

CONFUCIUS

THE ESSENTIAL
ANALECTS

Selected Passages with
Traditional Commentary

Translated by
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BOOK FOUR

Many of the passages in this book concern the supreme virtue of Goodness. Those who are truly Good love the Confucian Way and embody it in a wu-wei fashion—completely unself-consciously and effortlessly—as opposed to those who pursue the Way because of ulterior motives. Such true gentlemen require nothing from the world but the genuine joy and satisfaction they derive from virtue, as opposed to “petty people” who are motivated by considerations of profit or other external goods. This book also contains a series of statements (4.19 and 4.21) on filial piety that flesh out the treatment in Book One.

4.1 The Master said, “To live in the neighborhood of the Good is fine. If one does not choose to dwell among those who are Good, how will one obtain wisdom?”

4.2 The Master said, “Without Goodness, one cannot remain constant in adversity and cannot enjoy enduring happiness.

“Those who are Good feel at home in Goodness, whereas those who are clever follow Goodness because they feel that they will profit [利] from it.”

4.3 The Master said, “Only one who is Good is able to truly love others or despise others.”

4.4 The Master said, “Merely set your heart sincerely upon Goodness and you will be free of bad intentions.”

4.5 The Master said, “Wealth and social eminence are things that all people desire, and yet unless they are acquired in the proper way I will not abide them. Poverty and disgrace are things that all people hate, and yet unless they are avoided in the proper way I will not despise them.

“If the gentleman abandons Goodness, how can he merit the name? The gentleman does not go against Goodness even for the amount of

time required to finish a meal. Even in times of urgency or distress, he necessarily accords with it.”

4.6 The Master said, “I have yet to meet a person who truly loved Goodness or hated a lack of Goodness. One who truly loved Goodness could not be surpassed, while one who truly hated a lack of Goodness would at least be able to act in a Good fashion, as he would not tolerate that which is not Good being associated with his person.

“Is there a person who can, for the space of a single day, simply devote his efforts to Goodness? I have never met anyone whose strength was insufficient for this task. Perhaps such a person exists, but I have yet to meet him.”

4.7 The Master said, “People are true to type with regard to what sort of mistakes they make. Observe closely the sort of mistakes a person makes—then you will know his character.”

4.8 The Master said, “Having in the morning heard that the Way was being put into practice, I could die that evening without regret.”

4.9 The Master said, “A scholar-official who has set his heart upon the Way but who is still ashamed of having shabby clothing or meager rations is not worth engaging in discussion.”

4.10 The Master said, “With regard to the world, the gentleman has no predispositions for or against any person. He merely associates with those he considers right.”

4.12 The Master said, “If in your affairs you abandon yourself to the pursuit of profit, you will arouse much resentment.”

4.13 The Master said, “If a person is able to govern the state by means of ritual propriety and deference, what difficulties will he encounter? If, on the other hand, a person is not able to govern the state through ritual propriety and deference, of what use are the rites to him?”

4.14 The Master said, “Do not be concerned that you lack an official position, but rather concern yourself with the means by which you

might become established. Do not be concerned that no one has heard of you, but rather strive to become a person worthy of being known.”

4.15 The Master said, “Master Zeng! All that I teach can be strung together on a single thread.”

“Yes, sir,” Master Zeng responded.

After the Master left, the disciples asked, “What did he mean by that?”

Master Zeng said, “All that the Master teaches amounts to nothing more than dutifulness [*zhong* 忠] tempered by understanding [*shu* 恕].”

4.16 The Master said, “The gentleman understands rightness, whereas the petty person understands profit.”

4.17 The Master said, “When you see someone who is worthy, concentrate upon becoming their equal; when you see someone who is unworthy, use this as an opportunity to look within yourself.”

4.18 The Master said, “In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment.”

4.19 The Master said, “While your parents are alive, you should not travel far, and when you do travel you must keep to a fixed itinerary.”

4.21 The Master said, “You must always be aware of the age of your parents. On the one hand, it is a cause for rejoicing, on the other a source of anxiety.”

