

Way, and he is then either erratic or he systematically perverts the outer forms of *li* to serve personal profit.

Confucius's vision provides no basis for seeing man as a being of tragedy, of inner crisis and guilt; but it does provide a socially oriented, action-oriented view which provides for personal dignity. Moreover, when we place the comments made here in the larger context of Confucius's view of man, a context further discussed in the other essays in this book, we see then that the images of the inner man and of his inner conflict are not essential to a concept of man as a being whose dignity is the consummation of a life of subtlety and sophistication, a life in which human conduct can be intelligible in natural terms and yet be attuned to the sacred, a life in which the practical, the intellectual and the spiritual are equally revered and are harmonized in the one act—the act of *li*.

3

The Locus of the Personal

There is no doubt that for Confucius "*jen*" is at least equal in importance to any other single concept such as *li*. Unlike *li*, however, *jen* is surrounded with paradox and mystery in the *Analects*. *Jen* seems to emphasize the individual, the subjective, the character, feelings and attitudes; it seems, in short, a psychological notion. The problem of interpreting *jen* thus becomes particularly acute if one thinks, as I do, that it is of the essence of the *Analects* that the thought expressed in it is not based on psychological notions. And, indeed, one of the chief results of the present analysis of *jen* will be to reveal how Confucius could handle in a nonpsychological way basic issues which we in the West naturally cast in psychological terms. The psychological, subjective use of *jen* in Chinese is a later development, a use whose import is exaggerated both by the profound psychological bias of Buddhist commentators and by the Western, Graeco-Christian outlook of translators. The truly novel aspects of Confucius's doctrine of *jen* are precisely what we need to see but fail to see because they *are* novel and hence not easily formulated in the psychologically biased language we have ready to hand.

Jen has been translated variously as Good, Humanity, Love, Benevolence, Virtue, Manhood, Manhood-at-Its-Best and so on. For various commentators *jen* has seemed to be a virtue,

the all-inclusive virtue, a spiritual condition, a complex of attitude and feelings, a mystic entity. Its relation to *li* and to other important concepts remains obscure. Let us see if we can propose a meaning that will articulate precisely and clearly with the main ideas in the *Analects*. A further test will be whether our account of its meaning will substantiate Confucius's words: "There is nothing that I keep from you." But we must now turn to the task of developing afresh the interpretation of *jen*.

Waley says that *jen* is a "mystic entity."¹ There is no doubt that at least on the face of the text there is paradox. We are told *jen* is itself a heavy burden:

The True Knight of the Way must be great and strong; his burden is heavy, and his course is long. He has taken *jen* as his burden—is that not heavy? Only with death does his journey end—is that not long? (8:7)

But we are also told that *jen* comes "after what is difficult is duly done." (6:20)

And finally we seem to be told that it is neither difficult nor need wait till after the difficult is done: "Is *jen* so far away? I desire it, and lo!—it is here." (7:29)

Of one thing there is no doubt: *jen* is central to the ideal life. For example, Confucius says that:

One who really cared for *jen* would not let any other consideration come first. (4:6)

(An alternative but equally emphatic translation is: "One who really cared for *jen* would be surpassed by no one."²)

What are the observable and characteristic traits of a *jen* man? Here, too, we are initially puzzled. Not only are we told that, in general, Confucius "rarely spoke of profit, fate, or *jen*,"

1. Waley, *Analects of Confucius*, p. 28.

2. Chan, *Source Book*, p. 26, note 55.

(9:1),³ but he seems to say that the *jen* man is chary of speaking about it. (12:3)⁴ Yet we cannot suppose that this latter comment provides a clear direction which we can follow, for no one seems to be able to find a formula, acceptable to Confucius, for identifying actual men who are or were *jen*. Indeed if we turn to those books of the *Analects* which are generally acknowledged to be the earliest "strata," the most authentically direct reports of Confucius's words, there is extremely little about what *jen* itself is. The comments fall into several main groupings.

