Confucianism II

After Confucius: Mengzi, Xunzi, and Dong Zhongshu
• The central problem is the lack of an explanation of why one should practice the virtues Confucius advocated.

• Other philosophical traditions which also emerged during this period also offered more specific disputes:
  • The Mohists led by Mozi argued that Confucianism was insufficiently practical and too much emphasis is placed on rites and rituals – instead they advocated a more utilitarian approach.
  • The Legalists argued that the Confucians were insufficiently concerned with developing a strong defense and secure financial power base. They advocated an approach based on rule of law and emphasized the virtues of a warrior state with very strict rules and harsh punishments to enforce them.

Challenges to Confucianism
• **Mengzi/Mencius**
  - (372-289 BCE)

• **Xunzi/Hsün Tzu**
  - (313-238 BCE)

• **Dong Zhongshu/Tung Chung-shu**
  - (179? – 104 BCE)

The Defenders of Confucianism
• Agreed with Confucius that…
  • *Ren* is the fundamental virtue
  • *Li* is necessary in order to develop and manifest *Ren*

• Disagreed with Confucius over…
  • Role of *Yi* – Mengzi placed greater emphasis on *yi* as a means of developing *Ren*
Goodness versus Rightness:

• Mengzi argued that all humans are naturally good, but he recognized that they are not necessarily always acting rightly.

• *Ren* is associated with this innate goodness – also associated with “compassion, reverence and modesty; and know shame.” (p.211)

• *Yi* or “the correctness of action” will follow *ren* naturally if it is sufficiently nourished and developed

• Wrong or evil actions may then be explained through a lack of cultivation of *yi*. 

**Mengzi**
Two new concepts:

- Xin: heart-mind – that feeling which makes seeing the suffering of others unbearable

- Zhi: the virtue of knowing right and wrong

“Since every person draws his or her ideas about the rightness and wrongness of actions from reflections in his or her own heart-mind, it follows that these innate ideas of right and wrong must be found in every person.” (p.211)
By associating the common human nature with the essential goodness of the sage and then connecting the idea of self-cultivation with heaven as the source of all goodness, Mengzi has now added the component of spirituality to Confucianism, which was previously lacking: The reason we want to develop ourselves is to become ever closer to sage hood and thus ever closer to serving heaven.
• Agreed with Confucius and Mengzi in that …
  • The way to realize harmony and human flourishing is through the cultivation of virtue
• Disagreed with Mengzi that…
  • Heaven for Xunzi is not the ultimate spiritual reality as it was for Mengzi but for Xunzi it is nature itself “constant and indifferent to the wishes or actions of human beings.” (p.212)
  • Human nature for Xunzi is not inherently good but is instead inherently bad; people are born selfish and if untutored will simply live their lives in pursuit of desires.

Xunzi
• For Xunzi, then the question is not where does evil come from but how do humans become good?

• Xunzi’s answer is that we are sufficiently intelligent (rational) to realize that the unchecked pursuit of selfish desires will inevitably lead to no one’s satisfaction; we need a harmonious working society to live well and to get that we have to “regulate human behavior.” (p.213)
• Through this approach, Xunzi has now given us the philosophical foundation for the critical nature of li – if we exercise our intellect, the need for li is self-evident.
• During the Qin Dynasty, Confucianism was largely ridiculed, books were burned and Confucian scholars were persecuted.
• Don Zhongshu, among other of his Confucian contemporaries, realized that if Confucianism were ever to gain sufficient acceptance in order to effect the desired changes, they were going to have to take a more synthetic approach, not only adapting to the social and political needs of their time but also adapting competing components from other philosophical approaches into their own.
• They were so successful in this approach that by the Han Dynasty, Confucianism became the state orthodoxy.
• Dong Zhongshu critiqued the two principle competitors to Confucianism:
  • Legalism, while effective in war could not satisfy the needs of a peace-time society, it disregarded the importance of families, rode rough-shod over the dignity of the individual and the brutality inevitably led to rebellion.
  • Daoism, on the other hand, in its emphasis on minimal government and maximal freedom, could not provide the structure necessary to the administration of a large and complex society nor could it provide the means of reconciling conflicting demands of the people.
Don Zhongshu’s solution:

- He proposed a kind of Confucianism that was more universal and less elitist
- He emphasized the relationship between Heaven, Nature and Humans
- He demonstrated how the right government could be “grounded in the workings of the cosmos itself….” (p.215)
- He showed how the right kind of government could improve the lives of those it governed through education, a unity of vision, a careful selection and grooming of officials, and the provision of the ultimate role model in the emperor who “manifest(ed) the highest virtue”…and whose “authority came from Heaven….,” (p.215)
• “Don advised Emperor Wu that a real ruler sincerely listens to Heaven and follows its decree. Furthermore, a real ruler educates the people to complete their nature and he upholds the law to maintain the social order and control desires.” (p.215)