

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF MÊNG TZŪ

BY ARDELIA RIPLEY HALL

IN Mêng Tzŭ's¹ time, 371-288 B.C., China was divided into warring feudal states. The strife and tyranny of the petty kings brought confusion and misery to the people. Mêng Tzŭ was one of the *Ju* or *Literati*, who were scholars and royal counselors. This group had long supported a humanistic tradition, as defenders of the people, which was consummated in the philosophy of K'ung Tsŭ² and Mêng Tzŭ, his follower. The *Ju*, who have come to be regarded as the sages of China, had developed an intellectual and philosophic approach to their national problems. It is illuminating to compare this attitude with that of the Hebrew prophets, that being religious and emotional. Both faced national dangers when a state was courting disaster, but for the Hebrews there was grave extremity of annihilation, while for the Chinese the issue was long standing and less crucial.

Such a comparison with contemporary thought in other parts of the world makes the philosophy of Mêng Tzŭ seem all the more remarkable. Based upon the analysis of man's intellectual and moral nature—upon an approach that was psychological—his work is essentially realistic. It is also a rationalization on the basis of human factors of many principles which had been advanced earlier on religious grounds. In this sense Mêng Tzŭ rises above even his contemporaries in China. To understand his achievement and to appraise it fairly, one must recognize his heritage, the pattern of society in which he lived, and the exigencies of his time.

He defended the traditional organization of Chinese society and government, which was monarchial and paternalistic. He was a revolutionist only in so far as he recognized the ancient privilege of the Chinese people to drive an evil sovereign from power. Within the outlines of the existing social pattern, he attempted to instil and sustain a sense of social justice, a social consciousness in the ruling class. He attempted to bring home to them the reality of man's high-

¹The Latinization of Mêng Tzŭ is Mencius.

²The Latinization of K'ung Tzŭ is Confucius.

est nature, its potentialities, and its universality. He sought reform through the individual, reform that was moral and in turn social.

He constructed his philosophy upon an analysis of human endowments and human relations. This psychological groundwork was in the nature of generalized conclusions in a large-scale view of human behavior (contrasting with the detailed, almost microscopic, analysis of the individual in modern psychology). He had the discernment of a great poet. As the counselor of kings, he was a personage of high position, a man of wide experience and sophistication. His conversations display an assurance and fearlessness, as well as brilliant and rapier-like wit. With much humor he uses homely and simple parallels to drive home his arguments or to sharpen his criticism. Throughout the seven books, his dialogues are jumbled together in a haphazard way and his arguments are scattered; by re-assembling them the continuity of his ideas is clear. While he did not create a philosophical system, his teachings are integrated and coherent, forming a harmonious whole.

Mêng Tzū clearly states his empirical source of knowledge in the following terms, "All who speak about nature (*hsing*) (human nature is included) have in fact only their phenomena to reason from, and the value of a phenomenon is in its being natural" (IV B XXVI³). He goes on to explain the need for willingness to follow the evidence wherever it may lead without force or manipulation of facts, with the figure of how without effort Yu led off the waters: "If your wise men would also do that which gave them no trouble their knowledge would also be great. There is heaven so high; there are stars so distant. If we investigate their phenomena, we may, while sitting in our places, go back to the solstice of a thousand years ago" (IV B XXVI). The Emperor Shun had achieved his wisdom because he "clearly understood the multitude of things, and closely observed the relations of humanity" (IV B XIX 2). In giving advice to a pupil Mêng Tzū says, "The way of truth is like a great road. It is not difficult to know. The evil is only that men will not seek it. Do you go home and seek it and you will have an

³Cf. Mêng Tzū, Book IV, part B, chapter XXVI, verse 1. The philosophy of Mêng Tzū is contained in a work of seven short books; each book is divided into two parts (A and B, or I and II), and subdivided into chapters and verses. An English translation was made by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. II: *The Work of Mencius* in 1861, and reprinted under the title, *The Life and Works of Mencius*, in 1875. Throughout the references are written without the words, book, part, chapter, and verse as IV B XXVI 1.

abundance of teachers" (VI B II 7). Without mysticism or supernaturalism, Mêng Tzū approaches the scientific attitude.

