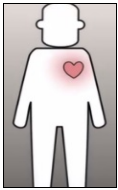


4.3 道 dào (path) and 心 xīn (the heart-mind)



One of the most central concepts in Mencius is that of the psycho-physical **heart-mind**. It's important we understand it in terms of the Chinese concept map rather than fitting it into the belief-desire framework typical of much of the West. One way to go about this is to look at the development of the ideographic structure of the character 德 **dé** (virtuosity), and how it expands the path metaphor and where the heart-mind fits in.



Below is a progression of the ancient written forms of the word 德 **dé** (virtuosity).



In early forms of the character, there is an element that looks like a path that branches (on the left) and also an eye that is seeing and following the path. The eye is like the guidance for the external dao (path).



In later forms, we still see the path that branches, as well as the eye. But we also see the heart, on the bottom right quadrant, consisting of three chambers.



And in the modern version of the character, all the elements are still there: the path, the eye, the heart. The eye transmits information, the heart issues guidance. Mozi emphasizes the senses (eye, ear), while Mencius is going to emphasize the heart.

What's important about 心 **xīn** (the heart, or the heart-mind, as it is more usually translated) is that it doesn't combine thought and desire in some way (as it would be described if we were using the belief-desire framework); rather, it **simply guides action**. It is a choice-making instrument, a **natural, physical organ** that is a natural, constant signpost within ourselves for how we should follow the social dao (path).

The heart-mind stores the courses we should take inside itself and **we don't need to use our eyes and ears and make distinctions** (as Mozi would have it) – because the heart already knows what to do. What Yang Zhu says of our physical length of life (our 生命 **shēng mìng**) is that it is a gift from nature. Similarly, for Mencius, the heart-mind is nature's gift to every human being. It is the core of human nature: this capacity to make moral decisions correctly, and our duty is to use this capacity to the greatest extent and bring about morality.