



Mencius*
(371 - 289BCE)

(Excerpts on gain)

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’?”

Book I, Part B, 5. King Hsuan of Ch’i asked, [. . .] “May I hear about Kingly government?” [. . .] “I have a weakness. I am fond of money.”

“In antiquity Kung Liu was fond of money too. The *Book of Songs* says,

He stocked and stored;
He placed provisions
In bags and sacks.
He brought harmony and so glory to his state.
On full display were bows and arrows,
Spears, halberds and axes.
Only then did the march begin.
(Song 250)

It was only when those who stayed at home had full granaries and those who went forth to war had full sacks that the march could begin. You may be fond of money, but so long as you share this fondness with the people, how can it interfere with your becoming a true king?”

Book II, Part B, 10. “Chi Sun once said, “How add Tzu-shu Yi was! His advice was not followed while he was in office. This did not prevent him from getting the younger members of his family into high office. Who is there that does not want wealth and rank? But he was the only one that had his own ‘vantage point’ therein.” In antiquity, the market was for the exchange of what one had for what one lacked. The authorities merely supervised it. There was, however, a despicable fellow who always looked for a vantage point and, going up on it, gazed into the distance to the left and to the right in order to secure for himself all the profit there was in the market. The people all thought him despicable, and, as a result, they taxed him. The taxing of merchants began with this despicable fellow.”

Book III, Part A, 3. Duke Wen of T'eng asked about government.

"The business of the people," said Mencius, "must be attended to without delay. The *Book of Songs* says,

In the day time they go for grass;
At night they make it into ropes.
They hasten to repair the roof;
Then they begin sowing the crops.
(Song 154)

This is the way of the common people. Those with constant means of support will have constant hearts, while those without constant means will not have constant hearts. Lacking constant hearts, they will go astray and get into excesses, stopping at nothing. To punish them after they have fallen foul of the law is to set a trap for the people. How can a benevolent man in authority allow himself to set a trap for the people? Hence a good ruler is always respectful and thrifty, courteous and humble, and takes from the people no more than is prescribed. Yang Hu said, 'If one's aim is wealth one cannot be benevolent; if one's aim is benevolence one cannot be wealthy.' [. . .]

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." [. . .]

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

Book VI, Part B, 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 favor 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 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'?"

Book VII, Part A, 25. Mencius said, "He who gets up with the crowing of the cock and never tires of doing good is the same kind of man as Shun; he who gets up with the crowing of the cock and never tires of working for profit is the same kind of man as Chih [translators note: a byword for robbers]. If you wish to understand the difference between Shun and Chih, you need look no further than the gap separating the good and the profitable."

Book VII, Part B, 34. Mencius said, "When speaking to men of consequence it is necessary to look on them with contempt and not be impressed by their lofty position. Their hall is tens of feet high; the capitals are several feet broad. Were I to meet with success, I would not indulge in such things. Their tables, laden with food, measure ten feet across, and their female attendants are counted in the hundreds. Were I to meet with success, would not indulge in such things. They have a great time drinking, driving and hunting, with a retinue of a thousand chariots. Were I to meet with success I would not indulge in such things. All the things they do I would not do, and everything I do is in accordance with ancient institutions. Why, then, should I cower before them?"

*Excerpted from *Mencius*, translated with an introduction by D.C.Lau, New York: Penguin books, 1970.