

4.1 Mencius's challengers: Mozi and Yang Zhu

Mencius (孟子 **Mèngzǐ**) sees himself as a defender of **Confucius** against **Mozi** and **Yang Zhu** 楊朱 **Yángzhū**), another classical Chinese philosopher. But Mencius actually draws a great deal on both.



In fact, Mencius claims that he dislikes Mohist 辯 **biàn**--disputing and making distinctions – and only does so because he is himself forced to do so. Why? Because:

楊朱、墨翟之言盈天下。

The words of Yang Zhu and Mozi fill all the world under the sky. (Mencius: Book 3B14)

We'll explore in detail in the rest of Week 4's lectures just what Mencius takes from each *and* how he ends up differing from **Confucius**, **Mozi**, and **Yang Zhu**, but here is the general outline.

- ✗ Mencius rejects Mozi's focus on **language** and analysis. He doesn't want to 辯 **biàn** (make distinctions) or use Mozi's operational measurement to decide the best ways of speaking.
- ✓ Instead, Mencius takes over the Confucian notion of 仁 **rén**; he likes the idea of our acting out of an **intuitive, heart-felt reaction** to things. Yet he also absorbs into the concept of 仁 **rén** Mozi's emphasis on the well-being of others (which is why in Mencius, 仁 **rén** is translated straightforwardly as “benevolence” or “charity”, while in Confucius it may be “goodness”, “humanity”, and so on.)
- ✗ But Mencius doesn't approve of Mozi's emphasis on **altruism**; rather, Mencius thinks that we should stress starting with the Confucian emphasis on **familial relations** (filiality), and wait for benevolence and concern for all to develop gradually in the process of moral growth.
- ✗ In the process of defending Confucian filial piety and **intuition**, Mencius unwittingly repudiates Confucius's **metathetical** reliance on traditions and past practice as sources of authority.
- ✓ In fact, Mencius adapts Mozi's stance that the source of normative authority is 天 **tiān** (nature:sky). Mencius thinks that our moral intuition is instilled in our hearts by 天 **tiān** (nature:sky).
- ✓ And Mencius derives this model from Yang Zhu's understanding of the role of 天 **tiān** (nature) in the natural course of human life. For Yang Zhu nature determines the natural course of our lives by 命 **mìng** (endowing) us with 生 **shēng** (life). We should follow the path that brings to that natural end.

