

6 CONFUCIAN TEACHINGS

Confucius (traditional dates, 551-479 B.C.) was a man of no particular distinction in his own day who exerted a profound influence on the development of Chinese culture through his teachings. He tried in vain to gain a high office, traveling from state to state with his disciples in search of a ruler who would listen to him. He talked repeatedly of an ideal age in the early Zhou, revealing his vision of a more perfect society in which rulers and subjects, nobles and commoners, parents and children, men and women would all wholeheartedly accept the parts assigned to them, devoting themselves to their responsibilities to others. Confucius revered tradition and taught his disciples the traditional arts—music, rituals, the Book of Songs and Book of Documents—while continually holding up for them high moral standards.

Confucius's ideas are known to us primarily through the sayings recorded by his disciples in the Analects. This book does not provide carefully organized or argued philosophical discourses, and the sayings seem to have been haphazardly arranged. Yet this short text became a sacred book, memorized by beginning students and known to all educated people. As such it influenced the values and habits of thought of Chinese for centuries. Many of its passages became proverbial sayings, unknowingly cited by illiterate peasants. In the selection that follows, sayings have been reorganized and grouped under four of the topics he most frequently discussed.

The eventual success of Confucian ideas owes much to Confucius's followers in the two centuries following his death, the most important of whom were Mencius (ca. 370-ca. 300 B.C.) and Xunzi (ca. 310-ca. 215 B.C.). The Mencius, like the Analects, is a collection of the philosopher's conversations, presented in no particular order, but unlike the Analects, specific points are often analyzed at length, perhaps because Mencius himself had a hand in recording them. Mencius, like Confucius, traveled around offering advice to rulers of various states. Over and over he tried to convert them to the view that the ruler who wins over the people through benevolent government would be the one to unify the realm. He proposed concrete political and financial measures for easing tax burdens and otherwise improving the people's lot. With his disciples and fellow philosophers, he discussed other issues in moral philosophy, particularly ones related to the goodness of human nature.

Xunzi, a half century later, had much more actual political and administrative experience than either Confucius or Mencius and was less committed to the precedents set in the early Zhou. He wrote fully argued essays on many of the issues in social, political, and moral philosophy that engaged thinkers of his age. He carried further than either Confucius or Mencius the tendency in Confucianism toward a humanistic and rationalistic view of the cosmos. Divination was to him fine as a social ritual but did not reveal Heaven's desires or tell anything about the future. He directly attacked Mencius's argument that human nature is inherently good, claiming to the contrary that men's inborn tendencies are bad and therefore education is essential.

SELECTIONS FROM THE ANALECTS

The Gentleman

Confucius said, "The gentleman concerns himself with the Way; he does not worry about his salary. Hunger may be found in plowing; wealth may be found in studying. The gentleman worries about the Way, not about poverty."

Confucius said, "When he eats, the gentleman does not seek to stuff himself. In his home he does not seek luxury. He is diligent in his work and cautious in his speech. He associates with those who possess the Way, and thereby rectifies himself. He may be considered a lover of learning."

Zigong inquired about being a gentleman. Confucius said, "First he behaves properly and then he speaks, so that his words follow his actions."

Sima Niu asked about the nature of the gentleman. Confucius replied, "The gentleman does not worry and is not fearful." Si asked, "Then, can not fearing and not worrying be considered the essence of being a gentleman?" Confucius responded, "If you can look into yourself and find no cause for dissatisfaction, how can you worry and how can you fear?"

Confucius said, "The gentleman reveres three things. He reveres the mandate of Heaven; he reveres great people; and he reveres the words of the sages. Petty people do not know the mandate of Heaven and so do not revere it. They are disrespectful to great people and they ridicule the words of the sages."

Confucius said, "The gentleman must exert caution in three areas. When he is a youth and his blood and spirit have not yet settled down, he must be on his guard lest he fall into lusting. When he reaches the full vigor of his manhood in his thirties and his blood and spirit are strong, he must guard against getting into

quarrels. When he reaches old age and his blood and spirit have begun to weaken, he must guard against envy.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman understands integrity; the petty person knows about profit.”

Confucius said, “For the gentleman integrity is the essence; the rules of decorum are the way he puts it into effect; humility is the way he brings it forth; sincerity is the way he develops it. Such indeed is what it means to be a gentleman.”

