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## After Human Nature

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### Abstract

In several previous papers, it has been argued that the Mencius text is not simply a collection of the sayings of Mencius; it is instead a record of his interviews with several rulers, and beyond that, it is also a repository of the writings of his two posthumous schools; one located in T'ng and emphasizing statecraft, the other located in Dzōu and emphasizing doctrine. In our present Mencius, the texts of these two posthumous schools run in parallel: the southern school in MC 2-3, and the northern in MC 4-7. The strong similarities between MC 3 and 7, noted in an important paper by Manyul Im, confirm the prediction that these two chapters, the last chapters of the two school texts, are contemporary in time.

This allows us to read from the text, not only what this or that late Mencian thought about some subject, but what preceded and followed that thought in the consciousness of that school. It allows us to read not just philosophy, but the history of philosophy, from the text. As one example of what can be gained from doing so, I here take up the famous human nature debate, the Mencian side of which is confined to the northern chapter MC 6A1-8 (the Sy'wndž side can be retrieved from SZ 23). It now becomes possible to ask, After this high-profile argument, during which both sides reached extreme positions on the issue, what happened next? Did the two positions on human nature become established in the teachings of those schools (the northern Mencian and the Sy'wndzian)? Or did they develop further?

It turns out that both Sy'wndž and the northern Mencians later modified their extreme positions in their respective later writings. This suggests that in the view of the participants themselves, the positions reached in MC 6 and SZ 23 had been too much influenced by the heat of debate, and were not tenable as permanent doctrines.

That the subject of human nature has been taken out of its MC 6 context, and greatly magnified in later centuries, is a fact in its own right. But that later body of thought need not closely correspond to the origin and further development of these ideas in their original 03rd century home.