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Human nature and governance: soulcraft and statecraft in eleventh century China

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Citation

Qiao, J. (2021, September 2). *Human nature and governance: soulcraft and statecraft in eleventh century China*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3209222>

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Issue Date: 2021-09-02

Chapter 4
Human Nature and the Limits of Government
-- Su Shi's Critique of Wang Anshi's Intellectual Source Mencius

In this chapter, I hope to enrich our understanding of the discussions in the preceding three chapters by presenting the discovery of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) on the nature of Wang Anshi's statecraft. At the end of chapter 3 section I, we have seen that Cheng Yi had grasped Wang's statecraft as a kind of soulcraft. Here we shall see that Su, usually taken as a literary genius, also figured this out in his political theory project, undertaken in the form of classical commentary, that was designed to oppose Wang Anshi's statecraft and completed around the turn of the twelfth century.

Using a set of eight entries from one of this project's output – *Explicating the Analects* (Lunyu *shuo* 論語說) – where Su took issue with Mencius, this chapter also seeks to address anew the relationship between Wang Anshi and Mencius, who was singled out as Wang's most important intellectual source in his biography that we read in chapter 1. This relationship had been widely noticed since the 1060s, resulting in numerous discussions from many perspectives among present-day scholars.¹ Recently, Li Huarui argued that “the nucleus of Mencius' political theory” was realized by Wang Anshi through the reform.² In chapter 2, I have begun presenting an alternative explanation, revealing how Mencius' insight into human nature provided the key theoretical premise for Wang's soulcraft. Here I would like to supplement that with the deep connections between the two that Su Shi identified. In what follows, I first give a brief account of the background of this project of Su Shi's and then discuss these eight connections he identified therein one by one.

I. Su Shi's Classical Commentary Project

While Su Shi had been criticizing the reform Wang Anshi designed since the late 1060s,³ it was only in this classical commentary project that he engaged it systematically at a high level of

¹ See, for example, Yang Zhijiu, “Wang Anshi yu Mengzi”; Wang Zengyu, “Mengzi zai Songdai yasheng diwei zhi quding jiqi yingxiang.”

² Li Huarui, “Northern Song Reformist Thought and Its Sources,” 225, 229.

³ Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, chapter 2.

abstraction. The project began in 1080,⁴ shortly after Su arrived at his first exile place Huangzhou 黃州 (in today's Hubei Province) following his release from prison. By 1081/4, Su Shi had finished a first edition of two of his three planned books – *Explicating the Analects*, *Commentary on the Classic of Change*, and *Commentary on the Book of Documents*.⁵ He did start working on the last one,⁶ but did not finish it.⁷ It was in late 1097, during his third exile to Danzhou (on today's Hainan Island),⁸ that he picked this project up again.⁹

In a poem written in the process of turning to it, Su stated his authorial intention as follows:

申韓本自聖	Shen Buhai's and Han Fei's [learnings] originated from the sage ¹⁰ ;
陋古不復稽	Slighting antiquity, they did not study it any more.
巨君縱獨欲	Jujun ¹¹ indulged in his autocratic desires,
借經作巖崖	Borrowing the classics as precipitous cliffs.
遂令青衿子	Thus those young students were made
珠璧人人懷	To each and every yearn for pearls and jades. ¹²
鑿齒井蛙耳	Xi Zaochi, ¹³ a frog at the bottom of a well only,

⁴ Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*,” 282.

⁵ Su Shi, “Yu Teng Dadao,” no. 21, in *Su Shi wenji*, 51.1482, and “Huangzhou shang Wen Lu Gong shu,” in *ibid.*, 48.1380. Wu Xuetao (*Su wen xinian kaolie*, 135) and Kong Fanli (*Su Shi nianpu*, 504–06) both date Su's cover letter to Wen to 1081/4 based on convincing arguments. Shu Dagang dates it to 1082 without explaining his grounds (“Su Shi Lunyu shuo liuchuan cunyi kao,” 123).

⁶ Su Shi, “Yu Wang Dingguo shu,” no. 11, in *Su Shi wenji*, 52.1519. Dated to the autumn of 1081.

⁷ For reasons unclear. His brother told us this book Su Shi finally wrote when living south of the sea (Su Zhe, *Luancheng ji*, houji, 22.1422).

⁸ There are no textual grounds supporting Shu Dagang's statement that Su Shi worked on this project when in Huizhou (“Fu shi san shu, ji jue cisheng bu xu guo,” 500). Rather, Su's writings during that period tell that he still placed his hopes on the political tide turning favorably towards him, even though he seemed to have settled down there with the building of a new residence. See, for example, Su Shi, “You ciyun er shou tong fang xinju,” in *Su Shi shiji*, 40.2221: “也知卜筑非真宅。”

⁹ Su arrived at his exile place in Danzhou on 1097/7/2 (Kong Fanli, *Su Shi nianpu*, 1273). In 1097/12, he was still putting together he-Tao poems (*Su Shi shiji*, 35.1882). Given these, the starting time of Su's focused work on the project was likely 1098. It is not impossible though, that he began turning his attention to it and did some preparatory work (like borrowing books, discussed below) in late 1097.

¹⁰ Confucius.

¹¹ Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE – 23AD).

¹² The source seems Cao Zhi's “Yu Yang Zude shu”: “當此之時，人人自謂握靈蛇之珠，家家自謂抱荆山之玉” (Yan Kejun ed., *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, 428). Su was using pearls and jades to refer to aiming for the abstract *dao* in learning, as he wrote in “Ri yu” 日喻 (The Sun as Analogy [for Learning]): “今者以經術取士，士求道而不務學” (*Su Shi wenji*, 64.1981). Su thought learning can lead one to *dao*, but *dao* itself cannot be sought as a goal (“道可致而不可求”, in *ibid.*).

¹³ Xi was a man active in the latter half of the fourth century. See his biography in Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, 82.2152–58, where it was actually the monk Dao'an 釋道安 who made such a boast.

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信謂天可彌 Casually said Heaven could be patched up.
大道久分裂 The great *dao* has long been divided;
破碎日愈離 Broken into pieces, it drifts away more and more daily.
我如終不言 Were I in the end not to speak,
誰悟角與羈 Who will make the young understand?
吾琴豈得已 My zither – how can it be put to rest?
昭氏有成虧 To Mr. Zhao, there exist completeness and incompleteness.¹⁴

Shen Buhai¹⁵ and Han Fei, two statist political theorists whose statecrafts Sima Qian thought originated from Laozi's idea of *daode*, disrespected tradition in a break from Confucius – apparently innuendos for Wang Anshi. The autocratic Wang Mang was probably alluding to Shenzong, who commissioned Wang Anshi to create a new curriculum with three Confucian classics, to have students learn to acquire the statist morality Wang designed.¹⁶ After some three decades since the official launch of the reform, it was no easy job to restore the *dao* that had been broken into pieces to its original completeness and get it back in line with Confucius' teaching. It needed someone who is broadly learned to make a serious effort at it. This left Su Shi no choice but to take it on himself, so that the new generations would have a chance to understand the situation.

The last two lines revealed Su's deep commitment in this project. In "On Equalizing Things" 齊物論, Zhuangzi ranked three levels of knowing: the utmost being before anything exists; next being before things get separated from each other; further next being before the separated things get differentiated into right and wrong. As for the rationale for this ranking, Zhuangzi explained:

The manifesting of right and wrong is that by which the *dao* becomes incomplete. That by which the *dao* becomes incomplete is that by which love¹⁷ gets complete. Do there indeed exist completeness and incompleteness? Do there indeed not exist completeness and incompleteness?

¹⁴ Su Shi, *Ying Song Dongpo Xiansheng he Tao Yuanming shi*, 3.14a-14b.

¹⁵ The minister hired by the ambitious Duke Zhao of Han 韓昭侯 (?-333 BCE) to carry out a systematic reform to strengthen the state. On him, see Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*.

¹⁶ There was even a shared classic – the *Zhouli*. On Wang Mang's use of it for programmatic policy-making, see Puett, "Centering the Realm."

¹⁷ By which Zhuangzi seems to mean preference.

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There existing completeness and incompleteness, thus Mr. Zhao plays the zither; there not existing completeness and incompleteness, thus Mr. Zhao does not play the zither.

是非之彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成。果且有成與虧乎？果且無成與虧乎？有成與虧，故昭氏之鼓琴也；無成與虧，故昭氏之不鼓琴也。¹⁸

Zhao Wen 昭文 (Manifesting Culture) is good at playing zither. Although he plays beautifully, he cannot command all the notes. Therefore, so long as he plays, the incompleteness of his skill becomes manifest. If he puts it aside and does not play it, however, the five notes are complete on their own. To Zhuangzi, humans' making explicit value judgments on things in the world impairs the original intactness of the *dao*: things being equal in the eyes of this self-claimed moral relativist,¹⁹ one's preference for this thing over that makes the *dao* lose its completeness. Following this line of reasoning, the only logical conclusion is non-action – not to intervene in the otherwise perfectly operating world. The translation of this in the zither case is that Mr. Zhao should not play the zither. Therefore, in declaring that he would not stop playing his zither, Su was directly contradicting Zhuangzi,²⁰ one of the thinkers whose talks of *daode* originated from Laozi, asserting that there are objective criteria against which to judge what is right and what wrong and that they need to be made manifest.

When preparing for working on this project, Su borrowed over a thousand volumes of books²¹ from Zheng Jiahui 鄭嘉會 (?-?), a scholar-official then stationed in Guangdong. In a poem written out of gratitude to Zheng in the late 1090s,²² Su disclosed his target:

猶當距楊墨 Still I should resist Yang Zhu and Mo Di,
稍欲懲荆舒 And slightly I want to punish Jing-Shu.²³

¹⁸ Guo Xiang et al., *Zhuangzi zhushu*, 2.40-41. For alternative translations (and interpretations), see Hinton trans., *Chuang Tzu*, 25; Watson trans., *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 11-12; Ziporyn trans., *Zhuangzi*, 14-15; and Graham trans., *Chuang-Tzu*, 54-55.

¹⁹ Philip J. Ivanhoe notes a deep self-contradiction in Zhuangzi: in insisting on the relativism of everything, Zhuangzi actually reveals his deeply held belief that is not relativist (“Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?”).

²⁰ Many scholars take Su as a devoted student of Zhuangzi. For a recent example, see Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity*.

²¹ Kong Fanli, *Su Shi nianpu*, 1281; Su Shi, “Yu Zheng Jinglao,” 1 of 4, in *Su Shi wenji*, 56.1674.

