

Mencius as a Public Philosopher

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CSJY 群書治要 Extracts from the Mencius

Interviews by the Historical Mencius (1)

1A1. Mencius was seen by Lyáng Hwèi-wáng. The King said, The Aged One has not thought a thousand leagues too far to come; he will certainly have something wherewith to benefit my state. Mencius replied, Why must the King say “profit?” All one need say is “benevolence” and “righteousness.” The King says “what will benefit my state;” the great dignitaries say “what will benefit my clan;” the officers and common people say, “What will profit my self?” When high and low contend with each other for profit, the state is in danger. Never was one benevolent who neglected his parents; never was one righteous who put his ruler last.

Invented Dialogues by Mencius’ Disciples (2 passages)

***1A4.** Lyáng Hwèi-wáng said, I should simply like to receive your teaching. Mencius said, Between killing a man with a judicial proceeding and with a knife, is there a basis for distinguishing? He said, There is no way to distinguish them. Mencius said, Between a knife and a government, is there a basis for distinguishing them? The King said, There is no way to distinguish them. [Mencius said], In your kitchens is fat meat; in your stables are fat horses, but the people have a famishing look, and in the wilds are the corpses of the starved. This is leading on wild beasts to eat men. What does this have to do with being the “father and mother of the people?” When wild beasts eat each other, men think it evil. To be the father and mother of the people, and to carry out the government, and not avoid leading on wild beasts to eat men, how can they be father and mother of the people?

***1B2.** Chí Sywǎn-wáng asked, That the park of Wǎn-wáng was 70 leagues square; was this so? Mencius said, It was. [The King] said, Was it was that large? [Mencius] said, The people still considered it small. [The King] said, This Lonely One’s park is only 40 leagues square, and the people consider it large. Why is this? [Mencius] said, The park of Wǎn-wáng was 70 leagues square, but the grasscutters and fuel-gatherers went into it; the pheasant and rabbit hunters went into it. He shared it with the people. That the people considered it small: was it not appropriate? Your subject has heard that within the boundary gates there is a park 40 leagues square. Anyone who kills a deer is as guilty as though he had killed a man. Then this area 40 leagues square is a pitfall in the midst of the state. That the people consider it big: is it not appropriate?

A New Formulation by the Unified Mencian School (3 consecutive passages)

2A6. Mencius said, All men have a heart which cannot bear the sufferings of others. The ancient kings had a heart which could not bear the sufferings of others, and so they had a government which could not bear the sufferings of others. With a heart which could not bear the sufferings of others, and conducting a government which could not bear the sufferings of others, to rule the world was like turning something around in the palm of one’s hand.

The reason I say that men all have a heart which cannot bear the sufferings of others: Suppose we suddenly see a child about to fall into a well; we will all feel alarm and distress. Looking at it from this angle, one without feelings of commiseration is not human; one without feelings of shame and aversion is not human; one without feelings of modesty and deference is not human, one without a feeling for right and wrong is not human. Feelings of commiseration are the basis of benevolence; feelings of shame and aversion are the basis of righteousness; feelings of modesty and deference are the basis of propriety; a feeling for right and wrong is the basis of wisdom. Men have these four bases just as they have four limbs. One with these four bases who says he is incapable of them is his own bandit; one who says that his ruler is incapable of them is his ruler's bandit.

2A7. Mencius said, How can we say that the arrowsmith is less benevolent than the shieldwright? But the arrowsmith worries only that men may not be harmed, while the shieldwright worries that they may be harmed. So also with the healer and the coffinmaker. Therefore one cannot be careless about one's occupation.

2A8. Mencius said, Dž-lù, when someone told him about a fault, he was delighted. When Yǔ heard of something good, he bowed. Great Shùn was also outstanding in this way. He thought it good to be like others; he would abandon his own idea and follow others; he delighted to accept an idea from others and would regard it as good. From the time he ploughed and sowed, potted and fished, until he came to be Emperor, there was nothing that was not taken from others. To regard it as good to take from others, is to be on good terms with others. Therefore the gentleman has no quality greater than to be on good terms with others.