In Books 2 through 9, and more spottily in 11 through 15, a good deal of the comment is negative, a series of rejections of suggestions of various commendable actions as necessarily signs of *jen*. (5:4, 7, 18; 7:33; 14:2, 17)

There is another group of passages which consist of general comments about the struggle for *jen*. Thus, as we have noted, it comes before any other consideration (4:6); the noble man never abandons it even for a moment. (4:5) It comes only after one has done what is difficult. (6:20) Yet it is not a question of insufficient strength but the will to use all one's strength. (4:6) One may have to give one's life for *jen*. (15:8)

3. In spite of the controversy over the reading of this passage, I think the traditional one, also concurred in by Waley, *Analects of Confucius* (p. 29), is correct. It makes sense to me from a philosophical standpoint. In addition, and in spite of Bodde's and Laufer's arguments, it seems to me to be justified, or at least rendered an open question, on stylistic grounds. Bodde argues that in these chain phrasings the conjunction *yu* is never used elsewhere in the *Analects*. But what he does not mention is that in such a closely neighboring passage as 9:4, we find almost a mirror-image of 9:1 except that the negative *mu* is used instead of the affirmative *yu* of 9:1. Why should not a sense of parallelism and rhythm have called for this perfectly permissible use of *yu* instead of the more common omission of any explicit conjunction?

4. Here again the reading is controversial. I have followed Waley, *Analects of Confucius* (p. 163, note 2), rather than other translators. The ambiguity of *chib* after *wei* and *yen* allows either that the *jen* man is chary of speech in general or of speaking about *jen* in particular. Given the option, I have decided on philosophical grounds of the kind indicated in the argument that is presented in my exposition.

Many other comments about *jen* are also quite general but concern the consequences and great power of *jen*. Without *jen*, a man cannot for long endure either adversity or prosperity. (4:2) Those who are *jen* rest content in *jen*; those who are wise profit from it. (4:2)

The power of *jen* is expressed—but with some ambiguity—in the statement that if one submits to *li*, everyone will respond to one's *jen*. (12:1) If a truly Kingly Man were to arise, within a single generation *jen* would prevail. (13:12) In each of the latter cases, the power of *jen* is explicitly linked to other conditions, kingliness or submission to *li*.

One passage seems to say that only the *jen* know how to love men and how to hate them (4:3), whereas those who sincerely strive to become *jen* abstain from hatred. (4:4) The text is obscure on this latter point, and Waley renders the passage so as to give an essentially opposite meaning. When opposite interpretations can be given to a passage on such a central question, it becomes all too evident that the concept *jen* is obscure.

In spite of all these comments on *jen*, there is a point to the saying that the Master "never spoke of *jen*," for the comments we have examined really tell us very little, if anything, of what *jen* is *in itself*. Yet we should not suppose that something is being hidden from us: The Master said: "My friends, I know you think that there is something I am keeping from you. There is nothing that I keep from you. I do nothing which you do not know." (7:23) We must take this disclaimer in all seriousness. Waley has suggested that Confucius is talking here only about his actions (*hsing*) and not necessarily about esoteric doctrine. But, as I argue here and in the other essays in this book, Confucius speaks in terms of action (*hsing*) because for him it is action and public circumstances that are fundamental, not esoteric doctrine or subjective states. We can at least provisionally dismiss this complex question by again quoting

the Master:⁵ the noble man "first declares himself, then follows through." (2:13)

Is there nothing we can learn from the Master regarding *jen* itself, its positive nature, the definition of the term or at least some definite traits of the *jen* man? There are a few clues, though one cannot help noting that the most explicit of these are, as one might expect, in the later or in any case less certainly authentic remarks of Confucius.

I shall pass lightly over certain rather cliché virtues ascribed in the later books to those who are *jen*. "Courteous," "diligent," "loyal," "brave," "broad," "kind" (13:19; 14:5; 17:6)—these are traditional virtues which give us no insight or other help. Furthermore, aside from the questionable authenticity of these later passages, especially 17:6, they are not decisive since, as we noted earlier, Confucius at various times indicates that the possession of such virtues is not sufficient for establishing that a man is *jen*. (Cf. 5:18; 5:7; 14:2; 14:5)

A distinctive but suspect pattern of characterization is reflected in a series of comments, most of which, however, come from 6:21. The latter text, as Waley points out,⁶ looks suspiciously Taoist and probably is corrupt. It tells us that the man who is *jen* is content to be *jen*; while knowledge keeps one on the move, the man of *jen* delights in mountains (6:21), and he is tranquil (6:21) and long-lived (6:21).

