as human.86

As argued above, these sprouts originate and find expression in family experience. Becoming human is the process of "getting the most" out these sprouts. In so doing, one is bringing something inchoate to "fullness" and thereby "bringing to fruition" to one's human virtue.87 To "get the most" (jin) out of something is to draw from it everything that it makes available. The notion is reflected in a cognate term, jin, which refers to the remnant ashes of something fully combusted. "Getting the most" out of something does not mean developing an inherent telos toward a pre-determined end. In keeping with the normative measure of harmony, "getting the most" out of a thing means integrating its qualities productively by facilitating an optimal degree of its self-expression within the aesthetic limits of balance and proportion. That jin involves a balanced, proper measure is suggested in the image of striking a bell from the Book of Ritual:

Struck with something small, it gives a small sound. Struck with something large, it gives a large sound. But let it be struck leisurely and properly and you "get the most" (jin) out of its sound.88

Jin refers to the "optimal expression" of something. Here, optimal expression involves proper proportion; for only then does something productively contribute its uniqueness. In the context of bringing about social order, to allow people to "optimally express" themselves and contribute their worth to the social whole is considered crucial to securing the legitimacy of one's rule. In the Documents we read:
If rural men and women are not given the confidence to "get the most out of themselves" (zijin), the people's lord will fail to complete his own achievement of merit.  

These passages contribute towards a more adequate understanding of jin in a Confucian philosophical context. The term involves balanced integration, optimal expression, and personal involvement. As we will see, for persons to "get the most" out of themselves is linked to the advancement of the human experience collectively.
1 Analects 1.2
2 Xiaojing 2/9/28.
3 Xiaojing 1/1/4-5.
4 Zhongyong 17 and 19.
5 Lewis (1999) pg. 358.
7 Mencius 4A: 28.
8 Irene Bloom and Roger T. Ames have established the two clearest positions on the issue:

Bloom argues that renxing for Mencius means “human nature” in a genetic or “fundamentally biological” sense. It is one, however, “intelligible in both normative and descriptive terms.” (See: Bloom (1994), pg. 44.) According to her reading, this is a position Mencius establishes in relation to three counter-positions advocated in the text, the most important of which is advocated by Gaozi in Mencius 6A: 3. Bloom calls this a “narrow biologism,” that maintains that xing can be wholly reduced to biological life and physical appetites. On Bloom’s reading, Mencius maintains in Mencius 6A: 7 that “the faculty of the moral mind” (xin) is just as “biological” as other physical drives and dispositions. Accordingly, Mencius affirms the presence of the moral “faculties” in terms “(referred to as) ’the capacities sent down from Heaven’ or what in modern terms we would recognize as genetic.” Mencius’ assertion that “the sage and we are the same in kind” further reflects, for Bloom, the genetic status of these faculties and affirms the fundamental identity of human beings. (See: Bloom (1997), pg. 27.) Thus, this heaven-endowed, genetic identity is what Mencius means by “human nature.”

Ames argues that “human nature” is not an adequate translation of renxing since the term is not intended as a description of what human beings “genetically” or “biologically” share. According to Ames, “genetic” readings reflect an “interpretive prejudice” that privileges an “ahistorical given” over what human beings themselves achieve. (See: Ames (1991), pg. 143.) Noting that the differences between the human being and the animal are considered “infinitesimal” (xi) in Mencius 4B. 19, Ames identifies these differences as cultural rather than biological. Appealing to the fact that xing in the Mencius is also used verbally (See: Mencius 7A. 21; 7A. 30; 7B. 33 and Ames (1991), p. 159-160), Ames maintains that the human virtues for Mencius are not “givens,”
but are instead, as Mencius 7A. 21 states, are “what the exemplary person cultivates as xing,” or, literally, what they “xing.” Being culturally achieved rather than biologically given, the human virtues identified with renxing are neither genetic nor inalienable. They can be forfeited or “lost” (shi) by morally inattentive people. Thus, for Ames, “when (Mencius) says ‘there is no human being who is not good (shan),’ he is also saying that ‘anyone who is not good is not really human.’” (See: Ames (1991), p. 162).

The interpretation forwarded here is more in line with Ames’ cultural reading, as will be demonstrated presently.

9 Mencius 7A: 15.
10 Mencius 6A: 7.
12 Such that the phrase, “The human and tian are joined in continuity” (tianrenheyi) is conceived not as the coordination of two separate and independent spheres, but rather in terms of the continuity (yi) of interdependent processes mutually emergent.
13 The episode is found in Mencius 3A: 4.
14 For more on Shenneng movement, see: Graham (1989), pp. 66-74.
15 Legge (1994) vol. 3, pg. 44.
16 Mencius 3A: 4.
17 Analects 8.19.
18 Mencius 3B: 9.
19 Mencius 4B: 19.
20 The question is more complex in the Xiaojing, where filial piety is described as arising out of respect for the physical inheritance of one’s skin and hair from one’s parents. It is difficult to say whether such a notion is indicative of thinking that Irene Bloom says, “in modern terms we would recognize as genetic.” (See: Xiaojing 1/1/4-6 and n. 8 above).
21 Mencius 6A: 7.
22 Mencius 4A: 1.
23 Mencius 2A: 1.
24 Analects 17.2
25 “Close by” (xia), and also by extension, “intimate with” (xiajin).
26 “Intimately connected to” (mier), and also by extension, “near to” (erjin).
28 Mencius 5A: 7.
29 Mencius 7B: 31.
30 Mencius 3B: 6.
To some degree, the human disposition as Mencius understands it relies on "biological" conditions. Birds, dogs, or plankton cannot adopt a human disposition, and one would presume that there are some "biological" factors that explain why not. Be that as it may, it is Mencius's intention to elevate cultural conditions over biological conditions in his presentation of renxing. One might say that for Mencius, to be "biologically" human is a necessary but not sufficient condition for having a renxing.


Xingzimingchu, Guodianchumuzhujian pg. 179.

Ibid.

Liang means "good" and in its extended sense, "fertile." It is also associated with "grain" (liang). See: GSR 735. Liang here means "good" in the sense of "good land" (liangtian). Maintaining the botanical metaphor here is important. To translate liang simply as "good" is to lose the sense of being "good for" or "productive," which is also the sense in which Mencius uses the term shan.

Gu has the extended sense of "binding" as in "binding one's hair in a knot." GSR 302. Presumably it is the unencumbered flow of configurative energy that is being "constricted" by unproductive, daily habits.

Cai is also associated with the notion of "planting" (caij). See: Karlgren (1957) pp. 247-248. Zhongyong 17 employs the notion of botanical "capacity" in a philosophical context.


Mencius 6A: 1.

Mencius 6A: 2.

A.C. Graham demonstrates that the Yangists and Mohists have points in common in terms of their terminology and technique of debate:
For example, the later Mohist dialectical chapters, the Yangist chapter Shenwei ("Be Aware of What You are For") in the Lushichunqiu, and the second and third dialogues of "Robber Chi" all share a technical use of the falling tone wei. "for the sake of," to pose the question of what one is for, one's end in life, the final criterion by which all actions are to be judged. See Graham (2001) pp. 221-222.

Hence, Graham translates the Mencian condemnation of Yang Zhu in these terms: "What Yang was for was self." (weiwo) See: Mencius 7A: 26 and Graham (2001) pg. 223. The Mohist interest in benefit (li) is clear enough throughout the Mozi. In Graham's reconstruction of the Yangist teachings, he proposes that Yangism "starts from the same calculations of benefit and harm as does Mohism." See: Graham (1989) pg. 56, passim.