Invented Dialogue by the Late Southern School (1 passage)

3A4. Ch'v́n Syàng saw Mencius and expounded the sayings of Syǔ Syíng . . . that the wise man will plough alongside the people to get his food . . . Mencius said, In governing the world, there are the responsibilities of the greater men and the responsibilities of the lesser men. Some tax their minds; some tax their strength. Those who tax their minds govern others, those who tax their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others feed others; those who govern others are fed by others. This is a constant principle recognized in the whole world. In the time of Yáu, the floodwaters spread everywhere over the whole world. Yáu alone was concerned for it; he raised Shùn and all was ordered. Shùn had Yǔ mark out the nine rivers and cut channels for the Rǔ and Hàn. During eight years away from home, he thrice passed by his gate but did not enter it. Though he wished to plough the land, could he have done so? Yáu regarded not getting Shùn as his own worry. Shùn regarded not getting Yǔ and Gāu-yáu as his own worry . . .

Sharing one's wealth with others we call Kindness; teaching others what is good we call Loyalty, getting the right men for the world we call Benevolence. For this reason, to give the world to another is easy; to find men for the world is hard.

Invented Dialogues by the Northern School (7, including 2 consecutive passages)

4A1. Mencius said, Not all the keen sight of Master Lí Lóu or the skill of Master Gūngshū could fashion squares and circles without the aid of compass and square. Not all the sensitive ear of Master Kwàng could put in order the Five Notes without the aid of the six pitchpipes. Nor could the Way of Yáu and Shùn peacefully order the world without the principle of Benevolent Government.

At present there are those of benevolent disposition and benevolent reputation, but the people are not benefited, and they cannot serve as a model for later ages. This is because they do not practice the Way of the Former Kings. Therefore I say, merely following the good is not enough to constitute a government; merely following example is not enough to guide personal practice . . . When the Sages had exhausted their powers of eye, they went on with compass and straightedge, level and line, to determine round and square. When they had exhausted their powers of ear, they went on with the six pitchpipes, and set straight the Five Notes. When they had exhausted their powers of thought and reflection, they went on with the government that cannot bear the sufferings of others, and their benevolence overspread the world. Therefore, to go high, one must start from a hill; to go deep, one must start from a declivity. If one conducts government without starting from the Rules of the Former Kings, can this be called wise? Therefore, it is only the benevolent who should occupy high positions. If the nonbenevolent occupy high positions, they will only spread evil among the masses.

4A3. That the Three Dynasties obtained the world was by benevolence. That they lost the world was by nonbenevolence. The reason for the fall or rise of nations is also the preservation of benevolence. If the Emperor is not benevolent, he cannot preserve the land within the Four Seas; if the lords are not benevolent, they cannot preserve their altars of soil and grain; if the nobles and great dignitaries are not benevolent, they cannot preserve their ancestral shrines; if the officers and common people are not benevolent, they cannot preserve their four limbs. At present, people hate death yet delight in what is not benevolent; this is like hating drunkenness but drinking deep of wine.

4B3. Mencius said to Chí Sywān-wáng, If a ruler regards his ministers as his hands and feet, then the ministers will regard the ruler as their stomach and heart. If a ruler regards his ministers as dogs and horses, the ministers will regard the ruler as a mere citizen. If a ruler regards his ministers as dirt and grass, the ministers will regard the ruler as a thief and an enemy.

6A12. Mencius said, Suppose a man's nameless finger [a loan translation from Skt/Pali *anāmika*, "little finger"] is bent and won't straighten. Though it does not hurt and is not disabling, if there is someone who can straighten it, he will not think a journey to Chín or Chǔ too far, because his finger is not like other people's. If his finger is not like other people's, he knows enough to dislike it, but if his heart is not like other people's, he does not know enough to dislike it. This is what we call not understanding proportion.