²² Su Shi, “He Tao zeng Yang Zhangshi,” in *Ying Song Dongpo Xiansheng he Tao Yuanming shi*, 4.15b-16a. For different views on the dating of this poem, see Lin Guanqun, *Xinbian Dongpo Haiwai ji*, 135.

²³ Other than the title of Duke of Jing mentioned above, Wang Anshi was posthumously conferred upon the title of King of Shu 舒王 during Zhezong's reign. For a textual variant of the last two lines, see Yang Tianbao, *Jinling Wangxue yanjiu*, 55: “未暇...，且復...”

He wanted to, like Mencius did in the Warring States period,²⁴ defend Confucius' teaching against mistaken approaches, by which he meant Wang Anshi's learning that guided the reform regime.²⁵

Before leaving Danzhou freed from exile in 1100/5, Su Shi had finished the project.²⁶ On the last day of the next month, heading back north, he met with a big flood in today's Guangxi Province, feeling his life endangered. In the middle of the moonless night, he got up in the boat anchored in the sea, deeply sighing: "Why is it that I keep riding such dangers? ... What I wrote on the *Change*,²⁷ the *Documents* and the *Analects* are all carried with me and there is no other copy in the world" 吾何數乘此險也! ... 所撰《易》、《書》、《論語》皆以自隨，世未有別本。²⁸ Given that in 1081, Su had sent a neat copy of *Explicating the Analects* to Wen Yanbo 文彥博 (1006-97), in part out of a wish for its preservation,²⁹ this suggests he had updated his earlier work to an extent that made the 1080s edition outdated. In any case, the critical edge toward Mencius that we shall read in the next section was not found in his pre-1097³⁰ writings.

While popularly known for his literary pieces,³¹ Su kept stressing these three commentaries were the consummation of his lifetime's learning, what he hoped to be remembered by.³² In recent years, studies of them have been growing,³³ but *Explicating the Analects* is yet to be discussed in English.³⁴

²⁴ Mencius, 3B.9: "楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著。"

²⁵ For an account of this from the perspective of Su Guo, the son accompanying Su Shi in exile, see the trilogy of poems Guo wrote on his father's birthday that year (Shu Dagang et al., *Xiechuan ji jiaozhu*, 84-88). On the dating of this trilogy, see Kong Fanli, *Su Shi nianpu*, 1281-82.

²⁶ Su Shi, "Ti suo zuo Shu Yi zhuan Lunyu shuo," in *Su Shi wenji*, 66.2073.

²⁷ Shu Dagang thinks this was the joint work of the three Sus ("Fu shi san shu, ji jue cisheng bu xu guo," 503-05). As I discuss below, even though his father and brother may have contributed something at the early stage, the edition completed around 1100 reflects Su Shi's view around that time, which even replaced his own in the early 1080s.

²⁸ Su Shi, "Shu Hepu zhou xing," in *Su Shi wenji*, 71.2277.

²⁹ Su Shi, "Huangzhou shang Wen Lugong shu," in *Su Shi wenji*, 48.1379-80.

³⁰ Including in the "Chaozhou Han Wengong miao bei" written in 1092 (*Su Shi wenji*, 70.508). On Su's such views showing his reverence of Mencius, see Jin Shengyang, "Lun Su Shi de Meng xue sixiang," section 1. This reverence probably ran through his whole life until this critical turn.

³¹ Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 68.

³² Shu Dagang, "Fu shi san shu, ji jue cisheng bu xu guo," 501-2.

³³ Peter Bol ("This Culture of Ours," 282-93) has studied Su's commentaries on the *Classic of Change* and the *Book of Documents*. Michael Fuller ("Aesthetics and Meaning in Experience," 323-25) and Curie K. Virág ("That Which Encompasses the Myriad Cares," chapter 7) have discussed passages in the former. Substantial studies of them in Chinese mainly include: Jin Shengyang, *Su Shi Yizhuan yanjiu*; Leng Chengjin, *Su Shi de zhexue guan yu wenyi guan*, chapter 1; Xu Jianfang, *Su Shi yu Zhouyi*; Deng Tanzhou, "Lun Su Shi Shuzhuan de zhengzhi sixiang"; Li Yun-long, "Su Shi Dongpo Shuzhuan yanjiu"; and Tsai Ken-hsiang, *Songdai Shangshu xue'an*, 179-212.

³⁴ For Chinese language studies of it, see below.

Among the three commentaries, this is the one that did not survive intact.³⁵ But it had been influential. In 1172, when prefacing his *Arguments in Reverence of Mencius, Cont'd* (*Zun Meng xubian* 尊孟續辨), Yu Yunwen 余允文 (fl. 1160s) wrote:

In recent times, [people] like He Shenzhi (He She 何涉, alive ca. 1041) deleted *Mencius*, Chao Yuezhi (1059-1129) slandered Mencius, and the ranks of Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019-1068), Liu Daoyuan (Liu Shu 劉恕, 1032-1078) and Zhang Yu (fl. ca. 1040s) all spoke of Mencius negatively. However, none of these gained the trust of later scholars. Therefore, it is certainly not worth arguing with them. [But] for instance, Wang Chong (27-ca. 97) of Later Han wrote *On Balance*, where there was a “Chapter on Ridiculing Mencius”; of late, Mr. Su Shi wrote *Explicating the Analects*, arguing with Mencius at [eight] places. Among scholars, those who read and study their books to get ahead are numerous. Can there be no arguments?

近世如何深之刪孟，晁說之詆孟，劉原父、道原、張俞輩，皆非議孟子。然皆不取信後學，茲固不足辨。如後漢王充著《論衡》，而有刺孟篇；近世蘇公軾作《論語說》，而與孟子辨者[八]。³⁶學者誦習其書以[謀]³⁷進取者總總也，可無辨乎。³⁸

Su Shi's *Explicating the Analects*, where he engaged with Mencius in eight entries, was not only widely and attentively read, but also deemed persuasive. Being versed in it was even considered an advantage in career advancement.

While bibliographical scholars have been retrieving entries in this lost book,³⁹ what is relevant to this study are those eight entries, which Wang Shuizhao and Zhu Gang think were the most valuable part in *Explicating the Analects*.⁴⁰ The text for them survived in two editions.⁴¹

³⁵ For discussions of its textual history, see Shu Dagang, “Lunyu *shuo xulu*”; Wang Shuizhao and Zhu Gang, *Su Shi pingzhuan*, 169–71.

³⁶ As the editor of Yu's book noted, this most likely misses a “八”, the number of engagements Su Shi himself counted (see below).

³⁷ The text reads 媒, probably a misprint.

³⁸ Yu Yunwen, “Zun Meng xu bian yuan xu,” in *Zun Meng bian (Fu xubian biele)*, 37. For Song literati's debates on Mencius, see Chun-chieh Huang, “Chinese Hermeneutics as Politics.”

³⁹ After Shu Dagang put most of them together in 2001, more were published (for instance, Gu Jian, “Su Shi Lunyu *shuo jiyi* buzheng”; and Xu Jiaying, “Su Shi Lunyu *shuo shiyi*”). However, not all of them can be trusted as coming from the original book without careful examination. For instance, for the *Analects* 1.6, Qing Sanxiang takes Su Shi's 1060 “Han Yu lun” as a comment on this entry (“Su Shi Lunyu *shuo gouchen*,” 112). While Su could have taken what he wrote some forty years ago as a basis, there is no way to know if those words got incorporated in the commentary verbatim, nor if Su's view on the *Analects* entry remained the same.

⁴⁰ Wang Shuizhao and Zhu Gang, *Su Shi pingzhuan*, 171.

⁴¹ Yu Yunwen, *Zun Meng xubian*, 49-55; and Shao Bo, *Shaoshi wenjian houlu*, 86-92.

Comparing them shows there is a reliable textual basis for discussing Su's ideas.⁴² In the past decade, there have appeared a number of studies of these eight entries. While some are devoted to defending Mencius,⁴³ Su's engagements with Mencius have begun to be linked to his opposition to Wang Anshi.⁴⁴ Based on what has been reconstructed in chapter 2, I shall for each issue Su Shi took with Mencius identify what he was actually going after in this project designed for opposing Wang Anshi's statecraft.

Among the eight, which I translate in full following the sequence in *Arguments in Reverence of Mencius, Cont'd*, the first and the last are both on human nature, whereas the middle six are all on governance, especially the political values used to guide it. We know Su Shi used to disapprove of talks of human nature, saying "the concern among Confucians lies in that they discuss [human] nature" 儒者之患，患在於論性。⁴⁵ Before looking into the content, this structural feature, plus Su's taking up the topic of human nature, which had by then been central in intellectual inquiry for nearly four decades,⁴⁶ suggests Su, like Cheng Yi, identified Wang's statecraft as a soulcraft.

II. Eight Engagements with Mencius

⁴² I have found six differences between the two: 1) Shao's edition includes one more entry, which appears behind the first one. Commentators generally disregard it as there Su Shi did not seem to be arguing with Mencius. Although why Shao put it there remains a question, Shao himself quoted Su saying "與孟子辨者八" (92). 2) the second entry in Yu's edition was the fourth in Shao's edition. 3) "環" in the sixth entry reads "完" in Shao's edition, which also adds a "而" in front of "以時修其橋梁." 4) in the seventh entry, Yu's edition says "鄭衛之聲" whereas Shao's "鄭衛之害." 5) in the last entry, Yu's edition says "難於善," whereas Shao's "離於善." The sixth difference lies in the statement that functions like a preface, which we shall read by the end of this chapter. Yu's edition includes the full text of what is quoted there, whereas Shao's has only the first sentence. In sum, ruling out differences in fullness of quotation and sequence, the two texts of the eight entries vary at but four characters, which though posing slightly different readings do not affect the argument.

⁴³ Chen Yingrui, "Fa Kongshi zhi mi"; and An Wenyan, "Su Shi bian Meng kao."

⁴⁴ Jin Shengyang, "Lun Su Shi de Meng xue sixiang"; Hu Jinwang, "Lun Su Shi de 'bian Meng' sixiang."

⁴⁵ Su Shi, "Han Yu lun," in *Su Shi wenji*, 4.114. So did Sima Guang and Su Zhe. For their criticisms of talks of nature and destiny, see Jin Shengyang, "Bei Song fei xingmingxue de xingqi yu zhuanbian," 64–65; and Ye Ping, "Su Shi, Su Zhe de 'xing ming zhi xue.'"

