I. A. Richards Selected Works 1919-1938

Volume 5: Mencius on the Mind

Edited by

John Constable

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First published 1932 by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd

This edition published 2001
by Roudedge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Roudedge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested.

ISBN 0-415–21736-9 (volume 5)

ISBN 0-415–21731–8 (set)

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CONTENTS

Editorial Introduction
Mencius on the Mind
Foreword
1. Some Problems of Translation
2. Types of Utterance in Mencius
3. Mencius' View of the Mind
4. Towards a Technique for Comparative Studies
Appendix. Passages of Psychology from Mencius
Index of Names

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Editorial Introduction

It was the painter James Wood who was responsible for introducing Confucian thought into the article, 'The Sense of Beauty',[1] which he was writing in 1920 with C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, and who also, as Richards later remembered, 'first awakened my interest in the multiple potentialities of Chinese phrases': 'We compared different translations of them in a kind of rapture.'[2] The Chinese characters for Chung Yung appear, very badly drawn, at the head of the article, and also in *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), where they are given in the calligraphy of the scholar and poet Hsu Tze-mou, then visiting Cambridge.[3] There follows a short quotation from *The Chung Yung* which explains that 'By Chung is denoted equilibrium', and that 'Yung is the fixed principle regulating everything under heaven':

> When anger, sorrow, joy, pleasure are in being but are not manifested, the mind may be said to be in a state of Equilibrium; when the feelings are stirred and co-operate in due degree the mind may be said to be in a state of Harmony. Equilibrium is the great principle.
>
> If both Equilibrium and Harmony exist everything will occupy its proper place and all things will be nourished and flourish.[4]

The core of the argument in both article and book suggests that *Chung* be made a model of the authors' preferred aesthetic theory, that of the equilibrium of impulses. *Yung* on the other hand is to be taken as representing the harmony of impulses characteristic of resolute action, and the authors suggest that art which produces such harmonies is only of a lower order of value. In Richards' Cambridge lectures of January 1921 this position was to become a major division, though in the interests of simplification it was not carried over into the book derived from these lectures, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). We may note it here as evidence of an early and very significant importation from Chinese thought, but also as a revealing anticipation of Richards' later interest in Mencius. Whereas his earlier writings, *Principles*, for example, and *Science and Poetry* (1926), had concentrated exclusively on equilibria, after *Practical Criticism* (1929) he began to take more interest in the suasive manipulation of impulses into harmonies conducive to action. *Mencius on the Mind* was motivated in some degree by a renewed concern with the relationship between aesthetic equilibrium and the harmonies of impulses, and the connections of both with social order.

Richards does not appear to have taken any disciplined interest in Chinese thought after 'The Sense of Beauty', though in February 1923 he was very seriously considering travel to China to make a film, with a possible post in a university in Peking as an added attraction, and even attempted to persuade Dorothy Pilley to accompany him.[5] They did not in fact visit Peking until the first months of 1927, shortly after

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their marriage in Honolulu on the 31st of December 1926. Though the visit was for only a few weeks, a mixture of honeymoon tourism and lectures, it was sufficient to attract the Richardses to the country, and they let it be known that an opportunity to return would not be unwelcome. Tentative negotiations began behind the scenes, and they had not been back in Cambridge much over a year when one of the English scholars resident in Peking, A. Pollard-Urquhart, wrote to Richards suggesting that he might like to come back to Tsing Hua University as a visiting professor. The letter arrived on the 16th of February 1929. Dorothy Richards recorded their feelings in her diary:

> Ivor wild with excitement. I rather bubbling too at the thought of travel and adventure and escape from the Cambridge routine […].

The routine at Cambridge had recently become more formally bureaucratic with the institution in October 1926 of a Faculty of English, a faculty in which students could spend their entire degree course, and it is not merely an academic pleasantry to suggest that there is a causal connection between this event and Richards' weakening of committment to the University. Richards had doubts as to the value of teaching English literature as a single degree subject, and very deep reservations about research degrees. However, a post in China, though attractive as a means of escaping these anxieties, required careful consideration. Pollard-Urquhart explained that not all universities were financially stable, but that his own, Tsing Hua, had recently become a state institution, and by virtue of its intellectual pre-eminence was now the 'apple of the Nanking Government's eye'. Consequently it was the only non-missionary university able to guarantee regular payment of salaries. The Richardses hesitated only briefly, and as soon as matters could be cleared in Cambridge they were preparing for departure so as to arrive in Peking for the academic year 1929–30. Their journey to China was unhurried, and began with some weeks climbing in the Alps, followed by a visit to Moscow. After only a brief stay of a few days, during which they met Eisenstein,[6] the Richardses took the Siberian Express to Vladivostok, arriving on the 29th of August, and then journeyed on by boat to Japan where they stayed briefly in Kyoto before taking ship for Korea. The overland journey to China via Manchuria was rapid, and on the 16th of September they were present at the opening convocation of Tsing Hua University, which Dorothy Richards described in a letter to her mother and father:

> Started our first day at Tsing Hua on my birthday. Got up 7 am, for we are twenty minutes from Tsing Hua which lies in a walled park of 100 acres, and we had to be by 9 o'clock at Convocation. […] The way from our gate, which is a large and handsome red building with a tiled roof full of dragons, leads out along a winding lane with a stream flowing beside it, and lovely willow trees like those on the Cambridge backs make a shade. The sun is still very hot though nights are distinctly chilly. […] Our meeting place was in a vast Hall holding 2000 but with bad acoustic properties. There we met the President, who is a politician

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(already we have a lot of cross-purpose stories about him and the place). He is put in by the Kuomintang and is already replacing a lot of old teachers by his own nominees. All the teachers had to sit up on the platform while the President made an emphatic and interminable speech. But first we faced the portrait of Sun Yat Sen, while an officer shouted out his will and gave the word of command, at which we all bowed solemnly three times. Then there was another order for silent prayer for three minutes. The hall was decorated with slogans and nationalist flags.[7]

Richards made a speech on understanding between scholars, and the day was brought to a close with a banquet, at which they were served ‘black eggs from the year before’, shark’s fin, chicken, fresh walnuts, freshwater shrimps, ‘stuffed crabs the size of pennies’, and, to Dorothy’s horror, black seaslugs.[8]

Teaching began three days later, Richards trying out Ogden’s newly invented Basic English on some of his language classes, though he was at this time ‘undecided about practicability for University as opposed to commercial English.’[9] With other classes he lectured on ‘Aristotle, Longinus, Dante, Milton, Boileau, Dryden, Coleridge, and Arnold’, ‘finding unexpectedly much to say that seemed to have a direct bearing on Chinese current problems’.[10]

Their house was beautiful and they were immediately at ease:

Here we are at the moment in Paradise. We live in a Llama Temple – ‘The temple of True Consciousness’ – turned by an ex-prime minister of China into a Palace of his own. All flowers and cassia bushes and marble terraces and altars and huge bronze incense burners and hills with aged pines and birds of paradise flashing from bough to bough. Here and there stand red lacquer pavilions, and we live in one of them with grinning retainers with whom at present we converse by gesture. The fairy tale feeling is so strong that we might at any moment wake up to find ourselves in Cambridge. All the West and North horizon is hills. Ranges behind ranges going up to 8000ft and easily reached. At night interminable frantic music is beaten out in the neighbouring village, and 8000 troops in some barracks a mile away blow reveilles from 2am onwards.[11]

