

## CHAPTER 1

# Ruler and Ruled



How should we describe the relationship between ruler and ruled in Confucian political thought? How is it best to understand the aims of Confucian government? The literature on early Confucianism largely involves two related sets of claims pertaining to these questions. On the one hand, it is argued, as I mentioned in the prologue, that Confucian government aims at the development of virtue in the populace. On the other hand, the concern with the people's well-being, physical and moral, is also used to argue for (proto-)democratic tendencies in early Confucianism. One large, interpretive problem burdens both sets of claims: the portrayal of the common people. Indeed, this portrayal suggests both that they are unlikely to become virtuous and that their role in choosing the ruler, or in having him removed from the throne, does not properly indicate consent.

This chapter sets the stage for the overarching thesis of the book by showing how the interpretive difficulties with the claims just mentioned can be solved by replacing the language of virtue and the language of democracy with the language of political order. What is meant by political order here, as will become clearer in what follows, is a simple idea: the administration of people who live together in a given territory for the sake of security and cooperation. I argue therefore, with Heiner Roetz, that "in general, the Confucians legitimize political rule as a precondition of a safe, peaceful, and civilized living together of men."<sup>1</sup> This explains why, as I argue in the third part of this chapter, they countenance, even at points approve of, hegemons.

<sup>1</sup> Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, 91. Roetz also adds, however, that Confucian

A concern with political order is usually recognized of Xunzi,<sup>2</sup> but it is precisely because of this recognition that commentators set him apart from his predecessors, Confucius and Mencius, who are thought to be concerned only with virtue in government. Although there is no denying the differences in the thought of the three Confucian thinkers, my aim in this chapter, and the book more generally, is to emphasize the similarities.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter proceeds as follows: I show, in the first section, that the qualities expected of the common people are not full-fledged Confucian virtues, but qualities pertaining to orderliness. I contend that the low level of expectations from the common people arises from viewing them as a “mass,” as part of a perspective on politics that focuses on social groups, rather than on distinct individuals. In the second section, I show that the significance of the common people is not so much in choosing or removing a ruler, but in signaling the ruler’s ability to maintain order. They so signal not by expressing individualized opinions, but by their physical movement, again as a “mass,” away from, or in the direction of, the ruler. In the last part of the chapter, I turn to the Confucian discussion of hegemons, and I show that, contrary to received wisdom, the Confucians countenance hegemons because of the latter’s ability to maintain political order.

### The Virtue Argument

On the reading of early Confucianism presented in the prologue, in which Confucian politics is read through the lens of Confucian ethics, the aim of Confucian government is, as Hsiao Kung-chuan puts it, to make the common people “noble and virtuous in character and deed.” In other words, its end is “transformation through teaching.”<sup>4</sup> Schwartz

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government has a moral purpose, relating to the cultivation of virtue. I argue in this chapter that this additional claim is misleading.

<sup>2</sup> Sato thus cites approvingly the argument of Chen Daqi, who takes Xunzi’s ultimate purpose to be the attainment of order. See Sato, *Confucian Quest for Order*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Sato also emphasizes the continuity in the thought of Mencius and Xunzi, though for historical, rather than theoretical, reasons: he argues that they are both part of the intellectual lineage of the Jixia Academy. See Sato, *Confucian Quest for Order*, 164. And though he argues, citing the famous Classical historian Sima Qian, that the Jixia Academy was concerned with “matters of order and disorder” (*zhiluan zhi shi* 治亂之事) (69–70), his goal is not to show that Mencius was concerned with order as well (he describes the concern with order as “post-Mencian” [120]), but that Xunzi was as concerned with morality as Mencius was (25, 427).

<sup>4</sup> Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 110.

draws a comparison between the Confucians and Plato and Aristotle, arguing that, like the early Greeks, Confucius views the political community as an ethical society aimed at promoting morality.<sup>5</sup> This explains, according to him, why it is the virtuous who are supposed to rule, and why providing for the welfare of the common people, a theme I will return to in the next chapter, is important: they can be hindered by adverse circumstances from achieving moral education.<sup>6</sup> Schwartz cites Mencius on this: “Nowadays, the means laid down for the people are sufficient neither for the care of parents nor for the support of wife and children. In good years life is always hard, while in bad years there is no way of escaping death. Thus simply to survive takes more energy than the people have. What time can they spare for learning about rites and [rightness] (*yi* 義)?”<sup>7</sup>

The thought that Confucians view political life as geared toward promoting virtue in the common people appears to be the logical continuation of their emphasis on virtue, and the idea that all persons are equally capable of becoming virtuous: told that he was being spied on with the purpose of seeing whether he was the same as everyone else, Mencius retorts, “In what way should I be different from other people? Even [sage kings] Yao and Shun were the same as anyone else.”<sup>8</sup> Xunzi also believes that any person can become a Yu, Yu being the third sage king of antiquity, since, according to him, it is possible for all men to understand and to be able to practice *ren*, rightness, and regulations (*fa* 法).<sup>9</sup>

There also appears to be direct evidence in the Confucian texts for the view that Confucian government aims at the moral improvement of the common people. Consider, for example, Confucius’s response to the question put to him by Ji Kangzi, one of the heads of the Ji family of the state of Lu, about the best way to govern. Confucius says, “To govern (*zheng* 政) is to correct (*zheng* 正). If you set an example by being correct, who would dare to remain incorrect?”<sup>10</sup> The same Ji Kangzi asks for Confucius’s advice about getting rid of thieves. Confucius answers, “If you yourself were not a man of desires, no one would steal

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 96–97. While this is a common reading of the early Greeks, I argued in the prologue that an alternative reading is also possible.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> *Mencius* 1A.7.

<sup>8</sup> *Mencius* 4B.32. See also *Mencius* 2A.8 and 6A.6.

<sup>9</sup> *Xunzi* 23.5a.

<sup>10</sup> *Analects* 12.17.

even if stealing carried a reward.”<sup>11</sup> When asked by Ji Kangzi again about how to inculcate in the common people the virtues of reverence (*jing* 敬), of dutifulness (*zhong* 忠), and of enthusiasm (*quan* 勸), Confucius answers, “Rule over them with dignity and they will be reverent; treat them with kindness and they will do their best; raise the good and instruct those who are backward and they will be imbued with enthusiasm.”<sup>12</sup> When asked by Zilu about government, he responds, “Encourage the people to work hard by setting an example yourself.”<sup>13</sup>

All of these passages indicate that it is possible for the ruler, by providing for the people, setting himself as a model (of correctness and lack of desires), treating the people with dignity and kindness, and promoting the worthy, to encourage the people toward moral reform. But what is also clear, and no less significant, about these passages and other similar ones is that they reveal that the qualities expected of the common people are not the cardinal Confucian virtues of *ren* 仁, rightness (*yi* 義), and wisdom (*zhi* 智)<sup>14</sup> that Confucius expects of himself and his disciples. In fact, I could only find two examples (in the *Mencius*) that associate the common people with one of these virtues.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Analects* 12.18.

<sup>12</sup> *Analects* 2.20.

<sup>13</sup> *Analects* 13.1.

<sup>14</sup> I will argue in Chapter 3 that the common people are encouraged to abide by ritual propriety (*li* 禮), but that they do not necessarily internalize the importance of ritual propriety in the way that a Confucian gentleman does.

<sup>15</sup> The first is the rhetorical question quoted above in which Mencius wonders how the people can fail to learn about the rites and rightness if they are provided for. The second is *Mencius* 7A.23: “When sages rule the world (*zhi tianxia* 治天下), they make grain be as plentiful as water and fire. When the people (*min* 民) have as much grain as they have water and fire, how can they fail to be *ren*?” (quoted from Van Norden). Two passages in the *Analects* are less obvious: *Analects* 1.9: “When funerals and sacrifices are properly undertaken, the virtue of the common people will incline towards fullness (*hou* 厚)” and *Analects* 15.35: “*Ren* is more vital to the common people than even fire and water. In the case of fire and water, I have seen men die by stepping on them, but I have never seen any man die by stepping on *ren*.” In the first, it is not clear what virtue inclining toward fullness means, and in the second, it could plausibly be argued that it is vital for the people to have a *ren* ruler, rather than be *ren* themselves. Similarly, *Analects* 8.2 can be read as suggesting that the common people will be stirred by (those who are) *ren* or toward (those who are) *ren*, as opposed to being stirred to (becoming) *ren* themselves. Other potential evidence for the claim that the common people are expected to become virtuous is even less convincing: In *Mencius* 7A.13, people under the rule of a king (as opposed to a hegemon) are said to move toward goodness (*shan* 善), but this is not the same as *ren* per se, especially since they are said to do so “without realizing” it. In 4A.3, Mencius says that an ordinary man (*shuren* 庶人) should be *ren* in order to preserve his limbs, but here Mencius is not talking about the people taken as a mass—which is what I am concerned with—but as individuals. Finally, in 4A.20, Mencius says that “if a ruler is

That high virtue is not expected of the common people should not actually be surprising if one considers Confucius's view of the common people's intellectual abilities, expressed in his statement that "the common people can be made to follow it [i.e., the Confucian Way], but they cannot be made to understand (*zhi* 知) it."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Mencius says that the multitude (*zhong* 眾) do not realize (*zhu* 著) what it is they practice, do not examine (*cha* 察) what they repeatedly do, and do not understand (*zhi* 知) the path they follow all their lives.<sup>17</sup> For Xunzi, the virtue of the common people merely consists in following custom, treasuring material possessions, and nurturing their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Even Hsiao admits that some people cannot actually be educated, and these "probably are not a minority," hence the Confucians' inevitable resort to punishment at times.<sup>19</sup> For Yuri Pines, the reason why the Confucians' concern for fulfilling people's needs and reaching their hearts did not result in an institutionalized form of political participation from below (more on this in the next section) is due to the identification of commoners with petty men (*xiaoren* 小人).<sup>20</sup> He cites in this regard Mencius's approval of the common saying: "There are those who use their minds and there are those who use their muscles. The former rule (*zhi* 治); the latter are ruled."<sup>21</sup>

I suggest, based on the preceding, that people's dispositions are indeed meant to be improved by Confucian government, but that such improvement does not amount to the full-fledged pursuit of virtuousness. Instead, it is more accurate to see the dispositions sought for the common people (to refrain from stealing, to work hard, and to be "correct") as dispositions relating to orderliness, rather than virtuousness. The qualities expected of the common people can be elicited in statements that establish the effect virtuous rulership has on the former,

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*ren*, no one will fail to be *ren*." The interpretive problem with this passage is that it is not clear whether "no one" here refers to the ministers serving the ruler, or to everyone in the realm.