⁴⁶ Chen Zhi'e thinks that under Wang Anshi's influence, talking about human nature became a shared interest among all major intellectual figures, including Su Shi (*Bei Song wenhua shi shulun*, 234–35). Chen is right to point out that Wang was the one who made this topic central in Song intellectual culture, but Su was not turning to be interested in human nature under Wang's influence. Rather, he took this topic up to seriously engage with him, *despite* his consistent lack of interest in exploring it.

Chapter 4

1. The master said: “Hui – his heart did not go against *ren* (humanity) for three months. As for the rest, but days or a month and no more.” Confucius said: “To people, I censure some and praise some. For those I have something to praise, I would necessarily examine them.”

子曰：“回也，其心三月不違仁，其餘則日月至焉而已矣。”⁴⁷ 孔⁴⁸子曰：“吾之於人也，誰毀誰譽，如有所譽者，其有所試。”⁴⁹

That Confucius had examined Yan Hui and observed him for long is no doubt. Probably he had quietly scrutinized him, for as long as three months, and none of his [behaviors] in hardship or hurriedness did not come out of *ren*. Therefore, Confucius knew he would not turn against it all his life. For a superior man to observe a person, he must necessarily observe him on where he does not ponder. Where he ponders there can be faking and even if [one observes him] for a lifetime one would not get his authentic [nature]. Therefore, during as long as three months, there must be where his preparation and pondering will not reach. What is faked is not different from what is authentic [on the surface], and [yet] the superior man slights it. Why? [Because] when faced with big gains and losses, it will fail. Mencius said: “Yao and Shun had it by nature; Tang and Wu took it on in person; and the five warlords borrowed it. Borrowing it for long and not returning it, how do you know they did not have it?” What is borrowed and what is in one’s nature have different roots, not to say returning it or not. Were Confucius to look at it, he would have figured it out in no more than one day, not needing to wait for three months. How come “not knowing [if they had it]”?

其於顏子，試之也，熟而觀之也，審矣。蓋嘗默而察之，閱三月之久，而其顛沛造次，無不一出於仁者，是以知其終身之弗叛也。君子之觀人也，必於其所不慮焉觀之。其所慮者，容有偽也，雖終身不得其真。故三月之久，則必有備慮之所不及者矣。偽之與真無以異，君子賤之，何也？有大利害臨之，則敗也。孟子曰：“堯舜性之也，湯武身之也，五霸假之也。久假不歸，安知其非有也。”⁵⁰假之與性，其本亦異矣，豈論其歸與不歸哉。使孔子視之，不終日而決，不待三月也，何不知之有。

Confucius’ explicit talks of human nature are at but two places in the *Analects*, and the above quotes are none of those. By adding 15.25 behind 6.7, which on the face of it seems to be

⁴⁷ The *Analects*, 6.7.

⁴⁸ Su Shi adds “孔” to the received text. As slight paraphrasing is common in Su’s commentaries, I shall not note them unless they affect the meanings significantly.

⁴⁹ The *Analects*, 15.25.

⁵⁰ *Mencius*, 7A.30.

about the difficulty of attaining full humanity, Su Shi got a theory of how to tell a person's true nature from Confucius. With "examining" having appeared in 15.25, Su thus bent 6.7 toward this direction: because, as Confucius said in 15.25, he would examine the person before making a statement about his quality, so what he said with regard to Yan Hui in 6.7 must be about examining him through long-term observation. He quietly scrutinized him for as long as three months, and found that he consistently acted out of humanity, whether in great predicament or in a hurry – situations that restrict his ability to pretend. It is then he knew *ren* is something Yan Hui would never turn against. With this, Su claimed: what one does that is not out of one's nature, i.e., the artificial, is less valuable, even though the behaviour may look the same, because such cannot last. This is where Su took issue with *Mencius* 7A.30.

In his resolute defense of Mencius against Su Shi, the Southern Song scholar Yu Yuwen argued that Mencius of course knew the five warlords were not by nature humane. The reason he said so was only because Mencius wished to encourage them to do some good after all.⁵¹ To Yu, Su Shi was making a fuss over something not worth arguing about at all. Indeed, this may sound plausible to most, including even Su Shi himself before the late 1090s. But what Su identified here is a deep connection between *Mencius* 7A.30 and the core of Wang Anshi's statecraft, which is using behavioural regulations to change human nature. Underlying this is the assumption that by having people behave in a different pattern over an extended period of time, their natures can be re-shaped. For this, Su found *Mencius* 7A.30 provide the theoretical foundation, which says that so long as one keeps behaving in a certain way for long, even if such behavior did not derive from one's inborn nature, the others would not tell much of a difference, but would be perhaps led to think he has it in himself as part of his nature.

This goes directly to the heart of Wang Anshi's entire design, because Wang was aware that the re-shaped nature is different from the inborn one – while in his efforts at rectifying names, he claims it is not artificial, he never said the reshaped nature is authentic. Now, Su took it up head on, saying that what came out of the authentic – one's inborn nature – would last, whereas that from the reshaped nature could not stand the test of big gains or losses. And Su had an estimation of how long the regime would last: in 1101, shortly before his death, Su planned to entrust his three commentaries to Qian Jiming 錢濟明 (?-?), telling him not to make them public until after

⁵¹ Yu Yunwen, *Zun Meng xubian*, 49.

three decades.⁵² It seems Su was not far from the mark: the Song state fell in 1126, with two emperors being captured, along with them the entire imperial entourage.⁵³ And, in the face of this kind of big loss, the reshaped nature did not sustain: after the Zhao house restored itself in the south, Wang Anshi's statecraft was never adopted as state rightness any more.⁵⁴

2. Confucius said: "Were wealth pursuable, even just a whip-holding soldier, I will do it. If not pursuable, I follow what I like."

子曰：“富而可求也，雖執鞭之士，吾亦為之。如不可求，從吾所好。”⁵⁵

For all things pursuable, one gets it by pursuing it. Without pursuing it, one does not get it. *Ren* and *yi* are never obtained without being pursued. [He] thus knew they are pursuable. Thus [he] said, "Is *ren* far? I desire of *ren* and *ren* comes." With regard to wealth and nobility, some pursue but don't get them, some don't pursue but get them. [He] thus knew they cannot be pursued. Therefore, he said, "Were wealth pursuable, even just a whip-holding soldier, I will do it. If not pursuable, I follow what I like." With regard to profit, the sage had never intended to pursue. How would he ask if it was pursuable or not? However, if he directly tells people not to pursue it, people will still entertain the hope that it can be obtained and only stop pursuing it under the sage's urging. If people stop pursuing it under the sage's urging, what is put on hold will arise at times. It is for this reason that he told them it is not pursuable, saying, were it pursuable, even I would be pursuing it. The thinking being that raising the height of the lane gate and reinforcing the case lock are not as good as opening the gate and unlocking the case, to show them there is nothing there. However, Mencius said, "[That one desires] food and sex is human nature, yet therein also lies destiny. That is why the superior man does not ascribe it to human nature. [That one can attain] *renyi* is destiny, yet therein also lies human nature. That is why the superior man does not ascribe it to destiny." The superior man, when it comes to teaching others, will use the substance. Why is there [something like] "do not ascribe it to"? Taking [the desire for] food and sex as human nature, then they can be obtained by pursuing, whereas the superior man forbids the pursuit of such. Taking *renyi* as destiny, then they cannot be obtained by pursuing, whereas the superior man urges the people to have them.

⁵² Shu Dagang, "Fu shi san shu, ji jue cisheng bu xu guo," 502.

⁵³ Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, chapter 16.

⁵⁴ Although the term *guoshi* continued to be used, as Yu Yingshi demonstrates (*Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 267-88), the concept was no longer the same in the Southern Song. Whereas in the Northern Song, it referred to adopting Wang Anshi's statecraft in governance as that which is right for the whole state, after the dynasty was reconstituted in the south, it referred to but one specific policy sphere – peace or war in foreign relations.

⁵⁵ The *Analects*, 7.12.

Chapter 4

Forbidding the people to have what they can pursue and urging them to have what cannot be pursued, who under heaven can follow it? Therefore, that *ren* and *yi* are pursuable while wealth and nobility not pursuable are truly so by the way things are. Were one to take what is pursuable as not pursuable and what is not pursuable as pursuable, even a sage cannot [manage].

凡物之可求者，求而得，不求則不得也。仁義未有不求而得者，是以知其可求也，故曰：“仁遠乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁至矣。”⁵⁶富貴有求而不得者，有不求而得者，是以知其不可求也，故曰：“富而可求也，雖執鞭之士，吾亦為之。如不可求，從吾所好。”聖人之於利，未嘗有意於求也，豈問其可不可哉？然將直告之以不求，則人猶有可得之心，特迫於聖人而止耳。夫迫於聖人而止，則其止也，將有時而作矣，故告之以不可求者，曰：使其可求，雖吾亦將求之。以為高其閤閤，固其肩鏞，不如開門發篋，而示之無有也。而孟子曰“食、色性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也；仁、義命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。”⁵⁷君子之教人，將以其實，何謂“不謂”之有。夫以食色為性，則是可以求得也，而君子禁之；以仁義為命，則是不可以求得也，而君子強之。禁其可求者，強其不可求者，天下其孰能從之？故仁義之可求，富貴之不可求，理之誠然者也。如以可為不可，以不可為可，雖聖人不能。⁵⁸

In this entry, Su Shi was engaging with Wang Anshi on the proper goal of learning, for which he found *Mencius* 7B.24 provide support for Wang. In chapter 2, we have seen that in the dual-track value system Wang designed, official ranks and high salaries were the secretly operative mechanism to draw people in. Even though the openly advocated were the statist values, the profit part was what actually got people motivated in the first place. To facilitate this, in his writings, Wang had been encouraging literati to pursue social-political success. For instance, in “Yang [Xiong] and Mencius” 揚孟, Wang admonishes all literati to make an effort to do better than what they are destined for on birth:

If by talent one can be lowly, one is lowly, or by the crime [one committed] one can die, one dies, then how would Mencius call this this person’s destiny without censuring him? He would necessarily hate his losing his proper destiny. Mencius said: “the way the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eyes towards colours, the ears towards sounds, the nose towards smells, and the four

⁵⁶ *The Analects*, 7.30.

⁵⁷ *Mencius*, 7B.24 as paraphrased by Su Shi.