52 Mencius 4B: 26.
53 Cf. Mencius 1B: 8.
55 Mencius 4A: 28. "If one is not engaged in family affection, one cannot be considered human."
56 Mencius 3A: 5.
57 XiaQjing 2/9/26-29.
58 Mencius 4A: 27. cf. 7A: 15.
59 Mencius 7B: 25. What is good (shan) in a person becomes beautiful (mei) when it is "given fullness so as to be brought to fruition" (chongshi). Shi in this instance is the resultative compliment of chong.
60 Mencius 6A: 7.
61 Mencius 2A: 2.
62 Xiaojing 2/9/28
63 In the spirit of Mencius, we "extend" the significance of certain episodes in order to suggest this point. What if, in Mencius 1A: 7, King Xuan felt that he could not bear the sacrificial slaughter of any animal? And what if the exemplary person did go into the kitchen? What if Mencius himself, so quick to call others animals, could experience the impact of the March on Montgomery and the wearing of placards that read, "I am a Man"? The point we suggest has the merit of being true. Standards of morality and feeling are transformed and re-defined with human experience. And there is always further to go.
64 Analects 1.2
We might round off the list of shared, human traits through a more analytic form of textual treatment. In scholarship more inclined to understand renxing in genetic terms, it is presented as "significant" that Mencius "repeatedly" uses the phrase "each and every human" in attributing "the natural tendencies he then specifies." (See: Bloom (1997) pg. 24.) There are seven instances in which Mencius uses the term "human" without qualification in connection with "each and every" (jie), and they are not always important where they do occur. There are the significant uses connected with the four sprouts, which "each and every human" has. (See: Mencius 2A: 6.) And there is the equally important discussion concerning that which "each and every human" is unable to bear (ren); the claim, however, is that each and every person has their limits, not that there is a uniform threshold. (See: Mencius 6A: 6.) There is the claim that "each and every human" can become a sage. (See: Mencius 6B: 2.) And there is also the claim that "each and every human" has, as part of his or her parental feeling (xin), the wish to see offspring happily married and not involved in shameful or illicit conduct. (See: Mencius 3B: 3.) In the "Fish or Bear's Paw" passage, discussed below, there is the claim that "each and every human" has a sense of dignity and self-worth that prevents him or her from surviving at any cost; we learn, however, that this dignity is only maintained in persons of quality. (See: Mencius 6A: 10.) The remaining claims: that "each and every human" believes that Chenzhong would refuse the state of Qi if offered under inappropriate circumstances, and that "each and every human" would hold his or her nose while passing by Xishi covered in filth, would appear to be less significant as "natural tendencies." (See Mencius 7A: 34 and 4B: 25.) The list of substantive traits shared by "each and every human" can be roughly categorized under the two proposed headings: feelings derived from being brought up in a family, and the satisfaction of generating self-worth by emerging as a distinct, well-integrated person. The notion of "self worth" and the "value" of a person will be considered presently.
Zhaomeng is the title of chief minister of Jin, a title held by four ministers in the house of Zhao. In the *Zouzhuan*, Zhaomeng is presented as capable of “observing the purposes” (guanzhi) of senior officers by having them chant a song of their own choosing. Zhaomeng then evaluates their characters accordingly. See: Lewis (1999) pp. 162, 424.

74 *Mencius* 6A: 17.
75 See *Mencius* 3B: 9 for his own explanation of his polemic purpose. Here, as elsewhere, his program is associated with the original work of the sages.
76 *Mencius* 7B: 36.
78 On the use of names as “claims” to obtain results in character, see: Lewis (1999) pg. 33.
79 *Analects* 15.20
80 Here we might note that surname (xing) is cognate with disposition (xing); both are initial starting points, but insufficient for the purpose of distinguishing one human from another.
81 *Mencius* 2A: 2.
83 *Mencius* 7A: 38.
84 *Mencius* 6A: 12.  
86 “Bringing something to fullness” (chong) and “getting the most out of something” (jin) also have a verb/compliment relationship in the *Mencius*. In *Mencius* 5B: 4, the content of appropriateness (yi) as a sort (lei) is discussed. The suggestion is made that taking anything that is not one’s own might count as theft. “Fully expressing (chong) the sort to such an extreme,” Mencius says, “is getting the most (jin) out of appropriateness.”
90 Shujing 6.4.11
CHAPTER FIVE
ADVANCING THE HUMAN WAY

The Constraints on Aspiration

Mencius' optimism with regard to the human disposition is tempered by the recognition that there is a propensity of circumstances within which the human experience must make its way. Social, political, and economic circumstances conspire to limit the achievements that might be brought to fruition in the course of human cultivation. While these circumstances will change with time, Mencius strives to maximize human experience and to forge the most productive course (dao) within the limits of the historical moment. Ideally, he aspires to transform that historical moment. Mencius is sensitive to circumstances that obtain by virtue of the "age" in which he lives, and his notion of tian reflects this sensitivity.

The meaning of tian in classical China ranges from anthropomorphic to naturalistic. Mencius exercises the full range of the term's meaning: from the increasingly eulogistic "heaven" that grants good fortune or calamity, to the meteorological "sky" above. Robert Eno finds that, in the Mencius, the term "varies with particular fluidity according to the instrumental context in which (it is) discussed." There is no univocal sense in which the term is used. One aspect of tian that Mencius wishes to be clear about, however, is that it does not "speak" (bayan), he thus distinguishes himself from the more anthropomorphic Mozi, who contends that tian does speak and is clear (ming) in its pronouncements.
Mencius employs a different vocabulary when he discusses the role of tian in human affairs, a vocabulary that suggests a sociological rather than anthropomorphic understanding. Rather than tian expressing an aspiration (zhi), as Mozi contends, tian for Mencius is what is manifested through occurrences and events in the world (xingyushi). Rather than ascribe anthropomorphic "purposes" to tian, Mencius locates the notion beyond any purposive agency: "What is done without doer is tian." What tian "allows" to occur (shou), Mencius says, is identical to what people (ren) themselves allow to occur. Quoting the Documents, he explains that "what the people see and hear are the eyes and ears of tian." For Mencius, tian denotes, in part, an intangible yet manifest aspect of societal experience and sentiment: something like the "age" in which one lives or the "general conditions of the times."

The Guodian strips assist in reconstructing this dimension of tian in the Mencius. One document in particular, Failure and Success According to the Times (Qiongdayishi) expresses a parallel interest and resonates linguistically with the Mencius. The document opens with the following observation:

There is tian and there are people. Between them there is a difference. By examining the difference one understands how to proceed. If you have the people but not the right age (shi), even those of quality will not proceed effectively. Yet if the age is right, what difficulties could there be?

The theme of Failure and Success According to the Times is echoed in the Mencius, in an exchange between Mencius and Song Goujian, a fellow scholar-official (shi) who is travelling from state to state in the hope of influencing the rulers of the day. Mencius advises:

Hold character in high regard and take pleasure in appropriateness, then you will be content. Scholar-officials do not abandon appropriateness in times of
failure (qiong), nor depart from the most productive course in times of success (da). By not abandoning appropriateness in times of failure, scholar-officials consummate themselves. By not departing from the most productive course in times of success, the people are not deprived of a focus for their hopes. When the ancients realized their aspirations (zhì), the people were further enriched. When they did not realize their aspirations, they cultivated their persons and presented these to the age (shì). In times of failure, they improved their character in solitude. In times of success, they improved the world together with others.10

In both of these texts, success and failure (qiong da) depend on circumstances beyond the aspirations (zhì) of particular individuals. If an age is not ripe for the realization of certain aspirations, the holders of those aspirations bring them to fruition in their personal characters and present themselves as models to their wayward age.

There is further resonance between the Mencius and Success and Failure According to the Times. Mencius, reflecting on the failure of Duke Ping of Lu to call upon his own services, relates:

When a person proceeds effectively (xíng) something facilitates it. When a person is hindered, something interrupts it. Proceeding effectively and being hindered are not within a person's control (nèng). That it did not come to pass (yu) that I would meet the Marquis of Lu is a matter of tian.11

Mencius' language in this context echoes that of the Success and Failure According to the Times, which states:

What comes to pass (yu) and what does not is a matter of tian.

Given the content of Success and Failure According to the Times, we can understand Mencius to be referring to the "age" (shì) when he speaks of tian as what hinders or facilitates what "comes to pass."
Pang Pu, reading the Guodian strips, asks what it means to consider the “age” in discussing **tian** and draws the following conclusion:

*Tian in these strips* is a force beyond the human being that the human being can neither anticipate nor control - yet must accept. It is an opportunity that comes and goes or appears in cycles, and it is the conditions under which you prosper if you grasp it and decline if you lose it, but you cannot command it. It is an environment people yield to fearfully and rely on to survive. Hence, what was then called “**tian**” took on a special meaning. Using modern concepts, it is actually the social context, social conditions, social opportunities, or simply put, social forces.12

**Tian** as the “social forces” of the “age” is not independent of the world. **Tian** denotes the conditions under which all things proceed, conditions that might be either favorable or unfavorable to human aspirations.