<sup>16</sup> *Analects* 8.9, quoted from Slingerland. Slingerland argues that early commentators, like Zhang Ping, read this statement as pertaining to rule by force only. In other words, the claim would be that those who rule by force cannot allow the people to understand their plans for fear they would evade them. See Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: Analects*, 81. It is unclear what the evidence for this reading is, especially since, as I contend, this statement is consistent with others made to the same effect by the early Confucians.

<sup>17</sup> *Mencius* 7A.5.

<sup>18</sup> *Xunzi* 8.7.

<sup>19</sup> Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 114.

<sup>20</sup> See Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 209–11.

<sup>21</sup> *Mencius* 3A.4.

and that reveal that there is in fact no expectation of a one-to-one correspondence between the virtue of the ruler and the qualities attained by the people. Thus Confucius argues, “When those above are given to the observance of the rites, the common people will be easy to command.”<sup>22</sup> Infuriated by Fan Chi’s questions about growing crops, he answers, “When those above love the rites, none of the common people will dare to be irreverent (*bujing* 不敬); when they love what is right, none of the common people will dare to be insubordinate (*bufu* 不服); when they love trustworthiness, none of the common people will dare to be insincere (*buyongqing* 不用情). In this way, the common people from the four quarters will come with their children strapped to their backs. What need is there to talk about growing crops?”<sup>23</sup> Ritual propriety, rightness, and trustworthiness are thus matched with obedience and reverence, subordination, and sincerity, respectively. The latter set of qualities is also emphasized by Mencius and Xunzi. Thus Mencius contends that if the people are not provided for in times of plenty, then in times of need, when the ruler needs them to fight on his behalf, they could refuse to do so.<sup>24</sup> Xunzi says that the common people should be filial, respect their elders, be honest and diligent, and not dare to be indolent or haughty.<sup>25</sup>

In short, the qualities expected of the common people are qualities like reverence, subordination, honesty, diligence, and correctness. There is no talk here of *ren*, rightness, or wisdom. What is at stake, then, in statements to the effect that the people should learn about rites and duties,<sup>26</sup> or that the ruler should teach (*jiao* 教) and instruct (*hui* 誨) them,<sup>27</sup> is not a full-blown moral education, but instruction in qualities favorable to an orderly society. One can even understand the idea of “reform” in Confucius’s famous statement that the goal of government should not be merely to keep people out of trouble, but also to encourage them to have a sense of shame (*chi* 耻) and to reform (*ge* 格) themselves, to simply mean the acquisition of the qualities listed above.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Schwartz recognizes this when he argues that the people are to be educated “to live up to the moral norms which should

<sup>22</sup> *Analects* 14.41.

<sup>23</sup> *Analects* 13.4.

<sup>24</sup> *Mencius* 1B.12.

<sup>25</sup> *Xunzi* 4.7.

<sup>26</sup> *Mencius* 1A.7. See above.

<sup>27</sup> *Xunzi* 19.10.

<sup>28</sup> *Analects* 2.3.

govern their lives within their families and communities. This does not mean that they must achieve the highest levels of knowledge or achieve the highest realization of *ren*.<sup>29</sup>

But if this is true, then what should we make of the tension between the Confucians' insistence that anyone can become virtuous and the reluctance to describe the common people as being able to do so?<sup>30</sup> To deal with this tension, David Hall and Roger Ames argue for "a perhaps blurred yet significant contrast between the amorphous, indeterminate mass of peasants (*min* 民), in themselves having little by way of distinguishing character or structure, and particular persons (*ren* 人)."<sup>31</sup> The depiction of the common people as an "amorphous, indeterminate mass," I contend, stems from the Confucians' adoption of what can be called an "external" or "sociological" point of view, which looks at society as a whole, thus considering social groups, rather than individuals, as units of analysis. This perspective can be contrasted with an "internal" or "individual-oriented" one that looks at moral development from the standpoint of each and every (socially embedded)<sup>32</sup> individual. From the internal point of view, the theoretical possibility of becoming virtuous is emphasized because the Confucians do not believe that endowments of birth are different between individuals. In their position within society as a whole, however, individuals are part of social groups with distinguishing lifestyles. The common people, as Hall and Ames point out, were mostly peasants, and were thus engaged in daily manual labor. As such, they did not enjoy the leisure needed to invest their time in the mental and social activities required for moral perfection. Instead, they devoted their days to communal agricultural practices, and their worries were naturally related to their livelihood, which accounts for the passivity and lack of differentiation with which they are described.

This does not mean that individual peasants cannot, in theory, break out of their social group;<sup>33</sup> it just means that they are, as a matter of fact, unlikely to be able to do so. This is indeed how I understand Mencius's claim in 1A.7: as opposed to taking it as conditional—if the common

<sup>29</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 108.

<sup>30</sup> I thank Stephen Angle for pressing me on this question.

<sup>31</sup> David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 139.

<sup>32</sup> Social relationships are crucial to the Confucian understanding of personhood and the self. Confucians do not conceive of individuals in isolation from society.

<sup>33</sup> As Shun did. See Chapter 2.

people lack constant means, then they lack constant hearts—I take it as descriptive—the common people lack constant means, therefore they lack constant hearts (in contradistinction to men of service [*shi* 士] who have constant hearts without necessarily having constant means).<sup>34</sup> Whether the common people would have constant hearts if they had constant means is in some sense beside the point, since it is not envisaged by Mencius or the early Confucians; as I argued in the prologue, the lens of an ideal theory in which hypothetical scenarios are envisioned is not the most obvious way to approach early Confucian political thought.

To reiterate my argument, the obstacle to the common people's moral and intellectual cultivation arises not from their ascriptive qualities, or their pedigree at birth, but from the social demands of the material life associated with the social group into which they are born. In other words, their limitation is not inborn but socially and economically imposed.<sup>35</sup> There is therefore no contradiction between the Confucians' insistence on equal potential among all human beings, and their recognition that the common people, from the standpoint of their status as peasants, are unlikely to develop their potential for virtue.<sup>36</sup> It is indeed telling that the only two anecdotes in which Mencius does associate the common people with *ren* and rightness are aimed at un-

<sup>34</sup> Because they have the leisure to learn and practice being virtuous, which enables them to reach this high stage of internal sufficiency. The *shi* started out as a warrior class but, as time passed, became mostly a bureaucratic class responsible for ritual and administrative functions, and were hence largely recruited on the basis of learning. See Choyun Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 8. See also Donald Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Hall and Ames argue that what makes someone move from the group of *min* 民 to become individualized *ren* 人 is not the privilege of being born into an elite class, but the “personal cultivation and socialization that renders him particular,” and they describe this move as “cultural.” See Hall and Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*, 139. My contention, however, is that the conditions needed for this “cultural” move to occur are socio-economic. My interpretation of the Confucian view of peasants is akin to the one that Jill Frank reads in Aristotle, which recognizes the effects of the activities they are devoted to in life on the development of persons' capacities and thus on their political status. See Jill Frank, “Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature,” *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (February 2004): 91–104.

<sup>36</sup> Schwartz argues, in relation to Mencius, that what is needed to fulfill people's equal potential for goodness are the right circumstances (basically, ones in which basic needs are met), which are ensured by a virtuous elite. See Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 288. My contention is that more than basic needs have to be met before the common people are able to achieve virtue: a social class of peasants would have to no longer exist, a possibility that the Confucians did not envision.



derscoring the importance of providing for them and ensuring their livelihood, exceptions that prove the rule that the emphasis should be on the latter, not the former.<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, I have argued in this section that the idea that Confucian government aims at instilling virtue in the common people is unsustainable because the early Confucians very rarely associate the common people, viewed as a group, with virtue. I have also shown that the qualities expected of, and encouraged in, the common people are qualities worthy of an orderly society. In the following section, I further my discussion of the conception of the people in early Confucian thought by elucidating their role in the choice and removal of a ruler.

### The People—Continued

#### *Succession to the Throne*

In the previous section, I elicited the Confucian political perspective from which the common people are viewed as a social group of manual laborers and argued that, from this perspective, the common people are expected not to become virtuous, but to acquire qualities relating to political order. In this section, my aim is to continue the preceding discussion by showing that the portrayal of the people as “mass” carries over into the Confucian discussion of succession to the throne. This means, as I will argue in what follows, that the framework of political order allows for a more plausible interpretation of passages from the *Mencius* that have traditionally been analyzed according to whether or not they reveal democratic tendencies. I move from there to analyzing the view of political order revealed by these passages, which I will show is based on a particular notion of fittingness between ruler and ruled.