⁵⁸ In another output of his commentary project, Su wrote: “士之所求者爵祿，而爵祿我有也。挾是心以輕士，此最人主之大患。故告之曰：臣之所以為民上者，非為爵祿也，為德也” (*Dongpo Shu zhuan*, 7.227).

limbs towards ease is human nature, yet therein also lies destiny. That is why the superior man does not ascribe it to human nature. The way *ren* (humanity) pertains to the relation between father and son, *yi* (duty) pertains to the relation between the monarch and his officials, *li* (the rites) to the relation between guest and host, *zhi* (wisdom) to the worthy, and the sage to the way of Heaven, is destiny, yet therein also lies human nature. That is why the superior man does not ascribe it to destiny.”⁵⁹

才可以賤而賤，罪可以死而死，則孟子豈以謂人之命而不以罪其人哉？亦必惡其失命之正也。孟子曰：“口之於味也，目之於色也，耳之於聲也，鼻之於臭也，四支之於安逸也，性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也。仁之於父子也，義之於君臣也，禮之於賓主也，知之於賢者也，聖人之於天道也，命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。”⁶⁰

Those who accept their fate as is are not getting their “proper destiny” and as such would be censured by Mencius. The point Wang was making by drawing on *Mencius* 7B.24 is that a literatus should not accept his lot, nor follow his natural inclination based on what his senses delight in, but must make efforts to change it,⁶¹ thereby to climb up on the social ladder. This is using Mencius to urge literati to break free from what they are destined to be and achieve beyond the limits of their inborn qualities,⁶² so as to maximize what everyone can contribute to the state, the key to swiftly increasing state power – what Wang Anshi’s biographer meant by saying his learning had “penetrated what could not be predicted from [the natural workings of] day and night or yin and yang, and entered [the domain of] the magical.” Now, in taking issue with Mencius on this, Su Shi was trying to reset the legitimate goal of learning back to *renyi*, contending, like Han Yu, that these humanist virtues were part of human nature, hence cannot be detached from being human.

3. Zigong asked about governance. The Master said: “Sufficient food, sufficient armaments, and the people’s trust. That is all.” Zigong said: “Were there no choice but to get rid of [one], which of the three first?” [The Master] said: “Get rid of armaments.” Zigong said: “Were there no choice but

⁵⁹ Translation modified from Lau’s (*Mencius*, 162).

⁶⁰ Wang Anshi, “Yang Meng,” in *LCJ*, 64.680.

⁶¹ On this being Mencius’ point, see Fu Sinian, *Xing ming gu xun bianzheng*, 631-33.

⁶² Scholars agree that to Wang, what matters is not the inborn, but the efforts made from outside. See, for example, Luo Chuanqi and Wu Yunsheng, *Wang Anshi jiaoyu sixiang yanjiu*, 59–61; Xiao Yongming, “Yi Wang Anshi wei daibiao de Xinxue Xuepai,” 169; Chen Zhi’e, *Bei Song wenhua shi shulun*, 277–80.

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to get rid of [one], which of the two first?” [The Master] said: “Get rid of food. Since of old everyone has to die, [but] without the people’s trust [the state] cannot stand.”

子貢問政，子曰：“足食、足兵，民信之矣。”子貢曰：“必不得已而去，於斯三者何先？”曰：“去兵。”子貢曰：“必不得已而去，於斯二者何先？”曰：“去食。自古皆有死，民無信不立。”^{63,64}

Mencius compared the lightness and weightiness of *li* and food. If *li* is weighty and food light, he then gets rid of food. If food is weighty and *li* light, he then gets rid of *li*. The same with sex. However, Confucius got rid of food and kept trust, saying “Since of old everyone has to die, [but] without the people’s trust [the state] cannot stand.” He did not further compare their lightness and weightiness. Why? [I] say: *Li* and trust, in comparison with food and sex, are like the five grains’ not killing people. Now someone asks: “I, for fear of the five grains’ killing people, want to forbid them. How about that?” The answer must be: “I would rather eat the five grains and die than forbidding them.” This is in line with Confucius’ theory of getting rid of food and keeping trust. Now one responds by saying: “Pick out those killing ones to forbid and those non-killing ones not to forbid.” Among the five grains, how come there were killing ones? This is in line with Mencius’ theory of comparing the lightness and weightiness of *li* and food. *Li* is what makes one get a wife. Those who abandon *li* and lose their wives are all over the place, [but] there has never been one who does not get a wife because he follows *li*. Trustworthiness is what makes one get food. Those who abandon trust and lose food are all over the place, [but] there has never been one who does not get food because he is trustworthy. Now in legislation they do not follow what is commonplace under Heaven, but rather follow what has never happened, to open the gate for removing or keeping [*li*]. When the people are made to think *li* is removable at certain times, then they will each weigh it according to their own idea. How can there be any constant standard for [evaluating] its lightness and weightiness then? Following Mencius’ theory, it won’t be long before *li* gets abandoned. Somebody says: “Shun got married without telling his parents. Then if he followed *li*, he would not have gotten a wife.” [I] say: “This is what Mencius transmitted. In ancient times, there were no such sayings. On the whole, what [Mencius said about] Shun’s painting the grain storage, repairing the well, and getting married without telling his parents were all vulgar persons’ talks in the states

⁶³ Scholarly views differ on the subject of “不立”. Some take it to be the state (Legge trans., *The Four Books*, 162; Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu*, 124; Chin trans., *Confucius The Analects (Lunyu)*, 183; Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, 128), some the common people (Lau trans., *Confucius: The Analects*, 113; Ni, *Understanding the Analects of Confucius*, 286). For the earlier imperial majority view on its being the state, see Cheng Shude, *Lunyu jishi*, 838-40.

⁶⁴ *The Analects*, 12.7.

of Qi and Lu. Upon checking in the *Book of Documents*: Shun's serving his parents was perhaps to 'advance them to become good' and not to become wicked. There were no such sayings there. Even if, unfortunately, such existed, then they were nonetheless not what is expected by the way things work among humans. Since Shun, those like the old deaf man perhaps also existed, but there has never been any who, as a father, does not want his son to get married. Therefore [I] say: 'There has never been one who does not get a wife because he follows *li*.'" Somebody says: "It is *li* for a sister-in-law and a younger brother not to touch hands when giving things. [But] seeing the sister-in-law drowning yet not pulling her by hand, saying according to *li* they should not touch hands – can one do this? This is [what made] *li* removable at certain times." [I] say: "That sister-in-law and younger brother do not touch hands is *li*. On the sister-in-law's drowning, pulling her by hand is also *li*. Why is there [a choice to be made between] removing or adopting [*li*]?"

孟子較禮食之輕重，禮重而食輕，則去食；食重而禮輕，則去禮。惟色亦然。⁶⁵而孔子去食存信，曰“自古皆有死，民無信不立”，不復較其輕重，何也？曰：禮、信之於食、色，如五穀之不殺人。今有問者曰：“吾恐五穀殺人，欲禁之，如何？必答曰：“吾寧食五穀而死，不禁也。”此孔子去食存信之論也。今答曰：“擇其殺人者禁之，其不殺人者勿禁也。”五穀安有殺人者哉？此孟子禮食輕重之論也。禮，所以使人得妻也。廢禮而失妻者皆是，緣禮而不得妻者，天下未嘗有也。信，所以使人得食也。棄信而失食者皆是，緣信而不得食者，天下未嘗有也。今立法不從天下之所同，而從其所未嘗有，以開去取之門，使人以為禮有時而可去⁶⁶也，則將各以其私意權之，其輕重豈復有定物？從孟子之說，則禮廢無日矣。或曰：舜不告而娶，則以禮，則不得妻也。曰：此孟子之所傳，古無是說也。凡舜之塗廩浚井、不告而娶，皆齊魯間野人之語，考之於《書》，舜之事父母，蓋“烝烝乂”，不至於姦。無是說也。使不幸而有之，則亦非人理之所期矣。自舜以來，如瞽瞍者，蓋亦有之；為人父而不欲其子娶妻者，未之有也。故曰：緣禮而不得妻者，天下無有也。或曰：嫂叔不親授，禮也。嫂溺而不援，曰禮不親授，可乎？是禮有時而去取也。曰：嫂叔不親授，禮也。嫂溺，援之以手，亦禮也，何去取之有？

In this long entry, Su Shi was mainly engaging with Mencius on two issues: first, Mencius unwittingly made Confucius' *li* 禮 removable, thereby opening the path for Wang Anshi's eventually removing it together with the other humanist virtues from being human; second, by

⁶⁵ Referring to *Mencius*, 6B.1, discussed below.

⁶⁶ *Zun Meng xubian* (51) reads 去 as 去取.

coupling it with *quan* 權, Mencius not only turned Confucius' concept of *li* into one that is more dogmatic, but also licensed people to freely depart from established norms, providing a ready justification for Wang Anshi's free application of *quan* in governance. Let us look at them one by one.

1) Mencius made *li* removable

In the beginning part of his commentary, Su Shi was referring to *Mencius* 6B.1:

A man from Ren asked Wulu Zi: "Which is weightier, *li* or food?" [Wulu Zi] said: "*Li* is weightier." "Which is weightier, *li* or sex?" [Wulu Zi] said: "*Li* is weightier."

[The man] said: "Eating according to *li*, you would starve to death; eating not according to *li*, you would get something to eat. Would you necessarily eat according to *li*? Welcoming the bride in person, you would not get a wife; not welcoming the bride in person, you would get a wife. Would you necessarily welcome the bride in person?" Wulu Zi was unable to answer. The following day he went to Zou and told this to Mencius.

Mencius said: "In answering this, what difficulty is there? If you bring the tips to the same level without measuring the difference in the bases, you can make a piece of wood an inch long higher than a tall building. In saying that gold is heavier than feathers, how can one be referring to the amount of gold in a clasp and a whole cartload of feathers? If you compare a case where food is weighty with one where *li* is light, how can the weightiness of food be the only [absurd conclusion you can draw]? If you compare a case where sex is weighty with one where *li* is light, how can the weightiness of sex be the only [absurd conclusion you can draw]? Go and reply to the questioner as follows: 'Twisting your elder brother's arm and taking the food from him, then you get something to eat; not twisting it, then you don't get anything to eat. Will you then twist it? Climbing over the wall of your neighbour on the east side and dragging their virgin daughter into your arms, then you get a wife; not dragging her, then you don't get a wife. Will you then drag her?'"⁶⁷

任人有問屋廬子曰：“禮與食孰重？”曰：“禮重。”

“色與禮孰重？”曰：“禮重。”

曰：“以禮食，則飢而死；不以禮食，則得食，必以禮乎？親迎，則不得妻；不親迎，則得妻，必親迎乎？”屋廬子不能對，明日之鄒以告孟子。

孟子曰：“於答是也，何有？不揣其本而齊其末，方寸之木可使高於岑樓。金重於羽者，豈謂一鈞金與一輿羽之謂哉？取食之重者，與禮之輕者而比之，奚翅食重？取色之重者，

⁶⁷ Translation modified from Lau's (*Mencius*, 134).

