

Further Reading

Confucius Analects, With Selections from Traditional Commentaries, translated by Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), combines an excellent contemporary translation of Confucius' sayings with key interpretations from the major commentaries. It may be the best place to begin one's reading of the Analects.

Authentic Confucius: A Life of Thought and Politics, by Aming Chin (New York: Scribner, 2007), tells the story of Confucius' life and teachings. Drawing on various sources, but primarily the *Analects*, Chin gives us both a biography and a very readable introduction to early Confucianism.

Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation, translated by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), is probably the best translation for philosophy students.

Introduction to Confucianism, by Xinzhong Yao (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), is an accessible, but comprehensive, introduction to Confucianism that concludes with discussions of contemporary Confucian thought.

Confucian Moral Self Cultivation, second edition, by Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), is probably the best introduction to the subject of Confucian moral self-cultivation.

Confucius and the Analects: New Essays, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), is an outstanding collection of essays representing recent scholarship on the teachings of Confucius. It is not always easy reading. It contains "An annotated Bibliography of Works on Confucius and the Analects" by Joel Sahlen (pp. 303-320).

The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (LaSalle,

IL: Open Court, 1996), is a collection of outstanding essays on Confucianism.

Confucius and the Chinese Way, by Herlee Glessner Creel (New York: Harper & Row, 1960, originally published in 1949), is quite accessible to students and is still one of the better studies of Confucius.

Thinking Through Confucius, by David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), may be the most helpful analysis of the thought of Confucius for contemporary Western readers. The most philosophical passages of the *Analects* (*Sayings*) are translated and commented on carefully, providing a coherent Confucian vision.

The Ways of Confucianism, by David S. Nivison (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1997), is a careful and sophisticated study of Confucian philosophy by one of the outstanding Confucian scholars of our time.

Confucius—The Secular as Sacred, by Herbert Fingarette (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), a modern classic of Confucian interpretation, is a very rich philosophical interpretation of ceremony and ritual (li) in the thought of Confucius.

Confucius: The Analects, by Din Cheuk Lau (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1979), is an excellent translation of the whole text, with a good introduction and helpful notes.

Centrality and Commonality, by Wei-ming Tu (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), is the single best study of the *Zhong-yung* (*Zhongyong*).

Not only is Tu's interpretation brilliant, but it is presented so clearly that it is accessible to most readers. *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*, by Wei-ming Tu (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), is a landmark study of Confucian self-cultivation.

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Development of Confucianism: Mengzi, Xunzi, and Dong Zhongshu

The Confucian philosophy outlined so far probably represents primarily the thought of Confucius and his students, although it is extremely difficult to keep separate the various streams of thought contributing to Confucianism. We need to keep in mind that Confucianism has its roots in ancient Chinese thought, some of which came to be recorded in the classics hundreds of years before Confucius was born. It was this ancient thought that Confucius revived and shaped into "Confucianism." And Confucianism, as a living spiritual tradition, has been dynamic, undergoing continuous change throughout its long history. To attain a perspective from which to understand the main changes, it is important to look at the competing "solutions" to the breakdown of social order and the ancient traditions that were being offered in Confucius's time.

CHALLENGES TO CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

Clearly, in the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period (722-221 BCE), the Chinese people experienced the collapse of their social and political world. In the suffering and chaos that prevailed, thinkers were challenged to find a way to restore social order and meaning to life. Although many solutions were proposed, all of them can be seen to belong to one or the other of three ways, each with its own set of ideas and each at odds with the others.

The first way, which included the Daoists, advocated a return to a simpler life, in accord with nature. Civilization itself was the problem, they argued. In order to achieve harmony and live peacefully, the conventions and institutions of society needed to be abandoned or simplified. Government, and even morality, should be abandoned. Then people would be naturally respectful and helpful to each other.

The second way was that of the pessimists who had given up hope. According to them, there was no way to restore order and provide for a meaningful life in society. Their recommendation was to withdraw from the world, with each person trying to save themselves. Because times were so bad and the outlook so bleak, although it had little to offer, the pessimistic way was quite popular.