In the first relevant passage where Mencius discusses succession to the throne, he starts out repudiating the story from the *Analects* in which Emperor Yao, a sage king of antiquity, is said to have abdicated the throne to Shun, another sage of antiquity, seeing that the latter was worthy of it.<sup>38</sup> Mencius argues that “the Emperor cannot give the Em-

<sup>37</sup> See note 15. My argument thus follows Xu Fuguan’s contention that rituals and rightness are concerned with people’s lives (*shenghuo* 生活) and not *vice versa*. See Xu, *Zhongguo sixiang shi lunji* 中國思想史論集 [Collected essays on the history of Chinese thought] (1974; repr., Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 135.

<sup>38</sup> See *Analects* 20.1. Yao, Shun, and Yu are paragons of virtue often cited by the early Confucians. They are supposed to have lived between 2500 and 2000 BCE, but are probably mythical. For a discussion of the framing and implications of the abdication story as

pire to another.” Instead, “Heaven (*tian* 天) gave it to him.”<sup>39</sup> He then explains how Heaven’s choice is revealed: When Emperor Yao died, Shun, who had served Yao for twenty-eight years, left the empire in the hands of Yao’s son and took leave. Nonetheless, “the [regional rulers] of the Empire coming to pay homage and those who were engaged in litigation went to Shun, not to Yao’s son, and ballad singers sang the praises of Shun, not of Yao’s son.” Mencius takes this to be a sign that Heaven favored the appointment of Shun, rather than Yao’s son. He adds that Heaven “sees with the eyes of its people” and that it “hears with the ears of its people.”

Mencius then recounts a similar story of succession following the death of Shun.<sup>40</sup> Shun recommended Yu, and Yu also withdrew once the mourning period for Shun was over. Yet the people followed him just as they had followed Shun upon Yao’s death, suggesting that Heaven favored Yu over Shun’s son.

These accounts, however, should not suggest that Heaven, and the people, will always choose meritorious ministers to accede to the throne, for the story takes a different turn when Yu dies. Mencius explicitly argues against the idea that virtue declined once Yu favored being succeeded by his own son, instead of choosing a “good and wise” man to ascend the throne. He again directs responsibility to Heaven: If Heaven decides to give the throne to a good and wise man, this would be the right choice. But if it decides to give it to the extant son, then this would also be right. And it is the people who again indicate Heaven’s choice in this case. Instead of following Yi, whom Yu had recommended, they went to Yu’s son, Qi, instead: “Ballad singers sang the praises of Qi instead of Yi, saying, ‘This is the son of our prince.’”<sup>41</sup>

The literature on the democratic pedigree of Confucianism is vast and varied, and actually mostly draws on the idea discussed in the pre-

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it appears in different texts from the Warring States period, see Yuri Pines, “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign’s Power,” *T’oung Pao* 91, no. 4 (2005): 243–300. Pines points out that the abdication story was used by its supporters to justify the idea of the promotion of the worthy, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

<sup>39</sup> Mencius 5A.5. “Empire” is a somewhat anachronistic translation for *tianxia* (天下), which can more literally be translated as “all under Heaven.” Its connotations are both cultural (referring to the world that is heir to the Zhou dynasty’s cultural legacy) and political (referring to the world constituted by the many warring states and later unified under the Qin, which heralded the imperial structure). See Yuri Pines, “Changing Views of *Tianxia* in Pre-imperial Discourse,” *Oriens Extremus* 43, nos. 1–2 (2002): 101–16. I also use “emperor” for *tianzi* 天子 (literally, the “son of Heaven”).

<sup>40</sup> Mencius 5A.6.

<sup>41</sup> Mencius 5A.6.

vious section about the Confucian recognition of equal potential for virtue.<sup>42</sup> But the passages from the *Mencius* that I just summarized have also been used as evidence for the idea that the people have an influence, even if indirect, on the choice of the ruler. For example, although he does not equate this with democracy, Joseph Chan identifies in these passages the notion that “acceptance or consent of the people is necessary for the ruler’s political legitimacy.”<sup>43</sup>

To clarify if a notion of consent is at play here, and what it amounts to, answers to the following two questions are needed: First, what is, all things considered, Mencius’s preferred mode of succession to the throne? And what is the common people’s role in it? I submit that there is reason to argue that Mencius is in favor of hereditary succession. Although in his account of the transition of power from Yao to Shun to Yu to Qi, Mencius says that the accession of both virtuous ministers (Shun and Yu) and heirs (Qi) is acceptable, it is possible, as Pines does,<sup>44</sup> to read the cases of Shun and Yu as exceptional (instead of taking Qi’s accession to be the exceptional one, as is more common to do). Indeed, it is not untypical of Mencius to provide ad hoc justifications for the actions of the sage kings of antiquity when these do not fit his teachings.<sup>45</sup> On my reading, then, Mencius dwells on the cases of Shun and Yu not because he takes merit-based accession to the throne to be the model to follow but, on the contrary, because these cases depart from his preferred option—hereditary succession—and thus require justification.

My admittedly controversial interpretation relies on a statement that Mencius appends to the accounts above, and in which he argues that, when a ruler obtains the throne through hereditary succession (*jishi* 繼世), he can be put aside by Heaven only “if he is like Jie or

<sup>42</sup> For example, see Brooke Ackerly, “Is Liberalism the Only Way toward Democracy? Confucianism and Democracy,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 4 (August 2005): 547–76.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Chan, “Democracy and Meritocracy: Toward a Confucian Perspective,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 186. A similar argument can also be found in Yang, “Mengzi and Democracy,” 90; Enbao Wang and Regina F. Titunik, “Democracy in China: The Theory and Practice of *Minben*,” in Zhao, *China and Democracy*, 78, and Tongdong Bai, “A Mencian Version of Limited Democracy,” *Res Publica* 14 (2008): 27n14. The argument about popular sovereignty can be found in Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 158. On the other hand, Chan argues that “the people’s consent” is not necessarily a sign of a democratic system, since a monarchical system could also be based on consent. He contends that, for it to be a sign of a democratic system and of democratic ideals like “popular sovereignty or political equality,” consent has to be the product of adequate “institutions or procedures” for equal political participation (emphasis original) (186–87).

<sup>44</sup> Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 277.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the defense of Shun in *Mencius* 4A.26, 5A.1, and 5A.2.

Zhou [Xin],” both tyrants.<sup>46</sup> This statement shows that Mencius is not against hereditary succession, but also that whatever benefit he sees in it is forfeited by the rise of a tyrant. The best way to interpret this benefit such that it fits both the rule and the exception is to see it as revolving around the avoidance of political turmoil: heredity as the default method of succession helps in the maintenance of orderly transitions to power. On the other hand, it can also produce heirs who bring havoc to the realm, which defies its own purpose (order), and thus justifies the exception that Mencius attaches to it. This interpretation is in line with Mencius’s preference for emolument of ministers on the basis of heredity,<sup>47</sup> and with Hsiao’s interpretation of this preference as ensuring a modicum of order and propriety in a time of free-for-all competition for power and public office.<sup>48</sup> Speaking of Confucius’s own preference for the heredity principle,<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Schwartz argues that the reason for it stems from Confucius’s belief that lineage is “the most potent base for social order and harmony,” and that the overthrow of rulers by force is a recipe for chaos.<sup>50</sup> Something similar, I argue, would explain Mencius’s preference for the hereditary succession of rulers.

Although there is no further textual evidence supporting my view, all alternative views (merit-based succession, popular choice, appoint-

<sup>46</sup> Mencius adds another qualification to the accounts above. He says that, in the case of a commoner (*pifu* 匹夫), virtue alone is not sufficient to win the empire, the emperor’s recommendation is also necessary. “That is why,” Mencius says, “Confucius never possessed the Empire.” How does the need for the ruler’s recommendation fit with my reading? Justin Tiwald takes the point about the need for the ruler’s recommendation to be an extension of hereditary succession, presumably in that a departure from the latter can be made only through the approval of the ruler. See Justin Tiwald, “A Right of Rebellion in the *Mengzi*,” *Dao* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 274. Pines considers the ruler’s recommendation to be important for Mencius to moderate the implication of his discussion of the people’s will in the stories of abdication. See Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 280. The problem with these interpretations, as with all interpretations of Mencius’s view on succession (including mine), is that there is not enough evidence to support any view definitively: in this case, Mencius mentions only the need for a recommendation in relation to Confucius. I therefore find it more likely, as I explain in what follows, that interruption of hereditary succession typically occurs when a very bad heir arises, which is signaled by the people, not the extant ruler.

<sup>47</sup> *Mencius* 3A.3.

<sup>48</sup> Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 176–77.

<sup>49</sup> Confucius shows a preference for hereditary prerogative when he argues against the usurpation, in the state of Lu, of royal ritual prerogatives (*Analects* 3.1), and against the attack on the state of Zhuanyu, whose rulers have a royal prerogative to preside over sacrifices to the eastern Meng mountains (*Analects* 16.1).

<sup>50</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 115–16.

ment by Heaven,<sup>51</sup> and appointment by the current ruler) also have slim backing, given that all Mencius says about succession is included in the three cases mentioned above, and in the corollary statements on which my interpretation has relied. I think Robert Eno is right when he argues that the relevant passages in the *Mencius* “have the effect of delegitimizing arbitrary cessions of thrones and supporting the institutional status quo,” and when he describes Mencius’s attitude as “institutional conservatism.”<sup>52</sup> As to what the “institutional status quo” consists of, this is where I lean toward the hereditary succession view. As Pines notes, despite the fluctuations in his view, Mencius ultimately “did not present any practical alternative to the hereditary principle of rule.”<sup>53</sup>

If my argument about Mencius’s preference for hereditary accession to the throne is correct, then this would make Mencius’s position close to Xunzi’s: Although he is the most adamant defender of meritocracy among the early Confucians, Xunzi’s meritocratic principles do not extend to the position of king.<sup>54</sup> He justifies the nonhereditary accession of Shun and Yu by arguing that, in the absence of a worthy descendant, the accession of a virtuous high-ranking minister to the throne does not cause significant interruption in government.<sup>55</sup> Mencius does not explicitly make the same argument about Shun’s and Yu’s rise to the throne (he merely cites Heaven’s choice to justify it), but if it is true, as I argue, that he is concerned about interruption in government, then a similar concern could explain his purpose in recounting the story of the accessions of Shun and Yu.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Goldin, *Confucianism*, 62–63. I discuss the role of Heaven and argue that it is largely symbolic in Chapter 6. The view I offer in Chapter 6 will thus explain why I have not assigned Heaven any role in the choice of the ruler in interpreting the passages above.

