**Analects (论语)**

Ancient Chinese original from https://ctext.org/confucianism/ens:

*Book One*

1.1. 子曰：“学而时习之，不亦说乎？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎？”

Commentary on the passage from *Confucius Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*:

1.1. As Cheng Shude (following Mao Qiling) notes, “People today think of ‘learning’ as the pursuit of knowledge, whereas the ancients thought of ‘learning’ as cultivating the self.” For evidence, he points to 6.3, where Confucius cites Yan Hui as the only one of his disciples that truly loved learning because he “never misdirected his anger and never repeated a mistake twice,” and 2.18, where learning is described in terms of seldom erring in one’s speech and seldom having cause for regret in one’s behavior. This is an important point: we will see throughout the text that the sort of learning Confucius is interested in is a practical kind of “know-how” rather than abstract theoretical knowledge (see 1.7). Li Chong explains that the three activities mentioned in 1.1 refer to the stages of learning: mastering the basics, discussing them with fellow students and working hard at mastering them, and finally becoming a teacher of others.

1.2 有子曰：“其为人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鲜矣；不好犯上，而好作乱者，未之有也。君子务本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其为仁之本与！”

1.2 The line enclosed in quotation marks is probably a traditional saying. A comment upon this passage found in the Garden of Persuasions reads, “If the roots are not straight then the branches will necessarily be crooked, and if the beginning does not flourish then the end will necessarily wither. An ode says, ‘The highlands and lowlands have been pacified/ The springs and streams have been made clear/ Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.’” The quoted ode is a variant of the extant Ode 227. We see from the common Confucian theme that political order grows naturally out of the moral character formed within the context of family life. As Chen Tianxiang notes, we find a similar theme in Mencius 4:A:11: “If everyone simply loved their parents and respected their elders, the world would be at peace.”

1.3 子曰：“巧言令色，鲜矣仁！”

1.3 This suspicion of glib speech and superficial appearance is found throughout the Analects. This saying is repeated in 17.7 below (cf. 5.5, 11.25, 12.3, 16.4), and in 15.11 the danger presented by “glib people” (ningren) is compared to the derangement of morals brought about by the music of Zheng. David Nivison (1999: 751) has made a very interesting observation that may explain Confucius’ hatred for these clever, ingratiating people: in archaic Chinese, ning was pronounced \*nieng2 and is actually a graphic modification of its cognate ren (AC \*nien). The original meaning of ren was something like “noble in form,” and it would appear that ning was its counterpart in the verbal realm: “attractive or noble in speech.” In giving ning a negative meaning in the Analects, Confucius drives a wedge between the two qualities: ren now becomes “true” (i.e., inner) nobleness or Virtue, whereas ning represents the false, external counterfeit of ren. This is no doubt the sentiment behind such passages as 12.3, “The Good person is sparing of speech,” and 13.27, “reticence is close to Goodness,” as well as Confucius’ general suspicion of language and outward show.

1.6 子曰：“弟子入则孝，出则弟，谨而信，泛爱众，而亲仁。行有馀力，则以学文。”

1.6 There is some debate about how to understand the term wen (“writing,” “culture”) here, but it most likely refers to a set of cultural practices such as those later formalized as the so-called “six arts” of ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics in which any cultured person was trained (see 7.6). Liu Baonan notes that the purpose of this passage is to emphasize that “manifesting filial piety and respect for elders in one’s behavior is the primary concern, while the study of the cultural arts is secondary”; as Yin Tun puts it, “Virtuous behavior is the root, while the cultural arts are the branches; only by exhausting both root and branches, and knowing which is primary and which secondary, can one enter into virtue.” This theme is reinforced in 1.7 below.

1.9 曾子曰：“慎终追远，民德归厚矣。”

1.9 By the time of the Spring and Autumn Period, education in ritual had sadly declined, and cruelty to one’s parents had become prevalent among the common people. Therefore, Master Zeng rebuked those in power by noting that if they would merely take care in seeing off their deceased and sedulously maintain the sacrifices to their distant ancestors, the common people would naturally become aware of their own meanness and be moved to return to kindness. As the Record of Ritual says, “Cultivate the ancestral temples, respectfully perform the ancestral sacrifices, and thereby teach the common people to maintain filial piety” (From Chapter 27, the “Record of the Dykes”; Legge 1967, vol. 2: 291. 🡨 Include footnotes from the commentaries in parentheses immediately after the commentary).

1.10 子禽问于子贡曰：“夫子至于是邦也，必闻其政，求之与？抑与之与？”子贡曰：“夫子温、良、恭、俭、让以得之。夫子之求之也，其诸异乎人之求之与？”

1.10 Huang Kan believes the point of this passage to be that the quality of rulership in a state is revealed in the sentiment of the common people, to which Confucius was particularly sensitive because of his virtuous nature. Rulers thus “give away” this information inadvertently to one as attuned as Confucius, who therefore does not have to make inquiries in the ordinary fashion. Zhu Xi believes that it is the rulers who, drawn by the power of the Master’s virtue, actively seek Confucius out to discuss the problems of governance. In any case, the point seems to be that Confucius “sought it in himself, not in others” (15.21), or that (as Lu Longqi puts it) “the sage seeks things by means of virtue, unlike ordinary people who seek things with their minds.” That is, while ordinary people consciously and deliberately pursue external goals, the sage focuses his attention upon his own inner virtue and allows external things to come to him naturally. Confucius does not actively pry or seek out information, but is so perfected in virtue that what he seeks comes to him unbidden, in a wu-wei fashion.

1.12 有子曰：“礼之用，和为贵。先王之道斯为美，小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以礼节之，亦不可行也。”

1.12 What it means to practice ritual with “harmonious ease” (i.e., in an wu-wei fashion) is illustrated in the description of Confucius’ ritual behavior in Book Ten. Ritual behavior must be accompanied by such easy joy and harmony if it is to be truly valued. On the other hand, such “ease” involves more than simply indulging one’s innate emotions: the innate emotions must be properly shaped by ritual forms before they can become truly “harmonious.” The message here is related to the theme of possessing both “native substance” (zhi) and “cultural refinement” (wen) in their proper balance (cf. 3.8, 6.18).

1.15 子贡曰：“贫而无谄，富而无骄，何如？”子曰：“可也。未若贫而乐1，富而好礼者也。”子贡曰：“《[诗](https://ctext.org/analects/xue-er/book-of-poetry/ens)》云：‘[如切如磋，如琢如磨。](https://ctext.org/analects/xue-er/book-of-poetry/qi-yu/ens?searchu=%E5%A6%82%E5%88%87%E5%A6%82%E7%A3%8B%EF%BC%8C%E5%A6%82%E7%90%A2%E5%A6%82%E7%A3%A8%E3%80%82&searchmode=showall#result)’其斯之谓与？”子曰：“赐也，始可与言诗已矣！告诸往而知来者。”

1.15 “Cutting and polishing” refer to the working of bone and ivory, while “carving and grinding” refer to jade work: cutting and carving being the initial rough stages, and polishing and grinding the finishing touches. Here the task of self-cultivation is under- stood metaphorically in terms of the arduous process of roughly shaping and then laboriously finishing recalcitrant materials. Zigong’s quotation of this ode shows that he has instantly grasped Confucius’ point, explained quite nicely by Zhu Xi:

Ordinary people become mired in poverty or wealth, not knowing how to be self-possessed in such circumstances, necessarily leading to the two faults of obsequiousness or arrogance. A person who is able to be free of both knows how to be self-possessed, but has still not reached the point of completely transcending poverty and wealth . . . When a person is joyful he is relaxed in his mind and physically at ease, and therefore forgets about poverty; when he loves ritual, he is at peace wherever he goes and follows principles in a cheerful, good-natured fashion, being equally unconscious of wealth. Zigong was a businessman, probably starting out poor and then becoming rich, and therefore had to exert effort to remain self-possessed. This is why he asked this particular question. The Master’s answer was probably intended to acknowledge what Zigong had already achieved while at the same time encouraging him to continue striving after that which he had yet to attain.

Zhu Xi also notes that Zigong’s quotation reveals not only that he has grasped Confucius’ specific point—that he, Zigong, still has quite a bit of “finishing” work to do—but also serves as a general statement of the Confucian view of self-cultivation: that one “should not be so satisfied with small achievements that one fails to urge oneself on” (5.8). This instant grasping of the larger point to be taught is an excellent example of a student “being given three corners of a square and coming up with the fourth” (7.8).

*Book Two*

2.1子曰：“为政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而众星共之。”

2.1 The point of this passage is that the spontaneous harmony brought about by Heaven in the natural world is to be a model for the human ruler, who—in a wu-wei fashion— will bring the world to order silently, inevitably, and unselfconsciously through the power of his perfected moral Virtue. As Bao Xian notes, “One who possesses Virtue is wu-wei, and—like the Pole Star—does not move yet receives the homage of the myriad lesser stars.” Cf. 2.3, 2.21, 12.17, 12.19, and especially 15.5.

2.2子曰：“诗三百，一言以蔽之，曰‘思无邪’。”

2.2 The quoted phrase is from Ode 297. The original reference is to powerful war horses bred to pull chariots and trained not to swerve from the desired path. The metaphorical meaning is that one committed through study to the Odes—“yoked” to them, as it were—will not be lead astray from the Confucian Way.

2.3子曰：“道之以政，齐之以刑，民免而无耻；道之以德，齐之以礼，有耻且格。”

2.3 This passage represents another expression of the theme of ruling through the power of Virtue (wu-wei) rather than force. As Guo Xiang notes, “If you employ governmental regulations you may correct people’s outer behavior, but in their hearts, they will not have submitted. Concerned only with expediency and evasion, they will behave shamelessly toward things. Is this not a superficial way of transforming people?” Zhu Xi adds, “Although they will probably not dare to do anything bad, the tendency to do bad will never leave them.” Cf. 8.9.

2.4子曰：“吾十有五而志于学，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳顺，七十而从心所欲，不逾矩。”

2.4 We have here Confucius’ spiritual autobiography. We can see his evolution as encompassing three pairs of stages. In the first pair (stages one and two), the aspiring gentleman commits himself to the Confucian Way, submitting to the rigors of study and ritual practice until these traditional forms have been internalized to the point that he is able to “take his place” among others. In the second pair, the practitioner begins to feel truly at ease with this new manner of being, and is able to understand how the Confucian Way fits into the order of things and complies with the will of Heaven (The link between these two stages—being without doubts and understanding the Mandate of Heaven—is also suggested by the line from 9.29, “One who understands does not doubt.”). The clarity and sense of ease this brings with it leads to the final two stages, where one’s dispositions have been so thoroughly harmonized with the dictates of normative culture that one accords with them spontaneously—that is, the state of wu-wei. Some interpretations take the ear being “attuned” to mean that Confucius at this point immediately apprehends the subtle content of the teachings he hears (Zheng Xuan), some that there is no conflict between his inner dispositions and the teachings of the sages (Wang Bi), and some both of these things. As Li Chong explains, “‘Having an attuned ear’ means that, upon hearing the exemplary teachings of the Former Kings, one immediately apprehended their virtuous conduct, and ‘following the models of the Lord’ (a reference to King Wen in Ode 241), nothing goes against the tendencies of one’s heart.” As Huang Kan explains, “By age seventy, Confucius reached a point where training and inborn nature were perfectly meshed, ‘like a raspberry vine growing among hemp, naturally standing upright without the need for support.’(A common saying emphasizing the transformative effect of environment upon one’s character; see, for instance, Chapter 1 “Encouraging Learning” of the Xunzi: “When a raspberry vine grows among hemp, it naturally stands upright without the need for support; when white sand is mixed with mud, both of them become infused with blackness” (Knoblock 1988: 137). The idea, of course, is that the tall, straight hemp acts as a natural stake guiding the growth of the raspberry vine, which otherwise would grow into a tangled bramble). Therefore he could then give free rein to his heart’s intentions without overstepping the exemplary standards.” Or, as Zhu Xi explains it, “Being able to follow one’s heart’s desires without transgressing exemplary standards means that one acts with ease, hitting the mean without forcing it.”

2.7 子游问孝。子曰：“今之孝者，是谓能养。至于犬马，皆能有养；不敬，何以别乎？”

2.7 The focus here is upon the importance of internal involvement when it comes to virtuous behavior, “respect” (jing 敬) encompassing both a manner of behaving and an emotional attitude.

2.9子曰：“吾与回言终日，不违如愚。退而省其私，亦足以发。回也，不愚。”

2.9 Here, in our first mention of Confucius’ favorite disciples, Yan Hui, in the text, we get a clear indication that there is something special about him. Some commentaries (particularly the early ones) assume that the “private behavior” that Confucius observes is Yan Hui engaged in informal conversation with other disciples, while other commentaries believe that Confucius is observing Yan Hui’s behavior when he is alone, in solitary repose. Line three of the following passage (“discover where it is that he feels at ease”) suggests that latter reading. In any case, the point is that Hui does not disagree or ask questions because he immediately comprehends everything that he is taught (cf. 9.20, 11.4), suggesting that he might be one of those superior few who are “born knowing it” (16.9), unlike those such as Confucius who must learn in order to know the Way (7.20). Cf. 5.9, 6.1, and 6.7.

2.10子曰：“视其所以，观其所由，察其所安。人焉廋哉？人焉廋哉？”

2.10 That is, how can his true character remain hidden? A person’s character is not properly judged by his words or his public reputation, but is rather revealed to one who carefully observes his actual behavior, comes to know something about his motivations, and discovers what he is like in private. It is in the details of one’s daily behavior that true virtue is manifested. Cf. 4.2, “The Good person feels at home in Goodness.”

2.11子曰：“温故而知新，可以为师矣。”

2.11 There is commentarial disagreement over whether this passage refers to keeping ancient teachings alive, or to keeping what one has previously learned in a lifetime current in one’s mind so that one knows what to expect in the future. The role of the teacher would suggest the former. Li Ao points out, however, that passages such as 1.15 (“Informed as to what has gone before, you know what is to come”) seem congruent with the latter interpretation.

2.12子曰：“君子不器。”

2.12 Qi 器, literally a ritual vessel or implement designed to serve a particular function, is also used metaphorically to refer to people who are specialized in one particular task. Although some commentators take this passage to mean that the gentleman is universally—rather than narrowly—skilled, the point seems rather that the gentleman is not a specialist (cf. 6.13, 9.2, 9.6, 13.4 and 19.7). As Li Guangdi explains,

We call a “vessel” someone who establishes a name for himself on the basis of a single ability. Consider Zilu’s ability to collect taxes, Ran You’s ability to serve as a steward, Gong Xihua’s ability to regulate the etiquette of host and guest [5.8], and even Zigong’s ability to serve as a “precious jade vessel” [5.4]—these are all cases of being a “vessel” in this sense. The learning of the gentleman emphasizes the perfection of Virtue over attainment in the arts, and perfection in behavior over the mere accomplishment of tasks. Somewhere in Yan Hui’s manner of seeing and hearing, speaking and moving, or Zengzi’s appearance, attitude, and demeanor . . . we can discern the working of Virtue—this is what it means to “not serve as a vessel.” Taking this passage to mean that there is nothing the gentleman does not know or nothing that he cannot do is simply to fall back into the trap of “vessel”-thinking.

2.15 子曰：“学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆。”

2.15 As Bao Xian notes, “If one learns but does not reflectively seek out the meaning of what is being taught, one will be lost and will have gained nothing from it.” Some commentators, such as He Yan, take dai 殆 (“danger”) in its alternate sense of exhaustion: “If one thinks without studying, one will achieve nothing in the end, and will have merely exhausted one’s intellectual energy for nothing.” Learning requires the active participation of the student (cf. 1.16, 5.27, 7.8, 15.16), but also imposes essential structure upon the student’s activities (17.10 and especially 15.31).

2.21或谓孔子曰：“子奚不为政？”子曰：“《[书](https://ctext.org/shang-shu/ens)》云：‘孝乎惟孝、友于兄弟，施于有政。’是亦为政，奚其为为政？”

2.21 There are probably two layers of meaning here. The more general point is that one should “do government” through “not doing” (wu-wei): that is, by perfecting oneself— as Master You puts it in 1.2, establishing the “root” of virtue—and letting the rest follow naturally through the power of one’s personal example and Virtue. Some commentators also see here an indirect criticism of the Ji Family, whose usurpation of power in Lu involved shocking mistreatment of parents and brothers. Cf. 12.11, 13.3.

*Book Three*

3.1孔子谓季氏：“八佾舞于庭，是可忍也，孰不可忍也？”

3.1 According to later ritual texts, different ranks in society were allowed different numbers of dancers to perform outside the ancestral hall during ceremonial occasions: the Son of Heaven allowed eight rows of eight dancers, feudal lords six rows, ministers four rows, and official two rows. Although he was de facto ruler of Lu, the head of the Ji Family officially held only the position of minister, and his use of eight dancers thus represented an outrageous usurpation of the ritual prerogatives of the Zhou king.

3.3子曰：“人而不仁，如礼何？人而不仁，如乐何？”

3.3 Although it serves as a general statement concerning the relationship of internal disposition to Confucian practice (cf. 3.12 and 17.11), this comment is probably more specifically directed at the head of the Ji Family and the other leading families of Lu criticized in 3.1 and 3.2. A passage in the History of the Han, after quoting this line, explains, The point is that a person who is not Good does not have the means to apply himself . . . not having the means to apply himself, he is unable to practice ritual and music. Even if he has many other talents, they will only be used to do no good. During the Master’s age, ritual and music were under attack by the ministers [of Lu], who greedily usurped the prerogatives of the king and mutually followed the established habits of corruption, and practiced wrongness so that it triumphed over what was right.

3.4 林放问礼之本。子曰：“大哉问！礼，与其奢也，宁俭；丧，与其易也，宁戚。”

3.4 Lin Fang is usually identified as a man of Lu, and presumably shared Confucius’ concern that his fellow citizens were neglecting the “roots” and attending to the superficial “branches” of ritual practice, which is why he is commended by Confucius for his question. When it comes to ritual is it harmony that is valued (1.12), but if one is to err, it should be on the side of the “roots”—that is, the emotions that ideally inform and motivate the ritual forms. Sparse ritual paraphernalia backed by genuine respect is better than empty ritual excess, and grief-induced lapses in ritual forms of mourning (e.g., Confucius’ own excesses upon the death of Yan Hui; see 11.10) are more easily countenanced than cool, emotionless perfection. Zhu Xi is probably correct in linking this theme to the relationship of emotional substance over cultural form described in 6.18. Although here in Book Three the importance of substance over cultural form is emphasized by Confucius (cf. 3.3, 3.4, 3.8, 3.12, 3.26), in other passages we see form being stressed over substance. Probably the desirability of both being balanced that is expressed in 6.18 is Confucius’ ultimate position, and his favoring of one over another is merely a response to the pedagogical needs of the moment (11.22).

3.8 子夏问曰：“‘巧笑倩兮，美目盼兮，素以为绚兮。’何谓也？”子曰：“绘事后素。”曰：“礼后乎？”子曰：“起予者商也！始可与言诗已矣。”

3.8 Again we have a disciple making the sort of conceptual leap that Confucius required of his students (cf. 1.15, 7.8). The point grasped by Zixia is that the adornment provided by the rites is meant to build upon appropriate native emotions or tendencies. Just as all of the cosmetics in the world are of no avail if the basic lines of the face are not pleasing, so is the refinement provided by ritual forms of no help to one lacking in native substance. Cf. 3.4, 5.10 and 6.18. An even stronger expression of the importance of substance is found in the Record of Ritual: “Just as that which is naturally sweet can be further harmonized through cooking, and just as colors may be applied to a white background, so a person who is dutiful and trustworthy can be allowed to learn the rites”(Chapter 10 (“Rites in the Formation of Character”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 414.). Here the virtues of dutifulness and trustworthiness are presented as native talents that are the prerequisites for moral education.

3.11 或问禘之说。子曰：“不知也。知其说者之于天下也，其如示诸斯乎！”指其掌。

3.11 Of course the unspoken implication is that there is no one in Lu who really understands the di, especially the Three Families, who have been shamelessly performing it in gross violation of ritual norms. The ability of a properly performed ritual—especially those having to do with filial piety, such as the di sacrifice to one’s ancestors— to order the entire world in an wu-wei fashion is expressed particularly strongly here, but has parallels in such passages as 1.2, 2.21, and 12.11.

3.12 祭如在，祭神如神在。子曰：“吾不与祭，如不祭。”

3.12 To sacrifice “as if the spirits were present” means to do so with an attitude of reverence and awe. There is no attribution for the first line, and its form (cryptic text followed by an expanded, explanatory version) suggests that it might be a fragment from a lost ritual text interpolated by a later editor. Whether the Master’s words or not, it nonetheless clearly harmonizes with the comment from Confucius that follows. Although some commentators take “being present” in the second line in its literal sense (i.e., being physically present at the sacrifice, not sending a proxy in one’s stead), the sense of the first line suggests that what is at issue is psychological or inner presence.

3.14 子曰：“周监于二代，郁郁乎文哉！吾从周。”

3.14 The metaphoric image of the Zhou gazing down upon the Xia and Shang Dynasties, as if from a summit, is meant to express the fact that its culture incorporated elements of the cultures that preceded it—presumably the best elements. Lu represented the depository of Zhou culture during Confucius’ age, and a related passage in the Record of Ritual (“Confucius said, ‘I look toward the Way of Zhou...Were I to abandon Lu, where would I go?’”) (Chapter 9 (“Ritual Usages”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 372.). suggests that part of the purpose of this passage is to emphasize the moral and cultural preeminence of Lu among the feudal states of the time, even though Lu was in fact relatively small and comparatively weak politically, economically, and militarily.

3.17 子贡欲去告朔之饩羊。子曰：“赐也，尔爱其羊，我爱其礼。”

3.17 According to commentators, this lamb sacrifice had originally been part of a larger ritual in the state of Lu to mark the official beginning of the new month, and which— according to the Annals (Legge 1994d: 243)—was discontinued during the reign of Duke Wen. According to Huang Kan, although the larger ritual itself was no longer being practiced by the rulers of Lu, the practice of sacrificing the lamb was being kept alive by traditionally-minded government functionaries. Zigong does not see the point of continuing this vestigial, materially wasteful practice in the absence of its original ritual context. Insisting upon the continuance of this practice, however, is Confucius’ way of mourning the loss of the original rite and keeping its memory alive, which in his view is worth the cost of an occasional lamb. The valuing of ritual propriety over pragmatic or financial considerations links this passage to 3.13, and the fact that Lu— as the inheritor of Zhou culture—still preserved at least the forms of the ancient rites links it to 3.9 and 3.14.

3.18 子曰：“事君尽礼，人以为谄也。”

3.18 Ritual practice had so degenerated by Confucius’ age that a proper ritual practitioner was viewed with suspicion or disdain. As many commentators note, an example of observing every detail of ritual propriety is found in 9.3, where Confucius stubbornly insists upon bowing before ascending the stairs to have an audience with a ruler, as ritual demands, rather than following the more casual contemporary practice of bowing after ascending the stairs. Such archaic manners were no doubt received by his contemporaries with precisely the sort of amusement or cynicism mentioned here.

3.20 子曰：“关雎，乐而不淫，哀而不伤。”

3.20 The “Cry of the Osprey” is the first of the Odes, and sometimes stands in metonymically for the Odes as a whole. There are two equally plausible interpretations of this passage, depending upon whether one thinks that it is the text of Ode 1 in particular or the music of the ode (and possibly the Odes in general) that is being praised. The text describes a young gentleman longing for and passionately seeking out a beautiful, virtuous young woman. Although originally the young woman in question was probably the anonymous subject of a peasant folk song, in the commentarial tradition that grew up around the Odes she became associated with the royal consort of King Wen, and the poem thus came to be seen as a model of restrained, honorable relations between the sexes. Huang Kan, for one, relies upon the text of Ode 1 to gloss this passage: “The mere prospect of joy in meeting this ‘chaste woman’ is why ‘the gentleman loves to pursue her’—it is not because he lusts after her beauty. ‘Tossing and turning at night he thinks of her’—he experiences sorrow at the fact that nowhere in this world can he find the person of his dreams, but does not allow this sorrow to diminish his affection for her.” Kong Anguo, on the other hand, understands this passage as referring to the music of the ode: “ ‘Expressing joy without becoming licentious, expressing sorrow without falling into excessive pathos’ refers to the perfect harmony [of the music].” In either case, we see in the Odes the perfect balance of emotion and restraint that characterizes the gentleman.

3.23 子语鲁大师乐。曰：“乐其可知也：始作，翕如也；从之，纯如也，皦如也，绎如也，以成。”

3.23 Music thus serves as a model or metaphor for the process of self-cultivation: starting in confusion, passing through many phases and culminating in a state of wu-wei perfection.

3.24 仪封人请见。曰：“君子之至于斯也，吾未尝不得见也。”从者见之。出曰：“二三子，何患于丧乎？天下之无道也久矣，天将以夫子为木铎。”

3.24 Most commentators take this as a reference to Confucius’ loss of the office of Criminal Judge in the state of Lu; this is presumably the reason that Confucius and his disciples are leaving the state. The ability of the border official to see Confucius’ true mission is taken by many commentators as an indication that he is a sage in hiding: a virtuous man who has taken a lowly position in order to protect himself in chaotic and unvirtuous times. The bell referred to is (depending on which source one consults) the kind used either by itinerant collectors and transmitters of folk songs or functionaries who circulated around the countryside promulgating official announcements. In either case, the border official’s point is thus that Heaven has deliberately caused Confucius to lose his official position so that he might wander throughout the realm, spreading the teachings of the Way and waking up the fallen world.

*Book Four*

4.1 子曰：“里仁为美。择不处仁，焉得知？”

4.1 There are two main interpretations of this passage—one literal, the other more metaphorical—and each is reflected in the two Warring States followers of Confucius. We see echoes of the more literal take in the Xunzi: “Therefore, when it comes to his residence, the gentleman is necessarily picky when choosing his village, and in his travels he seeks out the company of other scholars. He does so in order to guard against depravity and crudeness, and stay close to the right path of the mean” (Chapter 1 (“Encouraging Learning”); Knoblock 1988: 137). Understood in this way, the focus of the passage is the importance of one’s social environment for the development of one’s character. A slightly different interpretation is found in Mencius 2:A:7, where a quotation of 4.1 is prefaced with the following: Is an arrow-maker not less benevolent (ren) than the armor-maker? The arrow-maker is concerned solely with harming others, while the armor-maker is concerned solely with making sure others are not harmed. With shaman-doctors and coffin-makers it is the same (i.e., the same situation as that of the arrow-maker: they both profit off the misfortune or suffering of others). Therefore, one cannot but be careful in the choice of one’s profession. Although here one’s “dwelling place” is understood metaphorically as one’s general sphere of activity, the general idea is similar: one must be careful when choosing one’s environment.

4.2 子曰：“不仁者不可以久处约，不可以长处乐。仁者安仁，知者利仁。”

Regarding the first half of this saying, Kong Anguo comments, “Some cannot remain constant in adversity because sustained adversity motivates them to do wrong, and cannot enjoy enduring happiness because they inevitably fall into arrogance and sloth.” The second half is an explanation of the first: those who are truly Good are spontaneously and unselfconsciously Good—they “feel at home” in virtue, having internalized it to the point that externalities no longer matter. Both Confucius (7.16, 7.19) and Yan Hui (6.7, 6.11) illustrate this quality. Those who are merely clever are motivated by the external benefits of being virtuous, and therefore follow Goodness in a more self-consciously goal-oriented manner. The problem with this is that virtue does not always pay (4.5), so when the going gets rough these people lack the genuine inner commitment to remain upon the Way. Alternately, when virtue does end up paying off with social acclaim, wealth, and official position, these clever people— having attained their external end and lacking any commitment to the Way as an end in itself—fall into immoral arrogance and idleness. A more elaborate version of this passage in the Record of Ritual adds a third level of self-consciousness and effort: “Those who are Good are at ease in Goodness, those who are clever follow Goodness because they know that they will profit from it, and those who are afraid of punishment force themselves to follow Goodness” (Chapter 31 (“The Record of Examples”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 333). See also 6.20, “One who knows it is not the equal of one who loves it, and one who loves it is not the equal of one who takes joy in it.”

