

Dzǎi Wǒ went out. The Master said, Such is Yǔ's lack of humane feeling (仁). Only when Yǔ had been alive for three years did he finally leave the bosom of his father and mother. Now, a three-year mourning is the universal custom of the world. Did not Yǔ receive three years of love from his father and mother?

This argument from emotion was promptly ridiculed by the Micians:

**6:46** (MZ 48:13, c0272). Gūngmǐngdǔ said, I mourn for three years in imitation of the affection that a son shows his parents. Our master Mwòdǔ said, All an infant knows is to want its parents. When its parents cannot be found, it cries endlessly. And why? It is the ultimate stupidity. In what way is the wisdom of the Confucians any better than that of a baby?

Nice touch. But the elite side won this cultural war. It was ultimately about standardization, of individuals within a culture as well as between cultures. Here is Syǔndǔ, on the effort to produce standard results in the individual:

**6:47** (SZ 8:11b, excerpt, c0279). Setting a goal and repeating it as a custom transforms one's nature 性. It becomes one thing and not two, and thus constitutes a personal resource 積.<sup>34</sup> Repetition of custom redirects the will, and if long continued, it can modify the inner reality 質.

**Human Nature.** The Jwāngdǔ Primitivists made a strong response to this, in the process setting off a long philosophical debate about the nature of man, in which it becomes obvious that the participants are focusing on elite man, and on the process of self-improvement by which he fully realizes his potential.

**6:48** (JZ 8:4, excerpt, c0278). A minor confusion alters one's sense of direction; a major confusion alters one's nature . . . From the Three Dynasties on down, no one in the world but has altered their nature because of some external thing. The petty man will risk his life for profit; the officer will risk his life for reputation, the noble will risk his life for family advantage, the sage will risk his life for the world. So these several people have different intentions, and are known by various names, but in disfiguring their nature and risking their lives, they are the same . . .

Syǔndǔ appealed to a universally recognized standard of correctness:

**6:49** (SZ 19:2d, excerpt, c0278). Compass and square are the perfection of square and round, as ritual is the ridgepole of the Way of Man . . .

He was again answered, from one corner in terms of a human argument:

**6:50** (JZ 8:3, excerpt, c0277). And to rely on curve and plumbline, or compass and square, to make something right, is to scrape away its nature . . . to violate its character. So to use the bendings and bowings of Ritual and Music, the smiles and simperings of Benevolence and Righteousness, to comfort the hearts of the world, is to lose what is always so . . .

<sup>34</sup>Jī 積 “stored grain” is a technical term for what is accumulated by moral effort.

From another corner of the Jwāngdǔ came a more inclusive answer:

**6:51** (JZ 9:2, excerpt, c0276). When horses live on the plain, they can drink from the stream. If pleased, they twine their necks and rub; if angry, they turn their backs and kick. This is all horses know how to do. But if you pile poles and yokes on them, and line them up in crossbars and shafts, they will learn to snap the crossbars, break the pole, and chew the reins . . . In the time of H<sub>v</sub> Sy<sub>w</sub>, people stayed home but didn't know what they were doing; went out but didn't know where they were going . . . Then the Sage came along with the bendings and bowings of Ritual and Music to reshape the form of the world, with the reachings and strivings of Benevolence and Righteousness to comfort the hearts of the world, and the people for the first time went on tiptoe for love of wisdom, fought and struggled with a view to profit, and they could not be stopped. This was all the fault of the Sage.

But for Sy<sub>w</sub>ndǔ, only ritual standards can show the way to the ideal:

**6:52** (SZ 19:5b, excerpt, c0276). Ritual trims what is too long and extends what is too short, eliminates excess and remedies deficiency . . .

This was less desirable to others differently situated, who accepted even the irregular as natural and therefore good:

**6:53** (JZ 8:2, excerpt, c0275). He who makes Normality 正 his norm 正 does not lose sight of the conditions of his original nature. What is joined is not for him “webbed,” what branches off is not “extra.” What is long does not seem excessive; what is short does not seem deficient. Thus, the duck's legs are short, but to stretch them would hurt him; the crane's legs are long, but to cut them would pain him. So what is naturally long is not to be cut, what is naturally short is not to be stretched . . . I wonder if Benevolence 仁 and Righteousness 義 are really the nature of man?

