

DOCTORAL THESIS

Do sages make better king? a comparative philosophical study of monarchy in the Mèngzǐ and Marcus Aurelius's Meditations

Ciccotti, Jesse Andrew

Date of Award:
2019

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Abstract

This project examines and compares the political philosophies supporting the centralized authority of monarchs elaborated by two major figures of antiquity, Mèngzǐ (孟子 Mencius, 372-289 BC) of the Warring States period in China, and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Μαρκος Αυρηλιος Αντωνινος, 121-180 AD) of the later Roman Empire. The texts that have transmitted the ideas of these two men—the *Mèngzǐ* and the *Meditations*—have shaped the political actions of rulers, as well as the ideas and ideals of political theorists, from their formation down to the present day. Each thinker made substantial claims concerning the role of a philosophically-oriented monarch in actualizing governance that is both benevolent and beneficent under a form of absolute authority. The present study will compare basic principles of Mèngzǐ's and Marcus's political philosophies as they relate to monarchical rule expressed in those two classic works, and draw from these principles to create a new criterion in political philosophy that can be used to critique contemporary political arrangements characterized by strong centralization of power. This project will not be a polemic for monarchy or strongly centralized political governments; it is an exploration into political philosophical principles advocated by Marcus and Mèngzǐ, demonstrating how rulers in strongly centralized political institutions can exercise their power in ways that result in good for the people, and how principles advocated by Marcus and Mèngzǐ can be transformed into a criterion for practical application in contemporary political settings, without having to resort to political philosophical principles popular in most Anglo-European contexts.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	ix
CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE TO A CROSS-CULTURAL, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARISON	
1.1 The Project and Its Significance	1
1.1.1 The Project	1
1.1.2 Significance of this Project	2
1.1.2.1 Contemporary Significance and Impact of the Meditations	8
1.1.2.2 Contemporary Relevance of the <i>Mèngzǐ</i>	10
1.1.2.3 The Need to Correct a Bias in Contemporary Political Philosophy	12
1.1.3 Outstanding Contributions of This Project	17
1.2 State of the Research.....	18
1.2.1 Literature Review of Comparative Philosophy and Chinese-Stoic Philosophical Comparisons	19
1.2.2 Literature Review of the <i>Mèngzǐ</i>	27
1.2.3 Literature Review of the <i>Meditations</i>	36
1.3 Structure of the Study.....	41
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS COMPARATIVE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT.....	
2.1 Historical Contexts and Considerations	47
2.1.1 Warring States China	47
2.1.2 Late Roman Empire	51
2.2 Methodological Considerations	56
2.2.1 Philosophy in Comparative Mode.....	60
2.2.1.1 The Intuitive Ontology of Philosophical Comparison	60
2.2.1.2 The Intuitive Ontology Approach in this Project	77
2.2.2 Reading the <i>Meditations</i> with Political Philosophical Insight	80
2.2.2.1 Four Critical Views	82
2.2.2.1a View 1: Gretchen Reydam-Schils.....	82

2.2.2.1b View 2: Lukas de Blois	83
2.2.2.1c View 3: Christopher Gill	85
2.2.2.1d View 4: Pierre Hadot	86
2.2.2.2 Three Recognizable Forms of Political Philosophical Expression in the <i>Mèngzǐ</i>	88
2.2.2.2a The Dialectical	88
2.2.2.2b The Monologue	89
2.2.2.2c The Ambiguous	90
2.2.2.3 Reading the <i>Meditations</i> with New Lenses.....	91
2.2.2.3a Marcus the Man.....	92
2.2.2.3b Marcus the Adviser and Marcus the Emperor.....	92
2.2.2.3c Conclusion to Section 2.2.2.3	94
CHAPTER 3: CORE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE <i>MÈNGZǏ</i>	95
3.1 The Ruler’s Affective Sense of Care (<i>rén</i> 仁).....	99
3.1.1 Parallels with Feminist Care Ethics	105
3.2 Protecting the Interests (<i>hù</i> 護).....	112
3.2.1 Key Principles for Protecting the Interests of the People	117
3.2.1.0 Heaven’s Oversight of Political Affairs	117
3.2.1.1 Material and Moral Enrichment	120
3.2.1.2 Military Protection	124
3.2.1.3 Why Not <i>Minběn</i> 民本?.....	134
3.2.2 <i>Mèngzǐ</i> ’s Programmatic Suggestions.....	138
3.3 The People (<i>mín</i> 民).....	151
3.3.1 The Question of <i>Tiānxià</i> 天下.....	157
3.4 Governance, not Government (<i>zhèng</i> 政).....	166
3.4.1 The Way of the True King (<i>wáng dào</i> 王道).....	170
CHAPTER 4: CORE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE <i>MEDITATIONS</i>	174
4.1 The Primary Principle: <i>Cosmopolis</i> (κοσμόπολις).....	176
4.1.1 Four Key Features of <i>Cosmopolis</i>	178
4.1.2 Four Key Features of <i>Cosmopolis</i> in the <i>Meditations</i>	183
4.1.2.1 Members of the Cosmic Community	183

