

the institutional structures of a “school.” Yet it might have been the overriding importance of the school as a physical institution (as opposed to the adherence to a textual canon and its exegesis) that doomed them to obsolescence when the institution dissolved under the impact of the Qin and Han unification.

## FOUR

### *Interiority, Human Nature, and Exegesis in Mencius*

Tugh Temür, known as Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 1328–32) of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), devoted himself to Chinese cultural values and practices, founded a Confucian academy, and bestowed the title “Second Sage, Duke of the State of Zou” (*ya sheng Zouguo gong* 亞聖鄒國公) on Mencius (ca. 372–289). Mencius was thus officially honored as the second sage after Confucius and received a temple name related to his ancestral home close to Confucius’s birthplace Qufu in today’s Shandong Province. This was the outcome of a long process of canonization that had its roots in the Mid-Tang, when Han Yu declared Mencius the legitimate inheritor of the Confucian lineage, and culminated in the Song and Yuan, when *Mencius* developed into a centerpiece of Neo-Confucian discourse and became one of Zhu Xi’s “Four Books.”<sup>1</sup>

The label “Second Sage” describes well the status the text of *Mencius* enjoyed since the Tang and Song. But curiously, this qualification was already fitting for the Warring States Period when the text was written. *Mencius* represents the figure of Mencius as a second sage after Confucius. In this sense, the reception history of the figure of Mencius and his appearance in *Mencius* coincide in intriguing ways. It is almost as if *Mencius* had set its hero up to *become* the “Second Sage” of the Confucian

1. For a survey of the reception history of *Mencius* see Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics*.

pantheon some one and a half millennia later. This chapter argues that Mencius's position vis-à-vis Confucius is key to understanding many seemingly unrelated claims in *Mencius* about human nature and psychology, textual exegesis, and human physiology. Even the choice of the dialogue form in *Mencius*, which models itself rhetorically on Confucius lore as we see it in the *Analects*, casts the figure of Mencius as a second Confucius. The novel form of the expository essay that we see in *Mozi* is discarded in favor of the dialogue form, which in *Mencius* can be considered a conscious return, a holding on to the rhetorical charisma of Confucius, the master staged in dialogue.

The theme of "human nature" has received a curiously disproportionate amount of scholarly attention in discussions of *Mencius*. Mencius's conversations with Gaozi 告子 in which he expresses a view of "human nature" (*xing* 性) as inherently inclined towards goodness are usually read against Xunzi's fierce critique of Mencius's view in "Human Nature Is Evil" (*Xing e* 性惡). In this way the history of early Confucianism can be sketched as a history of polar bifurcations and crossroads. The issue of "human nature" could only become so popular because of a set of felicitous coincidences that occurred between Mencius's day and modern times. First, although Mencius gave the term *xing* long-lasting prominence in the Confucian tradition, he was responding to previous notions of *xing*<sup>2</sup> and contributing—not least by sparking Xunzi's most violent criticism—to disputes around what became one of the most hotly debated terms in the Late Warring States. Second, by the Song dynasty at the latest, the question of the "nature" of "human nature" stood at the center of Confucian morality and cosmological notions of self-cultivation. And third, the Western philosophical paradigm through which Masters Literature has largely been read in the modern period has projected Platonic and Aristotelian notions of ethics, nature, and culture onto Mencius's discussion of *xing*.

2. See Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature." In Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 7–66. Also, the recently excavated Guodian texts show us that *xing* was a prominent topic of discussion before Mencius.

These changes have led to a shift away from the understanding of *Mencius* as a text with its own context to the use of *Mencius* as a proxy in current debates about "nature" versus "nurture," a shift that has produced interesting scholarship in its own right. A. C. Graham has shown how Mencius appropriated the concept of "human nature" from his predecessor Yang Zhu and how it fits in with other protagonists of the debate.<sup>3</sup> For Graham, Mencius's assertion of the inherent benevolence of mankind is a strategy to deal with a metaphysical crisis triggered by a perceived disjunction between Heaven and human morality.<sup>4</sup> Chad Hansen gives a less generous reading of Mencius's dealing with this "metaphysical crisis" and sees Mencius's stance as an unconvincing reply to Mozi, who had forcefully called for universal standards as an antidote to the Confucian case-by-case approach to moral action. According to Hansen, Mencius just avoided Mozi's challenge by grounding morality on the equally shaky basis of an innate potential endowed by Heaven. Hansen barely conceals his disapproval of Mencius: "Paradoxically, Mencius's philosophical ineptitude may be the secret to his eventual cultural dominance."<sup>5</sup> Even beyond Mencius's philosophical ineptitude—as Hansen dubs it—it is doubtful why Mencius would even want to abide by Hansen's standards of being a "philosopher." In his spirited attack on Mencius's bias Hansen is caught in his own claims to "philosophicality."

More recently, Michael LaFargue has expressed the wish that discussions of *Mencius* let go of their anachronistic assumption that "human nature" is a psychobiological scientific entity. Instead, we should move closer to the context of Mencius's contemporary concerns and rhetorical choices:

If it [i.e. human nature] is not such an objective entity, then we cannot ignore the *structure* of Mencius' thought on this subject. By "structure" I mean such things as: what were the concerns motivating his thought about human nature; under what assumptions did his thought proceed, shaped by what categories; what was most basic to his thought on this subject (were his values based on his views of

3. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, III–32.

4. On the complex interrelations between early Confucian, Mohist, and Yang Zhu's thought traditions as reflected in a text from the Guodian materials, see Defoort, "Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh: the Middle Position of the Guodian Text 'Tang Yu zhi Dao.'"

5. Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, 154.

human nature, or vice versa); and what implications and conclusions did he associate with his views of human nature?<sup>6</sup>

LaFargue asks little-discussed, yet critical questions of fundamental importance for our appreciation of *Mencius*. Robert Eno addresses some of them intriguingly by tying together *Mencius*'s episodic format of dialogue scenes, its moral message, and its concern with lineage:

My intention here is to explore certain features of the *disorderliness* of ethical discourse in the *Mencius*. [...] A basic goal of Mencian ethical discourse seems to be to provide for members of *Mencius*'s tradition clear insight into the character of ethical authority, as conveyed through exemplary figures essential to the teaching lineage—most importantly, *Mencius* himself.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of LaFargue's questions and Eno's reflections, we need to ask what function the discussion about "human nature" has within *Mencius* as a whole. Why was *Mencius* so very passionate about this debate? This chapter argues that there is a close connection between *Mencius*'s attraction to the concept of "human nature" and *Mencius*'s role as the first textually traceable disciple who cared about representing himself as the inheritor of Confucius's legacy.

