

## Tensions Between Mencius 3 and 7

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**Abstract.** An interesting rift exists between Mencius 3 and 7 in how the relationship of Mencius and his followers to philosophical opponents is to be conceived. Passages in 3 show more urgency in quelling those opponents, as well as showing stricter adherence to their own principles. In 7, on the other hand, there are ways in which some toleration and even acceptance of those opponents is apparent. There is also, in 7, an explicit rejection of inflexible or overly restrictive principles. Based on these differences, I suggest that Gūngsūn Chǒu's multi-faceted role of foil in 7 (in 7A31 he seems to represent a Primitivist position, and in 7A39 a Mician one) may be understood as representing the relative “nearness” of philosophical opponents to the followers of Mencius – something which is quite absent in MC 3.

**Disputation and Urgency in MC 3.** Consider the discussion of byèn 辯 “disputations” in 3B9. Gūng-dūdǔ is portrayed as asking Mencius about the reputation Mencius has acquired. According to Gūng-dūdǔ, “outsiders” (外人) say that Mencius likes to engage in disputations. Mencius responds that, far from enjoying disputes, he is *compelled* to engage in them. His explanation of the compelling forces has an epic ring. First, an elaborate panegyric is given of the culture-heroes Yáu, Shùn, and Yǔ, followed by lamentations over the subsequent decline away from the dào of the sages (聖人之道). The brief return to order carried out by Wín and Wǔ is recounted, followed by a further lament over the ensuing chaos. Then, a reminder is given of Confucius's attempt to return civilization to that dào with his teachings in the Spring and Autumn annals. This is followed with yet more lamentations over the continuing absence of a sage king, the wanton ways of the feuding rulers, the perverse discussions of the scholars, and the widespread teachings of Yáng and Mwò. This last concern is most proximately responsible for Mencius's having to engage in dispute.

The recounting of moral epicycles emphasizes Mencius's place in this cycle: His own teachings (言) are based on the dào of the first sage kings. It is that dào which he defends against the teachings of Yáng and Mwò. What distinguishes Mencius's teachings, Mencius proclaims, is that when a sage arises again, he will not change Mencius's teachings. Hence, Mencius is not *merely* disputatious. His teachings are more than instruments of rhetorical combat. Twice in the passage, Mencius uses a term which will become intriguing when we compare it with one used in 7B30. He talks of repelling or opposing, jywè 距, the ways of Yáng and Mwò. He adds, concluding the chapter, that “the one who is able to oppose Yáng and Mwò with teachings is a disciple of the sages” (能言距楊墨者，聖人之徒也).

**Disputation and Acceptance in MC 7.** We may contrast 3B9 with a more complicated pair of passages, 7B26 and 7B30. 7B26, in the voice of Mencius, begins opaquely with a reference to the prodigal followers of Yáng and Mwò, and the right attitude to be taken toward them: “Fleeing (逃) Mwò, they must return (必歸) to Yáng; fleeing Yáng, they must return to Rú (儒), and when they return, simply accept them (歸, 斯受之而已矣).” What comes next is revealing: “Those who now dispute with Yáng and Mwò (與楊墨辯者) can be likened to those who, when a stray pig is chased and it is already back in its pen, continue to pursue it and tie its legs.” The lesson in this passage, like 3B9, is about disputation, byèn. And the lesson is that disputation with Yáng and Mwò followers is gratuitous. We should notice that whether the disputation in question is with yet unrepentant Yáng and Mwò followers or with the prodigal ones, the lesson is the same – there is neither need for nor point in disputation. The first part of the passage is not conditional; the suggestion seems to be that following Mwò or Yáng teachings is “unstable” in some way and so those followers must inevitably return eventually to orthodoxy. So, there is no need for dispute with them. Of course, the ones who have already returned should simply be accepted, for disputes with them would be more straightforwardly pointless.

What is revealed here, I think, is that the *threat* from Yáng and Mwò teachings is scarcely felt by the author(s) of this passage. This contrasts with the attitude expressed in 3B9. MC 3B9 shows Mencius reluctantly disputatious, yet with a sense of urgency about the effects of the Yáng and Mwò teachings. Strengthening this contrast is the portrayal of Mencius in 7B30, a passage which pairs naturally with 7B26 because of the echoing of the significant phrase “simply accept them” (斯受之而已矣). In 7B30, it is said of Mencius that when he arranges to teach someone: those who leave, he does not chase after; those who come to him, he does not ward off (來者不拒) — if they arrive because of the right mind, he simply accepts them (斯受之而已矣). Depending on how one reads the beginning of this sentence, as fū dǐ 夫子 or, alternatively, as fū yǐ 夫予, this is said by Mencius’s interlocutor or by Mencius about himself. In either case, Mencius is portrayed as one who takes all comers as his disciples. Significant in this passage are two things: that Mencius does not “ward off,” jywè 拒, those who come to him and that he “simply accepts” them. The latter echoes 7B26 and it is difficult not to read it as echoing the same point: that those Mwò and Yáng followers who wish to learn are not to be turned away. The term jywè 拒 seems to be a variant of jywè 距 which we saw in 3B9 with the same meaning: to repel or oppose. This provides another, if more speculative, point of contrast between the 3B9 attitude toward disputation and that found in both 7B26 and, by connection through echoing, 7B30. According to 3B9, one who, like Mencius, can jywè 距 Yáng and Mwò followers with disputation is a disciple of the sages. But in 7B30, Mencius is described as one who does not jywè 拒 any – including, presumably, Yáng and Mwò followers – who come to him to learn.