The third way was that of the activists who were convinced that order could be restored. But they disagreed about how to undo the damage and "straighten the crooked system." Their disagreements led the activists to develop three different schools or traditions, the Confucian, the Mohist, and the Legalist.

As we have seen, Confucius advocated a humanistic approach that emphasized the importance of moral development based on the ancient ideals. He argued against the Daoists and Pessimists, saying that a full human life can only be lived in society, and that to abandon civilization would be to live like the birds and beasts, not like human beings. But Confucian humanism was at odds with both Mohism and Legalism.

Mozhi (479–381 BCE) broke with the Confucian tradition, thinking that the Confucian emphasis on virtue and moral suasion was too ill-defined and too impractical to work. Instead, he argued for a utilitarian way that began with economic improvements to bring material benefits to the people. Mohists argued that good government would ensure just distributions of the benefits it provided the people. They ridiculed the Confucian emphasis on rites and music for cultivating virtue and social order. They also rejected the Confucian emphasis on the development of personal character and cultivation of filiality in favor of utilitarian love and universal equality.

The Legalists represented an even greater challenge to the Confucians than the Mohists. Emphasizing the importance of strict laws and harsh punishments for maintaining social order and ensuring political success, the Legalists (*fa jia*), succeeded in getting their philosophy adopted by the most powerful states in China during the period of the Warring States (475–221 BCE). According to the Legalists, the Confucian emphasis on virtue and learning would make the country weak and vulnerable to attack by other countries. Legalist policies proved effective in helping leading states become rich and powerful, eventually helping the emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) unify all of China. Granted the successes of Utilitarianism and Legalism, Confucianism was to have little impact on Chinese society for almost three hundred years after the death of Confucius.

Despite its failure to win public acceptance, Confucianism continued to develop and struggle against its more powerful rivals. Four Confucian teachers who succeeded the Master were regarded as so important in the formation of Confucianism that later tradition honored them as his Associates. Yan Hui (511–480 BCE), a favorite student of Confucius, is frequently praised in the *Analects* for his virtues and his understanding of the Confucian way. Zengzi (505–435 BCE) was another favorite and famous student, recognized for his understanding of moral learning and seen as an exemplar of filiality. Later tradition recognized him as the author of the influential *Book of Filiality* and credited him with transmitting the even more influential *Great Learning*. The third teacher, Zengzi's student, Zisi, Confucius' grandson, was thought to have compiled the very important *Doctrine of the Mean*. He is also recognized as the founder of the Zisi School and the teacher of Mengzi (372–289 BCE), the most famous student of this School. By further developing Zisi's teachings about the human heart and human nature, Mengzi was able to give Confucius' moral humanism a metaphysical foundation. So important was Mengzi's development of Confucianism that from the Song Dynasty on, he came to be regarded as the true transmitter of Confucius' teachings and was honored as the Second Sage.

The other pre-Han thinker to greatly influence the development of the Confucian tradition was Xunzi (313–238 BCE). A brilliant thinker and devoted follower of Confucius, Xunzi interpreted Confucian teachings in a much more naturalistic and rationalistic way than Mengzi

and the other followers of Confucius. His emphasis on the importance of law and propriety, on Heaven as an impersonal natural power, and on the need for education and social institutions to overcome the tendencies to evil that is part of human nature paved the way for the adoption of Confucianism a hundred years after his death.

There is no doubt that the realism of Xunzi and the idealism of Mengzi were the primary influences in the development of Confucius' thought into the Confucian tradition that formed the basis of Chinese culture for more than two thousand years. And it was the brilliant synthesis of Dong Zhongshu that won favor at the court, allowing Confucianism to be adopted as the official Chinese ideology during the Han dynasty. While Confucius emphasized *ren* and regarded *li*, *yi*, and *xiao* as necessary for a well-developed person and for a well-ordered society, he did not discuss the question of why one should practice these virtues in terms of the natural endowments of human nature. He simply saw that to achieve harmonious human relationships, a stable, well-ordered society, and personal happiness, it is necessary to practice moral self-cultivation. Mengzi and Xunzi, on the other hand, were very much concerned with the question of why one should live in accord with *ren*, practicing *yi* and *xiao*. Mengzi held that it was in order to develop the original goodness of human nature that one should practice the virtues stressed by Confucius. Xunzi, on the other hand, took the view that because of the original evil inherent in human nature one should practice these virtues in order to remove these innate evil tendencies and replace them with moral virtue.

