

3. An Ethic of Service

LY 4

Confucius died in 0479. His son had predeceased him. In the absence of a family member, his disciples presided at the funeral. Later legend says that the disciples stayed by the grave for three years, but Dž-gùng remained for another three years. It is probably true that Dž-gùng took charge of the proceedings: another legend makes him rich through trading. His surname Dwán-mù 端木 suggests a family of timber suppliers, and with much building going on in the capital, that occupation would have been very lucrative. One way or another, Dž-gùng had the means to bear the cost of the funeral ceremony.

There they were, the principal disciples of Confucius. What did they do, being all together for perhaps the last time? One thing was to remember what Confucius had taught them. It was probably Dž-gùng who wrote down sixteen sayings that seemed especially important. These sayings became the written heritage of Confucius. They would later form the beginning of the Analects.

Here are those sayings, as Dž-gùng arranged them, in four topical groups. The values, the code, of the civil servant, approached from different angles.

[4A. The Cardinal Virtue Rvn 仁]¹

Rvn 仁 . This word is homophonous with, and is related to, the word for person, rvn 人 . That word can also mean “other people,” as witness Shī 34, from the state of Bèi, a dialogue between a girl and her lover, with a flooded river between them. He makes his excuses. The last stanza is hers:

There is the boatman, beckoning
Others 人 cross, but I do not,
Others 人 cross, but I do not,
I am waiting for my friend

The virtue rvn 仁 (“the character consists of the word “man” 人 plus the determinative 二 “two”), occurs just twice in the Shī poems, both times as one of the qualities which a girl admires in her lover. It means “kind, considerate.” Says the girl in Shī 77 (a thought echoed by the girl in Shī 103):

洵美且仁 Truly handsome, and also kind

The “otherness” meaning is obvious: not self, but other, is the focus. The military ethos in which Confucius was raised knew another kind of otherness: the selfless dedication of warriors to their leader.

Confucius’s sayings take that quality of other-directedness, of concern for something outside oneself, into the civilian sphere.

¹The section headings are supplied by ourselves, which is why they are in brackets. See further **The Original Analects** (hereafter cited as **Original**), 13-19.

Dž-gùng's first section suggests the stages of a career, from a young person hoping to be noticed, to the senior person who himself does the noticing.

¶LY 4:1. The Master said, It is best to dwell among the rǎn. If he choose not to abide in rǎn, how will he get to be known?

↳LY 4:2. The Master said, He who is not rǎn cannot long abide in privation. nor can he forever abide in happiness. The rǎn are content with rǎn; the "knowing" turn rǎn to their advantage.

Hardship does not affect dedication. "Knowing" is sarcastic: the worldly wise. The next two sayings show someone already in office.

¶LY 4:3. The Master said, Only the rǎn can like others, or hate others.

↳LY 4:4. The Master said, If he is set on rǎn, he will have no hatreds.

As with many pairs of sayings, the second is a corrective or qualification of the first. One who is dedicated can spot that quality in others, and will disapprove those who may lack it (4:3). He is *discerning*. But disliking as such is not one's business (4:4). One's mind is set on getting the job done.

Disapproval of those who lack rǎn also figures in the next pair of sayings:

¶LY 4:5. The Master said, Wealth and honor are what men desire; but if he cannot do so in accord with his principles (dào 道), he will not abide in them. Poverty and lowliness are what men hate; but if he cannot do so in accord with his principles, he will not avoid them. If a gentleman avoid rǎn, how shall he make a name? The gentleman does not for the space of a meal depart from rǎn. In direst straits he cleaves to it; in deepest distress he cleaves to it.

↳LY 4:6. The Master said, I have never seen one who loved the rǎn and hated the not-rǎn. One who loved the rǎn would value nothing else above them; one who hated the not-rǎn would himself be already rǎn; he would not suffer the not-rǎn to come nigh his person. Is there anyone who for a single day can spend all his strength on rǎn? I for one have never seen anyone whose *strength* was not up to it. There may be such, but I for one have never seen them.

One's principles or Way² (dào 道) are the constant. To follow that inward Way may be difficult, but it is only the will that is lacking.

The section ends with an unpaired saying, giving advice to the senior civil servant about evaluating future candidates for office:

↳LY 4:7. The Master said, People's faults run true to type. If we look at their faults, it is only to discover their good qualities [rǎn].