與禮之輕者而比之，奚翅色重？往應之曰：‘紵兄之臂而奪之食，則得食；不紵，則不得食，則將紵之乎？踰東家牆而摟其處子，則得妻；不摟，則不得妻，則將摟之乎？’”

The one from Ren, apparently not buying Mencius' preaching on the importance of *li*, challenged Mencius' student with a tricky situation, where if one adheres to *li*, one will starve to death, whereas if one abandons it, one will get the food to survive. The same with sex.

In the face of such a grave consequence for adhering to *li*, Mencius' student found it hard to maintain his original position. He had no choice but to seek his teacher out and see how he would respond. Mencius thought this a piece of cake and saw the trick of the questioner lied in that he compared food at the weightiest (when a mouthful could save a life) with *li* at its lightest (when abandoning it costs little), making it obvious that the former is the more important. Tit for tat, Mencius responded with a reverse situation, where *li* is obviously a weighty matter (twisting older brother's arm) whereas food is light (just some food in a daily scenario, not the food the getting of which makes a difference between life and death).

To Su Shi, Mencius may have won the argument but had lost his ground. The real issue, as Su pointed out by comparing *li* and trust to the five grains, is that the questioner, in asking the question the way he did, assumes *li* to be on the same footing with food, whereas in *Analects* 12.7, Confucius treats trust – which Su took to be at the same level as *li* – as the foundational value on which the state stands that cannot be weighed against values like food or sex in any case. Indeed, in Su's explication, they were regarded by Confucius as the very foundation on which the basic human needs for food and sex could possibly be met. To Su, Mencius' mistake is that, by following the questioner's logic in his attempt to defend Confucius' teaching that *li* is more important than food and sex, Mencius fell into the trap the questioner set up by unwittingly accepting his assumption that as a value, *li* is removable, just like food or sex. By doing so, Mencius opened the path for Wang Anshi's eventual removal of the five constant virtues from being human. The right response, Su pointed out, is to reject the questioner's assumption upfront. This is because, just like the five grains do not harm humans, these humanist values can never be bad. As he wrote in the poem discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the point Su was trying to make here is that these virtues are inherently good and cannot be overturned no matter what. This is against Wang Anshi's contention, building on Laozi's dialectics and Zhuangzi's relativism, that the goodness of all

values is relative, depending on how they are defined by humans through their linguistic manoeuvre.

2) Mencius changed Confucius' concept of *li*

Su Shi thinks Mencius, by coupling *li* with *quan* 權, fundamentally changed Confucius' concept of *li*. This change he notes took place in *Mencius* 4A.18:

Chunyu Kun said: "Is it *li* that, in giving and receiving, a man and a woman should not touch hands?"

Mencius said: "It is."

[Chunyu Kun] said: "When one's sister-in-law is drowning, does one then pull her by hand?"

[Mencius] said: "Not helping a sister-in-law who is drowning is to be a brute. It is *li* that, in giving and receiving, a man and a woman should not touch hands, but pulling the drowning sister-in-law by hand is discretion."⁶⁸

淳於髡曰：“男女授受不親，禮與？”

孟子曰：“禮也。”

曰：“嫂溺則援之以手乎？”

曰：“嫂溺不援，是豺狼也。男女授受不親，禮也；嫂溺援之以手者，權也。”

As is frequently the case across the *Mencius*,⁶⁹ in this passage, Mencius had *li* mean a rule: a man and a woman should not touch hands. Therefore, when challenged by an imagined scenario where adhering to it could cost a human life, Mencius had to introduce another concept – “discretion”:⁷⁰ It is *a rule* that a man and a woman do not touch hands in giving and receiving things; it is [up to one's own] discretion that the younger brother, on seeing his sister-in-law drowning, saves her with his hands out of expediency.

Despite his self-conscious devotion to defending Confucius' *li*, that Mencius felt it necessary to add discretion to make it work implies he did not think Confucius' *li* allows individuals to decide what is the right thing to do on their own. And yet as Karyn Lai convincingly

⁶⁸ Translation modified from Lau's (*Mencius*, 84).

⁶⁹ See, for instance, *Mencius* 3B.3, 4B.27, 5B.6 and 5B.7. See also 2B.2 and 4B.3, where the speakers were not Mencius.

⁷⁰ For the importance of this concept to Wang Anshi, see Yang Qianmiao, *Wang Anshi "Yi" xue yanjiu*, 190–99; Jin Shengyang, “Wang Anshi *Yijie* yu Mengzi de guanxu chuyi,” 86; and Geng Liangzhi, “Wang Anshi *Yixue* yuqi *Xinxue* ji Luoxue,” 42.

argues, the *li* in the *Analects* is open-ended and exploratory, offering such flexibility in itself.⁷¹ Probably pressured by the need to propagate Confucius' teaching more than a hundred years after he passed away,⁷² Mencius inadvertently turned Confucius' *li* toward more like a dogma. While in his use, this *li* was not yet as sophisticated as Wang's that took on both a regulative and a transformative role, in making Confucius' *li* more dogmatic, it points toward the direction of stipulated regulations.⁷³

Moreover, Su Shi further pointed out: by licencing people to disregard *li* and make expediencies on their own, not only did it make people think that Confucius' *li* does not have to be always followed, but there would be no constancy in governance any more.⁷⁴ Mencius may not have intended it, but it was the change he introduced to Confucius' concept of *li* that opened the path for Wang Anshi's justifying the ruler's doing whatever that is necessary in the name of *quan*, like in the following case recorded in his diary.

In a 1069/9 meeting, Shenzong asked Wang how to respond to Cheng Hao's objection to their selling ordination certificates [for Buddhist monks]⁷⁵ in the Bureau of Sacrifices to increase the capital for running the Ever Normal Granary program. Wang replied:

What Hao said is what is thought of as the regular in the king's way. Your servant thinks what Hao said did not reach the discretionary in the king's way. "It is *li* that, in giving and receiving, a man and a woman should not touch hands, but pulling the drowning sister-in-law by hand is discretion. Not helping a sister-in-law who is drowning is to be a brute."⁷⁶ Now [by selling those ordination certificates], the Bureau of Sacrifices can obtain 450,000 *dan*⁷⁷ of millet. Supposing each person loans three *dan* in a famine year, this can save the lives of 150,000 persons. Now, to plan for famine years, one should do it in years of harvest, and yet there is no money to spare in the state's treasury. This is why [the ordination certificates in] the Bureau of Sacrifices are being sold. The 3,000 heads

⁷¹ Lai, "Li in the *Analects*."

⁷² Ivanhoe, "Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism," 216.

⁷³ This can be seen from Lau's translating Mencius' *li* as "prescribed by the rites" (*Mencius*, 84).

⁷⁴ Ivanhoe thinks that by doing this, Mencius grants the individual too much "autonomy" than Confucius ever allowed ("Thinking and Learning in Early Confucianism," 486). It seems to me what Mencius grants is the *liberty* for the individual to be freed from tradition, while at the same time removing the autonomy inherent in Confucius' concept of *li*.

⁷⁵ I thank Wilt Idema for help on this.

⁷⁶ Wang's paraphrase of *Mencius* 4A.18.

⁷⁷ One *dan* is about 5 bushels.

shaven can save the lives of 150,000 persons. If one doesn't approve of this, one does not know discretion.

顓所言，以為王道之正。臣以為顓所言，未達王道之權。“男女授受不親，禮也。嫂溺，援之以手，權也。嫂溺不援，是豺狼也。”今祠部所可致粟凡四十五萬。若凶年，人貸三石，可全十五萬性命。今欲為凶年計，當以豐歲為之，而國用有所不暇，故賣祠部。所剃三千人頭，而所可救活者十五萬人性命，若以為不可，是不知權也。⁷⁸

Seeing Mencius' concept of *quan* as essentially constituting a license to disregard constant norms when human lives were at stake, Wang made an application of it to defend the unconventional practice of selling ordination certificates to fund the Ever Normal Granary, part of the economic policies to raise start-up funds for his educational program: the money the government shall make through this sale can buy millets that can be loaned to sustain 150,000 persons in a famine year. Even though the current year is one of bumper harvest, it is fully justified to sell ordination certificates in the Bureau of Sacrifices, rather than using funds from the state's treasury, to make preparation for bad years. This is what knowing *quan* means, Wang contends.

Whether the others find this persuasive or not, Shenzong himself knew *quan* as so interpreted by Wang Anshi is not far from deception. During a conversation, he raised his concern with Wang: “Did Shang Yang ever deceive?” 商鞅何嘗變詐？ Wang Anshi assured him: “In governing the state, Yang's fault did not lie in deceiving, but in being unable to form subjects with *li-yi-lian-chi*” 鞅為國不失於變詐，失於不能以禮義廉恥成民而已。⁷⁹ Wang acknowledges that the way of governance he taught Shenzong has in it deceiving the people, but there is no need to worry about the people finding this out: by forming them with the statist values Wang designed, they shall become more and more obedient⁸⁰ and their critical faculty degenerate over time, hence less likely to object to or even detect inconsistencies in the ruler's previous and current orders.

In an inspired article, Philip J. Ivanhoe notes: “Mencius did not abandon the Confucian tradition or ignore its precedents. However, his view did diminish the stature of both the sages and

⁷⁸ Yang Shi, *Yang Shi ji*, 111-12. For a relevant discussion, see Hu Jinwang, “Lun Su Shi de ‘Bian Meng’ sixiang,” 32. Yang Shi and the author of *Songshi quanwen* (Wang Shengduo punctuated, 653) gave two accounts of this same discussion, suggesting that this conversation between Shenzong and Wang Anshi as recorded in Wang's diary that was in circulation in Yang's time perhaps indeed took place. Except for some minor variations in wording, the main difference was only that the latter did not make explicit the quote from *Mencius* 4A.18.

⁷⁹ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 135. Undated.