MENGZI

Mengzi, born more than a hundred years after Confucius had died, took the Master as his ideal, exemplifying the noblest teachings and practice the tradition could offer. Dedicating his life to honoring and transmitting Confucius' teachings and attempting to emulate his virtue, Mengzi became a great inspiration to the tradition. However, his attempts to influence rulers and to get them to adopt Confucianism as governmental policy were dismal failures. Facing even worse times and social conditions than Confucius, for forty years he traveled widely and put all of his energy into his attempts to persuade rulers to adopt the Confucian moral humanism as the basis of their way of governing. Peace and harmony, he argued, are brought about by moral cultivation, not by strict laws and harsh punishments. But to rulers embroiled in wars and power struggles, Mengzi's moral pacifism had no appeal and his insistence on the power of morality to bring about social order appeared naive and impractical. Eventually Mengzi realized that he could not succeed in his political efforts to replace the Utilitarian and Legalist policies of the courts with Confucian teachings and devoted the rest of his life to interpreting the classics and keeping alive and transmitting the teachings of Confucius to the next generation.

Mengzi agreed with Confucius that *ren* is basic and that it is the source and foundation of all goodness and virtue. And he also agreed with Confucius that *li*, or rules for proper behavior, was required for the development and manifestation of *ren*. In addition, *xiao* was recognized to be the beginning point for the cultivation of goodness. But Mengzi gave a more important role to *yi* than did Confucius. It is *yi*, or rightness, that above all else contains the key to the development and cultivation of *ren*, according to Mengzi.

The reason for the emphasis on *yi* is the recognition by Mengzi of the distinction between goodness and rightness. *Ren* refers to the goodness that is basic to human nature. But *yi* refers to the rightness of human actions. The need for the distinction comes from the fact that although all people possess *ren*, not all people act in the right way.

For Mengzi, who claimed that *ren* was an actual beginning of goodness present in each person, the problem was to explain the presence of evil in the world. If evil is due to wrong actions, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the rightness of actions and the goodness of human nature. Despite the presence of goodness, it is possible for human beings to act in a wrong way and thus bring about evil in the world. Because this is so, it is necessary to emphasize *yi*, the correctness of action, in order to rid the world of evil. Of course, Mengzi did not hold that *yi* and *ren* are totally different and do not meet. Rather, he held that if *ren* is completely developed, *yi* will naturally follow. And if all actions are in accord with *yi*, *ren* will be developed. Holding that to be human is to be human-hearted, Mengzi saw that rightness is the path to the fulfillment of our human potential. Because *yi* is the path to *ren*, it is appropriate to begin the development of human nature with the correction of a person's actions.

The other significant difference between Confucius and Mengzi is found in their views about human nature. Confucius had little to say about human nature and claimed that people have a potential for goodness. Mengzi, following Zisi, had a sophisticated theory of human nature and claimed that people possess an actual beginning of goodness as part of their nature. Indeed, Mengzi's distinction between goodness and rightness is grounded in his theory of human nature.

Mengzi's understanding of the original goodness of human nature is reflected in his disagreements with Gaozi, probably his contemporary. Gaozi claimed that human nature was originally neutral, neither good nor bad. Human nature, he said, is like a tree, while human goodness is like a bowl that is made from a tree, but is different from the tree. Mengzi rejected this analogy, arguing that in making a bowl from a tree we have to kill the tree and cut it into pieces. But in making ourselves good we do not destroy anything; we simply develop the goodness that is already there. Gaozi's second argument for the moral neutrality of human nature uses the analogy of running water. Just as water can flow either to the east or to the west without making any distinction between them, so human nature can turn to either good or evil, without making any distinction between them, he said. Mengzi also rejected this analogy, arguing that although water will flow indifferently either east or west, it will not flow indifferently up or down, but only down. And just as water only flows down, so is human nature disposed to goodness, and there is no man so evil that he does not show a tendency to be good.