4.4 子曰：“苟志于仁矣，无恶也。”

4.4 There are at least two other ways to render the second half of this line: “free of hatred (reading in falling tone, as in 4.3) or “free of wrong doing” (Zhu Xi). The first seems ruled out by the sense of 4.3: the Good person does in fact despise or hate when such an emotion is appropriate. Kong Anguo’s reading (“if you are able to set your heart sincerely upon Goodness, then in other respects you will forever be free of badness”) may endorse the second reading, but is somewhat ambiguous. Li Wei argues against the second reading, noting that “if the passage means that one who has set his heart sincerely upon Goodness will be ‘free of wrong doing,’ what would be the point of saying it? Of course a person who has set his heart sincerely upon Goodness will be free of wrong doing! It is more likely that the original meaning is that one will be free of bad intentions.” This accords better with 4.2: even a clever person can act in accordance with Goodness (i.e., remain “free of wrong doing”), but only a truly Good person thoroughly and spontaneously embodies it in action, emotion, and thought (cf. 2.4, 7.4, 7.5).

4.5 子曰：“富与贵是人之所欲也，不以其道得之，不处也；贫与贱是人之所恶也，不以其道得之，不去也。君子去仁，恶乎成名？君子无终食之间违仁，造次必于是，颠沛必于是。”

4.5 The true gentleman is dedicated to the Way as an end in itself, and does not pursue it for the sake of external goods (1.14, 4.9, 7.12, 8.12). As a result, he embodies the Way unselfconsciously and effortlessly, and derives a constant joy that renders him indifferent to externalities (7.16, 7.19, 9.29). Cf. the Xunzi: “Where there is Goodness there is no poverty or hardship, and where Goodness is lacking there is no wealth or honor” (Chapter 23 (“Human Nature is Bad”); Knoblock 1994: 161).

4.6 子曰：“我未见好仁者，恶不仁者。好仁者，无以尚之；恶不仁者，其为仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身。有能一日用其力于仁矣乎？我未见力不足者。盖有之矣，我未之见也。”

4.6 In 7.30 we read, “Is Goodness really so far away? If I merely desire Goodness, I will find that Goodness is already here,” and in 9.30, “I have yet to meet a man who loves Virtue as much as the pleasures of the flesh.” A bit of frustration is apparent in all of these passages: we all have the ability to be Good if we would simply love it as we should, but how can one instill this love in someone who does not already have it (or who loves the wrong things)? This problem comes again in 6.12, when the disappointing disciple Ran Qiu claims to love the Way but complains that he lacks the strength to pursue it. Confucius sharply rebukes him in words that echo 4.6: “Those for whom it is genuinely a problem of insufficient strength end up collapsing somewhere along the Way. As for you, you deliberately draw the line.” This is the heart of a paradox that Confucius faced—we might refer to it as the “paradox of wu-wei,” or problem of how to consciously develop in oneself or instill in others genuine unselfconscious spontaneity—that will come up again and again in the Analects (cf. 5.10, 7.34, 16.5). We also see in this passage the hierarchy of moral attainment: positive, unselfconscious love of Goodness being superior to a mere aversion to immorality.

4.7 子曰：“人之过也，各于其党。观过，斯知仁矣。”

4.7 Understood in this way, the point of this passage is that it is in unpremeditated, unconscious actions that one’s true character is revealed (cf. 2.9, 2.10), and this seems to fit well with the overall sense of Book Four. The pre-Tang commentators, however, take this passage as a comment on rulership and the need for understanding (shu 恕). Kong Anguo, for instance, remarks, “The fact that petty people are not able to act like gentlemen is not their fault, and so one should be understanding and not blame them. If you observe their mistakes, you can put both the worthies and the fools in their proper places, and this is what it means to be Good.” The link between Goodness and understanding that we find elsewhere (6.30, 12.2, 15.24) makes this a plausible reading, and it is reinforced by the fact that many pre-Tang versions of the text have min 民 “common people” as the subject of the first clause. Understood this way, the last part of the passage should be rendered something like, “this is what it means to understand Goodness.”

4.8 子曰：“朝闻道，夕死可矣。”

4.8 The pre-Tang commentators take the passage in the manner reflected by the translation. He Yan’s commentary reads, “The point is that [Confucius] is approaching death and has yet to hear that the world has adopted the Way.” Luan Zhao says:

The Way is what is employed in order to save the people. The sage preserves his self in order to put the Way into practice. The point is to save the people with the Way, not to save one’s self with the Way. This is why we read that if the Way were genuinely heard by the world in the morning, even if one died that evening it would be alright. [Confucius] is pained that the Way is not being put into practice, and moreover makes it clear that he is more concerned about the world than his own self.

Zhu Xi, on the other hand, understands the passage to mean: “Having in the morning learned the Way, one could die that evening without regret.” He comments, “If one were able to hear the Way, one’s life would flow easily and one’s death would come peacefully, and there would be no more regrets.” Both interpretations are plausible.

4.9 子曰：“士志于道，而耻恶衣恶食者，未足与议也。”

4.9 Li Chong comments, “Those who value what lies within forget about what lies without. This is why in past ages those who possessed the Way were able to put it into action, caused their family members to forget about their poverty, and caused kings and dukes to forget about glory—how much less would they have worried about clothing and food?” Cf. 1.14.

4.10 子曰：“君子之于天下也，无适也，无莫也，义之与比。”

4.10 The verbs of this passage all have to do with social associations, but it can be (and often is) understood more metaphorically and abstractly: “the gentleman has no predispositions for or against anything, and merely seeks to be on the side of the right.” In either case, we see here an indication of the situational responsiveness of the gentleman, who relies upon his internal moral sense—rather than conventional social prejudice—when judging people or affairs. Confucius’ approval of his conventionally tabooed son-in-law in 5.1 and his suspicion of unexamined social judgments in 13.4 can serve as a practical illustrations of this principle.

4.12 子曰：“放于利而行，多怨。”

4.12 As Master Cheng explains, “If you wish to obtain profit for yourself, you will inevitably harm others and thereby arouse much resentment.” The gentleman is to be guided by considerations of what is right, not what is profitable (4.16, 14.12).

4.13 子曰：“能以礼让为国乎？何有？不能以礼让为国，如礼何？”

4.13 Here we see two themes emphasized. The first concerns the efficacy of Virtue-based government, as opposed to government by force or reward and punishment, and is related to the distaste for contention and considerations of profit expressed throughout this Book. A passage from the Zuo Commentary describes the importance of ritual and deference for the functioning of the state:

Deference is the mainstay of ritual propriety. In an ordered age, gentlemen honor ability and defer to those below them, while the common people attend to their agricultural labors in order to serve those above them. In this way, both above and below ritual prevail, and slanderers and evil men are dismissed and ostracized. All of this arises from a lack of contention, and is referred to as “excellent Virtue.” Once an age declines into disorder, gentlemen strut about announcing their achievements in order to lord over the common people, and the common people boast of their skills in order to encroach upon the gentlemen. Both above and below there is a lack of ritual, giving birth simultaneously to disorder and cruelty. All of this arises from people contending over excellence, and is referred to as “darkened Virtue.” It is a constant principle that the collapse of the state will inevitably result from such a situation (Duke Xiang, Year 13 (559 b.c.e.); Legge 1994d: 438.).

The second theme is related to the sort of anti-Ivory-Tower attitude expressed in 13.5: traditional practices are meant to be applied to the real world, not merely studied theoretically.

4.14 子曰：“不患无位，患所以立；不患莫己知，求为可知也。”

4.14 Again we see a distaste for self-assertion, self-aggrandizement, and contention for external goods. The gentleman focuses solely upon achieving the internal goods of the Confucian Way. External recognition should and may follow, but is subject to the vagaries of fate and is not inevitable (especially in a disordered or corrupt age), and in any case is not a worthy object of concern. Cf. 1.16, 12.20, 14.30, 15.19.

4.15 子曰：“参乎！吾道一以贯之。”曾子曰：“唯。”子出。门人问曰：“何谓也？”曾子曰：“夫子之道，忠恕而已矣。”

4.15 Guan 贯 means “thread,” and Huang Kan reads it as a metaphor: everything that the

Master teaches is unified theoretically by one principle, like objects strung on a single

thread. The Analect’s emphasis on practice over theory makes it likely, however, that

the “single thread” is a kind of consistency in action rather than a unified theoretical

principle, and this is supported by Master Zeng’s elaboration below. See the commentary

to 15.3 for more discussion of the “single thread.”

Although there is a general agreement upon the meaning of shu, commentators differ considerably regarding their understanding of zhong. There are quite a few passages in the Analects directly or indirectly concerned with shu (5.12, 6.30, 12.2, and 15.24), and it is clear that this virtue involves some sort of considerations of others—an ability to imaginatively project oneself into another’s place. There is more debate about zhong. One dominant line of interpretation begins with Wang Bi, who defines zhong as “fully exhausting one’s emotions” and shu as “reflecting upon one’s emotions in order to have sympathy with other beings.” Zhu Xi and others belong to this line of thinking in defining zhong as “exhausting oneself” or “doing one’s utmost” (jinji 尽己). Relying solely upon relevant passages from within the Analects (3.19, 5.19), however, it would seem that zhong involves a kind of attention to one’s ritual duties, particularly as a political subordinate. Understood this way, being “dutiful” (zhong) involves fulfilling the duties and obligations proper to one’s ritually-defined role. This virtue is to be tempered by the virtue of “understanding” (shu): the ability to, by means of imaginatively putting oneself in the place of another, know when it is appropriate or “right” (yi) to bend or suspend the dictates of role-specific duty. Zhong is often translated as “loyalty,” but “dutifulness” is preferable because the ultimate focus is upon one’s ritually-prescribed duties rather than loyalty to any particular person, and indeed zhong would involve opposing a ruler who was acting improperly (13.15, 13.23, 14.7).

4.16 子曰：“君子喻于义，小人喻于利。”

4.16 Again, the gentleman is motivated by the inner goods of Confucian practice rather than the promise of external goods. Cf. 4.2, 4.5, 4.9, 4.11, and 4.12. Some commentators argue that the distinction between the gentleman and the petty person (xiaoren 小人) should be understood in terms of social class, because xiaoren is often used in Han texts to indicate simply the “common people.” It is clear, though, that Confucius felt anyone from any social class could potentially become a gentleman (6.6, 7.7) and that social status did not necessarily correspond to actual moral worth. It is apparent that—in the Analects at least—the gentleman/xiaoren distinction refers to moral character rather than social status.

4.17 子曰：“见贤思齐焉，见不贤而内自省也。”

4.17 That is, one is to emulate the virtues and avoid the vices observed in others; cf. 7.22. The emphasis here is upon action: not just seeing the qualities of others, but also using this insight as an opportunity for self-improvement. As Jiao Yuanxi explains, “The ‘seeing’ mentioned in this passage refers to that which any person can easily perceive— the difficulty lies entirely in actually beginning to do something about it. The intention of the sage [Confucius] in establishing this teaching was not merely to criticize people for not having true knowledge [of what is right], but rather to upbraid them for lacking sincerity of commitment or the courage to put their will into practice.”

4.18 子曰：“事父母几谏。见志不从，又敬不违，劳而不怨。”

4.18 One owes one’s parents a unique level of obedience—one that transcends legal responsibilities (13.18) and that exceeds even the demands of dutifulness in the political realm. As Zheng Xuan explains,

The “Patterns of the Family” [chapter of the Record of Ritual] says, “With a regard to a son serving his parents, if he remonstrates three times and is not heeded, there is nothing left to do but, with crying and tears, go along with their wishes.” However, it also says, “With regard to a minister serving his lord, if he remonstrates three times and is not heeded, he should leave his lord’s service and [turn to study of the classics?]”(The quoted passages do not appear in the “Patterns of the Family” chapter of the extant Record of Ritual, although almost identical variants do appear in Chapters 1–2 (“Summary of Ritual”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 114.) . . . Why is this? Father and son are genuinely linked to one another—with regard to our Heavenly nature, there is no relationship like it... Lord and minister, however, are brought together by considerations of rightness, and it is thus natural that they should have points of divergence.

Other commentators are also fond of quoting a passage from the “Patterns of the Family” chapter,

If a parent commits a transgression, the son should—with bated breath, a neutral expression, and in a gentle voice—remonstrate with them. If the remonstration is not heeded, he should summon up even more respect and filiality, and once the parent is pleased again, repeat the remonstration. If the parent is not pleased, it is preferable that the son should strongly remonstrate with them than allow them to commit a crime against the village or county. If the parent subsequently becomes angry and displeased, and hits the son so fiercely as to draw blood, the son should not dare to take offense, but should summon up even more respect and filiality (Legge 1967, vol. 1: 456–457.).

Also see Mencius 4:A:28, 5:A:2–4, and 7:A:35.

4.19 子曰：“父母在，不远游。游必有方。”

4.19 Going on an extended journey would entail neglecting one’s filial duties. As for the issue of itinerary, Huang Kan comments:

The “Summary of Ritual Propriety” [chapter of the Record of Ritual] says, “The ritual propriety proper to a son dictates that when he goes out, he must inform his parents, and that when he returns, he must report to them personally, and that in all of his travels he must keep to a fixed itinerary” (Legge 1967, vol. 1: 68.) . . . If one travels and does not have a fixed itinerary, this will cause one’s parents undue worry.

4.20 子曰：“三年无改于父之道，可谓孝矣。”

4.20 This is a repetition of the second half of 1.11; see Book One for commentary

4.21 子曰：“父母之年，不可不知也。一则以喜，一则以惧。”

4.21 There are various ways to understand this, but the most plausible is that the age of one’s parents is a cause for rejoicing that they have lived so long, while also a source of anxiety because of their advancing years.

4.22 子曰：“古者言之不出，耻躬之不逮也。”

4.22 Again we see the suspicion of glibness and an emphasis on action over speech. Huang Zhen comments, “The distinction between the gentleman and the petty person lies in whether or not their words and actions are consistent, and whether or not their words and actions are consistent depends upon whether or not their hearts are capable of knowing shame.” Wang Yangming adds sharply, “The ancients valued action, and were therefore shy with their words and did not dare to speak lightly. People nowadays value words, and therefore loudly flap their tongues and blabber nonsense at the slightest instigation.” Cf. 1.14, 2.13, 4.24, 12.3, 14.20, and 14.27.

4.23 子曰：“以约失之者，鲜矣。”

4.23 There are two slightly different ways to take this passage. Some, such as Zhao You, take restraint (yue 约) to be a supreme virtue:

With regard to the Heavenly Way and human affairs, there has never been anything that did not begin with restraint and end with restraint. Restraint that falls into extravagance cannot last, whereas extravagance tempered by restraint can endure. The “Summary of Ritual Propriety” [chapter of the Record of Ritual] says, “Arrogance cannot be allowed to endure, desires cannot be indulged, self-satisfaction cannot be countenanced, and joy cannot be taken to extremes” (Legge 1967, vol. 1: 62.). All of this refers to the Way of restraint.

Another way to understand restraint is as a quality that—while falling somewhat short of constituting full virtue—will at least keep one out of serious trouble (cf. 1.13). This second reading is more plausible, and is reflected in Kong Anguo’s commentary: “Neither [i.e., restraint or excess] hits upon the mean. If one is extravagant, then one’s arrogance and excessiveness will call down disaster, whereas frugality and restraint allow one to at least be free of troubles or concerns.”

4.24 子曰：“君子欲讷于言，而敏于行。”

4.24 Here again we see a concern about one’s words exceeding one’s actual virtue; cf. 4.22. As Wang Fuzhi comments,

With regard to faults that can afflict the student, none is more troubling than carelessness, and few tasks are begun or completed by those who are casual in their behavior. Carelessness reveals itself in speech—speech that flows like water, that resounds like the tongue of a reed organ, that is blabbered everywhere without one even noticing what one is saying. Proof of excessive casualness is found in one’s affairs—in behavior that is overly forward or excessively withdrawn, that is erratic and disrespectful, that is timid and cowardly without one even realizing it. It is only this lack of inclination to be slow to speak and quick to act that prevents the settled ambition of the gentleman from flourishing.

4.25 子曰：“德不孤，必有邻。”

4.25 A few commentators (such as Liu Baonan) believe that what it means for Virtue not to “be alone” (literally, “orphaned”) is that Virtue is never one-sided in a true gentleman: he is both internally respectful and outwardly righteous. A more likely interpretation is that the reference is to the attractive power of Virtue upon others. As the History of the Han explains:

When a minister learns of a king who has received the great commission from Heaven, he will be naturally drawn to him, in a manner beyond what human beings are capable of bringing about. This is the sort of good omen that manifests itself when one has received the Mandate. All of the people in the world will, with one heart, return to such a king, like children returning to their parents. Thus, the auspicious signs of Heaven are brought about through sincerity... When Confucius says, “Virtue is never alone; it always has neighbors,” he is referring to the effects caused by accumulating goodness and piling up Virtue.

For this interpretation, cf. 2.1 and 15.5. Reading this passage together with 4.1, the point might also be that one requires Good neighbors and friends in order to develop Virtue; for this interpretation, cf. 1.8, 9.30, 12.24.

*Book Five*

5.1 子谓公冶长，“可妻也。虽在缧绁之中，非其罪也”。以其子妻之。

5.1 The identity of Gongye Chang is not clear. Although he is identified by the Record of the Historian as a man from Qi, Kong Anguo and others describe him as a disciple of Confucius from Lu. It is not clear what his offense was, but his name later became associated with a variety of legends attributing to him the ability to understand the language of birds and other animals, including an amusing story that describes him being falsely accused of murder because he overheard a group of birds discussing the location of the body of a murder victim. He is freed only after having demonstrated his supernatural abilities to his jailor. Whatever the actual identity or supposed offence of Gongye Chang, the point of this passage is Confucius’ independence from convention. The social stigma attached to former criminals in early China was enormous and inescapable, since criminals were prominently branded, tattooed, or physically mutilated. In giving his daughter in marriage to a former criminal, Confucius is flouting conventional mores and making a powerful statement concerning the independence of true morality from conventional social judgments. As Fan Ning explains, “In giving his daughter in marriage to Gongye Chang, Confucius’ intention was to make quite clear the corrupt and excessive manner in which punishments were administered in his fallen age, and to provide future encouragement to those who truly held fast to rectitude.” Fu Guang adds:

If I have within me the Way of innocence, and yet unfortunately have guilt imposed upon me from the outside, what do I have to be ashamed of? If I have within me the Way of guilt, how can I consider myself worthy of honor, even if by dint of good luck I somehow manage to avoid being externally punished? Therefore, when the gentleman commits even a minor offense behind closed doors, in complete privacy, in his heart he is as mortified as if he had been publicly flogged in the market square. If, on the other hand, he is unfortunate enough to meet with disaster through no fault of his own, and to be punished in the market square or exiled to the barbarian lands, he will accept it all without the slightest bit of shame.

5.4 子贡问曰：“赐也何如？”子曰：“女器也。”曰：“何器也？”曰：“瑚琏也。”

5.4 Of course, “the gentleman is not a vessel” (2.12)—i.e., the true gentleman is more than a mere specialist. According to commentators, the hu and lian were precious jade food-offering vessels that were the most important ritual vessels in the ancestral temples of the Xia and Shang dynasties, respectively. Commentators point out that Confucius’ elaboration is double-edged: comforting, in that Zigong is no ordinary vessel, but perhaps even more critical because the hu and lian vessels were both archaic curiosities (no longer used in the Zhou rites) and extremely specialized (thus seldom used even during Xia and Shang times). Zigong was a highly accomplished statesman, skillful speaker (11.3), and successful businessman (11.18), but Confucius seems to have felt that he lacked the flexibility and sympathy toward others characteristic of Goodness. This is perhaps why Confucius uses Zigong as his audience for his teaching about understanding in 6.30 and singles out Zigong for his message that “be understanding” is the one teaching that can serve as a life-long guide in 15.24. Zigong seems to be the disciple designated throughout the Analects to illustrate the shortcomings of dutifulness uninformed by understanding. Here, his fastidious adherence to the rites leads Confucius to dub him a “sacrificial vessel” of limited capacity; in 5.11, his claim to be understanding is sharply dismissed by the Master; in 5.18, a person he presumably admires is dismissed as being dutiful but not Good; and in 14.29, he is criticized by Confucius for being too strict with others (i.e., for not moderating his duty-based demands on others with understanding). See also 9.6, 9.13, 11.13, 13.20, 14.17, 17.19.

5.8 孟武伯问：“子路仁乎？”子曰：“不知也。”又问。子曰：“由也，千乘之国，可使治其赋也，不知其仁也。”“求也何如？”子曰：“求也，千室之邑，百乘之家，可使为之宰也，不知其仁也。”“赤也何如？”子曰：“赤也，束带立于朝，可使与宾客言也，不知其仁也。”

5.8 The fact that Goodness functions as the ultimate telos defining the narrative arc of one’s life means that no final judgment concerning whether or not a given person possesses Goodness can be delivered until that life has been completed. This is why Goodness is portrayed as a dimly perceived and ever-receding goal to a work eternally in progress in 9.11, and why Confucius is reluctant here and elsewhere (5.19, 7.26, 7.33, 14.1) to pronounce anyone truly Good, including himself (7.34). There is probably also a secondary concern that seeing oneself as having already achieved Goodness would make one complacent and lazy. As Cheng Yaotian observes, “Goodness is both the most important thing in the world and the most difficult to achieve. This is why it is said that Goodness must be carried by oneself, that it is a heavy burden, that only after death will one find rest, and that the Way is long (All references to Analects 8.7.). If a person thought that he himself had already achieved this goal, and could therefore rest before having reached the end of his life, this is certainly a sentiment of which the sage would not approve.”

5.9 子谓子贡曰：“女与回也孰愈？”对曰：“赐也何敢望回。回也闻一以知十，赐也闻一以知二。”子曰：“弗如也！吾与女弗如也。”

5.9 Zigong’s hearing one thing and being able to grasp two is possibly a reference to 1.15 (when discussing the Odes and “informed as to what has gone before,” Zigong is able to “know what is to come”). Zigong is realistic enough to know that even this admirable ability pales in comparison to the almost preternatural talent of Yan Hui, who apparently knows what is being taught even before he is taught it (2.9, 11.4). Some commentators believe that Confucius’ last comment is intended merely to comfort Zigong, but it is possible that it is meant sincerely: Confucius was not “born knowing it” (7.20), and passages such as 2.9, 6.7, and 11.4 suggest that Yan Hui was one of those rare and superior people who are born already good (16.19).

5.10 宰予昼寝。子曰：“朽木不可雕也，粪土之墙不可圬也，于予与何诛。”子曰：“始吾于人也，听其言而信其行；今吾于人也，听其言而观其行。于予与改是。”

5.10 Zai Wo obviously lacks the “native substance” (zhi) that serves as the background on which the “color” of Confucian self-cultivation is to be applied (3.8). As Huang Kan comments,

Even when it comes to a famous craftsman or skilled carpenter, his carving is totally dependent upon having good wood to work with if he is to produce a perfect product. If he tries to apply his efforts to a piece of rotten wood, the result will be imperfect. Similarly, when trowelling a wall, if the earth that the wall is made out of is hard and solid, then it is easy to apply an even layer of plaster to create a smooth, clean veneer. If you try applying your trowel to a wall made out of dung, on the other hand, the plaster will crumble and fall off, resulting in an irregular surface. Confucius’ purpose in invoking these two metaphors is to tell Zai Wo that if he is the kind of person who sleeps during the daytime then it is impossible to teach him anything.

The first half of the passage emphasizes the importance of native substance. The second has to do with the suspicion of language we have seen several times already: many people talk about virtue, but few actually strive to attain it in practice. As Wang Fuzhi remarks, “When it comes to learning, nothing is more crucial than actual exertion and practice. What one says is not worth paying attention to. Whether or not one gets it through exertion and practice, in turn, depends solely on whether one is diligent or lazy. A person who is able to talk well and is subsequently said to be able to understand, and who then considers himself to have already understood and thus is no longer diligent when it comes to exertion and practice—such a person is profoundly despised by the gentleman.” Here, again, we see hints of the “paradox of wuwei” mentioned in the commentary to 4.6: one can only attain virtue if one genuinely desires to attain it, but how does one inspire such a genuine desire in someone who does not already have it? Cf. 6.12.

5.12 子贡曰：“我不欲人之加诸我也，吾亦欲无加诸人。”子曰：“赐也，非尔所及也。”

5.12 Zigong’s aspiration—what has been referred to as the “negative Golden Rule”—is a formulation of the virtue of understanding: the ability to temper the strict dictates of dutifulness by imaginatively placing oneself in another’s place (cf. 15.24). Zigong’s aspiration to the virtue of understanding is particularly amusing to Confucius because Zigong is the most unimaginative and rigid of all the disciples (cf. 5.4, 14.29). Zhu Xi says of Zigong’s aspiration, “This is the sort of thing that a genuinely Good person concerns himself with, and that he does not have to be urged or forced to do. This is why the Master considers it to be something beyond the reach of Zigong” (317).

5.13 子贡曰：“夫子之文章，可得而闻也；夫子之言性与天道，不可得而闻也。”

5.13 This passage has presented something of a puzzle to some interpreters, seeing that we can find one mention of human nature (xing 性) (17.2) in the Analects, and that— although the term “Way of Heaven” (tiandao 天道) appears nowhere else in the text— we do find quite a few mentions of the Mandate of Heaven or other topics having to do with Heaven’s will. 17.2 might be dismissed as a late addition, and even if we include it with all the various mentions of Heaven, it remains true that Confucius focuses primarily on “this world”—that is, the human world of learning and self-cultivation. Thus, one way to understand this passage is that Confucius did not concern himself much with such theoretical, esoteric subjects as human nature or the Way of Heaven, but rather tried to focus his disciples’ attention on the task at hand: acquiring the cultural refinement necessary to become gentlemen (cf. 6.22, 7.20, 11.12). A related interpretation is suggested by commentators who argue that “human nature” refers to the variable endowment one receives at birth (rather than to some theoretical stance about human nature as we see in the Mencius and Xunzi), and that, in classical texts, the “Way of Heaven” often refers simply to what we might call “luck” or “fate.” Understood this way, “human nature” and the “Way of Heaven” collectively refer to the range of things that are beyond human control, and the point is that the Master focused on what was within human control: commitment to learning and the Confucian Way. This harmonizes well with Confucius’ comment in 7.20 that he was not born knowing it, but simply loves learning—you cannot control your inborn qualities or your external luck, but you can decide whether or not to set your mind on learning and take your stand with ritual. It also harmonizes well with other statements concerning fate (ming 命) in the text (4.14, 6.10, 7.3, 7.19, 11.18, 14.36, 12.4–5, 20.3)(As Cheng Shude points out, further evidence for this interpretation can be found in an alternate version of 5.13 that appears in the Record of the Historian: “The Master’s teachings on the Heavenly Way and inborn destiny (xingming ) cannot be heard about” (320).).

5.19 子张问曰：“令尹子文三仕为令尹，无喜色；三已之，无愠色。旧令尹之政，必以告新令尹。何如？”子曰：“忠矣。”曰：“仁矣乎？”曰：“未知，焉得仁？”“崔子弑齐君，陈文子有马十乘，弃而违之。至于他邦，则曰：‘犹吾大夫崔子也。’违之。之一邦，则又曰：‘犹吾大夫崔子也。’违之。何如？”子曰：“清矣。”曰：“仁矣乎？”曰：“未知。焉得仁？”

5.19 Ziwen was Prime Minister in the state of Chu who was renown for his integrity and devotion to the state, and first took the highest office in 663 b.c.e. Cuizi and Chen Wenzi were both ministers in the state of Qi. The former is said to have assassinated Lord Zhuang of Qi in 548 b.c.e.