⁸⁰ See, for example, *ibid.*, 28, 39.

the rites. If everyone is capable of deciphering the eternal patterns, it is easy to see how one might begin to question the importance of the sages and the rites themselves.”⁸¹ This is the deep connection Su Shi identified between Mencius and Wang Anshi here. The solution, Su Shi pointed out at the end of this long entry, is not to take *li* as a fixed rule, but what one evaluates as the right thing to do on each specific occasion, that is, Confucius’ *li*.⁸²

How can *li* and trust be more important than food and sex – the basic needs for continued human existence – in managing the state? John Dunn’s work on Locke’s concept of trust can help illuminate this point on which Su Shi did not elaborate. As Dunn puts it, to Locke, “The duty to be trustworthy simply *is* more fundamental than the moral conventions or positive laws of any society, because none of the latter is necessarily morally valid and because, without the former, human society would not be possible at all.” Dunn follows by stressing: “without its display human society simply cannot exist.”⁸³ In other words, trust is the bond that holds individuals together and “what makes human society possible.”⁸⁴ In line with Locke, John Rawls also ranks values hierarchically in his engagement with utilitarianism, a tradition whose line Wang Anshi’s statecraft fell in, though his is perhaps more accurately called state consequentialist.⁸⁵ To Rawls, for a society to be well-ordered, certain values should be taken as “settled” and “uncompromising,” “not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests,” that is, “even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.” Rawls’ primary concern is with freedom and equality, but he also talked about trust: “Distrust and resentment corrode the ties of civility, and suspicion and hostility tempt men to act in ways they could otherwise avoid.”⁸⁶ We can supplement these with a brief note on *li*: in that trust bonds individuals whereas *li* reinforces this bond with appropriate

⁸¹ Ivanhoe, “Thinking and Learning in Early Confucianism,” 479. Different from Karyn Lai, however, Ivanhoe understood Confucius’ *li* as “rules.”

⁸² This may sound similar to Mencius’ “*quan*,” as at first sight it too seems to have left the decision on what is the right thing to do on each occasion to the whimsical will of each individual. The difference lies in Su’s concept of *wuli* 物理, discussed in length by Michael Fuller in *The Road to East Slope*, chapter 3 (see also id., *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes*, 46-47). Different from Wang Anshi’s relativist view of *wuli*, which takes right or wrong as just a matter of linguistic maneuver, Su’s concept refers to the inherent pattern of things out there that exists independent of human will. As such, it can be learned and one’s judgment of what is right on a specific occasion can be agreed upon by other reasonable humans. Keeping practicing making moral decisions according to the way things are, one can develop the ability to respond to things in a way that is both “true to himself and to the thing he is responding to and brings into being things that have real value for that moment” (Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*,” 284).

⁸³ Dunn, “The Concept of ‘Trust’ in the Politics of John Locke,” 286–87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸⁵ Because it does not pursue the maximization of pleasure. This is the term scholars like Ivanhoe use. I have been calling it “statist.”

⁸⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3-4, 6.

treatment of each other (Confucius' and Su Shi's *li*) to avoid resentment and hostility, these two values complement each other and work together to keep society cohesive and agreeable to live in.

The reason why these two values⁸⁷ are essential to Su Shi is because different from Wang Anshi, who sought to use a social reorganization to incorporate all individuals into the political system,⁸⁸ Su, like Han Yu in "Tracing the Way" and Ouyang Xiu in "On the Roots," assumes society is the voluntary association of self-governing individuals. The sociable values must be there because they are what makes society in this situation possible. The case is entirely different in the social structure Wang Anshi designed, where the most important value is accepting what the central authority orders the people to do.

4. Ji Kangzi asked Confucius about governance, saying: "Were I to kill those lacking the Way to [get the people to] move toward those possessing the Way, how about that?" Confucius responded: "In your governance, why use killing? Should you desire of good, the populace will be good. The virtue (*de*) of the superior men is like wind, and that of the petty men grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it will necessarily bend."

季康子問政於孔子曰：“如殺無道以就有道，何如？”孔子對曰：“子為政，焉用殺？子欲善，而民善矣。君子之德風，小人之德草，草上之風必偃。”⁸⁹

Even when Yao and Shun were up high, they still could not avoid killing those lacking the Way. Yet the superior men eventually do not take killing people as a rule. Among the populace, there are those who unfortunately tread on [a path] leading to death on their own. I did not kill them. Mencius' saying "were one to kill the populace with the way to make them live, even though they are put to death, they would not resent those who kill them" made later tyrants and corrupt officials all say "I am killing them with the way to make them live." It is therefore Confucius could not bear saying it.

雖堯舜在上，不免於殺無道，然君子終不以殺人為訓。民之不幸而自蹈於死則有之，吾未嘗殺。孟子言“以生道殺民，雖死，不怨殺者”，⁹⁰使後世暴君汙吏皆曰“吾以生道殺之”，故孔子不忍言之。

⁸⁷ The value of wisdom (*zhi* 智) is assumed in Su's commentary on the *Book of Documents* (see, for example, *Dongpo Shu zhuan*, 10.322-23 and 7.226).

⁸⁸ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 38.

⁸⁹ The *Analects*, 12.19.

⁹⁰ *Mencius*, 7A.12: “以佚道使民，雖勞不怨；以生道殺民，雖死不怨殺者。”

Su Shi grants that it is unavoidable for no matter how humane a ruler to suppress the unruly by putting them to death, as the *Book of Documents* says of sage rulers in antiquity. But there is a difference between resorting to it when having no choice but to and taking it as a guideline in governance. Whereas Mencius consistently advocated governing with *renyi*, what he said in *Mencius* 7A.12 amounts to legitimizing governing by cruelty: so long as the killing is for the populace to live, it is fully justified. Wang Anshi's justification of the reform government's treating the people inhumanely was precisely along this line: because its purpose is for putting everything in order and getting every human being their proper nature, it has the right to take control of the people's lives, including when necessary taking their lives. This was already made clear in the reform blueprint submitted to Renzong in the late 1050s:

The creation of methods and establishment of systems are difficult and those who take chances are unwilling to go along with and please [the ruler] to work toward [realizing the goal he set]. Therefore, those in antiquity, should they want to accomplish something, must necessarily precede it with punishment and execution. It is thereafter their will got fulfilled.

惟其創法立制之艱難，而僥幸之人不肯順悅而趨之，故古之人欲有所為，未嘗不先之以征誅而後得其意。⁹¹

Wang did not go this far in practice, nor did the reform regime – Su Shi, with all the charges of slandering and being disrespectful of the emperor, was spared his life. But Wang's logic was that of Ji Kangzi's. For this, the words in *Mencius* 7A.12 provided a ready justification.

5. Zigong asked by saying: "How can one be called a *shi* (literatus, man of noble character, or superior man)?" The Master said: "Conducting oneself with [a sense of] shame and, when dispatched to the four corners of the world, not disgracing the monarch's orders, such can be called a *shi*." [Zigong] said: "Dare I ask what's the next [best]?" [The master] said: "In what he says, he must necessarily keep his promise; in what he does, he must necessarily achieve the result. Shallow and obstinate, such is the look of a petty man, but perhaps he can still be the next [best]."

⁹¹ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.422.

Chapter 4

子貢問曰：“何如斯可謂之士矣？”子曰：“行己有耻，使於四方不辱君命，可謂士矣。”曰：“敢問其次。”曰：“言必信，行必果，硜硜然小人哉，抑亦可以為次矣。”⁹²

Making a sure promise and taking it as trustworthiness, braving the daunting and the tough and taking it as resoluteness – these certainly were what Confucius slighted. Following him, Mencius thus said: “The superior man, in what he says, does not necessarily keep his promise; in what he does, does not necessarily achieve the result.” This then is not what Confucius called the superior man. The superior man does not make a sure promise, but in what he says he never fails to keep his promise; he does not brave the daunting and the tough, but in what he does he never fails to achieve the result. Now, to take not necessarily keeping one’s promise as superior is to open the way leading gradually to abandon trustworthiness. This is not what Confucius meant by getting rid of food and armaments.

立然諾以為信，犯患難以為果，此固孔子之所小也。孟子因之，故曰“大人者，言不必信，行不必果”。⁹³此則非孔子所謂大人也。大人者，不立然諾，而言未嘗不信也；不犯患難，而行未嘗不果也。今以不必信為大，是開廢信之漸，非孔子去食去兵之意也。

In the *Analects* 13.20, Confucius said that those who necessarily keep their promises are petty; by contrast, in *Mencius* 4B.11, Mencius said the superior men does not necessarily keep their promise. Mencius’ words may look similar to those of Confucius’, but the two were qualitatively different: the former is an after-the-fact judgment Confucius made regarding those who do so, thinking such although less than ideal is not entirely without merit, whereas Mencius’ words essentially constitute a normative definition for what makes one a superior man that points toward the eventual removal of trustworthiness.⁹⁴

Like the connection Su Shi identified in the previous entry, this is again a theoretical starting point that Wang Anshi picked up from Mencius and developed to its logical conclusion. As he wrote in “King and Hegemon”:

Duke Huan of Qi, under the threat of Cao Mo’s sword, promised to return his land. The wish to return his land did not come from my heart. It was promised only to avoid death. According to the

⁹² The *Analects*, 13.20.

⁹³ *Mencius*, 4B.11.

⁹⁴ Cf. An Wenyan’s discussion (“Su Shi bian Meng kao,” 42).

way of the king, it is fine not to return it, and yet Duke Huan insisted on returning it. Duke Wen of Jin, when attacking Yuan, promised to withdraw in three days. After three days, [the people of] Yuan did not surrender. According to the way of the king, it is fine even if he waited until they surrendered, and yet Duke Wen insisted on withdrawing his troops. It is perhaps because he wanted to show his trustworthiness to the people.

齊桓公劫於曹沫之刃，而許歸其地。⁹⁵夫欲歸其地者，非吾之心也，許之者，免死而已。由王者之道，則勿歸焉可也，而桓公必歸之地。晉文公伐原，⁹⁶約三日而退，三日而原不降。由王者之道，則雖待其降焉可也，而文公必退其師，蓋欲其信示於民者也。⁹⁷

In line with Mencius, Wang claims that true kings would not care to keep their promise. Going one step further than Mencius, Wang turned to slight those who did keep their promise, thinking that in doing so, they were only making a show of their trustworthiness for others to see.

6. Somebody asked about Zichan. The Master said: “A kindhearted person.”

或問子產。子曰：“惠人也。”⁹⁸

Zichan made enclosed ditches, established a reviled administration, and cast the penal code for Zheng.⁹⁹ Upon dying, he taught his son Taishu with fierceness. His use of law was profound, and his governance strict. There was some immediate benefit extended to the populace, [but] no far-reaching plan for managing the state. Therefore, both Hunhan and Shuxiang ridiculed him, and Confucius thought him a kindhearted person but not *ren* (humane), perhaps slighting him. Mencius said, Zichan carried people across at Zhen and Wei rivers with his own horse carriage – “kindhearted but not knowing how to govern.” This was perhaps following Confucius’ words but lost the point. Zizhan, with regard to governing, put in order its military levies, repaired the full circle of city walls and roads and built bridges at the right time – these being more than enough, how come he would carry people across with his own horse carriage? The *Record of Rites* says:

⁹⁵ Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 86.3053-54.

