

The Self: East and West (HPPH7013)

Lecture 1: Confucian Ideas of the Self

Problem of Confucian/Confucianism

- ❑ Jesuits (16th century) emphasized the importance of Confucius as a figure to facilitate Chinese acceptance of Christianity
- ❑ ‘Confucius’/ ‘Confucianism’ *manufactured* by Jesuits; Chinese term is *Ru* 儒
- ❑ *Rujia* 儒家, the ‘School of the *ru*’ was a bibliographical category
- ❑ Confucianism as understood in academic literature is a very broad term inclusive of many different strands; Chinese thinkers would not exclusively identify as ‘Confucians’

Subjectivity in Chinese Culture

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) maintains that morality depends on “subjective freedom” rather than from past models
- subjectivity was something fundamentally absent from Chinese culture
- Instead, China is in the grip of “substance”, the unquestioned authority of tradition
- Absence of inwardness of conscience and morality
- Consequence: China cannot become “modern” unless it imports the principle of free subjectivity



Hegel on Subjectivity in Chinese Culture

“Together with more free reflection, the ethical separates from the legal. Then the constitution rests on the legal which brings forth laws while the ethical is left to the **individual**. [...] Nothing should appear in the laws what is free inside and has its being in the subject. In our modern consciousness we have the idea that the **inner life of the human being** should be respected. This demand expresses itself in the form of honor. It refers to the unimpeachable realm of **what I am for myself**. [...] It is a never-ending injury for me if someone touches this sphere in a hostile manner. This honor presupposes the sanctity of **my being for myself**. However, if someone rules over me morally, then my being for myself is not respected, and there is no room for honor here, and likewise not for the productions which come from my inwardness. That this is the case in China remains to be concretely shown.” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [Leipzig: Meiner, 1920], p. 300; translation by Heiner Roetz (2020), p. 5)

Immanence vs Transcendence

- Hegel posits religious source for lack of subjectivity → a world-immanent form of religious with transcendence; an “absolute secularization of the religious principle” (F.W.J Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*) → religious aura of worldly institutions, esp. the imperial institution → “where everything is holy, there is no leeway for subjectivity to develop” (Roetz [2020], p. 6), as everything is too dense, too compact
- Modern intellectual Liu Xiaobo 刘晓明 traced back his generation’s “submissiveness, parochialism and denial of independent thought” to a “form of thought” characterized by “lack of transcendence”: **“My tragedy is that I do not have transcendent values, it is the tragedy not to have a god.”** (Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波, *Zhongguo dangdai zhengzhi yu Zhongguo zhishifenzi* 中國當代政治與中國知識分子 (Taipei: Tangshan, 1990), 156)

The Hegel–Weber Paradigm

'Immanent' Religion (IR)

Typical case: Confucianism

This-worldliness = adaptation to the world

'Transcendent' Religion (TR)

Typical case: Puritanism

Other-worldliness = tension to the world

Consequences for the actor-world relations through absence (IR) or presence (TR) of 'leverage'

Subject – Object (natural world)

Unbroken unity with nature

Disenchantment and subjugation of nature

Subject – Co-subjects (social world)

Reification of the given order

Questioning of the given order

Subject – Subject (inner world of the self)