We have here both substantive, edifying descriptions of two Confucian virtues and an indirect statement concerning the difficulty of attaining Goodness: even these ancient worthies, renowned for their particular virtues, had not necessarily attained complete moral perfection. Zhu Xi’s comment on this passage is helpful:

People these days become instantly hot-headed, red in the face, at the slightest loss or gain. Ziwen was given official position and had this position taken away three times, and yet showed not the slightest sign of pleasure or resentment. These days people holding even minor posts are not willing to take the time to give a quick summary of their official actions to their successors, whereas Ziwen—holding such an exalted position— nonetheless gave an exhaustive and detailed account of the official state of affairs to the incoming prime minister. These days if people develop even the slightest ties to material things they can never manage to get free of them. Wenzi, on the other hand, possessed an immense estate of ten teams of horses and yet abandoned it without a second thought, as if it were an old pair of shoes . . . We must think about why the sage did not endorse as Goodness even the behavior of these two Masters—as elevated and exceptional as it was—and why their behavior was not seen as fully exhausting the virtue of Goodness. If we consider this carefully, and think as well upon how seldom one encounters the equals of these two Masters, it will impress upon us how rare it is to see the principle of Goodness actually realized.

5.22 子在陈曰：“归与！归与！吾党之小子狂简，斐然成章，不知所以裁之。”

5.22 Some commentators believe that this call to return home was occasioned by Lu’s offer of employment for the disciple Ran Qiu (11.17, 16.1). Probably the best comment on this passage is found in Mencius 7:B:37, which ties it together with 13.21:

Wan Zhang asked, “When Confucius was in Chen he said, ‘Oh, let us go home! Our young scholars back in Lu are wild and ambitious. They advance and seize their objectives, but cannot forget their former ways. When Confucius was in Chen, why did he think upon the wild scholars of Lu?”

Mencius replied, “Confucius said, ‘If you cannot get people who have achieved the Middle Way as your associates, you must turn to the wild or the fastidious. The wild plunge right in, while the fastidious are always careful not to get their hands dirty.’(This saying constitutes Analects 13.21.) Of course Confucius preferred those who had attained the Middle Way, but since he could not be assured of finding them, he thought about the second-best.”

“For what reason are some people referred to as ‘wild’?”

“Their ambitions are grand and their language extravagant. They are constantly saying, ‘The ancients! The ancients!’ and yet if you examine their daily behavior it does not live up to their words.”

Here again we have a craft metaphor for self-cultivation. Although the young followers in Lu are a bit rough around the edges, they at least have the proper “native stuff” (unlike, for instance, Zai Wo in 5.10), and merely need to have this coarse stuff shaped and properly trimmed. Their hearts are in the right place, but they need to learn discipline and restraint. In 13.21, both wildness (a preponderance of native stuff) and fastidiousness (a preponderance of cultural refinement) are presented as equally serious deviations from the Way (cf. 6.18), but Mencius 7:B:37 ranks the wild ones above the fastidious, and we see other passages in the Analects where erring on the side of native substance is preferred (3.4, 3.8, 7.33).

5.26 颜渊、季路侍。子曰：“盍各言尔志？”子路曰：“愿车马、衣轻裘，与朋友共。敝之而无憾。”颜渊曰：“愿无伐善，无施劳。”子路曰：“愿闻子之志。”子曰：“老者安之，朋友信之，少者怀之。”

5.26 Yan Hui’s aspiration was apparently realized before his death (8.5). Most commentators see Confucius’ aspiration as the possession of all-around virtue. Huang Kan reports a family saying concerning the passage: “If the aged are comforted by you, it is necessarily because you are filial and respectful. If your friends trust you, it is necessarily because you are free of deceit. If the youth cherish you, it is necessarily because you are compassionate and benevolent.” Cf. the more elaborate version of a similar conversation in 11.26.

5.27 子曰：“已矣乎！吾未见能见其过而内自讼者也。”

5.27 Zhu Xi remarks, “Rare are those who, when they make a mistake, are able to realize it. Rarer still are those who, aware that they made a mistake, are able to take themselves to task inwardly. If one is able to take oneself to task inwardly, then one’s sense of repentance will be profound and urgent—a necessity if one is to change oneself. The Master laments because he himself fears he will never get to see such a person, and this should be seen as a serious warning to his students.”

5.28 子曰：“十室之邑，必有忠信如丘者焉，不如丘之好学也。”

5.28 Dutifulness and trustworthiness are relatively pedestrian virtues well within the reach of the average person, but it is the Master’s love for learning that sets him apart from others (7.20) and that serves as the mark of the true gentleman. Such a love for learning—a prerequisite for attaining the supreme virtue of Goodness—was unfortunately a rare quality among his contemporaries, whose passions inclined more toward money and the pleasures of the flesh (9.18, 15.13). Even among his disciples only Yan Hui was viewed by the Master as having a true love of learning (6.3). An alternate parsing proposed by Wei Guan gives the passage a more wistful than critical tone, reading the second clause as, “How is it that they do not love learning as much as I?”

*Book Six*

6.3 子曰：“雍也可使南面。”

6.3 Duke Ai (r. 494–468 b.c.e.) was the nominal ruler of Lu, which was in fact controlled by the Three Families, led by the Ji Family. Commentators and Han sources disagree on the details of Yan Hui’s death, but it is clear that Yan Hui was significantly younger than Confucius, and that his premature death was a source of great sorrow for the Master (9.21, 11.9–11.10). We should note that Yan Hui’s love of learning is manifested in term of virtuous action, rather than theoretical knowledge. Zhu Xi comments,

If Yan Hui was angry at Mr. X he would never shift this anger to Mr. Y, and if he made a mistake in the past he would never repeat it in the future. The fact that Master Yan’s achievement in overcoming himself reached this height is why we can say that he genuinely loved learning . . . In saying that, “Now there are none who really love learning—at least, I have yet to hear of one,” the Master is probably giving expression to his profound sorrow in losing Yan Hui, while at the same time making it clear how difficult it is to find someone who genuinely does love learning.

Beginning with Huang Kan, some commentators have also seen this passage as an indirect criticism of Duke Ai, who vented his anger randomly and constantly repeated previous mistakes. Cf. the shorter version of this passage in 11.7, with Ji Kangzi as interlocutor.

6.5 原思为之宰，与之粟九百，辞。子曰：“毋！以与尔邻里乡党乎！”

6.5 Most commentators explain that the disciple Yuan Si was appointed to be steward of Confucius’ household while Confucius was serving as Minister of Justice in Lu. Again, this is probably not historically accurate, and it is more likely that Yuan Si’s employer is one of the Three Families. Some commentators see the point of this passage to be simply that, once one has accepted a position, it is improper to decline the salary that goes along with it, but there is probably a bit more to it than that. Reading this passage together as a partner to 6.4, and seeing it in light of the many injunctions against seeking office for the sake of material benefit found in Confucius’ teachings, the disciple Yuan Si no doubt expected to be praised by the Master for declining to be paid a salary. The point of Confucius’ response is that the proper course of action cannot be determined by a simple formula, but should be the result of careful reflection and consideration of the needs of others. Based on Yuan Si’s one other appearance in 14.1, as well as later legends that sprung up around him, he seems to have been one of the excessively “fastidious” (juan 狷) who Confucius complains about in 13.21: his obsession with remaining unsullied prevents him from effectively engaging with the world.

6.7 子曰：“回也，其心三月不违仁，其馀则日月至焉而已矣。”

6.7 Again we have Yan Hui being praised for his effortless and consistent embodiment of true virtue; cf. 2.9, 5.9, 6.11, 9.20, 11.4. “Three months” is probably meant in the general sense of “a long time” rather than in its literal sense.

6.10 伯牛有疾，子问之，自牖执其手，曰：“亡之，命矣夫！斯人也而有斯疾也！斯人也而有斯疾也！”

6.10 Early commentators explain that the disciple Boniu was suffering from a disfiguring illness and did not want anyone to see him, which is why Confucius must comfort him through the “window” (possibly referring simply to an opening in a screen set up around Boniu’s bed). The main point of the passage seems to be human helplessness in the face of fate. As Huan Maoyong explains,

Whether we are successful or unsuccessful in life, and whether we live to a ripe old age or die prematurely, are things that we consign to the space between what we can know and what we cannot know. The gentleman simply cultivates that which lies within his control, and then goes along with everything else, viewing it as fate, and that is all. Fate is something that not even the sage can change or avoid... which is why the ancients’ technique for protecting their lives consisted solely of being cautious when it came to their speech and showing restraint in their eating and drinking.

For the gentleman’s attitude toward fate, see 4.14, 7.3, 7.19, 11.18, 12.4–12.5, 14.36, and 20.3.

6.11 子曰：“贤哉回也！一箪食，一瓢饮，在陋巷。人不堪其忧，回也不改其乐。贤哉回也！”

Here again we see the idea that the true gentleman, sustained by the internal goods of the Confucian Way, is indifferent to externalities (cf. 1.14, 4.2, 4.5, 4.9, 7.12, 7.16, 15.32). Zhou Dunyi comments, “Master Yan simply focused upon what was important and forgot what was trivial. When you focus upon what is important, your heart is at peace; when your heart is at peace, you will find satisfaction in all things.” This idea of focusing on the important rather than the trivial links 6.11 with its partner passage 6.12.

6.12 冉求曰：“非不说子之道，力不足也。”子曰：“力不足者，中道而废。今女画。”

Ran Qiu has already decided he cannot proceed further along the Master’s Way, and so does not even really try. As we read in 4.6, there is no one who really lacks the strength to pursue the Way—what is lacking among most of Confucius’ contemporaries is the kind of genuine love for the Way that sustains Yan Hui and Confucius during the long and arduous journey of self-cultivation. As Hu Anguo observes

The Master praised Yan Hui for his imperturbable joy [in 6.11]. Ran Qiu heard this, and this is why he says what he says here [in 6.12]. However, if Ran Qiu really did delight in the Master’s Way, it would be like the palate’s taking delight in the meat of grain-fed animals:6 he would surely exhaust his strength in pursuing it, and how could he possibly worry about his strength being insufficient?

Despite his protests to the contrary, Ran Qiu actually lacks a true passion for the Way. The problem, as we have seen, is how to instill this love in someone who does not already possess it.

6.13 子谓子夏曰：“女为君子儒，无为小人儒。”

6.13 As discussed in the Introduction, in this context ru is a term that refers to a class of specialists concerned with transmitting and teaching the traditional rituals and texts of the Zhou. Most commentators see this passage as advice to Zixia before he begins to accept his own disciples. There are two general lines of interpretation of this passage. Kong Anguo (followed by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi) takes the “petty” ru to be someone like the “village worthy” of 17.13: “When a gentleman serves as a ru, it is in order to clarify the Way; when a petty person serves as a ru, it is because he is greedy for fame.” In other words, the petty ru, according to this interpretation, is someone who is after external goods and does not really love the Way for its own sake. Another line of interpretation links this passage to 13.4 and 13.20, and sees the petty ru as something more akin to the narrow technician or “vessel” mentioned in 2.12. As Cheng Shude explains,

At this time Zixia was establishing a school in Xihe to transmit the Odes and the Rites, and stood out among the Master’s disciples for his cultural refinement and learning. We can sincerely describe him as a ru. However, if one focuses one’s energies exclusively on philological studies and the explication of isolated passages one will become narrow-minded, vulgar, and shallow, and one’s achievements will be trivial. In advising Zixia to be a “gentlemanly ru,” the Master is probably encouraging him to enter the realm of broad-ranging concerns and lofty understanding.

Both interpretations are plausible.

6.17 子曰：“谁能出不由户？何莫由斯道也？”

6.17 We have here an eloquent expression of the exasperation Confucius felt with his contemporaries’ perverse refusal to follow the Way of the ancients. Fan Ning understands the passage as having to do with learning: “When walking, all people know that they have to go out by means of the door, and yet none realize that it is only by means of learning that they can be truly accomplished.” The Record of Ritual relates it to the ritualization of everyday life: “Ritual encompasses the great and the small, the manifest and the subtle... Therefore the primary rites number three hundred, and the everyday rites number three thousand, but the destination to which they ultimately lead one is the same. There has never been a person who has entered a room without using the door” (Chapter 10 (“Ritual Vessels”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 404.) In either case, the point is the same: the Way of the ancients is the only way to live a proper human life.

6.18 子曰：“质胜文则野，文胜质则史。文质彬彬，然后君子。”

6.18 This passage is perhaps the earliest expression of an ideal that later became very important in Confucian writings: the doctrine of holding fast to the “mean” (zhong 中), introduced explicitly in 6.29. A perfect balance between native substance and cultural refinement is the ideal state, although if one is to err it should be on the side of substance (3.4, 3.8, 5.10, 5.22, 7.33, 13.27). For the ideal of the “mean,” see also 1.12, 13.21, 17.8, and 20.1.

6.20 子曰：“知之者不如好之者，好之者不如乐之者。”

6.20 The “it” referred to is most likely the Confucian Way. There are several slightly different ways to take this passage, but what is being referred to is the increasing level of unselfconsciousness and ease that characterizes the true Confucian gentleman. Bao Xian takes the “it” in the more narrow sense of learning: “One who knows about learning lacks the sincerity of one who loves learning, and one who loves learning lacks the depth of one who takes joy in it.” Zhang Shi invokes an analogy to food:

It is like the five cultivated grains. “One who knows it” knows that they are edible. “One who loves it” has eaten them and found them delicious. “One who takes joy in it” has found them delicious and has moreover eaten his fill. If you know it but are not able to love it, this means that your knowledge is not yet complete, and if you love it but are not able to take joy in it, this means that your love has not yet been consummated. Is not [joy in the Way] what strengthened the resolve of the ancients and allowed them to go forward without rest?

6.22 樊迟问知。子曰：“务民之义，敬鬼神而远之，可谓知矣。”问仁。曰：“仁者先难而后获，可谓仁矣。”

Many commentators believe that Fan Chi is asking for advice in preparation for taking office, and therefore understand Confucius’ answers as tailored to the duties of an official. “Social harmony among the common people” is the translation of minzhiyi 民之义 —literally, “rightness [among] the common people.” “Rightness” in this sense usually refers to observing proper social distinctions and role-specific duties, and this is the sense in which this phrase is understood in later Han texts. The Record of Ritual, for instance, asks rhetorically,

What is meant by “rightness among the people” (renyi 人义)? Kindness on the part of fathers, filialness on the part of sons, goodness on the part of elder brothers, obedience on the part of younger brothers, rightness on the part of husbands, obedience on the part of wives, benevolence on the part of elders, compliance on the part of juniors, Goodness on the part of the ruler, dutifulness on the part of the minister—these ten things are what is meant by “rightness among the people” (Chapter 9 (“Ritual Usages”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 379–380.).

By himself providing an example to the common people, an official or ruler ensures that they will accord with rightness (1.2, 2.21). “Respecting the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance” is understood by most as fulfilling one’s sacrificial duties sincerely and in accordance with ritual (3.12), without trying to flatter the spirits or curry favor with them (2.24), and thereby also reinforcing moral behavior among the common people (1.9, 2.5). In this respect, 5.18 seems particularly relevant: Zang Wenzhong’s attempt to impress the spirits with ritually inappropriate decorations is declared by Confucius to be a sign of his lack of wisdom. Confucius’ comments on Goodness accord with the themes we have seen so far: the Good person focuses on self-cultivation and the inner goods of the Confucian practice rather than any potential external rewards. Also cf. 12.21 and 15.38.

6.23 子曰：“知者乐水，仁者乐山；知者动，仁者静；知者乐，仁者寿。”

6.23 This is a famously cryptic passage. A somewhat neo-Daoist-flavored interpretation of the first two lines is provided by Bao Xian: “The wise take joy in actively exercising their talent and wisdom in governing the world, just as water flows on and on and knows no cease. The Good take joy in the sort of peace and stability displayed by mountains, which are naturally nonactive and yet give birth to all of the myriad things.” The precise meaning of the last line is particularly problematic. It is unclear why only the wise (and not the Good) should be joyful, for instance. As for “the Good are long-lived” statement, some commentators attempt to reconcile it with the premature death of Yan Hui by understanding it metaphorically: it is the reputation or beneficial influence of the Good person is long-lived. Others reject this strategy, arguing that—the isolated counter-example of Yan Hui aside—the Good are longlived because they are calm and free of desire for external things. All of these interpretations are quite speculative.

6.25 子曰：“觚不觚，觚哉！觚哉！”

6.25 A guwas a ritual drinking vessel. Many commentators believe that Confucius’ sigh of displeasure was provoked by the fact that the sort of gu being made by his contemporaries was not a proper gu (i.e., not in accordance with ancient standards), although there is disagreement over the question of what precisely was wrong. Some claim that the offending guwas not of the proper size. Mao Qiling, for example, claims that the gu being made by Confucius’ contemporaries was larger than the traditional gu, and sees this passage as a complaint against the excesses of Confucius’ age—in this case, excessive drinking. His interpretation is supported by many of the early commentaries. Wang Su, for instance, remarks that “People of that age were besotted with wine, and thus ‘a gu not being made like a gu’ refers to this ignorance of ritual propriety”; Cai Mo adds, “The power of wine to disturb one’s Virtue has been a concern since ancient times, which is why [ancient regulations for drinking vessel size were established], to guard against drunkenness.” Many of these commentators see the loss of ritual propriety regarding drink as symbolic of more general ritual excesses. Other commentators—such as He Yan or Zhu Zhongdu—see the problem as related to the shape of the gu or the manner in which it was manufactured, in which case the passage is similarly understood as an illustration of Confucius’ strict adherence to ancient practices, his dissatisfaction with the practices of his contemporaries, and his concern for the proper use of names (cf. 13.3). Finally, Brooks and Brooks present a compelling alternate interpretation, based on the claim of William Willets that the gu was an exclusively Shang vessel that was no longer being manufactured or used during Confucius’ lifetime, and that had been reduced to a valued, but unused, museum-piece (1998: 36). This would somewhat change the meaning of the passage (“A gu that is not being used as a gu”), turning it into a lament on the part of Confucius that he—like the gu—was not being put to proper use.

6.27 子曰：“君子博学于文，约之以礼，亦可以弗畔矣夫！”

6.27 A person who has been molded by the two main Confucian traditional forms—learning and ritual training—can be relied on to act appropriately. As Zhu Xi comments, “When it comes to learning, a gentleman desires broadness, and there is therefore no element of culture that he does not examine. When it comes to self-control, he desires restraint, and his every motion must therefore be in accordance with ritual. Having been disciplined in this way, he will not go against the Way.” Some commentators believe that it is the learning or culture of the gentleman that must be restrained by the rites (rather than the gentleman himself), but 9.11 supports the first reading. This passage is repeated in 12.15.

6.28 子见南子，子路不说。夫子矢之曰：“予所否者，天厌之！天厌之！”

6.28 Nanzi was the consort of Lord Ling of Wei, and a woman of bad repute. Zilu is not pleased that Confucius would seek an audience with such a person. As many commentators point out, however, it is likely that ritual dictated that when arriving in a state one request an audience with the “orphaned little lord”—i.e., the wife or consort of the local ruler. In having an audience with Nanzi on arriving in Wei, Confucius was suppressing his personal distaste for Nanzi, overcoming the disapproval of his disciples, and risking more general opprobrium in order to observe an important dictate of ritual propriety. Zilu is being presented here as similar to Chen Wenzi in 5.19: as “pure,” but with a rigid fastidiousness that falls short of Goodness. Alternate interpretations of the passage see Zilu’s displeasure as resulting from suspicion—either that illicit activity may have occurred during Confucius’ audience with the notoriously lascivious Nanzi, or that the Master was seeking some sort of questionable political advantage in seeing her—and have Confucius defending his innocence.

6.29 子曰：“中庸之为德也，其至矣乎！民鲜久矣。”

6.29 An alternate reading of the final line is, “for some time now such virtue has been quite hard to find among the people.” This is how He Yan and Zhu Xi take it, but alternate versions of this passage in other early texts support the reading adopted in the translation. Yong 庸might also be read as “constant” rather than “application,” in which case the first line would read, “acquiring Virtue through constantly holding to the mean,” although the Record of Ritual supports the first reading when it praises the sage-king Shun: “He grasped both extremes, and applied the mean between them (yongqizhong 用其中) when dealing with the common people” (Chapter 32 (“Doctrine of the Mean”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 302). This ideal of keeping to the mean is also seen in 1.12, 6.18, 13.21, 17.8, and 20.1.

6.30 子贡曰：“如有博施于民而能济众，何如？可谓仁乎？”子曰：“何事于仁，必也圣乎！尧舜其犹病诸！夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人。能近取譬，可谓仁之方也已。”

6.30 We see here (as in 12.2, 17.20, and especially 12.22) hints of the shift toward ren as the more specific and limited virtue of “benevolence” that is complete by the time of Mencius (Refer to Appendix 1 for more on the development of the term ren). Many commentators see this exchange as an attempt to rein in excessive speculation on the part of Zigong and bring him back to the fundamentals of self-cultivation. As Huan Maoyong explains, Zigong discusses Goodness from some distant, esoteric perspective, while the Master discusses it as something intimate and close to home. Zigong talks about great and difficult to attain rewards—something on an order of magnitude that even Yao or Shun would find difficult. The Master talks about extending the self to reach other people—something that simply requires us to plumb our own minds and hearts, to start with what is near at hand in order to reach what is far away. The final line of Confucius’ advice sounds like a formulation of the virtue of understanding (shu)—something that we have already seen is apparently beyond Zigong’s grasp (5.12). This sort of ability to feel compassion for others and respond to the world flexibly is a crucial element of the more general virtue of Goodness that Zigong lacks, and this description of understanding as the “method of Goodness” is probably formulated for his benefit. In 7.34, the Master describes sageliness and Goodness as things beyond even his grasp, but makes it clear that he is at least practicing the “method of Goodness”: “working at it without growing tired” (taking his stand, realizing himself) and “encouraging others without growing weary” (helping others to take their stand and realize themselves). Cf. 17.5.

*Book Seven*

7.1 子曰：“述而不作，信而好古，窃比于我老彭。”

7.1 There is a great deal of commentarial controversy concerning the meaning of the reference to “Old Peng”—even if one or two people are being referred to—but the least fantastic explanation is that of Bao Xian, who takes the reference to be to one person: “Old Peng was a great worthy of the Yin Dynasty who was fond of transmitting ancient tales. In comparing himself to Old Peng, Confucius indicates his reverence for those who merely transmit [and do not innovate].” Some commentators, such as Huang Kan, believe that Confucius refrained from innovating because he was not a ruler and did not have the authority to create new social institutions. It is more likely that transmission is all that Confucius countenanced for people in his age, since the sagely Zhou kings established the ideal set of institutions that perfectly accord with human needs—the “door” through which anyone wishing to become a gentleman must pass (6.17).

7.2 子曰：“默而识之，学而不厌，诲人不倦，何有于我哉？”

7.2 Repeated in a slightly different form in 7.34, these seemingly modest qualities represent the “method of Goodness” mentioned in 6.30, something far beyond the grasp of most people.

7.3 子曰：“德之不修，学之不讲，闻义不能徙，不善不能改，是吾忧也。”

7.3 Commentators point out that the sort of “worry” (you 忧) mentioned here must be distinguished from the ordinary sorts of worries that other people have. As Jiao Yuanxi notes,

When the Master speaks of being “joyful and forgetting worry” (7.18), this “worry” is the sort of selfish worry that troubles the human mind—the same worry that is spoken of in the lines, “other people could not have born such worry/hardship (you)” (6.11), “the Good person does not worry” (9.29), and “the gentleman does not worry and feels no fear” (12.4). The “worry” spoken of here [7.3], however, is the sort of worry mentioned in the line, “the gentleman has worries his entire life” (Mencius 4:B:28)—that is, the “trembling fear, cautiousness and discipline” spoken of in Zhu Xi’s commentary to [Mencius 4:B:19]. It is this sort of “worry,” and this alone, that allows a worthy or a sage to become what they are.

In Mencius 4:B:28, the difference between these two types of worries is formulated in terms of a distinction between being “worried” (you) and “concerned” (huan 患):

The gentleman has worries his entire life, but is never concerned for even a single moment. Now, the sort of worries he has are of this sort: [the sage-king] Shun was a person. I am also a person. Shun served as a model for the world worth passing down to later generations, while I still cannot manage to be more than a common villager. This is indeed something worth worrying about. What is to be done about this worry? One should merely try to become like Shun, that is all. In this way, the gentleman is never concerned. If something is not Good, he does not do it; if something is not ritually correct, he does not put it into practice. Thus, even if some sort of external problem (huan) arises, the gentleman is not made concerned by it.

The aspiring gentleman focuses upon what is under his control (self-cultivation), and consigns the rest to fate. Cf. 4.14, 11.18, 14.36, 15.32.

7.4 子之燕居，申申如也，夭夭如也。

7.4 Huang Shisan comments, “This passage records the manner in which the sage’s bearing, even when he was merely sitting at his leisure, was harmoniously adapted to the circumstances and always appeared to be in accordance with the mean.” Like the accounts of Confucius’ ritual behavior that constitute Book Ten, this passage describes the effortless, unselfconscious manner in which the Master embodied the Confucian Way.

7.5 子曰：“甚矣吾衰也！久矣吾不复梦见周公。”

7.5 The point seems to be that one’s immersion in the culture of the Zhou should be so complete that it penetrates even into one’s dream-life. Some commentators also understand the ability to see the Duke of Zhou while dreaming as a testament to Confucius’ power of concentration and his power of will (zhi 志). The “Vast Will” chapter of The Annals of Lü Buwei refers obliquely to 7.5:

It is said that Confucius and Mo Di [Mozi] spent their entire days reciting, memorizing and practicing their lessons, to the point that, at night, they could personally see King Wen and Duke Dan of Zhou [in their dreams] and ask questions of them. With this sort of intensely focused will, what task could they not master? What action could they not bring to completion? Thus, it is said, “When you focus and immerse yourself in your studies, the spirits will come and report to you.” Of course, [such achievement] is not a result of the spirits actually reporting to you, but of your focus and total immersion (Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 618.).

7.6 子曰：“志于道，据于德，依于仁，游于艺。”

7.6 We seem to have here, as in 2.4, an account of the stages of self-cultivation, although the various achievements mentioned are not necessarily in chronological order. The first line might also be rendered, “Set your will/intention (zhi 志) upon the Way,” and (2.4) it seems to be the crucial first step in Confucian self-cultivation: a conscious and sincere commitment to the Way of the Zhou kings. Wang Yangming emphasizes the importance of this first step in his comment on this passage:

If you set your will upon the Way then you will become a scholar of the Way and Virtue, whereas if you set your will upon the cultural arts, you will become merely a technically-skilled aesthete. Therefore, you cannot but be careful about the direction of your will. This is why, when it comes to learning, nothing is as important as focusing upon the correct goal. What the ancients referred to as the “cultural arts” were ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic. These were all integral parts of their daily lives, but the ancients did not focus their will upon them—they felt that they must first establish the basics and then the rest could follow. What people nowadays refer to as the “cultural arts” are merely literature, calligraphy, and painting. What could these things possibly have to do with the needs of daily life?

The idea that the cultural arts represent the final finishing touch applied to an already substantial moral foundation is also found in 1.6 and 3.8.

7.7 子曰：“自行束修以上，吾未尝无诲焉。”

7.7 There is some debate over the exact meaning of the terms shu 束 and xiu 脩 , literally “restraint/bundle” and “strip,” here taken separately to mean “bundle of silk and strips [of cured meat].” The terms could also be taken as a compound, either as “bundle of cured meat” or (as in some early texts) the strip with which a man can bind his hair. Zheng Xuan explains that shuxiu means “over fifteen years of age,” presumably because this is the age when men in ancient times began binding their hair when going out in public. In this case, the point would be that Confucius would accept anyone over age fifteen as a student. Others take the term as a metaphoric extension of the “hair tie” sense (again, relying upon precedents in early texts), understanding it as a reference to the bearing of the person seeking instruction—that is, an attitude of self-restraint and self-discipline. As Mao Qiling observes, however, the verb “offering up” in the text strongly suggests that shuxiu refers to a literal object, and many early texts mention shuxiu in a context where it is clear that the term refers to small, symbolic, ritually-dictated offerings made by a student seeking instruction. Most likely, then, we should follow Kong Anguo in seeing the point as being that Confucius’ door was open to anyone who came willingly and in a ritually correct manner—that is, he did not discriminate on the basis of social status or wealth.