They began language lessons immediately and in March. Dorothy was able to write with some satisfaction that ‘my Chinese is now up to domestic needs’.[12] The military presence nearby continued to be unsettling and a reminder of the troubled state of the country. Dorothy noted that the troops ‘look about 15 years old dressed in grey cotton with cloth slippers on their feet so that when they march past you only hear their heavy breathing along the dusty road’. Richards, however, was so contented that he was, after only two months, contemplating a permanent residence in China.[13] He felt isolated both from the European world and his new colleagues and students, but he had already found compensating fascinations, as he explained in November to his friend Raffaello Piccoli, Professor of Italian in Cambridge, and Fellow of Magdalene:

Writing letters here feels like bombarding the moon for all the response

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> one gets… Here life suffers from being rather too interesting. It's rather paralysing. Students very able and incredibly charming but moving so much in another medium of thought and language from ours that they feel nearly as far off as fishes in a tank. I'm trying to get up courage enough to tackle a little Chinese. Though some of them talk and write remarkably good English, their mental habit is not ours. They think in what look like traditional figures of speech, to which context alone gives specific meaning. Their logic seems more like our poetry (without the poetry) than logic… I don't suppose I shall be able to find out anything in this short stay.[14]

Nevertheless he wanted to try, and in an effort to learn something of the character and causes of this mental habit, Richards instigated a series of seminar discussions with colleagues at Yenching University. Judging from the earliest surviving trace of these meetings, a typed document headed 'Notes Towards a Technique of Linguistic Analysis, For the Use of my Chinese Collaborators, Yenching 1929',[15] their first meetings addressed general topics. This enthusiastic start was restrained by a severe infection of the cavity of the lower jaw requiring several operations,[16] but work was restarted in mid-May on a project to read Mencius.[17] He asked three colleagues, A. C. Li (Li An-Che), H. T. Hwang (or Huang), and Lucius Porter, all of Yenching University, to meet for a series of more or less regular consultations. D. E. Richards' diary records meetings on the 22nd of May, the 4th of June, and a 'final session' on the 8th of July,[18] and the Richards Collection contains several documents bearing on these sessions. Notebook 3 records notes on extensive conversations with Lucius Porter and L. T. Huang, and numerous and detailed philological notes on some of the major terms discussed in *Mencius on the Mind*. Three separate documents record papers read by Richards to sessions IV, VII, and the 'Final Occasion' of what Richards refers to as the Yenching seminars.[19] These are concerned with material relevant to *Mencius*, but appear to have been addressed to a group larger than his three close collaborators, and their relationship to the conversations with Li, Porter, and Hwang is unclean They must, however, have been closely associated; Richards used the papers in the writing of *Mencius*.[20]

Something of the character of the discussions can be inferred from remarks made late in life by Richards (the reference here to a team of four appears to be a slip):

> Here was I doing my best to take part in academic activities which illustrated incomprehension – unknown, unrecognized failure of understanding and on such a scale, always hitting you. I felt I must do something. So I got together a very able team of four and I sat in more or less as secretary. I didn't pretend to any Chinese. I could just distinguish one character from another, but I didn't know anything. I couldn't be sensitive to the terrific, universe-wide, reverberations. And these four people were so sensitive in their various ways, and they did their best to explain to me some of the key things. […] My informants (and I had to rely on them), although they were devout Mengtzists, or whatever you call it, were very diverse in their understanding of the Master. I came to

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feel that this diversity was what mattered.[21]

The effect of these meetings was in fact galvanizing. When first planning his stay in Peking there is no evidence that Richards was intending any book on Chinese philosophy. The 'Programme for after return from China', dated 14 June 1929,[22] lists four books: 'Problems of Practical Criticism', 'General Linguistic Methodology', 'Belief, and 'Philosophy of Rhetoric'. The first stirrings of interest appeared on the 12 March 1930 when he added another, under the heading 'Book of summary provisional notes outlining problems. Items for a Program of Literary Studies'. There then follow four subheadings, 'Subjectivity', 'Belief', 'Prolegomena to Comparative Studies', and 'Metaphor'. By the nth of July, after the seminars with Li, Hwang and Porter, this project had become, as he wrote to E. M. W. Tillyard in Cambridge, a 'big inquiry into Chinese mentality, by means of a blend of literary criticism and psychology'.[23] After a summer break Richards returned to work in October 1930, writing to T. S. Eliot on the 19th of that month:

> I'm now trying hard to practise being on both sides of the mirror with Mencius. How successful it will be I don't yet know. But certainly there are degrees in it, there are better and worse versions of Mencius to be given in English. At the least it gives me the best exercise I have ever had in multiple definition and imagining possible meanings. There is something almost like a qualitative mathematics to be worked out for these things and your suggestion that I should be ready after Harvard to apply such analytic machinery to Humanism, Romantic-Classical etc. 'affairs' fits in exactly with part of my program. Alas that programs so much exceed performance.
>
> I'm realising every week that your 'understanding = familiarity' equation (suggested in your last letter) is not *very* far wrong. Mere getting used to Mencius, without knowingly developing thoughts or feelings further with regard to him, does seem to change one's sense of the situation. On the other hand it's not necessary to be cynical about it, since doubtless a good deal goes on unknowingly which ought to be counted in as genuine understanding. With poetry etc. I'm fairly sure that there is a spurious 'feeling of understanding' which *is* simply 'feeling of familiarity'. But that there is also genuine understanding (i.e. response which corresponds to what it ought to correspond to, whatever that may be) I don't doubt. So far as *assent,* conviction, belief-feelings, etc., come in (which, I agree with your *Dante* note, they needn't), these I should say were enormously influenced by familiarity (in some contexts) and by unfamiliarity (in others), e.g. the extra violent feeling in 'conversion' when the sense (or a sense) of a doctrine has just struck the convertee for the *first* time: and contrariwise the reassuring belief-feeling reinforcement of familiar ritual.
>
> Clearly these are topics which would bear some fruit if properly treated. I don't know why one does other things.[24]

A few days later, on the 29th of October, Richards began work on the first chapter of the book,[25] and on the 30th of November he wrote again to Eliot:

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> Mencius has gone fairly well, and though perhaps we can't quite understand what he said, the reasons for our failure keep on bringing up interesting considerations bearing on all acts of interpretation.[26]

Richards was now on the brink of leaving China to teach for several months in Harvard, but just before his departure in mid-January 1931 he managed to sketch the basic frame of the book, and dated the preface 'Peking, New Year's Eve 1930'. However, the work was far from over, indeed it was hardly begun. Once arrived in Harvard in early February Richards was kept extremely busy teaching criticism and practical criticism classes both at Radcliffe and Harvard. Recalling the occasion in 1953 he wrote that

> The book was written hurriedly, in a whirl of lecturing on *Ulysses* and on *The Possessed* […] with much of the feeling one has in trying to scribble down a dream before it fades away. The intellectual currencies of the Harvard scene, not to mention Leopold Bloom and Stavrogin, were driving out those Chinese *aperçus* all the while.[27]

However, the book was a third done by the end of February, 'beginning to take a form',[28] and on the 10th of April he wrote to Dorothy to say that it was all but complete, adding on the 15th that although not quite finished, 'I've got most of it done and the trimmings will merely be mechanical matters of detail'.[29] Negotiations had begun with Kegan Paul in London, and a contract for the book was made on the 4th of May.[30]

Richards had intended to spend a lengthy period in Harvard, certainly into the summer, but his stay was cut short by an accident. On the 15th of May he visited Sterling Leonard of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and together they went sail- canoeing on Lake Mendota. The boat was overturned by a freak wave, and Richards and Leonard were left clinging to the upturned canoe in the chill water. They were unnoticed for an hour and a half and suddenly Leonard's heart gave out. Despite Richards' efforts to support him he sank. Still later, as the sun was setting and Richards' own chances of survival were slipping away, a passing motor-launch spotted him. He was suffering from hypothermia and shock, and only his unusually high level of physical fitness, resulting from his mountain climbing, had saved him.[31] After a week in hospital, during which he was unable to write more than a single-word telegram to his wife, 'Undamaged', and a month of convalescence, he returned to Asia in early July, joining Dorothy in Kyoto, where they stayed with an American friend, Miss Denton, who was teaching at Doshisha University.