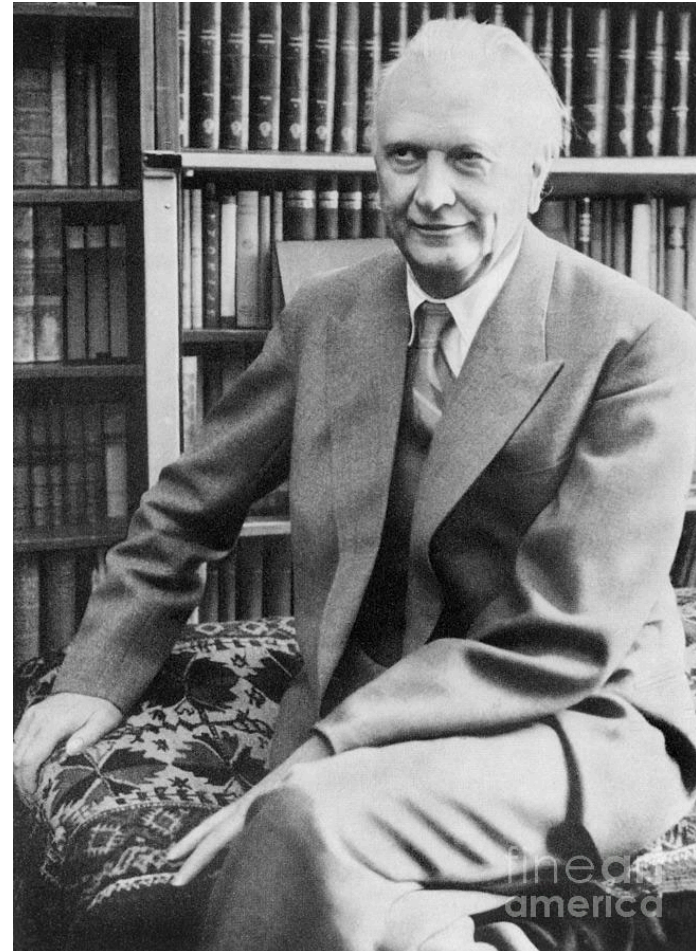
Collective identity

Development of subjectivity

Source: Roetz (2020), p. 8.

Critique of Hegel

- Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)
 - Thesis of the Axial Age, which is characterised by
 1. Breakthrough through the unquestioned presence and closedness of Life; humankind “transcends the world and himself.”
 2. Calling into doubt what Hegel calls “substance”: “Opinions, customs, conditions that had been unconsciously accepted were now scrutinized, questioned, dissolved.”
 3. Development of personhood and self-consciousness – of what Hegel calls “subjectivity.”
 4. Steps towards critical, detached thinking (second order reasoning).
 5. Steps towards the universal by reaching beyond oneself and “recognizing oneself in the other” rather than reifying what is one’s own.
- Chinese culture is one of transcendence (understood as a structural rather than ontological difference)



Roetz, Disenchantment and subjectivity

- Heiner Roetz, German sinologist, put Jasper's thesis on an empirical footing by studying the relationship between humans and nature in ancient China
- Roetz argues that from the 9th century BCE, "Heaven" (*tian* 天) the highest deity of the Zhou dynasty, lost its religious aura and "secularized to the notion of dysteleological 'nature'"
- The human world is no longer under the sway of gods and spirits → this becomes a source for subjectivity to develop
- This shift in the relationship between Heaven and humans, this disenchantment, signals a breakthrough through "substance" towards personhood and self-consciousness.
- Roetz agrees with Hegel that a recourse to subjectivity is hardly possible in a compact world where everything is sacred. However, he argues that transcendence is possible even within a world-immanent culture like the Chinese.
Transcendence: "a kind of standing back and looking beyond, a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and new vision of what lies beyond"
(Benjamin Schwartz, "The Age of Transcendence", *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (1975)).

Rolf Trauzettel's two paradigms on constitution of personhood

- ❑ Paradigm 1: person emerges from within the individual → an individual is an integral and inseparable agent; unique identity, cannot be substituted
- ❑ Paradigm 2: person externally imposed → divisible, partial; no unitary perspective; one part of the self can be observed by another part → person defined heteronomously by social roles. People are replaceable and dispensable. A Chinese person is not an individual because it lacks the undividedness that is characteristic for the smallest elements, *atoma* in Greek, *individua* (Cicero) or *substantia*.
- ❑ Trauzettel is, in my view, correct in saying that 'indivisibility' (Unteilbarkeit) is not within the semantic range of Chinese words that refer to a single human being.
- ❑ That is not to say that the self is less central to the human experience in China. I would argue that the opposite is true.
- ❑ "Self is synecdoche for everything that is human" (Deborah Sommer)



TERMS RELATED TO 'PERSON'

