

from Qu, gained right of passage through Yu to attack the state of Guo.⁶⁰ Qi of Gong remonstrated against this, but Boli Xi did not remonstrate against it. He knew that the Duke of Yu could not be remonstrated with, so he left and went to Qin. He was already seventy years old. If he did not yet know that it would be base to feed oxen in order to seek to meet Duke Mu of Qin, could he have been called wise? He knew that the Duke of Yu could not be remonstrated with so he did not remonstrate with him. Can this be called unwise? He knew that the Duke of Yu was about to perish, so he abandoned him first. This cannot be called unwise. When he was, in good time, raised to prominence in Qin, he knew that Duke Mu was someone with whom he could work, so he became his minister. Can this be called unwise? He was a minister in Qin and made his ruler distinguished throughout the world, so that he is an example for later ages. Is this something he would be capable of if he were not a worthy person? To sell oneself so as to accomplish things for one's lord—even a villager who cared for himself would not do this. Can one say that a worthy person would do it?"

Book Six

6A1 Gaozi said, "Human nature is like a willow tree; righteousness is like cups and bowls. To make human nature benevolent and righteous is like making a willow tree into cups and bowls."⁶¹

Mengzi said, "Can you, sir, following the nature of the willow tree, make it into cups and bowls? You must violate and rob the willow tree, and only then can you make it into cups and bowls. If you must violate and rob the willow tree in order to make it into cups and bowls, must you also violate and rob people in order to make them benevolent and righteous? If there is something that leads people to regard benevolence and righteousness as misfortunes for them, it will surely be your doctrine, will it not?"

6A2 Gaozi said, "Human nature is like swirling water. Make an opening for it on the eastern side, then it flows east. Make an opening for it on the western side, then it flows west. Human nature's not distinguishing be-

⁶⁰A small state ruled by the descendants of King Wen's younger brother. It was located in what is now Pinglu county in modern Shanxi province.

⁶¹Gaozi was a rival philosopher (see also *Mengzi* 2A2). Compare his comment here (as well as his statement in 6A4 below that the desires for food and sex are nature) with Xunzi's comments in "An Exhortation to Learning" and "Human Nature Is Bad." See *Xunzi*, chapter 1, pp. 248–52 and chapter 23, pp. 284–91, respectively.

tween good and not good is like water's not distinguishing between eastern and western."

Mengzi said, "Water surely does not distinguish between east and west. But does it not distinguish between upward and downward? Human nature's being good is like water's tending downward. There is no human who does not tend toward goodness. There is no water that does not tend downward.

"Now, by striking water and making it leap up, you can cause it to go past your forehead. If you guide it by damming it, you can cause it to remain on a mountaintop. But is this the nature of water?! It is that way because of the circumstances. That humans can be caused to not be good is due to their natures also being like this."

6A3 Gaozi said, "Life is what is meant by 'nature.'"⁶²

Mengzi said, "Is *life is what is meant by 'nature'* the same as *white is what is meant by 'white'*?"⁶³

Gaozi said, "It is."

Mengzi said, "Is the white of a white feather the same as the white of white snow, and is the white of white snow the same as the white of white jade?"

Gaozi said, "It is."

Mengzi said, "Then is the nature of a dog the same as the nature of an ox, and is the nature of an ox the same as the nature of a human?"

6A4 Gaozi said, "The desires for food and sex are nature. Benevolence is internal; it is not external. Righteousness is external; it is not internal."⁶⁴

Mengzi said, "Why do you say that benevolence is internal and righteousness is external?"

Gaozi said, "They are elderly, and we treat them as elderly. It is not that they are elderly because of us. Similarly, that is white, and we treat it as white, according to its being white externally to us. Hence, I say it is external."

⁶²The Song dynasty commentator Zhu Xi remarks, "'Life' refers to that by means of which humans and animals perceive and move." The Han dynasty commentator Zhao Qi suggests that Gaozi's comment means that, "In general, things that are the same in being alive will all be the same in nature."

⁶³In ancient Chinese dialectic, "white" was the stock example of a term that functions the same way regardless of the context of its occurrence. See Graham (1989), pp. 150–55.

⁶⁴Cf. Gongduzi's explanation in *Mengzi* 6A5 of what it means for a virtue to be "internal."

