INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

BRYAN W. VAN NORDEN

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■ PREFACE ■

This book is an introduction, both philosophical and elementary, to ancient Chinese thought. Because my approach is philosophical, I devote a considerable amount of space to explaining the basic vocabulary of contemporary philosophy. My hope is that readers will be inspired to pursue Chinese thought in more depth but will also be able to cross over easily to the study of Western philosophy, should they wish to do so. There are, of course, alternative ways of studying Chinese thought and culture that are equally valuable, but I hope no scholars will begrudge me this methodology simply because it is not their own.

Because this is an elementary introduction, I have greatly simplified many aspects of both Chinese and Western history and culture. Understanding any tradition is daunting. As one Confucian put it, "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" (*Analects* 9.11). Consequently, introducing too many nuances and scholarly controversies might overwhelm the beginner. By simplifying some points that are not central to my narrative, I hope to enable the reader to understand and grapple with other complex and profound issues. Cognoscenti should bear this in mind when they notice that I have typically not done justice to the multifaceted nature of the Western philosophers whom I cite as subjects of comparison nor to the complexities and controversies regarding Chinese history and philology.

In order to make this book as readable as possible, bibliographical information is exclusively in the endnotes (which are marked with Roman numerals). There is no need for the student to interrupt the flow of her reading by looking up an endnote unless she needs to know the source of a quotation. I have also tried to keep footnotes (which are marked with Arabic numerals) to a minimum, using them mainly for cross-references.

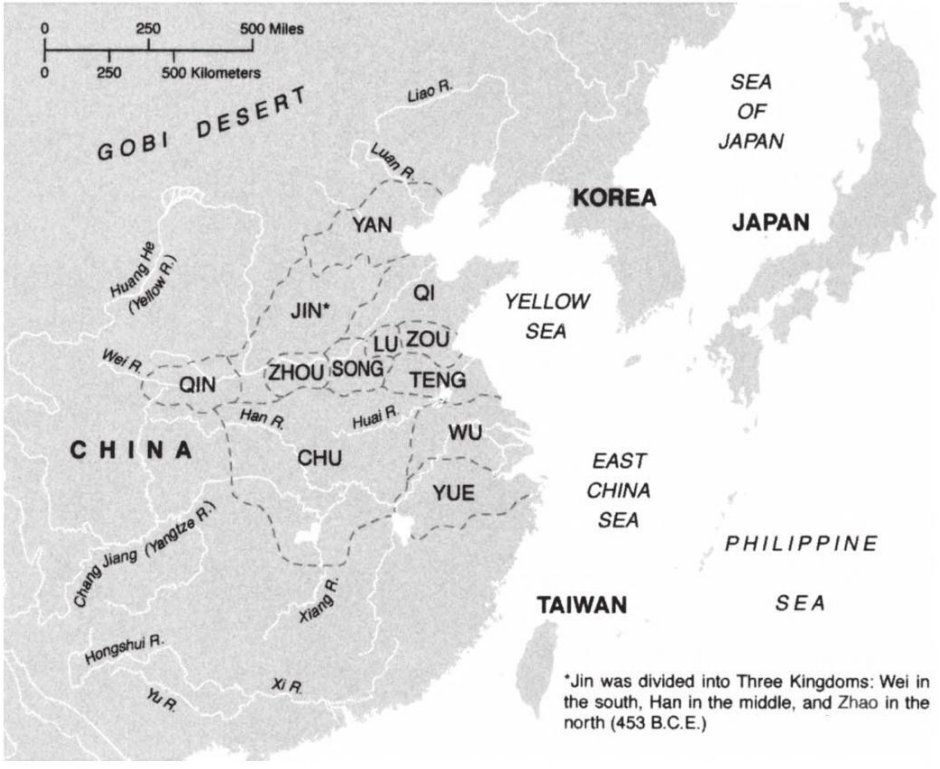
Translations are usually taken from Ivanhoe and Van Norden's *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy,* 2nd ed. An asterisk after a quotation indicates either that the passage is not found in *Readings* or that I have significantly modified the translation in that work. For passages from the *Analects* and *Mengzi* not found in *Readings,* I often quote Edward Slingerland's complete translation-with-commentary *Confucius: Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* or my own *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries.* I do not note if I make a slight change from the translations given in one of these texts.

Following many contemporary academic works, years are identified as either BCE (before the Common Era) or CE (Common Era), meaning the era common to Christianity and the other great world religions. These designations are used in place of BC and AD, not to downplay or denigrate the significance of Christianity, but merely to provide a usage comfortable to those with other beliefs.

My thanks to Paul Goldin, Aaron Stalnaker, Justin Tiwald, and Brad Wilburn, all of whom offered helpful suggestions and advice on earlier versions of this work. I am also grateful to Deborah Wilkes, Senior Editor at Hackett Publishing Company, for her support throughout this project with everything from matters of style to hunting gargoyles; Mary Vasquez, Project Editor at Hackett, for tirelessly answering my queries; and Simone Payment, my copyeditor, for making me sound more articulate than I am. Special thanks to Scott Thomson of Positively Postal, who generously provided images of the Chinese stamps that grace some of our chapter headings. Most of all I wish to thank my students, whose endless enthusiasm for Chinese thought is an inspiration and a challenge.

For those who wish to continue their study of this fascinating topic, the translations and secondary works listed below are just a fraction of the best work available.

Bryan W. Van Norden



■ SELECTED TRANSLATIONS ■

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- Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, trans. *Readings in Han Chinese Thought.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006. A well-chosen selection of translations on a variety of topics, with extremely helpful introductions and supporting material.
- Gardner, Daniel K., trans. *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007. The *Analects* of Confucius, the *Mengzi,* and two shorter texts as interpreted by later Confucian orthodoxy.
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- Ivanhoe, Philip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy,* 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005. Includes selections from all the major ancient Chinese philosophers.
- Johnston, Ian, trans. *The Mozi: A Complete Translation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. The only complete English translation of the diverse Mohist writings. Includes the Chinese text on facing pages.
- Lau, D.C., trans. *Tao Te Ching.* New York: Penguin Books, 1963. An elegant translation based on the traditional text of the *Daodejing.* Lau's revised translation is also available in the Everyman's Library series (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).
- Legge, James, trans. *The Chinese Classics,* 5 vols. Reprint. Taibei: SMC Publishing, 1991. This is one of many reprints of James Legge's Victorian-era translation of the *Four Books* (the *Great Learning, Analects, Mengzi,* and *Mean*) and three of the *Five Classics* (the *Odes, History,* and *Spring and Autumn Annals* with the *Zuo Commentary*). Although Legge's language is often archaic, this work is still very useful because it includes the Chinese texts of all works and extensive notes.

- Lynn, Richard John, trans. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the* Tao-te ching *of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. This fine translation includes what is perhaps the most seminal commentary on the *Daodejing.*
- Mair, Victor M., trans. *Tao Te Ching.* New York: Bantam Books, 1990. A translation based on the Mawangdui versions of the *Daodejing.*
- Sawyer, Ralph D., trans. *Sun Tzu: Art of War.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. A fine translation of the *Art of War,* with an informative scholarly introduction.
- Slingerland, Edward, trans. *Confucius: Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003. Invaluable for its fine translation combined with selections from classic commentaries on each passage. An abridged version is also available as *Confucius: The Essential Analects* (2006).
- Van Norden, Bryan W., trans. *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008. This is a complete translation with an interlineal commentary. An abridged version with commentary separated from the translation is also available as *The Essential Mengzi* (2009).
- Watson, Burton, trans. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1964. This translation of the *Zhuangzi* is beautiful for its directness and fluency.
- Watson, Burton, trans. *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1964. Selections from the *Han Feizi.*
- Watson, Burton, trans. *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. Selections from the *Xunzi.*
- Watson, Burton, trans. *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. Selections from the "synoptic chapters" of the *Mozi.*

■ SELECTED SECONDARY WORKS ■

- Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. *Essays on Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the* Laozi. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. Anthology of essays on the work also known as the *Daodejing* (*Tao Te Ching*) by Laozi (Lao Tzu).
- Graham, Angus C. *Disputers of the Tao.* Chicago: Open Court Press, 1989. General history of ancient Chinese philosophy. Particularly helpful on the Mohists and the "School of Names."
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation,* 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000. Readable and reliable introduction to some of the major issues among Confucians over two millennia.
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- Liu, Xiusheng, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002.
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- Tanner, Harold M. *China: A History.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009. A handy one-volume overview. Also available in a two-volume version.
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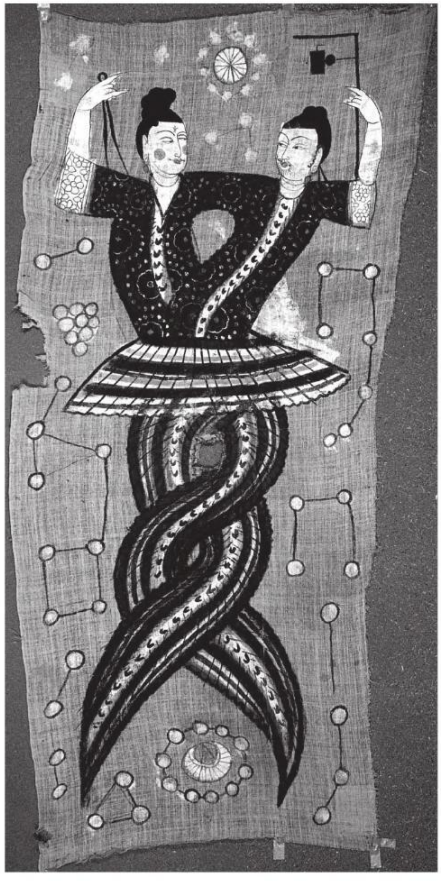
- Van Norden, Bryan W. *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. A more detailed defense of my philosophical methodology, and my interpretations of Kongzi, the Mohists, Yang Zhu, and Mengzi.
- Yearley, Lee H. *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. A seminal comparative study that launched the contemporary application of virtue ethics to Confucianism.

■ 1 ■

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I am not of their age or time and so have not personally heard their voices or seen their faces, but I know this by what is written on bamboo and silk, etched on metal and stone, and inscribed on basins and bowls that have passed down to us through succeeding generations.

—*Mozi,* "Impartial Caring"



In this image, the sages Fu Xi and Nuwa are depicted symbolically as intertwined snakes.

In order to understand early Chinese philosophers, we must understand the context in which they lived. As with every culture, this context consists of historical reality as well as their myths. The distinction is not sharp: myths often contain an element of historical truth, and what passes for historical truth often has mythical elements. In addition, there are different versions of the myths in early Chinese texts. I will present only one account, but we shall see in it many figures and themes that are important in the self-understanding of Chinese culture.[1]

I. Myth

According to Chinese tradition, the earliest people had a precarious existence, living in fear of wild animals, subsisting day to day on whatever they could forage, and sleeping in tree houses or drafty caves. They had no technology, no rituals, and no culture. Human life gradually improved and civilization developed through the actions of a series of sages, the earliest of whom are referred to as the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors. The first and second sovereigns were Fu Xi and his wife, Nuwa. Fu Xi taught people to hunt, fish, and trap. He created the institution of marriage and also developed the earliest portions of the *Yijing,* a work of divination that would come to have great significance in later Chinese cosmology. (The *Yijing,* or *Classic of Changes,* had scant influence on philosophy, per se, in the period this book covers, so we will have little to say about it.) Legends say that Nuwa was responsible for even more amazing feats than was her husband, such as keeping the Heavens from collapsing by repairing them when they were damaged. Nuwa thus became a symbol, in later Chinese history, for the power and importance of women. For example, the classic Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber,* noted for its strong female characters, recounts the legend of Nuwa in its opening.