When asked by Prince Dian what the affairs of the scholar-official are, Mencius responds with one word: aspiration.13 The scholar-official aspires to have rulers adopting associated humanity (**ren**) in their persons and to thereby bring about a harmonious social order. Rulers are to transform the predominant social conditions through their own “force of character” (**de**) as persons of authoritative humanity. They are to become “parents of the people” and thereby evoke spontaneous popular sentiment and order among their constituents, much as parents evoke spontaneous affection and piety in their children.14 Mencius recommends associated humanity for achieving political legitimacy and characterizes anything short of this as untenable. He quotes Confucius and alludes to the Songs:

Confucius said, “Associated humanity (**ren**) undermines the formation of a social mass. If the ruler of a state favors associated humanity, there will be no opposition in the world.” These days, the desire to have no opposition in the
world through means other than associated humanity is like taking hold of something hot without having cooled it in water. The Songs say: “Who can take hold of something hot without first cooling it in water?”

Mencius insists that there is no genuine political legitimacy short of that arising from a ruler’s own associated humanity. This is consistent with what Mencius identifies as a “common saying,” one that captures the Confucian way of bringing about social harmony: “Empire, State, Family: the empire is rooted in the state, the state is rooted in the family, and the family is rooted in the person.” On the authority of Confucius, Mencius maintains that in the sociopolitical realm “there are only these two ways: associated humanity and coercion (buren).” In the Mencius, the coercive way of exercising power is set in opposition to associated humanity on numerous occasions, and the former is presented as bound to fail.

Mencius says that associated humanity is an honor bestowed by tian, whereas political office is an honor bestowed by people. Becoming “parent to the people” and fostering associated humanity, however, have less to do with divine providence and more to do with the implementation of sound economic policies. In order for rulers to find themselves “without opposition in the world,” Mencius proposes the elimination of duties at border stations, the remittance of property tax on local merchants and on those working public lands into production, and other measures. These economic policies, Mencius explains, will attract commerce and inspire confidence, such that “neighboring states will look up to you as a parent.” And since “no one has ever succeeded in inciting children against a parent” the ruler’s legitimacy is secure. That ruler is “doing the work of tian” (tianshi).

Mencius places great significance on establishing economic conditions that will ensure that people have “dependable feelings” (hengxin), which he equates with having “dependable means of support” (hengchan). Under such conditions, people can regulate
themselves and there is no need to resort to punitive measures (xing). The fact that economic policy does the work of tian extends the significance of the Mencian notion that human feeling is “conferred by tian.” Economic conditions are also tian, and only once material needs are met will common people be in the position to develop feelings of associated humanity. Mencius therefore prescribes strategies to increase food production, proposing that “when food is as plentiful as fire and water, then who among the people will exhibit anything but associated humanity?” Only scholar-officials maintain a sense of associated humanity when economic conditions do not sponsor it. Additional economic proposals aim to ensure the execution of filial piety. The ruler who is “parent to the people” does not force the people to incur debt in carrying out their filial duties. Mencius therefore endorses a family-based economy proposed by King Wen, one that ensures that the material needs of elderly family members are easily provided for.

So while the propensities of tian in a given “age” are something that people must accept, this does not mean that people capitulate to conditions and abandon their aspirations for a better world. In Warring States China, overt political resistance might easily result in an early death; this fact prompts the Yangists to withdraw from political life altogether and focus their efforts on self-preservation. Mencius has a different attitude toward effecting change in the face of implacable forces (tian). As noted above, he recommends that scholar-officials focus on the cultivation of their persons and bide their time. He recommends a similar program to the rulers of oppressed states. He explains:

When the world is on the most productive course, those of little character submit to those of great character, and those of little quality submit to those of great quality. When the world departs from the most productive course, then the small submits to the big and the weak submits to the strong. Both of these are instances of “prevalent social, economic, and political forces” (tian). Those who accord with tian are preserved, while those who resist it are annihilated.
Duke Jing of Qi said, “Since we are not in the position to command (ling), and cannot endure what is commanded of us (ming), we are cut off from events.” In tears he gave his daughter in marriage to Wu.

Currently, small states emulate large states, and yet are humiliated having to endure what is commanded of them. This is like young people feeling humiliated in emulating their predecessors. If one is humiliated in this manner, it is best to emulate King Wen. Emulating King Wen, a large state given five years and a small state given seven will surely bring about order in the world...

Mencius identifies King Wen with the establishment of social, economic, and political conditions that will commence an “age” in which human experience flourishes without coercion through the dynamics of associated humanity. The rulers of oppressed states are encouraged to begin the process of bringing this about by initiating certain economic reforms and providing models of filial piety and personal cultivation: for these will be the “root” of such a sociopolitical order. Rulers must then exercise patience, and allow time for the influence of their characters (de) to take effect on the “age.”

Given the situation in Warring States China, Mencius considers this a long-term project. Rulers must work within conditions as they are, and even their best efforts may not yield results in their present generation. Mencius relates this to Duke Wen, who feels threatened by the rising state of Qi:

If you do your best (shan), then among your descendents in future generations there is sure to be a King. All the exemplary person can do in commencing an enterprise is to pass on an inheritance. When it comes to bringing that enterprise to successful completion, this is a matter of tian. What can you do about Qi? You can only do your best.26
Tian as forces beyond the ruler’s individual efforts must cooperate in bringing about a better world; recall that in order for something to come to pass, the “times” (shi) must be right.

Mencius feels that his time (jinshi) is one in which things ought to come to pass with greater ease (yiran) by virtue of the “propensity” (shi) of prevailing circumstances. Mencius sees his world as one that is tired of coercive forms of government and ripe for the advent of a more dynamic form of government through associated humanity:

In the present time (shi), if a state of ten thousand chariots were to bring about order through associated humanity, the people would rejoice as if being freed from hanging by their heels. With half the effort of the ancients, twice as much can be achieved: such is what is possible in these times.

Mencius sees promise in his age, but while his efforts as counselor to rulers fail his frustration grows. After failing to influence the course of affairs at Qi, he confides to Chongyu:

It must be that tian does not yet want to bring about peaceful order in the world. If there was a desire for peaceful order in this present age (shi), then who is there apart from us to bring it about? Of course I am frustrated.

As James Legge notes, Mencius perseveres in public council for fifteen years beyond this episode before finally retiring to compose his written works. Mencius understands the history of human accomplishment cyclically. He calculates that the world gives birth to a King in intervals of roughly five hundred years, and he says that “ages” take their names from these Kings. The more prolific Sage (shengren) influences a hundred generations. The influence of the exemplary person and the petty person each wane after five generations. Mencius employs the
"proximity" motif in discussing the influence of the Sage. That Confucius is so proximate yet Mencius' age so troubled is a fact that Mencius registers with incredulity, displeasure, and palpable frustration:

From the time of Confucius to the present is just over one hundred years. We are not yet far from the age of the Sage. And we are so near (jin) to the place that he lived. And yet there is no one. Very well then, there is no one.\textsuperscript{30}

However optimistic Mencius is about the capacity of the human disposition, he realizes that \textit{tian} poses a formidable constraint upon the aspirations of humans to advance their way.

The Conditions for Political Legitimacy

Regardless of the constraints posed by \textit{tian}, the most productive course (\textit{dao}) is one that can always be advanced. On all levels of experience: social, economic, political, biological, and so on, there are conditions that provide the baseline against which human progress itself is measured. The Guodian strips suggest that, like \textit{tian}, the notion of "conditions" (\textit{ming}) in the Zi-Meng school has a rather pronounced social dimension. This is evidenced in the document, \textit{Honoring Virtue and Appropriateness} (\textit{Zundeyi}), wherein the notion of \textit{ren} itself is plausibly understood as "society." The text reads:

One understands oneself by understanding "society" (\textit{ren}). By understanding society, one understands "conditions" (\textit{ming}). By understanding conditions, one understands the most productive course (\textit{dao}). By understanding the most productive course, one understands how to proceed effectively (\textit{xing}). There are those who understand themselves but do not understand conditions. There are none, however, who understand conditions but fail to understand themselves.
One understands oneself in relation to the possibilities of one's "age" by understanding the "forces" that shape one's historical moment. Once these are recognized, one understands the "conditions" under which humans must make their way (dao). With such an understanding, one can proceed effectively (xing) within the given circumstances.

Bringing the social dimension of tian and ming into the foreground is helpful as we establish the broader significance of these terms, particularly as they are used to express the notion of a socially conferred political mandate. Tang Junyi describes the notion of "tian's charge" (tianming) as a negotiation between tian and the human being in "their mutual influence and response, their mutual giving and receiving." In the Mencius, the potential effect of virtuous character (de) on society speaks to the "mutual influence" that Tang calls our attention to. "Forces" (tian) may begin as constraints, but within these constraints is an opportunity to establish an efficacious character with the power to sway political sentiment and alter "conditions" (ming) in a favorable manner. If this is accomplished, then conditions come to sponsor the person in the form of "tian's charge" (tianming). The political "mandate" is a negotiation between "forces" and the ruler, a result of their "mutual giving and receiving."