The argument proceeds in three steps. First, I explore how *Mencius* portrays himself as the first exegete of Confucius's personal legacy. Second, I show how many concerns in *Mencius* are related to the notion of depth—depth in temporal, textual, and physical senses. We can say that by creating a Confucian lineage with the figure of *Mencius* as the second generation, *Mencius* created Confucianism itself, giving the necessary temporal depth to this first step of lineage production. In launching itself onto extended paths of interpreting passages from the *Book of Poetry* and *Book of Documents*, which are highly revered in the *Analects* but mostly only cursorily mentioned, *Mencius* created textual depth through exegesis. He divorced literal meaning from transferred, "deeper" significations. In a parallel move to the generation of textual depth, *Mencius* created depth in

6. LaFargue, "More 'Mencius-on-Human-Nature' Discussions," 8.

7. Eno, "Casuistry and Character in the *Mencius*," 189–90. Zhang Cangshou's attention to the *Mencius*'s rhetorical features such as its colloquial simplicity, its trenchant brevity in argument, and its inquisitive unveiling of opponents' self-contradictions is also noteworthy in this context. See Zhang Cangshou, *Xian Qin zhuzi sanwen yishulun*, 25–40.

the body by clearly dividing the accessible, visible surface from the interiority of the heart-mind. As an outgrowth of this concept of the body, *Mencius* created depth in the representation of human interaction: when *Mencius* is in dialogue with rulers, he is represented as a "master of depth" who is able not just to fathom but even to inhabit the mind of his interlocutors.

Third, the exploration of various meanings of depth in *Mencius* prepares us to return to the question of why *Mencius* was so passionate about the notion of human nature. I argue that *Mencius*'s discovery of depth led to an increased anxiety over possible shifts—tectonic diastrophisms—between the "inner" and the "outer" of lineages, texts, bodies. Thus, the claim that human nature follows an inherent potential stabilizes the relation between the inner and the outer by connecting them firmly through a dynamics of inner latency and outer manifestation. This dynamics only works, of course, if the inner potential is considered benign. Thus the fascination with depth in its temporal, textual, and bodily dimensions links concerns in *Mencius* that seem otherwise far apart. The notion of depth also helps understand why *Mencius*, in other aspects so faithful an exegete of Confucius, cared to elevate a notion that had played no part in the *Analects*—human nature—to a radically new prominence that was only to increase in importance in the Confucian tradition for millennia to come.

### *Mencius, the Belated Disciple*

#### CONFUCIUS IN *MENCIUS*

*Mencius* was born a good century after Confucius's death. *Mencius* himself laments that he was not Confucius's immediate disciple, but he is also quick to emphasize that he nevertheless did have access to the immediate experience of the Master's aura through other people:

*Mencius* said, "The radiance of a superior person wanes after five generations, so does the influence of a petty person. Although I did not have the luck to be a disciple of Confucius, I have learned indirectly from him through others."<sup>8</sup>

8. Lau, *Mencius* 4B/22. My translations have benefitted from D. C. Lau's translation of *Mencius*.

孟子曰：「君子之澤五世而斬，小人之澤五世而斬。予未得爲孔子徒也，予私淑諸人也。」

Mencius was still close enough to Confucius to feel the Master's charismatic radiance (*ze* 澤). He had to make up "privately" (*si* 私) for the temporal gap between them by receiving (*shu* 淑, later glossed as *qu* 取) other people's reports about Confucius. "*Qu*" means "picking, choosing" from the transmission through other people, but it also means "inferring" information from what others say about him. Yet, Mencius is also close to the impending loss of Confucius's charismatic impact after five generations. This point is crucial for Mencius's belief that the transmission of Confucius's legacy is first of all a prophetic mission. The above passage assures us that there are ways to experience Confucius's aura even after his death. But it also expresses worries that the possibility of "inferring" that experience is about to expire—one more reason for Mencius to act.

Mencius's "private" way of availing himself of Confucius's legacy stands in contrast to the "public" community of Confucius's seventy-some disciples to which Sima Qian devotes a whole biography chapter in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. They were close to the Master during his lifetime, but it is significant that they mostly figure in the historical records as walk-on actors that *offset* the Master's effect on people. True, they are credited with committing Confucius's words to writing, and some of them are associated with the transmission of specific exegetical traditions, such as Zixia with the *Book of Poetry* or Zengzi with the *Classic of Filial Piety*. In contrast, Mencius, though no direct disciple, is the first to transcend the role of a tool of direct transmission, becoming a new type of master, distant in time to Confucius, but close in spirit.

Sima Qian claimed that Mencius actually did write *Mencius*, and although there is no way to ascertain this, it fits nicely with the fact that Mencius seems to care a lot about authorship and is eager to portray Confucius not so much as a speaking but as a writing master. It would not be surprising if Mencius's own valuing of writing triggered a search for Confucius's role as an author:<sup>9</sup>

9. Michael Puett reads Confucius's "authoring" (*zuo* 作) of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as an attempt in *Mencius* to claim it more literally as an act of (sagely) "creation" (*zuo*), thereby transforming Confucius, the self-declared "transmitter" of the past, into a true sage as depicted in the *Analec*s. See Puett, *Ambivalence of Creation*, 56–57. This read-

Mencius said, "When the wooden clappers of the true King fell into disuse, songs were no longer collected. When songs were no longer collected, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were written. The *Sheng* of Jin, the *Tao Wu* of Chu and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lu are the same kind of work. The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and the style is that of the official historian. Confucius said, 'I have applied didactic principles therein.'"<sup>10</sup>

孟子曰：「王者之熄而詩亡，詩亡然後春秋作。晉之乘，楚之檮杌，魯之春秋，一也。其事則齊桓、晉文，其文則史。孔子曰：『其義則丘竊取之矣。』」

Confucius's authoring of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is part of a narrative of decline. This narrative begins with the wooden clappers that officials used when traveling through the countryside, collecting songs about grievances and complaints that were to be brought back to court and responded to by appropriate changes in policy. In a first step the custom of song collecting disappeared, but the lyrics of the songs were written down. This meant, of course, that the mutual flux between popular complaints and central politics came to a standstill and was fixed in writing by scribes at the central court. Now, *Mencius* argues that when the collecting of songs from the periphery ceased, annalistic works such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were written.

The integration of the *Annals* into this scheme implies that the *Annals*, although dealing on the surface with major historical figures such as Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–43) or Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–28), and although cast in the language of the historian, is in fact a critical commentary on its times. Obviously, the plaintiff has changed locations—the popular will of the periphery is replaced by the critical spirit of Confucius, who is close to the center of cultural production, even part of it, but at a safe distance to the political establishment. But as Mencius pronounces through the mouth of Confucius, the significance of the work is the "application" (*qu* 取), the "inferences" to be drawn from Confucius's text. Paralleling Mencius's way of appropriating Confucius

ing reinforces my argument below that Mencius created a lineage for himself by integrating Confucius into the line of those sages from the distant past, which he himself revered so much. For Sima Qian's representation of Confucius as a figure of textual authority see Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 218–38.