Confucius said that Zichan possessed the way of the gentleman in four areas. In his personal conduct he was respectful; in serving his superiors he was reverent; in nourishing the people he was kind; in governing the people he was righteous.

Confucius said, “The gentleman has nine concerns. In seeing he is concerned with clarity. In hearing he is concerned with acuity. In his expression he wishes to be warm. In his bearing he wishes to be respectful. In his words he is concerned with sincerity. In his service he is concerned with reverence. When he is in doubt, he wants to ask questions. When he is angry, he is wary of the pitfalls. When he sees the chance for profit, he keeps in mind the need for integrity.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman is easy to serve but difficult to please. When you try to please him, if your manner of pleasing is not in accord with the Way, then he will not be pleased. On the other hand, he does not expect more from people than their capacities warrant. The petty individual is hard to serve and easy to please. When you try to please him, even if your method of pleasing him is not in accord with the Way, he will be pleased. But in employing people he expects them to be perfectly accomplished in everything.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman is in harmony with those around him but not on their level. The small man is on the level of those around him but not in harmony with them.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman aspires to things lofty; the petty person aspires to things base.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman looks to himself; the petty person looks to other people.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman feels bad when his capabilities fall short of some task. He does not feel bad if people fail to recognize him.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman fears that after his death his name will not be honored.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman does not promote people merely on the basis of

their words, nor does he reject words merely because of the person who uttered them.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman is exalted and yet not proud. The petty person is proud and yet not exalted.”

Zixia said, “The gentleman has three transformations. Seen from afar he appears majestic. Upon approaching him you see he is amiable. Upon hearing his words you find they are serious.”

Confucius said, “If the gentleman is not dignified, he will not command respect and his teachings will not be considered solid. He emphasizes sincerity and honesty. He has no friends who are not his equals. If he finds a fault in himself, he does not shirk from reforming himself.”

Zigong said, “When the gentleman falls into error, it is like the eclipse of the sun and moon: everyone sees it. When he corrects it, everyone will look up to him again.”

Zigong said, “Does not the gentleman also have his hatreds?” Confucius replied, “Yes, he has his hatreds. He hates those who harp on the weak points of others. He hates those who are base and yet slander those who are exalted. He hates those who are bold but do not observe the proprieties. He hates those who are brash and daring and yet have limited outlook.” Confucius then asked, “You too have your hatreds, do you not?” Zigong replied, “I hate those who pry into things and consider it wisdom. I hate those who are imprudent and consider it courage. I hate those who leak out secrets and consider it honesty.”

Zengzi said, “The gentleman knows enough not to exceed his position.”

Confucius said, “The gentleman is not a tool.”

Humanity

Zizhang asked Confucius about humanity. Confucius said, “If an individual can practice five things anywhere in the world, he is a man of humanity.” “May I ask what these things are?” said Zizhang. Confucius replied, “Reverence, generosity, truthfulness, diligence, and kindness. If a person acts with reverence, he will not be insulted. If he is generous, he will win over the people. If he is truthful, he will be trusted by people. If he is diligent, he will have great achievements. If he is kind, he will be able to influence others.”

Zhonggong asked about humanity. Confucius said, “When you go out, treat everyone as if you were welcoming a great guest. Employ people as if you were conducting a great sacrifice. Do not do unto others what you would not have

them do unto you. Then neither in your country nor in your family will there be complaints against you.” Zhonggong said, “Although I am not intelligent, please allow me to practice your teachings.”

Sima Niu asked about humanity. Confucius said, “The man of humanity is cautious in his speech.” Sima Niu replied, “If a man is cautious in his speech, may it be said that he has achieved the virtue of humanity?” Confucius said, “When a man realizes that accomplishing things is difficult, can his use of words be anything but cautious?”

Confucius said, “A person with honeyed words and pious gestures is seldom a man of humanity.”

Confucius said, “The individual who is forceful, resolute, simple, and cautious of speech is near to humanity.”

Confucius said, “The man of wisdom takes pleasure in water; the man of humanity delights in the mountains. The man of wisdom desires action; the man of humanity wishes for quietude. The man of wisdom seeks happiness; the man of humanity looks for long life.”