We now turn to some of the most specific and most helpful comments about the nature of *jen* itself.

You want to be established yourself, then seek to establish others. You wish to advance, then advance others. From what is near to one to seize the analogy (i.e., to take one's neighbor as oneself) — there is *jen*'s way. (6:28)⁷

5. See also, for example: 2:10; 5:9.

6. Waley: see especially pp. 239–40.

7. The version in parentheses is my attempt to render the meaning of an admittedly obscure phrase by retaining, but also making more explicit the key

He who can submit himself to *li* is *jen*. (12:1)

In both the preceding comments, *jen* is intimately linked to the relationship between man and man. In the first instance, this link is to the general reciprocal good faith and respect among men (*shu* and *chung*); in the second instance this reciprocal good faith is given a specific content: it is that set of specific social relationships articulated in detail by *li*. In short, where reciprocal good faith and respect are expressed through the specific forms defined in *li*, there is *jen's* way.

Thus *li* and *jen* are two aspects of the same thing. Each points to an aspect of the action of man in his distinctively human role. *Li* directs our attention to the traditional social pattern of conduct and relationships; *jen* directs our attention to the person as the one who pursues that pattern of conduct and thus maintains those relationships. *Li* also refers to the particular act in its status as exemplification of invariant norm; *jen* refers to the act as expressive of an orientation of the person, as expressing his commitment to act as prescribed by *li*. *Li* refers to the act as overt and distinguishable pattern of sequential behavior; *jen* refers to the act as the single, indivisible gesture of an actor, as his, and as particular and individual by reference to the unique individual who performs the act

metaphors of "grasping" and "near." I have tried to bring out explicitly what I take to be the terms of the "analogy," and I have tried to use words very close in meaning or etymology to those we might use in a more "literal" translation. As for the phrase "*jen's* way," because it seems not only concise and stylistically appropriate but because it is the only such concise phrase I can think of that retains the same ambiguity to be found in the original. This cryptic phrase follows a cryptic formula which in turn follows a more elaborate and plainer formula. But what precisely are the logical connections among these formulas? Are they variant definitions of *jen*? Are they different formulations of a way of getting to be *jen* (rather than descriptions of how one acts when one is *jen*)? Is one a method of getting there and the other a definition of *jen* or a localization of the region in which *jen* is found? Our phrase, "Smith's way," allows all of these meanings when unrestricted by context: (1) the way of getting to Smith's, (2) the immediate region where Smith lives, and (3) the way of action that is characteristic of Smith.

and to the unique context of the particular action.

Our more familiar Western terminology would be misleading. We are tempted to go further than I have above and to say *jen* refers to the attitudes, feelings, wishes and will. This terminology is misleading. The thing we must *not* do is to psychologize Confucius's terminology in the *Analects*. The first step in seeing that this is so is to recognize that *jen* and its associated "virtues," and *li* too, are not connected in the original text with the language of "will," "emotion" and "inner states." The move from *jen* as referring us to a person on to *jen* as "therefore" referring us to his inner mental or psychic condition or processes finds no parallel in the *Analects*. Certainly there is no systematic or even unsystematic elaboration of any such connections.

The only apparent exception to the above thesis is to be found in 9:28 and repeated in 14:30. Here, in both passages, we are told that the *jen* man is not *yu* (roughly: unhappy, anxious, troubled). What is more, the context suggests that this is not an incidental, but rather an essential characterization. Because of this apparently inner, subjective reference, and because of the suggestion that we deal here with something central to *jen*, we shall turn to a closer examination of these key passages and of the term *yu*.

In both passages we have a plainly rhythmic parallelism of internal structure. Three central virtues are mentioned, and in the same syntactical formula each virtue is characterized in a single phrase in the negative. The wise are not perplexed; the brave are not fearful; the *jen* are not *yu*. The almost tautological character of the first two phrases suggest that we should take in a similar way "the *jen* are not *yu*." *Yu*, it is fair to presume, is the opposite of *jen*.