10. Lau, *Mencius* 4B/21.

through “analogical inference” from other people’s words, Confucius sets up his legacy in writing in such a way that later people can make “inferences” about proper behavior—and about the charisma of Confucius himself. Confucius is presented as an encrypter who writes for those who know how to decode and “take” (*qu*) him.

Another passage in *Mencius* places Confucius’s authoring of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* within an even broader context of cultural decline. This extended passage not only explains Confucius’s actions, but goes a step further to show how Mencius envisions his own role in relation to the history of cultural decline in general and Confucius’s authoring of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in particular:

Gongduzi said, “Outsiders all say that you like arguments. May I ask why?” “Why would I like arguments?” answered Mencius. “I have no choice. The world has existed for a long time, sometimes in peace, sometimes in chaos. In the time of Yao, the water reversed its flow, flooded the central regions. Snakes and reptiles settled there, and people had no stable place to live. In lower regions, people lived in nests; in more elevated regions, they lived in caves.”<sup>11</sup>

公都子曰：「外人皆稱夫子好辯，敢問何也？」孟子曰：「子豈好辯哉？予不得已也。天下之生久矣，一治一亂。當堯之時，水逆行，氾濫於中國。蛇龍居之，民無所定。下者為巢，上者為營窟。」

The conversation starts with a question from Gongduzi, one of Mencius’s disciples. Gongduzi is puzzled that the master has a reputation for being infatuated with argument and techniques of persuasion, probably knowing that on other occasions Mencius claimed to distinguish himself sharply from persuaders and itinerant teachers. Gongduzi’s question triggers a lengthy response, in which Mencius justifies why “arguments” and disputation are necessary in his world. Given the incumbent threat of further decline because of the rampant polemics of the Mohists and the followers of Yang Zhu around him, Mencius claims that he has no choice other than to speak up. Mencius presents the interschool polemics between Confucius’s followers and the Mohists as yet another version of an age-old pattern of decline that had already started in the times of Great Yao. After the deaths of Yao and Shun, states *Mencius*, the Way of the Sages

11. Lau, *Mencius* 3B/9.

declined, tyrants arose, and together with the appearances of their luxurious parks, decadent artificial ponds, and lakes came the arrival of wild beasts and pests. The next phase was even more catastrophic:

When the world declined and the Way fell into obscurity, devious teachings and violence did arise again. There were murders of kings and fathers. Confucius, in fear, composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. To compose annals is the prerogative of the emperor, therefore Confucius said, “It is through the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that people will understand me; and it is through the same *Spring and Autumn Annals* that people will condemn me.”<sup>12</sup>

世衰道微，邪說暴行有作，臣弑其君者有之，子弑其父者有之。孔子懼，作春秋。春秋，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：「知我者其惟春秋乎！罪我者其惟春秋乎！」

Confucius’s authoring of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* was an act of apprehensive fear (*ju* 懼), his way of coping with a declining age. Mencius emphasizes that the urgency of the tasks justified Confucius’s infringement on royal prerogatives when writing the *Annals*. Confucius is aware that he has committed a criminal offense (*zui* 罪) for which he may be reprimanded; but he also proudly asserts that this crime will be his mark of distinction and will be understood by those who sympathize with him.

Introducing the terminology of criminal offense heightens our expectations about how Mencius will deal with the even more degenerate age of his own time:

Sage kings no longer create, feudal lords do as they please, people with no official position are uninhibited in their opinions, and the words of Yang Zhu and Mo Di fill the Empire. The teachings in the empire go back to Yangzi or Mozi. Yang advocates that people should focus on themselves, which implies a denial of one’s ruler; Mozi advocates universal love without discrimination, which implies the denial of one’s father. [. . .] When the path of benevolence and rightness is blocked, then we show animals the way to devour humans, and sooner or later it will come to humans devouring other humans. That is my fear. I must protect the way of the former sages, combat Yangzi and Mozi, and banish their excessive words so that heretic teachings cannot emerge.<sup>13</sup>

聖王不作，諸侯放恣，處士橫議，楊朱、墨翟之言盈天下。天下之言，不歸楊，則歸墨。楊氏為我，是無君也；墨氏兼愛，是無父

12. Lau, *Mencius* 3B/9.

13. Lau, *Mencius* 3A/9.

也。仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食。吾為此懼，聞先聖之道，距楊墨，放淫辭，邪說者不得作。

This is the dark picture of Mencius's age: devoid of worthy rulers and filled with irresponsible and uninhibited partisans of ideas that demolish proper human relationships, such as those between subjects and rulers, fathers and sons. In the same way Confucius feared (*ju*) the indulgence of the feudal lords in his age, Mencius now fears (*ju*) the indulgence of the Mohists and Yangists and sees it as his task to avoid "cannibalism" of the way of the former sages. It is significant that Mencius here not only puts himself in relation to Confucius, but also inserts his own name into the virtual lineage of former sages. This becomes clearer in the closure of the passage:

Were a sage to rise again, he would not change my words. In ancient times Yu controlled the Flood and brought peace to the empire; the Duke of Zhou subjugated the northern and southern barbarians, expelled wild animals, and brought safety to the people; Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; and rebellious subjects and scoundrels had great fear. [...] The Duke of Zhou wanted to punish those who denied the existence of their father and ruler. I, too, wish to continue the legacy of these three sages by rectifying the hearts of men, laying to rest heretic teachings, opposing extreme behavior, and banishing excessive views. It's not that I like arguments. I have no choice. Whoever can combat Yangzi and Mozi with words is a true disciple of the sages.<sup>14</sup>

聖人復起，不易吾言矣。昔者禹抑洪水而天下平，周公兼夷狄驅猛獸而百姓寧，孔子成春秋而亂臣賊子懼[...]無父無君，是周公所膺也。我亦欲正人心，息邪說，距誑行，放淫辭，以承三聖者；豈好辯哉？予不得已也。能言距楊墨者，聖人之徒也。」

Confucius figures with the Great Yu and the Duke of Zhou as one of the "three sages," among whom Mencius positions himself as the contemporary member. Each of them had different ways of coping with decline. If Confucius composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Mencius is obliged to engage in disputation for the sake of combating the Mohists and Yangists. Along with tightly knitting a lineage of both rulers and masters that stands up to increasing decline, Mencius has here also supplied us with a

14. Lau, *Mencius* 3B/9.

justification for why *Mencius* is largely true to the dialogue format of the "scene of instruction." Although the representation of Confucius in dialogue may have its origin in the jotting down of course notes by his disciples, it is perfectly plausible that Mencius resorts consciously to the representation of persuasion and argument in dialogue. In the same way that Confucius authored historical prose, Mencius authors a representation of the strategy he brought to the table for fighting the decline of his age, namely argument and persuasion.