<sup>52</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 255n28.

<sup>53</sup> See Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 76. Elstein also argues, citing Li, “Confucian Value and Democratic Value,” that “neither Mengzi nor any other early Ruist [Confucian] challenged the principle of hereditary succession.” See Elstein, *Democracy in Contemporary Confucian Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> He thus says, “Although a man may be the descendant of commoners, if he has acquired learning, is upright in conduct, and can adhere to ritual principles, he should be promoted to the post of prime minister (*qingxiang* 卿相), [man of service] (*shi* 士), or [counselor] (*dafu* 大夫).” There is no mention here of his appointment to the position of king (*Xunzi* 9.1, quoted from Watson, 36).

<sup>55</sup> *Xunzi* 18.5b. Like Mencius, Xunzi argues that when a bad descendant like Jie or Zhou Xin ascends the throne, he cannot be said to legitimately rule, and therefore the fact that the throne is taken over by worthy contenders (Kings Tang and Wu, respectively) is no usurpation (*Xunzi* 18.2).

The question that remains is how to determine when a ruler is bad enough, when he counts as a tyrant, such that the interruption of hereditary succession for his removal is warranted. This is where, I argue, the common people come in. Xunzi argues that a bad ruler is one who gets deserted by the regional rulers and the people.<sup>56</sup> This is the flip side of the portrayal of the people, in the stories of succession relayed above, as being “content” (*an* 安) in the presence of a good ruler, going to him for litigation, and singing his praises. In both cases, the people act as a gauge of the worth of candidates: If they find the ruler worthy enough, they give him their support. If they do not, they abandon him, either literally or metaphorically, precipitating the unraveling of political order. As Masayuki Sato argues in relation to Mencius, what the latter saw as “the most urgent problem facing contemporary rulers was to stop people from fleeing from their countries.”<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note that the common people act as passive,<sup>58</sup> rather than as active, political agents whose approval of the ruler, as Chan puts it, is more “automatic”<sup>59</sup> than deliberative.<sup>60</sup> Another way to describe the people’s approval is as instinctual or emotional (rather than reflective); as William Theodore de Bary suggests, it is the peo-

<sup>56</sup> Xunzi 18.2.

<sup>57</sup> Sato, *Confucian Quest for Order*, 128. Sato distinguishes between this concern with stopping people from fleeing from the concern with avoiding popular revolts, associating the latter with a concern for order. On my view, the loyalty of the common people, represented in their willingness not to flee, is actually key to political order.

<sup>58</sup> See David Elstein, “Why Early Confucianism Cannot Generate Democracy,” *Dao* 9 (2010): 436. Sungmoon Kim suggests that, while it is true that the common people are “passive . . . beneficiaries of the benevolent government,” Mencius is not referring to them alone when he speaks of the people’s approval of various candidates to the throne. In fact, as mentioned above, the regional rulers also pay homage to their preferred candidate. Kim argues that the regional rulers, along with “ministers of the noble families,” are “active subjects” who confer legitimacy on the ruler. See Sungmoon Kim, “Confucian Constitutionalism: Mencius and Xunzi on Virtue, Ritual, and Royal Transmission,” *Review of Politics*, no. 73 (2011): 382. This argument does not undermine, but rather buttresses, my contention in this section about the passive role of the common people. More generally, I agree with Kim about the importance of ministers in government. This will become clear in my discussion of hegemons below. The division of labor between a largely symbolic ruler and his competent and virtuous ministers is a key aspect of Confucian government that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>59</sup> Chan, “Democracy and Meritocracy,” 187.

<sup>60</sup> A lonely but intriguing statement in *Analects* 16.2 says that when the Way prevails, ordinary people do not “discuss” (*yi* 議), presumably matters of government, since what precedes in the anecdote is about government. This statement fits with the rest of my interpretation if it is taken to mean that the people express resentment (rather than actually deliberate) when they are not well governed.

ple's "feelings" that matter.<sup>61</sup> D. C. Lau speaks of the common people exercising "moral judgment," but describes this judgment as possible even for "the most simple-minded," which suggests that he also views the people's response as spontaneous rather than deliberative.<sup>62</sup> These views are borne out by textual evidence. Thus Mencius portrays the common people as turning to a virtuous ruler like the grass bends to the wind,<sup>63</sup> or like "water flows downwards or as animals head for the wilds."<sup>64</sup> Xunzi says that people follow their superiors "just as, for example, an echo responds to the sound and as the shadow has the shape of the form."<sup>65</sup> In other words, the common people act, in Justin Tiwald's description, as a "barometer"<sup>66</sup> of the success of government, rather than as agents expressing significant political choice. A. C. Graham makes a similar argument: "the people should make themselves felt only by the shifts of support towards or away from an occupant or contender for the throne which are a test of who has the mandate of Heaven [i.e., legitimacy]."<sup>67</sup> This means that any identification of proto-democratic seeds in these passages, even if only a notion of consent, is potentially misleading. To the extent that what we have here is an account of legitimacy, it is one based not on a normative conception of "the people" expressing consent to authority, but rather on an almost organic notion of fittingness between ruler and ruled. Political order ensues from this fittingness.

It is true that the Confucians recognize the common people as an important part of political society, and it is also true that they assign them the significant role of deserting a bad ruler through which they can cause the breakdown of the almost organic order that keeps them together. But, as will become clearer below, the importance of the common people can be reduced to being part of a holistic conception of political order based on the complementarity of interests between ruler and ruled. Government is neither "of the people" nor "by the people," and it is also not "for the people" exclusively. Government aims at an orderly society, of which the common people are a—key—

<sup>61</sup> De Bary, *Trouble with Confucianism*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Lau, introduction to *Mencius*, xli.

<sup>63</sup> *Analects* 12.19, *Mencius* 3A.2.

<sup>64</sup> *Mencius* 4A.9. See also 1A.6 and *Xunzi* 15.5.

<sup>65</sup> *Xunzi* 16.8. See also *Xunzi* 12.4.

<sup>66</sup> Tiwald, "Right of Rebellion," 272.

<sup>67</sup> A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1989), 116.

component. The ruler derives his authority from establishing political order, and not from fulfilling the needs or aspirations of the common people per se.

I will discuss in the next chapter the policies that the ruler has to pursue to win the loyalty of the common people and thus create order. Suffice it to say that these policies revolve around the satisfaction of people's welfare needs and the pursuit of consistent regulations regarding appointments to office and punishments for crimes. What I want to emphasize here is the nature of the conception of political order being presented. On the one hand, part of my underlying aim in this chapter, and in the book more generally, is to show that the Confucians share Thomas Hobbes's motivating concern with how to secure "order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation"—to answer what Bernard Williams calls "the 'first' political question."<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, the Confucian view of political order as I have presented it is very different from that of someone like Hobbes. The Confucian view, combining hereditary succession with a limited role for the common people, is far from being based on any notion of individual interest as Hobbes's is. For Hobbes, political order is achieved by a group of persons, concerned with their individual security, contracting among themselves to authorize a sovereign to govern them, thus escaping the inevitable state of war outside of government. For the early Confucians, the common people act as a "mass" rather than as a group of individuals with distinct interests. The legitimacy they confer upon the ruler is produced not by deliberative agreement, but by an instinctive and physical movement of approbation. Political order is held together not by a juridical notion of authorization, but by the physical proximity between ruler and ruled enabled by the complementarity of the interests of both (more on this below). Conversely, political order is lost when the people withhold approval of the ruler by going to another one; legitimacy can thus be withdrawn from the ruler, as it cannot be in Hobbes. This, however, should not mean that the Confucians allow for popular revolution. I will briefly reject arguments about popular revolution in the following subsection, then turn to a further clarification of my conception of political order, before concluding this part of the chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.



### *Removing a Bad Ruler*

I concluded the previous section by suggesting that the people express their disapproval of a bad ruler by disentangling themselves from the web of connections that bind them to him. It is difficult to see how this image could be squared with any notion of popular revolution. But the idea “that the people may justly overthrow a ruler who harms them” is sometimes imputed to the early Confucians, primarily to Mencius.<sup>69</sup> This interpretation emerges from combining two sets of passages in the *Mencius*: the passages cited above revolving around the people’s role in the choice of the ruler, and another set of passages that suggest the permissibility of the removal of a bad king. Since I already discussed the first set of passages in the previous section, arguing that the people’s role in the choice of the ruler is limited, I focus here on the second set of passages, and argue that the permissibility of overthrowing a bad ruler has no implications for the role of the common people in it.