Key words related to ‘person’

- *Ti* 體, limbs, physical frame, one’s own person
 - *Gong* 躬 human body, torso; one’s own person, oneself; used in ritual
 - *Xing* 形 outward form, appearance shape
 - *Shen* 身 one’s person, oneself; one’s integrity, moral quality; torso of man or animal; social status, identity
 - *Ji* 己 self; oneself; itself; used as pronoun
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- All terms except *Ji* 己 show degree of embodiment
 - Body is the unifying element, core of life itself
 - No absolute boundaries between the cognitive-psychological functions and a persons bodily presence or sphere of natural urges
 - Self is an aggregate of several properties

Shen 身

- Used when discussing relations with family members or persons with an ascribed relationship
- Physical, psycho-physical and social entity → *shenfenzheng* 身份證, ID card in modern Chinese
- Relationship referred to by *shen* not chosen
- *Shen* often parallel or resonant to another, often of different rank

Ti 體

- Ability to overlap with others
- Multidimensional
- Parts are consubstantial with the whole
- Materialist conception
- Sommer uses the image of the plant

Ji 己 ‘self’ and its semantic uses

- Refers least to somatic aspects of identity
- Has no visual marks or attributes
- Socially and conceptually constructed
- Not associated or located in certain part of body
- Discrete, does not extend beyond the own body; does not extend beyond itself
- Place of feelings, main site of desire (克己 *keji* to discipline oneself); disciplined desire are seen as wholesome aspirations
- *Ji* 己 describes certainly an individuated self, a self that is seen as being distinct from others
- But it also mostly implies a relationship with another, with another human being; not used in relationships with family member; actors not related

Ji 己 ‘self’

Ji 己 is used to distance the self from others and invites

- Comparison with others
- Negotiation
- Relationality
- Understanding (*bu zhi ji zhe* 不知己者 ‘one who does not know me’)
- Uncertainty of relationship
- Should the self to measure others?
- Xunzi (3rd cent. BC): “sages use themselves (*ji*) as a measure” (*yi ji du zhe* 以己度者).

Singularity of the ruler

- guaren 寡人 (Zhou dyn.; “the bereft one”)
- gu 孤 (Zhou dyn.; “orphan”)
- zhen 朕 (“I”; only used by emperor)

The ruler is in no relationship to anyone. He is the yardstick for everything.

Conclusions

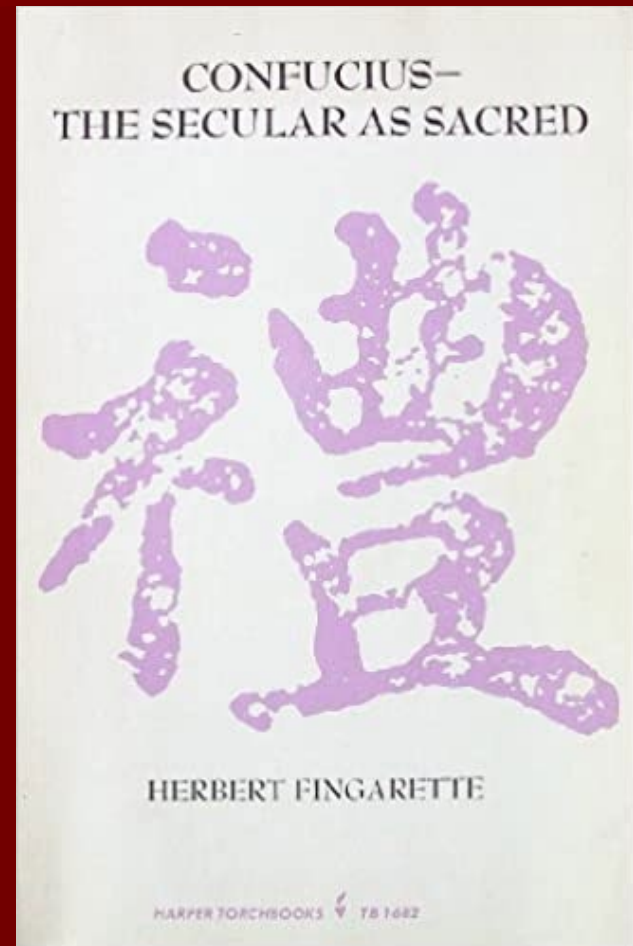
- ❑ Centrality of the ‘self’ in Chinese thought
- ❑ High level of abstractness
- ❑ the self cannot know itself directly → a person can never see themselves how they really are
- ❑ Chinese self is individuated but interconnected
- ❑ “Being humane comes from the self; how could it come from others?” (*Lunyu*, Yan Yuan)