### MENCIUS, THE PROPHET

In securing Confucius within a lineage of fighters against decline going back to the ancient sages and in depicting Confucius as a transmitter, author, and failed ruler, *Mencius* puts considerable weight on the figure of Mencius as Confucius's distant disciple. Producing lineage requires proof that one is worthy of being seen as part of that lineage. Radiating prophetic self-confidence was one possible way of providing such a proof:

When Mencius left Qi, Chong Yu asked on the way, "Master, you look a bit unhappy. I heard from you the other day that a superior person does not reproach Heaven or other people." "That was one time, this is another. Every five hundred years there must appear a true king, and in the meantime there should appear somebody from whom an age takes its name. From Zhou to the present, it has been over seven hundred years. The five hundred mark has passed and the time seems ripe. It must be that Heaven has no desire to bring peace to the empire yet. If it did, who is there in the present time other than myself? Why would I be unhappy?"<sup>15</sup>

孟子去齊，充虞路問曰：「夫子若有不豫色然。前日虞聞諸夫子曰：『君子不怨天，不尤人。』」曰：「彼一時，此一時也。五百年必有王者興，其間必有名世者。由周而來，七百有餘歲矣。以其數則過矣，以其時考之則可矣。夫天，未欲平治天下也；如欲平治天下，當今之世，舍我其誰也？吾何為不豫哉？」

There is an enticing tension in this passage between grievance over Heaven's delay in sending a true king and the hidden happiness claimed in the ambivalent concluding rhetorical question. Mencius's disciple Chong Yu

15. Lau, *Mencius* 2B/13.



充虞 detects a touch of sadness in his master's demeanor, but also uses this observation as an opportunity to take the master to task for one of his previous statements about how the superior person never feels reproachful. At first, Mencius's answer seems to tip the balance in the direction of disappointment: that time was a different occasion, but now he is puzzled by heaven's delay in sending a true king or at least an exemplary minister into the world. Yet Mencius suddenly shifts gears when he speculates that he, truth be told, is the only one in his generation whom Heaven might have destined for that purpose. The concealed happiness (*yu* 豫) is nourished by disappointment with the present combined with a future of potentially unrivaled promise. Mencius perfectly fits the role of a prophet who is living in the firm expectation of a future—to be salvaged by himself—and who is preaching in a still-desolate world. He derives credibility precisely from this oxymoronic state of mind.

#### MENCIUS, THE EXEGETE

In the *Analects*, Confucius is never really forced to give detailed interpretations of passages from the *Book of Poetry* or *Book of Documents*, the textual traditions he considers so important. His remarks are at best cursory when it comes to dealing with specific passages from these two texts. Mencius faced the challenge—and took the opportunity—of redeeming the *promise* of their importance and occasionally explaining these texts to his followers.

Given the contradictory richness and variegated origin of these early texts, explicating them was not always easy. One particularly difficult case that is amply discussed in *Mencius* is the ambivalent profile of Shun in early sources. Shun symbolized a choice against hereditary succession because he was appointed emperor through the ruling Emperor Yao. Shun was chosen because he was a paragon of virtue and piety, but then there are several moments in his biography when he behaves anything but piously towards his parents. Knowing that his parents and his brother apparently attempted to assassinate him made it easy to explain this impiety away. But still, the offense against the protocol of piety had to be addressed and redressed:

Mencius said, "There are three ways of being an unfilial son: The worst is to have no heir. Shun married without telling his father, because he was afraid he would not have an heir. To the superior person, this was as if he had told his father."<sup>16</sup>  
孟子曰：「不孝有三，無後爲大。舜不告而娶，爲無後也，君子以爲猶告也。」

No textual contradiction or puzzlement is acknowledged here. The passage assumes that the reader is familiar with the issues concerning Shun's parents and would therefore agree that, since they were unlikely to give their assent, a higher priority of filial piety—namely having a heir—should be tended to, even if it involved an infringement against lower forms of filial duty such as informing one's parents of one's marriage plans. But the text does not say that Shun's behavior was merely acceptable. It makes a point of saying that it was as if Shun had told his parents. Improper behavior is not just explained away, but it is converted into proper behavior by the discerning gaze of the superior person.

This passage prepares us for far more extensive conversions of literal wrongs into higher truths. This time, what is at stake is Shun's relation to his father ("the Blind Man") and to Yao after Yao's abdication. Both relationships, predictably, create problems, because they both entail competing hierarchical regimes: as former emperor, Yao should not be considered Shun's subject; and as father, the "Blind Man" should not be a mere subject of his son Shun:

Xianqiu Meng said "it is now clear to me that Shun did not treat Yao as a subject. But the *Book of Poetry* says,

'All territory under Heaven is the king's; all people on the borders of the land are his subjects.'

Now after Shun became Emperor, if the Blind Man was not his subject, what was he?" "This is not what the poem says. It is about those who were unable to tend to their parents because they labored for the king's business. They were saying, 'This is all the king's business. Why are only we overburdened?' Thus, in explaining a poem, one must not permit the literary patterning to affect the understanding of the words; and one must not permit our understanding of the words to affect our understanding of what was on the writer's mind. We use our sense

16. Lau, *Mencius* 4A/26.

to reach back to what was on the writer's mind—this is how we get it.' If one were merely to take the sentences literally, then there is the poem *Yun han* that says, 'Of the remaining people of Zhou not a single one survived.'

If you take this as literal truth, it would mean that not a single Zhou subject survived.<sup>17</sup>

咸丘蒙曰：「舜之不臣堯，則吾既得聞命矣。詩云：『普天之下，莫非王土；率土之濱，莫非王臣。』而舜既為天子矣，敢問瞽瞍之非臣，如何？」曰：「是詩也，非是之謂也；勞於王事，而不得養父母也。曰：『此莫非王事，我獨賢勞也。』故說詩者，不以文害辭，不以辭害志，以意逆志，是為得之。如以辭而已矣，雲漢之詩曰：『周餘黎民，靡有孑遺。』信斯言也，是周無遺民也。」

Mencius explains away the literal meaning of a stanza from the *Book of Poetry* in order to preserve the image of Shun's dutiful piety towards his father. To accomplish this, he recurs to a transferred meaning. He does not offer this transferred meaning as a possibility, but claims forthrightly that the literal meaning is wrong. With another example from the *Book of Poetry* he demonstrates that literal meaning often needs to be read for deeper truth. He wisely chooses a couplet that is disproven by the very continuity of Zhou heritage and therefore easily reduced *ad absurdum* if taken literally.