7.8 子曰：“不愤不启，不悱不发，举一隅不以三隅反，则不复也。”

7.8 As Zhu Xi notes, this represents the flip side of Confucius’ contribution as a teacher mentioned in 7.2 (“encouraging others and never growing weary”): for education to work, the student must also contribute to the process. The ideal student should come to the project possessed by an inchoate need for what study is able to provide—something like the passion for learning that causes Confucius himself to forget to eat (7.19). While Confucius certainly saw the role of traditional knowledge as being much more essential than Socrates did, there is nonetheless a similar maieutic quality to his method. Cf. 15.16.

7.9 子食于有丧者之侧，未尝饱也。

7.12 子曰：“富而可求也，虽执鞭之士，吾亦为之。如不可求，从吾所好。”

7.12 Again we have the idea that the gentleman does not pursue externalities. Some commentators see this passage as a comment on fate: wealth cannot be pursued because its acquisition is subject to fate. As in 7.16, however, there seems to be more of a normative edge here: the acquisition of wealth is indeed subject to fate, but is also in itself an unworthy object of pursuit. The point here is more about rightness than fate

7.14 子在齐闻韶，三月不知肉味。曰：“不图为乐之至于斯也！”

7.14 The Shao is the court music of the sage king Shun; cf. 3.25. As in 6.7, we are probably to understand “three months” in the sense of “a long time” rather than literally. According to the History of the Han, one of the descendents of Shun, who was enfeoffed in the state of Chen, was forced to flee to Qi, bringing Shun’s court music with him. We see in this passage, an association between music, joy, and forgetfulness that is also echoed by the graphic pun between the words for “joy” and “music” in ancient Chinese, which are both represented by the character . The joyous rapture inspired by sublimely beautiful music is one of the internal goods of the Confucian practice that frees the gentleman from the demands of externalities. Cf. 8.15.

7.16 子曰：“饭疏食饮水，曲肱而枕之，乐亦在其中矣。不义而富且贵，于我如浮云。”

7.16 As Huang Kan explains, the point of the last line is that “floating clouds move about on their own, up in the sky—what connection do they have with me? In the same way, what do wealth and fame improperly attained have to do with me?” We have here another expression of the gentleman’s independence from externalities; cf. 1.14, 4.5, 6.11, 7.12. Some commentators also link this latter comment to 7.15: the Master does not support the Lord of Wei—even considering the prospect of a generous salary—because both the Lord and his exiled father are behaving in an improper fashion.

7.17 子曰：“加我数年，五十以学易，可以无大过矣。”

7.17 The translation follows the Lu version of the Analects here in reading the intensifying particle yi 亦 in place of yi 易 ([Book of] Changes); the Gu version reads “If I were granted many more years, so that by the age of fifty I could complete my studies of the Changes, this might enable me to be free of major faults.” Commentators who follow the Gu version generally see these words as spoken by Confucius in his mid-forties—before he had reached the stage of “understanding the Mandate of Heaven” (2.4)—and explain that understanding the Mandate of Heaven is a prerequisite for delving into such an esoteric work as the Changes. Most later scholars, doubting that Confucius seriously studied the Book of Changes, prefer to follow the Lu version.

7.18 子所雅言，诗、书、执礼，皆雅言也。

7.18 Written Chinese characters are not directly phonetic in the manner of a Roman alphabet, and the same character can be pronounced differently by speakers with different dialects. In Confucius’ age, people were apparently aware that the spoken languages of the various regions of China differed significantly from the “classical pronunciation,” which Liu Baonan argues must have been the dialect spoken in the Western Zhou capital. We must assume that knowledge of these pronunciations was kept alive, at least in the state of Lu, through use in formal and ritual contexts. This passage suggests, though, that Confucius’ contemporaries had begun to ignore this tradition and eschew the classical pronunciations in favor of local dialect—a Christian analogy would be the abandonment of Latin in favor of services in the vernacular. This represents a departure from the Way of the Zhou that Confucius characteristically resists. No doubt part of the motivation for abandoning the classical pronunciations was that they were no longer comprehensible, and Zheng Xuan suggests that Confucius would follow his formal recitations with explanations in local dialect. Mao Qiling argues that the “classical pronunciation” (lit. “elegant speech”) also involved details of cadence, demeanor, and tone of voice.

7.19 叶公问孔子于子路，子路不对。子曰：“女奚不曰，其为人也，发愤忘食，乐以忘忧，不知老之将至云尔。”

7.19 The Duke of She was a high minister in the state of Chu; commentators explain that, since the Chu rulers had already usurped the title of “king,” Chu ministers had begun calling themselves “dukes.” There are two main explanations for why Zilu does not answer his query. Early commentators claim that Duke She was a power-hungry figure who was insistently trying to lure Confucius into his service, and that Zilu was leery of encouraging him in his efforts. Under this interpretation, one purpose of Confucius’ response is to indicate that he is not interested in accepting a morally questionable position for the sake of a salary or other material rewards. Later commentators, beginning with Zhu Xi, portray the Duke as a more sympathetic figure who admires Confucius, and see Zilu’s failure to respond as a result of the perceived ineffability of Confucius’ lofty, mysterious virtue. In this case, Confucius’ reaction is refreshingly straightforward: he is far from mysterious, being merely an ordinary man possessed by a great love for the Way of the ancients. The only thing that differentiates him from others is the object of his love; as Wang Yangming notes, “The passions of ordinary people do not extend beyond being passionate about rewards, fame, wealth, and honor . . . The nature of their passion is not different [from the Master’s], it is merely the object of their passion that is different.” The object, of course, makes all the difference. We see here again the idea that the unselfconscious joy derived from the internal goods of the Confucian Way renders one indifferent to externalities.

7.20 子曰：“我非生而知之者，好古，敏以求之者也。”

7.20 This passage serves as an elaboration of 7.19: Confucius is not especially gifted by nature, he simply knows where to look for knowledge and has the passion to sustain him in this quest. As Zheng Xuan notes, another purpose of this passage “is to encourage others to pursue learning.” Cf. 7.1 and 16.9.

7.22 子曰：“三人行，必有我师焉。择其善者而从之，其不善者而改之。”

7.22 Alternately, Confucius may be referring to discrete qualities in his companions rather than their overall characters: in any person he can find both virtues to emulate and vices to avoid. Model emulation is the primary method of moral education for Confucius, and the implication here is that the process of education is never completed: even the Master always has something to learn. Cf. 4.17, 16.11.

7.23 子曰：“天生德于予，桓魋其如予何？”

7.23 Huan Tui was a military minister in the state of Song who apparently wished to do Confucius harm. According to an account in the Record of the Historian, while in Song Confucius and his disciples were one day practicing ritual beneath a large tree when Huan Tui, in an attempt to kill Confucius, cut the tree down. The assassination attempt failed, and when the disciples urged the Master to make haste in escaping the state he delivered the remark reported here. Confucius is on a mission from Heaven (3.24), and is therefore subject only to Heaven’s command (ming). Human beings do not have the power to alter fate, and Confucius therefore accepts whatever may befall him with equanimity, viewing it as Heaven’s will. Very similar sentiments are expressed in 9.5 and 14.36.

7.30 子曰：“仁远乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁至矣。”

7.30 Bao Xian elaborates, “The Way of Goodness is not far—simply walk it and you will arrive there.” Jiang Xi puts a more political spin on the passage: “If you can return to ritual for only a single day, everyone in the world will return home to Goodness—this is how extremely close Goodness is to us.” The purpose of this passage is to emphasize the importance of sincere commitment to the Way, but it seems to conflict with passages such as 8.7 (“the burden is heavy and the Way is long”), and is thus symptomatic of the so-called “paradox of wu-wei” mentioned in the commentary to 4.6. For Confucius, the virtue of Goodness, as well as the power of Virtue that comes with it, can only be realized by one who truly loves them for their own sake. The point here in 7.30, however, seems to be that if one truly does love them, then one already has them—were a person to truly love Goodness in the same way that he loves to eat and drink, then the battle would be already won. This is no doubt the source of much of Confucius’ frustration with his current age (9.18, 9.24, 15.13), as well as with disciples such as Zai Wo, who presumably gives assent to the Confucian project but nonetheless lies sleeping in bed all day (5.10). The student cannot learn from the teacher unless he is passionately committed to learning, and this requires possessing a genuine love for the Confucian Way. The problem is that it is hard to see how the teacher can engender this sort of love in a student who lacks it. Cf. 7.34, 9.24, and 9.31.

7.32 子与人歌而善，必使反之，而后和之。

7.32 Some commentators claim that responding to another’s song was a dictate of ritual, but this is more likely simply a description of Confucius’ willingness and ability to learn from others (cf. 7.22). Zhu Xi comments,

The Master would inevitably ask the other person to sing again because he wished to get the nuances and learn from the fine points. Afterward he would harmonize with them because he was happy at having gotten the nuances and grasped the fine points. Here we see the easygoing disposition of the sage: sincere in intention and cordial to the highest degree, while at the same time humble, discerning, and happy to celebrate the excellences of others.

7.33 子曰：“文，莫吾犹人也。躬行君子，则吾未之有得。”

7.33 This is perhaps merely a polite demurral (cf. 7.34), but it serves to emphasize the difficulty of obtaining in practice the proper balance between cultural refinement and native substance, and is no doubt meant as a warning against falling into “foppish pedantry”—the more insidious and common of the two failings described in 6.18.

7.34 子曰：“若圣与仁，则吾岂敢？抑为之不厌，诲人不倦，则可谓云尔已矣。”公西华曰：“正唯弟子不能学也。”

7.34 A companion passage to 7.33 with an illuminating coda: the humble love of the Way and striving after it that Confucius is willing to grant himself as a quality is itself something beyond the ability of most people. Gong Xihua’s words are very revealing and get to the heart of the paradox of Confucian self-cultivation: in order to keep oneself moving forward along on the “long journey” of self-cultivation it is necessary that one genuinely desire to reach the destination, but how does one teach such desire to a person who does not already possess it?

7.35 子疾病，子路请祷。子曰：“有诸？”子路对曰：“有之。诔曰：‘祷尔于上下神祇。’”子曰：“丘之祷久矣。”

7.35 According to commentators, the Eulogy is the title of a traditional prayer text. That is, Confucius’ prayer has been his life’s work. Any other sort of appeal to Heaven is unnecessary, and the Master is ready to accept whatever fate Heaven may have in store for him. We also see here the theme expressed in 3.12 and 6.22: the gentleman keeps the spirits at a distance and focuses instead upon the human world and the task of self-cultivation. Brooks and Brooks’ comment on this passage is quite nice:

It is very moving, is it not? The Master patiently lets Zilu instruct him in ritual propriety, notwithstanding the fact (or what the hearer of this saying may be presumed to have regarded as fact) that he knows much more about it than Zilu. He then rejects the suggested intercession with the deities. Instead, he offers his whole life as the secular equivalent of a prayer. (1998: 44)

An alternate version of this story, which appears in a lost fragment from the Zhuangzi that is preserved in the Imperial Readings, focuses specifically upon Confucius’ comportment:

Confucius fell ill, and Zigong went out to make a divination. Confucius remarked, “When I take my seat I do not dare to put myself first, I dwell as if practicing austerities, and I eat and drink [sparingly] as if preparing to perform a sacrifice. I have been performing my own divination for quite some time now.”

The theme in this version is similar: one should live one’s entire life in a disciplined and reverent manner, rather than adopting discipline and reverence only when one wants to curry favor with the spirits or receive special guidance from Heaven.

7.37 子曰：“君子坦荡荡，小人长戚戚。”

7.37 The gentleman is relaxed because he is sustained by the internal goods of the Confucian practice, whereas the petty person’s focus on externalities exposes him to the vagaries of circumstance. As Jiang Xi notes, “The gentleman is self-possessed and at ease, relaxed and unselfish. The petty person, on the other hand, is always scrambling after glory and fighting for personal gain, constantly anxious about success or failure, and therefore perpetually full of worry.” Cf. 7.38 and 13.26.

7.38 子温而厉，威而不猛，恭而安。

7.38 This companion passage to 7.37 fleshes out the description of the perfected person, who effortlessly embodies the mean of virtue. Cf. 7.4.

*Book Eight*

8.2 子曰：“恭而无礼则劳，慎而无礼则葸，勇而无礼则乱，直而无礼则绞。君子笃于亲，则民兴于仁；故旧不遗，则民不偷。”

8.2 Many commentators have suggested that these two sections should be split into separate passages. The first half has to do with the ability of ritual to trim and shape native tendencies so that they fit the mean of true virtue (cf. 1.12, 11.16, 12.1, and especially 17.8, where study or learning rather than ritual training is described as the force preventing virtue from falling into vice). The second half has to do with the power of charismatic Virtue as a force for bringing about political order (cf. 1.9, 12.9). One way of making the two sections cohere is to see the first as a description of how to attain the sort of individual perfection that will then enable one to bring about the political-moral suasion described in the second section. This is how Zhang Shi understands it: “If one understands what comes first and what comes last in the Way of humans, then one can be respectful without being exasperating, careful without being timid, courageous without being unruly, and upright without being inflexible, and will thereby transform the common people and cause their virtue to return to fullness [1.9].”

8.7 曾子曰：“士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远。仁以为己任，不亦重乎？死而后已，不亦远乎？”

8.7 This passage plays on the literal and metaphoric meanings of dao, which means physical path or road and the abstract moral “Way.” The metaphor of self-cultivation as a life-long journey vividly illustrates the difficulty of the Confucian Way (cf. 8.3, 9.11). As Kong Anguo remarks, “Taking up Goodness as one’s own personal task is a heavy burden—there is nothing heavier. Stopping only once death has overtaken you is a long journey—there is nothing longer.” An alternate version of this passage found in the Record of Ritual is even more extreme: “The Master said, ‘As a vessel, Goodness is heavy; as a way, it is long. No one is up to the task of picking it up, nor is anyone able to walk it to its end.’ ” (Chapter 32 (“Record of Examples”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 334.)

8.8 子曰：“兴于诗，立于礼。成于乐。”

8.8 Here we have a more succinct version of the course of Confucian self-cultivation described in 2.4. The translation of the first phrase follows Jiang Xi’s interpretation of xing 兴as “to inspire, stimulate”: “Gazing upon the intentions of the ancients can give inspiration to one’s own intention.” Bao Xian takes xing to mean, more prosaically, “to begin”: “The point is that the cultivation of the self should start with study of the Odes.” “Taking one’s place” through ritual involves, as discussed in 2.4, taking up one’s role as an adult among other adults in society, something that requires a mastery of the rituals governing social interactions. Steps one and two thus represent, respectively, cognitive shaping through learning and behavioral shaping through ritual training. Finally, the joy inspired by the powerfully moving music of the ancients brings the cognitive and behavioral together into the unselfconscious, effortless perfection that is wu-wei. Mencius 4:A:27, which invokes the metaphor of dance, represents perhaps the best commentary on this passage:

The substance of benevolence (ren) is the serving of one’s parents; the substance of rightness is obeying one’s elders; the substance of wisdom is to understand benevolence and rightness and to not let them go; the substance of ritual propriety is the regulation and adornment of benevolence and rightness; and the substance of music is the joy one takes in benevolence and rightness. Once such joy is born, it cannot be stopped. Once it cannot be stopped, then one begins unconsciously to dance it with one’s feet and wave one’s arms in time with it.

Some commentators take all three nouns in the passage as titles of classical texts— “Take inspiration from the Book of Odes, take your place with the Book of Ritual, and perfect yourself with the Book of Music”—but it is unlikely that such books existed in Confucius’ time.

8.9 子曰：“民可使由之，不可使知之。”

8.9 “It,” of course, refers to the Way. There are several ways to understand this passage. The most simple interpretation is that the common people can be guided along the Confucian Way—most efficaciously through the influence of the gentleman’s Virtue—but lack the cognitive ability to grasp the principles of the Way (cf. 16.9 and Mencius 7:A:5). Some early commentators alternately see it as a comment on rule by Virtue as opposed to rule by force, in which case the second clause is read more along the lines of “the common people cannot be allowed to understand it.” As Zhang Ping puts it:

When one rules by means of Virtue, then everyone gets to fulfill their own nature, and everything in the world is put to use without being aware of it. This is why the Master says, “The common people can be made to follow it.” If, however, one tries to rule by means of punishments, one has to set up sanctions to prevent the common people from being bad. Once the common people become aware of these preventative sanctions, they will simply devise more clever ways of being bad [to evade the sanctions]. This is why the Master says, “They cannot be allowed to understand it.” The point is that one should govern by means of Virtue, which causes the people to follow and nothing more, rather than by means of punishments, in which case the people become aware of one’s technique.

This interpretation accords well with the sentiment of 2.3, where Confucius declares that ruling by a publicized legal code merely inspires the common people to devise devious ways to get around the law.

8.12 子曰：“三年学，不至于谷，不易得也。”

8.12 Confucius is again lamenting the fact that the majority of his contemporaries were focused upon external goods, and saw learning as merely a means to an end: that is, an official position, and the prestige and salary that went with it. A great deal of commentarial ink has been spilled over the significance of the three-year period, but—as Huan Maoyong notes—“the sense is not three temporal periods; ‘three years’ simply means a long time.”

8.13 子曰：“笃信好学，守死善道。危邦不入，乱邦不居。天下有道则见，无道则隐。邦有道，贫且贱焉，耻也；邦无道，富且贵焉，耻也。”

8.13 According to Bao Xian, the fact that a state is endangered means that disorder is imminent, and Zhu Xi explain that, although one already serving as an official has a duty to remain and try to protect an endangered state, “it is permissible for an outsider to refrain from entering into such a state.” Once a state has degenerated into immoral disorder—defined by Bao Xian as a situation where ministers are assassinating lords and sons killing fathers—a gentleman’s duty is to leave the state rather than sully himself by remaining. The end of the passage reiterates this theme: when there is an opportunity for virtuous service, it would be shameful for the gentleman to remain in obscurity and poverty; when nothing but immorality and corruption prevails, however, it would be equally shameful for the gentleman not to withdraw.

8.19 子曰：“大哉，尧之为君也！巍巍乎！唯天为大，唯尧则之。荡荡乎！民无能名焉。巍巍乎！其有成功也；焕乎，其有文章！”

8.19 The common people were “not able to put a name to it” because the influence of Yao’s Virtue was so subtle and pervasive that the people were transformed naturally, without being aware of what was happening. Compare this to Heaven’s manner of ruling “without the need for words,” as described in 17.19. As Kong Anguo observes, “Yao is being praised for modeling himself on Heaven and thereby transforming the people.” Cf. Mencius 7:A:13:

The subjects of a hegemon are happy, while the subjects of a true king are expansive and content like the heavens. The king can execute them without stirring up resentment, and can benefit them without receiving credit for it. The common people move daily toward goodness without being aware of who is bringing it about. This is because everything the gentleman passes by is transformed; everywhere he dwells is infused with spiritual power (shen 神), and above and below he joins together with the flow of Heaven and Earth.

*Book Nine*

9.2 达巷党人曰：“大哉孔子！博学而无所成名。”子闻之，谓门弟子曰：“吾何执？执御乎？执射乎？吾执御矣。”

Daxiang is said by commentators to be the name of a small hamlet.

According to one understanding of this passage, Confucius’ response is equally sarcastic as the question, expressing his contempt for limited or merely technical skills. Han and Jin Dynasty commentators, however, generally understand the villager from Daxiang as being sincere in his praise (“How great is Confucius! He is broadly learned, and yet does not achieve fame by means of any one particular art”) and Confucius’ answer as genuine self-deprecation—something along the lines of, “oh, perhaps I should specialize in something and make myself useful.” Charioteering was the least respectable of the gentlemanly arts, and so his choice is seen as especially humble. Under either interpretation, the sense of the passage accords with the 2.12, 9.6, 19.4, and 19.7, but—as Waley notes (1989: 244)—the first seems to make better sense of Confucius’ response.

9.3 子曰：“麻冕，礼也；今也纯，俭。吾从众。拜下，礼也；今拜乎上，泰也。虽违众，吾从下。”

According to commentators, the linen cap specified by ritual was an elaborate affair— consisting of many layers and involving intricate stitching—and Confucius’ contemporaries had begun replacing it with a simpler silk version. Confucius apparently feels that this does not interfere with its basic function. When approaching a ruler or other superior sitting on a raised dais, ritual dictates bowing before ascending the stairs, but Confucius’ contemporaries had taken to ascending the stairs and only bowing when directly before their ruler. This is a more substantial change—as Brooks and Brooks note, “the ‘below’ option implies asking permission to ascend; the ‘above’ option presumes it” (1998: 51)—and Confucius rejects it as not ritually proper. This passage describes the sort of judgment and flexibility that can be exercised by an accomplished ritual practitioner. It is possible to exaggerate the iconoclastic character of this passage—we should note that the one change Confucius accedes to is a rather minor one, and that he does not actually propose changing the rite, but simply goes along with the popular practice (with possibly a hint of reluctance). Nevertheless, we can appreciate the sense of it without ignoring Confucius’ profound conservatism: rites are expressive of a certain sense or feeling, and thus an alteration in the actual rite is permissible if it will not—in the opinion of one who has fully mastered the rites—alter its essential meaning.

9.5 子畏于匡。曰：“文王既没，文不在兹乎？天之将丧斯文也，后死者不得与于斯文也；天之未丧斯文也，匡人其如予何？”

9.5 As the Record of the Historian tells the story,

Confucius was leaving Wei, and was passing through the town of Kuang on his way to Chen. There was a person named Yang Hu who had in the past done violence to the people of Kuang, and they therefore detained Confucius, because he physically resembled this Yang Hu. Confucius was imprisoned there for five days.

The account goes on to note that Yan Hui had fallen behind on this journey and was finally reunited with Confucius in Kuang, providing the context for 11.23. Bao Xian also claims that, to add to the confusion, one of Confucius’ disciples was a known associate of Yang Hu, and happened to be driving Confucius’ chariot as he passed through Kuang, further rousing the suspicions of the Kuang people. As for Confucius being the bearer of culture, the Guliang Commentary for Duke Ai, Year 14 (482 b.c.e) cites Confucius as saying: “The Way of Kings Wen and Wu has not fallen to the ground— it still lives on in us.1 King Wen having passed away, is not his Way of being cultured truly to be found in me?” For this theme of Confucius being the Heaven-appointed bearer of Zhou culture—and therefore enjoying its special protection—see also 3.24, 7.23 and 14.36.

9.6 大宰问于子贡曰：“夫子圣者与？何其多能也？”子贡曰：“固天纵之将圣，又多能也。”子闻之，曰：“大宰知我乎！吾少也贱，故多能鄙事。君子多乎哉？不多也。”

9.6 There is a great deal of commentarial debate over the identity of the Prime Minister mentioned here, but none of the arguments offered are entirely convincing. The Prime Minister was presumably familiar with Confucius’ many technical abilities, and apparently has trouble reconciling this with Confucius’ own teaching that “the gentleman is not a vessel” (2.12). Zigong attempts to finesse the issue, but Confucius has no patience for this: his technical skills are the result of his humble background rather than being desiderata for an aspiring gentleman (cf. 9.2, 19.4, 19.7). Although—as implied in the elaboration 9.7—technical skills might come in handy for one who has yet to be properly employed.

9.10 子见齐衰者、冕衣裳者与瞽者，见之，虽少必作；过之，必趋。

Hastening one’s step, like rising to one’s feet, is a sign of respect. What is being emphasized here is probably, as Fan Ziyu says, not merely Confucius’ respectfulness, but also the sincere, wu-wei fashion in which it manifested itself: “The mind of the sage is such that he grieves along with those who are in mourning, feels respect for those who hold official rank, and feels pity for those who are disabled. It is likely that the Master rose to his feet and hastened his step spontaneously, without having consciously intended it.” Like 7.9–7.10, this passage resembles the descriptions of ritual behavior found in Book Ten.

9.11 颜渊喟然叹曰：“仰之弥高，钻之弥坚；瞻之在前，忽焉在后。夫子循循然善诱人，博我以文，约我以礼。欲罢不能，既竭吾才，如有所立卓尔。虽欲从之，末由也已。”

The “it” referred to by Yan Hui is most likely the Confucian Way. This passage represents the most dramatic expression in the text of the difficulty of self-cultivation and the incredible strength of will needed to remain on the path—especially because it comes from the mouth of Yan Hui, the most naturally gifted of Confucius’ disciples. Many esoteric and mystical interpretations of Yan Hui’s words have been offered by traditional commentators, but Huang Gan is correct in rejecting them:

The Way of the sage is certainly high and brilliant, expansive and great, so that it is indeed difficult to reach, but it still does not transcend our basic human nature. The details of one’s movements and expressions; the tasks of eating and drinking, rising and resting, interacting with others and meeting one’s social responsibilities; the standards that govern relations between ruler and minister, father and son, elder and junior, and husband and wife; going out in public or remaining at home, resigning or accepting office, declining or accepting reward, taking this and discarding that, along with everything else up to the implementation of government regulations— none of this lies outside the scope of the Way.

The difficulty does not lie in the Way’s transcendental nature, for it is right in front of us (7.30), in the details of everyday life. The true challenge is the almost superhuman stamina and determination required to walk it to its end. Cf. 8.7 and 9.19.

9.12 子疾病，子路使门人为臣。病闲，曰：“久矣哉！由之行诈也，无臣而为有臣。吾谁欺？欺天乎？且予与其死于臣之手也，无宁死于二三子之手乎？且予纵不得大葬，予死于道路乎？”

That is, following the rites proper to a minister attending to a lord—which, of course, Confucius was not.

Zilu means to honor his Master—and perhaps incidentally raise his own status—by having him attended as if he were a feudal lord, but this represents a serious abuse of ritual. As Li Ao explains, Confucius’ concern over the ritual violations of the Ji Family—who, as we have seen, were usurping the ritual prerogatives of the Zhou kings in an attempt to impress their contemporaries and curry favor with Heaven (3.1 and 3.6)—no doubt accounts for some of the harshness of his rebuke, which is then softened somewhat by his final remarks. As Brooks and Brooks note, although the disciples are ashamed of their Master’s lack of office and humble circumstances, Confucius himself “insists on his low rank, with devoted disciples and not sullen lackeys at his gate. Even a modern reader can hardly miss the note of intense, reproving affection” (1998: 53).

9.13 子贡曰：“有美玉于斯，韫匵而藏诸？求善贾而沽诸？”子曰：“沽之哉！沽之哉！我待贾者也。”

9.13 The gentleman should share his virtue with the world by taking public office, but only under a virtuous king and when approached in accordance with the Way. Confucius thus refuses to actively peddle his wares on the market, waiting instead for his virtue to be recognized by a ritually correct and morally cultivated ruler. As Fan Ziyu puts it, “The gentleman is never unwilling to serve in office, but also despises any offer that is not in accordance with the Way. The scholar waiting for the ritually proper approach is like a piece of jade waiting for the right price . . . he is certainly not going to compromise the Way in order to gain human rewards, or ‘brag about his jade in pursuit of a sale.’ ” Although clearly frustrated, Confucius seems somewhat less pessimistic here than in 9.9, where he has completely given up hope of finding a proper buyer for his wares.