Understanding *li* 禮 and *ren* 仁

THE LOCUS OF THE PERSONAL IN *ANALECTS*

Herbert Fingarette (1921-2018)

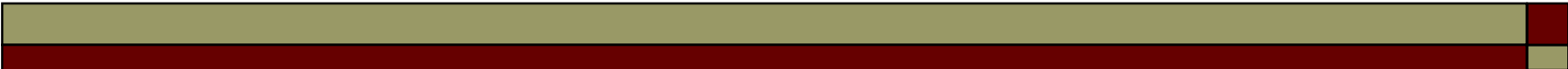


The Five Behaviours ('virtues')

- Five behaviors of the gentleman most central to the *Analects* are
 - benevolence (*ren* 仁)
 - righteousness (*yi* 義)
 - ritual propriety (*li* 禮)
 - wisdom (*zhi* 智)
 - trustworthiness (*xin* 信)

Confucius' main concerns

- *li* rituals/rites as tradition (socio-historical aspect)
- The pattern of overt behaviour, *li* as a set of rules that mould human actions
- Actions and how they relate to roles (“Let the father be a father; the son be a son;...”)
- The personal side of actions, especially those directed to or acted jointly with other human beings. Though personal, actions can be observed and are thus objective (e.g., a musical performance; we can observe liveliness of interpretation, hesitation etc. *in* the performance)



False assumptions

- ❑ Self as a room where virtues dwell
- ❑ Self as an enactor of rules
- ❑ Self as an aggregation of social rules

But

- ❑ Confucius' ideas involve a substantial and characteristic self; distinctive in itself and contributive to community and world at large

Person as the interplay between rites and personal orientation

li 禮 “sacred ceremonies”

- Traditional **social pattern** of conduct and relationships
- Particular exemplifying the rites
- Overt, distinguishable pattern of behaviour
- *Li* must be learned
- Example: greeting appropriate to a given social situation
- “it is ... in the medium of ceremony that the peculiarly human part of our life is lived” (Fingarette)
- Ability to act according to *li* and to submit to *li* are essential to human virtue and power

ren 仁 “humaneness”

- Oriented **toward person** who pursues or acts out *li*
- Expresses the orientation or concern of the actor in a given act; it is particular and unique to the person and the situation
- It does not refer to attitudes, feelings, wishes, motives (the internal psyche of the actor)
- Refers to the shaping of oneself in *li*
- BUT, referring to a person is not the same as referring to a person’s inner mental or psychic state
- The notion of a person’s inner psyche did not occur to Confucius
- Power of *ren* results from the directedness (vectoredness) of an action. Image of the vector.

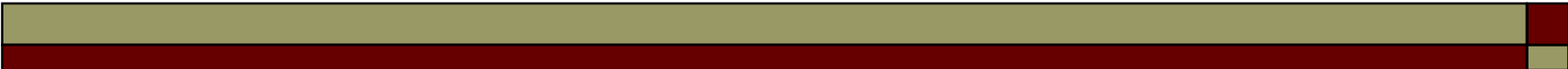
**SELF, HUMAN NATURE AND
IDENTITY IN *MENGZI* (MENCIUS)**

Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius)

- Meng Ke (孟軻), c. 372—289 BCE
- Explores questions of human nature and self through analysis of different aspects relating to body and mind
- Interest in the psycho-physiological makeup of humans