Consider, then, two anecdotes in the *Mencius* that deal with the issue of the removal of a bad ruler. In one anecdote, Mencius asks King Xuan of Qi what he thinks should be done about a friend who, entrusted with the care of one’s wife and children, leaves them to suffer from cold and starvation. The king answers that one should break with this friend. Then Mencius asks what should be done about the Marshal of Guards who cannot maintain order among his ranks. The king answers that he should be removed from his office. Finally, Mencius asks what should be done if the whole society is badly governed. “The King turned to his attendants and changed the subject.”<sup>70</sup>

In the second story, it is the king himself who asks Mencius about the truth of what is told of King Tang banishing the tyrant Jie, and King Wu marching against the dictator Zhou Xin. When Mencius confirms, the king asks whether this means that regicide is permissible. Mencius’s answer goes as follows: “A man who mutilates *ren* is a mutilator, while one who cripples rightness is a crippler. He who is both a mutilator and a crippler is a mere fellow (*yifu* 一夫). I have indeed heard of the punishment of the ‘fellow Zhou,’ but I have never heard of any regicide.”<sup>71</sup> What these two anecdotes specify are the reasons that make

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Chan, “Democracy and Meritocracy,” 188. Xu Fuguan and Hsiao Kung-chuan also subscribe to this view. See Xu, *Zhongguo sixiang shi lunji*, 135; Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 157; and Hu, “Confucianism and Western Democracy,” 59.

<sup>70</sup> *Mencius* 1B.6.

<sup>71</sup> *Mencius* 1B.8.

removing a ruler permissible: when a ruler fails to fulfill his obligations in governing his realm or, worse, is ruthless, he is no longer worthy, and his removal is allowed. But do they specify the holders of the prerogative to remove the king?<sup>72</sup> One hint we get from the second anecdote is that those who banished the tyrants Jie and Zhou are Kings Tang and Wu, both virtuous contenders to power. Indeed, Xunzi, who similarly argues that the overthrow of Jie and Zhou by Kings Tang and Wu is not tantamount to regicide (since to execute a tyrannical ruler is like executing a “solitary individual”), also emphasizes the virtuousness of Tang and Wu against the wretchedness of Jie and Zhou.<sup>73</sup> The necessity that worthies be the ones to remove the tyrant is also made clear in another anecdote in the *Mencius*, relating to Tai Jia, the son of Prince Tang, and Yi Yin, his virtuous minister:

Gongsun Chou said, “Yi Yin banished Tai Jia to Tong, saying, ‘I do not wish to be close to one who is intractable,’ and the people were greatly pleased. When Tai Jia became good, Yi Yin restored him to the throne, and the people, once again, were pleased. When a prince is not good, is it permissible for a good and wise man who is his subject to banish him?”

“It is permissible,” said Mencius, “only if he had the motive of a Yi Yin; otherwise, it would be usurpation.”<sup>74</sup>

The actual removal of a bad ruler is thus clearly restricted to the inner circle of highly ranked officials. The removal is legitimate when

<sup>72</sup> Pines identifies the holders of this prerogative in the following statement by Mencius: “Those who rise (*xing* 興) only when there is a King Wen are ordinary men. Outstanding [men of service] (*shi* 士) rise even without a King Wen” (7A.10). One can read *xing* 興 as meaning “to flourish” rather than “to rise,” in which case this passage from the *Mencius* has no relevance to the issue of rebellion. Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 72.

<sup>73</sup> *Xunzi* 18.2. Despite his recognition that only a few members of the elite can ever depose a ruler, and then only if he is extremely bad (like Jie and Zhou Xin), Pines still finds Mencius to be “almost a revolutionary.” See Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 72. On the other hand, although Xunzi justifies Tang’s and Wu’s overthrow of Jie and Zhou Xin just like Mencius does, Pines finds him to be almost conservative. He reads Xunzi’s view as a post facto justification of Tang’s and Wu’s acts, but not an attempt like Mencius’s to apply this principle of removing a bad ruler to “modern circumstances” (88). On my view, Mencius should not be seen as more forward-looking than Xunzi: Both Mencius and Xunzi wanted to leave the door open, if only so slightly, to legitimizing the removal of bad kings. But this is only a fleeting possibility, and the hereditary principle of kingly appointment, and of kingly immunity, is still the default principle for ordinary times.

<sup>74</sup> *Mencius* 7A.31.

the member of the elite responsible for it is virtuous,<sup>75</sup> because this is the only way to make certain that the removal is done for the right reason, that is, for the reason that the extant ruler fails to govern well. What the preceding passage also reveals again is that the common people's importance is restricted to signaling the appropriateness or lack thereof of a ruler's appointment, by merely showing outward signs of satisfaction or lack of satisfaction.

In short, the common people are not themselves the agents responsible for the removal of a bad ruler. There is no revolutionary impulse in Mencius, or early Confucianism more generally. Instead, just as the web-like relationship that I have described between ruler and ruled is formed gradually, as the ruler initiates policies to which the people respond favorably, so does it unravel through the gradual untangling of the common people from the web as they lose trust in the ruler. There are no contracts to be ended, no rights to be recovered, and thus no popular revolution to achieve such aims.

### *Ruler and Ruled*

That the common people do not choose the ruler, and that they are largely portrayed as passive, should not imply the view that Confucian government aims at the benefit of the ruler alone. On my interpretation, the maintenance of political order benefits both parts of society, ruler and ruled, equally. As I explained in the prologue, the common people emerged as an object of political concern with the rise of the warring states of early China (ca. 771–221 BCE). The leaders of the newly independent states relied on the common people as a source of military and economic strength. For the common people to persevere in this role, the ruler had to provide them with political order by promoting welfare and security measures—to be discussed in the next chapter. In other words, both ruler and ruled would benefit from the establishment of political order.

<sup>75</sup> Justin Tiwald discusses the anecdote in 2B.8 where Mencius argues that though the invasion of Yan is justified in itself, not anyone is justified in leading it; only a Heaven-appointed official is (and the king of Qi, who invades Yan, is not one). He takes it to suggest that what is important about this person (who is justified in overthrowing the ruler) is not so much his qualifications, but his appointment. In other words, he emphasizes what he calls the "procedural" aspect of political authority. See Tiwald, "Right of Rebellion," 273. In line with what I argued above, I disagree that one should take literally the idea of appointment by Heaven. I take the claim that one is appointed by Heaven to be a claim about this person's qualifications.

My view is thus distinct from two available ones in the literature. On one—minority—interpretation, sometimes made about the *Mencius*, the Confucian conception of government is ultimately aimed at fulfilling the ruler's self-interest. On this reading, Mencius's advice to kings is motivated by what is profitable for the king personally. The point of ensuring the satisfaction of the people, for example, is for the king to protect his own, personal rule, as opposed to protecting political society as a whole.<sup>76</sup> The problem with this argument is that, if the ruler's self-interest is really what is at stake in these texts, it is hard to see why the Confucians are so insistent on explicitly discouraging it. For example, the first story we read in the *Mencius* illustrates Mencius's practice of convincing rulers not to care for profit:

Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. "You, Sir," said the King, "have come all this distance, thinking nothing of a thousand [leagues]. You must surely have some way of profiting my state."

"Your Majesty," answered Mencius. "What is the point of mentioning the word 'profit' (*li* 利)? All that matters is that there should be *ren* and rightness (*yi* 義)."<sup>77</sup>

In another anecdote, Mencius is dismayed by Song Keng, who is eager to convince the kings of Qin and Chu to end their hostilities by showing them the "unprofitability" of war. As Mencius tells Song Keng, "Your purpose is lofty indeed but your slogan is wrong."<sup>78</sup> Xunzi's case against profit is also as straightforward as it is succinct: to put rightness (*yi* 義) before profit (*li* 利) is honorable; to put profit before rightness is disgraceful.<sup>79</sup> This is why "the [emperor] does not discuss quantities, [regional rulers] do not discuss benefit and harm, grand officers do not discuss success and failure, and [men of service] do not discuss commerce and merchandise."<sup>80</sup> It is true, of course, that ultimately the rejection of profit allows the king to maintain his rule, since, as Mencius suggests, it prevents discord with the people and the possibility of regicide on the part of officials. But though it might be true

<sup>76</sup> Thus Creel argues that, against conventional wisdom, Mencius actually advocates that the ruler adopt a utilitarian position, citing the encounter with King Hui of Liang. See Herrlee Glessner Creel, *Chinese Thought, from Confucius to Mao Tsê-Tung* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 86–87.

<sup>77</sup> *Mencius* 1A.1.

<sup>78</sup> *Mencius* 6B.4.

<sup>79</sup> *Xunzi* 4.6.

<sup>80</sup> *Xunzi* 27.63.

that the maintenance of political order is beneficial for the ruler, this does not mean it is beneficial to him alone.

On the second, more common view, which forms the ground for the proto-democratic view presented above, and which Chan, borrowing from Joseph Raz, calls the “*service conception of authority*,”<sup>81</sup> the common people are said to be the most important element in Confucian political theory, and the goal of the Confucian ruler is to satisfy their needs. This view is taken to be illustrated by Mencius’s statement that the people are most important, followed by the altars of the earth and grain (the symbols of the state), while the ruler comes last,<sup>82</sup> and it is usually expressed by the idea of a *minben* (民本), a later notion that translates as the “people as the basis” of government.<sup>83</sup> The difference between my argument about political order and this view is revealed by my disagreement with the way some describe the mixed scenario that Mencius’s account of the role of the people in government presents “as government for the people,” perhaps “of the people,” but not “by the people.”<sup>84</sup> It is obvious from this description that interpreters struggle with understanding how the common people matter, without their importance translating into influence in government. The struggle is clear in Lau’s following thought on Confucius: “Confucius may not have had too high an opinion of the intellectual and moral capacities of the common people, but it is emphatically not true that he played down their importance in the scheme of things. Perhaps, it is precisely because the people are incapable of securing their own welfare unaided that the ruler’s supreme duty is to work on their behalf in bringing about what is good for them.”<sup>85</sup>

The analogy that comes to mind here, which the Confucians themselves use, is to parents and children.<sup>86</sup> Mencius, indeed, suggests that the proper attitude for the ruler to assume toward his people is that of a parent: in various sections in which he propounds the need to ensure

<sup>81</sup> Chan, “Democracy and Meritocracy,” 188, emphasis original.