9.14 子欲居九夷。或曰：“陋，如之何！”子曰：“君子居之，何陋之有？”

9.14 The Nine Yi tribes were a group of “barbarians” who lived along the Eastern coast of present day China, possibly including the Korean peninsula. Many commentators link this passage to 5.7, where Confucius expresses a wish (facetious or not) to float away from China on a raft, and both passages are related to 9.9 and 9.13 in being expressions of frustration at having failed to find employment under a virtuous ruler in China proper. This passage is also a testament to the transformative power of the gentleman’s Virtue (cf. 12.19; as Ma Rong puts it, “Everywhere the gentleman dwells is transformed”), as well as the universality of the Way’s power: even non-Chinese barbarians are subject to its influence (cf. 13.19).

9.18 子曰：“吾未见好德如好色者也。”

9.18 There are two slightly different ways to take this passage. He Yan sees it as a criticism of Confucius’ contemporaries: “The Master is complaining that his contemporaries viewed Virtue lightly and instead focused upon the pursuit of female beauty.” This is how Sima Qian understands it as well, claiming in the Record of the Historian that 9.18 was inspired by an event in Confucius’ life when he was publicly humiliated by Duke Ling of Wei, who honored his consort—the infamous Nanzi—over Confucius himself. Li Chong, on the other hand, sees the passage as more of a general statement about self-cultivation, a claim that “if people simply loved Virtue as much as they love female beauty, then they would discard immorality and return to rectitude.” Most likely both points are intended: if only people could love the Way in the same spontaneous, wu-wei fashion that they love the pleasures of the flesh, Confucius’ job would be done, but he was not optimistic about this happening anytime soon with his contemporaries. As Xie Liangzuo explains: “Loving a beautiful woman or hating a foul smell—these are examples of sincerity. If one could only love Virtue the way one loves female beauty, this would mean sincerely loving Virtue. Unfortunately, few among the people are able to do this.” Both points are also clearly intended in the very similar, but slightly more explicit, 15.13; cf. 9.24, 15.16.

9.19 子曰：“譬如为山，未成一篑，止，吾止也；譬如平地，虽覆一篑，进，吾往也。”

9.19 The first half of this passage echoes 1.15, 8.7, and 9.17 in emphasizing the need for constant effort and indefatigable determination if one is to completely walk the long and arduous Confucian Way. As Zhu Xi puts it, “If the student is able to steel himself and not desist, then his accumulated small efforts will result in great success. If, on the other hand, he stops halfway down the road, then he has thrown away everything he has already achieved.” The second half provides some encouragement, somewhat balancing out Yan Hui’s lament in 9.11: the Way is long, but with every step one is making progress. An ancillary point is that, when it comes to self-cultivation, it is the internal decisions of the individual that determine success or failure; as Zhu Xi explains, “The decision to stop or move forward lies entirely within me, and is not determined by others” (cf. 12.1). 9.20 and 9.21 seem to flesh this passage out by providing a model of one who never grew tired or stopped in his forward progress: the perfect disciple Yan Hui.

9.23 子曰：“后生可畏，焉知来者之不如今也？四十、五十而无闻焉，斯亦不足畏也已。”

9.23 This forty or fifty year-old never-do-well is perhaps an example of the “sprout that fails to flower” or “flower that fails to fruit” mentioned in 9.22. Most early commentators take wen 闻(“learning”) as “reputation,” but, as Wang Yangming observes, “Confucius himself said, ‘This is reputation, not achievement,’ so why would he consent to using reputation as a standard for evaluating a person?” Wang is referring to 12.20, where Confucius rejects public reputation as an indication of a scholar’s level of achievement, and instead directs his questioner to look to a person’s actual comportment and level of personal virtue. We see other passages where Confucius is suspicious of public opinion as a measure of true attainment (13.24), and that fact combined with the common theme of learning in the surrounding passages argue for wen as “learning.”

9.24 子曰：“法语之言，能无从乎？改之为贵。巽与之言，能无说乎？绎之为贵。说而不绎，从而不改，吾末如之何也已矣。”

9.24 As Sun Chuo comments, “The Master is criticizing those who consent superficially but do not transform their hearts.” Nominal assent to the Confucian Way is insufficient—one must love the Way and strive to embody it in one’s person. The problem is what the teacher is to do with a student who intellectually understands or superficially agrees with the Way but cannot summon up the genuine commitment required of the gentleman. Confucius’ lament here is clearly related to the sarcastic 9.18: none of his contemporaries seems to have a problem finding the motivational energy required for the pursuit of sex, but their enthusiasm seems to flag when the object of pursuit is the Way. Cf. the Master’s difficulties with unmotivated disciples in 5.10 and 6.12, and his comment in 15.16.

9.29 子曰：“知者不惑，仁者不忧，勇者不惧。”

9.29 As Sun Chuo comments, “The wise are able to clearly distinguish between things, and therefore are not anxious. One who is at ease in Goodness is constant in his joy, and therefore is free of anxiety”; Miao Xie adds, “[The courageous person] sees what is right to do and does it, without being intimidated by physical force or threats, which is why he does not fear.” Alternately, reading this passage together with 2.4, the wise are free of anxiety because they understand the Confucian Way or the Mandate of Heaven; comparing it to 12.4, the Good are free of worry because they examine themselves inwardly and find nothing to fault. A slightly different interpretation is provided by Brooks and Brooks, who read it as a pair with 9.28: “It is left to the reader to supply the qualifications: the truly wise, ren, and brave; this nuance links 9.29 with 9.28. Doubts, anxieties, and fears are vacillations that negate virtues” (1998: 56). This saying is repeated in 14.28, where these qualities are all attributed to the gentleman, and presented as something beyond the Master’s capabilities.

Book Ten

10.2 朝，与下大夫言，侃侃如也；与上大夫言，誾誾如也。君在，踧踖如也。与与如也。

Confucius is traditionally said to have held the ofﬁce of Minister of Justice in Lu, a relatively minor post, which means that the “ofﬁcers of lower rank” were most likely his colleagues, although they may have included even more minor ofﬁcials under his authority. Confucius effortlessly adapted his countenance and behavior to the demands of the social situation; he was neither overly familiar with his colleagues nor obsequious to his superiors.

10.3 君召使摈，色勃如也，足躩如也。揖所与立，左右手。衣前后，襜如也。趋进，翼如也。宾退，必复命曰：“宾不顾矣。”

Some commentators believe that receiving guests was not part of Confucius’ officials duties, but that he was specially summoned by the head of the Ji Family for this purpose because of his knowledge of ritual. As for his final report, it was the custom in ancient China for the guest to turn around and bow repeatedly as he left; the host (or the host’s proxy, in this case Confucius) could return to his place only after this process was over. Here we see Confucius fulfilling his ritual duties with both precision and grace.

10.10 食不语，寝不言。

That is, he remained thoroughly focused in all of his activities. As Fan Ziyu explains, “The sage preserves his mind and is not distracted: when it is time to eat, he eats; when it is time to sleep, he sleeps. Neither of these times are appropriate for instruction or conversation.”

10.11 虽疏食菜羹，必祭，必齐如也。

As Zhu Xi explains,

When the ancients took their meals, they would take a small portion of each type of food and place it on the ground, among the sacrificial vessels, as an offering to their ancestors. In thus sacrificing to those of previous generations—who were also once people, and thus ate and drank like them—they demonstrated that they did not forget their roots. Even when it came to relatively worthless things, Confucius would always make an offering, and would do so in a respectful manner. Such is the sincerity of the sage.

10.12 席不正，不坐。

Zheng means literally “straight” as well as more abstractly “correct,” and possibly both meanings are intended. Fan Ning takes *zheng* in the literal sense, observing that “a straight mat is a means of expressing reverence and respect.” However, he also notes that, according to some commentators, different ranks of society had different types of seating mats they were ritually sanctioned to use, each being employed in its own proper context. Therefore, we might alternately render the passage, “He would not sit unless his mat were of the correct type.”

10.17 厩焚。子退朝，曰：“伤人乎？”不问马。

Considering that horses were quite valuable commodities and stable hands easily replaceable, Confucius’ response is both unexpected and moving—an expression, as many later commentators have put it, of Confucius’ “humanism.” According to the version of this passage in the Family Sayings of Confucius, the stables mentioned were the state stables of Lu. Most commentators, though, assume that the stables in question were those of Confucius himself, and argue that part of the point of this passage is the Master’s lack of concern for his own material possessions.

10.19 疾，君视之，东首，加朝服，拖绅。

Being sick, he could not rise to greet his lord or properly dress himself in court attire, but it would also be unseemly for him to receive his guest in civilian garb. He thus had himself arranged in bed so that he would be both ritually presentable and facing the door when the lord entered. Some commentators believe that the eastern orientation of the Master’s head was for medical reasons—Huang Kan, for one, explains that east is the direction of *yangqi* 阳气 (“virile/healthy-vital essence”), and thus laying in this direction when sick is advantageous for one’s health. It is more likely, however, a bit of ritual decorum. The *Record of Ritual*, for instance, contains the injunction, “When sitting, the gentleman always takes a place directly facing the window, and

when sleeping, his head is always towards the east.” (Chapter 13 (“Jade-Bead Pendants of the Royal Cap”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 5.) Of course, this ritual injunction possibly has as its origin certain *fengshui* 风水(Chinese geomancy; lit. “wind and water”) considerations.

10.20 君命召，不俟驾行矣。

Setting off immediately is a sign of respect and humbleness, and we see references to the immediate response of a vassal to the summons of his lord as early as Ode 100: “He hustles, throws on his clothes upside down/By his lord he has been summoned.” This ode is quoted in Chapter 27 of the *Xunzi* (“Great Compendium”) after it is explained that “when a feudal lord summons a minister, the minister does not wait for the horses to be hitched to the carriage, but throws his clothes on upside down in his haste and sets out on foot. This is ritual.” (Knoblock 1994: 208. See also the *Record of Ritual*, Chapter 13 (“Jade-Bead Pendants of the Royal Cap”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 17.) Some commentators explain that, since it would be unseemly for an official to travel by foot, after Confucius set out someone would hitch up the carriage and pick him up along the way. The appropriateness of Confucius’ behavior as described here is discussed in *Mencius* 5:B:7.

10.21 入太庙，每事问。

This is a repetition of a portion of 3.15; see that passage for commentary.

10.23 朋友之馈，虽车马，非祭肉，不拜。

A gift of sacrificial meat carries with it a sort of ritual solemnity not possessed by a nonreligious gift, no matter how sumptuous it might be. As Kong Anguo comments, “Not bowing signifies that all that has transpired is an exchange of goods.” There is probably no specific clause in the rites that dictate particular response; rather, Confucius, by virtue of his sensitivity to the ritual value of sacrificial meat relative to a sumptuous— but nonsacred—gift, simply knows how to respond properly.

10.25 见齐衰者，虽狎，必变。见冕者与瞽者，虽亵，必以貌。凶服者式之，式负版者。有盛馔，必变色而作。迅雷风烈，必变。

Many of these items of ritual etiquette are to be found in the Record of Ritual ( Chapter 1 (“Summary of Ritual”); Legge 1967, vol. 1: 94–97.). As in many cultures, pointing was considered rude.

10.27 色斯举矣，翔而后集。曰：“山梁雌雉，时哉时哉！”子路共之，三嗅而作。

This poetic, somewhat cryptic passage has always been very problematic for interpreters and translators, and seems like a nonsequitur at the end of a chapter devoted to short, prosaic descriptions of ritual behavior. Legge refers to it as “a fragment, which seemingly has no connection with the rest of the Book” (1991a: 236), and Leys has even stronger words: “the obscurity of this entire passage has acted as a dangerous stimulant upon the imaginations of many commentators. It seems in fact that the original text has become hopelessly garbled and corrupt; there would be little point in insisting on making sense out of it” (1997: 168). Even the infinitely resourceful Zhu Xi admits to being stumped, and suggests that some explanatory text has been lost. A quite plausible way to understand it, however, is as a summary of the chapter as a whole: different in style from other passages in this Book, it was probably added by the editors as a thematic capstone. While it is not entirely clear *why* the pheasant is being praised for timeliness (perhaps because it knows when to arise, when to alight, and when to fly off), the ideal of “timeliness” (*shi* 时)—according perfectly with the demands of the situation at hand—sums up fairly well the general theme of Book Ten:( If, that is, we see it as a set of descriptions of Confucius’ behavior rather than impersonal ritual

injunctions.) that the Master’s actions accorded perfectly with the demands of ritual propriety, no matter what the circumstances. Timeliness is Confucius’ particular forte, and indeed he is known to posterity (through the efforts of Mencius) as the “timely sage”—the one whose ritual responses were always appropriate to circumstances. As Mencius explains in 5:B:1:

When Confucius decided to leave Qi, he emptied the rice from the pot before it was even done and set out immediately. When he decided to leave Lu he said, “I will take my time, for this is the way to leave the state of one’s parents.” Moving quickly when it was appropriate to hurry, moving slowly when it was appropriate to linger, remaining in a state or taking office when the situation allowed—this is how Confucius was . . . Confucius was the sage whose actions were timely.

Liu Fenglu understands 10.27 in this fashion, quoting *Mencius* 5:B:1 and adding, “Book Ten records the fact that the Master’s words and actions all accorded perfectly with ritual, and all came at the proper time. When it comes to according perfectly with ritual, it is timeliness that is most important.”

Book Eleven

11.4 子曰：“回也非助我者也，于吾言无所不说。”

As Zhu Xi remarks, the comment seems to be meant ironically: the Master is in fact quite happy that Yan Hui “silently comprehends” everything that he hears (cf. 2.9). The Discourses on the Mean comments, “Yan Hui comprehended the essence of the sage, and therefore expressed no exhaustion or difficulties. This is why he alone achieved such an exalted reputation, and ranked at the top of the seventy disciples.”

11.9 颜渊死。子曰：“噫！天丧予！天丧予！”

A touching comment on the importance of Yan Hui for the Master and the affection with which he was viewed. As He Yan notes, “[The Master laments] ‘Heaven has bereft me!’ because losing Yan Hui was like losing himself, and the repetition emphasizes the depth of the Master’s pain and sorrow.” Beginning with Han Dynasty commentators, we also find the theory that Heaven provided Yan Hui as a helper and companion to the sage Confucius, which makes his loss particularly poignant and disturbing.

11.12 季路问事鬼神。子曰：“未能事人，焉能事鬼？”敢问死。曰：“未知生，焉知死？”

In this passage—often cited by Western commentators as an expression of Confucius’ profound “humanism”—we clearly see Confucius’ practical orientation: the aspiring gentleman is to focus his energy on virtuous conduct and concrete learning rather than empty speculation (cf. 7.21). As Huang Kan remarks, “the teachings of the Zhou Dynasty and of Confucius have to do solely with the here and now.” More metaphysically oriented commentators such as Zhu Xi contend that the Master did have esoteric teachings about death and spirits, but that Zilu is simply not yet ready to hear about them, and must complete more basic levels of education before he can receive the esoteric teachings. This, however, is unlikely. As Chen Tianxiang puts it, “The Way of the two sage-lords, the three kings, Duke Zhou, and Confucius focuses solely upon the exigencies of daily human existence and does not depart from them for an instant... nowhere do we hear of teachings concerning various levels of esoteric comprehension that must be completed so that one might understand the mysteries of death . . . The Master correctly saw that Zilu’s questions were only remotely related to practical concerns, and therefore answered him [as he did].”

11.17 季氏富于周公，而求也为之聚敛而附益之。子曰：“非吾徒也。小子鸣鼓而攻之，可也。”

Ran Qiu was serving as the household steward for the Ji Family under Ji Kangzi; cf. 3.6, 6.8, 16.1. An alternate version of this story appears in the Zuo Commentary:

The head of the Ji Family wanted to institute a land tax, and dispatched Ran Qiu to ask for Confucius’ counsel. Confucius replied, “I know nothing about such matters.” Several attempts were made, and finally the head of the Ji Family sent Ran Qiu with a message for Confucius, “You are a respected elder in this state, and I await your help in carrying out this action. How is it that you do not answer me?” Confucius did not send an official reply, but privately he remarked to Ran Qiu, “The conduct of the gentlemanly ruler is measured by ritual. In giving he is generous, in his affairs he upholds the mean, and in levying taxes he follows moderation. For a ruler like this, taxation according to the Qiu model (An ancient taxation system, the details of which are the subject of long and rather tedious commentarial debate) is already sufficient. However, if a ruler does not measure himself with ritual and lets his greed grow to insatiable proportions, then in the end even a land tax will not prove to be enough for him. If the Ji-sun Family head wishes to act in accordance with proper models, he has the standards passed down by the Duke of Zhou. If, on the other hand, he wants to proceed according to his own personal whims, what good will my counsel be to him?” Confucius’ words were not heeded (Duke Ai, Year 11 (485 b.c.e.); Legge 1991d: 826).

11.22 子路问：“闻斯行诸？”子曰：“有父兄在，如之何其闻斯行之？”冉有问：“闻斯行诸？”子曰：“闻斯行之。”公西华曰：“由也问闻斯行诸，子曰‘有父兄在’；求也问闻斯行诸，子曰‘闻斯行之’。赤也惑，敢问。”子曰：“求也退，故进之；由也兼人，故退之。”

That is, one should continue to defer to the judgment of one’s elders and not take the initiative.

For Ran Qiu’s excessive caution or timidity, see 6.12; for Zilu’s recklessness, see especially 5.7. This is a paradigmatic example of how the Master’s teachings were variously formulated depending on the individual needs of his students. As Zheng Xuan puts it, “Each piece of advice was aimed at correcting the fault particular to each person.” Han commentators and early texts take this passage as having to do with specifically with household financial decisions. Bao Xian’s commentary reads, “[This passage is about] matters having to do with saving people from penury or succoring them in need,” and Huang Kan elaborates by explaining that the issue is when it is necessary to consult with one’s elders before providing gifts to friends in need. In contrast, later commentators and Western translators generally take the unspecified thing that is heard of or learned (wen 闻) to be a bit of moral teaching or knowledge. Understood this way, the questions asked by the disciples would be rendered: “learning this teaching/moral principle, should one immediately put it into practice?” This interpretation fits better with 6.13, where Ran Qiu’s timidity has to do with self-cultivation, rather than practical decision making.

11.26 子路、曾皙、冉有、公西华侍坐。子曰：“以吾一日长乎尔，毋吾以也。居则曰：“不吾知也！’如或知尔，则何以哉？”子路率尔而对曰：“千乘之国，摄乎大国之间，加之以师旅，因之以饥馑；由也为之，比及三年，可使有勇，且知方也。”夫子哂之。“求！尔何如？”对曰：“方六七十，如五六十，求也为之，比及三年，可使足民。如其礼乐，以俟君子。”“赤！尔何如？”对曰：“非曰能之，愿学焉。宗庙之事，如会同，端章甫，愿为小相焉。”“点！尔何如？”鼓瑟希，铿尔，舍瑟而作。对曰：“异乎三子者之撰。”子曰：“何伤乎？亦各言其志也。”曰：“莫春者，春服既成。冠者五六人，童子六七人，浴乎沂，风乎舞雩，咏而归。”夫子喟然叹曰：“吾与点也！”三子者出，曾皙后。曾皙曰：“夫三子者之言何如？”子曰：“亦各言其志也已矣。”曰：“夫子何哂由也？”曰：“为国以礼，其言不让，是故哂之。”“唯求则非邦也与？”“安见方六七十如五六十而非邦也者？”“唯赤则非邦也与？”“宗庙会同，非诸侯而何？赤也为之小，孰能为之大？”

The Master’s smile is one of disapproval, probably of Zilu’s abrupt manner as well as the content of his answer. The disciples that follow are noticeably more cautious in their responses.

According to commentators, the Yi River was near Confucius’ home, and the Rain Altar was located just above the river. The “Rain Altar” was so named because traditionally it was a site where ceremonies were performed to pray for rain during times of summer drought, although here it seems to be featuring merely as a pleasant destination for an excursion.

The point of this final remark is that Zihua’s aspiration also involves high-level diplomacy and statecraft, despite the surface humility of his response. According to one plausible interpretation of this passage, the Master is equally disapproving of Zilu, Ran Qiu, and Zihua’s aspirations—all of which are overly focused on statecraft techniques—although only Zilu’s response is audacious enough to provoke a smile. The point is that true government is effected through the superior virtue gained by ritual practice, and the task of the gentleman is to focus on self-cultivation and attaining a state of joyful harmony with the Way. Such wu-wei harmony with the Way is exemplified by Zengxi’s musical bent, his reluctance to speak about his aspirations, and the sense of spontaneous joy in the cultivated life conveyed by his answer. As Li Chong puts it, “Only Zengxi has transcendent aspirations, only he is able to stir up the sounds of Virtue and give expression to the Master’s style and sensibility. His words are pure and remote, his meaning lofty and fitting, and his diligence is certainly something with which one with sagely Virtue would feel an affinity. By comparison, the answers of the other three disciples seem vulgar.” It is interesting to note that the opposition to techniques of statecraft seen here becomes an even more prominent theme in Books Twelve and Thirteen, and may reflect a growing influence of Legalist (fajia 法家) teachings. Another, slightly different interpretation is that the passage is about the importance of “timeliness” (shi 时): although the various aspects of statecraft pursued by the first three disciples are important, only Zengxi perceives that the time is wrong for their application. Mr. Zhou explains that “Zengxi wins approval because he alone understands timeliness,” and Huang Kan elaborates: “At that time the Way was in decline and the world was disordered, and everywhere people were striving against one another, which is why the disciples all had their hearts set on entering official service. Only Zengxi understood the vicissitudes of the age, which is why the Master approved of him.” Following this line of interpretation, some commentators connect 11.16 with 5.7 and 9.14, and see it as a similar expression of Confucius’ frustration with his contemporaries and desire to withdraw from public life.

Book Twelve

12.1 颜渊问仁。子曰：“克己复礼为仁。一日克己复礼，天下归仁焉。为仁由己，而由人乎哉？”颜渊曰：“请问其目。”子曰：“非礼勿视，非礼勿听，非礼勿言，非礼勿动。”颜渊曰：“回虽不敏，请事斯语矣。”

There is a long-running debate in the commentarial tradition concerning how to understand the phrase keji. The translation follows early commentators such as Ma Rong and Huang Kan in taking ke 克(often “defeat,” “overcome”) in the sense of “cutting” or “trimming,” and thus as “imposing restraint” (yue 约). This accords with the common metaphor of ritual as a tool for restraining, regulating, or reshaping one’s native substance (see 1.2, 5.21, 6.27, 8.2, 12.15, and especially 9.11, where Yan Hui notes that the Master “restrains me with the rites”). Ji 己 is taken as the simple first-person object pronoun, rather than having the sense of “selfish desires” (siyu 私欲), as Zhu Xi and later commentators would have it. As Huang Kan explains, “The point is that if one is able to restrain and discipline oneself in order to return to the mean of ritual, this is what it means to be Good. At the time, Confucius’ contemporaries tended to be extravagant and arrogant, exceeding the limits of ritual, which is why he mentions the rites.” For the contrast between looking within oneself and looking to others, cf. 4.14, 14.24, 15.21.

Liu Baonan’s commentary on the second half of 12.1 is very helpful:

Looking, listening, speaking, and moving are all things that come from oneself, not from others, which is why the key to achieving Goodness lies within oneself and does not come from others . . . If only I am able to restrain myself and return to ritual, whenever I am confronted with something that is not in accordance with ritual, I will have within myself the means to restrain my eyes and not look at it, restrain my ears and not listen to it, restrain my mouth and not speak of it, and restrain my heart and not put it into action. This is all that is meant by “restraining oneself and returning to ritual.”

As Brooks and Brooks observe, “the four ‘details’ (trivialized in the Three Monkeys of later art) make two pairs: do not promote impropriety either passively (by seeing or hearing it) or actively (by saying or doing it)” (1998: 89).

12.2 仲弓问仁。子曰：“出门如见大宾，使民如承大祭。己所不欲，勿施于人。在邦无怨，在家无怨。”仲弓曰：“雍虽不敏，请事斯语矣。”

The first set of advice concerns the virtue of dutifulness or respectfulness, the second that of understanding (cf. 4.15). The phrase rendered “in your public or private life” means literally “in the state or in the family,” and this line as a whole might alternately be rendered, “do not let resentment [effect you in your dealings] in your state or in your family.”

12.7 子贡问政。子曰：“足食。足兵。民信之矣。”子贡曰：“必不得已而去，于斯三者何先？”曰：“去兵。”子贡曰：“必不得已而去，于斯二者何先？”曰：“去食。自古皆有死，民无信不立。”

Wang Yangming’s comment on this passage is helpful: Once you have lost the hearts of the people, how can the rest be relied upon? Even if you have grain, would you even get to eat it? Even if your soldiers are numerous, this may merely set the stage for a rebellion. During the Sui Dynasty, Emperor Yang [r. 604–618] caused the fortress of Luokoucang to be built, and during the Tang Dynasty, Emperor Dezong [r. 780–805] built the Qionglin Treasury. They had an overflowing abundance of riches, and piles of grain as high as mountains; when their armies took the field, it was if a forest of trees had sprung up, and their assembled armor and horsemen covered the earth like clouds. Even then, they could not avoid losing their states and ruining their families, because they did not possess the hearts of the people. One who wishes to govern skillfully should think carefully upon this! This passage is primarily advice to the aspiring ruler. Li Chong additionally sees it as reflecting Confucius’ valuing of morality and the Way over physical life itself: “Confucius valued being able to ‘hear in the morning that the Way was being put into practice, and thus dying that evening without regret’ [4.8], while Mencius celebrated the ability to ‘abandon life in order to hold fast to rightness’ [6:A:10]. From ancient times we have had the imperishable Way, and yet there have never been imperishable people. Therefore, to allow one’s body to die is not to necessarily to sacrifice the [true] self, while to keep oneself alive at any cost in fact involves losing oneself.”

12.9 哀公问于有若曰：“年饥，用不足，如之何？”有若对曰：“盍彻乎？”曰：“二，吾犹不足，如之何其彻也？”对曰：“百姓足，君孰与不足？百姓不足，君孰与足？”

According to the Annals, the traditional ten percent tithe on agricultural production was doubled by Duke Xuan of Lu in 593 b.c.e., and then continued as standard practice. It is possible that this exchange between Duke Ai and Master You took place during the Lu famine of 484 b.c.e. (Year 14 of Duke Ai’s reign), which occurred after back-to-back plagues of locusts in 484 and 483 b.c.e. Master You is thus suggesting a return to a taxation rate over one hundred years old—quite a radical cutback. Probably the best commentary on this passage is a story from the Garden of Persuasions:

Duke Ai of Lu asked Confucius about governing. Confucius replied, “The purpose of the government is to make the common people rich.” Duke Ai asked, “What do you mean by that?” Confucius said, “Lighten the burden of levies and taxes, and this will make the common people rich.” The Duke replied, “If I did that, then I myself would become poor.” Confucius responded, “An ode says, ‘All happiness to our gentleman-ruler/Father and mother of his people’ [Ode 251]. I have never seen a situation where the children were rich and the parents poor.” (844)

The point, of course, is that if the Duke comported himself as the parent of his people, as he properly should, his sole concern would be for their welfare, not his own financial needs.

12.11 齐景公问政于孔子。孔子对曰：“君君，臣臣，父父，子子。”公曰：“善哉！信如君不君，臣不臣，父不父，子不子，虽有粟，吾得而食诸？”

In Duke Zhao, Year 25 (516 b.c.e.), Confucius arrived in Qi to find that Duke Jing, near the end of his reign, was in dire straights. His nominal minister, Chen Qi, had usurped control of the state, and the Duke’s plan to pass over his eldest son for the succession had set off contention among his sons. Confucius’ advice is thus very topical. His point is that if everyone would simply concentrate on conscientiously fulfilling their role-specific duties, order would result naturally—there is no need for some special technique or theory of “governing” (cf. 2.21, 13.3). Many commentators have seen this passage as concerned with the theme of “rectifying names” (zhengming 正名) mentioned in 13.3, whereby the actualities of one’s behavior should follow the standard set by one’s social role (“name”). This is the import of similar passages in the Annals of Lü Buwei:

Those who govern must make establishing clear distinctions (dingfen 定分) their first priority. When lords and ministers, fathers and sons, and husbands and wives all occupy their proper positions, then the lower member of each pair will refrain from overstepping their place, and the higher member will refrain from behaving arbitrarily. Juniors will not be audacious or unrestrained, and seniors will not be careless or arrogant . . . The difference between what is similar and what is dissimilar, the differentiation between noble and base, and the proper distinction between elder and junior are things about which the Ancient Kings were very careful, and constitute the guiding principle for controlling disorder (Chapter 25.5 (“Keeping to One’s Lot in Life”); Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 637.).