Confucius said, “If a man does not have humanity, how can he have propriety? If a man does not have humanity, how can he be in tune with the rites or music?”

Confucius said, “The humanity of a village makes it beautiful. If you choose a village where humanity does not dwell, how can you gain wisdom?”

Confucius said, “Humanity is more important for people than water or fire. I have seen people walk through water and fire and die. I have never seen someone tread the path of humanity and perish.”

Confucius said, “Riches and honors are the things people desire; but if one obtains them by not following the Way, then one will not be able to hold them. Poverty and low position in society are the things that people hate; but if one can avoid them only by not following the Way, then one should not avoid them. If the gentleman abandons humanity, how can he live up to his name? The gentleman must not forget about humanity for even the space of time it takes him to finish a meal. When hurried, he must act according to it. Even when confronted with a crisis, he must follow its tenets.”

Confucius said, “The strong-minded scholar and the man of humanity do not seek to live by violating the virtue of humanity. They will suffer death if necessary to achieve humanity.”

Confucius said, “In practicing the virtue of humanity, one should not defer even to one’s teacher.”

Confucius said, “Is humanity far away? Whenever I want the virtue of humanity, it comes at once.”

Zigong asked about the virtue of humanity. Confucius said, “The artisan who wants to do his work well must first of all sharpen his tools. When you reside in a given state, enter the service of the best of the officials and make friends with the most humane of the scholars.”

Confucius said, “Only the man of humanity can rightly love some people and rightly despise some people.”

Confucius said, “People can be classified according to their faults. By observing an individual’s faults, you will know if he is a person of humanity.”

Confucius said, “Those who possess virtue will be sure to speak out; but those who speak out do not necessarily have virtue. Those who possess the virtue of humanity certainly have strength; but those who are strong do not necessarily have the virtue of humanity.”

Confucius said, “Although there have been gentlemen who did not possess the virtue of humanity, there have never been petty men who did possess it.”

Filial Piety

Ziyou inquired about filial piety. Confucius said, “Nowadays, filial piety is considered to be the ability to nourish one’s parents. But this obligation to nourish even extends down to the dogs and horses. Unless we have reverence for our parents, what makes us any different?”

Confucius said, “When your father is alive observe his intentions. When he is deceased, model yourself on the memory of his behavior. If in three years after his death you have not deviated from your father’s ways, then you may be considered a filial child.”

Zengzi said, “I have heard from Confucius that the filial piety of Meng Zhuangzi is such that it could also be attained by others, but his not changing his father’s ministers and his father’s government is a virtue difficult indeed to match.”

Meng Yizi inquired about filial piety. Confucius said, “Do not offend your parents.” Fan Zhi was giving Confucius a ride in a wagon, and Confucius told him, “Meng Sun questioned me about filial piety and I told him, ‘Do not offend your parents.’” Fan Zhi said, “What are you driving at?” Confucius replied, “When your parents are alive, serve them according to the rules of ritual and decorum. When they are deceased, give them a funeral and offer sacrifices to them according to the rules of ritual and decorum.”

Confucius said, “When your father and mother are alive, do not go rambling around far away. If you must travel, make sure you have a set destination.”

Confucius said, “It is unacceptable not to be aware of your parents’ ages. Their advancing years are a cause for joy and at the same time a cause for sorrow.”

Confucius said, “You can be of service to your father and mother by remonstrating with them tactfully. If you perceive that they do not wish to follow your advice, then continue to be reverent toward them without offending or disobeying them; work hard and do not murmur against them.”

The Duke of She said to Confucius, “In my land there is an upright man. His father stole a sheep, and the man turned him in to the authorities.” Confucius replied, “The upright men of my land are different. The father will shelter the son and the son will shelter the father. Righteousness lies precisely in this.”

On Governing

The Master said, “Lead them by means of government policies and regulate them through punishments, and the people will be evasive and have no sense of shame. Lead them by means of virtue and regulate them through rituals and they will have a sense of shame and moreover have standards.”

Duke Ding asked about how rulers should direct their ministers and ministers serve their rulers. Confucius responded, “A ruler directs his ministers through established ritual protocols. A minister serves his ruler with loyalty.”