Thus understood, the mandate to rule differs fundamentally from the notion of "divine commandment" in the Judeo-Christian tradition; this is a point that Tang wishes to make clear:

Since God's commandment comes first (in the Judeo-Christian tradition), man's future can be determined by God, and the word "commandment" thus somehow implies predetermination. In ancient Chinese thought, on the contrary, the Heavenly mandate comes after man's cultivation of virtue (de), and the future of men is thus not determined by God. Moreover, after a man receives the Heavenly mandate, there is still something (i.e., cultivation of virtue) for him to do which can be done only by himself. The "acceptance of the Heavenly ming," in its true meaning, is therefore the starting point of something to be done, rather than the terminal point of something already accomplished.
In the Mencius, the conditions that facilitate moral and political legitimacy are brought about as a result of the associated humanity exhibited by the ruler. Through the personal cultivation of associated humanity, the ruler’s “force of character” (de) becomes authoritative in its influence on the sociopolitical realm: “forces” then turn in favor of the ruler. This is an achievement, but as a “mandate” it is sufficient only so long as the ruler sustains a root in filial piety and continues to govern through associated humanity.

The account of this dynamic in the Zhongyong presents as full an explanation as a Zi-Meng Confucian would desire, satisfying four important standards of evidence: historical example, botanical analogy, appeal to the Songs, and words attributed to Confucius himself:

Confucius said, “Shun was tremendously filial. His character (de) rendered him a sage, and his honor rendered him a son of tian. His wealth encompassed all within the four seas. Temple sacrifices were made to him, preserving his reputation. Hence, with great character one is sure to attain some status, enjoy some prosperity, succeed in achieving a name for oneself, and secure a long life.

So it is with the generation of things by tian. Bounty is awarded by virtue of the “capacity” or “wood-stuff” (cai) of a thing. Thus, well-planted trees are strengthened and those ready to fall are left to collapse.

The Songs say, “Admirable and pleasant the exemplary person, character clearly displayed, treating all people appropriately, tian grants its favor. Protection, assistance, and favorable conditions (ming) - from tian are these extended.” Thus, those with character (de) are certain to enjoy favorable conditions (ming).

To become an exemplary leader, one must first become a person of character. To remain a person of character, one must remain “firmly planted” in the soil that nourishes that state of character; hence, “Shun was tremendously filial.” In response to such character,
tian extends its favor in the form of conditions favorable to continued political success. Favorable conditions are withdrawn only with the moral decline of the ruler to whom the mandate to rule has been charged. In the Mencian framework, it is in large part tian as "social forces" or "the eyes and ears of the people" that bestows the favorable conditions (ming) that sponsor the legitimacy of a political figure.

The Conditions for Human Achievement

Tian and ming denote more than "social forces and conditions," but they retain the transactional aspect of the "social" across the range of their extended meanings. Judging by the Disposition Arises from Conditions document, "conditions" denote any phenomena encountered in the course of emerging in formative transaction with the world. Confucians defer to the causal efficacy of formative conditions. Confucius himself "stands in awe of conditions," and seeks to "understand conditions." Mencius also relates the following about Confucius:

Confucius said, "There are conditions (ming)." He advanced by way of ritual propriety and retreated by way of appropriateness. Whether he attained his objectives or not he said, "There are conditions." Tang suggests that ming in such contexts is not to be understood as terminal or ineluctable, but rather as in the political context: "the starting point of something further to be done." The Confucian notion of pressing forward while accepting conditions, however, has from early on been mistaken for a "fatalist" doctrine. Mozi perceived it as such: he claimed that the "fatalism" of the Confucians amounted to moral passivity and therefore threatened to "overthrow appropriateness in the world." Mozi's reasoning is easily understood. In a descriptive sense, ming does refer to objective conditions. These
conditions are often not negotiable, as when Confucius attributes Boniu's terminal illness to ming, adding that "there is nothing we can do," or when Sima Niu, lamenting that he has no brothers, is reminded by Zixia that "in death and life objective circumstances (ming) apply." It is possible that Mozi was aware of Confucians who exhibited a morally passive attitude toward conditions. Tang however believes that Mozi was "attacking an imaginary Confucianism, a product of his own mind." In any event, the "fatalism" debate is only indirectly registered in the Mencius.

The debate gives way to a more subtle discussion of the relationship between "conditions" (ming) and the formation of a disposition (xing). This is the theme of the Disposition Arises from Conditions document. Having highlighted the social dimension of "conditions," we are better prepared to address once again the transactional relationship between these two notions.

Disposition is an expression of limit. As suggested in "Disposition Arises from Conditions," just to be disposed is to be shaped in predilection and possessed of some measure of efficacy (shan). Predilections and efficacy take shape in the process of encountering "conditions" in the world. This formative transaction is registered at the level of feeling (xin). The emotional content (qing) of a disposition: pleasure, anger, grief, and sadness, indicate emerging habits that define the parameters of personal character, indicate the presence of personal aspiration, and attest to the limits of one's predilections and efficacy in relation to objective conditions as they stand.

Does this mean that one's disposition is wholly dictated by conditions? Mencius claims not. While everything is shaped by conditions, one does not capitulate to them completely. He explains:

There is nothing that is without conditions (feiming). One goes along with and accommodates only those conditions that are proper to accept; thus, one who comes to understand conditions will not go on standing beneath a wall on the
This statement can be understood in a number of ways. For instance, in the political realm, one resists the oppressive conditions of an age by cultivating one's person, in solitude if need be. In the moral realm, one fashions a moral disposition through education and effort by resisting the "desire" (yu) for objects that might otherwise condition one's predilections. However it is understood, this passage states unequivocally that "conditions" (ming) are not wholly determinative of the human experience. Aspiration plays an equally important role.

Human Virtue in the Sacrifices

The dynamic between "conditions" and "aspiration" is a basis upon which to understand human virtues in the Mencius. Human virtue consists of "getting the most" (jin) out of conditions as they present themselves. The term jin is closely associated with ritual propriety (li), particularly with the burial rites and sacrifices due to one's parents. The death of one's parents is an occasion for "getting the most" out of oneself (zijin) according to Mencius, and Confucius suggests the same. The relationship between the notion of zijin and the funeral rites provides insight into the participatory and emergent nature of all human virtues in the Mencian tradition. Since the "substance" of the four human virtues is not predetermined, Mencius, like Confucius, does not provide any definitive, once-and-for-all statement of what wisdom, associated humanity, appropriateness, or ritual propriety consists of. There is much discussion, however, about rites associated with the death of one's parents. As a subset of practices that fall under the virtue of ritual propriety, these rites provide insight into the nature of human
virtue generally. As we shall see, the notion of "integrity" is of central importance in "getting the most" out one's capacity and providing Confucian virtue its "substance."

Recall that, for Mencius, spontaneous reactions at the level of feeling historically gave rise to the burial rites of parents; and henceforth, these genuinely integrated (cheng) expressions of human feeling (xin) were codified into ritual propriety. Echoing the Mencian notion of ritual propriety, the "Summary on Sacrifices" (litong) chapter of the Book of Ritual submits:

Of all the ways to effect order among people, there is none more imperative than ritual propriety. There are five kinds of ritual practice, and there is none more important than sacrifices. Sacrifice is not something that comes to a person from outside (wai). Focused in the person (zizhong) it emerges, being born in feeling (xin). When feelings are moved, they are given expression in ritual propriety. Hence, only persons of quality are able to "get the most" (jin) out of ritual propriety's significance.

In coming to understand the Mencian notion of emergent human virtues, and how these relate to "getting the most" out of one's capacities and feelings, there are points to be drawn from this explanation of ritual propriety.

First, the relationship between ritual propriety and social order is not an instrumental, means-end relationship whereby ritual is an "external" (wai) device by which some antecedent discharge of feeling is directed to a desired end. Confucians like Mencius and the author of the "Summary of the Sacrifices" do not consider human beings to be driven by a preexisting set of unruly desires in need of sublimation through ritual propriety, as Xunzi later surmises. Ritual propriety is instead a quality conferred upon genuinely expressed feeling, not a device for the sublimation of some errant feeling. Confucius here concurs. When Confucius says that "deference without ritual propriety is lethargy, and caution without ritual propriety is timidity," ritual propriety denotes the
productive form of expressing deference and caution. Deference, in other words, is not a result produced through the instrumental application of "ritual form" upon a human lethargy that is already present; instead, as Confucius elsewhere says, "deference brings one closer to ritual propriety."55

As a human virtue, ritual propriety is an end as much as a means. Rather than being a tool for the purpose of maintaining social order, ritual propriety is both the expression of well-integrated feeling as well as the form in which an optimal level of self-expression is integrated in a productive, meaningful, and qualitatively "human" way. Within the framework of a qi cosmology, there is no sharp distinction between ritual form and its function. Ritual form is a configuration that enables the optimal expression of qualitative energies (qi) by fitting human experience and action productively into the patterns and dispositions of the environing world. Ritual propriety is itself a "disposition" that facilitates the discharge of qualitative energies and emotions.