His dialogues not only give evidence of his close observation but also display his insight into human nature and in the analysis of human motives. As when King Hsüan of Ch'i asks Mêng Tzū if such a king as he has the capacity to love and protect his people, Mêng Tzū in reply relates the incident of the time when a bull was being led across the lower court to a sacrifice for the consecration of a bell, King Hsüan in the hall above was so troubled by the frightened appearance of the animal "like an innocent man being lead to the place of death" that he ordered the bull released. As the consecration could not be neglected, he had a sheep substituted. For this he was criticized as niggardly. Mêng Tzū, however, tells him simply that it was because he had seen the bull but not the sheep. He brings home to the king that he thus has sympathy enough to reach even an animal how much more readily he should feel compassion for his subjects. King Hsüan acknowledges the truth of what Mêng Tzū has said. He recognizes the insight of Mêng Tzū by quoting a couplet from an ode, "What other men have in their minds, Can be measured by reflection" (I A VII). This understanding of human nature, Mêng Tzū himself describes even more explicitly when he says, he understands words, "When speeches are one-sided, I know how (the mind of the speaker) is clouded over; when they are extravagant, I know wherein (the mind) is ensnared; when they are all depraved, I know how (the mind) is departed (from principle); when they are evasive, I know how (the mind) is at (its wit's) end" (II A II 17).

The nature (*hsing*) of man reposes in the mind. In Chinese the seat of the mind was believed to be the heart (*hsin*). Like taste to the mouth, sound to the ears, sight to the eyes, is apprehension to the mind. "Hearing and seeing are obscured by external things, they do not think. To the mind belongs the function of thinking. By thinking it gets (the right attitude), by not thinking it fails to do this" (VI A XV). (It seems probable that the nature of thought was limited to moral perception.) Through our senses we all recognize agreeable flavors, enjoyable sounds, and beauty, and in the same way through intellectual perception we recognize that which we may approve, that which we may "hold to be right." Those things of which our mind approves are the principles of right (*li* and *i*)

(VI A VII 8). "*Li* and *i* are as agreeable to the mind as vegetables and meat are to the mouth." In the *Shu Ch'ing* (James Legge, *Chinese Classics*, Vol. III, pp. 326, 327) the same association between sense perception and mental perception, is found. This book of the *Shu Ch'ing*, the *Hung Fan*, is however, not generally recognized as among the genuine portions of the Book of History. Its classified ideology was probably a later systemization. Five elements of nature, eight objects of government, and various other numerical groups are listed, among which are the "five businesses." "The first is called demeanor; the second, speech; the third, seeing; the fourth, hearing; and the fifth, thinking." And the virtue of thinking is called "perspicaciousness" (*jui*). From *jui* are derived those qualities which make a sage, that is, sagemess (*sheng*).

Another reference to these ideas occurs in the *Tso Chuan*. It is probable that they were current even before Mêng Tzû's time. "He whose ear does not hear the harmony of the five sounds is deaf; he whose eye does not distinguish the beauty of the five colors is blind; he whose mind does not accord with the rules of virtue and righteousness is wayward; he whose mouth does not speak the words of loyalty and faith is a stupid chatterer" (James Legge, *Chinese Classics*, Vol. V, p. 192).

The activity of the mind ("the movements of one's nature"—thinking) was regarded as the universal endowment of mankind, just as seeing. The senses and the mind were bestowed by Heaven on all men, and because of this, men are the same in kind. The uniformity of men was within a defined range. "If a man were to make hempen sandals without knowing the size of a man's foot, he will not make them like baskets" (VI A VII). "Thus all things which are the same in kind are like to one another; why should we doubt in regard to man, as if we were the solitary exception to this? The sage and we are the same in kind" (VI A VII 3).

