

The Tao (v. Đạo) of the Superior Man

K'ung Fu Tzu (v. Khổng Phu Tử)

The Introduction

Traditionally, K'ung Fu Tzu (v. Khổng Phu Tử [551–479 BCE]) was credited by the Han-Chinese scholars to have written or edited all the “Five Classics.” Modern scholars have maintained Confucius’ status of being the “founder” of Confucianism but rejected his authorship or editorship of the Five Classics. They have now agreed that the only book that contains the thoughts of K'ung Fu Tzu (Master K'ung) is the *Analects*, which is one of the Four Books. The *Analects* was not written by Master K'ung (v. Khổng Tử) himself but compiled by his close disciples when they recollected his “sayings” after his death.

The *Analects* is, therefore, not a philosophical treatise but a collection of the “sayings” of Confucius as recollected by his close disciples. How many of these compiled sayings contained the “thoughts” of Confucius himself? How many of these sayings were actually made by his close disciples but attributed to their Master? No one knows! To maintain one’s scholarly skepticism on this matter is a good trait of an intellectually healthy mind.

The *Analects* can be interpreted to have contained, essentially, a philosophy of life, which maintains that the “rectification” of the basic human moral values and behaviors is the fundamental prerequisite for the creation and maintenance of a socially harmonious society. At the foundation of the basic moral values that Confucius recommends is the moral concept of “*jen*” (v. *nhân*), which is variously rendered into English as “*benevolence*” or “*humaneness*” or “*humanity*.” The utmost importance that Confucius assigns to this moral virtue is testified by the fact that fifty-eight of the 499 chapters of the *Analects* are devoted to the discussion of *jen* (v. *nhân*) and the word appears 105 times. Morally and theoretically important as it is for Confucius, but, unfortunately, he provides no philosophical grounding for the concept itself, due probably to his failure to work out a theory of human nature. This philosophical task was later taken up by ancient East Asian Confucianist thinkers like Mencius (ca. 371–289 BCE) and Hsun Tzu (v. Tuân Tử [ca. 298–238 BCE]) and Chinese philosophers like the Ch'eng Hao (1032–1085 CE) and Chu Hsi (1130–1200 CE).

The knowledge and personal cultivation of moral values are to become socially operational as the basic moral virtues of a person, if and only if, one’s behavior is to be conditioned by the “*li*” (v. *lễ*) as Confucius demands it. As a cultural and behavioral concept, *li* (v. *lễ*) includes “everything from grand

state ceremonies to the proper way to sit or fasten one's lapel" [Slingerland 2001:1]. As one enters into an interactional relationship with others, one has to act and behave properly according to the *li* (v. *lǐ*) understood ritualistically as "a refined system of manners designed to regulate the personal interactions arising in the various social relationships." [Bresnan 1999:132]

Unlike Lao Tzu, who prefers personal freedom over political command, Confucius believes in the transforming power of moral charisma and role modeling. The restoration of human morality (moral *tao* [v. *đào*]) under the self-decaying political framework of Chou feudalism rests with the new type of political leaders, the *chun tzu* (v. *quân tử* [superior men]), whom Confucius teaches for the political and moral tasks that his reform program demands.

Text

1. The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the *punishment*, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good." [II.3.1]
2. The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ *for the reception of truth*. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right." [II.4.1–6]
3. Tsze-kung asked what constituted the superior man. The Master said, "He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions." [II.13]
4. The Master said, "When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them." [VII.21]
5. The Master said, "A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old P'ang." [VI.1]
6. The Master said, "If a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret." [IV.8]
7. The Master said, "The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain." [IV.16]
8. The Master said, "Those who are without virtue cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment. The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue." [IV.2]
9. The Master said, "Riches and honours are what men desire. If it cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be held. Poverty and meanness are what men dislike. If it cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be avoided." [IV.5.1]
10. [The Master said,] "If a superior man abandons virtue, how can he fulfill the requirements of that name?" [IV.5.2]
11. [The Master said,] "The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it." [IV.5.3]
12. The Master said, "The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort. The superior man thinks of the sanctions of law; the small man thinks of favours *which he may receive*." [IV.11]

13. The Master said, "Shǎn, my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity." The disciple Tsǎng replied, "Yes." The Master went out, and the other disciples asked, saying, "What do his words mean?" Tsǎng said, "The doctrine of our master is to be true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others—this and nothing more." [IV.15.1-2]
14. [The Master said,] "Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others." [VI.28.2]
15. The Master said, "Respectfulness, without the rules of propriety [v. lǐ (c. li)-ccp], becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, without the rules of propriety, becomes timidity; boldness, without the rules of propriety, becomes rudeness." [VIII.2.1]
16. The Master said, "The superior man *seeks to* perfect the admirable qualities of men, and does not *seek to* perfect their bad qualities. The mean man does the opposite of this." [XII.16]
17. The Master said, "The way of the superior man is threefold, but I am not equal to it. Virtuous [v. nhân (c. jen)-ccp], he is free from anxieties; wise, he is free from perplexities; bold, he is free from fear." [XIV.30]
18. The Master said, "What the superior man seeks, is in himself. What the mean man seeks, is in others." [XV.20]
19. Tsze-kung asked, saying, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master said, "Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." [XV.23]
20. Fan Ch'ih asked about benevolence. The Master said, "It is to love *all* men." He asked about knowledge. The Master said, "It is to know *all* men." [XII.12.1]
21. When the Master went to Wei, Zan Yu acted as driver of his carriage. The Master observed, "How numerous are the people!" Yu said, "Since they are thus numerous, what more shall be done for them?" "Enrich them," was the reply. "And when they have been enriched, what more shall be done?" The Master said, "Teach them." [XIII.9.1-4]
22. Tze-chang asked Confucius about perfect virtue [v. nhân (c. jen)-ccp]. Confucius said, "To be able to practice five things everywhere under heaven constitutes perfect virtue." He begged to ask what they were, and was told, "Gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness. If you are grave, you will not be treated with disrespect. If you are generous, you will win all. If you are sincere, people will repose trust in you. If you are earnest, you will accomplish much. If you are kind, this will enable you to employ the services of others." [XVII.6]

Study Questions

D.9.1 K'ung Fu Tzu (v. Khổng Phu Tử), The Tao (v. Đạo) of the Superior Man

1. Explain what K'ung Fu Tzu (v. Khổng Phu Tử) means by "benevolence" (jen [v. nhân]) and his reasons why humans should be benevolent.
2. Critically compare and contrast the two types of men, the "superior man," and the "mean [inferior] man," that K'ung Fu Tzu (v. Khổng Phu Tử) praises and condemns respectively. Using the Yiian (v. Dịchian) doctrine of Yin-Yang (v. Âm-Dương) bipolarity (in the Yin, the Yang is hidden; and in the Yang, the Yin is hidden) as your theoretical resource, critically discuss whether Confucius' dualistic characterization of people is true.
3. Discuss the three main tasks of a Confucian government and make your critical response.
4. [The Master said,] "Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others." [VI.28.2] Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this Confucian ethic (tao [đạo]) and consider whether we should practice it.
5. Critically compare and contrast the Confucian tao (v. đạo) of the superior man with the Hindu and Buddhist ethics. Consider also which ethics would produce a more genuine human morality.