The account given of the generation of ritual form in the Zuozhuan locates it within a qi cosmology:

Ritual form involves three things: the regulative patterning of tian, the appropriate fit with earth, and the most effective course of behavior for human beings. People genuinely model themselves with respect to the regulative patterning of tian and earth. They model what in tian is clear, and accord with the dispositions (xing) of earth. They live by the six qi and have use of the five phases. Qi generates the five flavors, manifests itself in the five colors, and displays itself in the five tones. In excess these qualities confuse and disorder, and people lose their disposition (xing). Ritual form is generated to furnish (feng) a disposition (xing).57

Ritual forms are an embodiment of patterns generated out of environments in which productive integration is sought. In terms of qi cosmology, the functional dimension of ritual form is suggested in the cognate relationship it shares with the body (ti), which is
also an emergent pattern shaped over the course of adjustment to an environment, and also filled with configurative energy. As Peter Broodberg observes, "ritual form" and "body" are the only two common terms that share the "vase" phonetic (li). Both are "container" notions; and as such, both are "shapes" that configure qualitative energies.

For the Confucian, the ideal ritual-based society is one in which people participate in the accreted significance of human experience by contributing their energies to the performance of the rituals that have come to embody, express, and distinguish that experience. Ritual form, in turn, shapes the participants as qualitatively "human" by facilitating the transmission of feelings that have come, over the course of time, to be deemed "human." More is involved than an outward display of behavior. Ritual propriety is a constitutive disposition, both habitual and attitudinal. As a disposition, it is an achievement carved into the world, and is maintained only through the focused purposes of those so disposed. Mencius explains how the ancients regarded ritualized behavior, and thereby prescribes that it be adopted at the level of a disposition: thus, constitutive of a person's character (de):

Yao and Shun had it as their disposition (xing). Tang and Wu reverted back to it. When movements and countenance, all around, become completely focused in ritual propriety; this is the highest concentration of character (de). Mourning in sorrow for the deceased: not something done for the living. Advancing in virtue without wavering: not done to secure emolument. Invariably standing by one's word: not done to render one's conduct proper. Exemplary persons proceed by this standard (fa), and simply leave the rest to conditions (ming).

One's character (de) indicates the integrity of one's conduct; this is to say that moral and ritualized actions, unmediated by external desires or ends, proceed directly from a disposition that shapes habitual proclivities to behave in such a manner. Exemplary
persons aspire to cultivate themselves according to this “standard” of character, regardless of conditions (ming).

Character is important in the Zi-Meng school. The formation of one’s character in habitual conduct is the theme of the recently unearthed Five Modes of Conduct (Wuxingpian) document. The Mencian approach to the “internal/external” (nei/wai) dimensions of cultivating the four sprouts of virtue into habitudes is subtler than that of the “Five Modes of Conduct,” suggesting that the Five Modes of Conduct is a purer and most likely earlier statement of the “internalist” position on these matters. Still, the Five Modes of Conduct anticipates the Mencian notion of integrating virtue into one’s character through the development of a disposition as opposed to simply “practicing” (xing) virtuous acts. The text begins:

Associated humanity taking shape on the inside is called the formation of character (dezhixing); when it does not take shape on the inside it is called simply practice. Appropriateness taking shape on the inside is called the formation of character; when it does not take shape on the inside it is called simply practice. Ritual propriety taking shape on the inside is called the formation of character; when it does not take shape on the inside it is called simply practice. Wisdom taking shape on the inside is called the formation of character; when it does not take shape on the inside it is called simply practice. Sagacity taking shape on the inside is called the formation of character; when it does not take shape on the inside it is called simply practice.

The Five Modes of Conduct is concerned with the “internal” formation of habitudes that become constitutive of character.

In the Mencius, character (de) becomes less an “internal” and more a “transactional” notion. Character exhibits its influences in tension with both conditions (ming) and the characters of others. In the Mencius, the term “character” refers primarily to that “force of character” that in the Analects is likened to a wind (feng) that in the
absence of coercion transforms the characters of others. The absence of coercion transforms the characters of others.65 Mencius cites this saying of Confucius specifically in describing the influential character of those who wholeheartedly participate in the funeral rites of their parents.66 The “transforming influence of character” is the dominant sense of character (de) in the Mencius.67

The “force of character” that Mencius recognizes in those who execute the sacrificial ritual with integrity is a force that arises not from “within” the person but rather “in relation” through a form of well-integrated personality associated with filial piety and family affection. The forms of feeling that Mozi derogates as Confucian “partiality” (bie): that is, family devotion and deference to seniors, in the Zhongyong are identified as the sources of ritual propriety.68 When it comes to the burial rites, mourning observances, and seasonal sacrifices to one’s parents, these are all rooted in filial piety, which the “Summary of Sacrifices” identifies as the “storehouse” (chu) of the devotion required to ritually maintain the filial relationship beyond the parent’s death.69

Just as the “force of character” of a ruler is always in negotiation with the “mandate” (ming), and thus, in Tang Junyi’s words, “a mutual giving and receiving,” the force of character of those who perform sacrifices with integrity can also be understood as a negotiation with conditions (ming). Sacrifices deny the finality of death, an irrevocable ming, by maintaining the filial relationship regardless. Sacrifice is an ideal example of what it means to “get the most” out of experience within the constraints posed by conditions. The performance of the burial, mourning, and sacrificial rites is identified in the “Summary of Sacrifices” as “getting the most” out of one’s self (zijin): precisely that which Mencius considers so important on the occasion of the death of a parent.70 These three rites allow one to “get the most” out of the parent/child relationship by enabling the most complete expression of one’s filial feeling, even as conditions conspire to dissolve their significance. Hence, Mencius says:
While they live, caring for parents is not to be considered a great thing. Only when that care accompanies them into death is it to be considered a great thing.\textsuperscript{71}

In performing the sacrificial rites, the parent, the surviving offspring, and the relationship become sanctified as qualitatively human, over-against what is given by conditions.\textsuperscript{72} The human is not confined to, in Mencius' words, “die in fetters and chains,” by capitulating to each and every condition.\textsuperscript{73} This would factor out the forces of human feeling and aspiration.

In terms of its religious function, the key to ritual efficacy is integrity. Ritual must be performed by all with reverence and genuine feeling. For this reason, it is important that royalty personally participate in ritual observances rather than doing so through emissaries. The “Summary of Sacrifices” explains why this is so:

It is to give personal expression to their integrity and sincerity (chengxin). Integrity and sincerity is called “getting the most” (jin). “Getting the most” is called reverence. With reverence and “getting the most,” one is able to attend to the spirits and the inscrutable. Such is the way of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{74}

For the Confucian, personal integrity and reverence in the performance of a sacrifice are its most vital elements; in fact, these are deemed even more vital than the presence of the spirits themselves. In the Analects, we read:

“Sacrifice as though present” is considered to mean “sacrifice to spirits as though spirits are present.” But Confucius said: “If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though there were no sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{75}

When it comes to sacrifices, Confucius is mainly interested in the “human” dimension of the experience. While he advocates reverence in sacrifice, the realm of the spirits is among the topics that he “did not discuss.”\textsuperscript{76} Asked directly by Zilu how to attend to the
spirits, Confucius responds, "Not yet able to attend to other people, how can you attend to the spirits." In one form or another, the priority is always placed on the human dimension as the source of religious meaning.

Mozi considers the Confucian attitude towards sacrifice to be confused: Confucians reverently maintain the sacrifices and yet toward the spirits they are seemingly agnostic. Mozi's own argument for belief in the spirits in his "Clarifying Ghosts" (Minggui) chapter is a curious mixture. The bulk of his "demonstration" consists of detailed appeals to the written records of various ghostly encounters. Not surprisingly, however, the underlying thrust of his argument is based on his utilitarian principle of benefit (li). Belief in the existence of retributive spirits, Mozi reasons, will regulate human conduct; and even if such ghosts don't exist, the belief in their presence at the sacrifices will at least serve the purpose of "bringing people together in a pleasant group and generating intimacy among the village community."