Mengzi said, “[Elderliness] is different from whiteness. The whiteness of a [white] horse is no different from the whiteness of a gray-haired person. But surely we do not regard the elderliness of an old horse as being no different from the elderliness of an old person?⁶⁵ Furthermore, do you say that the one who is elderly is righteous, or that the one who treats another as elderly is righteous?”

Gaozi said, “My younger brother I love; the younger brother of a person from Qin I do not love. In this case, it is I who feel happy [because of my love for my brother]. Hence, I say that it is internal. I treat as elderly an elderly person from Chu, and I also treat as elderly my own elderly. In this case, it is the elderly person who feels happy. Hence I say that it is external.”⁶⁶

Mengzi said, “Savoring the roast of a person from Qin is no different from savoring my roast. So what you describe is also the case with objects. Is savoring a roast, then, also external?”

6A5 Meng Jizi asked Gongduzi, “Why do you say that righteousness is internal?”⁶⁷

Gongduzi said, “I act out of my respect, hence I say that it is internal.”

Meng Jizi said, “If a fellow villager is older than your eldest brother by a year, then whom do you respect?”

Gongduzi said, “I respect my brother.”

Meng Jizi said, “When you are pouring wine, then whom do you serve first?”

Gongduzi said, “I first pour wine for the fellow villager.”⁶⁸

Meng Jizi said, “The one whom you respect is the former, but the one whom you treat as elder is the latter. Hence, it really is external. It does not come from [how you feel] internally.”

Gongduzi was not able to answer. He told Mengzi about it. Mengzi said, “Next time, ask him, ‘Do you respect your uncle? or do you respect your younger brother?’ He will say, ‘I respect my uncle.’ Then you say,

⁶⁵Because an elderly person deserves to be treated with deference and respect, while an elderly horse is, in Mengzi or Gaozi’s view, almost worthless.

⁶⁶The Song Dynasty commentator Zhu Xi explains, “He means that the love is determined by me, hence benevolence is internal; respect is determined by elderliness, hence righteousness is external.”

⁶⁷Meng Jizi is a follower of Gaozi. Gongduzi is a follower of Mengzi.

⁶⁸Because ritual dictates that the elder person be served first.

‘When your younger brother is playing the part of the deceased in the sacrifice, then whom do you respect?’ He will say, ‘I respect my younger brother.’ Then you say, ‘What happened to the respect for your uncle?’ He will say, ‘The reason [why my respect changes] has to do with the role my younger brother occupies.’ Then you also say, ‘In the case you asked about in our previous discussion, the reason why my respect changes has to do with the role the fellow villager occupies. Ordinary respect is directed toward my brother, but temporary respect is directed toward the fellow villager.’ ”

Meng Jizi, upon hearing all this, said, “If you respect your uncle, then it is respect. If you respect your younger brother, then it is respect. So it really is external. It does not come from [how you feel] internally.”

Gongduzi said, “On a winter day, one drinks broth. On a summer day, one drinks water. Are drinking and eating also, then, external?”

6A6 Gongduzi said, “Gaozi says, ‘Human nature is neither good nor not good.’ Some say, ‘Human nature can become good, and it can become not good.’ Therefore, when Wen and Wu arose, the people were fond of goodness. When You and Li arose, the people were fond of destructiveness. Some say, ‘There are natures that are good, and there are natures that are not good.’ Therefore, with Yao as ruler, there was Xiang. With the Blind Man as a father, there was Shun.⁶⁹ And with Zhou as their nephew, and as their ruler besides, there were Viscount Qi of Wei and Prince Bi Gan. Now, you say that human nature is good. Are all those others, then, wrong?”

Mengzi said, “As for their *qing* 情, “what they genuinely are,” they can become good. This is what I mean by calling their natures good. As for their becoming not good, this is not the fault of their potential. Humans all have the heart of compassion. Humans all have the heart of disdain. Humans all have the heart of respect. Humans all have the heart of approval and disapproval. The heart of compassion is benevolence. The heart of disdain is righteousness. The heart of respect is propriety. The heart of approval and disapproval is wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded to us externally. We inherently have them. It is

⁶⁹See *Mengzi* 5A2 for a story illustrative of the evil of Shun’s brother Xiang and his father, the so-called “Blind Man.”

simply that we do not concentrate upon them.⁷⁰ Hence, it is said, ‘Seek it and you will get it. Abandon it and you will lose it.’ Some differ from others by two, five, or countless times—this is because they cannot exhaust their potentials. The *Odes* say,

Heaven gives birth to the teeming people.
If there is a thing, there is a norm.
This is the constant people cleave to.
They are fond of this beautiful Virtue.⁷¹

Kongzi said, ‘The one who composed this ode understood the Way!’⁷² Hence, if there is a thing, there must be a norm. It is this that is the constant people cleave to. Hence, they are fond of this beautiful Virtue.”

