

MENCIUS

TRANSLATED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY
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PENGUIN BOOKS

BOOK VI · PART A

1. Kao Tzu said, 'Human nature is like the *ch'i* willow. Dutifulness is like cups and bowls. To make morality out of human nature is like making cups and bowls out of the willow.'

'Can you,' said Mencius, 'make cups and bowls by following the nature of the willow? Or must you mutilate the willow before you can make it into cups and bowls? If you have to mutilate the willow to make it into cups and bowls, must you, then, also mutilate a man to make him moral? Surely it will be these words of yours men in the world will follow in bringing disaster upon morality.'

2. Kao Tzu said, 'Human nature is like whirling water. Give it an outlet in the east and it will flow east; give it an outlet in the west and it will flow west. Human nature does not show any preference for either good or bad just as water does not show any preference for either east or west.'

'It certainly is the case,' said Mencius, 'that water does not show any preference for either east or west, but does it show the same indifference to high and low? Human nature is good just as water seeks low ground. There is no man who is not good; there is no water that does not flow downwards.

'Now in the case of water, by splashing it one can make it shoot up higher than one's forehead, and by forcing it one can make it stay on a hill. How can that be the nature of water? It is the circumstances being what they are. That man can be made bad shows that his nature is no different from that of water in this respect.'

3. Kao Tzu said, 'The inborn is what is meant by "nature".'

'Is that,' said Mencius, 'the same as "white is what is meant by "white"'"?'

1. In '*sheng chih wei hsing*' ('the inborn is what is meant by "nature"'), the two words '*sheng*' and '*hsing*', though slightly different in pronunciation, were probably written by the same character in Mencius' time. This would

ANALOGY

'Yes.'

'Is the whiteness of white feathers the same as the whiteness of white snow and the whiteness of white snow the same as the whiteness of white jade?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, is the nature of a hound the same as the nature of an ox and the nature of an ox the same as the nature of a man?'

4. Kao Tzu said, 'Appetite for food and sex is nature. Benevolence is internal, not external; rightness is external, not internal.

'Why do you say,' said Mencius, 'that benevolence is internal and rightness is external?'

'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 it external.'

'The case of rightness is different from that of whiteness. "Treating as white" is the same whether one is treating a horse as white [14] or a man as white. But I wonder if you would think that "treating as old" is the same whether one is treating a horse as old or a man as elder? Furthermore, is it the one who is old that is dutiful, or is it the one who treats him as elder that is dutiful?'

'My brother I love, but the brother of a man from Ch'in I do not love. This means that the explanation [15] lies in me. Hence I call it internal. Treating an elder of a man from Ch'u as elder is no different from treating an elder of my own family as elder. This means that the explanation [15] lies in their elderliness. Hence I call it external.'

'My enjoyment of the roast provided by a man from Ch'in is no different from my enjoyment of my own roast. Even with inanimate things we can find cases similar to the one under discussion. Are we, then, to say that there is something external even in the enjoyment of roast?'

make the statement at least tautological in written form and so parallel to '*pai chih wei pai*' ('white is what is meant by "white"').

5. Meng Chi-tzu asked Kung-tu Tzu, 'Why do you say that rightness is internal?'

'It is the respect in me that is being put into effect. That is why I say it is internal.'

'If a man from your village is a year older than your eldest brother, which do you respect?'

'My brother.'

'In filling their cups with wine, which do you give precedence to?'

'The man from my village.'

'The one you respect is the former; the one you treat as elder is the latter. This shows that it is in fact external, not internal.'

Kung-tu Tzu was unable to find an answer and gave an account of the discussion to Mencius.

Mencius said, '[Ask him,] "Which do you respect, your uncle or your younger brother?" He will say, "My uncle." "When your younger brother is impersonating an ancestor at a sacrifice, then which do you respect?" He will say, "My younger brother." You ask him, "What has happened to your respect for your uncle?" He will say, "It is because of the position my younger brother occupies." You can then say, "[In the case of the man from my village] it is also because of the position he occupies. Normal respect is due to my elder brother; temporary respect is due to the man from my village."'

When Meng Chi-tzu heard this, he said, 'It is the same respect whether I am respecting my uncle or my younger brother. It is, as I have said, external and does not come from within.'

'In winter,' said Kung-tu Tzu, 'one drinks hot water, in summer cold. Does that mean that even food and drink can be a matter of what is external?'

6. Kung-tu Tzu said, 'Kao Tzu said, "There is neither good nor bad in human nature," but others say, "Human nature can become good or it can become bad, and that is why with the rise of King Wen and King Wu, the people were given to goodness, while with the rise of King Yu and King Li, they were given to cruelty."

Then there are others who say, "There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. For this reason, Hsiang could have Yao as prince, and Shun could have the Blind Man as father, and Ch'i, Viscount of Wei and Prince Pi Kan could have Tchou as nephew as well as sovereign."¹ Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean that all the others are mistaken?'