He was not yet strong enough to work, but *Mencius on the Mind* was already substantially complete. However, Richards decided to send his manuscript to his colleagues in Yenching for final comments and revision before forwarding it to London. It immediately went missing. Meanwhile, in early August Richards and his wife made their way back to England via Canada, returning to Cambridge in October to discover that his book was still lost and its whereabouts unknown. Writing to Theodore Spencer in Harvard he remarked that

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> *Mencius on the Mind* I keep thinking better and better, more revolutionary, epoch making, fundamental etc., every time I think of it. I can't check up these impressions as it seems fairly certain that it went astray between Japan and China early in July! What I have to reconstruct it from is pretty rudimentary I'm afraid.[32]

Fortunately, the disappearance was not much longer a mystery, and Richards was able to report the 'astonishing history' in a letter to Miss Denton:

> It seems that it did arrive at Yenching and then one of my collaborators put it in a bag to take round to the other. Then his cook, seeing the bag, tried its weight in his hand and decided that it must contain silver (alas, nothing so useful, only my heavy prose style.) So the cook decided to steal it, upped with the bag and ran off there and then. At the end of the street he stopped to force open the bag and found nothing but my papers inside. A horrible disappointment for him. But in China as you know all written paper is respected; so he simply threw the MSS up onto the top of the nearest house. There it stayed I don't know how long until word came that some foreigner's writing was on the roof. When he heard this my friend went and got them. And so, after a long while in which I tried to write it all again – my MSS came back home to me. […] the Cook went to prison for this and other things![33]

After this, matters seemed to have proceeded smoothly. In early December he told Dorothy that he had 'gone through and passed about 1/3 of the final Mencius copy', adding that he was pleased with the argument which he considered a 'really solid piece of scholarly work'. Interestingly he reports that his Yenching team had failed to offer any substantial comments on this final draft, and that they had 'passed apparently without noticing' 'all the daring guesses I put in'.[34] Two days later the book was complete,[35] and in January 1932 part of the text was published in Ogden's journal *Psyche* under the title 'Human Nature: An Early Chinese Argument'.[36] Sections of the final pages of the book, the Chinese appendix, were in proof on the 29th of February 1932,[37] and on the 3rd of May Richards was telling T. S. Eliot that the book would soon be issued.[38]

Writing in D. E. Richards' diary for the 1st of July 1932 Richards noted that 'So far Mencius has slipt out with distinguished inconspicuousness.' But it was, as he went on to admit, a difficult book to place, and he was receiving 'anguished enquiries from Editors as to who could review it'. The single review it had received by this date, that of Lowes Dickinson in the *New Statesman*, Richards thought 'backhanded'.[39] The anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement* in September was contemptuous, and provoked a letter in response from Richards.[40] A few days later, on the 31st of October, he met Soames Jennings at dinner in Magdalene and was told that the reviewer was none other than Arthur Waley. Jennings had just been to visit the great Cambridge sinologist H. A. Giles, who had been 'raving about Waley as an "impostor"'.[41] Richards was 'amazed', and described the matter in a letter to a Peking friend, E. S. Bennett:

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> Waley strangely committed himself in the *Times Literary Supplement* to a series of corrections of the translation – without looking up the commentators or even the other translators, e.g. Lyall, Legge, Courreur. So it was easy for me to reply with a couple of dilemmas to which he hasn't yet contrived an answer. I gather he has lost credit over it.[42]

While this affair might have some use as advertisement it could hardly lead to a more acute reading of what was proving to be a very puzzling book. Part of the problem was that while *Mencius* appeared to be about the interpretation of Chinese language and thought, Richards only employed these aspects of the study as a means of refocusing on other interests of longer standing. 'The Sinologues here have shown marked signs of resenting trespassers', he wrote to Lucius Porter, but then pertinently added 'Though why they should think it their province it is hard to imagine.'[43] Of the other reviews listed below only that of Jameson seems to have caught Richards' notice,[44] and it is still the only lengthy and informed commentary on the book. However, *Mencius on the Mind* has a confirmed reputation in comparative studies, and Edward Said has singled Richards' discussion out as a 'heartening' example of a 'genuine type of pluralism, with the combativeness of systems of definition eliminated'.[45] Of its relationship to Richards' own thought there is hardly any scholarly discussion, beyond brief general accounts such as those in Russo and W. H. N. Hotopf. The Chinese subject has warded off even capable readers, and the argument does not offer itself for easy inspection. Richards himself remarks in a later essay that the book 'stammered away persistently' but never made its point, and admits that he 'doubts whether any whole was in any steady way in the mind of the sayer'. Of these remarks Hotopf writes that 'It is a relief to be told this and hence to be absolved from one's difficulties in making much of it.'[46] This is needlessly timid. *Mencius on the Mind* is tentative, and difficult, but its relation to Richards' earlier work is not beyond discernment, and when this relationship is established its views become, though still subtle, intelligible.

In his own foreword Richards outlines four aims for his book:

1. 'to call the attention of those with a taste for analysis to a fascinating field for exploration – Chinese modes of meaning'

2. 'to discuss, more explicitly than is usual, the difficulties that beset every translator and every student of literature that is far removed in character from his own'

3. 'to apply the considerations which this discussion [i.e. that in item 2. above] brings out towards a clarification of our contemporary methods for controlling our meanings.'

4. 'to present a Chinese view of psychology which seems relevant to the vexed question of science and value'[47]

Of these the first two are evident in the book, and sufficiently clear in

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this elliptical outline description; but the third and fourth aims are hard to conceptualize as stated here, and the fourth is not even easy to recognize in the course of reading. Progress towards understanding this pair of aims depends on grasping the connections between *Mencius* and Richards' earlier work. The central theme establishing this continuity is the dual language hypothesis outlined at length in *The Meaning of Meaning*, popularized in *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Science and Poetry*, and touched on again in a more sophisticated way in *Practical Criticism*[48] As it appears in the second and third of these books it may be neglected here, but the presentation in the first of them must be grasped before proceeding further through *Practical Criticism* to *Mencius*.