6A18. Mencius said, Benevolence overcomes nonbenevolence just as water overcomes fire. The benevolent ones of the present are like seeking to put out a fire in a wagonload of firewood with a cup of water, and when it is not extinguished, saying that water does not overcome fire. This is much worse than not being benevolent at all.

6A19. The five grains are the best of all seeds, but if by chance they are not ripe, they are not as good as dock or darnel. With benevolence also, the whole point is ripeness.

7A12. Mencius said, If the people are employed in a regimen looking to their ease, then though they be toiled, they will not be resentful. If they are put to death under a system respectful of life, then they will not resent the one who kills them.

Appendix Stylistic Similarity in the Mencius Chapters

Calculated by Mary Elizabeth Cleary / Oct 2014

Introduction: Style is carried by function words, and style may be measured apart from content by noting, in one specimen of text, the frequency of the commonest connectives relative to general frequency expectations, and between two specimens of text, the degree to which they depart in a similar way from that general expectation. In the Brooks Index of Rhetorical Difference (BIRD) test, these two measures come out as follows. (1) The Neutrality (N) measure, a number 0 or larger, measures the degree to which departures from expectation cancel out, for the fourteen test words here tracked, or tend toward the positive side (more connectives than expected) or the negative side (fewer). (2) The Difference (D) measure reports the degree of difference between the *frequency profiles* of two texts; it is low when the two profiles closely correspond (that is, when one zigs when the other zigs) and high when they do not (when one zigs when the other zags). In the course of calibrating the test, it has tended to be the case that D values of 0.5 or below imply a very close similarity, as of one writing continuously, whereas D values of 1.0 or higher imply a difference sufficient to suggest a second author (there is not, and given the linguistic realities there cannot be, a test for authorship as such).

For purposes of this test, the Mencius chapters were taken as they are, without adjustment for spurious and genuine interviews of Mencius, or for late interpolations in an early chapter, and 上 and 下 halves of chapters were combined.

Chapter	1. 梁惠王	2. 公孫丑	3. 滕文公	4. 離婁	5. 萬章	6. 告子	7. 盡心
Count	5370	5142	5049	4750	5129	5234	4696
N	9.98	11.68	5.35	9.73	6.82	12.08	9.41
D	MC 1	MC 2	MC 3	MC 4	MC 5	MC 6	MC 7
MC 1	~	0.62	0.51	0.53	0.57	0.74	0.61
MC 2	0.62	~	0.69	0.29	0.56	0.68	0.61
MC 3	0.51	0.69	~	0.57	0.42	0.56	0.60
MC 4	0.53	0.29	0.57	~	0.47	0.56	0.37
MC 5	0.57	0.56	0.42	0.47	~	0.49	0.37
MC 6	0.74	0.68	0.56	0.56	0.49	~	0.42
MC 7	0.61	0.61	0.60	0.37	0.37	0.42	~

Interpretation. N values report similarity between the two chapters (MC 3 and 5) which consist of long passages rather than short sayings. D values: (1) Taking the chapters consecutively, there is modest closeness of style between MC 1 (interviews genuine or spurious), MC 2 (brief Mencius sayings), and MC 3 (longer Mencius sayings). Between consecutive *northern* chapters, MC 4-7, there is consistent similarity. The distinctiveness of the northern chapters, previously asserted from their content, is thus confirmed stylistically. (2) The last northern chapter, MC 7, is close not only to the preceding chapter, but to *all* the northern chapters. This has a content counterpart: several themes in MC 7 find doublets (in our view, retrospective interpolations) in earlier chapters. (3) Another similarity is between MC 2 (the first independent southern chapter) and MC 4 (the first independent northern chapter). In content, the doctrinal statement MC 2A3-2B1 has doublets in the corresponding set, MC 4A2-10. The two schools were then close together, in doctrine and also in style, at the time of the split. (4) For the similarity between MC 3 and 5, see again the N values.