Mengzi also argues against another theory that held that in some people human nature is bad while in others it is good. The argument for this view was that under the rule of a virtuous king, the people loved what was good, but under the rule of a cruel king, without virtue, the people loved what was cruel and not good. But according to Mengzi, there is another explanation. Under a good ruler, the people love the good, because the natural goodness of human nature is protected and developed by the ruler. Under a bad ruler, however, the people become bad, because the ruler allows the inherent goodness of human nature to be destroyed.

Arguments for the Goodness of Human Beings

Mengzi did not simply state that people possess an innate goodness; he presented arguments for this view. The first argument runs as follows: (1) the sage, according to everyone, is good by nature; (2) all persons have the same human nature; (3) therefore, all persons are good by nature.

But just because human nature inclines to goodness does not mean that every human being is always good. According to Mengzi's second argument, which the tradition has taken much more seriously than the first, the goodness of human nature is seen in the fact that to be human is to have a heart-mind (*xin*) that cannot bear to see the sufferings of others. The virtues of human-heartedness (*ren*), rightness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), and moral wisdom (*zhi*) have their beginnings in our heart-mind as soon as we are born. They are not inculcated by society from the outside. All human beings possess the beginnings of these virtues as can be seen by the universality of the basic feelings that constitute their beginnings. Mengzi's argument proceeds by identifying the feelings that constitute the beginnings in each of these virtues, illustrating them with examples.

Compassion is the beginning of *ren*. Any person would have compassion for a child about to fall into a well and would attempt to save the child. Shamefulness is the root of *yi*. Any person who robs another person or causes the death of that person will feel shame and try to make restitution. Respect is the beginning of *li*. The universality of this beginning can be seen in the fact that all children have a natural respect for their parents, and in the presence of superiors, all people feel their own shortcomings and are modest and respectful. Mengzi says that if one were to simply throw the body of a parent in a ditch instead of burying it and later come and see the birds and beasts preying on it, a natural respect would cause one to hurry and bury the body. The knowledge of right and wrong is the root of the virtue *zhi*. Since every person draws his or her ideas about the rightness and wrongness of actions from reflections in his or her own heart-mind, it follows that these innate ideas of right and wrong must be found in every person.

The conclusion of these arguments is that human beings are innately moral. Because of this innate goodness, they know right and wrong; have compassion, reverence, and modesty; and know shame. This means that because they possess the basis of moral judgment, they can distinguish between right and wrong and it is possible to perfect their human nature.

Sources of Evil

But if this innate goodness of human beings is granted, how is one to account for the presence of evil in the world? According to Mengzi, evil in the world has three sources. First, evil is due to external circumstances. Although people are by nature good, still their nature is distorted by the externals of life. Because competition in society encourages greed and selfishness, society itself is partially responsible for the presence of wrong actions and evil in the world despite the presence of goodness in human nature. Second, evil is due to the abandonment of self: people abandon their innate goodness. Rather than allowing their nature to manifest itself in goodness, they forsake this goodness and become evil. Third, evil is due to a failure to nourish the feelings and the senses. That is, though the intentions are good, one is incapable of doing the right things because of a lack of knowledge with which to make the correct decision.

If one accepts Mengzi's arguments for the innate goodness of human nature and agrees with his explanation of the source of evil in the world, it follows that people should live virtuously, according to *ren*, *yi*, and *li*, because living virtuously develops one's humanity, leading to harmonious social relationships and an orderly society. Furthermore, to regulate one's actions by *yi* and *li* is to live according to the innate goodness that is basic to human nature. In brief, one should practice the Confucian way because it is the way of fulfilling human nature.

