



*Mencius**

Book I Part A

1. Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. “Sir,” said the King, “you have come all this distance, thinking nothing of a thousand *li* [about 250 miles]. You must surely have some way of profiting my state?”

“Your Majesty,” answered Mencius. What is the point of mentioning the word “profit”? All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness. If Your Majesty says, “How can I profit my state?” and the Counselors say, “How can I profit my family?” and the Gentlemen and Commoners say “How can I profit my person?” then those above and those below will be trying to profit at the expense of one another and the state will be imperiled. When a regicide is committed in a state of a thousand chariots, it is certain to be by a vassal with a hundred chariots. A share of a thousand in ten thousand or a hundred in a thousand is by no means insignificant, yet if profit is put before rightness, there is no satisfaction short of total usurpation. No benevolent man ever abandons his parents, and no dutiful man ever puts his prince last. Perhaps you will now endorse what I have said, “All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness. What is the point of mentioning the word ‘profit’?”

3. [. . .] If the mulberry is planted in every homestead of five *mu* of land, [one *mu* = a bit less than 200 square meters, e.g., 10X20 meters or 33X66feet] then those who are fifty can wear silk; if chickens, pigs and dogs do not miss their breeding season, then those who are seventy can eat meat; if each lot of a hundred *mu* is not deprived of labour during the busy seasons, then families with several mouths to feed will not go hungry. Exercise due care over the education provided by the village schools, and discipline the people by teaching them the duties proper to sons and younger brothers, and those whose heads have turned grey will not be carrying loads on the roads. When those who are seventy wear silk and eat meat and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their prince not to be a true King.”

Book II Part A

2. [. . .] “What do you mean by ‘an insight into words’?”

“From biased words I can see wherein the speaker is blind; from immoderate words, wherein he is ensnared; from heretical words, wherein he has strayed from the right path; from evasive words, wherein he is at his wits’ end. What arises in the mind will interfere with policy, and what shows itself in policy will interfere with practice. Were a sage to rise again, he would surely agree with what I have said.”

“Tsai Wo and Tzu-kung excelled in rhetoric; Jan Nin, Min Tzu and Yen Hui excelled in the exposition of virtuous conduct. Confucius excelled in both and yet he said, “I am not versed in rhetoric.” In that case you, Master, must already be a sage.”

“What an extraordinary thing for you to say of me! Tzu-kung once asked Confucius, “Are you, Master, a sage?” Confucius replied, “I have not succeeded in becoming a sage. I simply never tire of learning nor weary of teaching.” [*Analects*, VII.34] Tzu-kung said, “Not to tire of teaching is wisdom; not to weary of teaching is benevolence. You must be a sage to be both wise and benevolent.” A sage is something even Confucius did not claim

to be. What an extraordinary thing for you to say of me!”

6. Mencius said, “No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others. Such a sensitive heart was possessed by the Former Kings and this manifested itself in compassionate government. With such a sensitive heart behind compassionate government, it was as easy to rule the Empire as rolling it on your palm.

“My reason for saying that no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others is this. Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of courtesy and modesty is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human. The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance of the rites; the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he has four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself; for him to deny the potentialities of his prince is for him to cripple his prince. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through. When these are fully developed, he can take under his protection the whole realm within the Four Seas, but if he fails to develop them, he will not be able even to serve his parents.”

Book II Part B

2. [. . .] At court rank is supreme; in the village, age; but for assisting the world and ruling over the people it is virtue. [. . .] Hence a prince who is to achieve great things must have subjects he does not summon. If he wants to consult them, he goes to them. If he does not honour virtue and delight in the Way in such a manner, he is not worthy of being helped toward the achievement of great things. Take the case of Yi Yin. T'ang had him first as a tutor and only afterwards did he treat him as a minister. As a result, T'ang was able to become a true King without much effort. [. . .] Today there are many states, all equal in size and virtue, none being able to dominate the others. This is simply because the rulers are given to employing those they can teach rather than those from whom they can learn.”

9. [. . .] when he made a mistake, the gentleman of antiquity would make amends, while the gentleman of today persists in his mistakes. When the gentleman of antiquity made a mistake it was there to be seen by all the people, like the eclipse of the sun and moon; and when he made amends the people looked up to him. The gentleman of today not only persists in his mistakes but tries to gloss over them.”

Book III Part A

3. [. . .] “‘*Hsiang*’, ‘*hsu*’, ‘*hsueh*’ and ‘*hsiao*’ were set up for the purposes of education. “*Hsiang*” means “rearing”, “*hsiao*” means “teaching” and “*hsu*” means “archery.” [. . .] They all serve to make the people understand human relationships. When it is clear that those in authority understand human relationships, the people will be affectionate. Should a true King arise, he is certain to take this as his model.”

