



## Moral Education and Self-Actualization in the Thought of Mencius

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### Abstract

The present article deals with the analytical study of moral education and self-actualization in the thought of Mencius, one of the greatest sages of ancient China and one of the most important commentators and promoters of Confucianism. Mencius's thought is based on the knowledge of man, and in addition to the knowing human nature, abilities and talents, it shows the way of their actualization, so that transform a man into a wise and perfect human being. Mencius considers human nature to be inherently good and believes that what the humanity of man depends on for growth and prosperity are four feelings, known as "Four Beginnings" that must be recognized and flourished, so that a potential man become an actual man. These Four Beginnings are as follows: 1). Feeling of pity is the beginning of kindness; 2). Feeling of shame and modesty is the beginning of conscientiousness; 3). Humility and decency is the beginning of observing rituals and ceremonies; and 4). Ability to distinguish between right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. Like the four members of his body, every man has inherently all of these four existential seeds, and whoever denies them is like one who paralyzing himself by his own hand. But on the contrary, if a person can fully nurture and flourish these four seeds, he achieve perfection and wisdom. These beginnings are neither learned nor acquired; but they are gifts that Heaven/Ti'an has put them in Human Mind/Heart to be the defining characteristics of human being compared to other beings.

**Keywords:** Four Beginnings, Mencius, Moral Education, Self-actualization.

### Introduction

Moral education is one of the vital aspects of education that aims to develop values and positive behaviors of human beings; and so it plays a very important role in the formation of personality and social behavior of people. This type of education helps people to understand social, moral, and cultural values and to benefit from them in their daily life. Moral education focuses on concepts such as sacrifice, forgiveness, respect for the rights of others, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and empathy. This kind of education also plays a significant role in creating a healthy and dynamic social atmosphere and thus helps a person to face challenges and moral issues in daily life and respond to them in a positive way. Furthermore, moral education not only helps a person to be shaped as a responsible member of society, but also contributes to the structure and health of society, since personality development and socio-moral improvement go hand in hand. Also educational psychology helps people to know themselves better and develop morally through self-realization.



## Research Findings

According to Mencius, self-actualization means the actualization of one's inner human talents through education and training, and thus cultivating and improving oneself. He saw self-actualization as a dynamic and continuous process of becoming a complete and good human being. He believed that all human beings are inherently good and have the capacity to become a perfect man. Among the important dimensions of self-actualization in Mencius' thought is the development of moral virtues such as honesty, justice, kindness and respect for others. For self-actualization, it is necessary to acquire knowledge and wisdom as a way to better understanding the world and one's position in it. Self-actualization does not only mean personal growth, but also includes helping others and society to improve. The condition of moral education and as a result self-realization is self-knowledge. In the spiritual dimension of man, there are potentially good elements that should be identified and strengthened. Mencius interprets these hidden elements in human nature as the Beginning, which should be taken into consideration and cultivated. The flourishing of these four inherent feelings in humans will lead to excellence, perfection and getting away from animality. These Beginnings are as follows: 1). feeling of pity or sympathy, which, if blossomed, will turn into benevolence and philanthropy; 2). feeling of shame and modesty, which, when realized, will make piety and righteousness flourish; 3). feeling of humility or respect and forgiveness, which will be crystallized in the form of the virtue of trustworthiness and observing of manners; and 4). Ability of distinguishing between right and wrong, which will lead to wisdom.

## Conclusion

Self-actualization is one of the important and constant topics of Confucianism, and Confucian scholars have emphasized on its importance and offered ways to achieve it. Mencius was one of the most important commentators and promoters of Confucius' opinions and thoughts. Emphasizing moral teachings, Mencius considered moral education as an important individual responsibility and believed that everyone is responsible for his/her own moral behaviors. According to him, moral self-actualization means trying continuously to improve and progress in morals and improve the moral values of one's personality. He believed in a concept similar to "self-realization", in which the individual is responsible for his/her own moral upbringing. From his moral and philosophical point of view, Mencius emphasized individual and social improvement through self-actualization and continuous improvement. Mencius believed that goodness or benevolence is inherent in human beings and should be cultivated, and the ways of its cultivating are practicing self-awareness and paying attention to one's thoughts, feelings and actions, developing empathy, which means understanding and feeling the pain and suffering of others, doing good deeds and helping others and society as a whole.

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