Nuwa was not only Fu Xi's wife, she was also his sister. This is intriguing, because the highest of the Greek gods, Zeus, was also married to his sister, Hera. Furthermore, in the Bible, God is said to have made Eve from Adam's rib, so she is, in a sense, his twin sister. Because these cultures developed independently, the similarity in their myths may reflect some deep need or tension that humans share. A Freudian, using a hermeneutic of suspicion, might suggest that the myths are a projection of subconscious, incestuous desires. In contrast, using a hermeneutic of faith we might interpret the myths as an expression of the legitimate human longing to find that masculinity and femininity are distinct (symbolized by the fact that Fu Xi and Nuwa are male

and female) yet complementary (symbolized by their marriage) and fundamentally unified, rather than dualistic (symbolized by the fact that they have the same parents).[1]

The third sovereign was Shen Nong, whose name means "spiritual farmer." Shen Nong discovered how to plant crops and domesticate animals. He also was a pioneer of Chinese medicine. One day, when he wasn't looking, a leaf fell into his cup of water. Drinking it, he noticed that it tasted different. In this way, he discovered tea. Experimenting by using different leaves for tea, he discovered their medicinal effects; using himself as a test subject, he tried different herbs, and noted what effects they had on his body.

The first of the Five Emperors was the Yellow Emperor, or in Chinese Huang Di. During his era, criminals and invading barbarian tribes terrorized the Chinese people. Although he preferred peace, the Yellow Emperor saw that it was necessary to institute armies and judicial punishments to protect the people. Huang Di's practices led to a decisive military victory over his enemies, a victory that is often considered to be the founding of the Chinese as an ethnic group.

Others in Huang Di's circle also made lasting contributions. The Yellow Emperor's wife, after inspecting a caterpillar infestation in the emperor's mulberry orchard, discovered how to spin and weave silk. Thereafter, weaving silk became a characteristically female task. Another distinctive cultural innovation, Chinese written characters, was supposedly invented by one of the Yellow Emperor's officials, Cang Jie.

So Fu Xi taught the people how to hunt, while Shen Nong taught them to farm. Modern archaeology teaches us that the earliest humans moved from place to place, hunting animals and gathering wild plants. Then, with the agricultural revolution, humans learned to plant crops and domesticate animals. This led to settled human communities. These communities allowed for the development of more complex forms of technology and civilization (including writing), but also created the need to protect one's territory and control crime. Consequently, the stories of Fu Xi, Shen Nong, and the Yellow Emperor, although mythical in their details, may represent a dim memory of the human transition from nomadic hunter-gatherers to farmers, and then to city dwellers.

The next three important emperors were Yao, Shun, and Yu. Yao, in addition to being a humane and wise ruler, is associated with discovering the rudiments of astronomy and the regularity of the seasons, important knowledge for any agricultural civilization. Thus, Kongzi (Confucius) said of him, "It is

1. See Appendix A on the difference between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of faith.

Heaven that is great, and it was Yao who modeled himself upon it" (*Analects* 8.19). As he approached the end of his life, Yao decided to find a virtuous successor to follow him as ruler. Searching his kingdom, Yao heard about Shun, a simple farmer who was known for his great filial piety.

Shun had what we would describe today as a dysfunctional family. His father, stepmother, and stepbrother repeatedly schemed to murder him and steal his wealth. According to one story, Shun's family asked him to dig a well. They planned to remove the ladder and cover over the well while Shun was still inside. Thinking that they had succeeded in their plot, Shun's brother told his parents that they could have Shun's livestock and his storehouses of grain. "But his spear and shield—mine! His zither—mine! His bow—mine! And his two wives shall service me in my bed!" However, Shun had survived the murder attempt. Despite their plots against him, Shun continued to love and care for his family, until eventually he won them over with his devotion. Impressed by stories of his character and achievements, Yao made Shun his prime minister. He was so successful in this position that when Yao passed away the people made Shun the new emperor.

As ruler, Shun was concerned with the problems of flood control and irrigation. These had long been issues in China. The Yellow River Valley is the heartland of Chinese civilization because of its fertile soil and because the river provides easy transportation and water for crops. However, the Yellow River often floods, leading to devastation. Consequently, some have referred to China as a "hydraulic civilization" because of how important organizing water control is to society. One speculation is that this encouraged a strongly centralized government, with the resources to organize massive irrigation, flood control, and canal-building projects.

It is not surprising that Shun felt the need to appoint an able minister, Yu, to supervise flood control. Yu worked tirelessly, dredging silt out of rivers and building canals. Yu eventually became Shun's prime minister and, in a parallel with the previous succession, his abilities led the people to treat him as the new emperor upon Shun's death.

Yu was a great ruler in his own right, and when he grew old he followed the pattern set by Yao and Shun of choosing the person he found most worthy as his successor. However, this time the people did not accept the emperor's choice. Instead, out of affection and respect for Yu, they treated Yu's son as the emperor. Because of this, Yu became (posthumously) the founder of the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia. It is significant that the people's preference for a ruler was taken to be of greater importance than even the great Yu's decision. Traditional Chinese culture was never democratic but always emphasized the well-being and happiness of the people as the ultimate arbiter of political legitimacy.

The traditional Chinese view is that dynasties follow a cyclic pattern: a sagacious ruler founds a dynasty, bringing prosperity and order to society, but in a way that is noncoercive. The people willingly and joyfully follow him. Over the centuries there is a gradual decline in the quality of the rulers, with a corresponding increase in social disorder, dissatisfaction, and disaffection. The decline is typically not linear: great kings will arise during a period of mediocrity to temporarily restore a dynasty to its greatness. However, eventually a dynasty will reach its nadir, and an evil last king will inspire full-fledged revolt against his atrocities, leading to the arrival of a sage who will found the next dynasty.

Myth: *"The Chinese word for 'crisis' literally means 'danger + opportunity.'"*

Fact: *The Chinese word for "crisis" means, well, crisis. It is composed of two words, which mean "danger" and "crucial point."*

So Yu was the sage who founded the Xia dynasty, which was brought to an end centuries later by the evil Tyrant Jie. The sage-king Tang overthrew Jie and went on to found the Shang dynasty. (The Shang dynasty is sometimes also called the Yin, after the name of the last capital city of the dynasty.)

II. Early History

At some point during the Shang dynasty, written records begin and we emerge from the enchanting mists of myth into the clearer light of actual history. The story of how the Shang dynasty moved from myth to history is intriguing. Near the end of the nineteenth century, "dragon bones" could be bought for their alleged medicinal properties. They were thought to be dragon bones because of their great age and because of the odd markings on them. However, a pair of Chinese scholars who examined the bones realized that the markings were archaic forms of Chinese characters written on ancient "oracle bones." These bones (often the flat bottom shell of a tortoise) were used in a ceremony whereby the Shang king would divine the future and make inquiries of the spirits of his ancestors. A bone was heated until it cracked, while the king made a pair of ritual pronouncements, "Our attack on the barbarians will be successful. Our attack on the barbarians will perhaps not be successful." By interpreting the cracks, the king would divine which pronouncement was correct. What is perhaps most fascinating is that, *after* the ritual was completed, the questions asked were typically inscribed into the oracle bone. If we today are lucky, the answer divined was also inscribed into the bone. And if we are *really* lucky, the actual outcome was inscribed too. These brief and frequently difficult to interpret inscriptions give us a narrow window into Shang civilization.

When the source of the "dragon bones" was excavated, archaeologists found tombs of the Shang kings who ruled in the city of Yin. Here was hard physical evidence for the historicity of the Shang dynasty. (We lack evidence like this for the Xia dynasty, which is why it is still considered mythical.) The earliest surviving oracle bones date from around 1200 BCE, and we may be confident that the dynasty existed at least as far back as the sixteenth century BCE. This was a Bronze Age culture, using the metal for weapons and for ceremonial vessels to make offerings of food and wine to the spirits of the ancestors. The staple crop was millet, a kind of wheat still grown in China today. (Rice doesn't grow well in comparatively dry northern China, so it is not until much later, when Chinese culture spread into the high-rainfall areas of the south, that rice became almost emblematic of China.)

The war chariot was the tank of the era: in it rode a driver, an archer, and a spearman. To see one approaching at full gallop must have been an intimidating sight. The size of a state was often expressed in terms of how many chariots its army could field (e.g., "a state of a thousand chariots"). But the Shang also used infantry, armed with spears, shields, and light body armor.

This Bronze Age culture was patriarchal, but some women held high status through some combination of noble birth and personal excellence. Most notably, Fu Hao was a noblewoman who commanded armies. After her death, ritual sacrifices were made to her, just as to noble male ancestors, and her burial tomb included goods almost equal in grandeur to that of a king.

The traditional view of history requires that the last king of the dynasty be evil: the (supposedly) evil last king of the Shang was Tyrant Zhou. The name of the dynasty that succeeded the Shang is also romanized as "Zhou." In Chinese, you would never confuse the two, because they are written with different characters and pronounced with different tones: *Zhòu* 紂 is the tyrant and *Zhōu* 周 is the dynasty. To keep them straight in English, "Zhou" without qualification will mean the dynasty and "*Tyrant* Zhou" will always be the last ruler of the Shang.

Tyrant Zhou was clever, fearless, and physically powerful. However, he was also ruthless, cruel, and dissolute. The ancient historian Sima Qian reports that "by a pool filled with wine, through meat hanging like a forest, he made naked men and women chase one another and engage in drinking long into the night."[ii] Tyrant Zhou had a loyal minister in his uncle, Bi Gan, who warned him that his actions would eventually turn his subjects against him. Tyrant Zhou replied that sages supposedly have larger hearts than others, and since Bi Gan spoke like a sage, he wished to see whether Bi Gan also had the heart of a sage. With that, he ordered his guards to cut the heart out of Bi Gan's chest.

Tyrant Zhou was overthrown, and a new dynasty was begun by the Zhou people. The Zhou justified their conquest through the theory of dynastic

cycles. I will let them speak for themselves, in documents that date back some three thousand years:

> Examining the men of antiquity, there was the founder of the Xia dynasty [King Yu]. He guided his mind, allowing his descendants to succeed him and protecting them. He acquainted himself with Heaven and was obedient. But in the process of time the mandate in his favor fell to the ground. So also when we examine the case of Shang. Heaven guided its founder [King Tang], so that he corrected their errors and so it protected his descendants. He too acquainted himself with Heaven and was obedient. But now the mandate in favor of him has fallen to the ground.[iii]

> When Heaven rejected and made an end of the mandate in favor of the great state of Shang, there were many of the former intelligent kings of Shang in Heaven. However, the king who had succeeded them [Tyrant Zhou], the last of their line, from the time of his entering into their appointment, proceeded in such a way as at last to keep the wise in obscurity and the vicious in office. The poor people in such a case, carrying their children and leading their wives, made their moan to Heaven. They even fled away, but were apprehended again. Oh, Heaven had compassion on the people of the four quarters. Its favoring mandate lighted on our earnest founders. Let our king feverishly revere Virtue![iv]

> King Wen [of the Zhou people] was able to make bright his Virtue and be careful in the use of punishments. He did not dare to show any contempt to the widower and widows. He appointed those worthy of appointment and revered those worthy of reverence. He was terrible to those who needed to be awed, so getting distinction among the people. It was thus he laid the first beginnings of the sway of our small portion of the empire, and one or two neighboring countries were brought under his improving influence, until throughout our western regions all placed in him their reliance. His fame ascended up to the High Ancestor, who approved of him. Heaven then gave a great charge to King Wen to exterminate the great dynasty of Shang and receive its great mandate, so that the various states belonging to it and their peoples were brought to an orderly condition.[v]

These passages don't just lay out a cyclic view of history, they specify a *philosophy of history* that explains those cycles. The founder of a dynasty is given

a mandate (*mìng* 命) to rule by Heaven (*tiān* 天). Because of this intimate relationship between Heaven and the king, the ruler is often referred to as the "Son of Heaven." "Heaven" can refer to the sky or the place where the spirits of the ancestors dwell, but in the period this book covers it most typically refers to a higher power that is thought of more or less anthropomorphically. The Mohists, a movement we shall examine in Chapter 4, conceived of Heaven as very much like a personal God, while the Confucians increasingly thought of Heaven as a more abstract higher power. Heaven bestows the mandate to rule based on a person's Virtue (*dé* 德). Virtue, here, is a sort of ethical charisma a person has because they possess attributes such as kindness, wisdom, and reverence for Heaven. If this notion of Virtue or ethical charisma seems naive to a modern reader, consider the extent to which the successful leadership of people such as Mahatma Gandhi and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., depended upon their perceived virtues. The mandate bestowed based on Virtue is transmitted to one's descendants, but it will be revoked for viciousness and given to someone more worthy. Even in modern Chinese, the word for "revolution" (as in "Cultural Revolution") is *gémìng* 革命, which is literally "stripping of the mandate."

