

Analysis of "in the idealist wing of confucianism: mencius"

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Analysis of “ In The Idealist Wing of Confucianism: Mencius” “ In The Idealist Wing of Confucianism: Mencius”, Fung explains the theories that Mencius developed and how it could be beneficial to a society. Mencius believed that all humans are born good and that they are also born with the “ four beginnings” which are wisdom, propriety, righteousness, and human heartedness instilled in them. Fung compares Mencius to other philosophers of the time to allocate the differences between their theories. His comparisons were biased in the way that he always thought of Mencius’ theories to be better than others which was not always true. Fung’s book provides the historical background of Mencius and how his ideas became so influential.

He begins by stating Mencius’ origin which is a native state of Tson and that he was linked to Confucius while studying after a disciple named Tzu-ssu (Fung 68). The article then goes on to account the creation of Mencius, which is a book composed by him and his disciples that recorded the information held between him and the feudal lords. His book later became part of the “ four books” that formed the basis of Confucian education. Further understanding of the philosophers of the time is essential for one to grasp the concepts of Mencius’ theories. Fung did so by providing brief descriptions of other major philosophers. He first begins by saying that Confucianism held the theory that every human should do what is right without hesitation, but Confucius failed to explain why humans should act that way (Fung 69).

Thus, this led to Mencius creating his theory that all humans are born good. Another group of philosophers known as the Mohists believed the idea that one should love everyone equally (Fung 72). Mencius opposed that idea
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because it went against his belief of filial piety which is to love and respect your parents. If one loves all people equally, then the love of parents is not put before the love of everyone else. Therefore, one can conclude why Mencius rejected that idea. The article mentions the main arguments of human nature being good but gives great attention to human righteousness and how one can become a sage.

Mencius not only developed theories about human nature but also political theories about who should be ruler. Fung included in the article that Mencius held the belief that only those who became sages were capable of becoming kings but if the people think the king is lacking ethical qualities then they have the right to remove him and replace him with one that is more suited for the position. This account shows that the kind of ideal government that Mencius had in mind is closely related to that of today's democratic government. A democratic government is one where the people have the power to select their leader and also have the power to overthrow their leader if he or she does not fulfill his or her duty. This is closely related to Mencius' beliefs in that he also believed that the people were most important in the government. This comparison shows the type of ideal government Mencius would have used.

Beyond the background of Mencius, Fung conveys on a variety of sources of Mencius' work to provide counter arguments to support the theories of Mencius. In many of Mencius' work, he lays priority on human nature and the role of becoming a sage. The article provides us with many arguments debating this topic, in which he attempts to convince rulers of the time that

deep inside us lays the “ four beginnings”. Fung effectively provides a wide range of stories and situations from Mencius’ book to demonstrate Mencius’ theories. The most famous is the child dropped in the well, where he disputes that if one is human then one will feel alarmed and pity witnessing a child on the brink of death and also the story of “ King Hsuan and the ox” in which the king is unable to endure the cries of an ox being taken to a sacrifice. Mencius discusses that if one can develop the “ four beginnings” that man possesses, then one can be distinguishable from beasts.

This theory contradicts Kao Tzu who believed that human nature is neither good nor bad and that the decision of doing good is not inherited but artificially added from outside. Fung situates Mencius as a positive philosopher while providing an elaborate assortment of stories that relate to his beliefs. As an author of an ancient philosopher, Fung confronted many challenges about the decisions of what content to include in his article. Fung’s article stresses Mencius’ theory of human nature which leaves other theories of his and their impact they had on a society unexplained. While the concept of human nature is thoroughly explained, Fung fails to identify the way a ruler should rule.

We are not told what kind of rules should be created, but we are told that the people ultimately decide the fate of the ruler. Also, Fung fails to mention Mencius’ views of rituals. We are not told if Mencius believes in having extreme rituals for elders like the Confucius’ did. One philosopher Fung fails to include in his debate is Xunzi, which had the theory that human nature is evil. If an explanation of why Xunzi theory fails was provided, then

one can better understand the theory of human nature being good and not evil.

Apart from the significance of human nature, one would challenge the views of Mencius' theories. The situation provided in his work of the child falling into the well questions the human nature theory. What Mencius intends to prove in this example is that all men will be moved by sympathy in this event and therefore act in a way to save the child. This event is impractical to prove this theory in the way that not everyone will behave this way.

Mencius theory of human nature is flawed because one cannot know the distinction between good and evil without ever being exposed to it. He contradicts himself by saying to have a good nature one must develop and maintain the " four beginnings" virtues and not let outside forces interfere.

Therefore, one can conclude that the good of human nature is not instilled in them but earned. In the end, the composition of " In the Idealist Wing of Confucianism: Mencius" was thoroughly portrayed. Fung had well-chosen quotes from Mencius' work to provide counter arguments against other philosophers. Even though there were facts not thoroughly explained, Fung was able to clearly demonstrate the meanings behind Mencius' theories and how they differ from other philosophers by providing further examples.

Mencius' view of human nature challenged the idea that a society needs strict rules to prevent them from falling into chaos. Instead, he suggests that if people maintained the " four beginnings", then people will be able to fulfill their lives in a better way rather than being forced to abide by certain laws.

Through Fung's article, Mencius' theories can be easily understood by students and general readers alike. Works Cited Yu-Lan, Fung ung, and Derk Derk Bodde. " In The Idealist Wing of Confucianism: Mencius", A Short History Of Chinese Philosophy. Free Pr, 1997.