⁹⁶ Lü Buwei, *Lüshi chunqiu*, 19.249-50.

⁹⁷ Wang Anshi, “Wang ba,” in *LCJ*, 67.714.

⁹⁸ The *Analects*, 14.9.

⁹⁹ For an alternative translation, see Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”*, 1405. I read “封” as an adjective for “洫” rather than a noun in a parallelly structured compound.

“Zizhan, being the mother of the multitude, was able to feed them but unable to teach them.” This further missed the point by following what Mencius said.

子產為鄭作封洫，立諉政，鑄刑書。¹⁰⁰其死也，教子大叔以猛。其用法深，其為政嚴，有及民之近利，無經國之遠猷，故渾罕、叔向皆譏之，而孔子以為惠人，不以為仁，蓋小之也。孟子曰：子產以乘車濟人於溱、洧，“惠而不知為政”¹⁰¹。蓋因孔子之言，而失之也。子產之於政，整齊其兵賦，環治其城郭、道路，以時修其橋梁，則有餘矣，豈以乘車濟人哉？《禮》曰：“子產，衆人之母也，能食之，而不能教。”此又因孟子之言而失之也。

The issue Su took with Mencius here was on the referent of Confucius’ concept of *hui*, the content of which the *Analects* 14.9 did not spell out.¹⁰² In his effort to elaborate on Confucius, Mencius thought it referred to the personal favour Zichan did for the people. Su Shi, however, wanted to draw on Confucius’ authority to ridicule Wang Anshi’s activist approach to governance, hence his filling the conceptual content of *hui* with building infrastructure, implementing mutual-surveillance among the people by encouraging them to report on each other, and casting penal code – measures that cannot fail to ring a bell to those undertaken by the reform regime. With this, Su wanted to point out that while these can bring some immediate benefit to the people, they are no long-term plan for managing the state.¹⁰³ To make his case convincing, Su found it necessary to discount Mencius’ interpretation of the *Analects* 14.9 among Confucians – for instance, when commenting on the *Record of Rites* sentence Su cited, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) built on Mencius’ speculation,¹⁰⁴ saying: “Zichan once carried those who wished to cross the river in the winter with his own horse carriage and yet the carriage-bridge was not built. This is tender-heartedness” 子產嘗以其乘車濟冬涉者，而車梁不成，是慈仁。¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Zhaogong 6, 1276.

¹⁰¹ *Mencius*, 4B.2.

¹⁰² Note, however, in *Zuozhuan*, it is said that on hearing Zichan’s words on keeping the schools open for the people in his state to discuss government, Confucius highly commended him, using even the word “*ren*” 仁 (Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Xiang 31, 1192; Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*, 293). This is also what Su Shi found praiseworthy in Zichan’s legacy (“Nan’an jun xue ji,” in *Su Shi wenji*, 11.373).

¹⁰³ This was a view Su had expressed decades earlier (see, for example, “Shang Shenzong Huangdi shu,” in *Su Shi wenji*, 25.730, 25.737), only now arguing for it more systematically at a higher level of abstraction in this commentary project.

¹⁰⁴ In his sub-commentary, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) revealed Zheng Xuan’s source was *Mencius* 4B.2 (Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda, *Liji zhengyi*, 50.1614).

¹⁰⁵ This is the only entry where I have not established a theoretical link between Mencius and Wang Anshi.

7. As for music, listen only to the Shao and Wu. Prohibit the tunes of Zheng, and keep glib people at a distance – the tunes of Zheng are licentious, and glib people are dangerous.¹⁰⁶

樂則韶、舞。放鄭聲，遠佞人。鄭聲淫，佞人殆。

The harm of the music of Zheng and Wei is on a par with that of glib people. Mencius said, “Today’s music is like ancient music.” Why? Were Mencius to govern, how could he keep the tunes of Zheng and not get rid of them? His saying “Today’s music is like ancient music” was only for getting his words accepted by [saying] what the king liked to hear. And this was not the only case. Loving beauty, money and bravery – these were the three illnesses of the various lords, and yet in each case, Mencius said: No harm. So long as you follow what I say, the hundred surnames will only fear the king’s not loving it. Take doctors for example. Thinking the medicine unable to be taken [by the patient], the doctor uses what they love as medicine. Will it work? Were [the love of] [licentious] tunes, beauty, and money able to make one a [true] king, then profit can also be used to advance *renyi* – why did he so deeply reject King Hui of Liang? Isn’t this losing his original intention?

鄭衛之害，與佞人等。孟子曰：“今樂猶古樂。”何也？使孟子為政，豈能存鄭聲而不去也哉？其曰“今樂猶古樂，”特因王之所悅而入其言耳。且不獨此也。好色、好貨、好勇，是諸侯之三疾，而孟子皆曰無害，從吾之說，百姓惟恐王之不好也。¹⁰⁷譬之於醫，以藥之不可行也，而以其所嗜為藥，可乎？使聲、色與貨而可以王，則利亦可以進仁義，何拒梁惠之深乎？此豈非失其本心也哉？

Su was pointing out a deep self-contradiction in Mencius: in rhetoric, he resolutely objected to putting profit before *renyi*, the message of *Mencius* 1A.1. In substance, however, he sought to get the kings to adopt his proposed way of governance with means essentially against his core values. In doing so, Mencius was, as Curie Virág points out, using efficacy to encourage rulers to do what Mencius thinks is good.¹⁰⁸ While the values Mencius aimed to sell were the humanist virtues *renyi*, in selling them with what they have to deliver instead of their inherent value per se, Mencius was not essentially different from Wang Anshi, who advised Shenzong to use official

¹⁰⁶ The *Analects*, 15.11. Translation slightly modified from Slingerland’s (*Confucius Analects*, 179).

¹⁰⁷ *Mencius*, 1B.3, 1B.5.

¹⁰⁸ Virág, *The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 123.

ranks and high salaries to attract literati to do what the central authority defines as “good conduct.” In this regard, the two of them are both consequentialists.

8. The Master said, “By nature, people are close; by practice, they are removed from each other.”

The Master said, “Only the wisest and the stupidest do not change.”

子曰：“性相近也，習相遠也。”子曰：“惟上智與下愚不移。”

Nature can be confused but not wiped out. What can be wiped out is not nature. Humans’ betraying their natures were at the extreme in the cases of Jie, Zhou and Robber Zhi. But their evilness must necessarily derive from what they delight in or are angry at. Where they do not delight in or are not angry at there was no evil doing ever. Therefore, [despite] the tree’s nature being upward and the water’s nature downward, if pressed down, a tree can be bent and wound downward. When what presses it down is exhausted, it has never been that it does not go upward again. In the case of water, splashing it, it can be made to shoot up and reach a higher place. When what splashes it is exhausted, it has never been that it does not fall down. This is what Mencius had seen. Mencius saw something regarding nature, but departed from it [by saying it is] good. The *Change* says: “Once *yin*, once *yang* is called the Way. What follows it is good. What completes it is nature.” What completes the Way is nature, whereas good is but what follows it, not nature. Nature is like *yin-yang* whereas good is like the myriad things. Of things, there is none that does not [have the successive movements of] *yin* and *yang*, but the myriad things cannot be taken as *yin-yang*. Therefore, *yin-yang* we watch but do not see and listen to but do not hear, and yet it is not non-existent. Now, one names them by [the criterion that] what is not non-existent is existent, then all that exist are things, not *yin-yang*. Therefore, Heaven the First makes water, but water isn’t Heaven the First; Earth the Second makes fire, but fire isn’t Earth the Second; human nature makes good, but good isn’t nature. Were nature able to be called good, Confucius would then have said it. If one can call it good, one can also call it bad. Thus what Excellency Xun said about nature’s being bad perhaps originated from Mencius and what Yang Xiong said about [nature’s being] a mixture of good and bad perhaps originated from the two masters. [Precisely] because nature cannot be named good or bad, Confucius’ words were thus but “By nature, people are close; by practice, they are removed from each other.” If they are close, then why cannot the wisest and the stupidest be changed? [I] say: there is a way by which they can be changed, but there are not [sufficient] resources with which to change them. It is like the theory of my younger brother Ziyou, who said: “What rains from Heaven is water. What runs in big rivers and is stored in pits and wells is also water. What accumulates [on

the ground] to make a muddy road is still water. Pointing at the muddy road and telling people “this has the nature of water” is acceptable. Saying “I shall wait till it becomes limpid and drink it” is, however, unacceptable. This is what is called “the wisest and the stupidest do not change.”

性可亂而不可滅。可滅非性也。人之叛其性，至於桀、紂、盜跖，極矣。然其惡，必自其所喜怒。其所不喜怒，未嘗為惡也。故木之性上，水之性下，木抑之，可使輪困下屬。抑之者窮，未嘗不上也。水激之，可使澗湧上達。激之者窮，未嘗不下也。此孟子之所見也。¹⁰⁹孟子有見於性，而離¹¹⁰於善。易曰：“一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也，成之者性也。”成道者性，而善繼之耳，非性也。¹¹¹性如陰陽，善如萬物；物無非陰陽者，而以萬物為陰陽則不可，故陰陽者，視之不見，聽之不聞，而非無也。今以其非無即有而命之，則凡有者皆物矣，非陰陽也。故天一為水，而水非天一也；地二為火，而火非地二也；人性為善，而善非性也。使性而可以謂之善，則孔子言之矣。苟可以謂之善，亦可以謂之惡，故荀卿之所謂性惡者，蓋生於孟子；而揚雄之所謂善惡混者，蓋生於二子也。性其不可以善惡命之，故孔子之言曰“性相近也，習相遠也”而已。夫苟相近，則上知下愚曷為不可移也？曰有可移之理，無可移之資也。若夫吾弟子由之論也，曰：雨於天者，水也；流於江河、蓄於坎井，亦水也；積而為泥塗者，亦水也。指泥塗而告人曰：是有水之性，可也。曰：吾將俟其清而飲之，則不可。是之謂上知與下愚不移。

In chapter 2, we have seen Wang Anshi, truly bothered by what Confucius said in the *Analects* 17.2 and 17.3, tried to explain away their negative effect on his project in two of the essays in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes. The reason is simple: the whole of his design of governance is premised on the assumption that human moral nature is malleable. Given this, it is perhaps no coincidence that Su Shi's engagements with Mencius end with an argument for the unchangeability of human nature.