Mengzi's Theory of Human Nature

First, Mengzi's theory of human nature led to three important views concerning Heaven, self-cultivation, and sagehood that were to profoundly influence Confucian spirituality for the next twenty-three hundred years. Human nature, which is inherently good, is given by Heaven (Tian). According to Mengzi, Heaven is inherently good, for it is the very source of goodness. Human nature, which is given by Heaven, is also inherently good. As the source of goodness, Heaven is the ultimate judge and sanction of human action and human goodness, making it the ultimate spiritual reality. As such, it grounds Confucian spirituality.

Second, because moral development is seen as the cultivation of the virtues inherent in human nature, learning comes to be seen as a process of self-cultivation that preserves and extends one's inherent good nature and serves Heaven. As the key to one's own moral development and the best way to serve Heaven, learning becomes the fundamental practice of the Confucian way.

Third, because self-cultivation allows one to develop his heart-mind to its fullest capacity and to understand his own nature, it comes to be seen as the way to becoming a sage, the highest spiritual ideal of the Confucian tradition. The ancient sages, such as Yao and Shun, are seen to be no different than any other person, and everyone has the potential to become a Yao or a Shun.

XUNZI

Xunzi was one of China's leading intellectuals in the latter portion of the Warring States period and the creator of a synthesis of ways of thought that was very influential in his time. A hundred years later it provided the basis for Dong Zhongshu's (179?–104 BCE) synthesis that persuaded Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) to adopt Confucianism as the official Chinese ideology and the worship of Confucius as the state cult. Unlike Mengzi, Xunzi was well received in the courts of kings and princes and frequently asked to provide advice on rituals, education, politics, and even military affairs. He wrote many essays on these and other topics, including critiques of all the leading philosophies of the time, which were later gathered together and edited as the multivolume *Book of Xunzi*.¹

Xunzi was also a devoted follower of Confucius, but his views on crucial issues are often diametrically opposed to those of Mengzi. Whereas Mengzi took Heaven to be a spiritual reality that enters into personal relationships with people, Xunzi regarded Heaven as nothing more than nature. Its function is simply that of natural law. There is no personal relationship between Heaven and people. Nature is constant and indifferent to the wishes or actions of human beings. And because the natural and the moral are two unrelated orders that operate independently of each other, Heaven, seen as simply nature, cannot guarantee human goodness.

Human Nature Is Bad

Xunzi's view that human nature is basically bad is diametrically opposed to Mengzi's view that human nature is inherently good. Xunzi argues that human beings not only lack the beginnings of the four virtues claimed by Mengzi, but they actually possess the beginnings of vice in their innate self-interest and in their inherent natural desire for profit and pleasure. Xunzi's theory is that people are born selfish, with desires, some of which are ordinarily unsatisfied. When desires remain unsatisfied, people strive for their satisfaction. And when many persons are selfishly striving for the satisfaction of their conflicting desires without rules or limits, there is contention and strife, which bring about disorder and are harmful to everyone. Xunzi does not claim that humans are essentially evil, but only that, if unchecked, their natural selfishness can lead to evil.

Sources of Goodness

How is it that if human beings are born bad, they can become good, and even, as Xunzi claims, become sages? The answer is that it is through education and participation in social institutions and culture that people become good. It is possible for any person to become a sage, because every person possesses intelligence, and through the employment of intelligence, goodness, including the ultimate goodness of the sage, can be brought about, according to Xunzi. He argues that because of their desire to live better, people use their intelligence to create forms of social organization and culture that regulate human behavior. People cannot provide the goods needed to live, let alone to live well, except through the cooperation of other persons. Nor can people make themselves secure from the various creatures and forces of nature without mutual cooperation.

Since it is clear, for these two reasons, that people require social organization, the question is, How does social organization bring about goodness? Xunzi's answer is that social organization requires rules of conduct, and following these rules brings about goodness. Accordingly, the early kings established rules of conduct (*li*) regulating the activities involved in attempting to satisfy desires, leading to the various rules for social living. They also established a system of laws and punishment (*fa*) to discourage negative and harmful behavior. By this line of reasoning, moral goodness is brought about as a result of the regulation of human conduct required for social living.