4. [. . .] “Hou Chi taught the people how to cultivate land and the five kinds of grain. When these ripened the people multiplied. This is the way of the common people: once they have a full belly and warm clothes on their back they degenerate to the level of animals if they are allowed to lead idle lives, without education and discipline. This gave the sage King further cause for concern, and so he appointed Hsieh as the Minister of Education whose duty was to teach the people human relationships: love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends.” [. . .] “To share one’s wealth with others is generosity; to teach others to be good is conscientiousness; to find the right man for the Empire is benevolence.”

5. [. . .] “Another day, [Yi Chih, a Mohist] sought to see Mencius again. Mencius said, “Now I can see him. If one does not put others right, one cannot hold the Way up for everyone to see. I shall put him right.”

Book IV Part A

14. Mencius said, “While he was steward to the Chi family, Jan Ch’iu doubled the yield of taxation without being able to improve their virtue. Confucius said, “Ch’iu is not my disciple. You, little ones, may attack him to the beating of drums.” From this it can be seen that Confucius rejected those who enriched rulers not given to the practice of benevolent government. How much more would he reject those who do their best to wage war on their behalf. In wars to gain land, the dead fill the plains; in wars to gain cities, the dead fill the cities. This is known as showing the land the way to devour human flesh. Death is too light a punishment for such men. [. . .]”

18. Kung-sun Ch’ou said, “Why does a gentleman not take on the teaching of his own sons?”

“Because in the nature of things,” said Mencius, “it will not work. A teacher necessarily resorts to correction, and if correction produces no effect, he will end by losing his temper. When this happens, father and son will hurt each other instead. “You teach me by correcting me, but you yourself are not correct.” So father and son hurt each other, and it is bad that such a thing should happen. In antiquity people taught one another’s sons. Father and son should not demand goodness from each other. To do so will estrange them, and there is nothing more inauspicious than estrangement between father and son.”

23. Mencius said, “The trouble with people is that they are too eager to assume the role of teacher.”

Book IV Part B

14. Mencius said, “A gentleman steeps himself in the Way because he wishes to find it in himself. When he finds it in himself, he will be at ease in it; when he is at ease in it, he can draw deeply upon it; when he can draw deeply upon it, he finds its source wherever he turns. That is why a gentleman wishes to find the Way in himself.”

15. Mencius said, “Learn widely and go into what you have learned in detail so that in the end you can return to the essential.”

20. Mencius said, [. . .] The Duke of Chou sought to combine the achievements of the Three Dynasties and the administration of the Four Kings.

Whenever there was anything he could not quite understand, he would tilt his head back and reflect, if need be through the night as well as the day. If he was fortunate enough to find the answer, he would sit up to await the dawn.”

27. Mencius said, “A gentleman differs from other men in that he retains his heart. A gentleman retains his heart by means of benevolence and the rites. The benevolent man loves others, and the courteous man respects others. He who loves others is always loved by them; he who respects others is always respected by them. Suppose a man treats another man in an outrageous manner. Faced with this a gentleman will say to himself, “I must be lacking in benevolence and courtesy, or how could such a thing happen to me?” When, looking into himself, he finds that he has been benevolent and courteous, and yet this outrageous treatment continues, then the gentleman will say to himself, “I must have failed to do my best for him.” When, on looking into himself, he finds that he has done his best and yet this outrageous treatment continues, then the gentleman will say, ‘This man is no different from an animal. One cannot expect an animal to know any better.’” [. . .]

33. [. . .] In the eyes of a gentleman, few of all those who seek wealth and position fail to give their wives and concubines cause to weep with shame.”

Book V Part B

7. [. . .] According to the rites, a Commoner does not dare present himself to a feudal lord unless he has handed in his token of allegiance.”

“When a Commoner,” said Wan Chang, “is summoned to corvee he goes to serve. Why then should he refuse to go when he is summoned to an audience?”

“It is right for him to go and serve, but it is not right for him to present himself. Moreover, for what reason does the prince wish to see him?”

“For the reason that he is well-informed or that he is good and wise.”

“If it is for the reason that he is well-informed, even the Emperor does not summon his teacher, let alone a feudal lord. If it is for the reason that he is a good and wise man, then I have never heard of summoning such a man when one wishes to see him. Duke Mu frequently went to see Tzu-ssu. ‘How did kings of states with a thousand chariots in antiquity make friends with Gentlemen?’ he asked. Tzu-ssu’s was displeased. ‘What the ancients talked about,’ said he, ‘was serving them, not making friends with them.’ The reason for Tzu-ssu’s displeasure was surely this. ‘In point of position, you are the prince and I am your subject. How dare I be friends with you? In point of virtue, it is you who ought to serve me. How can you presume to be friends with me?’ If the ruler of a state with a thousand chariots cannot even hope to be friends with him, how much less can he hope to summon such a man.” [. . .]

8. Mencius said to Wan Chang, “The best Gentleman of a village is in a position to make friends with the best Gentleman in other villages; the best Gentleman in a state, with the best Gentleman in other states; and the best Gentleman in the Empire, with the best Gentlemen in the Empire. And not content with making friends with the best Gentlemen in the Empire, he goes back in time and communes with the ancients. When one reads poems and writings of the ancients, can it be right not to know something about them as men? Hence one tries to understand the age in which they lived. This can be described as ‘looking for friends in history.’”

