

Abstract

Hsün Tzu on the Mind: His Attempted Synthesis of Confucianism and Taoism

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Using contemporary Western philosophic ideas, this essay examines Hsün Tzu's view of the mind as both a director of action and a spectator of action. In analyzing the mind as director, Hsün Tzu argues against Mencius's idea that the mind simply extends one's natural tendencies. Hsün Tzu's presentation of the mind as spectator—an idea developed chiefly in his discussion of obsession—accepts Chuang Tzu's stress on the importance of detachment, but argues that such detachment need not necessitate withdrawal from normal action. Hsün Tzu's two views of the mind can be reconciled by examining the mind's relationship to desires and to moral judgments. That examination also leads to the conclusion that Hsün Tzu thinks moral judgments have only a conventional and not a universal basis.