6A7 Mengzi said, “In years of plenty, most young men are gentle; in years of poverty, most young men are cruel. It is not that the potential that Heaven confers on them varies like this. They are like this because of that by which their hearts are sunk and drowned.

“Consider barley. Sow the seeds and cover them. The soil is the same and the time of planting is also the same. They grow rapidly, and by the time of the summer solstice they have all ripened. Although there are some differences, these are due to the richness of the soil, and to unevenness in the rain and in human effort. Hence, in general, things of the same kind are all similar. Why would one have any doubt about this when it comes to humans alone? We and the sage are of the same kind. Hence, Longzi said, ‘When one makes a shoe for a foot one has not seen, we know that one will not make a basket.’ The similarity of all the shoes in the world is due to the fact that the feet of the world are the same.

“Mouths have the same preferences in flavors. Yi Ya was the first to discover that which our mouths prefer. If it were the case that the natures of mouths regarding flavors varied among people—just as dogs and horses are different species from us—then why is it that throughout the world all preferences follow Yi Ya in flavors? The fact that, when it comes to flavors, the

⁷⁰Mengzi also discusses these virtues in *Mengzi* 2A6 and 4A27. For more on *ren* 仁, “benevolence,” see *Mengzi* 1A7. For more on *yi* 義, “righteousness,” see *Mengzi* 6A10. For more on *zhi* 智, “wisdom,” see *Mengzi* 5A9. For more on *si* 思, “concentration,” see *Mengzi* 6A15. For all four terms, also consult the appropriate entries under *Important Terms*. On Mengzi’s general view of self-cultivation, see *Mengzi* 7A17 and 7B31.

⁷¹*Mao* # 260.

⁷²No quotation such as this is found in the received text of the *Analects*.

whole world looks to Yi Ya is due to the fact that mouths throughout the world are similar.

“Ears are like this too. When it comes to sounds, the whole world looks to Shi Kuang. This is due to the fact that ears throughout the word are similar. Eyes are like this too. When it comes to a handsome man like Zidu, no one in the world does not appreciate his beauty. Anyone who does not appreciate the beauty of Zidu has no eyes. Hence, I say that mouths have the same preferences in flavors, ears have the same preferences in sounds, eyes have the same preferences in attractiveness. When it comes to hearts, are they alone without preferences in common?

“What is it that hearts prefer in common? I say that it is fine patterns and righteousness. The sages first discovered what our hearts prefer in common. Hence, fine patterns and righteousness delight our hearts like meat delights our mouths.”

6A8 Mengzi said, “The trees of Ox Mountain were once beautiful. But because it bordered on a large state, hatchets and axes besieged it. Could it remain verdant? Due to the rest it got during the day or night, and the moisture of rain and dew, it was not that there were no sprouts or shoots growing there. But oxen and sheep then came and grazed on them. Hence, it was as if it were barren. People, seeing it barren, believed that there had never been any timber there. Could this be the nature of the mountain?!

“When we consider what is present in people, could they truly lack the hearts of benevolence and righteousness?⁷³ That by which they discard their good heart is simply like the hatchets and axes in relation to the trees.⁷⁴ With them besieging it day by day, can it remain beautiful? With the rest it gets during the day or night, and the restorative effects of the morning *qi* 氣, their likes and dislikes are sometimes close to those of others. But then what they do during the day again fetters and destroys it. If the fettering is repeated, then the evening *qi* is insufficient to preserve it. If the evening *qi* is insufficient to preserve it, then one is not far from a bird or beast. Others see that he is a bird or beast, and think that there was never any capacity there. Is this what a human truly is?!

“Hence, if it merely gets nourishment, there is nothing that will not grow. If it merely loses its nourishment, there is nothing that will not van-

⁷³On “the hearts of benevolence and righteousness,” compare *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6.