<sup>82</sup> *Mencius* 7B.14.

<sup>83</sup> Tan, “Democracy in Confucianism,” 295.

<sup>84</sup> See Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 161. Chenyang Li argues that it is “for the people” but neither “of the people” nor “by the people.” See Li, “Confucian Value and Democratic Value,” 185–86.

<sup>85</sup> Lau, introduction to the *Analects*, 36.

<sup>86</sup> The analogy actually predates these Confucian texts, as it can be found in the *Classic of Poetry* (*shijing* 詩經) and also in the *Classic of Rites* (*lij* 禮記). In other words, it is not an idea introduced by the Confucians, but one that they gave their own spin to. I thank Mick Hunter for alerting me to this.

the people's welfare, he reminds the ruler that not doing so is failing to satisfy his role as "father and mother to the people" (*minfumu* 民父母). The following is a characteristic passage where he confronts King Xuan of Qi: "There is fat meat in your kitchen and there are well-fed horses in your stables, yet the people look hungry and in the outskirts of cities men drop dead from starvation. This is to show animals the way to devour men. Even the devouring of animals by animals is repugnant to men. If, then, one who is father and mother to the people cannot, in ruling over them, avoid showing animals the way to devour men, wherein is he father and mother to the people?"<sup>87</sup> Besides providing for the people, for Mencius, acting as a parent also involves promoting the worthy to government.<sup>88</sup> As for Xunzi, he argues that superiors generally, and kings particularly, should treat their inferiors as if they were protecting a child.<sup>89</sup> The people will, in turn, treat their king as they would their own parent and will be willing to die for him.<sup>90</sup> Xunzi also echoes Mencius when he argues that if a ruler is good, promotes the worthy, and provides for the people's needs, then those even from distant lands will follow him, looking upon him as their father and mother.<sup>91</sup>

The parental analogy, however, is misleading since it would suggest, as Elstein points out, that at some point the people will stop being children and become the ruler's equals, that is, that the ruler's obligation toward them is only temporary, which is nowhere suggested in the early texts.<sup>92</sup> The parental analogy should thus be interpreted not with an emphasis on the status of the common people as children but rather on the way the ruler should relate to them. Thus Xunzi suggests that if he desires safety in governing, the ruler should govern fairly (*pingzheng* 平政) and love the people.<sup>93</sup> The ideal of fairness or evenhanded treatment can also be found elsewhere in the texts: in the *Analects* we are told that impartiality (*gong* 公) is the best way to win the people,<sup>94</sup> and Mencius is at pains to deny that Emperor Shun was partial to his

<sup>87</sup> Mencius 1A.4.

<sup>88</sup> Mencius 1B.7.

<sup>89</sup> Xunzi 11.9a, 11.12.

<sup>90</sup> Xunzi 11.12.

<sup>91</sup> Xunzi 9.26. Mencius 2A.5. See also Xunzi 15.1b.

<sup>92</sup> Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot Generate Democracy," 437. I thus disagree with Sim's argument that, in Confucianism, "political government is simply the father-son relationship writ-large." See Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*, 166 (also 184–85). See also Li, "Confucian Value and Democratic Value," 185.

<sup>93</sup> Xunzi 9.4.

<sup>94</sup> *Analects* 20.1. See also *Analects* 7.31, where the governor is criticized for being partial in taking a wife from the same clan as his own.

own brother to the detriment of the common people.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the parental analogy can be seen to buttress the sense in which the ruler and the common people are inextricably tied to each other, as I have argued above, by suggesting that the ties between them are almost organic, rather than artificial, and that a relationship of mutual dependency prevails between them.

The parental analogy in the early Confucian texts thus need not necessarily be equated with a view that Confucian government is ultimately “for the people” in the way that parenthood or guardianship could be defined as aiming at the well-being of the children involved. On my view, in fact, there is no normative conception of “the people” as the aim of government. The aim of government is political order. It is for “the people” to the extent that they benefit from living in an orderly, secure, and productive society. What Mencius means, then, by his statement that the people are more important than the ruler is not that their well-being is the ultimate aim of Confucian government, for which the ruler is a mere means, but rather that they are developmentally (rather than normatively) more important than the ruler, that is, that no political order can obtain without their needs being satisfied first. This is made clear in Mencius’s statement that winning all under Heaven requires winning the hearts of the people.<sup>96</sup>

To conclude, I have elucidated in this section the relationship between ruler and ruled as a way to further clarify the Confucian conception of political order. I have emphasized the complementary relationship between the two, suggesting that political order follows precisely from this complementarity. This view is set in contradistinction to two alternative views: one that argues that politics in Confucianism benefits the ruler primarily, and one that argues that Confucian government is “for the people.”

## Hegemons

In the last part of the chapter, I further illustrate and substantiate my contention that the central organizing motif of Confucian political thought is the concern with orderliness by showing how this concern explains the intriguing acceptance, even praise, that the early Confucians express for a subset of rulers who are far from virtuous.

<sup>95</sup> *Mencius* 5A.3.

<sup>96</sup> *Mencius* 4A.9.

Hegemon (*ba* 霸, literally “the senior one”) was the title attributed to the statesmen who rose to prominence during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE). At that time, the Eastern Zhou king was king in name alone, and the Zhou realm had disintegrated into many independent states ruled by princely vassals of the preceding Western Zhou dynasty. Different states achieved dominance at various times. While the first state to do so was the state of Zheng, the first one to actually receive the title of hegemon was the state of Qi.<sup>97</sup> Ancient texts usually refer to “five hegemons” of the Spring and Autumn period.<sup>98</sup> These hegemons helped maintain a system of alliance among the states of the day, fending off attacks from “barbarians” at the borders, with the stated aim of preserving “the Zhou cultural and political order.”<sup>99</sup> In reality, though, they contributed to the gradual dissolution of the Zhou order. The precarious system of alliance they established was not to last long: the alliance devolved into more open competition during the subsequent Warring States period. As mentioned before, it was only in 221 BCE that the ruler of Qin succeeded at conquering all of his adversaries and called himself emperor.

Because of their effectiveness in government, hegemons are usually associated with a school of thought now known as Legalism (*fajia* 法家), which consists of an amalgamation of texts on statecraft from the Warring States period.<sup>100</sup> Given the usual opposition between Legalism and Confucianism, hegemons are often thought to be anathema to the Confucians.<sup>101</sup> Against the view that for the Confucians the only contrast is between “kingliness and despotism,”<sup>102</sup> however, I show in what follows that there is a third meaningful class of rulers for the

<sup>97</sup> Hsu, “Spring and Autumn Period,” 551–57.

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, *Mencius* 6B.7, 7A.30. These hegemons are thought to be Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Wen of Jin, King Zhuang of Chu, Duke Mu of Qin, and Duke Xiang of Song.

<sup>99</sup> Hsu, “Spring and Autumn Period,” 566.

<sup>100</sup> One of these, the *Guanzi*, is actually named after Guan Zhong, the prime minister of Duke Huan of Qi (the first of the hegemons), and is presented as a collection of his thoughts on government, but the attribution is spurious.

<sup>101</sup> Bryan Van Norden, in his introduction to an abridged translation of the *Mengzi*, writes that “Confucians typically condemned them [i.e., hegemons] for usurping the authority of the Zhou King and ruling by force and guile rather than by Virtue.” See Van Norden, trans., *The Essential Mengzi: Selected Passages with Traditional Commentary* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), xvii. On the other hand, closer to my reading, Irene Bloom describes the Confucian account of the legitimacy of the hegemons’ rule as “ambiguous.” See Bloom, trans., *Mencius*, 6n19.

<sup>102</sup> Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 64.



Confucians (less good than virtuous kings but better than despots) and that hegemons occupy it. Indeed, although hegemons' political effectiveness often came at the expense of virtuousness, the early Confucians countenanced, even praised, them. I contend that this approval stems from their ability to maintain political order at a time of chaos.

Before I proceed to discussing the early Confucians' view on hegemons, I should note that it is generally not the hegemons per se that the Confucians express praise for: except in Xunzi's case, the achievements of hegemons are mostly attributed to their ministers. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am interested in the aims of government rather than in its internal division of functions. Therefore, the relevant unit of analysis is the mode of government pursued by hegemons. When I discuss "hegemons," it is thus in reference both to hegemons and to their ministers, that is, as a shorthand for hegemonic government more generally.

Consider, then, the state of Qi, the first to acquire the title of hegemon. Its ruler, Duke Huan, one of the "five hegemons" mentioned above, owes his ascent to power to his prime minister Guan Zhong.<sup>103</sup> It is these two figures who are mostly discussed in the Confucian texts. To start with Confucius, he disparagingly calls Guan Zhong a "vessel of small capacity" and wonders whether, if even Guan Zhong can be said to understand the rites, anyone does not.<sup>104</sup> Everything else he says about Guan Zhong, however, is positive. He recounts that Guan Zhong took over three hundred households from the fief of a certain Bo family, without the latter daring to complain, which presumably indicates the extent of Guan Zhong's popularity.<sup>105</sup> He also says that Guan Zhong was behind Duke Huan's ability to unite the regional rulers several times without resort to force.<sup>106</sup> Confucius adds, "Guan

<sup>103</sup> For the tensions in the historical records about Guan Zhong, see Sydney Rosen, "In Search of the Historical Kuan Chung," *Journal of Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (May 1976): 431–40.

<sup>104</sup> *Analects* 3.22. Lau points out that a vessel is designed for "a specific purpose" and hence the fact that Guan Zhong is both a vessel and one of small capacity indicates his limited abilities. See Lau, *Analects*, 64n4.