It is easy to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to the doctrine of the mandate of Heaven. The Zhou people wanted to rationalize their conquest of the Shang and their story that they had a Heaven-given mandate to rule sounds as suspect as Western notions like manifest destiny or the divine right of kings. As the saying goes, "the winners get to write history," and it is possible that Tyrant Zhou was a good ruler who simply had the bad luck to be defeated by ambitious invaders. In general, the doctrine of the mandate of Heaven conveniently justifies the rule of the victors: if they won, it proves they had the mandate, which means that they are ethically superior to those they defeated.

A hermeneutic of faith reveals another side to the doctrine: it implies that a ruler is legitimate only as long as the people are happy. The king may have to use force against the occasional obdurate rebel or bandit, but by and large the people must acquiesce in being ruled. Thus, the king reminds a duke that "Heaven's mandate is not constant." He further warns him, "When you show a great discrimination, subduing men's hearts"—as opposed to coercing them with force—"the people will admonish one another, and strive to be obedient. Deal with evil as if it were a sickness in your person." In other words, do not be harsh in a way that causes unnecessary suffering and harm "and the people will entirely put away their faults. Deal with them like caring for a baby, and the people will be tranquil and orderly."[vi] We now understand what another duke means when he states, "Our king has received the mandate.

Unbounded is the happiness connected with it, but unbounded is the anxiety Oh, how can he be other than reverent?"[vii]

So the suffering people of Tyrant Zhou "made their moan to Heaven," which stripped him of the mandate and gave the mandate to King Wen, leader of the Zhou people, because he "was able to make bright his Virtue." However, out of loyalty, deference, and love of peace, King Wen restrained himself from rebelling against Tyrant Zhou. It was King Wen's son, King Wu, who finally led the conquest of the Shang. Wen (whose name means "cultured") is praised for his gentle forbearance, while Wu (whose name means "martial") is praised for his righteous use of force. They might be said to reflect two sides of Chinese culture.

King Wu's victory was quick and decisive because Tyrant Zhou's own soldiers turned against him. Tyrant Zhou retreated to his palace and, fearless and haughty to the last, set it afire and immolated himself in the palace rather than allowing himself to be captured.

When did the Zhou conquest of the Shang take place? The traditional date listed in many reference works is 1122 BCE, but current scholars believe this is wrong. We do know that in 1059 BCE there was a conjunction of all five of the planets visible with the unaided eye. As did the people of many ancient civilizations, the Chinese studied the Heavens carefully and believed that unusual celestial events provided portents of the future. Consequently, this conjunction would have led people to expect that a major change was about to take place, and this belief might have emboldened those anxious to rebel against Tyrant Zhou. In fact, the conjunction is mentioned in one ancient Chinese historical text, which states that the founding of the Zhou dynasty occurred twenty years later. This would seem to give us an exact date for the conquest. However, the dates given in this particular text seem to be off due to errors introduced by later scribes. Correcting these dates is a matter of guesswork, but many scholars think that King Wu defeated the Shang and established the Zhou dynasty around 1040 BCE.

King Wu's rule was short-lived; he died of natural causes a few years after the conquest. His son, King Cheng, succeeded him on the throne, but Cheng was only a child. To have a minor on the throne immediately after the founding of a new dynasty, with potentially rebellious subjects to govern, was a precarious situation. King Cheng's regent was his uncle, the Duke of Zhou. It must have been tempting for the Duke of Zhou to seize the throne. He could certainly have made a plausible claim to it: he was the brother of recently deceased King Wu and a son of King Wen. However, the Duke of Zhou supported King Cheng with loyalty and wisdom throughout his life. Because of this, he became a paragon of Virtue among later Confucians.

The strategy the Zhou used to control their newly expanded territory was to divide it into states of various sizes. A noble, typically a duke, governed each state. Many of these dukes were relatives of the Zhou royal family. Each duke had his own army and was responsible for maintaining order and collecting taxes in his state. He answered to the king, and upon a duke's death the king would approve his successor. This system worked well for centuries. However, the dynasty gradually decayed as weak kings lost the respect of the dukes. Perhaps this was inevitable. Imagine that you and your ancestors have ruled a state for generations. Within your state, you levy and collect taxes, make and enforce laws, and command your own personal army. Obeying the so-called king might seem unnecessary and, if the other dukes were ignoring the king, positively foolish.

The dynasty reached a low point under King You. King You's legitimate son by his queen was heir apparent. However, You fell in love with a seductive concubine, who bore him a second son. He decided to replace the legitimate queen and heir with his concubine and his second son. Given that his former queen had powerful relatives, this was immensely imprudent. The former queen's relatives raised an army to depose King You and put his elder son on the throne. While this army was secretly assembling, King You had taken to entertaining his new queen by lighting the beacon fires used to summon the armies of the dukes in case of emergency. Having been fooled by this prank more than once, the dukes decided not to answer the king's next signal. As a result, when the army of the deposed queen and heir attacked and King You lit the beacon fires to summon help, no one came. King You, his concubine-turned-queen, and his second son were all killed. His elder son was installed as king in a new capital city, further to the east. This marks the transition between the Western Zhou dynasty (c.1040–771 BCE) and the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–221 BCE).

III. The Period of the Philosophers

The philosophers we study in this book all lived during the Eastern Zhou dynasty, and it is especially important to understand the context in which they lived, argued, and wrote. The new, eastern capital was deeper in Chinese territory and hence easier to defend against barbarian raids. However, the events surrounding the deposing of King You demonstrated the weakness of the Zhou royal house and its dependence upon the power and support of lesser nobles. This crippled the Zhou dynasty, and the Zhou kings were mere figureheads from this point on. Real power lay in the hands of the dukes and other nobles who ran the various states into which China was divided. In the absence of centralized authority, the states schemed against one another, formed alliances,

broke those alliances, and frequently engaged in interstate warfare. The common people suffered horribly: they were robbed and assaulted by brigands the governments could not control, they were taxed to exhaustion by rulers who wanted to supply their armies and feed their own greed, and the planting and harvesting of their crops was interrupted by invading armies or by forced government labor. In the bitter words of the *Daodejing* (53):

> The court is resplendent,
> Yet the fields are overgrown.
> The granaries are empty,
> Yet some wear elegant clothes.
> Fine swords dangle at their sides;
> They are stuffed with food and drink,
> And possess wealth in gross abundance.
> This is known as taking pride in robbery.
> Far is this from the Way!

As is often the case, a chaotic and desperate situation stimulated philosophical thought as thinkers struggled to find a solution to the problems their society faced.

What these Chinese thinkers were looking for was the *dào* 道, which we render "Way." This crucial philosophical term has five related senses. "*Dao*" can mean a path or road (as in the modern Chinese compound "*dàolù* 道路," roadway). In both Chinese and English, there is a natural metaphorical extension from "way" in the sense of a literal *path* to "way" in the sense of *a way to do something*. Closely related to this is "Way" as *the linguistic account of a way* of doing something. From these senses, "Way" came to refer to *the right way to live one's life and organize society.* Eventually the term also came to mean *the ultimate metaphysical entity* that was responsible for the way the world is and the way that it ought to be (see Chapter 8). Although it can have any of these five senses, the primary meaning of *dao* (for most Eastern Zhou thinkers) is the right way to live and organize society.

Two important eras within the Eastern Zhou are the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 BCE) and the Warring States Period (403–221 BCE). The former is named after the *Spring and Autumn Annals,* a cryptically terse historical chronicle of the years in question, written from the perspective of Kongzi's home state, Lu.[2] The *Zuo zhuan* is a commentary on the *Spring and*

2. According to tradition, Kongzi himself wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and subtly encoded in its statements his judgments about the events described. However, most scholars today doubt this.

Autumn Annals that provides considerably more narrative detail about the period. Scholars disagree over how reliable it is as a historical account, but we shall have occasion to cite it at several points.

One of the opening stories in the *Zuo zhuan* gives a feel for what the Spring and Autumn Period was like. The ruler of a certain state had two sons. The mother disliked the older son, supposedly because she had a difficult labor with him, and favored the younger son. She asked the duke to declare the younger son his heir and pass over the older son, but the duke refused. When the father died and the older son became the new duke, his mother asked him to give his younger brother command over an important city. Eventually, the duke acceded to his mother's requests. Using the city as his new power base, the younger brother proceeded to usurp the prerogatives of the duke and prepare his soldiers for war. The duke refrained from taking action against his younger brother for as long as he could, despite the entreaties of his advisors. However, when the duke discovered that his mother had agreed to open the gate to his capital for his brother's invading army, the duke sent a force of two hundred war chariots against his brother. Support for the rebellious younger brother crumbled quickly, and he was forced to flee. The duke thereupon put his mother under permanent house arrest, vowing to not see her again "until we meet underground" (i.e., after death). After some time, the duke missed his mother, but felt that he could not break his vow. His dilemma was resolved when a clever servant suggested that the duke have a tunnel dug; there he could meet his mother underground. Thus, the duke and his mother were reconciled.

This inventive solution to the duke's quandary is typical of much Chinese ethical thought. In addition, this story illustrates the complex interrelationship between family and politics in this era. We can see why Confucians might stress the importance of loving and respecting members of one's own family, but we can also see why others (like the Mohists) would seek to minimize the role of familial relations in government.

In the power vacuum created by the impotence of the Zhou king, the institute of the Hegemon developed. The Hegemon (sometimes also called "Lord Protector") was a leader of one of the states who was able, through his individual military strength and judicious alliances, to become de facto ruler of China. The institution of the Hegemon officially existed to "support the king and repel the barbarians" that were raiding the Chinese states. However, the Hegemon actually ruled in the place of the king. The institution was intrinsically unstable, though, because the Hegemon was only one among several powerful rulers, alliances were fluid under even the best of circumstances, and any ruler who was too successful would incite the fear and envy of the others. Perhaps the most famous of the Hegemons were Duke Huan of the

state of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin. Duke Huan's success was due in part to his brilliant minister, Guan Zhong. Many rulers and ministers wished to emulate Duke Huan and Guan Zhong, but Confucians typically condemned them for usurping the authority of the Zhou king and ruling by force and guile rather than by Virtue. Nowadays, when the People's Republic of China condemns U.S. hegemony (*bàquán* 霸權) they are using a word derived from the ancient title "Hegemon" (*bà* 霸).