'As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good,' said Mencius. 'That is what I mean by good. As for his becoming bad, that is not the fault of his native endowment. The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong. The heart of compassion pertains to benevolence, the heart of shame to dutifulness, the heart of respect to the observance of the rites, and the heart of right and wrong to wisdom.² Benevolence, dutifulness, observance of the rites, and wisdom are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in me originally. Only this has never dawned on me. That is why it is said, "Seek and you will find it; let go and you will lose it."³ There are cases where one man is twice, five times or countless times better than another man, but this is only because there are people who fail to make the best of their native endowment. The *Book of Odes* says,

Heaven produces the teeming masses,
And where there is a thing there is a norm.
If the people held on to their constant nature,
They would be drawn to superior virtue.⁴

Confucius commented, "The author of this poem must have had knowledge of the Way." Thus where there is a thing there is a norm, and because the people hold on to their constant nature they are drawn to superior virtue.'

1. According to the *Shih chi* (*Records of the Historian*) the Viscount of Wei was an elder brother of Tchou, and son of a concubine of low rank. For this reason, it has been pointed out that the description of having Tchou as nephew applies only to Pi Kan. Cf. the coupling of the name of Chi with that of Yü in IV. B. 29.

2. Cf. II. A. 6.

3. Cf. VII. A. 3.

4. Ode 260.

7. Mencius said, 'In good years the young men are mostly lazy, while in bad years they are mostly violent. Heaven has not sent down men whose endowment differs so greatly. The difference is due to what ensnares their hearts. Take the barley for example. Sow the seeds and cover them with soil. The place is the same and the time of sowing is also the same. The plants shoot up and by the summer solstice they all ripen. If there is any unevenness, it is because the soil varies in richness and there is no uniformity in the fall of rain and dew and the amount of human effort devoted to tending it. Now things of the same kind are all alike. Why should we have doubts when it comes to man? The sage and I are of the same kind. Thus Lung Tzu said, "When someone makes a shoe for a foot he has not seen, I am sure he will not produce a basket." All shoes are alike because all feet are alike. All palates show the same preferences in taste. Yi Ya was simply the man first to discover what would be pleasing to my palate. Were the nature of taste to vary from man to man in the same way as horses and hounds differ from me in kind, then how does it come about that all palates in the world follow the preferences of Yi Ya? The fact that in taste the whole world looks to Yi Ya shows that all palates are alike. It is the same also with the ear. The whole world looks to Shih K'uang, and this shows that all ears are alike. It is the same also with the eye. The whole world appreciates the good looks of Tzu-tu; whoever does not is blind. Hence it is said: all palates have the same preference in taste; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should hearts prove to be an exception by possessing nothing in common? What is common to all hearts? Reason and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to discover this common element in my heart. Thus reason and rightness please my heart in the same way as meat pleases my palate.'

8. Mencius said, 'There was a time when the trees were luxuriant on the Ox Mountain. As it is on the outskirts of a great metropolis, the trees are constantly lopped by axes. Is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? With the respite they get in the day and in the night, and the moistening by the rain and dew, there is certainly no lack of new shoots coming out, but then the cattle and sheep

come to graze upon the mountain. That is why it is as bald as it is. People, seeing only its baldness, tend to think that it never had any trees. But can this possibly be the nature of a mountain? Can what is in man be completely lacking in moral inclinations? A man's letting go of his true heart is like the case of the trees and the axes. When the trees are lopped day after day, is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? If, in spite of the respite a man gets in the day and in the night and of the effect of the morning air on him, scarcely any of his likes and dislikes resemble those of other men, it is because what he does in the course of the day once again dissipates what he has gained. If this dissipation happens repeatedly, then the influence of the air in the night will no longer be able to preserve what was originally in him, and when that happens, the man is not far removed from an animal. Others, seeing his resemblance to an animal, will be led to think that he never had any native endowment. But can that be what a man is genuinely like? Hence, given the right nourishment there is nothing that will not grow, and deprived of it there is nothing that will not wither away. Confucius said, "Hold on to it and it will remain; let go of it and it will disappear. One never knows the time it comes or goes, neither does one know the direction." It is perhaps to the heart this refers.'

9. Mencius said, 'Do not be puzzled by the King's lack of wisdom. Even a plant that grows most readily will not survive if it is placed in the sun for one day and exposed to the cold for ten. It is very rarely that I have an opportunity of seeing the King, and as soon as I leave, those who expose him to the cold arrive on the scene. What can I do with the few new shoots that come out? Now take *yi*,¹ which is only an art of little consequence. Yet if one does not give one's whole mind to it, one will never master it. Yi Ch'iu is the best player in the whole country. Get him to teach two people to play, one of whom concentrates his mind on the game and listens only to what Yi Ch'iu has to say, while the other, though he listens,

1. The ancient name for the game of *wei ch'i*, better known in the West by the name *go* which is simply the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word *ch'i*. This game is also mentioned in IV. B. 30.