Sy<sub>w</sub>ndǔ finally had to directly insist that artifice (wèi 偽) is desirable:

**6:54** (SZ 19:6, excerpt, c0275). And so I say, nature is the basic initial material; artifice 偽 is the elegant realization. If there were no nature, artifice would have nothing to augment. And if there were no artifice, nature would not be able to become beautiful of itself . . .

In Sy<sub>w</sub>ndǔ's world, individual self-improvement needs guidance from outside. In the social realm, outside compulsion had long been the order of the day.

The Mencian theory of human nature went back to this early statement:

**6:55** (MC 2A6, excerpt, c0300) . . . The reason I say that men all have a heart that cannot bear the ills of others [the psychological basis of the virtue of benevolence] is this: Suppose a man suddenly sees a baby about to fall into a well, he will inevitably experience feelings of concern and distress. This is not to get on good terms with the child's parents; it is not to be praised by neighbors and friends; it is not that he does it because he would hate the reputation of not doing it. Seen thus, if one lacks feelings of compassion he is not a man . . .

In the final Mencian view, virtue is instinctive. It includes an innate respect for parents and an innate fellow-feeling; the latter ultimately owes much to the Mician idea of universal love (#4:4). The Sage not only preserves intact this instinctual endowment, but develops it until it includes all humanity. Only the Sage has sympathies which can include all the people of a state, or the world; the All Under Heaven (Tyēn-syà 天下).

Sy'wndž disagreed. For him, human nature is fundamentally bad, and must be schooled into a human condition. Effort is necessary:

**6:56** (SZ 23:4a, excerpt, c0274). The Sage's relation to ritual principles is just like that of the potter molding clay. How indeed could the principles of morality, resource, and acquired abilities be part of man's original nature? . . . This being the case, the Sage's relation to Ritual and Righteousness . . . is like that of the potter to his pots . . . Thus it is plain that human nature is bad, and any good is acquired by artifice 偽.

Sy'wndž was still living, and the Mencians referred to him under another name:

**6:57** (MC 6A1, excerpt, c0274). Gàudž said, Nature is like the willow wood; Righteousness is like cups and bowls. To make man's nature into Benevolence and Righteousness is like making cups and bowls out of willow wood. Mencius said, Can you make cups and bowls out of willow wood by following the nature of the wood? You must do violence to the wood and only then can you make cups and bowls . . . Will you also have to do violence to men to produce Benevolence and Righteousness? What will lead the people of the world to see Benevolence and Righteousness as a calamity will surely be your words.

That is, the public reaction to philosophical statements must also be considered.

Sy'wndž restated his position:

**6:58** (SZ 23:2a, excerpt, c0274) . . . Ritual and Righteousness come from the Sage's artifice, and not from man's nature. When the potter shapes clay to make the vessel, this is the creation of the potter's artifice, and not inherent in its nature . . .

And the Mencians recast it for purposes of discussion in this form:

**6:59** (MC 6A2, excerpt, c0274). Gàudž said, Man's nature is like water whirling around: open a passage for it to the east, and it will flow to the east; open a passage for it to the west, and it will flow west. Man's nature is indifferent to good and bad. Mencius said, Water will flow indifferently east or west, but will it flow up or down? Man's nature is good, just as water tends to flow downward . . . by damming and directing, you can force it up a hill, but is that movement according to the nature of water? . . . When men are forced to do wrong, their nature is being dealt with in this way.

This introduces the factor of external conditioning, as an explanation of the seeming bad nature of some persons.

Sy'wndž grants the point, but makes the circumstances themselves very early:

**6:60** (SZ 23:1d, excerpt, c0274). Mencius says the nature of men is good, but that they are made to lose or destroy their original nature. I say that portraying men's nature like this goes beyond the truth. . . . As soon as he is born, man begins to diverge from his original simplicity and childhood innocence, so that necessarily these are lost or destroyed.