<sup>105</sup> *Analects* 14.9. For this interpretation, see Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "The Development of Tension between Virtue and Achievement in Early Confucianism: Attitudes toward Kuan Chung and Hegemon (*pa*), as Conceptual Symbols," *Philosophy East and West* 31, no. 1 (January 1981): 18.

<sup>106</sup> *Analects* 14.16. The sentence that concludes this last anecdote, however, is more controversial. Like Chinese commentators before them, those translating the text into English disagree on how to render the sentence *ru qi ren* 如其仁. D. C. Lau translates it as "Such was his benevolence [*ren*], such was his benevolence" (Ames and Rosemont also

Zhong helped Duke Huan to become the leader of the [regional rulers] and to save the Empire from collapse. To this day, the common people still enjoy the benefit of his acts. Had it not been for Guan Zhong, we might well be wearing our hair down and folding our robes to the left. Surely he was not like the common man or woman who, in their petty faithfulness, commit suicide in a ditch without anyone taking any notice."<sup>107</sup>

On a straightforward reading, the contrast that Confucius establishes is between Guan Zhong and petty commoners. But a more telling, albeit more conjectural, way to recast this contrast is as a contrast between Guan Zhong's actions and those of Zhao Hu, who served with Guan Zhong as minister to Prince Jiu of Qi. When the prince was murdered by his own brother, none other than Duke Huan, who then ascended the throne, Zhao Hu killed himself while Guan Zhong simply shifted allegiance to Duke Huan. However loyal Zhao's decision was, it was Guan Zhong's that had the more admirable consequence: as Confucius says, Guan Zhong saved Zhou civilization from complete breakdown (by helping Duke Huan win the authority that made him into a hegemon and thus allowed him to unite the states and repel outsiders).<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Benjamin Schwartz takes Confucius's defense of Guan Zhong to be motivated by the master's loyalty to the collapsing Zhou dynasty and his readiness to "do anything possible to prevent the further disintegration of its sacred authority."<sup>109</sup> But one can understand Confucius's loyalty to the Zhou to be more than a mere emotional attachment to the vestiges of the past. It is a principled commit-

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adopt the "such was his *ren*" formulation). Edward Slingerland's translation, on the other hand, denotes criticism: "But as for his goodness [*ren*], as for his goodness. . . ." While earlier Chinese commentators adopted a position closer to Lau's, they took the claim to mean that Guan Zhong's actions merely had the appearance of *ren*, or had the consequence, but not the form, of *ren*. The latter is also Zhu Xi's position. See Tillman, "Development of Tension," 19. I lean toward this last interpretation for reasons that I will lay out in Chapter 4, when I revisit the question of virtuous rulership.

<sup>107</sup> *Analects* 14.17.

<sup>108</sup> Duke Huan is described favorably in *Analects* 14.15, where he is said to be correct (*zheng* 正), in comparison to Duke Wen of Jin, who is "crafty." Slingerland reports that a few Chinese commentators describe Duke Huan as having "dedicated himself to public duty at the expense of his own interests," which fits with the rest of the description of his and Guan Zhong's actions as I present them here. See Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: Analects*, 160.

<sup>109</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 110. Schwartz also writes, in relation to the depiction of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*, that he is judged, not on the basis of "pure ethics," but on the basis of an "ethics of political life which often involves the typical political choice between the greater and lesser evil" (109).

ment to the ideal of political order that the Zhou represented. In other words, Guan Zhong's praiseworthiness stems from his ability to maintain order in a time of chaos.<sup>110</sup>

Moving now to Mencius, he is also at points dismissive of Guan Zhong and Duke Huan. He is thus appalled when one of his disciples, Gongsun Chou, asks him whether, were he to get the chance to rule in the state of Qi, he would do as Guan Zhong did. Mencius cites Zeng Xi's claim that Guan Zhong's achievements were not important.<sup>111</sup> In another similar anecdote, when King Xuan of Qi asks Mencius about Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin (the second of the five hegemons), Mencius dismisses the question as one that Confucians were never keen on answering. He offers to speak instead of virtuous kings.<sup>112</sup>

Yet, like Confucius, Mencius is more ambivalent about Guan Zhong than is generally recognized,<sup>113</sup> since he describes him in a different passage as an accomplished statesman: indeed, Mencius cites Guan Zhong as part of a longer list of statesmen, which includes Shun, but also other less known ministers such as Jiao Ge, who was a worthy official at the court of the tyrant Zhou Xin,<sup>114</sup> and Boli Xi, who helped Duke Mu achieve political eminence.<sup>115</sup> The purpose of the list is to illustrate the lowly origins of all these statesmen, and Mencius argues that it is only when a person first suffers that he is then able to innovate.<sup>116</sup> The reference to Guan Zhong together with other worthy statesmen is noteworthy.

<sup>110</sup> Slingerland writes at one point that "Confucius admired his [Guan Zhong's] skill and achievements, but had doubts about his moral worthiness" (250). In his commentary on 3.22, however, he contends that despite Confucius's admiration for Guan Zhong, "at a deeper level he disapproves of his narrowly pragmatic approach and flouting of traditional norms and institutions" (27). But why should we think that the disapproval of Guan Zhong on the moral level is "deeper" than the approval of him on the political level? My argument is that the standards used to judge political action are simply different from (rather than less important than) the standards used to judge action from a strictly moral point of view.

<sup>111</sup> *Mencius* 2A.1.

<sup>112</sup> *Mencius* 1A.7.

<sup>113</sup> Kim writes that Mencius "berated" the hegemons "harshly," especially Duke Huan. See Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism," 386. Though recognizing Confucius's ambivalence about hegemons, Schwartz also argues that Mencius has a "much more purist attitude towards the hegemonic system," that "he feels he can stand in final judgment on them," and that his is a "soaring and defiant idealism." See Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, 286. See also Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, 170 and Fung, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 112.

<sup>114</sup> *Mencius* 2A.1.

<sup>115</sup> *Mencius* 5A.9.

<sup>116</sup> *Mencius* 6B.15.

That Guan Zhong is not an altogether bad minister, in Mencius's eyes, is further revealed in another anecdote from the *Mencius*. Mencius describes Guan Zhong as an example of a minister "who cannot be summoned" (*suo buzhao zhi chen* 所不召之臣), that is, a minister who is respected by his ruler. This is especially significant since Mencius refers to himself as one such minister: when Mencius receives a message from the king asking to see him, he refuses to go, justifying his refusal by arguing that

a prince who is to achieve great things must have [officials] he does not summon. If he wants to consult them, he goes to them. If he does not honour virtue and delight in the Way in such a manner, he is not worthy of being helped towards the achievement of great things. . . . Today there are many states, all equal in size and virtue, none being able to dominate the others. This is simply because the rulers are given to employing those they can teach rather than those from whom they can learn.<sup>117</sup>

Mencius then mentions two examples of officials who cannot be summoned: Yi Yin (who served under Prince Tang) and Guan Zhong. Yi Yin is a paragon of virtue from antiquity.<sup>118</sup> Guan Zhong is thus being compared to Mencius himself and to Yi Yin. Based on the quote above, it is clear that what makes Guan Zhong worthy of such a comparison is that he helped his ruler (Duke Huan of Qi) toward "the achievement of great things" and toward gaining "dominance" over neighboring states. The achievements of Duke Huan, allowed by his sponsorship of Guan Zhong, are made explicit in yet another anecdote where Mencius describes Duke Huan as the leader who brought the regional rulers together on a fivefold pledge, revolving around filiality, merit, and the good treatment of neighbors.<sup>119</sup> In short, what Mencius's discussion of Guan Zhong and Duke Huan reveals is the implicit recognition that, however lacking in virtue Duke Huan of Qi was, his ability to unite the states of his day, and set up rules for their interaction and internal regulation, prevented conflict and anarchy from erupting. Duke Huan was able to do this only because he was willing to listen to the advice of Guan Zhong.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>117</sup> *Mencius* 2B.2.

<sup>118</sup> *Mencius* 5A.6. See also *Mencius* 7A.31.

<sup>119</sup> *Mencius* 6B.7. Kim also cites 7A.13, where Mencius says that people under the rule of a hegemon look happy, while under the rule of a king they look satisfied. See Kim, "Between Good and Evil," 78.

<sup>120</sup> In two anecdotes in the *Mencius*, Mencius is encouraged to take up an official post

Finally, Xunzi offers the most sustained discussion of hegemons among our three thinkers.<sup>121</sup> He suggests at first that hegemons only give the appearance of *ren*, but are actually only concerned with profit.<sup>122</sup> They do not care for instruction or culture (*wen* 文), but merely seek to master the tactics of war,<sup>123</sup> and their army is motivated only by a desire for rewards.<sup>124</sup> What better proof is there of hegemons' lust for power than the fact that Duke Huan, whom Xunzi considers the most successful of the five hegemons, started his career by killing his own brother and usurping the throne?<sup>125</sup> As for Guan Zhong, Xunzi describes him as nothing but a man from the fields not fit to become the counselor of a king.<sup>126</sup>

This depiction of hegemons shows that they are inferior to virtuous kings. On the other hand, Xunzi says that hegemons are better than rulers who merely rely on force. Indeed, he contends that the hegemon "opens up lands for cultivation, fills the granaries and sees that the people are provided with the goods they need. He is careful in selecting his officials and employs men of talent, leading them on with rewards and correcting them with punishments. He restores states that have perished, protects ruling lines that are in danger of dying out, guards the weak, and restrains the violent."<sup>127</sup> But if hegemons do all this, what makes them less worthy than virtuous kings? Xunzi says that the virtuous king extols rituals, while the hegemon is merely good at governing (*zheng* 政), which he argues is better than being merely good at collecting taxes.<sup>128</sup> Xunzi also says that the king seeks to establish rightness (*yi* 義) while the hegemon seeks to establish trust (*xin* 信).<sup>129</sup> This trust is obtained through consistent punishments and re-

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with the argument that he can turn the ruler either into a king, or at least into a hegemon, suggesting that the latter possibility was not considered as anathema to Mencius (it would arguably not otherwise have been used in efforts to convince him). See *Mencius* 2A.2 and 3B.1.