A careful consideration of the meaning of *yu*, therefore, seems to be called for here. It will provide us with a deeper

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understanding—and corroboration—of the thesis of this discussion.

If we turn to the other passages in the *Analects* where *yu* is used, we find that the translations vary from translator to translator for any passage, and they vary from passage to passage for the same translator. Where Legge translates "sorrow," Waley translates "trouble," Leslie translates into French "*regretter*," and also "*embarras*." (16:1-8, 13) Or again, the term as used in 7:18 is translated "sorrows" (Legge), "bitterness" (Waley), "worries" (Chan), "*chagrins*" (Leslie). The pattern is repeated again and again: clearly the translators are choosing what they take to be an appropriate specific European term for a Chinese term which does not completely coincide.

If we look to see whether there is a common denominator to all these uses, we certainly find that in all uses *yu* implies a troubled condition. The word "troubled" implies both "unsettled," "untranquil," "disturbed" and also "with ominous and unpleasant significance uppermost." Translations such as "sorrow," "worry" and "bitterness" place the stress on what we would call the subjective state, the emotions and feelings of the person. This is a natural approach for a Westerner. The consequence is that, if the *jen* man is more or less equivalent to the man who is not *yu*, then *jen* is a psychological term since it would seem to be the contrary of *yu*.

However an examination of the actual texts, which provide the context of the use of *yu*, presents a different picture. In 2:6 the parents are *yu* about the child's illness. Here we have the parents characterized by reference to objective and ominous trouble, to objective unsettledness in the situation. Their response to trouble is a troubled response. The Westerner readily and naturally locates the "trouble" of the response in an "internal" psychic condition. But we must force ourself to look at the text here and see that, at least in this passage, there is no language of the psychically internal or subjective. The

child's illness is an observable condition, and so, one may truly say, is the troubled response of the parents. Not the text, but our own tacit presuppositions lead to supposing that the parents' troubledness is necessarily to be conceived as rooted in troubled "inner" states.

In 7:3 Confucius announces that the failure to pursue man's virtue (*te*), learning, morality—these make him *yu*. Again we find the person's response is in objective disorder and confusion, for these are the Confucian contraries of the Confucian way: they are *misconduct*. In 7:18 Confucius speaks of himself as so joyful and eager in pursuit of enlightenment that he forgets *yu* and that old age is coming on. Here again, the ominous but quite objective uncertainties of old age are side by side with *yu*.

I must emphasize that my point here is not that Confucius's words are intended to exclude reference to the inner psyche. He could have done this if he had had such a basic metaphor in mind, had seen its plausibility, but on reflection had decided to reject it. But this is not what I am arguing here. My thesis is that the entire notion never entered his head. The metaphor of an inner psychic life, in all its ramifications so familiar to us, simply isn't present in the *Analects*, not even as a rejected possibility. Hence when I say that in the above passages using *yu* there is no reference to the inner, subjective states, I do not mean that these passages clearly and explicitly exclude such elaboration, but that they make no use of it and do not require it for intelligibility or validity.

In 12:4 we find the closest to a "psychological" use of *yu* in the *Analects*. The noble man is neither *yu* nor afraid. Why? Because when he "looks within" he finds no "sickness." The image of looking "within" suggests—to us—a notion of the "inner life." But we must not fail to notice that *what* we are looking for is not presented as a "subjective state" but as "sickness." No doubt Confucius means something like "moral sick-

ness" or "spiritual sickness." No doubt one of the chief achievements of Confucius was to see and to teach, in a way none before him in China had, that there is a spiritual-moral dimension of human existence. But the point at issue is whether he systematically located this spiritual dimension "inside" the individual. Since we of the West can hardly conceive of it except in the language and imagery of the "inner," the first important step in learning what Confucius can teach us on this topic is at least to notice that, although occasion for use of such language is ever present in the *Analects*, its absence is (from our standpoint) glaring. To anticipate, I will merely remark here that for Confucius, the spiritual is public, "outer"—but not in the sense that it is embodied in gods or other nonhuman beings or nonhuman powers.