As A.C. Graham points out, the Mohists are in a sense less "religious" than are those they denounce as skeptics. The Confucian approach to the sacrifices, unlike that of the Mohist, is not instrumental in any bald, utilitarian sense. Based instead on the normative measure of harmony (he), Confucian sacrifices are designed to facilitate the enhancement of one's particular experience by integrating it into an order that both elevates and sanctifies that experience. Like the peppercorn in the pot of soup, when one participates reverently in a sacrifice one is both beneficiary of and contributor to an aesthetic order in which the uniqueness and significance of one's life become more pronounced. Establishing continuity between oneself and one's deceased family members is a uniquely human mode of generating meaning. The religious dividend of sacrifice is that the significance of a human life is enhanced through its sincere performance. Whether this entails the existence of ghosts is beside the point. Confucian spirituality has more to do with the depth and width of one's felt connections in the world, and the formation of a disposition that maximizes this experience.
As a human virtue, ritual propriety is something that transforms the human experience; it reconfigures one's very disposition in the world. Humans are made through ritual; but this is accomplished neither through a coercive process like that of “making” cups and bowls from a willow tree, nor through a self-conscious process like that of putting a doctrine into practice. Ritual makes humans by shaping their dispositions. When this is achieved, and ritual propriety is carried through with integrity (cheng), there is a real elevation of felt experience. Perhaps all of the Mencian “four sprouts” await this kind of development. Just as the establishment of sacrifices reflect one’s “getting the most” out of filial affection, the “fruit” of all human virtues emerge into experience as people find communicable forms with which to articulate, as best they can, the amorphous imperatives of feeling. One wonders if there is any limit to what it means to “become human” thus understood. Mencius, at least, does not appear to place any ceiling on the human capacity.

Aspiration and the Human Way

As suggested above, Mencius allows for discretion in determining which conditions (ming) are to be regarded as productive and which are to be regarded as unproductive to the advancement of the human way (dao). Since any disposition “arises from conditions,” this discretionary prerogative has bearing on the definition of a disposition. Not all conditions deserve equal status in determining what a “human” disposition will consist of. Mencius explains:

The relationships between mouth and taste, eyes and color, ears and sound, nose and smell, and the four limbs and physical repose: these are a matter of disposition (xing), and something about them has the quality of conditions (ming). Exemplary persons do not consider these as their disposition. The relationships between associated humanity and the parent/child relation,
appropriateness and the ruler/subject relation, ritual propriety and the guest/host relation, wisdom and the person of quality, and the Sage and the course of tian; these are a matter of conditions (ming), and something about them has the quality of a disposition (xing). Exemplary persons do not consider these as conditions. 81

Mencius is interested in the definition of a “human” disposition that goes beyond those traits that all animals share by virtue of biological conditioning. Distinctly “human” traits, here listed as five, correspond with the four Mencian sprouts plus sagacity: a listing also encountered in the Guodian Five Modes of Conduct document. Experience in the world “conditions” these five modes of conduct, although not in a strictly biological sense; instead, the experiences of family affection and a Confucian education condition them. Exemplary persons, rather than identify their dispositions with factors that condition animals generally, consider family and cultural conditioning to be formative of their dispositions. In doing so, exemplary persons estimate themselves as distinctly “human.”

Mencius, like Confucius, respects the power of conditions to limit the possibilities of human achievement. Neither of these thinkers, however, is “fatalist” in the manner that Mozi contends. For Mencius, humans find a way of asserting their aspirations in the face of conditions. Persons who extend the human way will “take their stands” (li) within conditions as they present themselves. Humans aspire to get the most out of what is available. As a corollary, extending human experience will mean getting the most out of the feelings (xin) concomitant with a human disposition. To find optimal expression for these feelings in the face of given conditions is to perform a role of enormous significance to Mencius, one that he identifies with tian. Mencius says:

Getting the most out of one's feelings is to realize one's disposition (xing). To realize one's disposition, one then realizes tian. If one sustains one's feelings and
nurture one's disposition, one thereby does the work of tian. Neither premature death nor long-life should cause one to be of two minds about this; one should cultivate one's person and await the consequences, and thereby take one's stand (ji) within the given conditions (ming).

The ability of a person to flourish within the conditions that environ human emergence reflects the quality of "integration" (cheng) that is initially developed in the Mencius and refined in the Zhongyong. The Zhongyong begins with the premise that "What tian conditions is a disposition" (tianmingzhiweixing), and what tian "mandates" in this instance also has the quality of what Tang describes as "the starting point of something to be done, rather than the terminal point of something already accomplished." The Zhongyong states that dispositions are to be furthered along (jianxing) and the most productive course for a disposition cultivated (xiudao). As in the Mencius, this involves the process of "getting the most" (jin) out of dispositions - transforming them - and thereby participating in the generative function of tian. The Zhongyong describes the process as follows:

Only those most optimally integrated (zhicheng) into the world are able to get the most out of their dispositions. Once able to get the most out of one's disposition, one is then able to get the most out of the disposition of others. Once able to get the most out of the disposition of others, one is then able to get the most out of the disposition of things and events. Once being able to get the most of the disposition of things and events, one can assist in the transforming and nourishing processes of heaven and earth (tiandij). Once able to assist in the transforming and nourishing processes of heaven and earth, one becomes the third member in a triad with heaven and earth.

In the Zhongyong, those who are able to perform this function are considered the "counterparts" of tian; expressed another way: they "are tian."
The Sage performs this role; and according to Mencius, anyone can become a Sage. Sagacity entails nothing more than getting the most out of one's conditions. To do this in the most familiar way is a profound achievement: "the way of Yao and Shun is simply to be a filial family member (xiaodi)." For Confucians, the most profound human experiences emerge from and remain rooted in such beginnings. Given this, Yao and Shun provide a "model" (fa) for human achievement as "the supreme realization of human relationships (renlun)," just as the carpenter's square and compass are the "supreme realization of squares and circles." To model the achievements of Yao and Shun does not mean simply replicating their relationships; rather, it means developing within one's own context one's own human relationships under conditions as they present themselves. To model Yao and Shun is to bring associated humanity to fruition in a novel way in one's own experience.

For rulers, however, this is not enough. Rulers must do more: they must establish socioeconomic conditions that promote the novel expression of human experience collectively. They must bring about order without coercion by facilitating the free intercourse of associated living: a political model that Mencius identifies with the ancient Kings. Mencius addresses rulers when he says:

Even with the way of Yao and Shun at hand, if one does not bring about order through associated humanity, then one is unable to securely order the world. Today there are those who have feelings of associated humanity and a reputation for it, but the people do not enjoy any benefit from them. They cannot leave a model for future generations since they do not proceed by the way of the ancient Kings. Hence it is said, "Goodness is insufficient for the purpose of bringing about order; a model cannot carry itself into practice." Rulers wishing to legitimate their rule must not only tend to the cultivation of their own persons; they must also establish the socioeconomic conditions for human flourishing
more generally. They must create conditions under which the human experience is allowed to emerge along the aspired-towards course of development.

Confucius teaches that "it is the human that is able to extend the way (dao), not the way that is able to extend the human." To be human is to actively participate in extending a way; and there is no destination antecedent to the process of extending it. In the same spirit, Mencius teaches that human virtues do not emerge (you) from outside (wai) the human experience itself. Bringing human virtue to fruition (shi) is a process of nurturing, cultivating, growing, and extending human sensibilities into a world that is always in the making. This process, like any growth process, takes shape within conditions: there are conditions that hamper it, and conditions that support it. The most productive course (dao) is one that makes the most out of these conditions, and proceeds most fruitfully given the circumstances.

Mencius, as we have seen, is concerned that the process of becoming human does not stagnate as it makes its way forward. Hence his disapproval of technical moralities that disengage the human experience from its lived connections at the level of feeling (xin), which is vital to the nourishment of the evolving human disposition. Recall that the formation of constitutive habit at the level of feeling is what marks the progress of a disposition's growth. Feeling, as the emotional content (qing) of a disposition, defines the very character of that disposition. Dispositions take shape as feeling extends and becomes reinforced in habit; and as the parameters of a "human" disposition are defined and developed, it is the human way itself that is extended. The human way (dao) "feels" its way forward in the pursuit of aspirations.