As discussed in *The Meaning of Meaning* the symbolic use of language is concerned with the direction, the organization, the recording, and the communication of *reference*, by which Ogden and Richards meant nothing less than *thought*. This latter point is set out in a memorable passage:

> It is Thought (or, as we shall usually say, *reference)* which is directed and organized, and it is also Thought which is recorded and communicated. But just as we say that the gardener mows the lawn when we know that it is the lawn-mower which actually does the cutting, so, though we know that the direct relation of symbols is with thought, we also say that symbols record events and communicate facts.[49]

The relationships between thought and referent can be very direct, 'as when we think about or attend to a coloured surface we see', or they may consist of a 'very long chain of sign-situations intervening between the act and its referent', for example the chain when we are thinking of Napoleon would consist of 'word – historian – contemporary record – eye-witness – referent (Napoleon)'.[50] By contrast emotive utterances are intended to express an *attitude*, and perhaps to *evoke* similar attitudes in others.[51] It becomes evident therefore that the distinction between emotive and symbolic is in its deepest sense a psychological distinction between *thoughts* and *attitudes*, and language is classified as either emotive or symbolic depending on whether its primary use (Ogden and Richards expect nearly all real instances to be mixed cases) is the recording, support, organization, and communication of reference (thought) or the expression or evocation of attitudes:

> If we say 'The height of the Eiffel Tower is 900 feet' we are making a statement, we are using symbols in order to record or communicate a reference, and our symbol is true or false in a strict sense and is theoretically verifiable, but if we say 'Hurrah!', or 'Poetry is a spirit', or 'Man is a worm', we may not be making statements, not even false statements; we are most probably using words merely to evoke certain attitudes.[52]

That is to say that emotive language is concerned with the 'expression of emotions, attitudes, moods, intentions, etc' and 'their

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communication, i.e., their evocation in the listener'.[53]

This account is further developed as a five part analysis of the functions of language, of which I shall here list only four, the last being vaguely defined and abandoned by Richards in later treatments:

1. Symbolization of reference
2. The expression of attitude to listener
3. The expression of attitude to referent
4. The promotion of effects intended.[54]

This leads Ogden and Richards into what I have elsewhere called a combinatorial theory of language function,[55] where an utterance can make use of any combination of the above functions. Pure symbolization of reference, without any interference from the other functions is a theoretical possibility, aimed at by the sciences and sometimes, perhaps, actually achieved. In most cases of normal science, we may infer, interference is likely though irrelevant. In some utterance, greetings and valedictions for example, this referential function may lapse completely. Orders and commands exhibit yet another constellation, since they must satisfy reference and purpose conditions, but can be quite void of attitude. Of the many other combinations few are distinct from one another, but some are highly salient. For example, the purely referential or would-be purely referential language of science, on the one hand, and on the other that of utterance only designed to manipulate the attitudinal state of the listener. Such poetic utterance may employ reference as a means, but as reference it is merely ancillary:

> In strict symbolic language the emotional effects of the words whether direct or indirect are irrelevant to their employment. In evocative language on the other hand all the means by which attitudes, moods, desires, feelings, emotions can be verbally incited in an audience are concerned.[56]

In *Practical Criticism* this view appears again under a slightly different guise, the four terms above being replaced by Sense, Tone, Feeling, and Intention. An internal rearrangment of priorities also takes place. Since 'Tone' in *Practical Criticism* is a feature which cannot lapse, and 'Intention' underlies all utterance and 'operates through and satisfies itself in a combination of the other functions',[57] the reader is left with the conclusion that the concept of pure referential utterance has been banished even as a theoretical possibility. However, the most important deviation from the views of *The Meaning of Meaning* occurs in an appendix, and is only touched on in the course of an attempt to recast his views on the status of reference in poetry. Richards begins by noting that 'sense'

> as we know it in its developed form in strict prose discussion, frequently appears to lapse in poetry. Or it returns there to that vaguer kind of

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reference by which we speak *of This* or *That*, not as objects having the properties by which, if challenged, we might in some science define them, but as objects of a kind towards which we have certain attitudes and feelings, or objects that have this or that effect upon us. This vagueness is very frequently misunderstood in poetry. It is due to a replacement of scientific classifications by emotive classifications. We make use of external properties in place of internal properties – the effects produced by objects on us, instead of qualities inherent in the objects. But these emotive classifications are in their own way very strict and definite. Thus incoherence in the thought of poetry, though it cannot be demonstrated by the same means as incoherence in a logical exposition, can be inquired into once we have grasped the principle at work.[58]

By a quite unexpected route Richards is reintroducing reference into evocative utterance, and his conclusion to this movement is a crucial transition in his own development:

But thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought, and with words so used Function 1 (sense), though not in the most obvious way, may still be dominant.[59]

Richards was very well aware of the importance of this, and remarked on it in a letter to his wife at the time he was writing this section and that on ‘Sense and Feeling’ in the main body of *Practical Criticism*:

I’m on a very interesting line about feeling and sense and if I could get it worked out (and I’m fairly sure another spell will do it) I’d be very much advanced in all kinds of ways – it’s something *new* and an extension in a rather unexpected degree of some *Meaning of Meaning* work. But *very* much to the point for poetry.[60]

But he makes no further attempt beyond the appendix in *Practical Criticism* to expand this point, and we are left uncertain as to how much of the argument of *The Meaning of Meaning* has been abandoned. Instead he returns to his main subject, namely the cases, normal in poetry, where the statement is merely a means to attitudinal adjustment and is discarded when certain feelings have been successfully evoked. However, the concept of a reference employing evocation as its medium was clearly too interesting to neglect for long, and it is this which Richards takes up in *Mencius on the Mind*. Initially, in the opening sections of *Mencius*, which discuss the choice of equivalents in translation of major terms in his Chinese sources, Richards remarks that we must choose between alternatives because of their varying emotive effects, and he suggests that this is probably the way Mencius himself worked:

In the case of Mencius the emotive components of the meaning probably take precedence of the sense components in ways which we would not consciously allow in our modern choices of words.[61]

The emotive theory being invoked here is the simplified two- term

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version familiar from the earlier phase of *The Meaning of Meaning* and from *Principles*, and the reader may be forgiven for seeing little more in it. We are closer to the combinatorial theory in such remarks as this, anticipated in the letter to Piccoli quoted above, when Richards observes that Mencius' '*method* – even when his aim is severely prosaic – is frequently the method of condensed poetry':

> If we wished for a short description of the difference between Confucian philosophic method and, shall we say, Kantian, we could hardly do better than to say that the latter endeavours to use an explicit logic and the former an indicated guess.[62]

This is to all appearances derogatory, as if Mencius and the other Confucians were being vague and somewhat lazy, but the view Richards in fact adopts in the core passages of his book, those on pages 55–64, take up the remark that thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought. In these pages Richards notes that Mencius' writings are 'dominated by suasive purpose', and are untroubled with the usual goals of logically minded dispute. There is, for example, little concern to explicate points of difference between two positions, and the opponent's argument is not scrutinized for flaws. Generally, Richards notes, 'the theoretic or general interest of securing intellectual adequacy is absent'.[63] Such tolerance is possible because the conversants all share basic principles, the respect for age for example, and are concerned only 'with *how* this respect is determined', and 'not at all with justifying the respect, or inquiring into the reasons for giving it.'[64] This leads Richards to observe that their psychology is serving different purposes than it would in the idealized scientific form of western thought:

> What they are doing is not so much enquiring into the nature of man as giving an account of it which will conduce to the maintenance of these fixed, unquestionable observances.[65]

This leads him to a conclusion, ameliorated by a concession that the same may apply to Western psychology in some part, that Mencius' work is devoted to the maintenance of a preexisting social and political order.

> We have become accustomed to regarding myth as deriving from ritual, as an explanatory imaginative construction arising from rituals that are prior to it. Probably the psychology of Mencius should be regarded in the same way – as an explanatory apology for a system of social practices of a ritual nature whose sanction, in the sense of compulsive authority, is *elsewhere* than in the doctrines of the sages. These doctrines would thus be constructions – historico-sociological in the case of Confucius, psychological in the case of Mencius – designed to give intellectual support to a system whose basis is social.