We seem to have agreement about the *loss* of natural feelings. But then comes:

**6:61** (SZ 23:1e, excerpt, c0274). It is the nature of men that when hungry they want something to eat, when cold they want warm clothing, and when tired they want rest: these qualities are inherent in his nature . . . . A son's deference to his father and a younger brother's deference to his elder brother, a son relieving his father of labor . . . . these are contrary to men's nature. If we consider the implication of the facts, it is plain that human nature is bad, and any goodness is acquired by artifice.

Many theories of human nature were being proposed at this time. Here "Mencius" clarifies his own position:

**6:62** (MC 6A6, excerpt, c0274). G'ngd'udž said, G'audž says man's nature is neither good nor bad. Others say that nature can be either good or bad [as the people are good under good rulers and vice versa] . . . . Still others say that the nature of some people is good, and that of other people is bad [as witness good people appearing under the reigns of bad rulers] . . . . And now you say, Nature is good. Are all the others then wrong?

Mencius said, The condition of men is that they can become good; this is what I mean by "good." If they do wrong, it is not the fault of their endowment. The capacity for compassion, all men have; the capacity for shame, all men have; the capacity for respect, all men have; the capacity for distinguishing true from false, all men have . . . .

Sy'wndž was not to be convinced. He sees the Sage not as resonating with the people, but as prescribing for them out of his superior ritual knowledge, a knowledge which also includes the fundamentals of the legal system:

**6:63** (SZ 23:3a, excerpt, c0274). Mencius says that nature is good. I say it is not . . . . Were that the case, what use would there be for the Sage Kings, and what need for ritual and moral principles? . . . . The nature of man is bad. Thus in antiquity the Sages . . . . established the authority of lords and superiors to supervise men, elucidated ritual and morality to transform them, set up laws and standards to make them orderly, and added penalties and punishments to restrain them . . . .

Here the world of law and the world of lǐ (ritual) have come together. It is an argument from the status quo, and on behalf of those who serve the status quo or propose to do so, a group which included Sy'wndž himself.

The argument climaxed on the nature of the people: political man at large. Yes, there are bad people in the world, is this really the deep nature of men?

The Mencians preferred to account for bad men by external circumstances, a view they expressed in this, the most beautiful passage in the Mencius:

**6:64** (MC 6A8, c0274). Mencius said, The trees on Bull Mountain were once beautiful. But because it adjoins a great state, axes and hatchets assailed it, and could it remain beautiful? To be sure, what with the winds of day and night, and the moistening of rain and dew, shoots and sprouts did appear on it. But oxen and sheep came along and grazed on them, and thus it came to be bare. Men see how bare it is, and think there never were any timber trees 材 on it, but how is this the nature of the mountain?

And if we consider men, how can they be without feelings of kindness and justice? The way they lose these better feelings is like the axes and hatchets and the trees: morning after morning they hack at them, and can they remain beautiful? With the winds of day and night, and in the air of dawn, their loves and hates are near to those of other men, but these feelings are only faint, and with what happens during the day, they are fettered and destroyed. And when they are fettered again and again, the air of night is not strong enough to preserve them, and when the air of night is not strong enough to preserve them, they become little different from animals. People see that they are like animals, and think there never was any potential 才<sup>35</sup> there, but how is this the condition of man?

And so, if it gets its nourishment, there is no creature but grows; if it loses its nourishment, there is no creature but declines. Confucius said,

Hold it and it remains;  
Release it, and it is gone.  
Its coming and going have no season;  
No one knows its home.

Was he not speaking about the heart?

Thus did the Mencians explain the inhumane. The theory of innate goodness is saved – but not as a description of the world in which we live.

The Analects people, watching this from the sidelines, allowed themselves a comment on the issue. After all, if new Confucius sayings are going to be invented, who more qualified than themselves?

**6:65** (LY 17:2a, c0270). The Master said, By nature 性 they are near each other; by habitual action 習 they become further apart.

And they added this comment on the malleability of human nature in general:

**6:66** (LY 17:2b, c0270). The Master said, It is the highest wisdom and the lowest stupidity that do not change.

The Analects school had always emphasized an effort at self-improvement, and they here attribute the possibility of change (that is, betterment) to most men. However, they reserve a place for the Sage, who is outside that process.

<sup>35</sup>Note the echo between tsái 材 “timber trees” and tsái 才 “talent, human potential.”