Between these two examples he makes a few comments about the general rules of healthy reading of the important texts. His exegetical armory consists of "literary patterning," "words," and "intentions." He warns us not to misunderstand "words" by following the superficial literary patterning. In turn, one should not misunderstand the poet's "intentions" by imposing peculiar meanings of isolated "words." He proposes an empathic method, where meaning is set on the way—in reverse direction to the moment of the poem's composition (*ni* 逆)—towards meeting the poet's intentions. This implies, of course, that the exegete is given ultimate control over where to locate the middle way between meaning and intentions. It is thus the exegete, Mencius, who calibrates the degrees of interpretive depth at his own whim.

17. Lau, *Mencius* 5A/4.

### Creating Depth

We have already seen how Mencius creates temporal depth for himself and Confucius's lineage, extending far beyond Confucius to the ancient sages. Also, *Mencius* proposes a hermeneutics that devalues the textual surface in favor of a "deeper," transferred meaning to be plumbed by a skilled exegete. We will now touch upon two other areas that show a similar appreciation for depth.

#### MENCIUS, THERAPIST OF RULERS

Without a doubt, Mencius is the most adroit therapist among the pre-Qin master figures. Rulers praise him for his capacity to look into others' hearts, even to expose themselves to their own hearts and to move them to corresponding actions. As King Xuan of Qi says, full of admiration,

The King said, "The *Book of Poetry* says, 'The heart is that of another person, but I have fathomed it.' That's just how you are. When I looked back into myself I did not understand my own heart, although it was me who had acted in this way. When you described it for me it resonates with my own heart. What made you think that my heart would befit that of a true King?"<sup>18</sup>

王說曰：「詩云：『他人有心，予忖度之。』夫子之謂也。夫我乃行之，反而求之，不得吾心。夫子言之，於我心有戚戚焉。此心之所以合於王者，何也？」

The King of Qi eloquently quotes from the *Book of Poetry* to describe the experience he has while talking to Mencius. He is stunned by Mencius's capacity to understand the deep recesses of the King's mind more clearly than the King himself. This capacity, combined with Mencius's ability to proceed in slow, measured steps with his questions, often enables Mencius to be truly effective in persuasion, especially when it comes to seemingly incorrigible personalities:

Zhuang Bao went to see Mencius. "I had an audience with the king," he said, "and he told me that he loved music. I didn't know what to say." Then Zhuang Bao added, "What about the love of music?" Mencius answered, "If the King has

18. Lau, *Mencius* 1A/7.



a great love for music, then there is some hope for the state of Qi." When Mencius had an audience with the King on another day, he said, "Is it true that Your Majesty told Zhuang that you loved music?" The King blushed and said, "I am incapable of appreciating the music of the Former Kings. I only love the popular music of our day." "If you have a great love for music, then there is some hope for the state of Qi, regardless whether it is modern or ancient music." "Can I hear more about this?" "What is more fun, enjoying music by yourself or in the company of others?" "In the company of others." "What is more fun, enjoying music with only a few or with a crowd?" "With a crowd. In the company of many." "Your servant asks to be allowed to speak to the king about music and the way to enjoy oneself."<sup>19</sup>

莊暴見孟子，曰：「暴見於王，王語暴以好樂，暴未有以對也。」曰：「好樂何如？」孟子曰：「王之好樂甚，則齊國其庶幾乎！」他日，見於王曰：「王嘗語莊子以好樂，有諸？」王變乎色，曰：「寡人非能好先王之樂也，直好世俗之樂耳。」曰：「王之好樂甚，則齊其庶幾乎！今之樂猶古之樂也。」曰：「可得聞與？」曰：「獨樂樂，與人樂樂，孰樂？」曰：「不若與人。」曰：「與少樂樂，與眾樂樂，孰樂？」曰：「不若與眾。」「臣請為王言樂。」

Mencius gains the ruler's confidence by provoking his astonishment. Zhuang Bao 莊暴 does not know how to handle the ruler's musical foible and falls silent, dropping out of the role of the eloquent persuader. The next time Mencius goes to see the ruler, he asks him directly; the ruler blushes shamefully. He might have expected that Mencius would generously pass in silence over his confession of love for popular music, and so he is astonished that Mencius instead hails his foible. After the bond is established through Mencius's surprise attack, the therapeutic dialogue starts, and a back-and-forth exchange ensues until it reaches the point when Mencius can push through his own point of view. He tells the ruler that what is crucial is the way he enjoys himself, not what he enjoys:

Suppose Your Majesty would enjoy a hunt here, and when the people heard the sound of your chariots and horses and saw the magnificence of your banners they would say to each other, shaking their heads and knitting their brows, "Our king loves hunting, so why does he let us come to dire straits? Fathers and sons don't meet, and brothers, wives and children are parted and scattered?" The reason

19. Lau, *Mencius* 1B/1.

would simply be that you failed to share your enjoyment with the people. [...] Again, suppose you were hunting here, and when the people heard the sound of your chariots and horses and saw the magnificence of your banners they all looked pleased and said to one another, "Our King must be in good health, how could he otherwise go hunting?" The reason would simply be that you shared your enjoyment with the people. Now if you shared your enjoyment with the people, you would be a true King.<sup>20</sup>

今王田獵於此，百姓聞王車馬之音，見羽旄之美，舉疾首蹙頰而相告曰：「吾王之好田獵，夫何使我至於此極也？父子不相見，兄弟妻子離散。」此無他，不與民同樂也。[...] 今王田獵於此，百姓聞王車馬之音，見羽旄之美，舉欣欣然有喜色而相告曰：「吾王庶幾無疾病與？何以能田獵也？」此無他，與民同樂也。今王與百姓同樂，則王矣。」

Mencius leads the king through the minds of his subjects, only to ultimately reach the king's own heart, persuading him that popular music, hunting, and other royal pleasures are not just admissible for the king, but should also be an absolute pleasure for his subjects, if he would only share them. Mencius makes it easy for the king by suggesting unconditional pleasure. The flirtation with a charismatic tautology in the closing sentence conveys the effortlessness with which the "king" could become a true "King": "if you, the present king, shared your enjoyment with the people, you would be a true King." Here Mencius has an undeniably populist tone, one that is gentle on the royal heart.<sup>21</sup>

Like no other Masters Text, *Mencius* affords us vistas into the psyche of rulers, or, to be more precise, into the psyche of rulers who are capable of personal cultivation. Rulers are inclined to let Mencius see into their hearts, in the same way as they "take in" Mencius's advice. Sometimes King Hui of Liang is depicted as a willing patient who doesn't need to be persuaded to listen to Mencius's words in the first place, but asks for them. In *Mencius* 1A/4 he declares that he is ready to listen to what Mencius has to say, and in the ensuing passage the King confesses his shame that his state lost vast territory to Qi, Qin, and Chu during his reign. He does not leave it at that, but continues,

20. Lau, *Mencius* 1B/1.

21. At the beginning of book 1B there is a cluster of passages that proposes sharing with the populace as a panacea for the dealing with cravings for luxury. See Lau, *Mencius* 1B/1, 1B/2, 1B/3, 1B/5.