All men have the feelings of pity and sympathy, deference, shame, and hate, and approving and disapproving. From these feelings, from the "pity sympathy of mind," "deference of mind", and so forth, arise the qualities of loving kindness (*jen*) from the first, good form (*li*) from the second, the sense of right (*i*) from the third, and knowledge or wisdom (*chih*) from the fourth. These qualities are not acquired from without, "not from without melted into us," but we contain them within ourselves (VI A VI 7). "We

may thus see that to every faculty and relationship there must belong its law, and that since the people possess this normal nature, they therefore must love its normal virtue" (VI A VI 8). This passage Mêng Tzŭ quotes from K'ung Tzŭ. While Mêng Tzŭ accepted the psychological theories of his day, and followed the teachings of K'ung Tzŭ, his work is distinguished for a closer analysis and differentiation of moral perceptions.

Of the four virtues, *jen*, *li*, *i*, and *chih*: *jen* and *i* with sincerity (*hsin*) and true-heartedness (*chung*), Mêng Tzŭ lists as constituting the nobleness of heaven (VI A VII). He regarded kindness (*jen*) and right (*i*) as most important. Sincerity will be seen later to be of particular importance in Mêng Tzŭ's theory of the development of character, yet it is seldom mentioned by name. It is later to be found as one of the five cardinal virtues of Confucianism in the Doctrine of the Mean.

Jen may only with difficulty be translated. It is an attitude of mind—goodwill embodying love, the "charity" of Corinthians, human kindness and sympathy—this Legge calls benevolence, in its derived meaning of *bene*—well and *volo*—wish. However, the breadth of meaning is found in Couvreur's translation of the Chinese Classics into Latin where *jen* is rendered *humanitas*. A disciple asked K'ung Tzŭ about *jen*. "He answered, 'It is to love (all) men.'" *Jen* is a dynamic force which engenders *i*. It so permeates the philosophy of Mêng Tzŭ that his Sayings might be called the doctrine of *jen*, of human kindness. The ideal man is a man of *jen*, the ideal ruler is a benevolent king, the ideal government is a humanitarian government. "*Jen* is man's mind (*hsin*), *i* his path (*tao*)" (VI A XI). "*Jen* is the tranquil habitation of man and *i* his path" (IV A X 2). "*Jen* (benevolence) is the distinguishing characteristic of man; as embodied in man's conduct it is called the path (*tao*)" (VII B XVI). "Do you doubt my words? The path (*tao*) is one and only one." (III A L 3).

Because *jen* and *i* are innate in the mind of man this constitutes its "proper goodness" (VI A VIII 2). This goodness is as natural to the human mind as the forest was to the Niu Mountain (VI A VIII). He regarded the heroic emperors Yao and Shun as the traditional examples of royal virtue. "Mêng Tzŭ discoursed how the nature of man is good, and when speaking always made laudatory references to Yao and Shun" (III A I 2). He qualifies his

conviction in the following way. "From the feelings proper to it, it (nature) is constituted for the practise of what is good. This is what I mean by saying that nature (*hsing*) is good" (VI A VI 5). And again, "The (tendency of) man's nature to goodness is like the (tendency of) water to flow downwards. There are none but have (this tendency to) goodness, (just as) water flows downwards" (VI A II 2).

A capacity for goodness is like the capacity for growth. Mêng Tzū compares the development of our talents with the growth of barley (VI A VII 2), the difference in growth being dependent on whether the soil is rich or infertile, upon the amount of rain and upon cultivation. He uses this same comparison when he describes an unwise king, "Suppose the case the most easily growing thing in the world, but give it one day's warmth and ten day's cold and it will not grow. It is but seldom that I have an audience of the king, and when I retire, there come all those who act on him like the cold. Though I succeed in bringing out some buds of goodness, of what avail is it?" (VI A IX).

This difference in the development of character makes for the differences in men. "So the sages among mankind are also the same in kind. But they stand out from their fellows and rise above the level" (II A II 28). "He who nourishes the small is small; he who nourishes the great is great" (VI A XIV 2). "Those who follow the part of themselves which is great are great men. Those who follow the part of themselves which is small are little men" (VI A XV). "Take stand in one's greatness then smallness cannot take it away. This makes a great man and just that" (VI A XV 2).