4.1.2.2 The Role of Law of the Cosmic Community	188
4.1.2.3 Mode of the Cosmic Community	192
4.1.2.4 The Whole-Part Relationship of the Cosmic Community	196
4.2 A Rational Sense of Affection for Fellow Citizens	200
4.2.1 <i>Pathē</i> πάθη and <i>Euratheiai</i> εὐπαθειαι	201
4.2.1.1 Passions (<i>Pathē</i> πάθη).....	202
4.2.1.2 Emotions (<i>Euratheiai</i> εὐπαθειαι).....	206
4.2.2 <i>Oikeiōsis</i> (οἰκείωσις).....	211
4.2.3 Marcus, a Ruler of Rational Affection for Fellow Civic Members	215
4.3 The Common Benefit and Good	217
4.3.1 Passive Good.....	219
4.3.2 Active Good	225
4.3.3 The “Common” Good	229
4.4 Justice	236
4.4.1 The Role of Justice in Marcus’s Political Philosophy	237
4.4.2 Marcus’s View of Justice	243
CHAPTER 5: A COMPARISON OF MARCUS’S AND MÈNGZǏ’S CORE	
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES	
5.1 Comparisons, Concepts, and Intuitions.....	254
5.2 Four Points of Contact	257
5.2.1 The Concept of Polity: <i>Cosmopolis</i> (κοσμόπολις) and <i>Tiānxià</i> (天下)	
.....	257
5.2.2 A Monarchical Ruler’s Affective Experience.....	260
5.2.3 The Purpose of the Polity: Protecting the People’s Interests and the	
Common Good	265
5.2.4 The Delimitations of “The People”.....	269
5.3 Three Points of Significant Non-Convergence	272
5.3.1 Justice	273
5.3.2 Governance	276
5.3.3 Varying Concepts of “Law”: “law” (<i>nomos</i> νόμος) and “models” (<i>fǎ</i>	
法)	279
5.4 A New Criterion in Political Philosophy Pertaining to Strongly Centralized	
Political Systems	282

5.4.1 Salient Considerations from Marcus’s and Mèngzǐ’s Core Political Philosophical Principles Relevant to Creating a New Criterion in Political Philosophy	286
5.4.1.1 The Scope of the Polity	287
5.4.1.2 What is Good (for the People)	291
5.4.1.3 Reengaging Tronto on Care in Political Ethics	293
5.4.1.4 What is the Link Between Care and Action? <i>Tuī</i> and <i>oikeiōsis</i> Revisited	298
5.4.2 Benevolent and Beneficent Governance	302
5.4.2.1 The New Criterion Defined and Explained	303
5.4.2.2 Questions Not Resolved by this Criterion	309
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	317
6.1 Concluding Summary	317
6.2 Final Comparison and Closing Comments	324
6.2.1 Mèngzǐ in Marcus’s Court	325
6.2.2 Ancient Monarchical Political Philosophy for Today	327
6.2.3 Do Sages Make Better Kings?	330
Chinese - English Glossary	333
Greek - English Glossary	334
Appendix 1: The <i>Mèngzǐ</i> 1A:7	335
Appendix 2: The Meaning and Use of <i>Shù</i> 術 in the <i>Mèngzǐ</i> 1A:7	342
On Van Norden’s (2008) translation of <i>shù</i> , and Zhū Xī’s commentary	347
Appendix 3: <i>koinē phusis</i> κοινή φύσις	351
Bibliography	354
Curriculum Vitae	383