4.22 The Master said, “People in ancient times were not eager to speak, because they would be ashamed if their actions did not measure up to their words.”

4.24 The Master said, “The gentleman wishes to be slow to speak, but quick to act.”

4.25 The Master said, “Virtue is never solitary; it always has neighbors.”

BOOK NINE

Most of the passages in this book consist of the Master's pronouncements concerning the importance of focus, sincerity, and perseverance in the pursuit of learning and virtue. In contrast are other passages where Confucius expresses his frustration with his contemporaries for failing to embrace the Way that he has been fated by Heaven to proclaim to the world.

9.2 A villager from Daxiang remarked sarcastically, "How great is Confucius! He is so broadly learned, and yet has failed to make a name for himself in any particular endeavor."

When the Master was told of this, he said to his disciples, "What art, then, should I take up? Charioteering? Archery? I think I shall take up charioteering."

9.3 The Master said, "A ceremonial cap made of linen is prescribed by the rites, but these days people use silk. This is frugal, and I follow the majority. To bow before ascending the stairs is what is prescribed by the rites, but these days people bow after ascending. This is arrogant, and—though it goes against the majority—I continue to bow before ascending."

9.5 The Master was surrounded in Kuang. He said, "Now that King Wen [文] is gone, is not culture [wen 文] now invested here in me? If Heaven intended this culture to perish, it would not have given it to those of us who live after King Wen's death. Since Heaven did not intend that this culture should perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me?"

9.10 Whenever the Master saw someone who was wearing mourning clothes, was garbed in full official dress, or was blind, he would always rise to his feet, even if the person was his junior. When passing such a person, he would always hasten his step.

9.11 With a great sigh Yan Hui lamented, "The more I look up at it the higher it seems; the more I delve into it, the harder it becomes. Catching a glimpse of it before me, I then find it suddenly at my back.

"The Master is skilled at gradually leading me on, step by step. He broadens me with culture and restrains me with the rites, so that even if I wanted to give up I could not. Having exhausted all of my strength, it seems as if there is still something left, looming up ahead of me. Though I desire to follow it, there seems to be no way through."

9.12 The Master was gravely ill, and Zilu instructed his fellow disciples to attend Confucius as if the disciples were his ministers.

During a remission in his illness, the Master [became aware of what was happening and] rebuked Zilu, saying, "It has been quite some time now, has it not, that you have been carrying out this charade! If I have no ministers and yet you act as if I have, who do you think I am going to fool? Am I going to fool Heaven? Moreover, would I not rather die in the arms of a few of my disciples than in the arms of ministers? Even if I do not merit a grand funeral, it is not as if I would be left to die by the side of the road!"

9.13 Zigong said, "If you possessed a piece of beautiful jade, would you hide it away in a locked box, or would you try to sell it at a good price?"

The Master responded, "Oh, I would sell it! I would sell it! I am just waiting for the right offer."

9.14 The Master expressed a desire to go and live among the Nine Yi Barbarian tribes. Someone asked him, "How could you bear their uncouthness?"

The Master replied, "If a gentleman were to dwell among them, what uncouthness would there be?"

9.17 Standing on the bank of a river, the Master said, "Look at how it flows on like this, never stopping day or night!"

9.18 The Master said, "I have yet to meet a man who loves Virtue as much as he loves female beauty."

9.19 The Master said, "[The task of self-cultivation] might be compared to the task of building up a mountain: if I stop even one

basketful of earth short of completion, then I have stopped completely. It might also be compared to the task of leveling ground: even if I have only dumped a single basketful of earth, at least I am moving forward."

9.22 The Master said, "Surely there are some sprouts that fail to flower, just as surely as there are some flowers that fail to bear fruit!"

9.23 The Master said, "We should look upon the younger generation with awe because how are we to know that those who come after us will not prove our equals? Once, however, a man reaches the age of forty or fifty without having learned anything, we can conclude from this fact alone that he is not worthy of being held in awe."