The text does reveal that he on at least three occasions vaguely alluded to the "inside," but on the other hand he constantly talked, in elaborated terms, of conduct, comportment and the rules of conduct. What is more, his references to the "inside" and to the "private" are always by way of locating here one source of sickness, lack of moral development. Success, the positive characterization of moral development, is always a matter of objective comportment—of the reciprocal good faith and respect expressed specifically and concretely in *li*.

In a further series of uses of *yu* (12:5, 15:11, 15:31), we learn that without brothers (i.e., family), one is *yu*, and with respect to the future the wise person is *yu*—and naturally enough, for here are two of the chief conditions of objective uncertainty and potential danger. We also learn that the noble man is *yu* with regard to the *Tao*, but not *yu* with regard to poverty. Here again, the notion of objective uncertainty and unsettledness with possible ominous import is relevant. The noble man is not on the road to wealth; hence any uncertainty about it imports no troubled unsettledness in his comportment. But it

is quite otherwise with regard to the *Tao*. Here all is risked, and the Way is not easy. Only the Sage is able to walk the Way in a completely stable, spontaneous way.

Even in the obviously much later passage of 16:1, the word *yu* is still used in what is clearly the context of an objectively troubled state, one associated with military and political troubles.

In summary, then, the condition of being *yu*, whose absence is critically characteristic of the *jen* man, is the condition of a person involved in and responding in an objectively unsettled, troubled situation where a bad outcome is a distinct and evident possibility.

It follows that the absence of *yu* is the condition of a man who is responding in a way that is well integrated into an objectively settled and organized situation. What is this condition? Clearly we have described what, for Confucius, is the condition of a man who has "submitted to *li*." Ideally, he should live in a society that is genuinely governed by *li*.

Since *li* is that structure of human conduct that harmonizes the doings of all men and establishes their well-being as men, it is clear that he who is fully established in *li* is living a life that is perfectly organized and is entirely conducive to the flowering of human existence.

If *jen* is the aspect of conduct that directs our attention to the particular person and his orientation as the actor, it is clear that the objective failure to conform to *li* will be perceived, from the actor-perspective, as an objective, disquieting lack of clear direction or readiness in the stance of the actor; there will be disruptedness, troubledness and trouble. In short *yu* is indeed the absence of *jen*, and *jen* is the absence of *yu*.

We are now in a position to comment on, and I believe make intelligible, the paradox that *jen* is both difficult and yet is here for the wishing. And this will show further how *jen* is not a psychological concept referring to the "inner" self.

Jen requires "doing what is difficult first" because man is born with only the raw stuff of humanity: the uncarved, unpolished material, the raw impulses and potential which can be fashioned into a mature person. An organized personal stance has not yet been achieved. *Jen* develops only so far as *li* develops; it is the shaping of oneself in *li*.

For example, one cannot have a profound and intelligent loyalty toward one's prince until one has reached the stage where one has knowledge about social-political relations and problems, until one has had reasonably extensive experience in these matters, until, in short, one has learned, by participation, the specific character of governmental affairs. We must appreciate the gap between a child's naïve, simple and unsophisticated clinging and dependence, and the profound and sophisticated loyalty of a great statesman to his prince. The movement across this gap is the learning and mastery of *li*. Similarly, the love and loyalty of a husband for a wife, however intense it may be at first, is relatively amorphous and impoverished in content as compared to what it may become over the course of many years of married life through crises, good fortune and sheer routine. Ultimately, this personal stance of each toward the other cannot be cultivated, deepened and enriched, except by entering into a series of new situations requiring new forms of conduct, new obligations, new kinds of yielding and taking. Suffering (in the classical sense) and acting are what shape the man. Thus, until *li* is learned, *jen* cannot be realized. One cannot ripen without the other, since they are merely different perspectives on one and the same thing.

Jen comes "after doing what is difficult." Of course, it takes time, effort, persistence to learn *li*; and therefore it takes time, effort, and persistence before one can be *jen*.

A man who is not *jen* can have nothing to do with *li*. (3:3)

The man who can submit himself to *li* is *jen*. (12:1) It works both ways.

Jen is ready at hand for wishing. What does this mean? The answer to this is more complex; but it is also more revealing.