Source: *Half Portraits of the Great Sage and Virtuous Men of Old* 至聖先賢半身像 (Yuan Dyn.).
National Palace Museum, Taipeh. Accession number: 中-畫-000329-00000



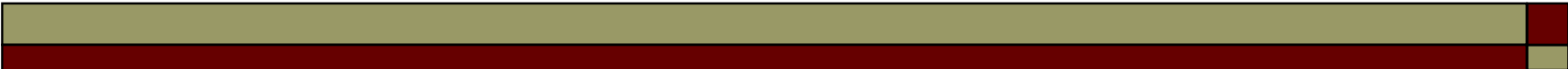
Susan Wolf, “Moral saints”

“By moral saint I mean a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be. Though I shall in a moment acknowledge the variety of types of person that might be thought to satisfy this description, it seems to me that none of these types serve as unequivocally compelling personal ideals. In other words, I believe that moral perfection, in the sense of moral saintliness, does not constitute a model of personal well-being toward which it would be particularly rational or good or desirable for a human being to strive.” (Wolf, “Moral Saints”, p. 419)

Moral self vs perfect self

- ❑ Moral self: person who adheres to moral codes and tries to be as morally good as possible
- ❑ Perfect self: seeks to nurture within itself the defining characteristic of being human (which is also the ultimate human good)

“For Mencius, the perfection of the self is a state of oneness with heaven, whereas for Aristotle, it is a state of contemplation, of being one with God.” (Yu Jiyuan, “The Moral Self and the Perfect Self,” p. 236)



Mencius 2A2: The man of Song

“There was a man of Song who was concerned that the sprouts in his field were not growing well, so he went and tugged at each one. He went home utterly exhausted and said, ‘Oh, I’ve made myself ill today! I’ve been out helping the sprouts to grow.’ His sons rushed out to look and found the stalks all shriveled up. There are few in the world who do not ‘help their sprouts grow.’ There are those who do not ‘weed’ – they have simply given the whole task up as useless. But the ones who tug on the sprouts to help them grow, they are worse than useless, for they do harm!”

Qi 氣 (energy, life force)

- ❑ Flows freely and gives life to a person
- ❑ Responsible for the operation of the senses, e.g. speech in the mouth and sight in the eyes
- ❑ Linked to the emotions → a person's psychological and physical wellbeing is depends on the appropriate balance of *qi* (e.g. illness and strong emotions such as fear are explained through condition of *qi*)

Xin 心 (heart-mind)

- Can have desires (*yu* 欲) and emotions (*qing* 情) or feel pleasure and displeasure; BUT
- *Xin* is also capable of deliberation (*lü* 慮), pondering (*si* 思) or keeping things in mind (*nian* 念); capable of focused intentions (*zhi* 志)
- *Xin* is capable of self-reflection, of guiding a person and setting them in direction of self-improvement
- The heart-mind is independent of external control; obviously, it is subject to external influences but ultimately the heart-mind has the power to resist them.

Heart-mind and other aspects of the person

- Different aspects of a person are mutually interacting
- *Qi* can be affected by what happens to the body, e.g. the nourishment it gets
- Directions of the heart (*zhi* 志) can guide and shape the life forces (*qi*) for their execution; conversely, the working of the heart-mind can be weakened if the *qi* is not adequately nourished.

→ Confucian conception of self comprises not just the heart-mind but the whole person including various parts of the body

Mengzi 2A2 (1) Attaining an “unmoving heart”

Gongsun Chou asked, “If you, Sir, were to receive a high post among the grandees of Qi and were able to implement the Dao, it would not be startling if the ruler were to rise to the position of hegemon or even a true King. If this were to occur, would your heart¹ be moved by this?”

“No,” replied Mencius. “By the age of forty I had cultivated a heart that could not be moved.”

“If that is so, then you, Sir, have exceeded the valor of Meng Ben² by far!”

“That is not difficult,” said Mencius. “Actually, Gaozi³ attained an unmoving heart earlier than I.”

“Is there a *dao*⁴ for achieving an unmoving heart?” asked Gongsun Chou.