Xunzi also argues for the creation of goodness through the use of human intelligence. He observes that it is not the absence of fur or feathers on this two-legged creature that distinguishes humans from other animals; rather, it is their ability to make distinctions. Human intelligence is displayed in the making of social distinctions. Since it is the making of social distinctions and the resulting social relationships regulated by *li* that distinguish human beings from the birds and the beasts, people ought to act according to *li* in order to overcome their evil inclinations and acquire virtue.

Both lines of argument given by Xunzi emphasize that goodness is created by the employment of intelligence in the making of distinctions in the social sphere and through creating the rules required to ensure cooperation for the common good. Unlike Mengzi, who stressed the importance of developing the beginnings of goodness already present in human beings, Xunzi stressed the importance of overcoming the inborn human tendencies to evil through processes of education and socialization that would give people a virtuous nature. Xunzi differs from both Confucius and Mengzi in distinguishing between goodness and intelligence and in stressing the actual evil present in nature. Furthermore, whereas Confucius saw *ren* as primary and Mengzi saw *yi* as primary, Xunzi put primary emphasis on *li*. But all three agreed that cultivation of moral virtue was the key to individual and social well-being.

Through their attempts to support the social philosophy of Confucius by answering the questions, Why regulate life by *li*? and Why develop *ren* by practicing *yi*? Xunzi and Mengzi strengthened the Confucian philosophy considerably. What happened historically was that neither of these philosophers was rejected in favor of the other. Rather, both the idealism of Mengzi and the realism of Xunzi were added to the philosophy of Confucius, thus rounding out Confucianism. From Mengzi was taken the emphasis on developing the goodness inherent in human nature and the emphasis on ensuring the correctness of action as a means to the development of humanity. From Xunzi was taken the emphasis on following rules of behavior for developing human nature and the use of laws and punishments for discouraging bad behavior. By adopting both views, Confucianism endorsed respect both for internal sanctions, using the internal feelings as guides to behavior, and for external sanctions, using social rules as guides to behavior. This is roughly equivalent to employing both the internal criterion of conscience and

the external criterion of law to determine how one should live. Of course, conscience tended to have priority in the Confucian way because only those social rules that conformed to *ren* were part of the moral way.

DONG ZHONGSHU AND A NEW FORM OF CONFUCIANISM

Despite the genius of Confucians like Mengzi and Xunzi, the brutal power politics that characterized the end of the Warring States period provided no opportunities for Confucianism to become part of governmental policies. During the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE), Confucianism was ridiculed and scorned, most Confucian books were burned, and many Confucian scholars killed. Yet during the next dynasty, the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), Confucianism came to be adopted as the state orthodoxy and the Confucian classics enshrined as the basis of the imperial university where they were to remain as the basis of all education for more than two thousand years. How did this remarkable change occur?

The short answer is that Confucianism adapted itself to the needs and opportunities of the day. In part shocked by its near demise at the hand of the Qin and in part buoyed by the prospects of greater inclusion in the new Han Dynasty, Confucians hastened to adapt their teachings to satisfy the spiritual, political, and cultural needs of their society. In doing this, they had to broaden and enrich Confucianism so that it could prevail over the competing philosophies of Legalism, Mohism, Daoism, and Yin-Yang cosmology that were strongly established in government and in society.

The Qin had adopted Legalism and through its policy of strict laws and harsh punishments for any and all infractions had managed to hold the empire together for fifteen years. Following the death of the first emperor in 210 BCE, however, the people rebelled against their brutal treatment, harsh conditions, and the government's disregard for the sanctity of the family and the dignity of human life, overthrowing the dynasty in 206 BCE. Confucians lost no time in trying to convince the new Han rulers that while Legalism might prove successful in times of war and conquest, it could not succeed as a basis for government in times of peace, as proved by swift collapse of the Qin. They warned the new Han rulers that unless they adopted a different philosophy of government, they would suffer the same fate as the Qin, a warning the new rulers took seriously.

