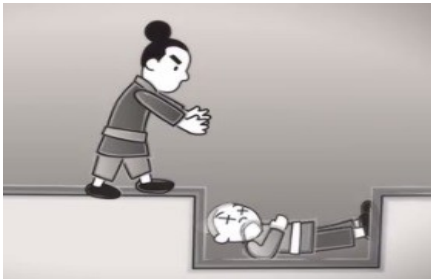


## 4.4 Defending the Confucian burial ceremony

Mencius, a Confucian, opposes Mozi's proposal to **reform traditional conventions**. He targets particularly Mozi's stinging condemnation of elaborate Confucian burial ceremonies. . Mozi, as you recall, had criticized the Confucian burial ceremony as wasteful and therefore harmful rather than beneficial. Mencius responds with a sort of origin story about a time before there were rituals.

### Burial ceremony origin story

蓋上世嘗有不葬其親者。其親死，則舉而委之於壑。他日過之，狐狸食之，蠅蚋姑嘬之。其類有泚，睨而不視。夫泚也，非為人泚，中心達於面目。蓋歸反藁裡而掩之。



In the most ancient times, there were some who did not inter their parents. When their parents died, they took them up and threw them into some water-channel.



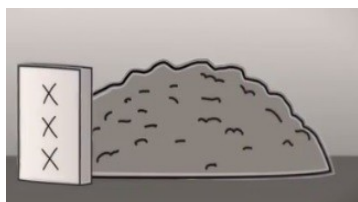
Afterwards, when passing by them, they saw foxes and wild-cats devouring them, and flies and gnats biting at them. The perspiration started out upon their foreheads, and they looked away, unable to bear the sight.



The emotions of their hearts affected their faces and eyes, and instantly they went home, came back with baskets and spades and covered the bodies.

(Mencius: Book 3A5, trans. James Legge)

So notice that Mencius sees the ritual as originating from a **natural physical and psychological response**. The sweat breaks out on our foreheads, and we are guided by our heart-minds to cover the body. But how do we get from throwing some dirt over the bodies to the elaborate burial ceremony that Mozi objected to?



Well, according to Mencius, our hearts prompt the first step—a very simple burial. Then it might prompt a marker, then a more respectful one and so on until we converge on a tradition of elaborate burials. Each step is prompted **by our heart-mind's response** to a current practice. Thus we eventually develop the burial into today's elaborate ceremonies. (Notice: this blatantly contradicts the Confucian sage-king-authority version.)

Mencius's story and explanation introduces a Daoist turn in Confucianism—no surprise, he takes the strategy from the proto-Daoist Yang Zhu. He borrows Yang's version of authority of nature to give him a response to Mozi's naturalist challenge. Nature instills the correct (Confucian) *dào* in us, programmes it into our physical constitution (which, for Mencius, becomes the physical heart-mind).

Notice that in the course of defending the Confucian burial ceremony, Mencius has ends up **rejecting Confucian metaethics**: guidance is no longer from transmission of social practices. Our physical impulses guide them. The burial ceremony is not justified by it's having been passed down to us from the sages. Our heart-mind's naturally inborn, intuitive reaction to seeing our dead parents in a ditch is its origin.