I feel deep shame and wish, in what little time I have left before death, to wash away this shame. How can I do this?<sup>22</sup>

寡人恥之，願比死者一洒之，如之何則可？

Mencius advises him about ways to practice benevolent government towards the people, to reduce punishments and taxations, and to avoid interrupting farm work so as to prevent famines and so forth. He closes with an affirmative exhortation:

It is said: "The benevolent person has no match." I beg of Your Majesty to have no doubts.<sup>23</sup>

故曰：「仁者無敵。」王請勿疑！

Like a good therapist, Mencius truly cares about his patients. He is willing to assure them with affirmative gestures, rather than forcing them with a more confrontational tone onto a path of cleansing self-reflection. He considers that using harsh words towards the ruler is close to being physically offensive and warns in *Mencius* 4A/1 that one should never cripple the ruler by telling him that he is incapable of improvement and of properly implementing advice from others. Mencius empathizes with his patients, even with their foibles, which he tries to combat. Despite his disapproval of wars and hegemonic expansion, he might use military analogies simply because he knows that the king is fond of war.

Mencius treats his patients' foibles so forgivingly that they are not ashamed to admit to them. King Xuan of Qi is of that type. He listens to Mencius's words about the way of benevolent government, or of felicitous diplomacy with neighboring states, but then successively unravels what he considers his weaknesses (*ji* 疾) that prevent him from following Mencius's advice. Whether the king is too fond of military prowess and war<sup>24</sup> or whether he is too fond of money and profit, or of women and beauty,<sup>25</sup> Mencius always finds a way out for him. Sometimes he takes the bull by the horns and advises King Xuan to *increase* his foibles, for example to be even fonder of military prowess. At other times, Mencius applies the panacea of sharing with the populace, virtually advising the King that "shared

22. Lau, *Mencius* 1A/5.

23. Lau, *Mencius* 1A/5.

24. Lau, *Mencius* 1B/3.

25. Lau, *Mencius* 1B/5.

foibles are strengths." Both strategies overcome the foibles by the back door, leaving their façades still standing. This subtle procedure of persuasion considerably increases the king's confidence in his chances of self-improvement—and Mencius's success in his persuasion.

#### MENCIUS, THE PSYCHOMETRIST OF THE BODY

Mencius's gaze can see deeper into the ruler's heart than the ruler himself can. He is a measurer of hearts and minds, a master of psychometrics. The ability to both diagnose and skillfully console a progressively repentant ruler, thereby setting him on a path towards improvement, seems a rare talent that a sage might conceal from ordinary audiences. But Mencius seems willing to share parts of the secret and to explain his method of psychometrics in more general terms:

Mencius said, "There is nothing more ingenuous in people than the pupils of their eyes. They cannot conceal their wickedness. When a person is upright in his heart, his pupils are clear and bright; when he is not, they are clouded and murky. How can people conceal their true character if you listen to their words and observe the pupils of their eyes?"<sup>26</sup>

孟子曰：「存乎人者，莫良於眸子。眸子不能掩其惡。胸中正，則眸子瞭焉；胸中不正，則眸子眊焉。聽其言也，觀其眸子，人焉廋哉？」

*Mencius's* interest in the pupils as the gateway to the heart is remarkable in the corpus of Masters Literature. It is a diagnostic secret that enables anybody to decide whether a person has something to hide or not. That the pupils of a dishonest person would be clouded and murky stands in *literal* parallel to this person's desire to "cloud" and hide his evil intentions. It is highly significant that "observing people's pupils" is mentioned along with another diagnostic method, "listening to people's words." This passage shows clearly that Mencius conceives of his bodily diagnosis of the human psyche as complementary to his exegetical endeavors—be they with words or texts. Both pupils and words are the "telling" surface of the

26. Lau, *Mencius* 4A/15.

heart-mind—as the “depth” of the body—and of signification as “deeper” meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Mencius’s role as the master exegete undercuts the authority of canonical texts by creating a deeper meaning under the control of the exegete rather than the author. But the underlying canonical text could also function as the ultimate center from which signification radiated. In fact, in order to secure his position as master exegete, Mencius has to ensure a dynamics of latency through which the inner manifests itself on the outside. Inner and outer become so closely intertwined that they can almost freely change positions. This latency is suggestively described in the following passage, again formulated both on the level of the body and on the level of words:

What a superior person follows as his nature, that is to say, benevolence, righteousness, the rites, and wisdom, is rooted in his heart, and shows itself in his face, giving it the luster of life. They also show in his back and extend to his limbs: the four extremities don’t speak but convey them without words.<sup>28</sup>

君子所性，仁義禮智根於心，其生色也，睟然見於面，盎於背，施於四體，四體不言而喻。

This is an abridged and more pointed formulation of the “four sprouts” (*si duan* 四端) of human morality in *Mencius* 2A/6.

Mencius said, ‘Everybody has a heart sensitive to the suffering of others. The Former Kings had such a heart and this manifested itself in their compassionate government. When exercising compassionate government with a compassionate heart, ruling All Under Heaven is as easy as rolling it on your palm. [...] A heart of pity is the germ of benevolence; a heart of shame, of righteousness; a heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance of the rites; a heart knowing right and wrong, of wisdom. People have these ‘four sprouts’ just as they have four limbs. To have these four sprouts but to say one is incapable of practicing them is to cripple oneself; to tell one’s ruler that he is incapable of practicing them is to cripple one’s ruler.’

孟子曰：「人皆有不忍人之心。先王有不忍人之心，斯有不忍人之政矣。以不忍人之心，行不忍人之政，治天下可運之掌上。」

27. For a contextualization of *Mencius*’s physiological notion of morality within Warring States and early imperial received and excavated texts, see Csikszentmihályi, *Material Virtue*.

28. Lau, *Mencius* 7A/21.

[...] 惻隱之心，仁之端也；羞惡之心，義之端也；辭讓之心，禮之端也；是非之心，智之端也。人之有是四端也，猶其有四體也。有是四端而自謂不能者，自賊者也；謂其君不能者，賊其君者也。」

Apart from the fact that the present passage presupposes the “four sprouts,” while the much more frequently discussed passage *Mencius* 2A/6 explains them, there is a crucial difference in the rhetorical presentation of the “sprouts.” In *Mencius* 2A/6 they are described as related to the four limbs of the body through a simile: “Man has these four sprouts just as he has four limbs” (*ren zhi you shi si duan ye, you qi you si ti* 人之有是四端也，猶其有四體). In the present passage the relationship between the “sprouts” and the body is not just a handy analogy: they are the very same thing, since they extend into various parts of the body from their root in the heart.