Recall that in “Tracing the Way,” Han Yu claims that the way constituted by *renyi* was lost after Mencius. Part of the reason he said so was because whereas Confucians from Xunzi onward did not get right the relationship between *renyi* and *daode* fully, Mencius only advocated *renyi*, never speaking of *daode*. Before the late 1090s, Su Shi did not question this. Rather, as late as 1091, in the preface to Ouyang Xiu's anthology, he was still following Han's judgment on this

¹⁰⁹ *Mencius*, 6A.1-2.

¹¹⁰ It seems the textual variant in *Shaoshi wenjian houlu* reads better here (91). *Zun Meng xubian* says 難 (54).

¹¹¹ For a reiteration of this view, see Su Shi, *Su shi Yi zhuan*, 7.160.

matter. But now he had a different understanding: it was Mencius who initiated the *daode* discourse in the Confucian tradition, by linking talks of human nature to morality, even though in his writings the term *daode* did not appear.¹¹² With Mencius saying human nature is good, Xunzi followed by saying it is bad, so did Yang Xiong, who said it is a mixture of good and bad. The problem is not whether human nature is good or bad or a mixture of the two, but that it originally did not refer to this moral sphere – in the *Analects*, the sphere Confucius referred to was intellectual. Mencius led all subsequent Confucians into this sphere that Confucius did not mean it to refer to.

As Curie Virág perceptively notes, Su Shi’s point here is that “[t]o discourse on the normative condition of the nature itself, then, was a problematic endeavor. The proper object of inquiry was at the level of what the nature brought into being, not what it *was*.”¹¹³ She further observes that for Mencius, “insight into the workings of reality, and of human nature as part of that reality, is necessary for mastering the science of politics.”¹¹⁴

Broaching the link between human nature and morality is the greatest theoretical contribution Mencius made to Wang Anshi’s soulcraft. Indeed, it was precisely because Mencius had made this link that Wang could claim that when Confucius said the stupidest and the wisest are unable to be changed, Confucius was not referring to human nature – which he was –, but was referring to talent.¹¹⁵ Building on Mencius, Wang made talks of human nature all about morality, which were further used to manipulate the people’s spirit and eventually transform their moral nature.¹¹⁶

¹¹² The tendency to read Mencius back into Confucius has prevented scholars from discovering this. For instance, while aware of this tendency among later Confucians, Yü-sheng Lin nonetheless thinks Confucius implicitly holds the view that human nature is moral (“The Evolution of the Pre-Confucian Meaning of *Jen* 仁 and the Confucian Concept of Moral Autonomy,” 186n23, 186-87n24). Similarly, while noting Mencius thinks “man is *by nature* oriented toward morality,” Sungmoon Kim still assumes Mencius was “articulating” what Confucius meant to say but did not make explicit (*Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*, 96, 7, 10-11). On the fundamental difference between Mencius and Confucius on human nature, see Lin Guizhen, *Tiandao tianxing yu renxing renqing*, 211.

¹¹³ Virág, “That Which Encompasses the Myriad Cares,” 265.

¹¹⁴ Virág, *The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 121.

¹¹⁵ Wang Anshi, “Yuan xing,” in *LCJ*, 68.727.

¹¹⁶ Apparently not everyone in Su’s time had figured this out, one example being Liu Chang, another Wang Anshi critic. When responding to Ouyang Xiu’s question – whether Mencius’ claim that “the nature of humans must necessarily be good” 人之性必善 was consistent with Confucius’ words “the wisest and the stupidest do not change” 上智與下愚不移 –, Liu produced an answer that was essentially in line with what Wang Anshi did in “Yuan xing”: granting that Mencius did not fundamentally contradict Confucius, Liu said the two were referring to two different spheres (*Gongshi xiansheng dizi ji*, 4.62).

Indeed, this theoretical breakthrough Mencius made was so important that Wang even once tried to build a tradition of it, so that Mencius would not look so singular in the Confucian tradition. This was attempted in his “On [Human] Nature” 性論:

Were one to make clear the grades of one’s talent, then Confucius’ so-called theory that the wisest and the stupidest do not change is right. Were one to make clear nature, then what Confucius said with “By nature, people are close; by practice, they are removed from each other”, what the *Doctrine of Mean* said with “following nature is called the Way,” and Mencius’ theory that “there is no human being who is not good” are right. Among those who were good at talking about nature in antiquity, none surpassed Zhongni (Confucius). Zhongni was the best among sages. Below Zhongni, none surpassed Zisi. Zisi was one who learned from Zhongni. Below Zisi, none surpassed Meng Ke. Meng Ke was one who learned from Zisi. Zhongni’s words were recorded in the *Analects*. The theories of Zisi and Meng Ke were sketched out in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and expounded in the seven chapters [of *Mencius*].

欲明其才品，則孔子所謂上智與下愚不移之說是也。欲明其性，則孔子所謂性相近習相遠，中庸所謂率性之謂道，孟軻所謂人無有不善之說，是也。古之善言性者，莫如仲尼。仲尼，聖之粹者也。仲尼而下，莫如子思。子思，學仲尼者也。其次莫如孟軻，孟軻，學子思者也。仲尼之言，載於論語；子思孟軻之說，蓋於中庸，則明於七篇。¹¹⁷

As discussed in chapter 2, this is an essay Wang wrote before his learning was completed. But his solution to discount the negative effect of Confucius’ view on the unchangeability of human nature was along the same line that he later settled on: making a distinction between the intellectual and the moral and restricting Confucius’ words to the former sphere only. Believing that for anything to last, it had to maintain a continuity with tradition on the surface,¹¹⁸ Wang did not wish to highlight Mencius’ groundbreaking innovation, but tried to make it look like Mencius was following in the footsteps of Confucius via Zisi, even though neither made the link between human nature and morality. It was important for Wang to create this façade of continuity between Mencius and Confucius, because in his project to reshape human moral nature, Mencius was the only

¹¹⁷ Wang Anshi, “Xing lun,” in *LCJ*, 1064.

¹¹⁸ Wang Anshi, “Shang wu shi zhazi,” in *LCJ*, 41.440.

authority to fall back on in the Confucian tradition. This is why Wang venerated Mencius so much, claiming “Meng Ke, a sage” 孟軻，聖人也。¹¹⁹

Recent scholarship suggests Su Shi was probably right. According to Chen Lai, at the time of “Human Nature Comes via Mandate” (*Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出), a text dated to the period between Confucius and Mencius,¹²⁰ there still did not exist a doctrine of human nature is good.¹²¹ This suggests this doctrine was perhaps indeed invented by Mencius. Once human nature has been linked to moral judgments, using moral education to change it toward what is defined as good is only a matter of time.

As a whole, these eight entries were where Su Shi did his political theoretical work, like Han Yu’s “Tracing the Way” and Ouyang Xiu’s “On the Roots.” At the same time when carrying forward their enterprise by defending the humanist way of governance, Su laid out a systematic critique of Wang Anshi’s statecraft by revealing its deep connections with its most important theoretical source *Mencius*. With this, Su sought to make clear how Mencius, in his defense of Confucius at a challenging time, unwittingly opened the path that eventually led to Wang Anshi’s anti-Confucian approach to governance that could claim a grounding in the Confucian tradition thanks to its being in line with Mencius at a number of critical places. In this way, he showed that, Mencius, whose status had been steadily rising since mid-Tang, especially among the ancient prose practitioners, was actually the starting point of a type of learning different from that of Confucius’, i.e., a *yiduan* 異端 (!).¹²²

As Su wrote when stating his purpose of arguing with Mencius:

I, in composing *Explicating the Analects*, argued with Mencius [at] eight [places]. I am not fond of arguing, [but] I thought Mencius was close to Confucius. The world declining and the Way obscure, the ranks of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Yangzi and Mozi, although all alike derived [their learning] from Confucius, deviated and departed from him so extremely as to [approaching] the [barbarian] Hu

¹¹⁹ Wang Anshi, “Da Gong Shenfu shu,” in *LCJ*, 72.765. It was perhaps for this reason Wang played a major role in elevating the official status of *Mencius*. On this, see Yang Zhijiu, “Wang Anshi yu Mengzi,” 142; Chun-chieh Huang, “The Rise of the Mencius,” 173-74; Xu Hongxing, “Tang Song jian de Mengzi shengge yundong,” 106-7; Wang Zengyu, “Mengzi zai Songdai yasheng diwei zhi quding jiqi yingxiang,” 491-92; Zhou Shuping, *Liang Song Mengxue yanjiu*, 55-57.

¹²⁰ Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of the Guodian*, 108-9.

¹²¹ Chen Lai, “The Guodian Bamboo Slips and Confucian Theories of Human Nature,” 33, 43-44.

¹²² Seen from *Mencius* 1A.3 and 1A.7, it seems Mencius’ approach to governance was also interventionist.

and Yue. Now if I argue with Lao, Zhuang, Yang and Mo, even if I won, it would still be far removed from Confucius. Therefore, I must argue with Mencius. Should I argue [with him] and win, then I shall arrive at Confucius.

吾為《論語說》，與孟子辯者八。吾非好辯也，以孟子為近於孔子也。世衰道微，老、莊、楊、墨之徒皆同出於孔子，而乖離之極，至於胡、越。今與老、莊、楊、墨辯，雖勝之，其去孔子尚遠也，故必與孟子辯。辯而勝，則達於孔子矣。¹²³

In his deep contemplation on how the ancient prose movement resulted in Wang Anshi's statecraft,¹²⁴ Su found the origin lied in Mencius, the most vocal defender of Confucius whose adherence to governing by *renyi* was taken for granted by Han Yu, Ouyang Xiu and his earlier self. Around the turn of the twelfth century, Su figured out it was Mencius who opened the path leading to and provided the indispensable theoretical premises for Wang Anshi's anti-humanist soulcraft – governing by transforming human nature.¹²⁵

¹²³ Yu Yunwen, *Zun Meng xubian*, 54-55. On Su seeing his three commentaries as that by which to safeguard Confucius' learning, see "Shu Hepu zhou xing," in *Su Shi wenji*, 71.2277.

¹²⁴ On the reform Wang designed being a descendant of the ancient prose movement, see Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 72.

¹²⁵ Scholars have long noted the influence of Daoism on Mencius. See, for example, Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 50; and Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way*, 194). This is perhaps why Wang Anshi could have favored *Laozi* and *Mencius* simultaneously.