The Warring States is a period of even more intense inter- and intrastate conflict. During this period, rulers of some of the more powerful states were declaring themselves king, usurping the title that was still supposedly the sole prerogative of the Zhou dynasty. In addition, the most wealthy and powerful families in a state were sometimes usurping the power of the hereditary rulers, so that some dukes became mere figureheads, just like the Zhou king.

At the very beginning the Eastern Zhou period, one noble had been particularly distinguished in defending the surviving members of the royal family against attack by barbarian raiders, thereby ensuring the survival of the dynasty. As a reward, the new king made him ruler of a semi-barbarian territory in northwestern China. This became the state of Qin. Ironically, it was a descendant of this same noble who led Qin when, in 256 BCE, it accepted the surrender of the last Zhou king. A few years later, in 221 BCE, Qin succeeded in conquering all the other states and unifying China. This event brings the Warring States Period and the Zhou dynasty to a close. The ruler of Qin thereupon bestowed upon himself the title "First Emperor." The grandiose title "emperor" (*huángdì* 皇帝) was constructed from the titles of the Three Sovereigns ("huang") and the Five Emperors ("di"). The Qin ruler obviously had no lack of confidence in his own abilities, and he predicted that he would be the First Emperor of ten thousand in his dynasty. What actually happened after his death . . . well, to tell you would be getting ahead of our story. For now we are finally ready to consider the first great philosopher of the Chinese tradition, Kongzi.

IV. Timeline

- Yao becomes emperor, and chooses Shun as his prime minister.
- Yao dies. The people choose Shun as the new emperor. Shun puts Yu in charge of flood control. Yu's success in this leads Shun to choose him as his prime minister.
- Shun dies. The people choose Yu as the new emperor.
- Yu dies. The people choose his son as the new emperor, thereby creating the first Chinese dynasty: the Xia.

- Over many generations, the Virtue of the Xia kings declines, culminating in the vicious rule of Tyrant Jie.
- Tyrant Jie is overthrown by the sage Tang, who becomes king of the second Chinese dynasty: the Shang.
- Over many generations, the Virtue of the Shang kings declines, culminating in the vicious rule of Tyrant Zhou.
- King Wen patiently endures Tyrant Zhou, but his Virtue increasingly draws the support of the people and other nobles.
- Circa 1040–771 BCE: Western Zhou dynasty.
    - King Wen's son, King Wu, leads the rebellion that overthrows Tyrant Zhou and founds the third Chinese dynasty: the Zhou.
    - A few years after the conquest, King Wu dies of natural causes, leaving his young son, King Cheng, on the throne. King Cheng's regent is his uncle, the Duke of Zhou, who loyally advises and defends King Cheng, solidifying Zhou rule.
    - Over many generations, the Virtue of the Zhou kings declines.
    - 771 BCE: A group of disaffected nobles and "barbarians" attacks and murders King You.
- 770–221 BCE: Eastern Zhou dynasty.
    - A surviving member of the Zhou royal family is established as king in a new capital to the east, deeper in the Zhou territory.
    - 722–481 BCE: Spring and Autumn Period.
        - 680 BCE: Duke Huan of Qi, with the assistance of his Prime Minister Guan Zhong, becomes the first Hegemon.
        - 551–479 BCE: Lifetime of Kongzi (Confucius).
    - Fifth century BCE: Lifetime of Mozi, anti-Confucian philosopher who advocated "impartial caring."
    - 403–221 BCE: Warring States Period.
        - Fourth century BCE:
            - Birth of Yang Zhu, egoist philosopher.
            - Birth of Mengzi (Mencius), Confucian who argued "human nature is good."
            - Birth of Hui Shi, key figure in the "School of Names."
            - Birth of Zhuangzi, Daoist philosopher who advocated emptying rather than cultivating one's heart.
            - Birth of Xunzi, Confucian who argued "human nature is bad."

  - Third century BCE:
    - Possible date of composition of the *Daodejing,* attributed to Laozi.
    - Birth of Han Feizi, Legalist philosopher.
- 221–207 BCE: The Qin dynasty, founded by the self-proclaimed "First Emperor," unifies China, bringing the Warring States Period to a close.

Review Questions

1. According to the traditional Chinese philosophy of history, what cycle does each dynasty go through? Explain the role of Heaven, the mandate, and Virtue in this philosophy.
2. The figures in this chapter who will be referred to most frequently are Yao, Shun, Yu, Jie, Tang, Tyrant Zhou, Wen, Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. Give at least one sentence identifying something distinctive about each of these individuals.
3. Give the names of the Three Dynasties in the historical order in which they occurred. Name the first ruler of each dynasty and the last ruler of the first and second dynasties.
4. The last of the Three Dynasties is divided into two periods. What are these two periods called, and what event marks this historical division? The second half of this dynasty is divided into what two subperiods?
5. Briefly describe the governmental structure of the last of the Three Dynasties. In particular, what were the responsibilities of the dukes and the king?
6. In what century was the last of the Three Dynasties founded? What year is conventionally taken as the end of this dynasty?
7. What are the five senses of *dao,* "Way"?

■ 2 ■

KONGZI AND CONFUCIANISM

How could I dare to lay claim to either sageliness or Goodness? What can be said about me is no more than this: I work at it without growing tired and encourage others without growing weary.

—Kongzi, *Analects* 7.34

All of later Chinese thought reacts in one way or another to Kongzi.

I. Kongzi's Social Context and Life

According to the philosophy of history that the Zhou used to justify their conquest of the Shang, political power can only be obtained and maintained by Virtue, which accrues to a person who is respectful of his ancestors, kind to the people, and wise in his judgments. However, this view had come to seem increasingly quaint and irrelevant to many rulers and ministers during the Spring and Autumn Period. The Zhou king, who supposedly had the mandate from Heaven to rule, was now a mere figurehead. The rulers of the various states vied for supremacy through warfare and intrigue, each hoping to become Hegemon, de facto ruler of all China. For example, in 529 BCE, when the state of Jin was dominant and the state of Lu attempted to resist its authority, a leading minister of Jin ominously informed a representative of the state of Lu:

> Our ruler has here 4,000 chariots of war. Even if he acts contrary to the Way, it is still necessary to fear him; if he, beyond that, is acting in accordance with the Way, who can prove his opponent? If even a small ox were to attack a pig, would you not fear the pig would die? . . . If we lead on the multitudes of Jin, using also the forces of the other states . . . if we come thus to punish Lu for its offenses . . . what can we seek that we shall not get?[i]

Consequently, many rulers and ministers preferred power politics and sneered, "Of what use is culture?" (*Analects* 12.8*). The *Art of War* by Sunzi is traditionally dated to this era. While it may actually be a later text, the view of warfare that it espouses would have been endorsed by many Spring and Autumn rulers. It begins, "Warfare is the greatest affair of the state, the basis of life and death, the Way to survival or extinction. It must be thoroughly pondered and analyzed."[ii] Thus, for Sunzi, the Way is no longer the Way of Virtue; it is the Way of warfare. And with this Way comes a particular set of values. Sunzi tells us to master the art of deception, to motivate our soldiers with anger toward the enemy and the promise of spoils if they win.

Kongzi (551–479 BCE; better known in the West as Confucius) lived during this era. His attitude toward the reigning philosophy of militarism is captured by the story of his brief visit to the state of Wei. The duke of Wei asked Kongzi for advice about the arrangement of military formations. Kongzi icily replied, "I know something about the *arrangement* of ceremonial stands and dishes for ritual offerings, but I have never learned about the *arrangement* of battalions and divisions." Kongzi left the very next day (*Analects* 15.1). Instead of looking for a military solution to the problems of society, Kongzi called for

putting into government people who were benevolent, wise, and reverent. Kongzi believed that such people would rule skillfully; in addition, the ethical example they set would inspire others to follow them willingly, without the need for force. When an influential official in Kongzi's home state asked him what he thought about capital punishment, Kongzi replied, "In your governing, Sir, what need is there for executions? If you desire goodness, then the common people will be good. The Virtue of a gentleman is like the wind, and the Virtue of a petty person is like the grass—when the wind moves over the grass, the grass is sure to bend" (12.19).

We should, of course, try to understand Kongzi in his own historical context. But, to think of him in today's terms, consider this: The kind of person who wants to "get tough on crime" and prefers government spending on defense to spending on domestic programs would probably have sided with Sunzi. People who think that a well-fed and well-educated population will also be more law abiding and who believe that war should only be a last resort would probably align themselves with Kongzi.

Kongzi's family had noble ancestors, but his father died when Kongzi was young, so he and his mother fell on hard times and he had to take many menial jobs in order to survive (9.6). He nonetheless managed to become very well educated and sought to enter government service. However, the times were unreceptive to his message. The duke of Lu, the state in which Kongzi was born, was a mere figurehead. Real power rested with the Three Families—wealthy, powerful clans whose members became the prime ministers of Lu. Kongzi complained that the Three Families taxed the people to pay for warfare and personal luxuries (11.17) and usurped prerogatives and government authority that they were not entitled to (3.1).

The Ji family did appoint Kongzi to office, but they apparently ignored his criticisms. Eventually, the state of Qi sent a group of "dancing girls" to the head of the Ji family, who enjoyed their services in private and did not show up to court for three days, ignoring his official duties. This was the last straw, and Kongzi resigned and left Lu, trying to find a ruler who would put his proposals into effect (18.4*). In light of this, we can perhaps understand the frustration that led Kongzi to sigh, "I have yet to meet a man who loves Virtue as much as he loves sex" (9.18).

For the next few years, Kongzi wandered from state to state, giving advice to rulers and seeking office. His life was difficult. He was almost murdered more than once (7.23, 9.5) and nearly starved to death on another occasion. This led his disciple Zilu to bitterly complain, "Does even the gentleman encounter hardship?" Kongzi replied, "Of course the gentleman encounters hardship. The difference is that the petty man, encountering hardship, is overwhelmed by it" (15.2).

In order to understand this exchange, we must fully grasp what a "gentleman" is. The term we render "gentleman" is "jūnzǐ 君子," which literally means "son of a ruler." As such, it has aristocratic connotations (as does "gentleman" in British English). In this sense, it is opposed to the "petty man" (literally, "small person"), meaning those of lower social class. However, Kongzi claimed that being a gentleman is not about social class but about being a good person. In Kongzi's view, a person of high social class might actually be a "petty man," because he is cruel, foolish, and arrogant, while a person born into poverty and obscurity might be a real gentleman, because he is benevolent, wise, and reverent. Consequently, when Zilu asked Kongzi if "even the gentleman" must go without food, he was whining, "Why should an upper-class person like myself have to go hungry?" Kongzi's reply means, If you are truly a gentleman, you will have the perseverance to endure suffering; if you cannot, then you are a petty man, regardless of how aristocratic your background.

Myth: *"Confucius said, 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.'"*

Fact: *No, he didn't. This saying is actually from the* Daodejing *(a work discussed in Chapter 8). It is common to see inspiring quotations falsely attributed to Confucius. If he were alive today, Confucius might agree with baseball legend Yogi Berra: "I didn't say most of the things I said."*

Kongzi never found the opportunity that he sought to take office under a ruler who wished to govern with benevolence and wisdom, and he eventually returned to Lu. For the rest of his life he focused on training disciples. Given his own impoverished upbringing, it is not surprising that Kongzi did not discriminate in accepting disciples based on their wealth or social status. He remarked that all he demanded as tuition was a symbolic gift of "as little as a bundle of silk or bit of cured meat" (7.7; cf 15.39). He hoped that his disciples would take part in public affairs and change the world for the better, and some of them were quite successful. But he did not think of himself as founding a movement, much less one named for him. In fact, the term we render "Confucian" in English is "rú 儒," which is etymologically unrelated to the name "Kǒngzǐ 孔子." Nonetheless, his personal ethical charisma (his Virtue) and the profundity of his teachings (his Way) formed the basis of a multifaceted social and intellectual movement that has inspired both fervent admiration and intense criticism. It remains one of the most challenging and important of the major philosophical and religious traditions in the world today.