Thus far we might feel that Richards has done little more than any late-nineteenth century rationalist, or any late twentieth- century theorist of ideology, would have managed when scrutinizing the

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religion and philosophy of a people. Mencius brings the powers of poetry to bear on the minds of his listeners through the evocative use of a whole range of terms, 'respect, revere, obey, defer to, honour', to generate a sanction which the principle of respect for age could not achieve in any explicit or logical way.[66] At this point Richards surprises us. Admitting that such an account would seem to reduce the interest of Mencius' work to almost nothing, viewed from a scientific psychological viewpoint, he remarks that:

> But this would be taking too short a view of the matter. Even allowing great influence to the dominating social purpose, there is still room for plenty of variety in the conceptions developed in its service. […] And it is arguable that the very fixity and stability of the purpose might in time allow the conceptions which best served it to take note of facts in a manner less confused by shifting intentions and metaphysical revolutions. Also that, if we can allow for the purpose, we can read the conceptions, as representations of facts, more clearly than we could otherwise.[67]

This is not a pellucid view of the doctrine, but reference to *Practical Criticism* will assist us. Thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought, and may even have practical advantages in terms of its referential capacities, provided we know how to read it. Further, Richards notes that Mencius' example with its openly suasive psychology reminds us that many of the conceptions of modern psychological research are 'equally influenced by extraneous purposes of a different and an opposed nature'.[68] The consequences of this are, frustratingly, never made explicit in Richards' remarks, but it seems reasonable to conclude that the covert nature of contemporary suasion is being presented as a threat to its referentiality.

The most striking, and in some senses terrifying, conclusion which Richards reaches is the suggestion that the employment of psychology in the service of social suasion, the ideological manipulation of a people, is justifiable if the consequences are themselves desirable, as his experiences in China had led him to believe they could be. It should be remembered that he was thinking of the long-term formative influence of the Confucian tradition, not more recent developments under the Kuo Min Tang. Richards' respect for China's social order was profound and long lasting, but tended to transcend local historical realities. As late as 1968 he was prepared to affirm the statement, put to him in an interview, that 'China is closer to achieving "the good life"' than the West, citing the Chinese people's 'deep ingrained horror of violence'.[69]

Having reminded us once more that Mencius was unconcerned with 'systematic observation and prediction', but only with the 'enforcement of a schema of conduct' he goes on to recommend that we contemplate the possibility of such a method ourselves:

> It may well be that a purely scientific psychology could give us no self-control or power of influencing others except in such indirect ways as are exemplified by the administration of drugs or the use of exercises. If so,

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> we should be forced probably to supplement scientific psychology with a fictional account of human nature in the interests of a finely ordered society and of reasonably unwasteful living. There may thus be another advantage in studying, if only as a set of fictions, the scheme of conceptions which has given both a fine and a very widely diffused civilization to the Chinese people.[70]

This is of course straightforwardly recognizable as related to parts of the argument of *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and of *Science and Poetry*. Namely, that scientific knowledge may at present be too much for the mind to bear, and that science's emotional deficiencies must be supplied by poetry. However, the variations from this earlier view are very significant. While *Science and Poetry* had seemed to hold out the possibility that some future science might be so complete and developed that emotional satisfaction could be derived from it, Richards here, more pessimistically and conventionally, sees it as being inherently limited to mechanistic manipulation. (It should be noted as a possible source of influence at this point that whilst in Harvard, writing up *Mencius*, Richards visited the psychological laboratories there, becoming acquainted with the great theorist of learning B. F. Skinner, whose views on the power of psychological science for social control were strong and likely to alarm a liberal of Richards' generation.[71] Richards also met Gordon Allport,[72] and others with whom he discussed *Mencius*[73]) In addition we may detect a shift of attention away from the psychological benefit for the individual to that of the whole population, an emphasis which was in fact already becoming apparent in *Practical Criticism*[74] Moreover, the 'poetic' use of language that is being commended – the fictional account of human nature – is not simply the type in which reference is employed only as a means to attitudinal adjustment which produces equilibria of impulses with no consequent action, that is poetry, but a suasive type, one in which reference may actually be handled via evocative categories. Put still more simply and in terms of a Confucian doctrine we know Richards had already invoked in relation to his aesthetic views, the calm of the aesthetic state must be supplemented by judicious use of harmonies of impulses to bring about concerted action towards desirable ends, ends which, as in the case of Chinese civilization, are self-evidently valuable. This is the obscure fourth aim of the book, in which Richards proves to be making a fundamentally political recommendation. In his earlier writings he had suggested that science was insufficient to support personal emotional life, and must be supplemented by poetic manipulation of our impulses to form equilibria. He now suggests that science is insufficient as a basis for politics and morals, a point he illustrates by suggesting that the exercise of private and public virtue did not depend on and might be impaired by self-awareness. Suasive techniques were to be recognized as beneficial in maintaining a social consensus. Worries as to where this consensus would originate and how a bad consensus might be criticized are to some extent deflected by raising the possibility that a discussion governed by evocative categories might have its own

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referential value. Richards then immediately follows his plea for moral government through a 'fictional account of human nature' with a chapter discussing Mencius' view of the mind, so that the reader may decide for himself whether reference has here survived.

Overall this was an extraordinary position, and one which may be regarded as much more dramatic a departure from earlier views than the relegation of science in *Coleridge on Imagination*.[75] As a program, and in the further reduced form outlined above, it might seem strikingly irresponsible. After all it is one thing to call for a supplementation of science by a judicious fiction, but it is quite another to deliver the means of evaluating such fictions, and of integrating them with scientific thought. But Richards does attempt, both in *Mencius* and in his later writings such as *Interpretation in Teaching*, to provide the means for such a discriminative use of language. In *Mencius* the attempt will be found in the final chapter, 'A Technique for Comparative Studies'. The presentation is complex, but the salient features are simple enough for summary without gross distortion. Richards returns to the multiple functions of language first outlined in *The Meaning of Meaning* and further worked over in *Practical Criticism*. As in this latter work he reduces the functions to four, but he finds a new set of names, and he re-orders them in accordance with the position outlined in the earlier parts of his study of *Mencius*. Literary meanings are said to be comprised of:

1. Intention or purpose
2. Feeling, or attitude towards what is being spoken about
3. Tone, or attitude to those spoken to
4. Sense, or reference to what is being spoken about.[76]

Intention here comes first since he now regards all thought as purposive,[77] a position he had first indicated in *Practical Criticism*. Reference is reduced in importance, as an antidote to our prevalent belief that it is the main and most important language function. Indeed, it is this growth in our respect which most threatens us. Suasive and fictionally oriented text requires careful reading, but the growth of science has made us careless in this regard, and while we may sometimes fail to recognize good suasion for what it is, rejecting it as bad reasoning,[78] we are as likely to make the parallel mistake of thinking that good suasion is good reasoning. To guard against these errors, and to improve our ability to distinguish between better and worse suasive uses, Richards proposes that readers be trained in 'Multiple Definition', which he describes as 'accompanying any definition or distinction we make use of with a set of rival definitions in the background of our mind':

> Only so can we protect ourselves from the coercive suggestion of any one interpretation which seems for the moment to fit.[79]

