

SELECTIONS FROM THE BOOK OF MENCIUS

I. MENCIUS: PARABLE OF A MAN WITNESSING A CHILD FALLING INTO A WELL

Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child (Mencius 2A:6)

II. MENCIUS: THE PARABLE OF THE OX MOUNTAIN

There was a time when the trees were luxuriant on the Ox Mountain. As it is on the outskirts of a great city, the trees are constantly lopped off by axes. Is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? With the respite they get in the day and in the night, and the moistening by the rain and dew, there is certainly no lack of new shoots coming out, but then the cattle and sheep come to graze upon the mountain. That is why it is as bald as it is. People, seeing only its baldness, tend to think that it never had any trees.

But can this possibly be the nature of a mountain? Can what is in man be completely lacking in moral inclinations? A man's letting go of his true heart is like the case of the trees and the axes. When the trees are lopped day after day, is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? If, in spite of the respite a man gets in the day and in the night and of the effect of the morning air on him, scarcely any of his likes and dislikes resembles those of other men, it is because what he does in the course of the day once again dissipates what he has gained. If this dissipation happens repeatedly, then the influence of the air in the night will no longer be able to preserve what was originally in him, and when that happens, the man is not far removed from an animal. Others, seeing his resemblance to an animal, will be led to think that he never had any native endowment.

But can that be what a man is genuinely like? Hence, given the right nourishment there is nothing that will not grow, while deprived for it there is nothing that will not wither away. (Mencius, 6A:8)