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The Problem of Mencius 5

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Abstract

Mencius 5 has been a problem for centuries: it is of little philosophical interest in a text that is usually read for its philosophical content. Using recent chronological and stylistic studies of the Mencius, I will approach this problem from a slightly different perspective, asking not only what the chapter does (which is obvious enough: it disputes variant traditions about the pre-Jōu authority sources, exploits some Jōu exemplars, and redefines the protocol and function of ministers), but why the northern Mencians should have taken up just those topics, at just that time (c0282-0275).

The handout will contain most of the substance of this presentation, and I will take only a few minutes to single out the highlights, leaving the remainder of the time for discussion and criticism.