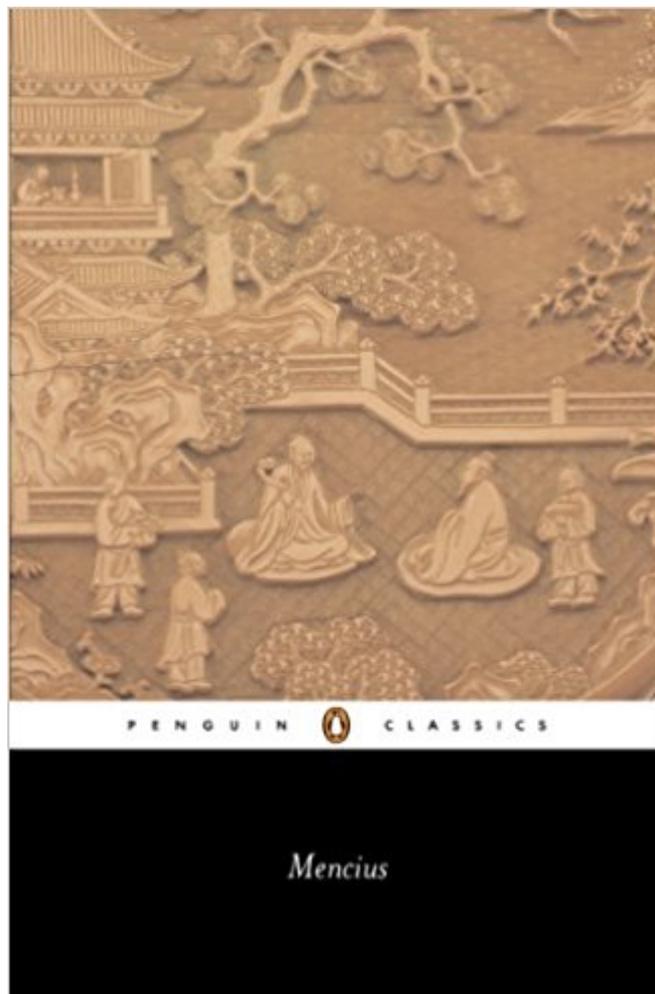


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Mencius (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Mencius was one of the great philosophers of ancient China, second only in influence to Confucius, whose teachings he defended and expanded. The Mencius, in which he recounts his dialogues with kings, dukes and military men, as well as other philosophers, is one of the Four Books that make up the essential Confucian corpus. It takes up Confucius's theories of jen, or goodness and yi, righteousness, explaining that the individual can achieve harmony with mankind and the universe by perfecting his innate moral nature and acting with benevolence and justice. Mencius' strikingly modern views on the duties of subjects and their rulers or the evils of war, created a Confucian orthodoxy that has remained intact since the third century BCE. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

For those who don't know, Mencius was a disciple of Confucius's philosophy - probably the most famous. He helped spread it by adding his own flavour to the theories. This book presents them. It is easier to read than the Analects, in my opinion, as it presents much longer and more coherent paragraphs many of which are like stories. As a result, less time is spent getting acquainted with the

background. One of the key features of Mencius that separates him from Confucius is the book of Mencius has a lot of philosophical argument and rhetoric that is quite sophisticated from a cursory reading (with Confucius, much of the sophistication is apparent only if you know the text EXTREMELY well). Mencius was a keen maker of illustrations in arguments. This is the book that contains the famous argument that human nature is fundamentally good because a person seeing a child on the edge of a well about to fall in will initially be compelled to run and save the child. Basically, there was a sort of split in the interpretation of Confucianism. Xunzi believed that humans are essentially evil (or at least selfish) and therefore it is necessary to have ren (benevolence), li (ritual/propriety) and fa (law) to enable them to develop themselves and overcome their base urges. Mencius went the other way, considering people essentially good (as can be seen in the well example). He would see evil as a result of corruption by society, and ren and li as tools to enable one to develop their true nature. From reading his work though, I think he was far from naive and he certainly did not have an idyllic view of humanity. Rather, Xunzi and Mencius seemed to be advocating the same kind of philosophy and there is not actually that much difference between them.

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