“Yes,” replied Mencius, “there is.”

Mengzi 2A2: ‘Will’ and *qi*

Gongsun Chou said, “May I inquire about the formulas that you and Gaozi used to attain an unmoving heart?”

Mencius replied, “Gaozi’s rule was, ‘If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart. If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in your heart, do not search for it in your *qi*.’ I agree to the formula, ‘If you do not find it in the heart, do not search for it in the *qi*.’ But it is unacceptable to say, ‘If you do not find it in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart.’

“The will¹ is the leader of the *qi*, and *qi* is something that fills the body. Wherever the will leads the *qi* follows. Thus there is a saying, ‘Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.’”

Gongsun Chou said, “On the one hand you have said, ‘Wherever the will leads the *qi* will follow.’ But you have also said, ‘Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.’ Is there not an inconsistency?”

Mencius answered, “When the will is unified it moves the *qi*. But when the *qi* is unified, it can move the will. For example, when you see a man stumble or rush about, this is the action of his *qi*. In such cases, it has turned back upon the heart and moved it.”

Mengzi 2A2 (4): ‘Flood-like *qi*’

Gongsun Chou said, “May I presume to inquire how you, Sir, excel?”

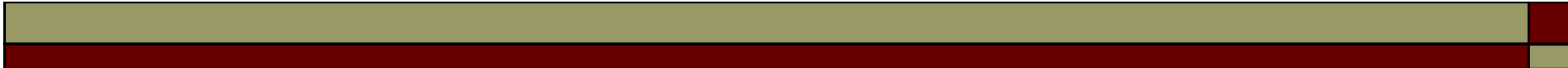
“I can interpret what speech means,” replied Mencius, “and I nurture well my flood-like *qi*.”

Gongsun Chou asked, “What do you mean by ‘flood-like *qi*?’”

“It is hard to describe,” said Mencius. “This is a *qi* that is as vast and firm as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never impairs it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right (*yi*). It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away.

“This is why I say that Gaozi never really understood righteousness. He looked for it in external standards other than the heart. But your task must always be before you and you must not go making small adjustments. The task of nurturing this *qi* must never be forgotten by the heart, but you must not meddle and try to help it grow. Don’t be like the man from the state of Song.¹

“There was a man of Song who was concerned that the sprouts in his field were not growing well, so he went and tugged at each one. He went home utterly exhausted and said, ‘Oh, I’ve made myself ill today! I’ve been out helping the sprouts to grow.’ His sons rushed out to look and found the stalks all shriveled up. There are few in the world who do not ‘help their sprouts grow.’ There are those who do not ‘weed’ – they have simply given the whole task up as useless. But the ones who tug on the sprouts to help them grow, they are worse than useless, for they do harm!”



Mengzi 6A2

6A.2 Gaozi said, “Human nature is like water swirling at a wellspring. If you dig a channel towards the east it will flow east; if you dig a channel towards the west it will flow west. Human nature makes no distinction between good and bad, just as water makes no distinction between east and west.”

Mencius said, “It is true that water makes no distinction between east and west, but does it make no distinction between up and down? The good disposition of human nature is like water’s tendency to flow down. There are no men who are not innately good, just as there is no water that does not flow down. Now, by splashing you can make water leap up higher than your forehead, and by churning it you can make it flow up a hill, but how could this be the nature of water? It is merely a result of force. The fact that men can be made to act badly merely shows that human nature is like this as well.”