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The procedure is made explicit in the multiple definitions that Richards gives of what he terms the ‘senses’ (referential uses) and the ‘gestures’ (the emotive meanings, 1–3 listed above)[80] of the four terms, ‘beautiful’, ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, and ‘order’.[81] As he notes, the seeming complication promises a great reduction in eventual labour, since the ‘“indefinable” peculiarities of a sense can be resolved into features of its range of gestures’.[82] This final chapter constitutes the most detailed re-articulation of the dual language hypothesis in Richards’ work after *The Meaning of Meaning*, and though it surrenders some of the clarity of the earlier presentation, and may be thought to abandon science when it is most needed, it has merits, particularly the understanding that the recognition of intention may be primary in communication. As a chapter in the history of Richards’ thought it is crucial, being the first occasion in his writings subsequent to *The Foundations of Aesthetics* on which he attempts to deal with the distinction between harmonies and equilibria of impulses, and it is complementary to *Coleridge on Imagination*, which takes up the distinction again in a purely literary context, with the focus on equilibria. *Mencius on the Mind* is an attempt to discuss harmonies in a socio-political connection, and the result is a programme which recommends an enlightened ideological manipulation, a self-manipulation in the public interest, with the entire system being regulated by the private discrimination of every individual as a reader. This is a very striking, indeed a bizarre suggestion, but one which will be found repeatedly, though in progressively less and less clearly articulated forms, in Richards’ later writings.

Two objections immediately suggest themselves. Firstly, that such a politics is unlikely to be stable, and that the history of the decade following the publication of *Mencius* shows that the consensa which suasion were to support might so easily be wrong (Richards himself acknowledges this in *Coleridge on Imagination*[83]). Secondly, and more trenchantly, it might be said that Richards’ recommendation is redundant, since this mixture of science and suasive morals is in fact the normal state of our politics.

In neither case does mere literary education seem likely to be a sufficient remedy or guide, and just as one possible conclusion to a reading of Richards’ various apologies for poetry is that after all such a defense is impossible and unjustifiable, so after *Mencius on the Mind* we might feel that what is required is not less but more science.

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Reviews and other Discussions of *Mencius on the Mind*

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Note on the Text

Mencius on the Mind was published in June 1932 by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. in London, and an American edition, composed of imported sheets, was issued by Harcourt, Brace and Co. of New York.

The text reprinted here is that of the First Edition of 1932. No subsequent reprint was revised.

To facilitate the tracing of references the page numbers of the First Edition have been supplied in the margin. All internal cross-references, including those of the index but excluding those in the contents chapter listings, are to these original page numbers.

Some errors in the transliteration and the printing of the Chinese have been corrected from information supplied to me by Ming Xie, Assistant Professor in the Department of English, University of Toronto. These changes are as follows:

On page 96 of the main text (original pagination) *cheng* has been corrected to *ch'eng*.

In the Appendix numerous errors have been corrected, as listed in the following table, where 'page' refers to the pagination of the Appendix, 'line' refers to the three-tiered line (each consisting of a Chinese-character line, a Wade-Giles transliteration line, and a line of English equivalents), and 'character' to the Chinese character, counted from the left.

page	*line*	*character*	*notes*
2	7	1	*yu* corrected to *shih*
5	6	4	*sai* corrected to *sui*
6	1	1	*p'o* corrected to *po*
6	4	8	*ché* corrected to *chê*
7	2	1	*ch'i* corrected to *shih*
7	3	1	*ch'i* corrected *to shih*
7	6	2	*ch'i* corrected to *shih*
8	6	5	*ch'i* corrected to *shih*
9	4	5	*ch'i* corrected to *ch'u*
13	4	10	*t'ang* corrected to *t'i*
15	6	1	*pai* corrected to *hai*
16	5	6	*pai* corrected to *hai*
16	7	9	*kuai* corrected to *k'uai*
19	7	6	*tzê* corrected to *tzu*
23	5	7	*chih* corrected to *yeh*
27	8	5	*yüeh* (曰) corrected to *jih* (日)
29	2	4	hsiang corrected to *ch'ing*

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30	4	6	*la* (刺) corrected to *tz‘u* (刺)
30	5	6	*la* (刺) corrected to *tz‘u* (刺)
31	3	2	*shih* corrected to *ssu*
31	3	8	*shih* corrected to *ssu*
33	1	8	*shih* corrected to *shuai*
36	3	9	(徙) corrected to (徙)
37	10	4	*chu* corrected to *ch‘ü*
39	6	7	*shu* corrected to *shou*
40	8	1	*p‘in* corrected to *pin*
41	5	5	*ch‘i* corrected to *ssu*
43	5	8	(已) corected to (已)
44	5	2	Transliteration added: *lü*

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1 C. K. Ogden, I. A. Richards, James Wood, ‘The Sense of Beauty’, *Cambridge Magazine*, 10/2 (Jan.-Mar. 1921), 73–93. Reprinted as *Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), and used in Chapter 7 ‘The Meaning of Beauty’, of *The Meaning of Meaning*.

2 ‘Beginnings and Transitions: I. A. Richards Interviewed by Reuben Brower’, in Reuben Brower, et al., eds, *I. A. Richards: Essays in his Honor* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1973), [17–41], 31.

3 For further remarks on his acquaintance with Hsu, both in Cambridge and later in China, see Richards’ brief account in ‘The Chinese Renaissance’, *Scrutiny*, 1/2 (Sep. 1932), [102–13] 110.

4 *Foundations of Aesthetics*, 14.

5 D. E. Richards’ diary, 29 Feb. 1923, Richards Collection, Magdalene College, Cambridge (hereafter RCM).

6 D. E. Richards’ diary, 15 Aug. 1929, RCM.

7 D. E. Richards’ diary, 16 Sep. 1929, RCM.

8 D. E. Richards’ diary, 16 Sep. 1929, RCM.

9 D. E. Richards’ diary, 15 Oct. 1929, RCM.

10 D. E. Richards’ diary, 20 Sep. 1929, RCM.

11 D. E. Richards’ diary, 29 Sep. 1929, RCM.

12 D. E. Richards’ diary, 3 Mar. 1930, RCM.

13 D. E. Richards’ diary, 26 Oct. 1929, RCM.

14 Transcribed in D. E. Richards’ diary, 30 Nov. 1929, RCM.

15 Richards Collection, Box 11/Prose A, RCM.

16 D. E. Richards’ diary, 15 Mar. 1930, RCM.

17 D. E. Richards’ diary, 15 and 16 May 1930, RCM.

18 D. E. Richards’ diary, 8 July 1930, RCM.

19 Box 11/Prose A, RCM. A note on the document relating to session IV remarks that the notes for sessions I and II are in the ‘Middle Red backed notebook’, a notebook now lost.

20 IAR to D. E. Richards, 15 Apr. 1931, RCM: ‘what I’ve been doing lately has been the Yenching later lectures over again’.

21 ‘Beginnings and Transitions’, 32.

22 Notebook 3, RCM. The plan appears to have been based on an earlier oudine dated 14 May 1928.

23 D. E. Richards’ diary, 11 July 1930, RCM.

24 John Constable, ed., *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 58.

25 D. E. Richards’ diary, 29 Oct. 1930, RCM.

26 *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards*, 60.

27 ‘Toward a Theory of Comprehending’, *Speculative Instruments* (University of Chicago Press: Illinois, 1955), [17–38], 17. Originally published as Toward a Theory of Translating’, in Arthur F. Wright, ed, *Studies in Chinese Thought* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1953).