Zigong inquired about governing. The Master said, “Make food supplies sufficient, provide an adequate army, and give the people reason to have faith.” Zigong asked, “If one had no choice but to dispense with one of these three, which should it be?” “Eliminate the army.” Zigong continued, “If one had no choice but to get rid of one of the two remaining, which should it be?” “Dispense with food,” Confucius said. “Since ancient times, death has always occurred, but people without faith cannot stand.”

Jikangzi asked Confucius about governing, posing the question, “What would you think of my killing those without principles to help those with principles?” Confucius responded, “You are the government. Why employ killing? If you want what is good, the people will be good. The virtue of a gentleman is like the wind, the virtue of a small person like the grass. When the wind blows over it, the grass must bend.”

When Zhonggong was serving as chief minister to the Ji family, he asked for advice on governing. The Master said, “Put priority on your subordinate

officials. Pardon their minor mistakes and promote those who are worthy and talented.” “How can I recognize those who are talented and worthy to promote them?” Confucius replied, “Promote those you know. Will others neglect those you do not know?”

The Master said, “If one has corrected himself, what problem would he have in governing? But if he is unable to correct himself, how can he govern others?”

Duke Ding asked, “Is there a single saying that can bring about the success of a country?” Confucius responded, “One cannot expect so much from a saying, but the people do have this maxim: ‘To be a ruler is difficult; to be a minister is not easy.’ If you recognize the difficulty of being a ruler, that may come close to furthering your state through a single maxim.” The Duke asked again, “Can a single saying lead to the ruin of a state?” Confucius responded, “One cannot expect so much from a saying, but the people do have this maxim, ‘I get no pleasure from being ruler other than that no one can contradict what I say.’ If what he says is good and no one contradicts it, that is fine. But if what he says is not good and no one contradicts it, isn’t that almost a case of one maxim bringing about the ruin of the state?”

The Master said, “When superiors love ritual the people are easy to direct.”

The Master said, “Shun was the one who governed effectively without activism. What was there for him to do? He simply made himself respectful and took up his position facing south.”

SELECTIONS FROM THE *MENCIUS*

On Government

Mencius had an audience with King Hui of Liang. The king said, “Sir, you did not consider a thousand *li* too far to come. You must have some ideas about how to benefit my state.” Mencius replied, “Why must Your Majesty use the word ‘benefit’? All I am concerned with are the benevolent and the right. If Your Majesty says, ‘How can I benefit my state?’ your officials will say, ‘How can I benefit my family,’ and officers and common people will say, ‘How can I benefit myself.’ Once superiors and inferiors are competing for benefit, the state will be in danger. When the head of a state of ten thousand chariots is murdered, the assassin is invariably a noble with a fief of a thousand chariots. When the head of a fief of a thousand chariots is murdered, the assassin is invariably head of a subfief of a hundred chariots. Those with a thousand out of ten thousand, or

a hundred out of a thousand, had quite a bit. But when benefit is put before what is right, they are not satisfied without snatching it all. By contrast, there has never been a benevolent person who neglected his parents or a righteous person who put his lord last. Your Majesty perhaps will now also say, ‘All I am concerned with are the benevolent and the right. Why mention ‘benefit?’”

After seeing King Xiang of Liang, Mencius said to someone, “When I saw him from a distance, he did not look like a ruler, and when I got closer, I saw nothing to command respect. But he asked, ‘How can the realm be settled?’ I answered, ‘It can be settled through unity.’ ‘Who can unify it?’ he asked. I answered, ‘Someone not fond of killing people.’ ‘Who could give it to him?’ I answered, ‘Everyone in the world will give it to him. Your Majesty knows what rice plants are? If there is a drought in the seventh and eighth months, the plants wither, but if moisture collects in the sky and forms clouds and rain falls in torrents, the plants suddenly revive. This is the way it is; no one can stop the process. In the world today there are no rulers disinclined toward killing. If there were a ruler who did not like to kill people, everyone in the world would crane their necks to catch sight of him. This is really true. The people would flow toward him the way water flows down. No one would be able to repress them.’”