Mengzi 6A6: The Four Seeds

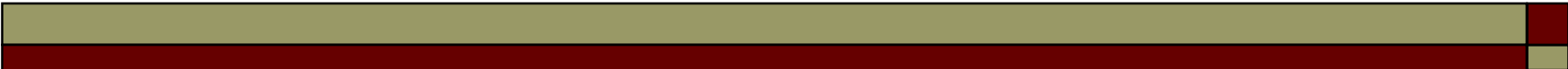
6A.6 Gongduzi said, “Gaozi says that human nature is neither good nor bad. Others say human nature is such that people can become good or become bad, and that this is why when the sage Kings Wen and Wu arose the people loved to be good, and when the tyrannical Kings You and Li arose people loved to be violent. Still others say there are people whose nature is good and people whose nature is bad, and that is why there could be a bad man like Shun’s brother Xiang living under Yao’s sagely rule, why Shun could be a sage even though his father was a bad man like Gusou, and why Weizi Qi and Prince Bigan could be outstanding, though Zhòu was their brother’s son and their ruler as well. Now you say human nature is good – is everyone else wrong?”

Mencius said, “What I mean by saying it is good is that there is that in our nature which is spontaneously part of us and can become good. The fact that we can become bad is not a defect in our natural endowment. All men possess a sense of commiseration; all men possess a sense of shame; all men possess a sense of respect; all men possess a sense of right and wrong. The sense of commiseration is the seed of humanity (*ren*); the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness (*yi*); the sense of respect is the seed of *li*; the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. Thus humanity, righteousness, *li*, and wisdom are not welded to us from outside. We possess them inherently; it is simply that we do not focus our minds on them. This is the meaning of the saying, ‘Seek for it and you will get it; let it go and you will lose it.’ The reason why some men are twice as good as others – or five or countless times better – is simply that some men do not exhaust their endowment to the full. The *Poetry* says:

Tian gave birth to the teeming people,
For every thing there is a norm.
The constant for people, within their grasp,
Is love of beautiful virtue’s form.¹

xing 性

“The *xing* of a living thing was commonly understood to be the way in which it develops and declines from birth to death when uninjured and adequately nourished.” (A. C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” pp. 27-28)



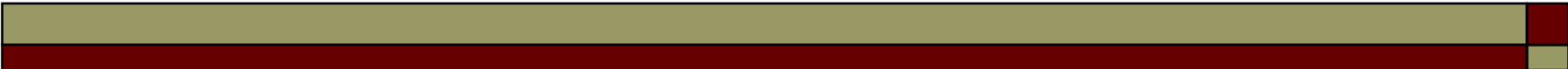
Mencius 7B25

“A man worth having is called good. A man who possesses goodness in himself is called faithful. One who is filled with goodness is called excellent. A man whose full goodness radiates outward is called great. A great man who transforms others is called a sage. One who transforms others like a sage without their awareness is called spirit-like. Yuezhengzi’s quality lies within the first two, but below the other four.”

Self-actualization in *Mencius*

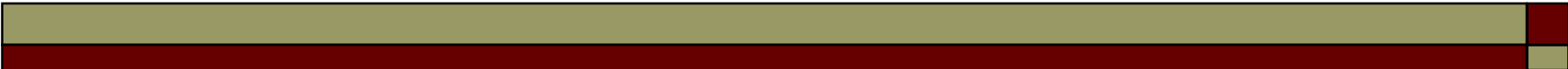
7A.1 Mencius said, “He who exhausts his mind knows his nature; to know one’s nature is to know Tian (Heaven, TJ). The way to serve Tian is to preserve the mind and nourish the nature. The way to stand waiting for Tian’s commands (ming) is this: never waver for fear of death, just cultivate your person and await them.”

- person fully actualizes their nature not in oneness with society, but in oneness with Heaven → if the way of heaven prevails, there is no tension between these two unities
- Self-cultivation does not mean to be habituated (to be formed and determined by social habit or custom) → there is higher value than social value
- The moral self and the perfect self are different stages in the growth of the same self. They are not contradictory.