So what was the Way of Kongzi? This has been hotly debated over two millennia. Even a complete book could not begin to do justice to the complexities of the discussion. Part of the difficulty is that Kongzi left behind no

writings of his own. Traditionally, the authorship of certain works has been attributed to him, but most contemporary scholars would say we are in the same evidential position in regard to Kongzi as we are with Jesus, Socrates, and the Buddha. We know each of these world-historical individuals only through what their followers and critics have said about them. Our primary source of the sayings of Kongzi is the *Analects,* a text divided into twenty "books" (closer to the size of chapters), each of which is subdivided into "chapters" (which range in length from one sentence to a few paragraphs in length). The *Analects* is traditionally said to have been recorded by the disciples of Kongzi soon after his death. However, among contemporary scholars there is considerable debate about how soon after the death of Kongzi each book in the *Analects* was composed, and hence how reliable each is as a guide to Kongzi's own thought. Based on linguistic evidence, Books 16–20 seem to have been written much later than the time of Kongzi, and some scholars believe there is stylistic evidence that Books 3–9 were written the earliest. However one dates individual passages, five themes are clearly central to the thought of Kongzi, and to everything that might plausibly be labeled "Confucianism" over the next twenty-five hundred years: the everyday world, tradition, the family, ritual, and ethical cultivation. In this chapter, we shall explore each of these themes in more detail.

II. Five Themes of Confucianism

1. Happiness in the Everyday World

While Kongzi did not deny that there is an afterlife, he thought that our primary ethical obligations relate to finding happiness for ourselves and others in this world. Thus, when Kongzi's disciple Zilu asked about how to serve ghosts and spirits, Kongzi replied, "You are not yet able to serve people—how could you be able to serve ghosts and spirits?" Zilu persisted, asking about death, but Kongzi just answered, "You do not yet understand life—how could you possibly understand death?" (11.12; cf 6.22) The significance of this emphasis becomes clearer if we contrast it with one major strain of Western thought. According to Plato, there is another world beyond the material realm. This other world is more perfect, more real, and more valuable than this world. It is inhabited by the gods and by the souls of the virtuous. Our actions in this life have value through their relationship to the other world. Thus, Plato says, the true philosopher makes dying his profession. Plato's ideas have influenced many in the West, including Christians such as Simone Weil. She expressed this perspective when she wrote, "There is a reality outside the

world, that is to say, outside space and time, outside man's mental universe. . . . That reality is the unique source of all the good that can exist in this world: that is to say, all beauty, all truth, all justice, all legitimacy, all order, and all human behaviour that is mindful of obligations."[iii]

As Weil's reference to our obligations makes clear, her Platonistic version of Christianity requires that we act virtuously in this life. But our ultimate goal should be to transcend our bodily desires, as much as we can, so that our souls will be purified and ready to ascend to the higher realm after death. In contrast, for Kongzi and later Confucians, the goal of human existence is to do good in this world and to live well in this world. Thus, when he is asked what his aspirations are, Kongzi mentions values manifested among humans in this world: "To bring comfort to the aged, to inspire trust in my friends, and be cherished by the youth" (5.26; cf 6.30).

2. Revivalistic Traditionalism

The Confucian emphasis on tradition is also related to how it differs from Platonism. Because Plato believed that we have intellectual access to a higher world beyond this one, he was willing to radically question the beliefs and morality of his society. For example, in the *Republic,* Plato describes a utopian society in which the members of the ruling class will have no families, never even knowing who their own fathers and mothers are. But for Kongzi there is no higher standard of judgment than human civilization at its best. Thus he said of himself, "I transmit rather than innovate. I trust in and love the ancient ways" (7.1). It is possible within a Confucian framework to modify or reject elements of one's tradition, but this must be done by appealing to other values, beliefs, and practices within that same tradition. For example, when people switched from using linen ceremonial caps to cheaper ones made of silk, Kongzi approved of the change, because it was more frugal, yet maintained the spirit of the ritual (9.3).

Many modern readers will object to this idea, arguing that we must think for ourselves rather than let tradition think for us. There is an irony here, though, in that we are following a tradition (that of the Enlightenment) when we assume that thinking for ourselves and thinking through our tradition are inevitably opposed. A popular bumper sticker says "Question Authority," but in commanding us to do this, the bumper sticker has itself assumed the role of an authority. This irony reveals a deep philosophical point. Every time we think for ourselves, we must (whether we like it or not) begin from the concepts, beliefs, practices, and values that have been handed down to us from tradition. One must argue that any change is, in reality, a deeper and more

consistent expression of the tradition. It is tempting to say that natural science gives us a technique for getting at the truth ahistorically. Although it would be far beyond the scope of this book to illustrate the case in detail, suffice it to say that almost all contemporary philosophers of science would acknowledge that science is a communal and historical enterprise in which progress can only occur via each generation of scientists learning the tradition before they extend it. For example, Einstein revolutionized our understanding of space, time, mass, and energy, but he could only do this by starting from within the Newtonian scientific tradition he learned in school. Similarly, Galileo overturned the medieval physics that preceded him, but this was only possible because of the puzzles identified and discussed within the Aristotelian tradition by the "impetus" theorists of the Middle Ages.

We might say that Kongzi is advocating not traditionalism or conservatism but rather revivalism. Revivalism is a movement to effect positive social change in the present by rediscovering the deep meaning of the texts, practices, and values of the past. Many of the great progressive social movements of history have been revivalistic, including the American civil rights movement. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. called on Americans to actually live up to the principles of freedom, equality, and human dignity central to the Christian tradition and to Western democratic thought rather than merely pay lip service to them:

> When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. . . . Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. . . . [E]ven though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.[iv]

King realized that the implications of reviving and living up to the deep meaning of tradition would be not conservative but radical. The same was true of Kongzi. He sought to awaken people to the highest values implicit in their own tradition in order to give them alternative ideals to force, violence, and greed. Just as King was motivated by a dream, so Kongzi said that he dreamed of the Duke of Zhou (7.5), whose loyal, wise, and humane government Kongzi admired and wished to restore. Therefore, we should not be quick to dismiss Kongzi's emphasis on tradition. His approach is actually

consistent with some of the most sophisticated trends in contemporary philosophy, and it grows out of his desire to effect positive social change through revivalism.

3. The Family and Differentiated Caring

It is not surprising that a philosopher who emphasized the everyday world and tradition would also emphasize the family. The family is important in Confucianism in two related ways. First, it is as part of a family that one initially learns to be a good person. A disciple of Kongzi made this point when he said, "The gentleman applies himself to the roots. 'Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.' Might we not say that filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness?" (1.2). To put it in very modern terms, it is by loving and being loved by one's family members that one learns to be kind to others, and it is by respecting the boundaries of others in one's family and having one's own boundaries respected that one develops integrity. This is an insight to which modern Western developmental psychologists are only beginning to catch up.

The second way in which the family is important in Confucianism is "differentiated caring" (also called "graded love"). Differentiated caring is the doctrine that one has stronger moral obligations toward, and should have stronger emotional attachment to, those who are bound to oneself by community, friendship, and especially kinship. For example, the duke of one state bragged to Kongzi that his people were "upright," explaining that one son had turned in his own father for stealing a sheep. Kongzi replied, "Among my people, those whom we consider 'upright' are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. 'Uprightness' is to be found in this" (13.18). The Confucian view on this topic has been criticized for encouraging nepotism and favoritism. In China, the Mohists (whom we shall study in Chapter 4) were particularly harsh critics of Confucianism on this topic. Many Westerners (and modernizers in China) have argued in favor of a morality based on respect for another person simply as a human being, regardless of personal relationships. However, other thinkers, notably feminists who advocate an ethics of care, hold a position similar to that of Confucians on this point.

Confucians would make several points in their own defense. First, we need an ethics that is practical for humans as they actually are rather than one that makes unrealistically impartial demands on us.[1] Second, differentiated caring

1. See the discussion of *Mengzi* 3A5 in Chapter 6.

means greater concern for certain people; it does not entail indifference, much less hostility, toward strangers. One of Kongzi's disciples spoke for millennia of Confucians when he said, "Everyone within the Four Seas is one's brother" (12.5). Third, in ancient China the king and the nobles of individual states were hereditary rulers; therefore government was intertwined with familial relations. Confucians did not see any way this government system could work unless people developed the love and respect that would inhibit political rivalry among family members.

4. Ritual and Functionalism

So far I have been emphasizing themes that are readily understood from our contemporary Western perspective, even if we may disagree with the stance Confucians take on these themes. However, one of the themes most important in Confucianism is much more difficult for many of us to understand and appreciate today: rituals or rites (*lǐ* 禮). The rituals encompass what we would classify today as belonging to fundamentally different kinds of activities. In the most basic sense, rituals are religious activities, such as offering food and ale to the spirits of one's ancestors, using the oracle bones for divination, and performing a funeral. Some rituals were very lively, involving elaborate dances accompanied by music. However, ritual also includes matters of what we would describe as etiquette, such as how to greet or say farewell to a guest, and the appropriate manner in which to address a subordinate ("pleasant and affable"), a superior ("formal and proper"; 10.2), or a person in mourning ("respectful"; 10.25). Finally, Kongzi sometimes speaks as if ritual refers to all of ethics (12.1).

The *Analects* notes, in what is generally taken to be a description of Kongzi acting in accordance with ritual, "He would not sit unless his mat was straight" (10.12). This line has been used for two thousand years to parody Kongzi and Confucians as obsessively observant of the minutiae of etiquette, perhaps to the point of absurdity. But how could Confucianism have captured so many of China's greatest minds, generation after generation, if it were really as shallow as that?

One simpleminded way of thinking about ritual is as a kind of primitive technology. For example, the king becomes ill. One performs a divination to determine what restless ancestral spirit is afflicting him, then offers a sacrifice to appease that ancestor, hoping to make the illness go away. Certainly, rituals have sometimes been used in this way in China (and in the West). However, philosophical Confucianism at its best has always had a much more sophisticated conception of ritual, one that is broadly functionalist.

Functionalism is a doctrine associated with the great sociologist Émile Durkheim. According to functionalism, the question to ask about a ritual is

what social or psychological needs or goals it satisfies. Functionalists see rituals as expressing and reinforcing emotions and dispositions that are necessary for the maintenance of communities. To understand how a ritual could perform such functions, consider the example of a marriage ceremony. Ideally, getting married is an expression of love and commitment to another person. Of course, simply saying "I love you" performs a similar function, but most people would agree that a wedding allows for a fuller and more intense expression of these feelings. In addition, participating in the ceremony typically makes the participants feel more invested in the relationship, thereby strengthening it. Of course wonderful relationships can exist without weddings, and marriage ceremonies sometimes fail to have good effects, but as the existence of commitment ceremonies attests, it is not only the legal benefits of marriage that leads gays and lesbians to seek the legal right to participate fully in this social institution.

The importance of ritual can be seen even in everyday matters of etiquette. Try to imagine navigating your social life without any rituals. Do you ever shake a person's hand? This is a ritual action. Or are you the sort of person who greets others with a hug? This, too, is a ritual. If you maintain that hugging is just an expression of how you feel, you would be correct. But it is a *ritual* expression of how you feel. If you doubt that this is the case, try hugging someone in a culture without this ritual and see what reaction you get.