As Zhu Xi observes, Confucius’ attempt to advise the Duke was ultimately for naught: “Duke Jing praised Confucius’ words, but did not subsequently put them into practice. In the end, he failed to clearly establish a successor, and thereby set the stage for the disaster of the Chen clan assassinating their lord and usurping control of the state.”

12.17 季康子问政于孔子。孔子对曰：“政者，正也。子帅以正，孰敢不正？”

As Zhai Hao notes, a passage in the Book of Documents reads: “If you are able to make yourself correct, how can others dare not to be themselves correct?”(Chapter 25 (“Jun Ya”); Legge 1991a: 580.) This is also probably a proverbial saying and is found is various permutations in several early texts. The theme of personal perfection on the part of the potential ruler radiating out to encompass the family, the state, and then the entire world is developed in the opening of the “Great Learning” chapter of the Record of Ritual (Legge 1967, vol. 2: 411–412). Passages 12.17–12.19 are similar in theme, and echo the series 2.19–2.21 in Book Two; also cf. 13.6.

12.18 季康子患盗，问于孔子。孔子对曰：“苟子之不欲，虽赏之不窃。”

Kong Anguo comments, “The point is that the common people are transformed from above, and they do not act in accordance with what their superiors explicitly command, but rather with what their superiors themselves personally desire.” A similar and more elaborate exchange is found in the Zuo Commentary. There we read that Lu was plagued by robbers, and that the head of the Ji Family said to Zang Wuzhong, Minister of Crime at the time, “You are the Minister of Crime, why are you not able to deal with these robbers?” Wuzhong’s reply is similar to that of Confucius:

You, Sir, invite foreign robbers to come to our state and then treat them with great ritual honor—how am I supposed to put a stop to the robbery in our state?... Shu Qi stole cities from Zhu and arrived here, and yet you gave him wives from the Ducal line, as well as other cities, and gave gifts to all of his followers . . . I have heard it said that those above can rule others only after they have purified their own hearts, learned to treat others consistently, and regulated their trustworthiness by means of models and regulations, so that their trustworthiness is clear for all to see. For the model set by the actions of their superiors is what the common people will turn to” (Duke Xiang, Year 21 (551 b.c.e.); Legge 1991d: 490).

Again, the key to political order is personal self-cultivation on the part of the ruler.

12.19 季康子问政于孔子曰：“如杀无道，以就有道，何如？”孔子对曰：“子为政，焉用杀？子欲善，而民善矣。君子之德风，小人之德草。草上之风，必偃。”

An alternate version of this story is found in the Exoteric Commentary:

The state of Lu had a case of a father and son filing civil complaints against each other, and Ji Kangzi wanted to have them executed. Confucius said, “You cannot execute them... When the common people do something that is not right, it is only because their superiors have lost the Way . . . If the superiors make manifest their teachings and then take the lead in obeying these teachings, the common people will then follow as if being impelled by a wind” (Chapter 3.22; Hightower 1952: 100–101; see also 3.24: 105–106.).

We also find this wind metaphor for the virtuous influence of the ruler8 in a passage from the Garden of Persuasions—“Those below are transformed by those above like grass bending in the wind... the direction from which the wind is blowing will determine the direction in which the grass bends. This is why the ruler of men must be very careful about his behavior”—and it also appears in a warning to a ruler in a portion of the Book of Documents: “You are the wind, and the people below are the grass.”(Book 21 (“Jun Chen”); Legge 1991a: 539. Most scholars believe that this book is a forgery dating to the fourth century b.c.e. Also cf. the quotation of 12.19 in Mencius 3:A:2.) In this passage, we see again a suspicion of recourse to legal means and reliance on punishment—widespread disorder among the common people is a sign of immorality among the ruling class, and in such a situation it is actually cruel and unfair to punish the people for their transgressions. Throughout traditional Chinese texts on rulership the common people are portrayed as childlike and easily influenced by their superiors, and therefore not totally accountable for their behavior. Some modern scholars of Confucianism present passages such as Analects 12.17–12.19 as examples of how traditional China had something like the modern Western liberal-democratic ideal of governmental accountability, but it is important not to lose sight of how distinct from modern liberal ideals the early Confucian conception actually was.

12.24 曾子曰：“君子以文会友，以友辅仁。”

Friends in virtue are drawn to each other by their common interest in learning and culture—their common love of the Way—and then support each other in these endeavors. A related passage in the Record of Ritual reads:

When it comes to instruction in the great learning, every season has its appropriate subject, and when the students withdraw to rest, they are required to continue their studies at home . . . Therefore, when it comes to learning, the gentleman holds it dear, he cultivates it, he breathes it, he rambles in it. Because of this, he is at ease while learning and feels affection for his teacher, takes joy in his friends and trusts in the Way. This is why, even when separated from the support of his teacher, he does not go against what he has been taught (Chapter 16 (“Record of Learning”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 85.).

A passage in the Garden of Persuasions puts it more succinctly: “Having worthy teachers and excellent friends at his side, and the Book of Odes, Documents, Ritual, and Music spread out in front of him—few indeed ever abandon the Way and go bad in such an environment.”

Book Thirteen

13.3 子路曰：“卫君待子而为政，子将奚先？”子曰：“必也正名乎！”子路曰：“有是哉，子之迂也！奚其正？”子曰：“野哉由也！君子于其所不知，盖阙如也。名不正，则言不顺；言不顺，则事不成；事不成，则礼乐不兴；礼乐不兴，则刑罚不中；刑罚不中，则民无所措手足。故君子名之必可言也，言之必可行也。君子于其言，无所苟而已矣。”

Lit., the gentleman should “leave a blank space” (que 阙). Cf. 15.26, where que is used in its literal sense, with the point being much the same: the gentleman should not pretend to knowledge that he does not have; also cf. 2.17, where Zilu is also the target of the lesson.

“If names are not rectified, speech will not accord with reality; when speech does not accord with reality, things will not be successfully accomplished. When things are not successfully accomplished, ritual practice and music will fail to flourish; when ritual and music fail to flourish, punishments and penalties will miss the mark. And when punishments and penalties miss the mark, the common people will be at a loss as to what to do with themselves. This is why the gentleman only applies names that can be properly spoken and assures that what he says can be properly put into action. The gentleman simply guards against arbitrariness in his speech. That is all there is to it.”

Reading this passage in light of 12.11 (“let the fathers be true fathers, the sons true sons”), it can be seen as a barb against the ruling family of Wei, whose disordered family relations (discussed in 7.15) eventually threw the state into chaos. The “Duke of Wei” referred to in Zilu’s initial question is thus probably Duke Chu, grandson of Duke Ling and son of Kuai Kui. As Zhu Xi observes, “At this time, Duke Chu was not treating his father as a father, and instead was performing the paternal ancestral sacrifices to his grandfather. In this way, name and actuality were confused, and this is why Confucius saw the rectification of names as the first priority.” Huang Kan quotes a passage from the Exoteric Commentary that shows Confucius putting the rectification of names into practice in the state of Lu:

Confucius was seated in attendance at the side of the head of the Ji-sun Family. The Ji-sun’s steward, Tong, said, “If you, lord, send someone to borrow a horse [from one of your ministers], would it in fact be given to you?” [Before the head of the Ji-sun could reply,] Confucius remarked, “When a lord takes something from a minister, it is called ‘taking,’ not ‘borrowing.’ ” The Ji-sun head understood Confucius’ point, and reproved his steward, saying, “From now on, when speaking of your lord taking something, call it ‘taking,’ do not call it ‘borrowing.’ ” In this way, Confucius rectified the names involved in the expression, “borrowing a horse,” and thereby established clearly a relationship of rightness between lord and minister (Chapter 5.33; Hightower 1952: 190.).

The passage then quotes Analects 13.3, as well as Ode 339: “The lord should not lightly utter his words.” For other examples of the “rectification of names,” see 12.11, 12.17, and 13.14, the story in the Zuo Commentary about Confucius bemoaning the inappropriate use of titles and ritual insignia, (Duke Cheng, Year 2 (588 b.c.e.); Legge 1991d: 344.) and the “Rectification of Names” chapter of the Xunzi. (Chapter 22; Knoblock 1994: 113–138.)

13.4 樊迟请学稼，子曰：“吾不如老农。”请学为圃。曰：“吾不如老圃。”樊迟出。子曰：“小人哉，樊须也！上好礼，则民莫敢不敬；上好义，则民莫敢不服；上好信，则民莫敢不用情。夫如是，则四方之民襁负其子而至矣，焉用稼？”

Part of the theme here is clearly the proper distinction between the vocations of the “great person,” or gentleman, and the “little person,” or commoner. The Book of Documents says that “Knowing the painful toil of sowing and reaping... one knows the livelihood of the commoner”;4 similarly, we read in Mencius 3:A:4 that plowing the fields is the “work of the commoner.” There are at least two ways to understand how this relates exactly to Confucius’ response. Commentators such as Li Chong read this passage together with 15.32 (“the gentleman focuses his concern on the Way, not on obtaining food”), as well as the hints of Fan Chi’s acquisitiveness in 6.22 and 12.21, understanding Confucius’ point to be that the gentleman does not give up the pursuit of moral excellence in order to pursue externalities such as food or money. Others, such as Cheng Shude and Jin Lüxiang, read it together with Mencius 3:A:4 as an attack on the so-called “Divine Farmer” (shennong 神农) or “primitivist” movement. This movement—which produced a host of writings recorded in the History of the Han, and which was probably also the incubator of the famous Daoist text Laozi—advocated a kind of agricultural communism: educated people should withdraw from public life into isolated agricultural communities, where social distinctions would be abolished and the educated would plow the fields alongside the commoners, everyone sharing in the tasks required to sustain life. In 3:A:4, Mencius defends Confucian social distinctions and division of labor against this “leveling” doctrine, arguing that, just as the heart-mind is the ruler of the body, those who work with their minds should rule over those who work with their bodies. We can see Confucius’ response here as a similar counter-argument to primitivist doctrines, by which Fan Chi has apparently been at least partially seduced. This understanding of the passage is supported by 14.39, 18.6, and 18.7, which present encounters between Confucius and his disciples with disillusioned former officials who have apparently turned to the practices of primitivism. The appeal of primitivism to educated elite troubled by the chaos of the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in China should not be unfamiliar to those acquainted with the various “back to nature” movements popular in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, which arose among elite, educated people disillusioned with the ills brought about by modern industrial capitalist societies—and among whom the Laozi was quite popular in English translation.

13.5 子曰：“诵诗三百，授之以政，不达；使于四方，不能专对；虽多，亦奚以为？”

The words of the Odes formed part of the repertoire of an accomplished statesman of the time, who would often quote an apt phrase to make a point or invoke a relevant historical allusion (cf. 16.13, 17.9–17.10). The point here, though, is that merely memorizing the Odes is not enough to make one a good messenger or envoy—one must also learn to think on one’s feet. As the Book of Etiquette and Ritual observes of serving as an envoy, “The words one are to speak cannot be determined ahead of time; one must speak in accordance with the situation” (Chapter 15 (“Rites Concerning Official Missions”); Steele 1917, vol. 1: 233.). A story from the Exoteric Commentary refers obliquely to 13.5 in its portrait of a skillful envoy in action:

Duke Jing of Qi dispatched an envoy to Chu. The King of Chu accompanied him in ascending his nine-level throne-dais. Fixing his gaze upon the envoy, the King of Chu asked, “Does the state of Qi have a dais the equal of this?” The envoy replied, “My lord has a place to sit when dealing with governmental affairs. It has three levels of earthen stairs, a roughly-made thatched hut at the top, and unadorned wooden rafters. Even still, my lord feels that he has overworked those who made it, and worries also that he who sits in it will be overly proud. How could my lord have a dais the equal of this one?” Thereupon the King of Chu was ill at ease. Because of his ability to engage in repartee, this envoy can be said to have not disgraced his lord’s commission (Chapter 8.12; Hightower 1952: 266–267.).

13.6 子曰：“其身正，不令而行；其身不正，虽令不从。”

A passage in the New Arrangement elaborates on 13.6:

If you sing and others do not harmonize with you, or you move and others do not follow, it is invariably because there is something lacking within yourself. Therefore, do not descend from your place in order to set the world straight; simply look within yourself. [13.6.] This is the reason the Former Kings were able to simply assume a reverent posture and beckon, and have everyone within the Four Seas respond. This is a case of the regulation of sincere Virtue manifesting itself on the outside. Thus, the ode [263] says, “Because the King’s plans are sincere and reliable, the people of the Xu region come immediately [and submit to his rule].”

Again, we have the theme of wu-wei rulership through personal moral perfection and the power of Virtue; cf. especially 2.1, 2.3, 2.21, 12.17, 13.13, and 15.5.

13.12 子曰：“如有王者，必世而后仁。”

These passages are probably to be read together as a contrasting pair. Liu Baonan, elaborating on Zheng Xuan, understands the “excellent person” in terms of 11.20: someone with considerable native talent, but not yet the equal of a true King. Being excellent—and thus superior to the actual rulers of Confucius’ age—such a series of people could very slowly improve the common people to the point that they could do away with the most onerous of punishments, although not punishment altogether. Commentators such as Zhao Luan emphasize that transformation through the power of Virtue takes at least a generation, because it is gentle, gradual, and lasting, unlike behavioral modification through harsh laws and punishments, which may achieve more immediate—but short-lived—results.

13.16 叶公问政。子曰：“近者说，远者来。”

The Duke, personal name Zigao, was lord of the walled city of She within the powerful state of Chu. Alternate versions of this encounter appear in many Warring States texts; the only significantly different one, found in the Mozi, gives Confucius’ answer as: “Those who are good at governing draw close to them those who are far away, and renew that which is old.”(Chapter 46 (“Geng Zhu”); Mei 1929: 216.) The point seems to concern rule by Virtue, whereby common people are naturally drawn to the kind and Good ruler. The message may be especially intended for the Duke of She because of the harsh legalist practices apparently practiced in the state of Chu, as well as Chu’s policy of aggressive military expansion (cf. 13.18).

13.18 叶公语孔子曰：“吾党有直躬者，其父攘羊，而子证之。”孔子曰：“吾党之直者异于是。父为子隐，子为父隐，直在其中矣。”

This represents the classic statement of the Confucian valuing of familial relations over considerations of public justice that so infuriated the Mohists and statecraft thinkers such as Hanfeizi. Some commentators see this passage as a specific response to Hanfeizi (and thus of quite late provenance), but legalist tendencies probably had their beginning in China long before they were systematized by the late Warring States statecraft theorists. In the Confucian view, proper relations between father and son are the root of Goodness (1.2), and Goodness—rather than rule of law—is the only way to properly order a state (cf. 2.3, 12.13, 12.17–12.19, 13.6). Comparing 13.18 to Mencius 7:A:35 is also helpful:

Tao Ying asked, “When Shun was serving as the Son of Heaven, and Gao Yao was his minister, if the Old Blind Man [Shun’s father] had committed murder, what would have been done?” Mencius replied, “The Old Blind Man would simply have been apprehended.” “Would Shun not have prevented it?” “How could Shun have prevented it? Gao Yao had his rightful duty to perform.” “So what would Shun have done?” “Shun would have regarded giving up his rulership of the world no differently than throwing away an old pair of sandals: he would have secretly taken his father on his back and fled into exile, taking up residence somewhere along the coast. There he would have spent the rest of his days, cheerful and happy, with no thoughts of his former kingdom.”

The emphasis is slightly different here, in that the rightfulness of legal punishment is not denied, but the basic theme is the same: it is the duty of the filial son to sacrifice himself in order to prevent the law from being applied to his father. Alternate versions of the “Upright Gong” story in other Warring States texts present his fault as an overly developed sense of “trustworthiness” (xin 信)—trustworthiness in the sense of “fidelity to one’s word” being closely allied to uprightness (5.24, 17.8). In his commentary to Mencius 4:B:11 (“The great person is not always necessarily true to his word (xin), because he is concerned only with rightness”), Zhao Qi observes that “the fact that rightness sometimes involves not necessarily being true to one’s word is shown by the example of son covering up for the father,” and the Zhuangzi similarly remarks that “Upright Gong reporting his father and Wei Sheng allowing himself to drown are examples of the dangers of trustworthiness.” (Chapter 29 (“Robber Zhi”); Watson 1968: 334. For Wei Sheng, see the commentary to 1.13.) For other criticisms of the virtue of trustworthiness becoming a vice through excess, see the commentary to 1.13, 13.20, and 17.8, where the danger of excessive trustworthiness is described as “harmful rigidity,” and the danger of excessive uprightness as “intolerance.”

13.20 子贡问曰：“何如斯可谓之士矣？”子曰：“行己有耻，使于四方，不辱君命，可谓士矣。”曰：“敢问其次。”曰：“宗族称孝焉，乡党称弟焉。”曰：“敢问其次。”曰：“言必信，行必果，硜硜然小人哉！抑亦可以为次矣。”曰：“今之从政者何如？”子曰：“噫！斗筲之人，何足算也。”

Here again the flexibility and true grace of the gentleman is contrasted with those who are simply “renown” (cf. 12.20, 17.13, 17.18), and those who are too narrowly focused on trustworthiness (cf. 1.13, 13.18) or attaining results (cf. 13.17). As Mencius 4:B:11 observes, “The great person is not always necessarily true to his word (xin), because he is concerned only with rightness.” Apparently even such narrow, rigid officials are to be preferred to the “vessels” (2.12) or “petty functionaries”— doushaozhiren 斗筲之人, lit. “peck and basket men,” which we might have rendered more colloquially as “bean counters”—who dominated public life in Confucius’ age.

13.21 子曰：“不得中行而与之，必也狂狷乎！狂者进取，狷者有所不为也。”

In the commentary to 5.22 we have already cited portions of Mencius 7:B:37, which discusses both 5.22 and 13.21. The “wild” (kuang 狂) have a preponderance of native substance insufficiently shaped by refinement (5.22), while the “fastidious” (juan 狷) lack the passion, flexibility, and courage possessed by a true gentleman. Zilu might serve as an example of the former, while examples of the latter include the excessively “pure” Chen Wenzi in 5.19, the overly cautious Ji Wenzi in 5.20, the excessively scrupulous disciple Yuan Si in 6.5 and 14.1, or the various principled recluses presented in Books Fourteen and Eighteen. These two types represent extremes of the ethical spectrum, and each has its strengths, but it is the mean between these two extremes that is truly desirable.

13.24 子贡问曰：“乡人皆好之，何如？”子曰：“未可也。”“乡人皆恶之，何如？”子曰：“未可也。不如乡人之善者好之，其不善者恶之。”

We see again the suspicion of public opinion voiced in 12.20, 15.28, 17.13, and 17.18. This is related to the deeper problem of separating appearance from substance that motivates both Confucius’ suspicion of glibness and flattery and his tendency to favor native substance over refinement. These themes also appear in 13.25 and 13.27.

Book Fourteen

14.5 南宫适问于孔子曰：“羿善射，奡荡舟，俱不得其死然；禹稷躬稼，而有天下。”夫子不答，南宫适出。子曰：“君子哉若人！尚德哉若人！”

Kong Anguo identifies Nangong Kuo as a minister in the state of Lu, an unusually virtuous member of the Three Families, and son of the Meng Yizi mentioned in 2.5; Zhu Xi believes him to be the Nan Rong mentioned in 5.2. Both Yi and Ao were legendary martial heroes of the Xia Dynasty with questionable morals: Yi usurped the throne of one of the kings of the Xia Dynasty, and Ao was the son of one of Yi’s ministers. Ao subsequently murdered and dethroned Yi, and was in turn slain and overthrown by one of his own ministers (For the legend concerning these two figures, see the Zuo Commentary, Duke Xiang, Year 4 (568 b.c.e.); Legge 1991d: 424). Yu and Hou Ji, on the other hand, were moral worthies and heroes of civilized arts: Yu tamed the Yellow River and introduced irrigation, receiving the rulership of the world from Shun in return, while Hou Ji (“Lord Millet”) is the mythical founder of agriculture and progenitor of the Zhou royal line (See the Book of Documents 55 (“Punishments of Lu”; Legge 1991b: 595) for legends of these two figures). The point is that the world is won through moral cultivation and civilization rather than martial prowess; cf. 8.10, 14.4, and 17.23, where mere martial courage is dismissed as inferior to the balanced moral courage of the gentleman. Zhu Xi suggests that Nangong Kuo meant to compare Confucius to Yu and Ji, and that Confucius remains silent out of modesty: “Probably Kuo brought up Yi and Ao as analogies to the wielders of power in Confucius’ time, and Yu and Ji as analogies to Confucius himself, and this is why Confucius did not answer.”

14.12 子路问成人。子曰：“若臧武仲之知，公绰之不欲，卞庄子之勇，冉求之艺，文之以礼乐，亦可以为成人矣。”曰：“今之成人者何必然？见利思义，见危授命，久要不忘平生之言，亦可以为成人矣。”

Zang Wuzhong (grandson of the Zang Wenzhong mentioned in 5.17; cf. 14.14) and Meng Gongchuo (14.11) were both respected officials in Lu, and Zhuangzi was an official in the walled city of Bian, on the eastern border of Lu, who was legendary for his courage. For Ran Qiu as master of the cultural arts, see 6.8. The point here is that only the possession of all of these virtues allows one to merit the description “complete” or “perfect” person (chengren 成人), just as the gentleman, who possesses the overarching virtue of Goodness, is often presented as having a number of the lesser virtues in their proper proportions (13.19, 13.27, 14.4, 15.18, 17.6). Confucius’ qualification in the second paragraph seems analogous to his characterization of “secondrate” (ci 次) scholar-officials in 13.20: in Confucius’ corrupted age, it is perhaps too much to ask for true perfection. Some commentators also see this concession to the lowered standards of his age as an encouragement to Zilu, who may have felt intimidated by the likes of former worthies such as Zang Wuzhong and Zhuangzi of Bian.

14.13 子问公叔文子于公明贾曰：“信乎夫子不言、不笑、不取乎？”公明贾对曰：“以告者过也。夫子时然后言，人不厌其言；乐然后笑，人不厌其笑；义然后取，人不厌其取。”子曰：“其然，岂其然乎？”

Gongshu Wenzi is the posthumous title of Gongsun Ba (alternately Gongsun Zhi), a worthy minister in Wei who apparently passed away before Confucius’ first visit to that state. Little is known about Gongming Jia, but he was presumably Gongshu Wenzi’s disciple or retainer. Gongshu Wenzi clearly had a reputation for virtuous restraint, but what his disciple or retainer is claiming for him is in fact even more impressive. As Huan Maoyong notes, “Not speaking, not laughing, and not taking are all negative restrictions that someone wishing to affect virtue or make a name for themselves could force themselves to adhere to, whereas speaking only when the time is right, laughing only when genuinely full of joy, and taking only what it rightful to take are qualities of the timely sage.” Confucius’ disbelief probably stems from the fact that Gongming Jia is claiming that his master was a true gentleman, embodying the Way in an wu-wei fashion, rather than merely one of the lesser, fastidious men whom Confucius is accustomed to encountering.

14.24 子曰：“古之学者为己，今之学者为人。”

Kong Anguo and Huang Kan understand this in terms of the words versus actions dichotomy we have already seen several times. Kong explains, “Those who study for their own sake actually personally put it into practice, whereas those who do it for the sake of others are only able to talk about it.” Huang elaborates:

The ancients learned about those things in which they themselves did not yet excel. Thus, they would study the Way of the Former Kings, desiring thereby to personally put it into practice and perfect themselves, nothing more. People in Confucius’ age, on the other hand, did not learn in order to remedy flaws in their own behavior, but rather with the sole purpose of lording it over others and having others praise them as excellent.

Reading this passage along with 4.2, 4.5, 4.9, 4.11–4.12, 4.16, 14.23, and 14.30, a related interpretation is to see the issue as one of motivation: the gentleman learns for the sake of his own improvement and out of love of the Way, whereas the petty person learns in order to acquire an official position and salary. This is how Xunzi understands it; after quoting 14.24, he adds: “The gentleman learns in order to improve himself, whereas the petty person uses learning like a ceremonial offering of birds and calves [i.e., to attract their superior’s attention].”(Chapter 1 (“Encouraging Learning”); Knoblock 1988: 140. Also cf. the comparison of the “learning of the gentleman” and the “learning of the petty person” earlier in the same chapter (Knoblock 1988: 140).) Cf. 15.21.

14.25 蘧伯玉使人于孔子。孔子与之坐而问焉，曰：“夫子何为？”对曰：“夫子欲寡其过而未能也。”使者出。子曰：“使乎！使乎！”

Qu Boyu was a virtuous minister in the state of Wei; he appears again in 15.6. He is also mentioned in the Zuo Commentary for 558 b.c.e. as a principled minister who leaves a state rather than participate in an uprising against his lord, (Duke Xiang, Year 14 (558 b.c.e.); Legge 1991d: 465.) and must have been significantly older than Confucius. He also appears in the Zhuangzi and Huainanzi. The former text says that he “Qu Boyu has been going along for sixty years and has changed sixty times, and there has never been a case where he did not start out saying something was right and end up rejecting it as wrong,” (Chapter 25 (“Ze Yang”); Watson 1968: 288.) and the latter that “Qu Boyu, at age fifty, realized that he had been wrong for forty-nine

14.27 子曰：“君子耻其言而过其行。”

As Huang Kan explains, “The gentleman is the type of person who pays attention to his words and is careful about his behavior.” Cf. 1.14, 2.13, 4.22, 4.24, 12.3, and 14.20.

14.29 子贡方人。子曰：“赐也贤乎哉？夫我则不暇。”

Despite the importance of being able to evaluate the character of others that has been stressed throughout this Book, one must not be too eager to pass judgment on others. As we saw immediately in 14.28, even the Master did not presume to declare himself a true gentleman or sage (cf. 7.34), and in that light Zigong’s pretension to be an arbiter of virtue becomes even more absurd. This passage might also be compared to other passages where Zigong is criticized by Confucius for being too strict and judgmental with others—i.e., for not moderating his duty-defined demands on others with understanding. The translation follows Zheng Xuan, who reads fang 方 as equivalent to bang 谤(“criticize, slander”). This is supported by 15.25 (“When it comes to other people, who should I criticize and who should I praise?”), and is how the passage is understood in the Record of the Three Kingdoms:

Criticism and praise are the source of hatred and love, and the turning point of disaster or prosperity. Therefore, the sage is very careful about them. This is why Confucius said, [quotes 15.25 and 14.29]. If even with the Virtue of a sage Confucius was this reluctant to criticize others, how more reluctant should someone of moderate Virtue be to carelessly criticize and praise?

This is also how the passage is understood by Wu Kangzhai, who remarks, “If day and night I am ceaselessly toiling away at the task of self-examination, where will I find the time to examine others? If I focus my attention on criticizing others, then my efforts with regard to regulating myself will be lax. One cannot but be on guard against this fault!”

14.30 子曰：“不患人之不己知，患其不能也。”

As Wang Kentang comments, “This is because having ability or not is something that lies within one’s own control, whereas whether or not one is recognized is under the control of others.” Cf. 1.16, 4.14, 15.19, 15.21.