⁷⁴The phrase *liang xin* 良心, “good heart,” is reminiscent of the *liang zhi* 良知, “best knowledge,” and *liang neng* 良能, “best capability,” mentioned in *Mengzi* 7A15.

ish. Kongzi said, ‘Grasped then preserved; abandoned then lost. Its goings and comings have no fixed time. No one knows its home.’⁷⁵ Was it not the heart of which he spoke?”

6A10 Mengzi said, “Fish is something I desire; bear’s paw⁷⁶ is also something I desire. If I cannot have both, I will forsake fish and select bear’s paw. Life is something I desire; righteousness is also something I desire. If I cannot have both, I will forsake life and select righteousness. Life is something I desire, but there is something I desire more than life. Hence, I will not do just anything to obtain it. Death is something I hate, but there is something I hate more than death. Hence, there are calamities I do not avoid. If it were the case that someone desired nothing more than life, then what means that could obtain life would that person not use? If it were the case that someone hated nothing more than death, then what would that person not do that would avoid calamity? From this we can see that there are means of obtaining life that one will not employ. From this we can also see that there are things that would avoid calamity that one will not do. Therefore, there are things one desires more than life and there are also things one hates more than death. It is not the case that only the worthy person has this heart. All humans have it. The worthy person simply never loses it.⁷⁷

“A basket of food and a bowl of soup—if one gets them then one will live; if one doesn’t get them then one will die. But if they’re given with contempt, then even a homeless person will not accept them. If they’re trampled upon, then even a beggar won’t take them. However, when it comes to a salary of ten thousand bushels of grain, then one doesn’t notice propriety and righteousness and accepts them. What do ten thousand bushels add to me? Do I accept them for the sake of a beautiful mansion? for the obedience of a wife and concubines? to have poor acquaintances be indebted to me? In the previous case, for the sake of one’s own life one did not accept what was offered. In the current case, for the sake of a beautiful mansion one does it. In the previous case, for the sake of one’s own life one did not accept what was offered. In the current case, for the obedience of a wife and concubine one does it. In the previous case, for the sake of one’s own life one did not accept what was offered. In the current case, in order to have poor acquaintances be indebted to oneself one does it. Is this in-

⁷⁵No quotation like this is found in the received text of the *Analects*.

⁷⁶A culinary delicacy.

⁷⁷Cf. Xunzi’s “On Correct Naming.” See *Xunzi*, chapter 22, pp. 278–84.

deed something that one can't stop doing? This is what is called losing one's fundamental heart."⁷⁸

6A12 Mengzi said, "Suppose someone has a ring finger that is bent and will not straighten, and it is not the case that it hurts or that it interferes with one's activities. But if there is something that can straighten it, one will not consider the road from one end of the world to the other too far, because one's finger is not as good as other people's. If one's finger is not as good as other people's, one knows to dislike it. But if one's heart is not as good as other people's, one does not know to dislike it. This is what is called not appreciating the categories of importance."

6A15 Gongduzi asked, "We are the same in being humans. Yet some become great humans and some become petty humans. Why?"

Mengzi said, "Those who follow their greater part become great humans. Those who follow their petty part become petty humans."

Gongduzi said, "We are the same in being humans. Why is it that some follow their greater part and some follow their petty part?"

Mengzi said, "It is not the office of the ears and eyes to concentrate, and they are misled by things. Things interact with things and simply lead them along. But the office of the heart is to concentrate. If it concentrates then it will get [Virtue]. If it does not concentrate, then it will not get it."⁷⁹ This is what Heaven has given us. If one first takes one's stand on what is greater, then what is lesser will not be able to snatch it away. This is how to become a great human."

Book Seven

7A1 Mengzi said, "To fully apply one's heart is to understand one's nature."⁸⁰ If one understands one's nature, then one understands Heaven. To preserve one's mind and nourish one's nature is the means to serve Heaven. To not become conflicted over the length of one's life, and to cultivate oneself to await it is the means to stand and await one's fate."

⁷⁸"Fundamental" is literally *ben* 本, "root." Cf. *Mengzi* 3A5.

⁷⁹On *si* 思, "concentration," see also *Mengzi* 6A6 and *Important Terms*.

⁸⁰This should be read in the light of *Mengzi* 6A6.