It seems to be precisely a functionalist view of ritual that the later Confucian Xunzi is expressing when he writes,

> One performs the rain sacrifice and it rains. Why? I say: There is no special reason why. It is the same as when one does not perform the rain sacrifice and it rains anyway. When the sun and moon suffer eclipse, one tries to save them. When Heaven sends drought, one performs the rain sacrifice. One performs divination and only then decides on important affairs. But this is not for the sake of getting what one seeks, but rather to give things proper form. Thus, the gentleman looks upon this as proper form, but the common people look upon it as connecting with spirits. (*Xunzi* 17; *Readings,* p. 272)

In another passage, Xunzi makes clear that "proper form" is connected with the expression and reinforcement of one's emotions and dispositions: "In every case, ritual begins in that which must be released, reaches full development in giving it proper form, and finishes in providing it satisfaction. And so when ritual is at its most perfect, the requirements of inner dispositions and proper form are both completely fulfilled" (*Xunzi* 19; *Readings,* p. 276).

Although our society and Kongzi's China are different in countless ways, they do have some things in common. Both now and then, many people feel alienated from one another and see no point to anything other than satisfying their own immediate needs. At their best, rituals remind us of how we are connected with and dependent upon other humans. Consequently, rituals can help humans form and maintain genuine communities, in which people care for and respect one another.

Ritual includes a range of activities from elaborate religious ceremonies to matters of everyday etiquette to how to live well in general. What do these activities, which our society categorizes separately, have in common? Kongzi believed that the proper underlying attitude in a religious ceremony is reverence or awe. Because they see not only religious ceremonies but also many other spheres of human life as ritual, Confucians invite us to do everything with the same serious attentiveness. Whether putting flowers on a relative's grave or studying for a test, giving a speech before Congress or working in the checkout line, Confucians would urge you to focus on what you are doing, take it seriously, and do it to the best of your ability. This does not mean that your life should be somber and joyless. Far from it! Kongzi had a good sense of humor himself, one that was charmingly dry and droll.[2] The point is that whether you laugh, cry, love, or compete, invest everything you do with importance by doing it with the same intensity that a believer gives to a religious ceremony. Thus, Kongzi's comment that "If I am not fully present at the sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice at all" (3.12) has wider application than it seems at first glance. Be "fully present" in everything that you do—even if it is simply straightening your mat before you sit down on it.

Some of the most famous, and controversial, of the Confucian rituals have to do with funerals and mourning. In the Eastern Zhou, a Confucian funeral was often elaborate, with inner and outer coffins, special garments for the corpse, and other goods buried in the grave. After the funeral, there was a ritual period of mourning, the length of which depended upon how close the relation was. Mourning the death of one of your parents was the longest, and lasted three years (this meant just into the third year, or twenty-five months). During this time, the mourner was to wear plain clothes, eat simple food, maintain a somber demeanor, and curtail practical activities as much as possible. The Mohists, among others, criticized these practices as wasteful. It is interesting to note, though, that Kongzi himself emphasized appropriate feelings over ostentatious display. "When it comes to ritual, it is better to be spare

2. See 5.7*, 9.2, 14.29, 17.4*.

than extravagant. When it comes to mourning, it is better to be excessively sorrowful than fastidious" (3.4). This fits a functionalist interpretation, according to which the real point of the rituals is not the amount one spends or getting every minor detail right.

In another passage, Kongzi's disciple Zai Wo complains that the mourning period for parents is too long and wasteful, and proposes a one-year period. Kongzi asks, "Would you feel comfortable then eating your sweet rice and wearing your brocade gowns?" When the disciple replies that he would, Kongzi states, "Well, if you would feel comfortable doing so, then by all means you should do it." However, after the disciple leaves the room, Kongzi sighs, "This shows how lacking in Goodness this Zai Wo is! A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years of his life—this is why the three-year mourning period is the common practice throughout the world. Did Zai Wo not receive three years of care from his parents?" (17.21).We see again in this passage that Kongzi emphasized inner feeling over outward form in the rites. But we also see that Kongzi thought there were certain emotions a person ought to have, and that someone could be praised or blamed not only for their actions, and not just for their intentions in acting, but also for how they *feel*.

Immanuel Kant had a very different view. Kant held that while emotions may be conducive to, or an impediment to, moral conduct they are never morally right or wrong in themselves. The reason that we cannot be praised or blamed for our emotions is that we have no control over them. I cannot help whether I hate, love, or am indifferent to you, Kant says. But even if I hate Jane, I am morally responsible for treating her with respect because she is a human being. And my kindness toward John has no *moral* value unless it is given because he is a human being and not because he is my friend.

Kant is a paradigmatic modern thinker, so it would not be surprising to be sympathetic to his view. However, consider someone who hates people based on their race but who manages to force herself to treat everyone the same. Or imagine a man who holds women in contempt but who acts as if he does not, because he thinks that he is morally required to treat them as equals. Can we say that there is *nothing* ethically wrong with racism and misogyny as long as people keep it to themselves? This takes us back to the question of whether it is possible to change our emotions. The Western Stoics thought that emotions and beliefs were always perfectly consistent. If you believe the snake you see is poisonous, then you will be afraid of it. If you recognize that it is a harmless insectivore, you will not be afraid of it. However, this seems inadequate. I might have a phobia of all snakes, even ones that I firmly believe are not dangerous to humans.

5. Ethical Cultivation

The question of how emotions can change leads to the last of our five themes: ethical cultivation. Kongzi hoped to improve society by putting virtuous people into positions of authority, but he was well aware of how rare true Virtue is. Consequently, he pioneered educational techniques for making people not just more skillful or more knowledgeable, but more benevolent, wise, and reverent.[3] Kongzi's general philosophy of education is summed up in a pithy quotation: "If you learn without thinking about what you have learned, you will be lost. If you think without learning, however, you will fall into danger" (2.15). Much of the lively debate among Confucians over the twenty-five hundred years after Kongzi's death concerned the comparative emphasis one should give to "thinking" and "learning" in ethical cultivation, and what human nature must be like to justify this emphasis.[v]

"Learning," broadly speaking, is internalizing the actions, thoughts, and feelings of those who are virtuous, especially sages. If we are fortunate, these can be people we have actually encountered, but they can also be people we learn about through classic texts. The *Odes* seems to have been the primary classic text for Kongzi. This anthology of poetry was already quite old by Kongzi's time and is diverse in content, including poems about love, war, farming, major dynastic events, religious ceremonies, and lamentations. We begin to understand its role in ethical cultivation if we consider the very first ode. It is about an impending marriage, and Kongzi praised it on the grounds that it "expresses joy without becoming licentious, and expresses sorrow without falling into excessive pathos" (3.20). When we read the ode, we are drawn into the perspective of the poem and led to see (and to feel about) marriage a certain way. We see it as something happy and sensual but not frivolous or purely sexual. We sympathize with the natural longing of the lovers but not in a way that is self-indulgently lugubrious.

Other odes are more political in nature, such as that of the peasants who complain of overtaxation by singing of their ruler, "Big rat, big rat, / Do not gobble our millet! / Three years we have slaved for you, / Yet you take no notice of us."[vi] As someone who was raised in poverty, Kongzi no doubt wanted his students to learn to sympathize with the plight of farmers whose produce was the ultimate source of their salaries.

Kongzi summarized his approach to the *Odes* by saying that they "number several hundred, and yet can be judged with a single phrase: 'Oh, they will

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3. See Appendix A for a comparison between Kongzi's virtue-centered view of education and the Platonistic and Baconian positions that are best known in the West.

not lead you astray'" (2.2). In other words, the *Odes* ultimately are a guide to not swerving from the Way. This passage also illustrates Kongzi's fondness for seeing multiple layers of meaning in a poem. The phrase "Oh, they will not lead you astray" is a quotation from the *Odes,* and in its original context it refers to a team of stout, reliable horses that will not go off the path. However, Kongzi used it as an ethical metaphor (cf 1.15 and 3.8). Some scholars think this shows that Kongzi did not care about the meaning of the *Odes* themselves, that they were simply a pretext for expressing his own views. However, many ethical traditions believe that the metaphorical sense of the classics is part of their meaning. Augustine, for example, gave an elaborate metaphorical reading of the creation story in Genesis and saw it as part of God's meaning.

Literature can also teach us to perceive and think about ethical matters in a more profound way. As Iris Murdoch said, "By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil,* which partially conceals the world. . . . It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is."[vii] Trained as a philosopher, Murdoch became a novelist because she felt that imaginative literature often does a better job of helping us with this "task." The later Confucian Mengzi illustrates such a use of literature when one of his disciples cites an ode that says one must inform one's parents when getting married, and then asks why Sage-King Shun did not follow this injunction (*Mengzi* 5A2). Mengzi explains why Shun's abusive parents made his failure to inform them of his marriage a legitimate exception to the rule. This simple case shows how the *Odes* and the stories of the sages can help us to think more deeply about complex ethical situations. Examples abound in other traditions as well, including the fervent discussions in the Indian tradition of whether, in the *Ramayana,* King Rama treated Queen Sita fairly in banishing her. This kind of learning is possible because great literature consists not just of entertaining stories, but of narratives about complex people wrestling with difficult issues central to human life. To grapple with these issues is to grapple with our own existence.

Of course, Kongzi was also aware of the practical value of a good education for people who want to take part in public life. Being well read, eloquent in expression, and a careful reader are skills that are immensely useful and highly sought after in every literate society. Confucian learning was, therefore, something like a liberal arts education. It did not train one for any one particular task: as Kongzi put it, "The gentleman is not a vessel," meaning he is not a specialist good at only one thing (2.12; cf 9.6, 13.4, and 19.7). Rather, the gentleman has general skills that can be applied to a variety of activities. However, in Kongzi's society, as in our own, some were critical of the value of such a literary

education, because it requires a great investment of time without providing training in any particular craft. So we can understand why Kongzi said, "It is not easy to find someone who is able to learn for even the space of three years without a thought given to official salary" (8.12; cf 9.2, 12.8).

We have been examining Kongzi's view of learning, but *thinking* is necessary for every aspect of learning. Kongzi himself never encouraged rote memorization or mindless repetition. If one learns in this way, one will be "lost" (2.15), knowing only a jumble of confused and undigested bits of trivia. As the later Confucian Xunzi put it, "The learning of the petty person enters through his ears and passes out his mouth. From mouth to ears is only four inches—how could it be enough to improve a whole body much larger than that?" (*Xunzi* 1; *Readings,* p. 259). Kongzi was therefore very demanding of his students:

> I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again. (7.8)

At the same time, Kongzi believed that unless thinking works upon what one has already internalized via learning, one will "fall into danger" (2.15). Why? This relates to a point we discussed earlier: Kongzi's emphasis upon tradition. If our thinking has any content to begin with, it frames that content in terms of the language, concepts, values, and paradigms that we have inherited from our culture. If our understanding of that cultural tradition is shallow, then our thinking will also be shallow. Thus, from an authentic Confucian perspective, the thoughtless conservative and the unrealistic radical are really just the flip sides of the same coin: someone who mouths slogans he does not understand, and rejects positions he does not fully appreciate. The true Confucian gentleman learns deeply, always thinking about what he has learned, and applies it in his life and in trying to change the world for the better.

What are some of the other characteristics of the Confucian gentleman? And how does the emphasis upon producing a morally exemplary person make Confucianism a form of virtue ethics? To these questions we turn in the next chapter.

Review Questions

1. What is the name of the Chinese historical era in which Kongzi lived? Kongzi lived around which of the following years BCE: 1040? 770? 722?

500? 403? 221? (Bonus points if you remember from last chapter what eras the other years begin.)