In rejecting Legalism, however, the new Han rulers initially went to the opposite extreme, adopting the philosophies of Huang and Laozi that advocated minimal government and maximum freedom of the individual. In this environment, various occult practices rooted in the Yinyang School and theories of the Five Agencies flourished, and Daoism and Mohism both gained strength. The Confucians argued against the policies of minimal government and maximum freedoms, claiming that it could not provide a basis for administering a large empire and ensuring social order. These policies, they claimed, would lead to increasing anarchy, disorder, and eventual collapse of the government. But it was also necessary to convince the rulers that the Confucian way could provide both a basis for government and attractive ways of life for the people.

Leading Confucian thinkers recognized that to take advantage of this opportunity to possibly become government policy, Confucianism would need to adopt and integrate the best ideas of the other traditions. In a spirit of inclusive synthesis, Confucianism adopted various aspects of Legalism, Taoism, Mohism, Yinyang thinking, and even aspects of shamanistic practices popular with the many superstitious people at this time. To Dong Zhongshu (179?–104 BCE), probably the leading Confucian of his time, as well as to other leading Confucians, it seemed that Confucianism was now broad and robust enough to meet all of the important needs of society and government. It was no longer viewed by the court as a narrow, elitist moral teaching. Instead, it was now seen as a universal moral way capable of ordering the whole society, harmonizing it

with both Heaven and nature. It was able to show how imperial politics were grounded in the workings of the cosmos itself and to show how moral actions could improve the lot of the people. It was, in short, a complete philosophy of life and society, the central principles of which were self-cultivation and moral development.

It was with this confidence in Confucianism that Dong responded to the young Emperor Wu's request for recommendations on how to reform the government and establish a firm basis on which to unify governmental policies and regulations. In his memorials to Emperor Wu, Dong recommended the establishment of a Grand Academy (*taixue*) to ensure high levels of education throughout the empire, ensuring well-educated officials to administer the government at all levels. The basis of this education was to be the five Confucian classics. He also urged that all officials be selected on the basis of their virtue and their learning. Because government officials are the models for the people, it is important that they, and the emperor himself, manifest the highest virtue.

Although Dong considered the emperor to be the absolute authority in administering the empire, he emphasized that ultimately his authority came from Heaven and that he must submit to the will of Heaven, serving heaven as every son serves his father. Furthermore, this submission and service to Heaven must be manifest in his practice of the Confucian virtues. Thus, although the emperor has absolute authority, this authority is subject to both moral restraints and the will of Heaven.

Like Xunzi, Dong places primary emphasis on education and thinks that the emperor's first duty is to ensure the education of the people. The state will prosper and flourish only when the people are virtuous, and the people will become virtuous only when they are educated. Like all Confucians, Dong sees moral learning, the learning to become fully a person through the development of virtue, as the heart of education and the study of the classics as crucial to the success of education.

According to Dong, human nature is neither innately good nor innately evil. Rather, humans have selfish feelings, which manifest as greed and envy, leading to evil, and also feelings of kindness and compassion, which manifest as virtue, leading to goodness. Through education human goodness can be nourished and developed and through regulated behavior (*li*) and laws (*fa*) the desires and feelings that lead to evil controlled. Thus, laws and regulations as well as education are crucial to social order and harmony. This is why Dong insisted that the emperor and his officials must not only ensure the education of the people but that they themselves must uphold the law.

Dong's Advice to Emperor Wu

Dong advised Emperor Wu that a real ruler sincerely listens to Heaven and follows its decree. Furthermore, a real ruler educates the people to complete their nature and he upholds the law to maintain the social order and control desires. Dong concluded that if the ruler carries out these measures, he will have a solid foundation for his empire.