The sprouts are “rooted” (*gen* 根) in the heart. While rooted in the heart as the basis of human nature (*xing*), they manifest themselves on the face: actually, since “xing” and “sheng” would have been homographs in Mencius’s times, when radicals would not necessarily have been added to the graphs, the manifestation of the “sprouts” of the heart on the face is close to the very “color of human nature” or, as translated above, “luster of life” (*sheng se* 生色). The “sprouts” also extend into the four limbs. It is the last phrase that is most telling of Mencius’s way of connecting textual exegesis to the body: “The four limbs don’t speak, but convey [the four sprouts] without words through *yu*” (*si ti bu yan er yu* 四體不言而喻). *Yu* describes the process of “understanding” both in a receptive and in a causative way: “to understand” but also “to make oneself understood” and, in a more technical, exegetical sense, “to explain through analogy or illustration.”<sup>29</sup> In *Mencius* the term can appear in both the general and a more technical meaning, so the four limbs “make themselves understood” or “manifest” themselves as the extensions of the “sprouts in the heart”; but

29. *Mencius* uses *yu* both in the more general (receptive and causative) sense, and in the more technical sense of “analogy, illustration.” *Zhuangzi* uses the term overwhelmingly to refer to “analogy.” “Illustrations of *Laozi*” (*Yu Lao* 喻老) from *Han Feizi* comments on specific *Laozi* passages and shows the term *yu* as part of the technical vocabulary of early exegesis. For the use of *yu* in early exegetics of the *Book of Poetry*, see Riegel, “Eros, introversion, and the beginnings of *Shijing* commentary.”

they also "illustrate" the sprouts, explaining them through the rhetorical device of analogy.

Taken together with the passage on pupil diagnosis, the sprout passage leads us to conclude that Mencius envisions the manifestation of the "sprouts" of human nature on the outside of the body as parallel to the manifestation of poetic meaning on the surface of words or texts. The text of *Mencius* confirms his notion of "manifest depth" with a circular move: because we possess an inner nature, we can expect certain manifestations of it on the outside, especially in the region of the face; and because our body shows certain expressions on the outside, we can infer from them the person's psyche. That this reasoning is circular does not distract from its attractiveness, but quite to the contrary ensures a most perfect circulation between the "inner" and "outer."

Now, Mencius's reliance on the notion of depth to explain bodies, texts, and his relation to Confucius was vulnerable to dislocations, disturbances in the relation between "inner" substance and "outer" manifestation. This provided a powerful motivation for his unprecedented claim that human nature emanates from an inherently good potential. The goodness of human nature serves to stabilize the relation between inner substance and outer manifestation, connecting them firmly through a dynamics of benign latency that safeguards proper outer manifestations. In short, the trope of "depth" symbiotically informs what is considered one of the central intellectual issues in *Mencius*, the innate goodness of human nature.

### *Protecting Depth*

Let us reformulate our statement about the relationship between inner dispositions and outside manifestations: we should not describe this relationship with the potentially derogatory term "circular," but instead point out that this relationship is one of codependency. In order for this system of corporeal and textual exegesis to work, we have to ensure that the relationship comes full circle. There are moments in *Mencius* when the threatening possibility that the relationship becomes disturbed by interferences is actively dismissed in order to affirm the relationship of codependency. When arguing the importance of proper burial rituals, Mencius begins to speculate about the origin of such rituals:

There were presumably cases in ancient times when people did not bury their parents. When the parents died, they were thrown in the gullies. Then one day the sons passed by and there lay the bodies, eaten by foxes and sucked by flies. The brows started sweating, and they could not bear to look. The sweating was not put on for show. It came from the depths of their hearts and reached their faces. They went home for baskets and spades. For them it was an act of sincerity to bury their parents, so it must also be right for all dutiful sons and benevolent people to do likewise.<sup>30</sup>

蓋上世嘗有不葬其親者。其親死，則舉而委之於壑。他日過之，狐狸食之，蠅蚋姑嘬之。其顙有泚，睨而不視。夫泚也，非為人泚，中心達於面目。蓋歸反藁裡而掩之。掩之誠是也，則孝子仁人之掩其親，亦必有道矣。」

This passage explains both the historical and psychological origin of burial rituals. Mencius seems defensive when he emphasizes that the people who saw the devoured corpses of their parents were not just putting on a show, but that the relationship between the depths of their hearts (*zhongxin* 中心) and their external reaction was immediate and transparent. Their facial expressions were "manifestations" emanating from within.

We can now return to the beginning of the chapter and consider why Mencius's role as the master exegete of his master Confucius's legacy is intimately connected to his vision of "human nature." The exegete, as the diagnostician of human nature, had to believe in an unintercepted, transparent relationship between text and interpretation, between outer manifestation and inner latency. Once he lets go of the transparency of this relationship, he loses control of both texts and minds. It is this anxiety—which we have encountered in Mencius's speculation on the origin of burial rituals—that is reflected in the famous dialogues between Mencius and Gaozi on "human nature."

As seen in the following passage, Mencius is acutely aware that things can interfere with the transparency of the relation between latency and manifestation. Mutilation through outer interference is one way in which the transparency of the relationship can be destroyed:

Gaozi said, "Human nature is like the *qi* willow. Dutifulness is like cups and bowls. To produce benevolence and righteousness from human nature is like

30. Lau, *Mencius* 3A/5. For a discussion of this passage in the context of Mencius's polemics against rival masters, see Chapter 1.

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, do you then also mutilate people to make them benevolent and righteous? If people of this world bring disaster upon notions of 'benevolence' and 'rightness,' it will certainly be because of your words!"<sup>31</sup>

告子曰：「性，猶杞柳也；義，猶柎捲也。以人性為仁義，猶以杞柳為柎捲。」孟子曰：「子能順杞柳之性而以為柎捲乎？將戕賊杞柳而後以為柎捲也？如將戕賊杞柳而以為柎捲，則亦將戕賊人以為仁義與？率天下之人而禍仁義者，必子之言夫！」

To carve and "ignominiously kill" (*qiang ze* 戕賊) human nature in order to achieve benevolent and righteous behavior is probably the most intrusive disturbance of the dynamics of manifestation and latency. This passage is the shortest of the dialogues on human nature and is often considered an incomplete analogy designed as an "appetizer" for further discussion of the issue.<sup>32</sup> However, in addition to the more frequently discussed *Mencius* 6A/4 in which Mencius redresses Gaozi's view that "benevolence" should be considered "internal" (*nei* 內) and "rightness" "external" (*wai* 外), this passage offers some suggestive clues about Mencius's position on the relation between latency and manifestation.