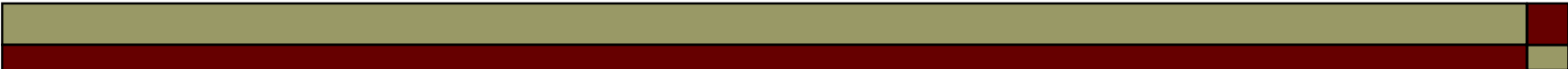
Self and Social Role

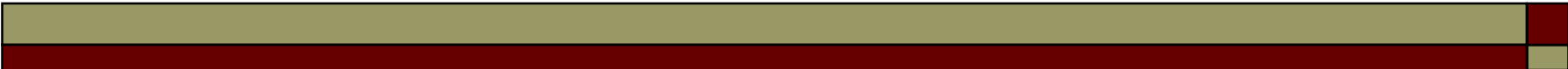
- ❑ Confucian thinkers see self intimately connected to social roles one occupies
- ❑ Humans are distinct by being able to draw social distinctions and abide by social norms; letting oneself be shaped by social order/norms makes one fully human
- ❑ Ethical ideals informed by traditional social setup, but that does not prevent the capacity to reflect on one's relation to social order
- ❑ The self's relation to social order and even cosmic order deemphasises distinction between self and others; humans with cultivated have transformative effect on other human beings.
- ❑ Self-cultivation extends beyond the heart-mind to the whole person; but it also extends the person beyond oneself to other human beings and things



Autonomy and rights

- Does the Confucian concept of self leave room for the notions of autonomy and rights?

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- ❑ Chad Hansen: “[W]e may justifiably generalize that there is no individualism in Chinese philosophy” (Brindley, p. xviii)
 - ❑ Can individualistic behaviour go together with conformism?
 - ❑ Does the challenge of individualism necessarily entail a challenge to the viability of the notions of freedom and autonomy?
 - ❑ Can human rights only be preserved within an individualist framework?



Erica Brindley, *Individualism in Early China*

- shows how changing notions of human agency affected prevailing attitudes toward the self as individual
- Warring States China: onset of ideals that stress the power and authority of the individual, either as a conformist agent in relationship to a larger, cosmic whole, or as an individualistic agent endowed with inalienable cosmic powers and authorities. (Brindley, p. xvi)
- “individual” for Brindley “implies a certain type of agency, authority, and power accorded to one’s person, in and of itself.” (p. xx)

Individualism

- ❑ (1) a belief that individuals possess any number of positive prerogatives or powers in the world by virtue of their existence as individuals, and
- ❑ (2) a belief that individuals can achieve their ideals through the use of their own autonomous, or self-inspired, authority of some kind.

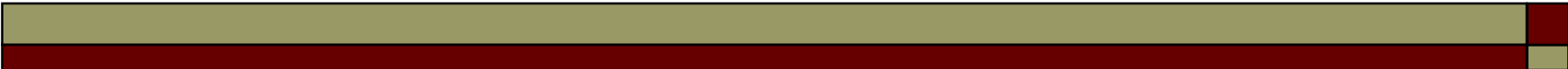
agents

- ❑ Conforming agent
- ❑ Individual agent

- ❑ → source of authority and control of an individual's actions
- ❑ Individual agency with framework of conformism to cosmos (“conforming self-determination”)
- ❑ What does “autonomy” mean?

Definition Individual

- individual not understood as “an atomistic, isolated, and undifferentiated part of a whole, but as a distinct organism that must serve particular functions and fulfill a unique set of relationships in the worlds of which he or she is a part.” (p. xxx)



Mohist concept of Heaven

- ❑ Fulfillment of Heaven's will is wholly dependent on individual determination in the world.
- ❑ Heaven serves as the ultimate judge and authority over humankind
- ❑ underlying responsibility for insuring good order in the world lies firmly in the human realm. (Brindley, p. 4)

Thinking conformists

Early Mohist ideology shows

- that one can speak of conformists as both decision-making and self-reflective *agents* who find freedom in a fixed and universal truth beyond the individual.
- Freedom is integral to their conformity, and their conformity detracts not in the slightest from their individual prerogative to think, decide upon, and direct the course of their lives.

Zhuangzi as an individualistic philosophy

- Zhuangzi's thought individualistic in deeply interconnected way → transcendent individual relates to the whole of the cosmos.
- Humans become individuals not by virtue of being unique in and of themselves, but by virtue of being unique as an *individualized manifestation* of the workings of Dao.

Thank you for listening!