Recall that, according to Disposition Arises from Conditions, the feeling (xin) that is concomitant with an initial, emergent disposition does not have any fixed aspirations (dingzhi) prior to the process of transacting with conditions. Once human feeling comes to have its aspirations, however, these become realized through distinctly human forms of expression: poetry, literature, and ritual and musical form. The "art"
that this entails is one that is reflected in the Mencian project as well. *Disposition Arises from Conditions* relates the following:

Generally, feelings come to have aspirations. Without them nothing is possible. People cannot carry them through in isolation, just as a mouth cannot speak in isolation. An ox born will grow. A goose born will spread its wings. It is disposition that causes this to happen. However, for a human, it is education that brings it about.93

As for the way (dao), the art of feeling (xinshu) is most important. The way has four artistic modes, and the “art of human way-making” (rendao) is the only mode that can lay the course. The other three artistic modes only proceed on it.94

In the arts of poetry, writing, and ritual and musical form, their beginnings emerge in and in each case are born of the human experience (ren). In poetry, there is something done and it is produced. In writing, there is something done and it is recorded. In ritual and musical form, there is something done and these are established.95

In *Disposition Arises from Conditions*, the process of making the human way (rendao) is designated first among the arts: it is the art of “feeling the human way forward.” The remaining three arts are only expressions of what humans come to do through the art of feeling, which is the vanguard of novelty in the human experience. Feeling, however, forges ahead only by virtue of its aspirations (zhi), which are not fixed at the start. They do come to be formed, however; for in their absence no “human” expression is possible. Without aspirations, humans would merely go through their biological motions, as when oxen grow or geese spread their wings. Humans would simply eat, live, and die – all without significance. Humans have more to contribute to the world than the discharge of a biological disposition, however: they proceed in the “art” of creating their way. Humans contribute their aspirations.
The Mencian way demands that humans aspire to the most that they can possibly achieve. Anything short of this is unacceptable:

Gongsun Chou said, "The way is lofty and beautiful, but to attempt it is like climbing to tian itself; it is something that cannot be reached. Why not replace it with something people can hope to reach so they can be diligent on a daily basis?"

Mencius said, "A great carpenter does not surrender the plumb-line to accommodate the inept worker. Yi did not surrender the proper standards for drawing the bow to accommodate the inept archer. Exemplary persons, in drawing the bow, don't just discharge it; they seem to lower themselves respectfully, they find center on the way (dao) and take their place. Those who are able, follow them."%6

For Mencius, maintaining the way requires positive human effort and the ability to measure up to standards that challenge the "ineptitude" of an age. Without such high ideals, human progress stagnates. In the passage that follows directly on that above, Mencius makes the point again:

When the world is on the way (dao), that course inspires the person; when the world is off the way, the person aspires for that course. I have never heard of a course inspired by what people just happen to be."%7

Becoming human is not an idle affair for Mencius; nor is it some irrevocable birthright. While one might be born under human conditions, one must sustain and extend the feelings that distinguish that disposition if one is to remain human. To remain human means to keep pace on the human way; and that way continues to advance. There are some humans whose feelings issue into aspirations for a more equitable, harmonious,
and beautiful world, and like master archers or carpenters, they have already set the next standard despite the lag of their contemporaries.

Aspirations are not realized in isolation, however, just as a mouth cannot communicate in isolation. Mencius relates that the ancient sages, in times of success, realized their aspirations by improving the world together with others. And when social forces and conditions required them to pursue their aspirations in solitude, this was done only in order to present themselves as inspirations to the age.99 The Mencian way is one of personal cultivation and individual sagacity; but the goal is communal growth and transformation. The society that best facilitates this goal is one governed by associated humanity. Mencius endorses government by associated humanity as a condition for the possibility of unhindered human feeling. Recall that for Mencius “associated humanity is human feeling (renxin),”99 and “associated humanity coming together in what is human is called the way (dao).”100 The “way” emerges from the shared experiences of a community, one that is literally “feeling” that way forward. Ideally, each person in this community becomes a sage and thereby extends the collective human “way” – each person contributes something towards what it means to “become human.”

At the outset of this study, reference was made to the grove of trees at the Mencius Temple at Zouxian. Recall that at this site, dedicated to the legacy of Mencius, there stand saplings beneath magnificent, towering trees. This illustration of Mencian thought was used to introduce the botanical metaphor and to distinguish the more aesthetic reading of “becoming human” from the more prevalent reading that takes renxing to mean “human nature” in an essentialist or teleological sense. Now having developed the alternative, aesthetic reading of this Mencian metaphor and having
presented the notion of “human disposition” (renxing) that it supports, we are in a position to reflect upon the philosophical contributions of this tradition.

Perhaps the most important assertion made in the Mencius is that the human experience, in its most important respects, does not reduce to biological conditioning. While there are biological conditions within which humans make their way, these conditions do not provide a sufficient account of the qualitatively human disposition. In this tradition, cultural features serve to distinguish the human experience from that of the animal or brute; whereas, biological or genetic features alone do not do this. Equally important in the Mencius is the privileging of family-borne features that situate the process of becoming human in sets of circumstances unique to particular persons rather than in a set of circumstances identical to all persons. While family is an important, even defining feature of the human experience in the Mencius, it serves within the Mencian framework to reinforce the site-specificity of personal growth. Together, these features of becoming human: the privileging of cultural over genetic conditions and the location of human becoming in particular sets of circumstances rather than a uniform set, controvert the kind of essentialism associated with an end-driven “nature.” The human experience for Mencius is a product of education, nurture, culture, personal relationships, and aspirations: influences that are considered "accidental" rather than "essential" in any standard essentialist framework.

In the yard of the temple in Zouxian, those saplings do not represent generic instances of some uniform process. Instead, they represent the potential to re-make the grove in which they have “taken their stand" (ii). Metaphorically, those young trees are like the young people that Confucius holds in such high esteem: for as the Master says, “how do we know that they will not surpass our contemporaries?” Humans have the capacity to improve human life in the Confucian framework, not by virtue of what they essentially are, but by virtue of what they might become if they commit themselves to getting the most out of the opportunities that conditions present. Confucians respect the
force of conditions (ming), but they do not capitulate to them. Humans, one might say, “conspire” with conditions while “aspiring” to surpass their limits. The model of becoming human in the Mencian school is transactional: the dialectic between “forces” (tian), “conditions” (ming), and the “human disposition” (renxing) is one of mutual shaping and continual reshaping. There is no room in this framework for an unchanging “nature.” The human way (rendao) that proceeds within the on-going processes of tian (tiandao) is a way that is always in the making.

The process interpretation confers upon the notion of renxing a relevance that essentialist readings with a commitment to a static, a-historical “nature” cannot hope to confer. If the “human” (ren) experience in the Mencius is rendered essential, then it is essentially a fourth-century Confucian experience. The Mencius then speaks to none of us. One of the merits of Mendian process thought, however, is its capacity for internal self-correction over time. Within the Mencian framework, the category of the “human” can be continually updated by the activity of sages, and the standards for human feeling and conduct are thereby continually revised in each successive “age” that, according to Mencius, takes its name from those sages. The process notion of renxing is far more sensitive to human history than is the alternative, essentialist conception.

This renders the process notion “transcendent” in a much more relevant sense than its a-historical alternative. The Mencian notion of renxing, as an open-ended process notion, “transcends” the limits of any imperfect age. At no point does the notion of what is “human” become locked into an imaginary, static eternity by the ambitions of one group at a single time and in a single place. At no point in human history can the human experience be declared finished. At no point in the course of human cultivation can the product be regarded complete. The process notion is fundamentally progressive. One remains well within the parameters of Mencian thinking while maintaining that Mencius himself, in fourth century China, failed to see the possibilities of the human experience. Mencian thinking “transcends” even Mencius.
The notions of integration (chêng) and harmony (hé) represent the normative measures of personal and communal growth in the Confucian school. Yet, there is no set limit to their realization, nor any single formula that will secure their fulfillment as conditions shift. Mencius is sensitive to this. As long as there is change and growth in the human experience, there is need for greater integration and harmony. As long as these measures are less than perfectly realized, then every aspiration for a better human experience can become the next standard to which humans are challenged to rise. It is my contention that history more urgently needs the process conception of becoming human - more so than any than stale conception declaring humans essentially “Good” for all time. It is the statement of the former, more challenging conception of becoming human that I find to be the central message of the Mencius. And in my estimation, this is the feature that gives this text its enduring value.
1 Mencius 2A: 4 and 4A: 8 quote the Songs regarding the "calamity" that tian is capable of reaping. Mencius 1B: 10 also makes reference to the calamity that might issue from tian, although here too the words are not Mencius' own. In Mencius 2B: 1, Mencius speaks of the "seasons" of tian, the meteorological counterpart of the geographical features of the earth. In Mencius 1A: 6, tian also refers to the sky.