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28 IAR to D. E. Richards, 21 Feb. 1931, RCM.
29 IAR to D. E. Richards, 15 Apr. 1931, RCM.
30 Contract in RCM.
31 IAR to D. E. Richards, 27 May 1931, RCM. Other information in a short biography of Leonard attached to W. E. Leonard to IAR, 18 Sep. 1931, RCM.
32 Recorded in D. E. Richards' diary, 25 Oct. 1931, RCM.
33 D. E. Richards' diary, 1 July 1932, RCM.
34 IAR to D. E. Richards, 11 Dec. 1931, RCM.
35 IAR to D. E. Richards, 13 Dec. 1931, RCM.
36 *Psyche*, 12/3 (Jan. 1932), 62–77.
37 D. E. Richards' diary, 29 Feb. 1932, RCM.
38 *Selected Letters of I. A. Richards*, 64.
39 D. E. Richards' diary, 1 July 1932, RCM.
40 Arthur Waley, 'Mencius on the Mind', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31/1598 (15 Sep. 1932), 634. Richards replied in 'Mencius', *The Times Literary Supplement* 31/1601 (6 October 1932), 711. Both are reprinted in Volume 10.
41 IAR to D. E. Richards, 31 Oct. 1932, RCM.
42 Transcribed in D. E. Richards' diary, 16 Nov. 1932, RCM.
43 Transcribed in D. E. Richards' diary, 26 Nov. 1932, RCM.
44 See *Coleridge on Imagination*, 157.
45 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1991 [1978]), 254.
46 W. H. N. Hotopf, *Language, Thought and Comprehension: A Case Study of the Writings of I. A. Richards* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1965), 64–5. Richards' remarks are quoted from 'Toward a Theory of Comprehending' (see above).
47 *Mencius on the Mind*, xii.
48 See my introduction to *The Meaning of Meaning*, Volume 2, for a more detailed discussion of the relation between the various versions of the emotive meaning theory in those books.
49 *Meaning of Meaning*, 9.
50 *Meaning of Meaning*, 11
51 *Meaning of Meaning*, 125.
52 *Meaning of Meaning*, 149.
53 *Meaning of Meaning*, 149.
54 *Meaning of Meaning*, 226–7.
55 See Introduction to Volume 2.
56 *Meaning of Meaning*, 235.
57 *Practical Criticism*, 182.
58 *Practical Criticism*, 354.
59 *Practical Criticism*, 354.
60 IAR to D. E. Richards, Undated (begins 'Good news from Ward'), datable from internal evidence to after 5 July 1928, RCM.
61 *Mencius on the Mind*, 17.
62 *Mencius on the Mind*, 7.
63 *Mencius on the Mind*, 55.
64 *Mencius on the Mind*, 55
65 *Mencius on the Mind*, 56.
66 *Mencius on the Mind*, 58.
67 *Mencius on the Mind*, 59.
68 *Mencius on the Mind*, 59.
69 'An Interview Conducted by B. A. Boucher and J. P. Russo', in J. P. Russo, ed., I. A. Richards, *Complementarities: Uncollected Essays* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1976), [254–69], 267.
70 *Mencius*, 64.
71 Skinner sent Richards a copy of his early paper, 'The Concept of the Reflex in the Description of Behavior', *The Journal of General Psychology* 5/4 (Oct. 1931), 427–58, but there is nothing in this which explicitly describes social control, and the impact on Richards, if any, would be conversational and of a general kind.
72 IAR to D. E. Richards, 21 Feb. 1931, RCM.
73 IAR to D. E. Richards, 28 Feb. 1931, RCM.
74 The terms used in *Mencius on the Mind*, 'fine and a very widely diffused', echo those in *Practical Criticism*, 314: 'high and diffused civilization'.

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75 See Introduction to Volume 6.
76 *Mencius on the Mind*, 88.
77 *Mencius on the Mind*, 91.
78 *Mencius on the Mind*, 89.
79 *Mencius on the Mind*, 90.
80 *Mencius on the Mind*, 99.
81 *Mencius on the Mind*, 100ff.
82 *Mencius on the Mind*, 99.
83 *Coleridge on Imagination,170*.

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Mencius on the Mind

v *To my Collaborators*
L. T. Hwang
Lucius Porter
A. C. Li

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vii ‘This were a wonder thing’, quod Troilus,
‘Thou coudest never in love thy-selven wisse;
How devel maystow bringen me to blisse?’

‘Ye, Troilus, now herke’, quod Pandare,
‘Though I be nyce; it happe ofte so,
That oon that exces doth fill yvele fare
By good counseyl can kepe his freend ther-fro.
I have my-self eek seyn a blind man go
Ther-as he fel that coude loke wide
A fool may eek a wys man ofte gyde.

A whetston is no kerving instrument,
And yet it maketh sharpe kerving-tolis.
And ther thow woost that I have ought miswent
Eschewe thou that, for swiche thing to thee scole is;
Thus ofte wyse men ben war by folis.
If thou do so, thy wit is wel biwared;
By his contrarie is every thing declared.’

Troilus and Criseyde, Book 1

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x Mencius, 372–289 BC, a descendant of one of the noble families of Lu, is second only to Confucius in reputation and authority as a moralist and philosopher. The record of his teachings and his conversations with princes who sought his counsel, or disciples who gathered around him for instruction, forms the fourth of the Four Books; and upon the principles they inculcate, a great portion of the orthodoxy of China in matters relating to ethics and social order is directly founded. Few details of his personal history have been preserved, but a tradition records that having been left an orphan in childhood by the death of his father, he was educated with tender but wise solicitude by his mother. In later years he studied, it is said, under disciples of the renowned Tzu Ssu (K‘ung chi), the grandson of Confucius, becoming thus a direct inheritor of the Confucian doctrines. The record of his teachings was first made the subject of profound study and elaborate commentary in the second century AD by the scholar Chao Ch‘i, who gave him the honorific epithet Sage Second, and this has since remained as the philosopher's distinctive title. In AD 1083 the Emperor Sung Chen Tsung conferred upon him the retrospective honour of elevation to the rank of Duke of Cheng (鄭國公), and he was classed among the most honoured of the disciples of Confucius. His reputation gained fresh lustre from the disquisitions of the schoolmen of this period, and in AD 1330 an imperial decree invested him with the additional title of 亞聖公 (Ya Sheng Kung). The Sage's tomb is still reverently guarded near the city of Tsou Hsien in Shantung.

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Chapter One

Some Problems of Translation [1]

> This is not strange, Ulysses!
> The beauty that is borne here in the face
> The bearer knows not, but commends itself
> To other's eyes: nor doth the eye itself
> That most pure spirit of sense – behold itself,
> Not going from itself: but eye to eye oppos'd Salutes each other with each other's form;
> For speculation turns not to itself
> Till it hath travell'd and is mirror'd there
> Where it may see itself This is not strange at all!
>
> *Troilus and Cressida*

1. To a mind formed by modern Western training the interpretation of the Chinese Classics seems often an adventure among possibilities of thought and feeling rather than an encounter with facts. Perhaps this should be so at present with all ancient or foreign utterances. Perhaps we are only forced here to recognize an unescapable situation more frankly. However this may be, our first passage[1] plunges us abruptly into the wild abyss of conjecture through which we have, in this undertaking, to make our way.

The following scheme of possibilities for our first two lines one of the few methodological observations to be found in Mencius 2 – indicates some of the readings which can, without undue straining, be given to them.