Mêng Tzū with all the force of his belief that "If men do what is not good, the guilt is not to be imputed to their natural powers" (VI A VI 6), however, is not blind to the evil in men or the evils of his day. Nor was he optimistic. He says, "That whereby man differs from animals is but small. The mass of men cast it away, while superior men preserve it" (IV B XIX). Again and again he links the degradation of the people with poverty and deprivation. "In the good years the children of the people are most of them good and in the bad years they are most of them evil. It is not owing to their natural endowments conferred by Heaven, that they are thus different. It is owing to circumstances. . . ."

One can safeguard the native endowment through the preservation of those inborn tendencies toward good: "Hold fast and it re-

mains with you. Let go and you lose it. Its outgoing and incoming are not dependent on time or place" (VI A VIII 4). In cherishing the natural goodness, this is to "preserve one's mind," to "maintain a fixed heart" or mind strong to hold to what is good. The small man (*hsiao jen*) is one who has lost his original nature, "How lamentable is it to neglect this path (of righteousness—*i*) and not pursue it, to lose this mind (of benevolence—*jen*) and not know how to seek it (again)" (VI A XI 2). It is the man of intelligence and education who has these qualities fixed within him. "They are not men of talents and virtue only who have this mental nature. All men have it—what belongs to such men is simply that they are not able to lose it" (VI A X 5). And again he says "They are only men of education, who, without a certain livelihood, are able to maintain a fixed heart" (I B VII 20).

Education is the strengthening of the natural mind, the regaining of their native heritage by those who have lost it. The emphasis is on the development of character as the goal of education. It is the superior man who is the leader, the guide for those who are of lesser talent, and upon this principle depends the aristocracy of teachers in China (I B III 7). "Those with ability train up those who have it not" (IV B VII). "The object of learning is nothing else but to seek for the lost mind" (VI A XI 4). It is the nourishment of one's nature (*hsing*) (VI A VIII 3).

With the preservation of the mind, and the nourishment of one's nature, a firm will should be maintained for the protection and control of *ch'i*. *Ch'i* which is given such importance by Mêng Tzŭ can only with great difficulty be interpreted. It is translated "*passion-nature*" by Legge. Its obscurity is perhaps due to the fact that even Mêng Tzŭ himself found difficulty in describing it, and the Chinese commentators have much that is vague to say. However, several clues to the meaning of *ch'i* may be traced: it pervades and animates the body, it is controlled by the will, it is nourished by righteousness and reason, it is necessary to a perfect and balanced individual, without it man's nature is starved. Mêng Tzŭ says "I understand words (as they reveal to him the mind and nature of the speaker, (see above p. 18), I am skillful in nourishing my vast, flowing passion-nature—*ch'i*. . . . Being nourished by rectitude. . . . it fills all between heaven and earth" (II A II 12, 13). The present meaning of *ch'i* is literally breath or air, which takes the abstract

meaning of a vital substance—like the air we breathe out rather than in, on which life was believed to depend—an emanation, a force given off, an influence, this abstract meaning in turn was specialized in the sense of feelings or emotions. It would appear that here the meaning of *ch'i* is limited to that emotional force which may be nourished by rectitude or righteousness: that wide human sympathy which grows from a full understanding of men and is dependent upon justice and right. In the Chinese figure, as something breathed out, given off, it is thus an out-flowing compassion filling all space, an all-encompassing sympathy.

That such feeling must be translated into action, and how it should be done is well put by Mêng Tzū in his conversation with King Hsüan. The king had asked how he should attain royal sway, and Mêng Tzū again turns the discussion to the responsibility of a ruler to protect his subjects by describing the man who had the strength to lift three thousand catties and yet he could not lift a feather, and another whose eyes could see a hair (on a leaf) but not a wagon-load of faggots, saying "The truth is the feathers were not lifted because strength was not used; the wagon-load was not seen because the eyesight was not used; and the people's not being loved and protected is because kindness is not used. . . . It is because you do not do it, and not because you are not able to do it" (I A VII 10).