King Xuan of Qi asked, “Is it true that King Wen’s park was seventy *li* square?” Mencius answered, “That is what the records say.” The King said, “Isn’t that large?” Mencius responded, “The people considered it small.” “Why then do the people consider my park large when it is forty *li* square?” “In the forty square *li* of King Wen’s park, people could collect firewood and catch birds and rabbits. Since he shared it with the people, isn’t it fitting that they considered it small? When I arrived at the border, I asked about the main rules of the state before daring to enter. I learned that there was a forty-*li* park within the outskirts of the capital where killing a deer was punished like killing a person. Thus these forty *li* are a trap in the center of the state. Isn’t it appropriate that the people consider it too large?”

After an incident between Zou and Lu, Duke Mu asked, “Thirty-three of my officials died but no common people died. I could punish them, but I could not punish them all. I could refrain from punishing them, but they did angrily watch their superiors die without saving them. What would be the best course for me to follow?” Mencius answered, “When the harvest failed, even though your granaries were full, nearly a thousand of your subjects were lost—the old and weak among them dying in the gutters, the able-bodied scattering in all directions. Your officials never reported the situation, a case of superiors callously inflicting suffering on their subordinates. Zengzi said, ‘Watch out,

watch out! What you do will be done to you.’ This was the first chance the people had to pay them back. You should not resent them. If Your Highness practices benevolent government, the common people will love their superiors and die for those in charge of them.”

King Xuan of Qi asked, “Is it true that Tang banished Jie and King Wu took up arms against Zhou?” Mencius replied, “That is what the records say.” “Then is it permissible for a subject to assassinate his lord?” Mencius said, “Someone who does violence to the good we call a villain; someone who does violence to the right we call a criminal. A person who is both a villain and a criminal we call a scoundrel. I have heard that the scoundrel Zhou was killed, but have not heard that a lord was killed.”

King Xuan of Qi asked about ministers. Mencius said, “What sort of ministers does Your Majesty mean?” The king said, “Are there different kinds of ministers?” “There are. There are noble ministers related to the ruler and ministers of other surnames.” The king said, “I’d like to hear about noble ministers.” Mencius replied, “When the ruler makes a major error, they point it out. If he does not listen to their repeated remonstrations, then they put someone else on the throne.” The king blanched. Mencius continued, “Your Majesty should not be surprised at this. Since you asked me, I had to tell you truthfully.” After the king regained his composure, he asked about unrelated ministers. Mencius said, “When the king makes an error, they point it out. If he does not heed their repeated remonstrations, they quit their posts.”

Bo Gui said, “I’d like a tax of one part in twenty. What do you think?” Mencius said, “Your way is that of the northern tribes. Is one potter enough for a state with ten thousand households?” “No, there would not be enough wares.” “The northern tribes do not grow all the five grains, only millet. They have no cities or houses, no ritual sacrifices. They do not provide gifts or banquets for feudal lords, and do not have a full array of officials. Therefore, for them, one part in twenty is enough. But we live in the central states. How could we abolish social roles and do without gentlemen? If a state cannot do without potters, how much less can it do without gentlemen. Those who want to make government lighter than it was under Yao and Shun are to some degree barbarians. Those who wish to make government heavier than it was under Yao and Shun are to some degree [tyrants like] Jie.”

On Human Nature

Mencius said, “Everyone has a heart that is sensitive to the sufferings of others.

The great kings of the past had this sort of sensitive heart and thus adopted compassionate policies. Bringing order to the realm is as easy as moving an object in your palm when you have a sensitive heart and put into practice compassionate policies. Let me give an example of what I mean when I say everyone has a heart that is sensitive to the sufferings of others. Anyone today who suddenly saw a baby about to fall into a well would feel alarmed and concerned. It would not be because he wanted to improve his relations with the child's parents, nor because he wanted a good reputation among his friends and neighbors, nor because he disliked hearing the child cry. From this it follows that anyone who lacks feelings of commiseration, shame, and courtesy or a sense of right and wrong is not a human being. From the feeling of commiseration benevolence grows; from the feeling of shame righteousness grows; from the feeling of courtesy ritual grows; from a sense of right and wrong wisdom grows. People have these four germs, just as they have four limbs. For someone with these four potentials to claim incompetence is to cripple himself; to say his ruler is incapable of them is to cripple his ruler. Those who know how to develop the four potentials within themselves will take off like a fire or burst forth like a spring. Those who can fully develop them can protect the entire land, while those unable to develop them cannot even take care of their parents."