2. What is the most fundamental difference between the Way of Sunzi and the Way of Kongzi?
3. What was Kongzi's family situation when he was growing up?
4. Why did Kongzi leave his home state of Lu and visit other states?
5. Why is it ironic that we use the terms "Confucian" and "Confucianism" in English to describe the movement associated with Confucius?
6. What is the *Analects* and how was it composed?
7. What are Kongzi's two senses of "gentleman"? What are his two senses of "petty man"?
8. Explain the difference for Kongzi between emphasizing the "everyday world" and being "otherworldly."
9. Why might it be more accurate to describe Kongzi as "revivalistic" than as "conservative"?
10. What are the two aspects of the Confucian emphasis on the family?
11. According to functionalism, how should we understand ritual?
12. What are the two major aspects of Confucian ethical cultivation?
13. What are the *Odes,* and what roles did Kongzi think they played in ethical cultivation?
14. Explain how each of the following passages relates to one of the five themes of Confucianism: 11.12, 7.1, 1.2, 13.18, 3.4, and 2.5. (You will have a solid basic understanding of Confucianism if you can remember these passages.)

■ 3 ■

KONGZI AND VIRTUE ETHICS

The gentleman has no biases for or against anything in the world. He simply seeks to be on the side of the right.

—Kongzi, *Analects* 4.10

This time-lapse photograph illustrates Kongzi's saying in *Analects* 2.1 that "one who rules through the power of Virtue is analogous to the Pole Star: it simply remains in its place and receives the homage of the myriad lesser stars."

In terms of the categories of Western normative ethics, Confucianism is a form of virtue ethics. In order to understand what is distinctive about virtue ethics, it is easiest to begin by explaining its alternatives: consequentialism and deontology. Most simply, consequentialism and deontology emphasize what kinds of actions one ought to *do,* while virtue ethics is about what kind of person one ought to *be.*

I. Three Normative Theories

Consequentialism is one of the most intuitive normative theories. Nineteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham, a seminal Western consequentialist, argued that what makes an action right is that it produces the "greatest happiness for the greatest number of people." For example, in considering whether capital punishment is morally right, a consequentialist would ask whether executing criminals produces more happiness, on balance, than other alternatives, such as life imprisonment. In most cases an execution will make the prisoner and his family unhappy, but it will make the victim's family and friends happy. Bentham would also consider the long-term consequences of execution. Does the example set by execution deter crime and thereby increase happiness, or not? Does life imprisonment consume tax dollars that would produce more happiness if redirected to hospitals, schools, and public parks? Taking everything into account, if executing a prisoner produces more happiness than alternatives such as life imprisonment, then executing him is the right thing to do.

The form of consequentialism derived from Bentham and his later followers (such as John Stuart Mill and contemporary philosopher Peter Singer) is called "utilitarianism." Utilitarians generally identify the good with some positive mental state, like pleasure, happiness, or, more technically, "preference satisfaction." Act-consequentialists, like Bentham, say we should judge each individual action by how much impartial good it produces. Rule-consequentialists, like Mill, argue that we should act according to rules that, if we follow them, produce the most impartial good. For example, Mill would admit that particular instances of free speech may have bad consequences overall, such as a speech given by a Nazi. However, Mill thinks it will produce the best consequences if society follows a general rule permitting free speech, rather than tries to make a case-by-case judgment about when free speech should be allowed. (We'll see in Chapter 4 that the Chinese Mohists were consequentialists.)

Some objections commonly raised against consequentialism are facile and easily refuted. For example, some people object that we can't know every

consequence of any one action. This is true, but we are only responsible for choosing the action most likely to have the best consequences. And our uncertainty about the future doesn't stop us from making all kinds of other choices based on probable outcomes, from choosing whether to try a new flavor of ice cream, to picking an elective course in college, to deciding where to invest our retirement funds.[i]

A deeper objection is whether good consequences are quantifiable in a way that allows us to add them up and determine the best possible outcome. How can I compare arithmetically the pleasure you get as a result of selling me candy, the pain I get from developing a cavity, and the pleasure the dentist gets from charging me to fix my cavity? Even within my own perspective, does the pleasure I get from reading a good book differ only in amount from the pleasure I get from eating ice cream, or are they different in kind? Utilitarian John Stuart Mill agreed that these pleasures are different in kind, but once one admits that, one can no longer simply add up pleasure as if it were a homogenous good.

The second deep objection to consequentialism concerns whether it is always right to do what has the best consequences. Consider the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II. There is continuing debate about whether these bombings were justified. Consequentialists debate whether, for example, it was possible for the United States to demonstrate the power of the bomb by dropping it on an uninhabited region of Japan and thereby convince Japan to surrender without having to obliterate a city. But if invading Japan had been necessary, it would have cost many casualties on both sides. Estimates of potential U.S. casualties alone range up to one hundred thousand. Suppose using the A-bomb on a city really would cost fewer lives than invading Japan. In that case, wouldn't everyone agree with the consequentialist that bombing Hiroshima was the morally right decision?

No. Philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe argued forcefully that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were intrinsically immoral and unjustifiable, regardless of whether on balance they saved lives by ending the war more quickly. Why? Anscombe states that it is justifiable to target soldiers in wartime, because doing so is an extension of one's general right to self-defense. However, she says that it is never justifiable to intentionally kill civilians, since they are not a direct threat. To put her point in terms with contemporary relevance, targeting civilians is *terrorism,* not an act of war. Now, one of the main reasons that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were "good targets" for the A-bomb was that they were largely intact, even after four years of war: they had not been targeted for prior aerial bombardment because they were of minimal military importance. In other words, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were *civilian* targets, not *military* targets. Consequently, according to Anscombe, bombing them was intrinsically morally wrong.[ii]

Anscombe was a deontologist. Broadly speaking, a deontologist claims that sometimes the right action is not the one that produces the most "good" (pleasure, happiness, and so on) overall. Ask yourself if the ends justify the means. If you think that the end does justify the means (as long as the end is good from an impartial perspective), then you are a consequentialist. If you think that the end does not always justify the means (because some means are simply wrong), then you are a deontologist. Many deontologists are (like Anscombe) rule-deontologists. Rule-deontologists claim that we can do what we like as long as we do not violate certain moral imperatives, such as "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not lie," and "Do not assault others." At the other extreme, act-deontologists think that imperatives like those above are, at best, useful rules of thumb to which there will always be exceptions. For example, as a general rule, one should not steal, but what if one steals a loaf of bread from a well-stocked supermarket to feed one's starving family?

So far I have explained some standard technical terms in philosophy and used them in well-established senses. However, it is useful at this point to mark a less-common distinction. Imagine a horizontal line representing a spectrum of views. At the left end is extreme generalism while at the right end is extreme particularism. Extreme generalism is the view that one substantive rule captures all moral evaluations. Extreme particularism is the view that there are no substantive, useful moral rules: all moral evaluation is completely context sensitive. Bentham's utilitarianism is at the extreme generalist end of the spectrum while act-deontology is at the extreme particularist end. Most ethical views fall somewhere in between these two extremes, but they can be described as closer to the generalist or the particularist end of the spectrum. For example, some rule-deontologists think that there are several substantive, highly general, inviolable moral rules, such as "Do not lie" and "Do not murder." Aristotle was a bit more of a particularist: he thought that moral rules provide guidance but they require substantial interpretation to be correctly applied in concrete situations.

As different as they are, consequentialism and rule-deontology both emphasize what a person ought to *do*. Virtue ethics is an alternative position that emphasizes what a person ought to *be*. To put it another way, consequentialism and rule-deontology are theories about *right action,* while virtue ethics is a theory about *good character*. There are different forms of virtue ethics, but all of them address four questions: (1) What is it to live well? (2) What traits of character (virtues) does one need to live well? (3) What is human nature like (such that one can live well and have the virtues)? (4) How can one cultivate the virtues (given what human nature is like)?

Virtue ethics can simply be a complement to a consequentialist or rule-deontological position. For example, a consequentialist like Bentham might

answer the four questions of virtue ethics in the following way. (1) What is it to live well? Living well is being happy, including taking pleasure in the happiness of others. (2) What virtues does one need to live well? One needs to be intelligent and benevolent. Intelligence is the ability to figure out the best means to achieve happiness, and benevolence is enjoying the happiness of others. (3) What is human nature like? Human nature is not fixed but is shaped by social conditioning. (4) How can one cultivate the virtues? Through good childhood education, enlightened laws, and social conditioning, humans can be taught to take happiness in helping others, and their intelligence can be maximized. So consequentialism tells us what we ought to *do,* and a "moderate virtue ethics" complements it by specifying what kind of person to *be* in order to do the right actions. Similarly, we could construct a moderate virtue ethics to accompany a rule-deontological position.

In moderate virtue ethics, claims about what kind of person one ought to be are logically dependent upon what one ought to do. However, according to "radical virtue ethics," what one ought to do is derived from what kind of person one ought to be. How would this work? One possibility is that ethics is derived from human nature. Perhaps we must first determine what the potential and limitations of human nature are, and only then can we determine our ethical obligations. For example, a radical virtue ethicist might object to Bentham's view, saying that before we know whether we ought to aim at the happiness of others, we must determine whether human nature allows us to do this. Suppose human nature makes it impossible for us to care about everyone equally. (This was the objection of some Confucians to the impartial consequentialism of the Mohists.) Or suppose human nature is purely self-interested, so that it is unnatural to care for anyone but oneself. (We'll see in a later chapter that this was the objection of Yang Zhu to both Mohist consequentialism and Confucianism.)

Many advocates of radical virtue ethics are highly particularistic. In response to the question, "What should I do?" the particularistic virtue ethicist answers, "You should do what a virtuous person would do in your particular situation." There is little to be said at a highly general level beyond this, because no simple rule captures what a virtuous person will do in every situation. She will, however, notice and appropriately respond to all kinds of aspects of situations that most of us will ignore or misinterpret. This is because the virtuous person has more wisdom than most of us. Wisdom is importantly different from intelligence. Intelligence comes in different forms, but we have ways to measure it, including IQ tests, standardized exams like SATs, and tests of skill at activities like mathematics. Wisdom is harder to quantify, but it is an important trait that we recognize and value in others. Think of someone who typically gives good advice about personal predicaments. Consider a

person who is good at running meetings or solving practical problems. Imagine people who are generally happy and relaxed, but who also pay their bills, meet their deadlines, and are successful overall. All of these people are wise. One can just as easily imagine people who are extremely intelligent, but who fail miserably at all of these things, because they are not wise.

Many years ago, I was giving a guest lecture on Confucianism, and during the discussion session a young woman asked me, "What would Kongzi say if your parents didn't approve of the guy you were dating?" I could tell by the tone of her voice and the look on her face that this was not a purely hypothetical question. I began by explaining that Kongzi lived in a very patriarchal and sexist society, so he assumed that women should just marry the men their parents picked for them. However, I went on to say, we don't live in Kongzi's society, so we should focus on how contemporary Confucians would address this issue. They would probably say that it depends on the details of the situation. Do the parents dislike the guy because of his race or religion? If so, one should not follow their advice. Or do the parents dislike the guy because he treats their daughter disrespectfully? Do the young woman's friends agree with her parents' assessment? If her friends disagree among themselves, ask the friend who seems to be the best judge of people's characters. These are the kinds of questions and concerns that a wise person would begin by raising.

II. Confucianism as Virtue Ethics

It is a stereotype that Confucianism is monolithic and unchanging. In fact, Confucianism takes a variety of forms, which have evolved historically. However, Confucians disagree over the details of how to answer the four topics of virtue ethics.