9.24 The Master said, "When a man is rebuked with exemplary words after having made a mistake, he cannot help but agree with them. However, what is important is that he change himself in order to *accord* with them. When a man is praised with words of respect, he cannot help but be pleased with them. However, what is important is that he actually *live up* to them. A person who finds respectful words pleasing but does not live up to them, or agrees with others' reproaches and yet does not change—there is nothing I can do with one such as this."

9.28 The Master said, "Only after Winter comes do we know that the pine and cypress are the last to fade."

9.29 The Master said, "The wise are not confused, the Good do not worry, and the courageous do not fear."

BOOK TEN

Based on their style, lack of explicit subject, and parallels to be found in other early ritual texts such as the Record of Ritual or Book of Etiquette and Ritual, scholars have concluded that most of the passages in this book were probably culled from a lost ritual text that provided anonymous guidelines and injunctions for the aspiring gentleman. From earliest times, however, this book has been viewed by commentators as an extended description of the ritual behavior of Confucius in particular, and it was probably intended by the editors of the earliest stratum of the Analects (Books One through Ten) to be understood that way. The translation and commentary will reflect this understanding of the text, rendering it as descriptive rather than injunctive, and understanding Confucius as the implicit subject, although he is only explicitly mentioned in a few passages. Seen as an actual description of the Master's behavior rather than a set of impersonal ritual guidelines, Book Ten serves as a sort of capstone for the first stratum, providing a series of descriptions of the Master effortlessly embodying in his words, behavior, and countenance the lessons imparted throughout the rest of the text. What is being emphasized in this book is the ease and grace with which the Master embodies the spirit of the rites in every aspect of his life—no matter how trivial—and accords with this spirit in adapting to new and necessarily unforeseeable circumstances. The final passage, 10.27, identifies this ability as the virtue of “timeliness” (shi 時)—that is, always according perfectly with the demands of the situation at hand. This is Confucius' forte, and he is in fact known to posterity (through the efforts of Mencius) as the “timely sage”: the one whose ritual responses were always effortlessly and unself-consciously appropriate (Mencius 5:B:1).

10.2 At court, when speaking with officers of lower rank, he was pleasant and affable; when speaking with officers of upper rank, he was formal and proper. When his lord was present, he combined an attitude of cautious respect with graceful ease.

10.3 When called on by his lord to receive a guest, his countenance would become alert and serious, and he would hasten his steps. When

he saluted those in attendance beside him—extending his clasped hands to the left or right, as their position required—his robes remained perfectly arrayed, both front and back. Hastening forward, he moved smoothly, as though gliding upon wings. Once the guest had left, he would always return to report, “The guest is no longer looking back.”

10.10 He would not instruct while eating, nor continue to converse once he had retired to bed.

10.11 Even though a meal was only of coarse grain or vegetable broth, he invariably gave some as a sacrificial offering, and would do so in a grave and respectful manner.

10.12 He would not sit unless his mat was straight [*zheng* 正].

10.17 One day the stables burned. When the Master returned from court, he asked, “Was anyone hurt?” He did not ask about the horses.

10.19 When he was sick, and his lord came to visit him, he would lay with his head to the east, draped in his court robes, with his ceremonial sash fastened about him.

10.20 When summoned by his lord, he would set off on foot, without waiting for his horses to be hitched to the carriage.

10.23 When receiving a gift from a friend—even something as valuable as a cart or a horse—he did not bow unless it was a gift of sacrificial meat.

10.25 When he saw someone fasting or mourning, he invariably assumed a changed expression, even if they were an intimate acquaintance. When he saw someone wearing a ritual cap or a blind person, he would invariably display a respectful countenance, even if they were of low birth [*xie* 褻].

When riding past someone dressed in funeral garb, he would bow down and grasp the crossbar of his carriage. He would do so even if the mourner was a lowly peddler.

When presented food with full ritual propriety, he would invariably assume a solemn expression and rise from his seat.

He would also assume a solemn expression upon hearing a sudden clap of thunder or observing a fierce wind.

10.27 Startled by their arrival, a bird arose and circled several times before alighting upon a branch. [The Master] said, "This pheasant upon the mountain bridge—how timely it is! How timely it is!" Zilu saluted the bird, and it cried out three times before flying away.