Gaozi said, "Human nature is like whirling water. When an outlet is opened to the east, it flows east; when an outlet is opened to the west, it flows west. Human nature is no more inclined to good or bad than water is inclined to east or west." Mencius responded, "Water, it is true, is not inclined to either east or west, but does it have no preference for high or low? Goodness is to human nature like flowing downward is to water. There are no people who are not good and no water that does not flow down. Still, water, if splashed, can go higher than your head; if forced, it can be brought up a hill. This isn't the nature of water; it is the specific circumstances. Although people can be made to be bad, their natures are not changed."

SELECTIONS FROM *XUNZI*

A Discussion of Heaven

Constant principles underlie Heaven's behavior. Heaven does not prevail because you are the sage Yao or disappear because you are the tyrant Jie. Blessings result when you respond to Heaven by creating order; misfortune results when you respond to it with disorder. When you concentrate on

agriculture and industry and are frugal in expenditures, Heaven cannot impoverish your state. When you store provisions and act quickly in emergencies, Heaven cannot afflict illness on your people. When you are singleminded in your cultivation of the Way, Heaven cannot send disasters. Thus, even if they come, droughts and floods will not bring starvation, extremes of temperature will not bring illness, uncanny phenomena will not prove unlucky.

On the other hand, if you ignore agriculture and industry and spend extravagantly, then Heaven cannot make your country rich. If you are negligent concerning provisions and slow to respond to crises, Heaven cannot keep your country whole. If you renounce the Way and act recklessly, Heaven cannot make you lucky. In such a case, starvation will result even without flood or drought; illness will occur even without severe weather; misfortunes will occur without any uncanny phenomena. Even though the seasons are identical to those of an orderly age, the resulting fortune or misfortune is different. But you should not resent Heaven. It is your Way that is responsible. Thus those who can distinguish what is in the realm of Heaven and what is in the realm of man are men of the highest order....

Are order and disorder the product of Heaven? I say, the sun and the moon, the stars and the constellations are the same as they were in the time of Yu and Jie. Yu brought order, Jie created disorder, so order and disorder do not come from Heaven. Are they a product of the seasons? I say, plants sprout and grow in spring and summer, and are harvested and stored in fall and winter, just the way they were during the reigns of Yu and Jie. Yet Yu brought order, Jie disorder, so order and disorder are not the product of seasons. Is it land then? I say, obtaining land leads to life, losing it leads to death, just as in the time of Yu and Jie. Yet Yu brought order, Jie disorder, so order and disorder are not a product of land....

Why does it rain after a prayer for rain? I say, for no reason. It is the same as raining when you had not prayed. When there is an eclipse of the sun or moon, you “save” it; when there is a drought, you pray for rain; when an important decision is to be made, you divine. It is not that you can get anything by doing so. It is just decoration. Hence, the gentleman considers them ornament, but the common people think spirits are involved. To consider them ornament is auspicious; to consider them as spiritual acts is inauspicious.

A Discussion of Ritual

Where does ritual come from? I say, people have desires from the time they are

born. When they want something they do not get, they inevitably try to get it. When there are no limits imposed on how they can try to get it, they inevitably struggle for it. Struggles lead to disorder, disorder to exhaustion. The ancient kings detested disorder and so instituted ritual and moral principles to set shares, thus satisfying people's desires and supplying their wants. They saw to it that desires and the supply of goods were kept in balance. This is how ritual began....

Sacrifices are concerned with the feelings of devotion and longing. Feelings of depression and melancholy cannot be prevented from occasionally arising. Thus, even when enjoying himself in pleasant company, a loyal official or a filial son will occasionally be overcome by grief. If he is greatly moved by his feelings, but he restrains himself and does not express them, he will be incomplete in ritual. Therefore the ancient kings established ways to fulfill the principle of honoring those deserving honor and expressing closeness to relatives. Hence, sacrifices are concerned with the feelings of devotion and longing. They fulfill loyalty, faith, love, and respect. Ritual conduct is the perfection of decorum. Only sages can fully understand this. Sages comprehend it, gentlemen comfortably carry them out, officials preserve them, and the common people consider them the custom. Gentlemen consider them to be part of the way of man; common people think they have something to do with ghosts....