14.34 或曰：“以德报怨，何如？”子曰：“何以报德？以直报怨，以德报德。”

The initial quoted phrase appears in the Laozi (Chapter 63)—and Confucius’ response to it is certainly anti-Laozian in flavor—but it was likely a traditional saying not necessarily identified with the Laozi itself. As He Yan notes, de here is used in the more archaic sense of “kindness,” and it is possible that 14.33 and 14.34 were paired together because they both use de in something other than the standard Confucian sense. The point of 14.34 seems to be that order is brought about through proper discrimination. Each type of behavior has a response that is proper to it: injury should be met with sternness, whereas kindness is to be rewarded with kindness. Failure to discriminate in this way is an invitation to chaos; as Huang Kan notes, “The reason that one does not repay injury with kindness is that, were one to do so, then everyone in the world would begin behaving in an injurious fashion, expecting to be rewarded with kindness. This is the Way of inviting injury.” For Confucius, being impartial or just (gong 公) means to discriminate properly, giving to each his due.

14.35 子曰：“莫我知也夫！”子贡曰：“何为其莫知子也？”子曰：“不怨天，不尤人。下学而上达。知我者，其天乎！”

Another comment on the Master’s failure to find employment or official recognition (cf. 9.13), but the hint of bitterness is then tempered, perhaps in response to the injunction in 14.30 to “not worry that you are not recognized by others, but rather worry that you yourself lack ability.” Confucius pursues that which lies within his own control—the study of the Way—and does so for his own self-improvement (14.24), consigning the vagaries of official recognition or attainment of office to fate. Kong Anguo understands that which is “below” as “human affairs,” and that which is “above” as “knowing the Heavenly Mandate.” Probably what is being described is similar to the progression found in 2.4, where learning and ritual lead to an understanding of Heaven and an wu-wei harmony with the Way of the Ancients. In the end, Confucius thus finds comfort in the thought that, though he is neglected by the rulers of his time, at least Heaven understands him.

14.36 公伯寮诉子路于季孙。子服景伯以告，曰：“夫子固有惑志于公伯寮，吾力犹能肆诸市朝。”子曰：“道之将行也与？命也。道之将废也与？命也。公伯寮其如命何！”

Zilu was at this time presumably working as steward for the Ji Family. Zifu Jingbo, a minister in the state of Lu—Liu Baonan claims that he was a kinsman of the Meng Family—is claiming that he has enough influence with Ji Kangzi that he can both convince him of Zilu’s innocence and see to it that his fellow minister, Gongbo Liao, is punished for his slander. The punishment in such a case of ministerial malfeasance would be public execution, after which, according to Zhou custom, the corpse would be displayed in public for three days. Confucius, sure of his correctness and the correctness of his disciple, sees no need for such machinations. The attitude expressed here is not so much passive fatalism as a surety in one’s own rectitude and a confidence that Heaven’s will shall be done (cf. 9.5). As Zhang Erqi comments,

That which is certain and cannot be evaded when it comes to the Way of human beings is rightness; that which is original and cannot be disputed when it comes to the Way of Heaven is fate. The fact that poverty, wealth, nobility, baseness, attainment, loss, life, death are all regulated and cannot be forced is the same, whether you are a gentleman or a petty person . . . The gentleman, by means of rightness, makes his peace with fate, and therefore his heart is always calm. The petty person, on the other hand, used cleverness and force in order to struggle against fate, and therefore his heart is always filled with resentment.

Some commentators identify both Gongbo Liao and Zifu Jingbo as disciples of Confucius, but this is unlikely

14.38 子路宿于石门。晨门曰：“奚自？”子路曰：“自孔氏。”曰：“是知其不可而为之者与？”

Most commentators believe the Stone Gate to be one of the outer gates of the capital of Lu, and explain that Zilu is returning from having traveled about with the Master in search of employment. The Lu gatekeeper may be a principled recluse, (3As was mentioned with regard to the border guard at Yi in the commentary to 3.24, disillusioned officials sometimes retired by withdrawing from active life and taking some minor post, such as gatekeeper, that would at least serve to feed their families.) or simply an ordinary functionary, but in any case he shares the view of Weisheng Mou in 14.32 and the recluse in 14.39 that, confronted wherever he goes by indifferent or actively immoral rulers, Confucius should simply give up.

14.39 子击磬于卫。有荷蒉而过孔氏之门者，曰：“有心哉！击磬乎！”既而曰：“鄙哉！硜硜乎！莫己知也，斯己而已矣。深则厉，浅则揭。”子曰：“果哉！末之难矣。”

This event is possibly meant to have taken place during Confucius’ sojourn in Wei after losing office in Lu (3.24). Confucius’ critic is wearing a wicker basket strapped to his back—the sign of a farmer or manual laborer—and yet has an ear for classical music and can quote from the Odes. This would indicate that he is no ordinary commoner, but rather a scholar who has gone into reclusion, whether for philosophical or political reasons. Like the figures in 14.32 and 14.38, he is annoyed at Confucius’ persistence in the face of an indifferent world, and advises him to simply accord with circumstances—as he himself has presumably done. The final comment of Confucius can be variously rendered. The interpretation adopted in the translation takes it to be sarcastic—recluses like this one are taking the easy way out, and their claim to merely be “according with the times” is mere rationalization; alternately, Yu Yue’s understanding of guo 果 (“resolute”) as cheng 诚(“really, sincerely”) makes Confucius’ response somewhat softer and more wistful, though still ultimately disapproving: “Ah, truly that would be the easy way to go!” Cf. 8.7, 18.6 and 18.7.

14.44 阙党童子将命。或问之曰：“益者与？”子曰：“吾见其居于位也，见其与先生并行也。非求益者也，欲速成者也。”

According to most commentators, Que was a district of the suburbs just outside one of the gates of Qufu, Confucius’ home town. The bearing of messages was a fairly complex ritual task, normally born by adults. Confucius’ unnamed interlocutor is impressed by this precocious boy, and expects Confucius to share his admiration.

The Master replied, “I observed him sitting in the presence of adults, and also walking alongside his elders. He is not looking to improve himself, but is just after quick success.”

As we read in 13.17, those who “crave speed will never arrive.” Brooks and Brooks describe this passage as “another vignette of cultural decline in the young; not a desire to improve oneself by associating with his moral superiors, but an eagerness to get ahead by hanging around the powerful” (1998: 169). In his desire for quick success, this young boy arrogantly flouts the dictates of ritual propriety, which require that boys stand while in the presence of adults, and that juniors walk behind their elders. Again, such a lack of deference to elders and ritual respect in a young person will lead to nothing but trouble. Both 14.43 and 14.44 document disturbing signs of ritual carelessness among the youth of Confucius’ age.

Book Fifteen

15.1 卫灵公问陈于孔子。孔子对曰：“俎豆之事，则尝闻之矣；军旅之事，未之学也。”明日遂行。

Confucius is playing on the word chen, which is both a noun referring to military formations and a verb meaning “to arrange” or “set out,” often with reference to ritual vessels. The point, of course, is that the true ruler causes his state to prosper by means of Virtue rather than military force. Some commentators read 15.1 and 15.2 as one passage, arguing that the troubles in Chen described in 15.2 occurred after Confucius left Wei because of his conversation with Duke Ling, but there is no compelling reason to read the passages together.

15.2 在陈绝粮，从者病，莫能兴。子路愠见曰：“君子亦有穷乎？”子曰：“君子固穷，小人穷斯滥矣。”

As Huang Shisan observes, the point of this passage is that “it is only in adversity that the gentleman reveals himself. ‘A fierce blaze or intense fire only adds to the luster of gold’—how true is this proverb!” Besides the oblique reference in 11.2, this is the only appearance of this incident in the Analects, but it was a very popular story in later Warring States texts.

15.5 子曰：“无为而治者，其舜也与？夫何为哉，恭己正南面而已矣。”

Although the concept of wu-wei, or “effortless action,” can be found throughout the Analects, this is the only place in the text where the term “wu-wei” appears. There are two distinct lines of interpretation concerning what it would mean to rule by means of wu-wei. One, beginning with He Yan, understands this passage to be referring to what we might be called “institutional wu-wei.” Under this interpretation, “wu-wei” is to be understood more in its literal sense of “doing nothing,” the point being that, if the ruler can fill his ministerial posts with able people and effectively set the machinery of government in motion, the state will more or less run itself, without any need for action on the part of the ruler himself. As He Yan puts it, “The point is that if you fill your posts with the right people, you can ‘do nothing’ and yet the state will be governed.” This interpretation of 15.5 accords with some of the passages in Book Fourteen that emphasize the importance of employing the right people. Considering the general drift of the Analects, however, it is far more likely that ruling by wu-wei refers to ruling by means of Virtue: the ruler morally perfects himself and thereby effortlessly transforms everyone around him. “Wu-wei” in this sense is thus not meant literally (“doing nothing”), the point rather being that one does not force anything or attempt consciously to achieve results—one simply “follows the desires of the heart” (2.4) and everything else falls into place. As Wang Fuzhi explains in his commentary on 15.5,

Shun’s wu-wei is similar to Confucius’ not innovating [7.1]: in both cases, the point is that one follows along with the times and thus utilizes them effectively, thereby gradually accumulating one’s achievements. “Making oneself reverent” refers to cultivating Virtue within oneself; “taking one’s position facing South” refers to allowing one’s regulating force to be applied to the common people. All of this refers to the constant Way of the ruler, and cannot really be spoken of as “doing” anything in particular.

This idea of “ruling by not ruling”—concentrating on self-cultivation and inner Virtue and allowing external things to come naturally and noncoercively—has been a constant theme throughout the Analects, but cf. especially 1.12, 2.19–2.21, 12.17–12.19, and 13.6. Zhu Xi somewhat bridges the two different interpretations with his observation that “ruling by means of wu-wei refers to the sage accumulating Virtue and thereby transforming the common people, so that there is no need to wait for him to actually do anything in particular... Moreover, in this way he also attracts the right people to fill the various offices, which makes it even less likely that one will see traces of the ruler’s actions.”

15.9 子曰：“志士仁人，无求生以害仁，有杀身以成仁。”

As Kong Anguo remarks, the point is that “the scholar-official of noble intention and the Good person do not overly cherish their own lives.” An alternate version of Confucius’ statements is found in Mencius 3:B:1 and 5:B:7, which recount a story from the Zuo Commentary where a gamekeeper risks death by refusing to answer a rituallyimproper summons from his lord, and then quote Confucius as remarking, “The scholar-official of noble intention never forgets that he may end up in a roadside ditch, and the courageous scholar-official never forgets that he may lose his head.” The idea is that the true devotee of the Confucian Way values it over life itself. This is not to say that such a person is foolhardy or suicidal, merely that, for him, issues of rightness take precedence over self-preservation. As we read in Mencius 6:A:10,

Fish is something that I desire; bear’s paw [a rare delicacy] is also something that I desire. If it is not possible to obtain both at the same time, I would give up the fish and take the bear’s paw. Life is something that I desire; rightness is also something that I desire. If it is not possible to obtain both at the same time, I would give up life and take rightness. This is because, although life is something that I desire, there are things that I desire more than life. Therefore, life is not something that I seek to preserve at any cost. Death is something that I hate, and yet there are things that I hate even more than death. This is why there are troubles that I do not choose to avoid.

The Mencius passage is targeted at the self-preservationist school exemplified by Yang Zhu, and it is possible that 15.9 has a similar target.

15.11 颜渊问为邦。子曰：“行夏之时，乘殷之辂，服周之冕，乐则韶舞。放郑声，远佞人。郑声淫，佞人殆。”

The calendar of the Xia—which was in fact something like a combination calendar and almanac, providing instructions for what to do at various points in the year—began the year in the spring, and was apparently well adapted to the cycles of the seasons and the needs of farmers. The state carriage of the Shang, according to commentators, was stately but relatively unadorned, while the ceremonial cap of the Zhou was elegant and practical; according to Bao Xian, it shielded both the eyes and ears, making it easier to resist distractions and concentrate upon ritual. Both the Shang carriage and Zhou cap thus realized the perfect harmony of form and function without being overly ostentatious. A slightly different interpretation of the carriage and cap is offered by Zhu Xi: the Shang carriage, being an everyday item, exemplified the simplicity of native substance, whereas the Zhou cap, being a special ritual item, represented the flourishing of cultural refinement.

“As for music, listen only to the Shao and Wu. Prohibit the tunes of Zheng, and keep glib people at a distance—for the tunes of Zheng are licentious, and glib people are dangerous.”

The Shao and Wu, as we saw in 3.25 and 7.14, represent the best of classical, properly formed music, in contrast to the licentious, seductive popular music of Zheng that was the rage among Confucius’ contemporaries. The lyrics of the Zheng music were somewhat racy, (Refer to the Book of Odes, “Airs of Zheng” (numbers 75–95)) and although little is known about the exact nature of the music, commentators assert that it had a simple but catchy beat, was sung by mixed groups of men and women, and gave rise to sexual improprieties—all of which should sound very familiar to concerned parents of any nation or age. As Waley notes,

Toward classical music, the “music of the former kings” (Mencius 1:B:1), ordinary as opposed to serious-minded people had the same feelings as they have towards our own classical music today. “How is it,” the Prince of Wei asked Zixia, “that when I sit listening to old music, dressed in my full ceremonial gear, I am all the time in terror of dropping off asleep; whereas when I listen to the tunes of Zheng and Wei, I never feel the least tired?” (Waley 1989: 250; the citation is from the Record of Ritual, Chapter 19 (“Record of Music”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 116–177. In his response to the prince, Zixia defends the salutary effects of ancient music, condemns the bizarre excesses of the new music, and concludes by reproving the prince for his taste with words that should sound familiar to any curmudgeon fed up with the latest musical fad: “what you just asked about, Sir, was music, but what you happen to like is mere sound.”).

For more on Confucian education and music, cf. 8.8 and 9.15. The tunes of Zheng were seen as counterfeits of true music, just as glib speakers were viewed as counterfeits of genuinely virtuous people. The two are mentioned together because the danger they represent is similar: because of their surface appeal, both can easily lead people astray, and this is why someone wishing to order a state must carefully prevent either one from taking hold. As Kong Anguo remarks, “Both the tunes of Zheng and glib people have the power to move people’s hearts, the same sort of power possessed by classical music and worthy men. In the former case, however, this power causes people to fall into licentious disorder and imperils the state, which is why the two things must be gotten rid of and kept at a distance.” A very similar point in made in 17.18, where Zheng music and glib people are condemned along with flashy new colors for corrupting traditional standards and leading to disorder.

15.16 子曰：“不曰‘如之何如之何’者，吾末如之何也已矣。”

The translation follows Zhu Xi, but the Han commentators read it rather differently, along the lines of, “One might say, ‘What can be done? What can be done?’, but there is now nothing that I can do.” Li Chong, for instance, comments that “one must make plans to deal with problems before they have manifested themselves, and regulate situations before they have become disordered. Therefore, what use is it to wait until one is faced with difficulties and only then say, ‘What can be done?’ ” 15.12 might be cited as support for this interpretation, but it requires reading the text in a somewhat awkward fashion, and Zhu Xi’s interpretation is confirmed by an alternate transmission of this passage found in the Luxuriant Dew. The point is one that we have seen before: the Master cannot teach someone who is not driven by a need to learn, and he cannot impart the Way to someone who does not, at some level, already love it. This accounts for the frustration expressed above in 15.13: there is nothing the Master can do with someone who loves female beauty more than Virtue. Cf. 5.10 and 7.8.

15.18 子曰：“君子义以为质，礼以行之，孙以出之，信以成之。君子哉！”

As in 6.18, the gentleman is portrayed as the balanced product of native substance refined by cultural refinement, with both elements portrayed as crucial. As Xia Xichou observes, “The first level [rightness, substance] is the marrow—without it, one would become one of those types who associates with and participates in the corruption of the village worthy [17.12]. Without the second level [cultural refinement], however, one would possess the fault of excessive bluntness, or would fall into the trap of becoming like the excessively fastidious. This emphasis on both is why the teaching of the sage is comprehensive, balanced, and free of flaws.” The focus on rightness also sets up an implicit contrast between the gentleman, who focuses on goods internal to Confucian practice such as rightness, and the petty person, who focuses on externalities. As Wang Yangming remarks, “it is only the gentleman who takes rightness as his substance, in the same way that the petty person takes profit as his substance [4.16]. When one takes profit as one’s substance, one loses entirely the fundamentals of character. Then selfish desires take over the heart and become the ruler of the self; the eyes and ears, hands and feet all become the slave of these desires; and all of one’s movements, words, and actions are subject only to their command.”

15.21 子曰：“君子求诸己，小人求诸人。”

This passage is very similar to 14.24. He Yan also links it to 15.15: “The gentleman makes demands upon himself; the petty person makes demands upon others.” As Yang Shi observes, 15.19–15.21 seem to constitute a set:

Although the gentleman is not distressed that others fail to recognize him, he is nonetheless distressed by the possibility that his name will not be celebrated after he dies. Although he is distressed by the possibility that his name will not be celebrated after he dies, the means by which he seeks [to be worthy of being known] is simply to look within himself and nothing more. The petty person seeks for it in others, and this is why there is no extreme of violating the Way that he will not go to in the pursuit of reward and praise. Although the text of these three passages are not identical, their basic sense is in fact very complementary, and this was no doubt the intention of the editors.

15.24 子贡问曰：“有一言而可以终身行之者乎？”子曰：“其恕乎！己所不欲，勿施于人。”

This is an alternate version of 4.15, which identifies the “single thread” that unifies the Master’s teaching as dutifulness coupled with understanding. It is probable that dutifulness is dropped in 15.24 not only because Zigong asked for “one word,” but also because Zigong already possesses dutifulness to a fault, and in fact needs to learn how to moderate it with understanding (cf. 5.4 and 5.12). This passage can also be seen as a continuation of 15.3: the Master actually identifies his “single thread” to Zigong. A passage from the Exoteric Commentary clarifies how understanding in the person of the ruler might function:

The fact that you yourself hate hunger and cold allows you to understand that everyone in the world desires food and clothing. The fact that you yourself hate labor and bitter exertion allows you to understand that everyone in the world desires rest and ease. The fact that you yourself hate poverty and deprivation allows you to understand that everyone in the world desires prosperity and sufficiency. Knowing these three things, the sagely king can order the world without ever having to descend from his seat. Thus, ‘the Way of the gentleman is none other than dutifulness and understanding, that is all’ [4.15] (Chapter 3.38; Hightower 1952: 123).

For more on understanding and the “negative Golden Rule,” cf. 6.30 and 12.2.

15.28 子曰：“众恶之，必察焉；众好之，必察焉。”

Again we have the suspicion of public opinion; cf. especially 13.24. As Wang Su comments, “Sometimes one can play to the crowd and please others in a partisan fashion, and sometimes one takes an unpopular stand in opposition to the crowd. This is why both love and hatred must be carefully examined.” Yang Shi connects this passage to 4.3: “Only the Good person is able to properly love or despise another. If you accept the love or hate of the masses without examining it, you will sometimes fall victim to selfish distortions.” A similar passage in the Guanzi is more narrowly focused on the issue of a ruler knowing his underlings:

If a confused ruler does not examine the achievements of his ministers, he will simply reward those who are praised by the masses. If he does not look carefully into their transgressions, he will simply punish those who are condemned by the masses. In this way, wicked ministers with no achievements will end up being rewarded, and innocent, dutiful ministers will end up being punished (Chapter 67 (“Explanation of ‘Making the Law Clear’ ”); Rickett 1998, vol. 2: 162).

15.29 子曰：“人能弘道，非道弘人。”

As Cai Mo explains, “The Way is silent and without action, and requires human beings in order to be put into practice. Human beings are able to harmonize with the Way— this is why the texts reads: ‘Human beings are able to broaden the Way.’ The Way does not harmonize with humans—this is why the text reads, ‘It is not the Way that broadens human beings.’ ” Liu Baonan similarly argues that the point of this remark is that it is human ability that allows the Way to manifest itself in the world, quoting a line from the Record of Ritual that says, “If you are not able to fully realize virtue, the complete Way will not have nowhere to make itself concrete,” (Chapter 32 (“Doctrine of the Mean”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 323.) as well as a passage from the History of the Han:

When the Way of the Zhou declined with the accession of [the wicked kings] You and Li, it was not that the Way was lost, only that You and Li failed to follow it. With the accession of King Xuan, who focused upon and treasured the Virtue of the Former Kings, that which was stagnant was reinvigorated, and that which was flawed was made complete; the achievements of Kings Wen and Wu were brought back to light, and the Way of the Zhou made its splendid resurgence.

The Way thus is transcendent, in the sense that it continues to exist even when it is not being actively manifested in the world, but it requires human beings to be fully realized.

15.30 子曰：“过而不改，是谓过矣。”

Cf. 1.8. An alternate version of this saying attributed to Confucius in the Exoteric Commentary reads, “If you make a mistake but then change your ways, it is like never having made a mistake at all.” (Chapter 3.17; Hightower 1954: 94.)

15.31 子曰：“吾尝终日不食，终夜不寝，以思，无益，不如学也。”

Cf. 2.15, which presents thinking and learning as equally important. 15.31, in contrast, stresses the danger of thinking in isolation. Rather than attempt to pointlessly reflect on one’s own, the accumulated wisdom of the classics should form the very basis of one’s thinking. Thinking outside the context of learning might be compared to randomly banging on a piano in ignorance of the conventions of music: a million monkeys given a million years might produce something, but it is better to start with the classics (cf. 11.25, 17.10). We find a very similar theme in the Xunzi, which provides a more succinct version of 15.31, “I once spent the entire day doing nothing but thinking, but this is not as good as even a single moment devoted to learning,” and adds:

I once stood on my tiptoes to look into the distance, but this is not as good as the broad view obtained from climbing a hill. Climbing a hill and waving your arms does not make your arms any longer, but they can be seen from farther away; shouting downwind does not make your voice any louder, but it can be heard more clearly; someone who borrows a carriage and horses does not improve the power of his feet, but he can travel a thousand li; someone who borrows a boat and paddle does not thereby become able to swim, but he can cross great rivers. The gentleman by birth is not different from other people—he is simply good at making use of external things. (Chapter 1 (“Encouraging Learning”); Knoblock 1988: 136.)

15.36 子曰：“当仁不让于师。”

Deference to elders and teachers is a virtue, but, when it comes to being moral, any hesitation or deference is both unnecessary and harmful. As Zhang Ping comments, “Putting others before oneself, showing no concern for one’s physical well-being but caring for things, treading the way of modesty and dwelling in humbleness—these are the means by which one practices Goodness. Acting in this way does not mean that one is not fond of showing deference, it just means that the Way is something with regard to which one does not defer.”

15.37 子曰：“君子贞而不谅。”

Again we have the concern about petty or rigid trustworthiness (liang 谅); for the dangers of excessive or inflexible trustworthiness, cf. 1.13, 13.18, 13.20, and 17.8, and for the importance of flexibility in general, cf. 19.11. As Huang Kan comments, “The gentleman uses discretion to respond to changing circumstances and does not have any single, constant way of doing things. In his handling of affairs he must sometimes bend the rules in order to harmonize with the Way and properly realize principle. Therefore, when the gentleman does something, he is not bound by petty fidelity (xin) like those who ‘strangle themselves in some gully or ditch.’ [14.17]”

15.41 子曰：“辞达而已矣。”

As a general statement, this is probably meant as a warning against glibness or cleverness of speech—i.e., allowing the embellishments of cultural refinements to overwhelm the basics of native substance. This is the point of the grammatically very similar 19.14, which concerns ritual behavior rather than speech: “Mourning should fully express grief and then stop at that.” As Kong Anguo remarks, “In all things, never allow the substance of the matter to be exceeded. When words convey their point, leave it at that—do not needlessly complicate matters with refined and voluptuous (wenyan 文言) words.” Gui Fu notes a parallel passage in the Book of Etiquette and Ritual where the context more narrowly concerns the speech of an official envoy: “If one’s words are excessive, one comes off as pedantic; if one’s words are too few, however, the point [of the mission] is not conveyed. The perfection of meaning is realized when words are just adequate to convey the point.” (4Chapter 18 (“Ritual for Official Visits”); Steele 1917, vol. 1: 233–234.)

Book Sixteen

16.4 孔子曰：“益者三友，损者三友。友直，友谅，友多闻，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，损矣。”

We see here again the importance of choosing one’s friends properly; cf. 1.8, 9.25, 9.30, 12.24, 15.10, 16.5. As Wang Yangming comments,

In life, it is impossible to go without friends, and when making friends it is unacceptable not to be selective. Befriending those who are upright, true to their word, and broadly learned, you will always get to hear of your own transgressions, learn things that were previously unknown to you, develop your excellences and remedy your faults, open and expand your heart, and every day make further progress in rendering both your Virtue and learning bright and noble. On the other hand, associating with clever flatterers, dissemblers, and the glib will make you dependent upon flattery and constant affirmation; no one will demand excellence of you, and you will grow self-satisfied and complacent; arrogance will develop and you will pursue wrongness, to the point that every day your Virtue and learning will descend further into the depths of immoral crudeness. The benefit and harm provided by friendship are not to be underestimated, and therefore you cannot but be careful in choosing your friends!

16.5 孔子曰：“益者三乐，损者三乐。乐节礼乐，乐道人之善，乐多贤友，益矣。乐骄乐，乐佚游，乐宴乐，损矣。”

In this companion passage to 16.4, we see how one’s affective responses have significance for moral cultivation: one must learn to take joy in the right sorts of things, because only one who actively takes joy in the Way can genuinely master it (6.20). Both Confucius and Yan Hui seem to have naturally possessed this joy in the Way, but of course the trick is how one can instill this joy in a person who lacks it or, conversely, how one who lacks this joy can go about acquiring it. Cf. 4.6, 5.10, 6.12, 7.30.

16.8 孔子曰：“君子有三畏：畏天命，畏大人，畏圣人之言。小人不知天命而不畏也，狎大人，侮圣人之言。”

This parallel to 16.7 can perhaps be compared to 2.4, where recognizing or understanding (zhi 知) the Mandate of Heaven is presented as an essential step in comprehending the Way and achieving wu-wei perfection. Two views on how to understand “great men” can be traced back to He Yan and Zheng Xuan, with He Yan arguing that it refers simply to morally great people, such as the sages, and Zheng Xuan arguing that it refers specifically to socio-political superiors. Either interpretation is plausible, but the metaphorical structure of the concept of the “Mandate of Heaven” supports the latter, suggesting a parallel between submitting to fate and showing due deference to a political superior. Things that are beyond the immediate control of the individual (wealth, fame, health, life-span) are metaphorically “commanded” or “mandated” by the Heavenly ruler, and thus the true gentleman—understood in the metaphor as a loyal minister—submits to these “decisions” without anxiety or complaint. The petty person, on the other hand, has no respect for rank, does not know his place, and is always scrambling to get ahead. Cf. 11.19, where the disciple Zigong, who has been engaging in business speculation and trying to get ahead economically, is criticized for “not recognizing fate-Mandate,” as well as 12.4 and 12.5.

16.9 孔子曰：“生而知之者，上也；学而知之者，次也；困而学之，又其次也；困而不学，民斯为下矣。”

Yan Hui seems to have belonged to the first category (2.9, 5.9, 6.7, 11.4), and Confucius to the second (7.20). In contrast to 15.39, we have here a hierarchy of native ability presented, but the point seems ultimately to be the same: although perhaps more difficult for the less gifted, learning the Way is within the reach of all who are willing to dedicate their life to its pursuit and never give up (cf. 8.7 and 9.11). As Yang Shi observes, “All three of the first categories, although different in terms of native substance, are the same in eventually attaining knowledge. This is why the gentleman values learning, and nothing else. It is only someone who does not learn because he finds it difficult who is ultimately dismissed as inferior.”

16.13 陈亢问于伯鱼曰：“子亦有异闻乎？”对曰：“未也。尝独立，鲤趋而过庭。曰：‘学诗乎？’对曰：‘未也。’‘不学诗，无以言。’鲤退而学诗。他日又独立，鲤趋而过庭。曰：‘学礼乎？’对曰：‘未也。’‘不学礼，无以立。’鲤退而学礼。闻斯二者。”陈亢退而喜曰：“问一得三，闻诗，闻礼，又闻君子之远其子也。”

Boyu is Confucius’ son, and the disciple Ziqin is curious to see if, because of his special relationship to the Master, he has obtained any sort of esoteric learning not shared with the other disciples.