Book VI Part A

9. Mencius said, “Do not be puzzled by the King’s lack of wisdom. Even a plant that grows most readily will not survive if it is placed in the sun for one day and exposed to the cold for ten. It is rarely that I have an opportunity of seeing the King, and as soon as I leave, those who expose him to the cold arrive on the scene. What can I do with the few new shoots that come out? Now take [the game of] Go, which is only an art of little consequence. Yet if one does not give one’s whole mind to it, one will never master it. Yi Ch’iu is the best player in the whole country. Get him to teach two people to play, one of whom concentrates his mind on the game and listens only to what Yi Ch’iu has to say, while the other, though he listens dreams of an approaching swan and wants to take up his bow and corded arrow to shoot at it. Now even though this man shares the lessons with the first, he will never be as good. Is this because he is less clever? The answer is, ‘No.’”

11. Mencius said, “Benevolence is the heart of man, and rightness his road. Sad it is indeed when a man gives up the right road instead of following it and allows his heart to stray without enough sense to go after it. When his chicken and dogs stray, he has sense enough to go after them, but not when his heart strays. The sole concern of learning is to go after this strayed heart. That is all.”

15. [. . .] “The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think and can be misled by external things. When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it. The organ of the heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think; otherwise, it will not find the answer. This is what Heaven has given me.” [. . .]

Book VI Part B

2. [. . .] “If the ruler of Tsou receives me and I am given a place to lodge, then I should like to stay and be a disciple of yours.”

“The Way is like a wide road. It is not at all difficult to find. The trouble with people is simply that they do not look for it. You go home and look for it and there will be teachers enough for you.

4. Sung K’eng was on his way to Ch’u. Mencius, meeting him at Shih Ch’iu, asked him, “Where are you going, sir?”

“I heard that hostilities had broken out between Ch’in and Ch’u. I am going to see the king of Ch’u and try to persuade him to bring an end to them. If I fail to find favour with the king of Ch’u I shall go to see the king of Ch’in and try to persuade him instead. I hope I shall have success with one or the other of the two kings.

“I do not wish to know the details, but may I ask about the gist of your argument? How are you going to persuade the kings?”

“I shall explain to them the unprofitability of war.”

“Your purpose is lofty indeed, but your slogan is wrong. If you place profit before the kings of Ch’in and Ch’u, and they call off their armies because they are drawn to profit, then it means that the soldiers in their armies retire because they are drawn to profit. If a subject, in serving his prince, cherished the profit motive, and a son, in serving his father, and a younger brother, in serving his elder brother, did likewise, then it would mean that in their mutual relations, prince and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, all cherished the profit motive to the total exclusion of morality. The prince of such a state is sure to perish. If on the other hand, you

placed morality before the kings of Ch'in and Ch'u and they called off their armies because they were drawn to morality, then it would mean that the soldiers in their armies retired because they were drawn to morality. If a subject, in serving his prince, cherished morality, and a son, in serving his father, and a younger brother in serving his elder brother, did likewise, then it would mean that in their mutual relations, prince and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, all cherished morality to the exclusion of profit. The prince of such a state is sure to become a true King. What is the point of mentioning the word 'profit.?'”

16. Mencius said, “There are more ways than one of instructing others. My disdain to instruct a man is itself one way of instructing him.”

Book VII Part A

14. Mencius said, “Benevolent words do not have as profound an effect on the people as benevolent music. Good government does not win the people as does good education. He who practices good government is feared by the people; he who gives the people good education is loved by them. Good government wins the wealth of the people; good education wins their hearts.”

20. Mencius said, “A gentleman delights in three things, and being ruler over the Empire is not amongst them. His parents are alive and his brothers are well. This is the first delight. Above, he is not ashamed to face Heaven; below, he is not ashamed to face man. This is the second delight. He has the good fortune of having the most talented pupils in the Empire. This is the third delight. A gentleman delights in three things and being ruler over the Empire is not amongst them.”

40. Mencius said, “A gentleman teaches in five ways. The first is by a transforming influence like that of timely rain. The second is by helping the student to realize his virtue to the full. The third is by helping him to develop his talent. The fourth is by answering his questions. And the fifth is by setting an example others not in contact with him can emulate. These are the five ways in which a gentleman teaches.”

43. Kung-tu Tzu said, “When T'eng Keng was studying under you, he appeared to deserve your courtesy; yet you never answered his questions. Why was that?”

“I never answer any questioner,” said Mencius, “who relies on the advantage he possesses of position, capability, age, merit or status as an old friend. T'eng Keng was guilty on two of these counts.”

Book VII Part B

30. [. . .] “In setting myself up as a teacher, I do not go after anyone who leaves, nor do I refuse anyone who comes. So long as he comes with the right attitude of mind, I accept him. That is all.”

* Excerpts taken from *Mencius*, translated with an introduction by D. C. Lau, New York: Penguin Books, 1970.