Human Nature Is Bad

Human nature is bad. Good is a human product. Human nature is such that people are born with a love of profit. If they follow these inclinations, they will struggle and snatch from each other, and inclinations to defer or yield will die. They are born with fears and hatreds. If they follow them, they will become violent and tendencies toward good faith will die. They are born with sensory desires for pleasing sounds and sights. If they indulge them, the disorder of sexual license will result and ritual and moral principles will be lost. In other words, if people accord with human nature and follow their desires, they inevitably end up struggling, snatching, violating norms, and acting with violent abandon. Consequently, only after men are transformed by teachers and by ritual and moral principles do they defer, conform to culture, and abide in good order. Viewed this way, it is obvious that human nature is bad and good is a human product.

A warped piece of wood must be steamed and forced before it is made straight; a metal blade must be put to the whetstone before it becomes sharp. Since the nature of people is bad, to become corrected they must be taught by teachers and

to be orderly they must acquire ritual and moral principles. When people lack teachers, their tendencies are not corrected; when they do not have ritual and moral principles, then their lawlessness is not controlled. In antiquity the sage kings recognized that men's nature is bad and that their tendencies were not being corrected and their lawlessness controlled. Consequently, they created rituals and moral principles and instituted laws and limitations to give shape to people's feelings while correcting them, to transform people's emotional nature while guiding it. Thus all became orderly and conformed to the Way. Those people today who are transformed by teachers, accumulate learning, and follow ritual and moral principles are gentlemen. Those who indulge their instincts, act impulsively, and violate ritual and moral principles are inferior people. Seen from this perspective, it is obvious that human nature is bad, and good is a human product.

Mencius said that people's capacity to learn is evidence that their nature is good. I disagree. His statement shows he does not know what human nature is and has not pondered the distinction between what is human nature and what is created by man. Human nature is what Heaven supplies. It cannot be learned or worked at. Ritual and moral principles were produced by the sages; they are things people can master by study and effort. Human nature refers to what is in people but which they cannot study or work at achieving. Human products refers to what people acquire through study and effort....

Now, it is human nature to want to eat to one's fill when hungry, to want to warm up when cold, to want to rest when tired. These all are a part of people's emotional nature. When a man is hungry and yet on seeing an elder lets him eat first, it is because he knows he should yield. When he is tired but does not dare rest, it is because he knows it is his turn. When a son yields to his father, or a younger brother yields to his elder brother, or when a son takes on the work for his father or a younger brother for his elder brother, their actions go against their natures and run counter to their feelings. And yet these are the way of the filial son and the principles of ritual and morality. Thus, if people followed their feelings and nature, they would not defer or yield, for deferring and yielding run counter to their emotional nature. Viewed from this perspective, it is obvious that man's nature is bad and good is a human product....

Fanruo and Jushu were great bows of ancient times, but they could not on their own have become accurate without being pressed and straightened. The great swords of ancient times—Duke Huan's Cong, King Wen's Lu, Lord Zhuang's Hu, and King Helü's Ganjiang, Moyeh, Jueque, and Bilü—would never have become sharp without being put to the grindstone. Nor could they have cut

without men using their strength. The great horses of ancient times—Hualiu, Qiji, Xianli, and Luer—could never have run a thousand *li* in a day if they had not first been restrained by the bit and bridle, taught to respond to the whip, and driven by someone like Zaofu. Similarly, a man may have a fine temperament and a discriminating mind, but he must first seek a wise teacher to study under and good friends to associate with. If he studies with a wise teacher, what he hears will concern the way of Yao, Shun, Yü, and Tang. If he finds good friends to associate with, what he observes will be loyalty, good faith, respect, and deference. Each day he will come closer to humanity and morality without realizing it, all because of their influence. But if he lives with bad people, what he will hear will be deceit and lies, and what he will observe will be wild, undisciplined, greedy behavior. Without knowing it, he will end up a criminal, all because of their influence. It has been said, “If you do not know the man, observe his friends. If you do not know the lord, look at his attendants.” Influence affects everyone.

Translated by Mark Coyle and Patricia Ebrey