Along with 8.8, this passage serves as one of the clearer expressions of the constitutive function of the Confucian tradition: learning the Odes provides one with the resources to speak (cf. 13.5, 17.9–17.10), and learning ritual provides a model for everyday behavior, allowing one to “take one’s place” among other adults in society (cf. 2.4, 12.1, 20.3). As Huang Kan notes, “The rites are the root of establishing one’s self by means of reverence, frugality, gravity, and respectfulness. With the rites, one can be at ease; without the rites, one will be imperiled.” Regarding the principle of “keeping one’s son at a distance,” Sima Guang remarks, “To ‘keep at a distance’ refers not to being cold or alienating, but rather to being timely in the way one allows one’s son to approach, and always receiving him with ritual propriety. The point is simply that father and son do not consort with one another day and night in an indecently familiar manner.” A passage from the Summary of Discussions suggests that such formality does not extend to the third generation: “The gentleman keeps his sons at a distance, but is familiar with his grandsons.” Boyu’s denial that he has received any esoteric instruction accords with the Master’s statement in 7.24 that he “hides nothing” from his disciples, as well as the Analects’s general eschewal of abstruse concerns in favor of the everyday practicalities of self-cultivation (5.13, 7.21, 7.25).

Book Seventeen

17.2 子曰：“性相近也，习相远也。”

Although not a primary concern for Confucius, the topic of human nature (xing 性) became a central focus of debate in later Confucianism. Mencius famously declared that “human nature is good (shan 善),” and repeatedly defended this claim against his opponents. Xunzi chose human nature as the center of his confrontation with Mencius, famously entitling one of his chapters, “Human Nature Is Bad.” The character of human nature was a topic of lively debate throughout pre-Tang Confucian thought, with various positions—it is good; it is bad; it is neutral; it is mixed (some people are born good, others bad)—all being defended as expressions of Confucius’ original view. The lack of theoretical consistency in the Analects makes it possible to argue for any of these positions. Passages that emphasize the importance of native substance (zhi 质) (3.4, 3.8) sometimes seem to imply that at least some people are born with the “stuff” of virtue that merely needs to be refined into full Goodness; passages such as 2.9, 5.9, 11.4, 16.9, and 17.3 imply that some exceptional sages (such as Yan Hui) are born fully good, while 5.10 and 17.3 similarly imply that some are born hopelessly flawed. The general tenor of the Analects, however, seems to be summed up fairly well here in 17.2: all people, even non-Chinese barbarians, are born with more or less similar basic stuff, and it is the quality of the tradition into which they are socialized—the consequences of “practice” (xi 习)—that really makes the difference.

17.8 子曰：“由也，女闻六言六蔽矣乎？”对曰：“未也。”“居！吾语女。好仁不好学，其蔽也愚；好知不好学，其蔽也荡；好信不好学，其蔽也贼；好直不好学，其蔽也绞；好勇不好学，其蔽也乱；好刚不好学，其蔽也狂。”

As Kong Anguo explains, “Zilu had stood up to answer the Master [as required by ritual], and therefore the Master tells him to take his seat again.”

“Loving Goodness without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of foolishness. Loving wisdom without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of deviance. Loving trustworthiness without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of harmful rigidity. Loving uprightness without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of intolerance. Loving courage without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of unruliness. Loving resoluteness without balancing it with a love for learning will result in the vice of willfulness.”

The “six words” are the six virtues named, each paired with an attendant vice (bi 蔽; lit. “obscuration”). Learning is presented as a force able to restrain or regulate the inherent emotional “stuff” of human beings, which would tend toward excess if left to develop on its own; cf. 8.2, where the restraining force is ritual. The discipline provided by training in traditional cultural forms allows one to reshape one’s native substance and hit on the mean of virtue (cf. 1.12). This description of the “six virtuous words” and their attendant vices is reminiscent of Aristotle’s discussion of the virtues and their excesses and deficiencies. Aristotle describes his virtues as the mean (mesotes) point between two extremes: truthfulness or straightforwardness, for instance, is the mean between the vice of excess (boastfulness) and the vice of deficiency (selfdeprecation).( Nicomachean Ethics 1127a–b.) Although Confucius discusses his virtues in pairs (the virtue and its excess when not restrained by the rites or learning) rather than triads (the virtues and its excess and deficiency), the basic conceptual structure of the “mean”—in Chinese, zhong 中, or “the center of an archery target”—is very similar, based as it is on the metaphor of a physical continuum with extreme ends or edges and a desirable midpoint. For more on the mean in the Analects, cf. 6.29, 13.21, 20.1.

17.9 子曰：“小子！何莫学夫诗？诗，可以兴，可以观，可以群，可以怨。迩之事父，远之事君。多识于鸟兽草木之名。”

For the Odes as a source of inspiration, cf. 8.8, and as a resource for interpersonal communication, cf. 13.5. This passage fleshes out Confucius’ comment in 16.13 to his son, Boyu, that “unless you learn the Odes, you will be unable to speak.” As Zhu Xi comments,

The Odes stimulate the mind and inspire the ambition, and examining them allows one to understand success and failure. They express harmony without getting carried away, and express complaint without falling into anger. With regard to the Way of human relationships, there are none which are not contained in the Odes; these two [i.e., serving one’s father and one’s lord] are cited because they are the most important. Moreover, the remainder of the Odes is able to serve as a broad resource for a knowledge of things in the world.

The Odes play a broad role in fostering in the individual the ability to speak and interact socially, providing the student with everything from quotations and turns-of-phrase useful in social situations to exemplary models of the most important role-specific duties. Seen in this light, the Master’s rebuke of Boyu in 17.10 is quite understandable.

17.10 子谓伯鱼曰：“女为《周南》、《召南》矣乎？人而不为《周南》、《召南》，其犹正墙面而立也与？”

The “South of Zhou” and “South of Shao” are the first two sections of the “Airs of the States” portion of the Book of Odes, and here probably stand in for the Odes as a whole. The sense of this passage is thus similar to 16.13 and 17.9: without the knowledge provided by the Odes, one will lack the means to think clearly or associate with others. Some commentators believe that it is merely these two sections of the Odes that Confucius has in mind, but the sense is in any case much the same. As Liu Baonan remarks,

It seems to me that these two sections of the Odes are entirely concerned with the Way of husbands and wives, which in turn is the first step in kingly moral transformation. Thus, the gentleman, in reflecting upon himself, must first cultivate it inside. Only then can he use it to discipline his wife, extend it to his brothers, and finally rely upon it to manage the state. The History of the Han says, “Once the Way of the household is cultivated, the principle of the world is obtained.” This is exactly what I mean. Is it not also possible that, at the time this dialogue occurred, Boyu was establishing his household, and the Master therefore particularly singled out the “South of Zhou” and “South of Shao” in order to instruct him?

17.11 子曰：“礼云礼云，玉帛云乎哉？乐云乐云，钟鼓云乎哉？

Reading this passage together with 3.3 and 3.12, one point could be that, just as true music requires not merely instruments, but also sensitive musicians to play them, so true ritual requires not merely traditional paraphernalia, but also emotionally committed, sensitive practitioners. Most commentators, however, understand the message as concerning the confusion of means and ends among Confucius’ contemporaries. As Wang Bi comments,

The governing principle of ritual is respect; jade and silk are merely the means for expressing and adorning respect. The governing principle of music is harmony; bells and drums are merely the tools with which music is made. In Confucius’ age, that which went by the name of “ritual” emphasized gifts and offerings at the expense of respect, and that which went by the name of “music” failed to harmonize with the Ya and Song, despite its profusion of bells and drums. Therefore Confucius is here attempting to rectify the meanings of these words.

Understood this way, this passage may serve as another example of the “rectification of names” that Confucius held to be so important (cf. 6.25, 12.11, 13.3).

17.13 子曰：“乡原，德之贼也。”

Probably the best commentary on this passage is Mencius 7:B:37, where Mencius quotes 17.13, and then is asked for further explanation by the disciple Wan Zhang:

“What sort of person is this, who is referred to as a ‘village worthy’?”

“He is the type of person who says, ‘Why be so grandly ambitious?’ His words have nothing to do with his actions, and his actions have nothing to do with his words. Such a person then goes on to declare, ‘The ancients, the ancients, why were they so standoffish and cold? When you are born in an age, you should accommodate yourself to it. As long as you do so skillfully, this is acceptable.’ Someone who, in this way, tries to surreptitiously curry favor with his contemporaries—this is the ‘village worthy.’ ”

“If everyone in a village praises a man as being worthy, and nowhere can you find someone who does not consider him worthy, what did Confucius mean by calling such a person a ‘thief of Virtue’ ?”

“Those who try to censure him can find no basis; those who try to criticize him can find no faults. He follows along with all the vulgar trends and harmonizes with the sordid age. Dwelling in this way he seems dutiful and trustworthy; acting in this way, he seems honest and pure. The multitude are all pleased with him—he is pleased with himself as well—and yet you cannot enter with him into the Way of Yao and Shun. This is why he is called the ‘thief of Virtue.’ Confucius said, ‘I despise that which seems to be but in fact is not. I despise weeds, for fear they will be mistaken for domesticated sprouts. I despise glibness, for fear it will be mistaken for rightness. I despise cleverness of speech, for fear it will be mistaken for trustworthiness. I despise the tunes of Zheng, for fear they will be mistaken for true music. I despise the color purple, for fear it will be mistaken for vermillion [17.18]. I despise the village worthy, for fear that he will be mistaken for one who truly possesses Virtue.’ ”

The village worthy is one who carefully observes all of the outward practices dictated by convention and so attains a measure of social respect, but who lacks the inward commitment to the Way that characterizes the true Confucian gentleman. Confucius refers to him as the “thief of Virtue” because from the outside he seems to be a gentleman laying a false claim to Virtue. By serving as counterfeit models of virtue for the common people, the village worthy is in effect a false prophet, not only blocking the development of true virtue in himself but also leading others astray. This is why Confucius despises him. Cf. 12.20, 13.24, 15.28, and especially 17.18.

17.18 子曰：“恶紫之夺朱也，恶郑声之乱雅乐也，恶利口之覆邦家者。”

Vermillion—the color of the Zhou—was the traditional and proper color for ceremonial clothing, and purple a mixed, more “modern,” and increasingly popular variant; cf. 10.6 and Mencius 7:B:37, quoted in the commentary to 17.13. A passage in the Hanfeizi tells how purple was popularized by Duke Huan of Qi (685–643 b.c.e.), who started a craze for purple garments among his people by wearing purple himself, apparently because he possessed a stock of purple garments he had to unload and wished to create a profitable market for them. “Duke Huan of Qi was fond of wearing purple.” the Hanfeizi says. “The people of Qi esteemed it as well, and were willing to exchange five plain garments for a single purple one.”(Chapter 32 (“Outer Congeries of Sayings, The Upper Left Series”); Liao 1959, vol. 2: 53–54.) The target of Confucius’ scorn is thus perhaps the first recorded marketing fad in history. For the political trouble caused by both the Zheng music and the clever of tongue, see 15.11. The danger represented by all of these phenomena—purple, the tunes of Zheng, clever speakers—derives from the fact that, as Liu Baonan concludes, “they seem to be the real thing, but in fact are not.”

17.19 子曰：“予欲无言。”子贡曰：“子如不言，则小子何述焉？”子曰：“天何言哉？四时行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？”

Reading this passage together with the ones that precede it, the theme is related to the suspicion of glibness and hypocrisy: whenever there is speech, there is the danger of a discrepancy between speech and action, which is why Confucius elsewhere has been led to declare that “the Good person is sparing of speech” (12.3) and “reticence is close to Goodness” (13.27). We see here again the metaphor of Heaven as ruler: Heaven governs the natural world in an effortless fashion, without having to issue orders, and the counterpart to Heaven in the social world is the sage-king of old, someone like Shun, “who ruled by means of wu-wei” (15.5). We have already seen the analogy between the wu-wei manner of ordering the human world and the spontaneous harmony effected by Heaven in the natural realm in 2.1, where one who rules by means of virtue is compared to the Pole Star. Like the natural world, then, a properly ordered human society functions silently, inevitably and unselfconsciously. Confucius’ somewhat exasperated remark here is therefore inspired by the contrast between the natural, silent, and true order that prevailed in ancient times and the garrulous, self-righteous, hypocritical disorder that characterizes his own age.

17.21 宰我问：“三年之丧，期已久矣。君子三年不为礼，礼必坏；三年不为乐，乐必崩。旧谷既没，新谷既升，钻燧改火，期可已矣。”子曰：“食夫稻，衣夫锦，于女安乎？”曰：“安。”“女安则为之！夫君子之居丧，食旨不甘，闻乐不乐，居处不安，故不为也。今女安，则为之！”宰我出。子曰：“予之不仁也！子生三年，然后免于父母之怀。夫三年之丧，天下之通丧也。予也，有三年之爱于其父母乎？”

There is some evidence from early texts, such as the Book of Odes, that a three-year mourning period (usually understood as into the third year—i.e., twenty-five months) for one’s parents had at least some currency. As we have already seen in 14.40, however, this three-year period was viewed as impractical by many of Confucius’ contemporaries, and we mentioned the claim of official in Teng, recorded in Mencius 3:A:2, that such was not even the practice of the ancients. Both of these arguments against the three-year period were later raised and pursued in detail by Mozi (See especially Chapter 25 (“Simplicity in Funerals”); Mei 1929: 123–134.) Here Zai Wo appears as a critic of the practice from within Confucius’ own school, repeating Zizhang’s implicit criticism in 14.40 that three years is impractical and counterproductive, and then adding a novel cosmological twist: if people want to model their behavior on Heaven, the one-year Heavenly cycle should be their standard. Ma Rong explains that the “rekindling of the fire” mentioned by Zai Wo refers to a ritual of renewal whereby, at the beginning of each season, a new ceremonial fire was lit from the wood of a tree appropriate to that season. After the passage of four seasons, the cycle was complete, and thus—Zai Wo claims—should one’s mourning for one’s parents’ death also come to an end. This concern with cosmology marks this passage as rather late. This rather persuasive argument of Zai Wo’s may also be an illustration of the eloquence attributed to him in 11.3, although such facility with words is, of course, a mixed blessing (at best) in Confucius’ eyes, no doubt partly because it allows one to rationalize one’s own immorality (cf. 11.25).

While mourning his parents, a son is restricted to ordinary millet to eat—rice being an unusual luxury in northern China of this time—and rough hemp for clothing, and is to refrain from such pleasures as music or sex. He is also to dwell in a specially built mourning hut rather than his ordinary chambers. Refer to the commentary for 14.40.

Kong Anguo understands this judgment of “not Good” to signify that Zai Wo “lacks a feeling of benevolence (ren’en 仁恩) toward his parents”; such an understanding of ren as a kind of feeling (compassion, empathy) would also mark this passage as rather late (cf. 12.22). Miao Bo, however, argues for a more standard Analects understanding of ren as general moral excellence cultivated by means of ritual: Zai Wo’s failure is not one of feeling, but rather of ritual propriety. What is certainly new here, in any case, is defense of a ritual standard in terms of an essential characteristic of human biology: the fact that an infant is helpless at birth and is completely dependent upon his or her parents for the first three years of life. The implication is that the length of the mourning period is not an arbitrary cultural artifact, but is rather grounded in the very nature of human experience. This sort of direct link between Confucian practice and human nature is rarely postulated in the Analects, but later becomes one of the major elements in the thought of Mencius.

17.23 子路曰：“君子尚勇乎？”子曰：“君子义以为上。君子有勇而无义为乱，小人有勇而无义为盗。”

“Gentleman” and “common person” are here meant in terms of social rank, as in 17.12 and 17.25. The general point is that virtues must be balanced by one another: an individual virtue like courage, possessed in isolation, is potentially dangerous (cf. 8.10). More particularly, some commentators suggest that Zilu has been singled out for this teaching because courage uninformed by other virtues, such as wisdom, was his particular fault (cf. 5.7, 7.11, 11.3, 11.22). For the more general idea of virtues unbalanced by traditional restraints turning into vices, see 17.9.

Book Eighteen

18.6 长沮、桀溺耦而耕，孔子过之，使子路问津焉。长沮曰：“夫执舆者为谁？”子路曰：“为孔丘。”曰：“是鲁孔丘与？”曰：“是也。”曰：“是知津矣。”问于桀溺，桀溺曰：“子为谁？”曰：“为仲由。”曰：“是鲁孔丘之徒与？”对曰：“然。”曰：“滔滔者天下皆是也，而谁以易之？且而与其从辟人之士也，岂若从辟世之士哉？”耰而不辍。子路行以告。夫子怃然曰：“鸟兽不可与同群，吾非斯人之徒与而谁与？天下有道，丘不与易也。”

Confucius and his entourage were apparently attempting to cross a nearby river, but this passage is probably also to be read allegorically: the “ford” is the way out of the “great flood” of chaos mentioned below. The use of self-consciously primitive technology by these two figures (most plows were ox-drawn by this time), as well as their knowledge of Confucius’ identity revealed below, makes it clear that they—like the farmer/music critic in 14.39—are no ordinary commoners, but rather educated, primitivist recluses who have deliberately rejected society and culture. Like many of the figures in the Zhuangzi, their names appear to be allegorical (changju 长沮 means “Standing Tall in the Marsh” and jieni 桀溺“Prominent in the Mud”); the appearance of this literary technique and the complex narrative quality of this passage mark it as quite late.

18.7 子路从而后，遇丈人，以杖荷蓧。子路问曰：“子见夫子乎？”丈人曰：“四体不勤，五谷不分。孰为夫子？”植其杖而芸。子路拱而立。止子路宿，杀鸡为黍而食之，见其二子焉。明日，子路行以告。子曰：“隐者也。”使子路反见之。至则行矣。子路曰：“不仕无义。长幼之节，不可废也；君臣之义，如之何其废之？欲洁其身，而乱大伦。君子之仕也，行其义也。道之不行，已知之矣。”

The old man’s comment is a rhyming verse in the Chinese—an indication that again we are not dealing with an ordinary, illiterate farmer. Its target is both Zilu and Confucius: in his scholar-official dress and with his unsoiled hands, Zilu is clearly not suited to manual labor in the fields. The farmer is gently mocking both Zilu’s uselessness and the sort of education that produced it. Zilu does not respond to this rather rude remark, probably out of respect for the old farmer’s age, and his quiet, dignified demeanor apparently wins the old man over.

Commentators believe that Zilu’s final remarks are delivered to the old farmer’s two sons, presumably to be passed on when he returns. The point is that the old recluse clearly recognizes the first set of relationships (between elders and juniors) in requiting Zilu’s formal hand clasping—an expression of respect by a younger man for an elder—by providing Zilu with proper hospitality and formally presenting his sons, but he ignores the second (between ruler and minister) by living in reclusion and avoiding any sort of official contact. Cf. the account of a similar encounter between Confucius, Zilu, and a recluse in the Zhuangzi (Chapter 12 (“Ze Yang”); Watson 1968, 285–286.).

18.8 逸民：伯夷、叔齐、虞仲、夷逸、朱张、柳下惠、少连。子曰：“不降其志，不辱其身，伯夷、叔齐与！”谓：“柳下惠、少连，降志辱身矣。言中伦，行中虑，其斯而已矣。”谓：“虞仲、夷逸，隐居放言。身中清，废中权。”“我则异于是，无可无不可。”

These men were all famous recluses who withdrew from public service on moral grounds. The version of the Analects on which Zheng Xuan based his commentary apparently mentioned only five people here, dropping Yi Yi and Zhu Zhang. In any case, Zhu Zhang is dropped in the elaboration below, which suggests that the name has crept in by mistake.

For Bo Yi and Shu Qi, see the commentary to 5.23, 7.15, and 16.12.

For Liuxia Hui, see 15.14 and 18.2. Little is known about Shao Lian besides a mention in the Record of Ritual, where he and an older brother are described as Eastern barbarians who are, nonetheless, very sincere and conscientious mourners. (8Chapter 21 (“Miscellaneous Records”); Legge 1967, vol. 2: 153–154.)

Nothing certain is known about either of these figures. Zhu Xi identifies Yu Zhong as Zhong Yong, the brother of the Great Uncle mentioned in 8.1 (see the commentary to 8.1 for both Zhong Yong and the Great Uncle). Qing scholars such as Huan Maoyong, however, argue fairly convincingly against this identification.

As Ma Rong comments, “The Master did not necessarily have to enter service, nor did he necessarily have to withdraw from service—he is ‘merely on the side of what is right [4.10].’ ” This sums up what separates a true gentleman such as Confucius from the merely pure or fastidious: he is the “timely sage” (Mencius 5:B:1), and thus is able to respond flexibly to the demands of the situation. Cf. especially 10.27.

Book Nineteen

19.6 子夏曰：“博学而笃志，切问而近思，仁在其中矣。”

Here the combination of learning and personal reflection is presented as one of the keys to attaining Goodness; cf. 2.15 and 2.18.

19.7 子夏曰：“百工居肆以成其事，君子学以致其道。”

Jiang Xi is probably correct in thinking that part of the point here is that learning is something that one needs to acquire through hard work: “A craftsman is certainly not born skillful. He must spend time in his workshop in order to broaden his knowledge, and as his knowledge broadens, his skill is perfected. Similarly, the gentleman is not able to intuitively comprehend everything he needs to know—he must learn in order to broaden his thinking, and as his thinking is broadened, his Way will become perfected.” Zixia is likening the practice of the gentleman to more mundane craft practices (cf. other craft metaphors for self-cultivation in 1.15, 3.8, 5.10, 15.10), but with the clear implication (especially after 19.4) that the way of the gentleman is the higher and more inclusive path.

19.11 子夏曰：“大德不逾闲，小德出入可也。”

An illustration of this principle is found in a story from the Exoteric Commentary, where it is put into the mouth of Confucius:

When Confucius encountered Cheng Muzi in the region of Yan, he lowered the canopy of his carriage and talked with him for the rest of the day. After some time, he turned to Zilu and said, “Make up fourteen bundles of silk and present them to the gentleman.” Zilu replied, “I have heard from the Master that scholar-officials do not receive one another when on the road” (I.e., without observing the formalities of presenting an introduction and being ritually received.) Confucius said, “As long as one does not transgress the bounds when it comes to important Virtues, it is permissible to cross the line here and there when it comes to minor Virtues.” (Chapter 2.16; Hightower 1952: 54–55.)

For similar themes in the Analects, cf. 9.3 and 15.37. An alternate interpretation is offered by Kong Anguo and Huang Kan, who take the passage to be referring to two levels of people, along the lines of “Those with great Virtue do not transgress the bounds; when it comes to people of small Virtue, crossing the line here and there is acceptable.” This reading is supported by a comment attributed to Confucius in the Xunzi: “Correct when it comes to important regulations, but occasionally crossing the line here and there when it comes to minor regulations—such is the middling gentleman (zhongjun 中君).” (Chapter 9 (“On the Regulations of the King”); Knoblock 1990: 97) The interpretation adopted in the translation seems preferable, however, having more support in the Analects itself.

19.12 子游曰：“子夏之门人小子，当洒扫、应对、进退，则可矣。抑末也，本之则无。如之何？”子夏闻之曰：“噫！言游过矣！君子之道，孰先传焉？孰后倦焉？譬诸草木，区以别矣。君子之道，焉可诬也？有始有卒者，其惟圣人乎！”

Ziyou is criticizing Zixia for making his younger disciples practice minor ritual tasks instead of teaching them about the “important” issues, but what he fails to understand is only someone who starts at the beginning of the Way of the gentleman can truly walk it to its end. This means that the teacher must distinguish between the “grass” (the younger students at the beginning of the path) and the “trees” (the more mature students capable of advanced work), and target his instruction accordingly—forcing students to learn things of which they are not yet capable lead only to exhaustion. As Bao Xian notes, “Zixia’s point is that those who are taught the Way too early will inevitably be the first to grow tired, and therefore he starts his disciples off with minor tasks, and only later instructs them in great matters.” A further import of the metaphor is that the manner with which one comports oneself with regard to small matters is connected organically to how one will develop in the end; therefore, one cannot neglect the “roots,” nor can one rush the process. As Huang Kan remarks, “Because the great Way of the gentleman is so profound, the only way to study it broadly is in stages.” For the “root” metaphor, cf. 1.2 and 3.4, and for the importance of the details of daily behavior in judging and cultivating one’s character, cf. 2.10. An alternate reading of the final line is, “Possessing both the beginning and the end [at the same time]—surely only the sage is like this!” Under this interpretation, the point is that, while most people have to proceed in a step-wise fashion, there are rare sages who possess it all at birth.

19.14 子游曰：“丧致乎哀而止。”

Reading this passage together with 3.4 and 15.41, this is a warning against allowing cultural refinement to overwhelm native substance. Kong Anguo and Huang Kan read it rather differently, however, seeing it as a warning against allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by grief to the point of personal harm. As Huang Kan puts it, “Although mourning rituals are based upon the emotion of grief, the filial son cannot allow excessive grief to harm his health.” Cf. 19.17.

19.21子贡曰：“君子之过也，如日月之食焉：过也，人皆见之；更也，人皆仰之。”

Huang Kan’s interpretation of this metaphor seems apt:

An eclipse of the sun or the moon is not the result of deliberate action on the part of the sun or moon; in the same way, a gentleman’s transgression is not intentional... Everyone sees an eclipse of the sun or moon, in the same way that everyone sees the transgression of the gentleman, because he does not attempt to conceal it... When an eclipse of the sun or moon passes, darkness is transformed into light, and everyone in the world together cranes their neck to gaze upon it. In the same way, the Virtue of the gentleman is not permanently sullied by prior transgressions.

Cf. the importance of “making emends” (gai 改) when one has erred (1.8, 7.22), as well as the repetition of 19.21 in Mencius 2:B:9.

Book Twenty

20.3 子曰：“不知命，无以为君子也。不知礼，无以立也。不知言，无以知人也。”

Ming 命 here probably refers to “fate” rather than the “Mandate of Heaven” (cf. 2.4), although of course the two concepts are related. Kong Anguo remarks, “Fate refers to the allotment of success and failure.” Huang Kan elaborates,

When it comes to those things in life that are subject to fate, whether or not one receives them is up to Heaven, therefore one must understand fate. If one does not understand fate and tries to forcibly pursue those things that are subject to it, one will not be able to perfect the Virtue that will allow one to become a gentleman.

Similar observations about fate are found in the Mencius. 7:A:1 reads, “Preserving one’s heart-mind and nourishing one’s nature are the mean by which to serve Heaven. Considering with equanimity an untimely death or long life, and cultivating oneself in order to simply await what comes—these are the means by which to establish fate.” In 7:A:3, the issue of fate is linked to the distinction between internal and external concerns:

“Pursue them, and you will get them; let go and you will lose them.”8 This refers to situation where pursuing it helps one to get it, because the search lies within oneself. “Pursuing it requires a technique; whether or not you actually get it is a matter of fate.” This refers to a situation where pursuing it does not help one to get it, because the search lies outside oneself.

The point is that the aspiring gentleman needs to focus his energy on the internal goods of the Confucian practice, the attainment of which is within his control, instead of wasting his time pursuing such externalities as wealth or fame; cf. 4.14, 11.18, 12.5, 15.32. With regard to ritual, the aspiring gentleman must understand it because it is the means by which he becomes socialized, and therefore a true human being (16.13). As Huang Kan observes, “Ritual governs reverence, dignity, temperance, and respectfulness, and thus is the root of establishing oneself. A person who does not understand ritual lacks the means to establish himself in the world.” Zhu Xi adds, putting it more vividly, “A person who does not understand ritual has no idea where to focus his eyes and ears, and has no place to put his hands and feet.” Finally, with regard to understanding words, most commentators take this to refer to an ability to judge other’s characters from their utterances. As Liu Baonan remarks, “Words are the voice of the heart. Words can be either right or wrong, and therefore if one is able to listen and distinguish between the two types of words, one will also be able to know the rightness or wrongness of the speaker.”