<sup>121</sup> Though Xunzi is clearest in his support for hegemons among our three thinkers, some still argue that this support is not wholehearted. Thus Mark Edward Lewis argues that later essays in the *Xunzi* "grudgingly accept the practices of the Spring and Autumn hegemons when no true king exists." See Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 66.

<sup>122</sup> *Xunzi* 7.1 and 9.8.

<sup>123</sup> *Xunzi* 7.1.

<sup>124</sup> *Xunzi* 15.1d.

<sup>125</sup> *Xunzi* 7.1.

<sup>126</sup> *Xunzi* 27.58.

<sup>127</sup> *Xunzi* 9.8, quoted from Watson, 42.

<sup>128</sup> *Xunzi* 9.5.

<sup>129</sup> *Xunzi* 11.1a. For Kim, trust is "political morality that a ruler in the pursuit of *badao* [the Way of a hegemon] must possess" (for example, the way Duke Huan trusted Guan

wards, avoiding deceiving the people, and honoring agreements with allies.<sup>130</sup> Xunzi's most repeated formulation of the difference between virtuous king and hegemon is that one who extols rituals and honors the worthy becomes a king, while one who stresses regulations (*fa* 法) and loves the people becomes a hegemon.<sup>131</sup>

As Hoyt Tillman suggests, Xunzi's systematic account of hegemons could be seen as distinct from the account of the historical hegemons (Duke Huan and Guan Zhong) who, though they were competent, did not necessarily fulfill all the responsibilities adumbrated by Xunzi above.<sup>132</sup> What Xunzi offers in the comparison between virtuous kings and hegemons is an idealized model of the latter, which can be seen as building upon the historical hegemons' achievements, to imagine what their principles of government should have been like. It should be clear from this account of idealized hegemons that their government aims at the production of an orderly society through the provision of grain, the use of consistent punishments, winning the trust of the people, and honoring agreements with allies.

In short, for our three Confucian thinkers, hegemonic rule is appreciated for its success in preventing the unraveling of the Chinese states amid turbulent times. It might be argued, however, that this success, and the praise that it induces, stems from the fact that hegemons provide the conditions necessary for the emergence of a society in which morality flourishes. Thus, according to Sor-hoon Tan, "hegemons' coercive authority is legitimate to the extent that it creates the external conditions for personal cultivation; its inadequacy lies in failing to foster the internal conditions for personal cultivation through transformative exemplification."<sup>133</sup> On my view, however, although it is true that personal cultivation; in principle requires adequate external conditions (such as basic subsistence), it is not necessarily true that the aim of establishing the latter is personal cultivation. Welfare, peace, and order

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Zhong), but also what the hegemon seeks to obtain in his relationship to the people. See Kim, "Between Good and Evil," 84.

<sup>130</sup> *Xunzi* 11.1c.

<sup>131</sup> *Xunzi* 16.1, 17.9, and 27.1. Another formulation is that the king seeks to win the people, the hegemon seeks to win allies, while the ruler who relies on force seeks to win land (*Xunzi* 9.6).

<sup>132</sup> See Tillman, "Development of Tension," 23. Sumner B. Twiss and Jonathan Chan also argue that although Mencius and Xunzi at point criticize "the actual operation" of the system of hegemons, hegemons' role "as such might not be objectionable from the Confucian point of view." See Twiss and Chan, "The Classical Confucian Position on the Legitimate Use of Military Force," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 3 (2012): 450, 453n7.

<sup>133</sup> Tan, *Confucian Democracy*, 196.

are goods in themselves and need not be justified through the fulfillment of “ethical” standards. Indeed, this is precisely what my discussion of hegemons is meant to show. To put it differently, my aim in this chapter, and in this book as a whole, is to elicit a space between “ethical politics” and “crass politics.” Hegemons lie in this space.

Tan also offers a related but different argument to the effect that hegemons exemplify a modicum of moral virtues such that, if we conceive morality as a spectrum from least virtuous to most virtuous, hegemons would fall somewhere in the middle. She argues, for example, that “Mencius’ distinction between hegemony and true kingship does not preclude the possibility of a developmental process connecting the two.”<sup>134</sup> She cites in this regard *Mencius* 2A.3, in which hegemons are said to borrow from *ren*, and 7A.30, in which Mencius repeats the same idea and then wonders that “if a man borrows a thing and keeps it long enough, how can one be sure that it will not become truly his?” The problem with this interpretation is that it suggests that the early Confucians, especially Confucius and Mencius, should have actually been much more positive about the early hegemons, if the latter were indeed on the road to becoming *ren*. In fact, the rest of the textual evidence does not indicate that the qualities recommending hegemons are a primitive form, or a diluted version, of the central Confucian virtues. It is true that hegemons exhibit trustworthiness, which is an important virtue for the Confucians.<sup>135</sup> They also exhibit, at least for Xunzi, love for the people, which Xunzi takes to be a characteristic of hegemons borrowed from kings.<sup>136</sup> But they do not exhibit the Confucian cardinal virtues of *ren*, rightness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. Indeed, the qualities that the three Confucians converge on in describing Guan Zhong are qualities like resoluteness, courage, and effectiveness. These qualities become moral only when they are associated with other moral virtues. Thus, in the *Xunzi*, resoluteness is used to describe a worthy person to whom the whole world yields,<sup>137</sup> a good minister,<sup>138</sup> and mo-

<sup>134</sup> Tan, *Confucian Democracy*, 197.

<sup>135</sup> Kim describes trust as a “civic virtue.” See Kim, “Between Good and Evil,” 85. I agree with this description, which fits with my description of the qualities expected of the common people as civic as well. But though it can be described as “virtue,” the important point for my purposes here is that it is a political, not a moral, virtue. As I argue in what follows, political virtues are not a diluted version of ethical ones, but form a distinct category.

<sup>136</sup> This explains why Xunzi says that hegemons enjoy a “mixed” form, while kings possess the pure form of Confucian government. (*Xunzi* 16.6).

<sup>137</sup> *Xunzi* 6.10.

<sup>138</sup> *Xunzi* 13.4.

rality as such.<sup>139</sup> Courage (*yong* 勇) is also praised in the Confucian texts, yet the courageous person needs to also be versed in the rites in order to be counted as virtuous.<sup>140</sup> In fact, in the *Analects*, martial courage is rejected in favor of moral courage,<sup>141</sup> and Mencius makes a distinction between small and great valor: the first is the valor of common men, while the latter is the valor of virtuous men like King Wen.<sup>142</sup> In short, though trust, resoluteness, courage, and effectiveness can attach themselves to a moral person, they are not by themselves preparatory qualities for becoming moral. Guan Zhong is complimented for having them as such, and not for being on the path toward virtue. The spectrum view of virtue cannot thus account for the Confucian approval of hegemons.

This said, Tan is right to raise questions about the relationship between hegemons and virtuous kings specifically in the case of Mencius because Mencius, as I will show in Chapter 4, does suggest the importance of a *ren* (benevolent) government for the achievement of political order. Thus, to the extent that hegemons do promote political order (rather than because we expect the Confucians to favor moral government as such), one would expect them to partake of benevolent government. Based on the view I will offer in Chapter 4 on the relationship between *ren* and *ren* government (*renzheng* 仁政), however, I contend that hegemonic government, insofar as it promotes order, partakes of *ren* government, without hegemons necessarily partaking of *ren*.

To summarize, then, hegemons are countenanced, and at points praised, because they have historically succeeded, through the efforts of their leading ministers, at saving the Chinese world from all-out war by forming strong states and rules of engagement among these. Also, as an ideal type, at least in the way Xunzi presents them, hegemons provide the model of how a ruler succeeds at achieving political order

<sup>139</sup> Xunzi 30.4. Resoluteness (*gang* 剛) is mentioned three times in the *Analects* as something one should aspire to, but it is not clearly defined. See *Analects* 5.11, 13.27, and 17.8. In 5.11, it is associated with a lack of desires. In 17.8, it is said to need to be balanced by a love of learning.

<sup>140</sup> *Analects* 8.2, 14.12, and 17.24. In 17.8, the suggestion is that courage must be combined with learning.

<sup>141</sup> *Analects* 5.7, 8.10, 14.4, and 17.23.

<sup>142</sup> Mencius 1B.3. See also 2A.2. On the distinction between moral and nonmoral courage, see Xinyan Jiang, "Mengzi on Human Nature and Courage," in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, ed. Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 143–62.



without necessarily showing qualities of virtue. In other words, hegemon's model what an heir should do to maintain the throne.<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the aim of Confucian government is not primarily either to instill virtue in the common people or to represent their needs and interests, but rather to promote political order. I have elicited the concern with order in the qualities expected of the common people, in the preference for hereditary succession, and in the approval of hegemon's. I have also shown that political order follows from a complementary relationship between ruler and ruled in which the common people express loyalty and allegiance to a ruler who satisfies their needs. I have not, however, specified what tasks and policies the ruler has to pursue to win the approval of the people. The chapter that follows explores this question.

<sup>143</sup> This said, historically speaking (rather than as an ideal type) hegemon's, like Duke Huan of Qi, usurped hereditary prerogative to become rulers. When Mencius and especially Xunzi advocate hereditary succession, they are therefore implicitly criticizing hegemon's for violating hereditary rule.