A shortcoming *is* a shortcoming, but that person may still have good qualities. A candidate for office may have too little human insight to be a good judge, but might be well placed as a granary supervisor. The service can use many talents. A good manager is one who can match the talent to the task.

²Not the mystical Way, or the Way of Nature in the naturalistic philosophy of Chí, but one person's values. In the public sector, "the way the state should be ordered," with the ruler unambiguously in charge, and others properly subordinate. This was not the case in Confucius's Lǚ: the Three Families, descendants of younger brothers of the early ruler Hwán-gūng, had come increasingly to contest the authority of the ruler.

[4B. The Public Context: Dào 道]

Dào 道. The individual's Way, his principles, we have met above. Here is its counterpart: the public Way, the way the political world should be ordered:

☐**LY 4:8.** The Master said, If in the morning he hears that the Way obtains, and that evening he dies, it is enough.

☐**LY 4:9.** The Master said, An officer who is dedicated to the Way, but ashamed of poor clothes or food, is not worthy to be called into counsel.

For one really dedicated to that Way, personal hardship does not matter.

This section ends with a final “envoi” saying, which has wider implications:

☐**LY 4:10.** The Master said, The gentleman's relation to the larger world is like this: he has no predilections and no prohibitions. If he thinks something is right, he associates himself with it.

He is committed to whatever is right (yì 義). Not legal right, but what ought to be; what is appropriate. Personal preferences have no place here. Instead, there is *detachment* from the local or the particular, emphasizing the general.

[4C. The Gentleman 君子 and His Opposite]



The text now contrasts the larger viewpoint taken by the “gentleman” and that of his opposite, the “little man,” the man of merely local sympathy.³

☐**LY 4:11.** The Master said, The gentleman likes virtue 德; the petty man likes his own place (tù 土). The gentleman likes justice [punishments; sying 刑]; the petty man likes mercy (hwei 惠).

☐**LY 4:12.** The Master said, He who conducts himself with an eye to profit will be much resented.

The little man prefers exemptions to justice. The statecraft texts also condemn favoritism in the working of the law. The gentleman does not do himself favors, or work for his own advancement. As to the government itself,

☐**LY 4:13.** The Master said, Can one run the country with propriety and deference (禮讓)? Then what is the obstacle? But if one *cannot* run it with propriety and deference, what good is propriety?

Courtesy recognizes differences of status. At any moment, somebody must be in charge, and things work better if that can be routinely acknowledged.

³There is no satisfactory translation for 君子 (“son of a ruler, wellborn”). We use the usual equivalent “gentleman.” The characters 君子 in the illustration above are from a fragment of the Hàn Stone Classics, which stood outside the Imperial Academy in Latter Hàn. The Analects part was engraved in the year 183 AD.

[4D. Preparation for Office]

The gentleman must continually cultivate the qualities needful to his calling.

┌LY 4:14. The Master said, He does not worry that he has no position; he worries how he is going to *perform* in the position. He does not worry that no one knows him; he seeks to be *worth* knowing.⁴

└LY 4:16. The Master said, *The gentleman concentrates on*⁵ what is right; the little man concentrates on advantage.

And how does the gentleman learn the necessary qualities?

└LY 4:17. The Master said, When he sees a worthy man, let him think how to equal him. When he sees an unworthy man, let him look within.

Let him correct those failings in himself. He learns from his response to others. *One learns otherness from others.* They no longer had Confucius as a teacher, but they had, from him, all they needed to make further progress on their own.

These sayings have a certain formality, a gravity. It shows especially in their courtly parallel structure. Consider LY 4:5, evidently a deeply felt remark:

富與貴

┌Wealth and honored rank:

是人之所欲也

these are what everyone wants;

不以其道得之，不處也

but if not in accord with his principles he do so, he will not abide in them.

貧與賤

┌Poverty and low station:

是人之所惡也

these are what everyone hates;

不與其道得之，不去也

but if not in accord with his principles he do so, he will not avoid them.

君子去仁

┌If a gentleman discard *rén*,

惡乎成名

┌how will he make a name?

君子無終食之間違仁

The gentleman does not for the space of a meal depart from *rén*.

造次必於是

┌In direst straits, he cleaves to this;

顛沛必於是

┌In deep distress, he cleaves to this.

Here is the total dedication of the warrior, expressed in the accents of the courtier.

⁴The missing LY *4:15, as the asterisk implies, is a later interpolation.

⁵For the words italicized here (君子喻) see the illustration on the preceding page.