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In attempting to choose one reading rather than another a very important consideration is soon forced upon us. As we shall see, Chinese thinking often gives no attention to distinctions which for Western minds are so traditional and so firmly established in thought and language, that we neither question them nor even become aware of them as *distinctions*. We receive and use them as though they belonged unconditionally to the constitution of things (or of thought). We forget that these distinctions 4 have been made and maintained as part of one tradition of thinking; and that another tradition of thinking might neither find use for them nor (being committed to other courses) be able to admit them. And an analysis into separate alternative readings, such as the above, is likely (in a measure which we have no means at present of estimating) to misrepresent the original meaning, which may not correspond to any one of them but be nearer to a blend of several. But this blending metaphor will mislead, if we are dealing here with a meaning which includes, or treats as one, ingredients which for us may be distinct and separate, but were never analysed and then put together by the Chinese. And we should be rash to suppose that any blend we can achieve by abstraction and synthesis will really reproduce a thought which was not arrived at by these processes. We can come nearer to it perhaps by reversing our mental activity and going back from our defined and articulate abstractions to concrete imagining. This may, perhaps, be the very advice that Mencius is giving here to the wise ones. Not to work away arbitrarily at the problem of Nature (human and general), but to submit the mind to the fact so that the knowledge which it is in the mind's nature to have of itself (and the rest of Nature) may develop without interference. But the instance he gives of the success which the almanackmakers can attain tells against such an interpretation.

This ore-like character of Chinese thought including, together without distinction, elements we only have a use for when we have separated them – elements we can take together only as a result of high abstraction and with conscious philosophic daring –is illustrated in this passage both by *Hsing* (Nature) and *Ku* (Cause), and also in the structure of the sentences. *Hsing* stands 5 both for Human Nature - the subject enquired about in most of these passages from Mencius – and for Nature in general. It is useful to have here at the beginning such a striking instance of the identification (or, better, non-separation) of the two. The point will need further discussion, but we must from the outset realize that psychology and physics are not two separated studies for early Chinese thought (or for later); and that, however metaphysically abhorrent it may be to us, the mind and its objects are not set over against one another for Mencius, or (I understand) for any of his fellows.

This non-separation of human and external Nature – elaborated in Sung times, by Chucius (Chu Hsi), with Buddhistic speculations that seem to verge towards an idealism – may be connected with the fact that (except for Moh Tih and his followers) there seems to have been no problem of knowledge for Chinese thought. This absence of one of our prime Western problems may be an effect or a cause of the *Hsing*

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We’d jump the life to come.…

Vaulting ambition which o’er leaps itself
And falls on the other.

The parallel with such poetry is, I think, illuminating here, and we must often be doubtful whether Mencius (still more Confucius at times, and Tzu Ssu, the author of the *Chung Yung*) should not primarily be regarded as a poet. His aims seem often to be those of poetry rather than of prose philosophy. Be this as it may, his *method* – even when his aim is severely prosaic – is frequently the method of condensed poetry. If we wished for a short description of the difference between Confucian philosophic method and, shall we say, Kantian, we could hardly do better than to say that the latter endeavours to use an explicit logic and the former an indicated guess.

It may be relevant also to note that in the traditional reading of the text, even for the purposes of exposition, scholars of the old school give it a very pronounced roll amounting almost to a 8 chant. This, and the fact that from early times until yesterday it has been learnt by heart *before* any attempt to understand is made, should be borne in mind. Psychologically the consequences of this last may go to the roots.

For this learning-by-heart gave the text a general meaning and sanction based on the duration of its familiarity. Moreover, the text became for all scholars a common schema with reference to which the gestures of mutual understanding could be performed.

Another comparison may help to make this indefinite use of language seem less wanton or jejune, and more interesting. Such a list of alternative readings as the above bears at points a resemblance to the successive attempts that a speaker will sometimes make to convey a thought which does not fit any ready formulation. He may intimate as he switches (with an ‘or rather’ or a ‘perhaps I ought to say’) over from one statement to another, that he is ‘developing his thought. Those with a taste for clear, precise views (itself a result of special training) will accuse him of not knowing what he wants to say, or of having really no thought yet to utter. But there is another possibility – that a thought is present whose structure and content are not suited to available formulations, that these successive, perhaps incompatible, statements partly represent, partly misrepresent, an idea independent of them which none the less has its own order and coherent reference.

This is not a possibility to be conceded too freely since mere muddle-mindedness is probably much commoner than genuine inexpressible thought. But often with Mencius the successive 9 translations that come up – some not ‘making sense’, some irreconcilable, none seeming adequate – do seem to indicate that his terse utterances shroud and figure forth such ideas. Though they have passed in one interpretation or another into the fabric of Chinese mentality to a degree which has perhaps no parallel in the West, they remain, some of them, highly mysterious, even to the best equipped Chinese scholars. So our problem is not merely one of translation, but of interpretation and understanding. It is well to remember this fact, that we often are not dealing with expressions whose meaning, to good

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Index of Names

When originally published *Mencius on the Mind* did not have an index; that given here, which refers only to proper names, has been generated for this edition and the references are to the pagination of the current volume.

Aristotle 20, 50, 87, 122
  Metaphysics 31

Bacon, Francis 122
Book of Rites 26
Bradley, F. H. 87
  Principles of Logic 84
Burrow, Trigant
  The Social Basis of Consciousness 78

Chao Ch'i 5
Chaucer, Geoffrey
  Troilus and Criseyde 3
Chu Hsi 68, 87
Chucius (Chu Hsi) 16
Chung Yung 18, 47, 59, 93
Coleridge, S. T.
  'Outline of a History of the Art of Reasoning' 11, 122–123
Confucius 5, 18, 24, 39, 42
Croce, Benedetto 104

Darwin, Charles 113
Durkheim, Émile 78

Faber 82

Galileo 122
Garrod, H. W.
  Poetry and Life 114
Gilson, Etienne 9
  The Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas 9, 103
Granet, Marcel 60
  Danses et legendes de la Chine antique 29
  Great Learning 47

Hamlet 102
Hsun Tze
  Rectification of Names 33
Hu Shih 8
  The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China 14, 33
Hwang, L. T. 1, 7

Copyrighted material

James, William 82, 113

K'ung chi 5
Kant, Immanuel 18, 20, 87
Kao Tzu 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41, 49, 50, 51–52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 69, 75, 86
Keats, John
  'Ode on a Grecian Urn' 109–110
Kipling, Rudyard
  Stalky and Co. 63
Koran 101
Kung-tu Tzu 37, 38

Lawrence, D. H. 104
Legge, James 27, 42, 82
Leibnitz, G. W. 52
Lévy-Bruhl, L.
  How Natives Think 94
Li an-che 1, 7
  Li Ki 33
Lu 5
Lu, Prince of 48

Marx, Karl 88
Masson-Oursel 59
Meng Chi Tzu 38
Meng Shih Shê 39, 73
Mill, J. S. 87
Moh Tih 14, 16, 60

Ogden, C. K
  Foundations of Aesthetics 95
  The Meaning of Meaning 33, 95, 105

Pangloss 52
Pei Kung Yu 39
Piaget, Jean 15
  The Language and Thought of the Child 15
Plato 36, 87, 122
Porter, Lucius 1, 7

Radin, Paul
  Primitive Man as Philosopher 89
Read, Herbert 94, 95
  English Prose Style 90–92
Richards, I. A.
  Foundations of Aesthetics 95
  Practical Criticism 85, 93
  Principles of Literary Criticism 105
  The Meaning of Meaning 33, 95, 105

Shakespeare, William
  Macbeth 18

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