Li stresses the act as overt, the series of movements through space and time. As such, the act is analyzable into segments, into a series of steps, each step a prerequisite for its successor. There is therefore a *way* (i.e., a sequence of steps by which) to carry out *li*, but not so with *jen*. When we look at action from the standpoint of the actor, we use categories that do not provide us with complex patterns of action analyzable in spatial and temporal relationships but with "simple" acts. To put it another way: to look at an act from the standpoint of the actor is not to shift from outer space and time, and to look instead into an inner mysterious realm, but it is to characterize the act in terms of categories that do not have the same logical features as the ones that characterize the act as overt behavior. What does this mean in the case at hand?

One decides to greet someone and does so. The *greeting* is *li*: in a certain kind of context we observe a sequence of overt movements—the movement of hand and arm in complex sequences, the utterance of prescribed phrases, the coordinated execution of a series of actions which can be analyzed into elements, behavioral and linguistic, extending through space and time. But the *deciding* to greet the person need not be conceived as another "inner" act, a "mental" act which is also necessarily analyzable into steps consisting of mental actions. There is no inherent *way* or *method* of deciding. One simply decides. It may take time *until* we decide; that is, our deliberations may extend through time. We may upon occasion use one or another handy method to help us come to our decision. None of this is essential to the decision; it does not constitute the decision as the shaking of the person's hand is a constitutive element in that act of greeting. The point can be seen in

this way: we could have made the *same* decision though our deliberations preceding it had taken a different route; but we cannot give the *same* greeting except by taking the very same steps. The steps constitute the greeting. But there are no steps that *constitute* the decision.

One may portray this to oneself as evidence of the miraculous or magical character of the act of decision, an act having no steps in time and space but just "happening" at an instant—and this is what Confucius tended to do.

Or one may portray "deciding" ("deciding to be *jen*") to oneself as a process or an act taking place in a mysterious inner, private or "mental" realm where there is supposedly invisible "machinery," "structures" or "agencies," as we of the West have so often done, especially since Descartes.

Or one may portray this type of contrast between such acts as "deciding" and "greeting" as a difference in the "logical" role of the concepts. On this view, "He decided to greet John," no more reports a mysterious act in an inner psychic realm than "He made a profit" reports an act in an economic realm that is distinct from his observable acts of buying and selling. Since the phrase "make a profit" and the phrase "make a decision" are not used to point out the sequential, spatial and bodily aspects of conduct *per se*, it is on this view no mystery of metaphysics but a truth of "grammar" that one cannot describe or show the behavioral sequence of "steps" that constitutes the act of deciding or making a profit.

If we can withdraw ourselves from the traditional mentalistic bias of the West, whether we do so *tout court* or by virtue of shifting to the sort of linguistic analysis sketched above, then we are freer to appreciate Confucius's notion of *jen* and related notions. Of course, we must not suppose that he was teaching or using the doctrines of contemporary philosophical analysis, nor as I have said, should we take him to be excluding or arguing against a mentalistic interpretation of human com-

portment. His formulation was his own, peculiar to him and without even tacit reference or allusion to mentalistic concepts and models.

Confucius merely observed and reported the truth of the matter; *jen* being a matter of the person's deciding to submit to *li* (once he has the objective skill to do so), there is no step-by-step analysis of *how* to be *jen*: one really wants to be *jen*, and lo!—it is so. There is only one way ultimately to decide and that way is—to decide!

Analogous considerations are relevant to other notions (which we in the West psychologize) such as "thinking," "feeling," "having an attitude" or "desiring." In the case of each such concept, there is no overt and analyzable process—one simply has or does not have an attitude, or thinks or desires. All of these are in such respects logically similar to the idea of *jen*. There is a "way" to ride a bicycle—in a certain temporal sequence one moves one's feet and leans in certain ways, and the doing of this as the bicycle rolls *is* the riding of the bicycle. But there is no "way" to desire or think. There is no *way* to see the validity of a step in logic or to act out of noble motives—in the last analysis, one does (or one doesn't), but to come to the point of doing so may involve much labor at self-development.