Individual responsibility and effort are emphasized again and again throughout Mêng Tzū's discussions. The development of a man depends upon himself alone and there is no limit set to his attainment. "All men may be Yao and Shun" (VI B II). The importance of this idea of the unlimited potentiality of the individual like the American ideal that "All men are created equal" is far reaching in any social philosophy. A young prince sought the advice of Mêng Tzū on the death of his parents. Like the King Hsüan he hesitated before the responsibilities facing him. Mêng Tzū replied, ". . . he may not seek a remedy in others but only in himself" (III A II). It is in sincerity to oneself (IV A XII) and responsibility to oneself (IV A XIX) that one achieves one's highest destiny (VI A I 3). If a superior man does not influence men for good he should look to himself for the reason (IV B XXVIII, IV A X 1). "The principle which the superior man holds is that of personal cultivation and the empire is thereby tranquillized" (VII B XXXII). Thus by extension through the development of the individual (and particularly a ruler), a whole kingdom may be controlled.

This brings us to one of the most fundamental and far-reaching principles of Mêng Tzŭ's philosophy: the power of influence. K'ung Tzŭ had already described it in a beautiful figure of the wind blowing and bending the grass. The noble man or ruler exerts an influence which will likewise sway the lowly to goodness (*Lun Yü*, XII, XIX, James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I). "What the superior loves, his inferiors will be found to love exceedingly" (III A II 4). In the sages, in the great rulers, in the princely men (*chün jen*) models of human conduct are to be found. "By the sages, human relations are perfectly exhibited" (IV A II 1). There has never been one possessed of complete sincerity who did not move others" (IV A XII 3). The power for good lies particularly in the hands of the king. As the father of his people he exerts an influence over all his kingdom. "If a prince, is benevolent, all is benevolent" (IV A XX, IV A V). "A benevolent ruler will establish a benevolent government" (I A VII, I B XII 3). "Let a prince by his excellence seek to nourish men and he will be able to subdue the whole empire" (IV B XVI).

A belief in the all sufficiency of good—*shan*—underlies the whole of Mêng Tzŭ's philosophy. When a disciple, Yo Ching, was appointed to the administration of the government of Lu, another follower asked if he were a man of vigor? Mêng Tzŭ answered, "no." If he were wise in council and possessed much information? And again he answered no. "He is a man who loves what is good. If that love of what is good is more than sufficient qualification for the government of the empire, how much more is it so for the State of Lu" (VI B XIII).

Mêng Tzŭ has set forth on the basis of psychological observation the following argument. The nature of man is in the mind. The mind has the sense of pity, respect, shame, and judgment; as well as sincerity and loyalty; from these feelings it is equipped to practise what is good. The mind (and body) is animated by *ch'i*, and controlled by the will. These faculties may be undeveloped, thwarted, or lost, depending upon the individual. For the mass of people, the loss may be brought about through the disintegration of society, the result of crushing burdens of taxation, of wars, and of famines. These faculties may be increased by education, individual effort, economic security, and the influence of the ruler. All these principles Mêng Tzŭ held with unassailable sincerity. He has said, "If a scholar have not faith, how shall he take a firm hold?" (VI B XII).

Upon these theories and arguments rests his social philosophy. They lead directly to his recommendations toward a government conducted in the interests of the people (I A V). These include the same fundamental issues of political science and economics that are met with today. The ruler should be noble and benevolent. There should be able officials of the highest training (III A IV 6; II A V; I B IX). Upon peace and stability the welfare of a country rests (III A III 3). There should be no aggressive wars (I B XIII). Taxes should be no higher than the ability of the people to pay (III A III 4). Trade also should be regulated (II A V 2). No customs should be charged at the frontiers (II A V 3). Agriculture should be developed (I A III; I A V). Punishments and fines should be less severe (I B V; I B VII 20). The young and old, and the destitute should be cared for. Piety, respect, sincerity, and honesty among the people should be cultivated.