First, Gaozi's "internal"/"external" distinction appears as a division of the bowls into "material" and "form." While for Gaozi material is amorphous, for Mencius even raw material has a predisposition, a "nature" endowed with the potential of form. In other words, latency and manifestation are coextensive. Second, in this passage Mencius is far more distressed by Gaozi's opinions than in any other passage where he discusses the issue of human nature. In *Mencius* 6A/4 Mencius leads Gaozi's assumptions *ad absurdum*, and the way he closes his polemic—on the example of the culinary pleasure of a roast—is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. In *Mencius* 6A/2, which we will look at shortly, Mencius wins out by deviously appropriating Gaozi's analogy of human nature and water, employing it for his own purposes. In the present passage, however, Mencius is not as

31. Lau, *Mencius* 6A/1.

32. See Lau, "On Mencius' Use of the Method of Analogy in Argument," 239.

determined to have the last word in an argument about human nature. Instead he is horrified by the violence<sup>33</sup> implicit in Gaozi's proposed analogy and closes in the voice of a distressed Cassandra: "If people of this world bring disaster upon notions of 'benevolence' and 'rightness,' it will certainly be because of your words!"

Mencius feels an unmistakable distress about the prospect of the destruction of the transparent relation between the inner and outer, and the latent power the inner holds over the outer. He tries to find a perfect counter-analogy that could drive out the nightmare of the carved bowls. Not surprisingly, this opportunity presents itself in the immediately adjacent passage, where Gaozi himself helps him find the ideal analogy:

Gaozi 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 distinguish between good or bad just as water does not distinguish between East or West." Mencius said, "Water certainly does not distinguish between East or West, but does it show the same indifference to high and low? Human nature is good just as water seeks low ground. All people have the potential to be good; all water has the potential to flow downwards. Now in the case of water, by splashing it one can make it shoot up over one's head, and by forcing it one can make it stay on a mountain. But how could that be the nature of water? It is the circumstances being what they are. That people can be made bad shows that their nature is no different from that of water in this respect."<sup>34</sup>

告子曰：「性猶湍水也，決諸東方則東流，決諸西方則西流。人性之無分於善不善也，猶水之無分於東西也。」孟子曰：「水信無分於東西，無分於上下乎？人性之善也，猶水之就下也。人無有不善，水無有不下。今夫水，搏而躍之，可使過顛；激而行之，可使在山。是豈水之性哉？其勢則然也。人之可使為不善，其性亦猶是也。」

33. In a reading of this passage, Michael Puett has drawn attention to Mencius's tendency to avoid the vocabulary of creative crafting: "Mencius would not approve of the vocabulary of creative construction so often employed by the Mohists. Indeed, even Confucius's view of cultivation as a process of organizing and patterning one's raw substance would be too strong: for Mencius, the analogy can only work if it is used to discuss nourishing and bringing out something that is already there. For this reason, the process of cultivation is more analogous to a farmer helping grains to grow than to a craftsman working raw material." See Puett, *Ambivalence of Creation*, 58.

34. *Mencius* 6A/2.

It is gravity that inspires Mencius to utilize and refine Gaozi's water analogy. The change from "bowls and cups" to "water," from the solid to the liquid state, is favorable to blurring the boundaries between "form" and "material," which Mencius had found wanting in Gaozi's previous remark. But this change of state is not sufficient. Mencius has to make sure that the "material" is not just "liquid material," but that it has an intrinsic form, a "nature" of its own, and that is gravity. Gravity is the best way to describe the working of latency. In this sense, the water analogy is the most apt expression of Mencius's concern with ensuring the coextensive continuity of the inner and outer, of mind and body, significance and text.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Nature of Mencius's Analogies about Human Nature*

Why is Mencius so passionate about the issue of human nature in his conversations with Gaozi? And why are the analogies Mencius spins out and develops in these conversations among the finest samples of arguments by analogy in *Mencius*? If one considers the discussions to be the Chinese contribution to a universal discourse about "human nature," they are mere illustrations of Mencius's philosophical position on the issue, external flourishes to the underlying core issues at stake. According to this approach, different images in these analogies could have done equally well

35. Another example of the use of the water trope is *Mencius* 7A/24:

"Mencius said, 'When he climbed Eastern Mountain, Confucius felt that Lu was small, and when he climbed up Mount Tai, he felt that the world was small. Thus it is difficult for water to meet the expectations of someone who has seen the ocean, and it is difficult for words to meet the expectations of someone who has studied under a sage. There is an art to judging water: Watch for its ripples. There is luster in the sun and moon and their light will shine from the least crack that will admit it. Flowing water is the kind of substance that *does not flow further until it has filled all the hollows inside*. Thus, a superior person pursues the Way as his goal and *does not get there before he has perfected his beautiful pattern*.'" (Emphasis added). 孟子曰：「孔子登東山而小魯，登太山而小天下，故觀於海者難為水，遊於聖人之門者難為言，觀水有術，必觀其瀾，日月有明，容光必照焉，流水之為物也，不盈科不行；君子之志於道也，不成章不達。」

In this passage, "water" and the "superior person" stand in chiasmatic relation: While water fills up crevices before it flows outside, the superior person's inside emanates into a beautiful pattern on the outside. The chiasmatic juxtaposition enhances the sense of "fluidity" between latency and manifestation that is—very much in Mencius's interest—so blurred that it makes external interference almost impossible.

to convey the universally true concepts that are presumably the meat of Mencius's arguments. D. C. Lau, however, gives the analogies a far greater intellectual role.<sup>36</sup> He sees a negatively heuristic purpose in them, explaining that they are most helpful not in the way they draw parallels, but for the moments when similarities break down and the particular analogy has run its course. They are momentary stages, momentous tools of the thinking process.

I would push this reading even further, saying that analogies such as "willow wood" or "water" are not just illustrating images, but conceptual metaphors with philosophical virulence. They enable Mencius in the first place to conceptualize the dynamic of depth, the interdependence between latency and manifestation. While the bowls-out-of-willows analogy is a horrifying warning against conceptual metaphors that are destructive to that relationship, the revised water analogy is the perfect code to stabilize the relation between inner substance and outer pattern. In other words, these images are not just analogies that illustrate a universal concept of human nature, but they are models for proper "manifest latencies" in *Mencius* and for a novel discourse of interiority and depth. Viewed from within the entire book of the *Mencius*, the dispute about "human nature" is not aimed at finding universally true parameters of human psychology. Instead, it establishes Mencius as a master of depth: as the first master to create a lineage by declaring himself the master exegete of Confucius's heritage, the diagnostician of human bodies and minds, and the therapist of rulers' hearts.

36. Lau's suggestion to draw parallels between Mencius's use of analogy and Mohist rhetorical practice is particularly interesting, because it shows how Mencius, on his prophetic mission against Mohism, cannot help using the weapons of his opponents. See Lau, "On Mencius' Use of the Method of Analogy in Argument," 261. For a discussion of arguments by analogy in the *Mencius* in relation to Mohist terminology, see Lei Shujuan, "Mengzi leibi lunzheng fangfa fenlei de lilun yiju."