6 Mencius 5A: 5.


8 Shou means both to "bestow" and to "accept." In keeping with the primacy of situation over agency, these notions are resolved in the event of "allowing" something to occur by both permitting it and sponsoring it. For more on the "priority of situation over agency" see: Ames and Lau (1998) pp. 20-22. Footnote #


10 Mencius 7A: 9.

11 Mencius 1B: 16.


13 Mencius 7A: 33.

14 "Parent" (fumu) of the "people" (min) is a notion that occurs in Mencius 1A: 4, 1B: 7, and 3A: 3. Mencius does not make any explicit connection between political sentiment and family affection; that is my observation.

15 Mencius 4A: 7.

16 Mencius 4A: 5.

17 Mencius 4A: 2. As associated humanity (ren) is understood as a non-coercive form of governing, its opposite, buren, can be understood as any "coercive" form.

18 Mencius 2A: 4, 4A: 1, 4A: 3, 4A: 8, 4A: 9, 6A: 18, and 7B: 13.

19 Mencius 2A: 7 and 4A: 16.

20 See Mencius 2A: 5 for quoted references.

21 Mencius 1A: 7 and 3A: 3.

22 Mencius 6A: 7.

23 Mencius 7A: 23.
This is a strongly glossed translation of tian, proposed only to suggest that "prevalent social, economic, and political forces" lie within the term's range of meaning in this context.

The analytic distinction between the "descriptive" and "prescriptive" dimensions of tian and ming has been introduced and profitably examined by Robert Eno and Kwong Loi Shun. See: Eno (1990) p. 102-106 and Shun (1997) pp. 17-21. I prefer to proceed without this distinction and to allow these dimensions to dissolve as much as possible back into the more synthetic understanding representative of the tradition itself.

The phrase "there is nothing we can do" is found in the recently unearthed Dingzhou text. See: Ames and Rosemont (1998) p. 240 n. 93.
Martha Nussbaum has recently argued that emotions are not undergone passively, but rather indicate the conferral of value upon objects not completely within one's control yet deemed important to one's own flourishing. The account of emotional content in *Disposition Arises from Conditions* resonates with this view. See: Nussbaum (2001) pp. 19-33, passim.

Mencius 7A: 2.

Mencius 3A: 2.

Analects 19.17

Mencius 3A: 5.

Mencius 7A: 2. As for placing the *Lij"ong* chronologically, it is difficult to say whether the text pre-dates Mencius. Legge notes that "the concluding paragraph shows that (the *Lij"ong*) was written while the state of Lu was still had an existence; and if the whole Book proceeded from the same hand, it must have been composed some time after the death of Confucius and before the extinction of Lu," which took place in 248 B.C.E. Legge (1967) vol. I, pg. 37. Mencius lived from 372-289 B.C.E.

Xunzi 19.1a, 23.1 a-b.

Analects 8.2

Analects 1.13

Feng is another term that illustrates the primacy of situation over agency. It means both to "receive respectfully with both hands" and to "offer or serve respectfully."


Mencius 2A: 2.


The phrase shengde, which occurs as well in Mencius 5A: 4, can be rendered "abundance of character." As a transitive verb, however, the character sheng, pronounced cheng, means to "fill" or "put into a container." The grammar of Mencius 7B: 33 would tolerate the adjective more readily than the transitive verb; however, given the "container" dimension of ritual form, and the mention of "focus" (zhong), I consider it fitting to appeal to the term's seamless range of meaning and render shengde as "concentration of character."

Mencius 7B: 33.

Pang Pu suggests that, after the death of Confucius, Confucians divided into two camps: the "externalists" (*wai*) and "internalists" (*nei*). He suggests that, in responding to the question of how humans have the capacity for associated humanity (*ren*), the "internalists" begin with feeling (*xin*), whereas the "externalists" begin with *tian*. In the
former category, he includes Mencius and Zisi, and in the latter category, Xunzi and the
“Great Learning” (Daxue). See Pu (1998) pg. 89. While I do think there was an important
nei/wai debate in this period, Mencius is not nearly as “internalist” as the Five Modes of
Conduct document. I think Mencius is moving beyond the dichotomy altogether.

63 Roger Ames suggests that the phonetic play between “taking shape” (xing) and what is
in its first instance rendered “formation” and in its second, “practice” (xing), entails the
“formation of character” (dexing) in the first instance. (Unpublished translation)

Judging by the notion of “character” in Mencius 7B: 33 and the similar use of xing in
Mencius 4B: 19 as the emergent “course” of virtue in juxtaposition to the idea of its mere
“practice” would suggest that this is so.

64 Wuxingpian, Guodianchumuzhujian, pg. 149.

65 Analects 12.19

66 Mencius 3A: 2.

67 Most of the thirty-seven occurrences of “character” (de) in the Mencius can be
understood within the framework of “transforming influence.” The question of how
much “character” is required to become an effective king is one such instance. (Mencius
1A: 7) What D.C. Lau translates as the “transforming influence of morality” (de) is
deemed vital to the king that seeks to effect associate humanity (ren) among the
populace. (Mencius 2A: 3) In effecting order in the world, such influence of character is
said to “overflow and fill the four seas.” (Mencius 4A: 6) Friends are to be sought based
on their character (Mencius 5B: 3), and there is a correlation between the prevailing
character (de) of a state and the “quality” (xian) of those in positions of influence.
(Mencius 5A: 6; 4A: 7). The transforming influence of character is to be “prized” and
“respected” (Mencius 2A: 4; 2B: 2; 7A: 9); it is considered more important that the
influence of rank and age in governing people. (Mencius 2B: 2).

68 Zhongyong 20.

69 Liji 26/2/1 to 26/3/5

70 Liji 26/4/7

71 Mencius 4B: 13.

72 Burton Watson, commenting on Mozi’s condemnation of the ancient burial practice of
“ascending the roof” to call back the deceased, describes the Confucian purpose in
retaining this ritual as being, according to the Liji, “not because such rituals were
believed to have any efficacy, but because they were regarded as fitting expressions of
I do not endorse this characterization of Confucian ritual or of the Liji. While I doubt that “ascending the roof” ever produced a spirit, one cannot so easily divorce “expression” and “efficacy” in a Chinese world when expression is understood in terms of a disposition. Dispositions have efficacy and propensity; they may not raise the dead, but they certainly alter the world of the living.

As for the Liji, it is not so easy to make generalizations about its teachings on ritual. Certain texts, such as the Jitong, are Mencian in spirit and describe ritual as emerging directly from feeling (xin). Other texts, however, have a Xunzian spirit and describe ritual as established by the ancient kings for more functional purposes. The Sannianwen (“Questions about the Three Years”), for instance, is a portion of Xunzi’s “Discourse on Ritual” nearly verbatim. See: Liji vol. II, Bk. 35; cf. Xunzi 19.9a – 19.9c.

73 Mencius 7A: 2.
74 Liji 26/5/15
75 Analects 3.12
76 Analects 7.21
77 Analects 11.12
78 Mozi 31.

80 The Confucian focus on integrity (cheng), while prioritizing the human dimension, does not negate the beliefs of popular religion. In the classical tradition, there is a well-established relationship between cheng and the inscrutable (shen). In the Shujing it is said that spirits will only accept the sacrifices of those who are cheng, and that only cheng can influence the inscrutable. (See: Legge vol. III, p. 209-210, 66.) Likewise, the Zhongyong identifies cheng with efficacy in the realm of the inscrutable. (See: Zhongyong 24 and 16.) Integrity in the Mencius is considered to have the power to “move” (dong) other people. (See: Mencius 4A: 12.)
81 Mencius 7B: 24.
82 Zhongyong 1.
84 Zhongyong 1.
85 Zhongyong 22.
86 Zhongyong 31 and 32.
87 Mencius 6B: 2.
88 Mencius 4A: 2.
89 Mencius 4A: 1.
The feature of "situation over agency" is very pronounced in this passage, where dao is used as a verb in two senses. "Laying the course" is dao, but dao is also "proceeding on the course" that is laid by the art of feeling; that is, the art of human way-making (renda).

The words "conspire" and "aspire" share the common Latin root, spirare, "to breathe." To conspire is to "breathe with" and to aspire is to "breathe on." There is something of the transactional nature of human becoming captured in the etymology of these terms, as breathing is a function that resists any strict reduction to inner or outer.
REFERENCES