1. Living Well

In the previous chapter, we saw that the Confucian conception of living well includes finding happiness and benefiting others in the everyday world, enjoying life with one's family and friends, a revivalistic use of tradition, participation in ritual, and educational activities aimed at making one a better person. A charming and moving passage that nicely illustrates the Confucian view of a good life is *Analects* 11.26:

> Zilu, Zengxi, Ran Qiu, and Zihua were seated in attendance. The Master said to them, "I am older than any of you, but do not feel

> reluctant to speak your minds on that account. You are all in the habit of complaining, 'No one appreciates me.' Well, if someone were to appreciate you, what would you do?"
>
> Zilu spoke up immediately. "If I were given charge of a state of a thousand chariots—even one hemmed in between powerful states, suffering from armed invasions and afflicted by famine—before three years were up I could infuse its people with courage and a sense of what is right."
>
> The Master smiled at him.

Ran Qiu and Zihua (who noticed that Kongzi smirked at Zilu because of his overconfident answer) then tried to outdo each other in giving increasingly humble descriptions of their own political aspirations. Finally, Kongzi turned to Zengxi:

> Zengxi stopped strumming his zither, and as the last notes faded away he set the instrument aside and rose to his feet. "I would choose to do something quite different from any of the other three."
>
> "What harm is there in that?" the Master said. "We are all just talking about our aspirations."
>
> Zengxi then said, "In the third month of Spring, once the Spring garments have been completed, I should like to assemble a company of five or six young men and six or seven boys to go and bathe in the Yi River and enjoy the breeze upon the Rain Dance Altar, and then return singing to the Master's house."
>
> The Master sighed deeply, saying, "I am with Zengxi!"

Zilu, Ran Qiu and Zihua all aspire to help others via participation in government. This is a central aspect of the Confucian vision. However, Kongzi sighs in agreement with Zengxi, because his aspiration expresses the fact that political activity is merely a means to something that is even more important in Confucianism: enjoying simple everyday pleasures like a walk down to the river, going for a swim, singing, and hanging out with your friends and family.

2. The Virtues

So which virtues does Kongzi think one needs to live such a life? Kongzi's primary virtue term is *rén* 仁, which several fine translations render "Goodness." This reflects the fact that *ren* is, in a way, the highest human excellence for Kongzi. I slightly prefer to translate *ren* as "humaneness," for several reasons. First, "humaneness" suggests that one of the most important aspects of

ren is "caring for others" (12.22). Indeed, for later Confucians this is its primary sense. Second, just as the word "humaneness" has the word "human" in it, so does the character *rén* 仁 have *rén* 人, "person," in it. (The other part of *rén* 仁 is 二, "two," suggesting that this is a virtue manifested in relationships between people.) Ultimately, though, it doesn't make much difference whether one says "Goodness," "humaneness," or something else, as long as one remembers that *ren* is the most important virtue for Kongzi, and it is manifested primarily in caring for others.[1]

Almost as important as Goodness, for Kongzi, is wisdom. The relationship between the two virtues is illustrated when a disciple, Fan Chi, "asked about Goodness":

> The Master replied, "Care for others."
> He then asked about wisdom.
> The Master replied, "Know others."
> Fan Chi still did not understand, so the Master elaborated: "Raise up the straight and apply them to the crooked, and the crooked will be made straight." (12.22; cf 2.19)

"Straight" and "crooked" are metaphors for moral rectitude and corruption, so to "raise up the straight" refers to Kongzi's strategy for reforming government by putting people with good character into positions of authority. Kongzi is implying that two traits are necessary to carry out this policy. One must be Good, which entails caring about the well-being of others, but caring is not enough. One must also be wise, which involves being able to recognize who is upright and who is corrupt. Without Goodness, one lacks the proper motivation; without wisdom, one lacks the skill to achieve one's goal.[2]

An important part of wisdom is being able to judge the character of others. Indeed, much of Book 5 of the *Analects* is taken up with Kongzi's appraisals of other people. For contemporary Western readers, Kongzi's emphasis on judging others may seem off-putting because we live in a society that frowns on people who are judgmental. But there is great irony in this, because to condemn others for being judgmental is to judge them yourself. This is more than an amusing paradox. The fact is, it is impossible to live without sometimes evaluating others. We all condemn certain kinds of people, such as the racist, the misogynist, and the child molester. And if

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1. Some of the many passages in the *Analects* that discuss Goodness include 1.2, 1.3, 3.3, 4.1–6, 5.8, 5.19, 6.30, 7.30, 9.1*, 12.1–2, 14.1, 14.4, 15.9, 15.36, 17.6*, and 17.21.

2. Other passages that discuss Goodness and wisdom together include 4.1, 4.2, 6.22, 6.23, 9.29, 15.33*, and 17.8.

we are to be fair to our friends, we need to *evaluate* whether, for example, they are being honest for our own good, blunt but a bit tactless, or simply hurtful when they tell us a truth we do not want to hear. If being judgmental is a vice, it cannot mean simply having opinions about others, because we cannot help having opinions. Rather, to be judgmental is really to make judgments about others in a manner that is not informed and not thoughtful. A person cannot begin to be informed and thoughtful in her opinions as long as she keeps telling herself that she (unlike everyone else in the world) does not make any judgments.

The virtue of humility is required in order to avoid being judgmental, so Kongzi encourages us to "not delay in reforming if you make a mistake" (1.8*). He does not think he is above this advice: he admits that he is sometimes wrong in his judgments about others (2.9, 5.10), and he frequently notes his own failings (7.3, 7.33, 7.34, 9.8*) and praises the excellences of others (5.9). Kongzi sums up the importance of thoughtful evaluation when he says, "When walking with two other people, I will always find a teacher among them. I focus on those who are good and seek to emulate them, and focus on those who are bad in order to be reminded of what needs to be changed in myself" (7.22).

Appreciating the good and bad points of others is an important part of wisdom, but not the only one. Wisdom is also a metavirtue, in the sense that it requires understanding and being committed to other virtues. Thus, Kongzi asks, "How could someone who does not choose to dwell in Goodness be considered wise?" (4.1). General intelligence seems to be a third part of wisdom for Kongzi (5.9), as manifested in such things as interpreting the *Odes* with insight (1.15, 3.8, 3.11).[3]

Those who are familiar with Western ethics might wonder how Confucian wisdom differs from *phronēsis,* or "practical wisdom," in Aristotelian thought. There are some striking similarities. For both Kongzi and Aristotle, wisdom is something very different from theoretical intelligence, and it cannot be fully captured in any set of rules. Whereas some philosophers (such as the Mohists and Western utilitarians) think of ethics as being almost like mathematics, Confucians and Aristotelians conceive of wisdom as more like the learnable but uncodifiable skill of a master craftsperson. Furthermore, for both Confucians and Aristotelians, wisdom requires understanding and being committed to the other virtues. However, there are important differences between the two views as well. For Aristotle, *phronēsis* is the master virtue that subsumes

3. Other passages about wisdom (sometimes also translated as "knowledge" or "understanding") include 2.17*, 5.18*, 7.20, 7.28, 8.9, 11.12, 15.4*, 15.8*, 15.34*, 16.8, 16.9, 17.3*, 17.24*, 19.23*, and 20.3*.

all the others. In contrast, Goodness is the overarching virtue in the thought of Kongzi.

Righteousness, dutifulness, trustworthiness, and courage are four virtues that are important for Kongzi but much more narrow than Goodness. The Good person will possess these lesser virtues, but none of them, by itself, is sufficient to render a person Good. Righteousness is the integrity of a person who will not do what is wrong, even when confronted with strong temptations. The same Chinese term is used to describe the rightness of the actions the righteous person performs. In fact, many interpreters of the *Analects* consistently translate it "rightness" because they think that (for Kongzi at least) it is primarily a quality of actions rather than the name of a virtue. Insofar as it may be considered a virtue, it is clear that a righteous person does what is right even in the face of danger or the lure of wealth: "The gentleman understands rightness, whereas the petty person understands profit" (4.16).[4]

Myth: *"Chinese characters are all pictures."*

Fact: *Fewer than 3 percent of Chinese characters were originally pictograms or ideograms. So what are they? Read Appendix B to find out.*

Dutifulness and trustworthiness are virtues that Kongzi frequently mentions together (1.4, 1.8*, 5.28, 7.25*, 12.10*, 15.6*). Dutifulness is a sort of devotion or loyalty, especially when that commitment conflicts with one's own self-interest (5.19). However, Kongzi stresses that dutifulness is never blind loyalty: "If you care for someone, can you fail to encourage him? If you are dutiful to someone, can you fail to instruct him?" (14.7*).

As the structure of the character suggests, to be trustworthy (*xìn* 信) is to be a person (*rén* 人) who stands by his words (*yán* 言): to be honest and sincere. This is important for Kongzi, because he sees a key difference between genuine Goodness and the superficial semblance of Goodness that is provided by being "glib" (15.11)or having a "clever tongue" (1.3). A true gentleman is reticent (12.3*) and does not promise more than he can deliver (14.27).

Kongzi distinguishes being courageous from being rash. Thus, when the always headstrong Zilu expresses a willingness to rush into a dangerous situation, Kongzi dryly remarks, "Zilu's fondness for courage exceeds my own" (5.7*). A person does not lack courage because she is unwilling to expose herself to needless danger. Rather, "to see what is right yet not do it is to lack courage" (2.24*). This is similar to the view of most Western virtue ethicists. However, Aristotle and Plato considered courage an extremely important vir-

4. Other passages that discuss rightness/righteousness include 1.13*, 2.24*, 4.10, 5.16*, 6.22*, 7.3, 7.16, 12.10*, 12.20*, 13.4, 14.12, 14.13, 15.17*, 15.18, 16.10*, and 16.11*.

tue, whereas Kongzi seldom mentions it, and he seems to spend more time discouraging excessive courage than he does encouraging genuine courage (8.2, 8.10*, 14.4, 14.21, 17.8, 17.23, and 17.24*; but contrast 9.29). This may have something to do with the fact that a paradigm of courage (in both China and the West) is bravery in battle; however, Kongzi wanted to discourage his contemporaries from thinking in militaristic terms as much as possible.

A number of other virtues are named in the *Analects,* but the preceding are the most important.

3. Ethical Cultivation and Human Nature

It is not surprising that a philosopher's conception of human nature and her theory of ethical cultivation are typically closely related: how we should cultivate the human potential to be virtuous depends upon what that potential is. We saw in the previous chapter that Kongzi stresses both thinking and learning in ethical cultivation (2.15). But Kongzi was vague about the relative importance of these two factors and how they relate to human nature. Consequently, this was the subject of intense debate in the later Confucian tradition. Here I shall present an interpretation of Kongzi that is close to that of Xunzi. However, be aware that for the last millennium, most Confucians have believed that Mengzi's position best elaborates what is implicit in Kongzi's thought.[5]

One of the disciples closest to Kongzi remarked that one could not hear him talk about human nature (5.13). Indeed, his only explicit statement on the topic is that "By nature people are similar; they diverge as the result of practice" (17.2). But this is so vague that it is consistent with almost any view; human nature could be good, bad, or morally neutral. Kongzi does seem to have an implicit view of human nature, though. He praises a disciple who compares ethical cultivation to the laborious process of grinding and polishing jade (1.15). Furthermore, in what has been called Kongzi's "spiritual autobiography," he describes how he committed himself to learning at the age of fifteen and only fifty-five years later, at the age of seventy, could he "follow [his] heart's desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety" (2.4). And in a pronouncement to his most talented disciple, Kongzi characterizes Goodness as "restraining yourself and turning to the rites" (12.1). Taken together, these comments suggest that humans are not innately disposed to ward the virtues and that human nature is actually very resistant to ethical cultivation.

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5. For Xunzi, see Chapter 10; for Mengzi's view, see Chapter 6; for later Confucian views of Kongzi, see Chapter 12.