Emperor Wu was so impressed with Dong's Confucianism that he ordered it adopted as state orthodoxy, making it the official ideology of China. As such it became the foundation of all education and, eventually, the basis for the exams for entry into the Civil Service that were instituted to administer the empire. Although, as a living tradition, it was to continue to develop and change over time, it was this very Confucian tradition that would be the basis of Chinese culture for the next two millennia.

Review Questions

1. How does Mengzi argue for his view that human beings are inherently good? How does he account for evil?
2. Why does Xunzi think that human beings are inclined to evil? How, according to him, does goodness come about?
3. What are the main similarities and differences between Mengzi and Xunzi?
4. In what ways did Mengzi and Xunzi advance Confucian thought?
5. What were the main modifications that Dong Zhongshu introduced into Confucianism?

Further Reading

- Early Confucian Ethics*, by Kim-chong Chong (Chicago, IL: Open Court Press, 2007), examines the strengths, weaknesses, differences, and similarities of Mengzi's and Xunzi's theories of what it means to be human and shows how their views are related to Confucius's ethical system.
- Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vols. 1–3, by John Knoblock (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988–1994), is the most thorough study of Xunzi.
- Mencius*, by D.C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), is a clear and readable translation and study of Mengzi.
- Hsün-tzu: Basic Writings*, by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), is a reliable partial translation of Xunzi.
- Human Nature, Ritual and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy*, by Antonio Cua (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), is a careful study of Xunzi's ethics in its historical context. In his contrast of Mengzi's and Xunzi's views of human nature, he argues that Xunzi does not claim that humans are essentially evil, but only that, if unchecked, their natural selfishness can lead to evil.
- Centrality and Commonality*, by Wei-ming Tu (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), is the single best study of the *Zhongyong*. Not only is Tu's interpretation brilliant, but it is presented so clearly that it is accessible to most readers.
- Mengzi and Early Chinese Thought*, by Kwong-loi Shun (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), presents Mengzi's thought in its philosophical and cultural context.
- Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, by Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), is an excellent introduction to six major Confucian thinkers: Confucius, Mengzi, Xunzi, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Dai Zhen.



Daoism: The Daodejing

Daoism, like Confucianism, seeks a way of living well by realizing the harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity and by realizing peace and harmony within society and within the individual person. But Daoism finds this way for living well in doing what is natural, rather than in adhering to the conventions of society. Consequently, instead of emphasizing the cultivation of virtue and the development of human relationships as Confucianism does, Daoism emphasizes the spontaneous ease of living attained by acting in accord with the natural way of things.

The story of Daoism can be told in two installments. The first part of the story deals with the philosophy developed in the classical work known as *The Treatise on the Way and Its Power* (*Daodejing*). This is traditionally regarded as the philosophy of Laozi, although it is probably a composite work reflecting the views of a number of authors and editors. The second part of the story, which will be examined in the next chapter, is concerned with the vision of Zhuangzi, who drew out the epistemological and metaphysical implications of Daoism.

LAOZI

According to Chinese tradition, Laozi, a slightly older contemporary of Confucius, lived during the sixth century BCE and was the founder of Daoism. Some modern scholars, however, think that Laozi is entirely legendary. At best, they argue, the legendary Laozi is a composite of several historical persons whose lives spanned several centuries. The name “Laozi” means “Old (lao) Master (zi),” and the tradition recognized this ancient sage as the author of a short book, which came to be called the *Laozi*. Although he may actually be only a legendary figure, we will follow the tradition in referring to him as an historical person, Laozi.

When the *Laozi* came to be recognized as a canonical text, one of the “classics,” it was re-named the *Daodejing*, usually translated as the “Classic of the Way and its Virtue.” Its influence on East Asian culture has been profound and pervasive, in part because it is the source of both a school of philosophy (*daojia*) and a religious tradition (*daojiao*). More than seven hundred commentaries have been written on it over the past two thousand years. From the third to the sixth century CE, the *Laozi* inspired an intellectual movement, “Learning the Mysterious (Dao),” that dominated the Chinese elite or high culture. As a result of its cultural importance, the *Laozi*