From this standpoint we now can see that in one sense there is, after all, a way to be *jen*; it is a necessary but not a sufficient means. *Jen* comes "after what is difficult is done," i.e., after one has mastered the skills of action required by *li*. Learning the skills of civilized intercourse is indeed difficult. It takes persistence, however, rather than supernormal strength. (4:6) On the other hand, there is no *way* to persist, no *way* of being *jen*: either one keeps at one's learning or one doesn't—that *is* persistence or lack of it; either one acts with equal concern for others as equally dignified in *li*—or one doesn't—that is being *jen* or not. From this perspective it is easy to be *jen*: simply,

be *jen*! Presuming one has mastered the skills of proper ceremonial action, either one does or does not conduct oneself toward others "as though in the presence of an important guest," as though "officiating at an important sacrifice," in short as though others have the same fundamental dignity as oneself. (12:2)

We can now see yet another way in which *li* must be learned, but *jen* is immediately at hand if desired. When we look at action from the perspective of its structure, as a pattern of overt behavior, we are well aware that unavoidable obstacles may interrupt the pattern and thus frustrate the act. But when we think of action in terms of the actor's orientation toward others, the *direction* he gives his act, we see that here we have a kind of infallibility, a fate distinguishable from the ultimate fate of the overt act. The pianist aims at playing a certain chord, but fails. Outer obstacles do not prevent the *aiming*, only the success of the act. Hence, in this light we see that there are no obstacles to *aiming*. All one need do is aim. Again, analogously, we can often see a certain kind of *concern* for others in an act even if the act fails due to obstacles. *Jen* is a form of concern. Thus that concern which is *jen* is that "if one wishes"—there are no obstacles. Hence it is precisely apt to say of *jen*, but not of *li*, that "if you desire it, it is there." Looked at from this standpoint, action again has a dimension that, compared to some other aspects, is magical, miraculous and paradoxical. Either one has a certain concern in one's action, or not; it's up to the person *entirely*, yet there is no *way* for him to make his act a genuinely concerned one.

The preceding comments have been primarily designed to bring out the aspect of immediacy and infallibility of the *jen* perspective, the personal perspective, and also in a way to de-mystify this aspect, to recall to our awareness how familiar is that perspective in our everyday life. A few further remarks may be appropriate in this context to emphasize the natural-

ness and propriety of looking at the personal, *jen* aspect of conduct as "outer" or public even though personal.

We can perhaps best begin by re-emphasizing that Confucius examines the public and mundane world from a variety of public perspectives. He is, for example, concerned with the social *history* of the ceremony, which an act exemplifies—that is, with *li* as tradition.² He is also concerned with the *pattern of overt behavior* of the act—*li* as literally a set of rules for action.³ He is concerned with action as *role* performance, the roles being defined by *li*—"let the prince be a prince," etc. (12:11)

And finally⁴ he is concerned with action as personal, as done by human beings and directed toward or acted jointly with other human beings—*jen*, reciprocal respect (*shu*), loyalty (*chung*), and good faith (*hsin*). How does he conceive the personal to be an objective and observable aspect of the act?

Acts that are *li* are not mere rote, formula-conforming performances; they are subtle and intelligent acts exhibiting more or less sensitivity to context, more or less integrity in performance. We would do well to take music, of which Confucius was a devotee, as our model here. We distinguish sensitive and intelligent musical performances from dull and unperceptive ones; and we detect in the performance confidence and integrity, or perhaps hesitation, conflict, "faking," "sentimentalizing." We detect all this *in* the performance; we do not have to look into the psyche or personality of the performer. It is all "there," public. Although it is there *in* the performance, it is apparent to us when we consider the performance not as "the Beethoven Opus 3" (that is, from the composer perspective), nor as a "public concert" (the *li* perspective), nor as a "post-Mozartian opus" (the style perspective), but primarily as this particular person's performance (the personal perspective).

Analogously, an act may be seen as *jen* if we look to see how *this* person does it, and more specifically whether it reveals that he treats all persons involved as of ultimately equal dig-

nity with himself by virtue of their participation along with him in *li*. And even if the pattern of his behavior is unavoidably disrupted, we can see the direction it had, the aim, the concern in it, just as we can see the chord the pianist aimed to play but in the upshot failed to play. We see all this by observing the act in its observable context, not by looking into the person's head or some purely inward psychic realm.

As we can detect fakery in the musical performance, so we can on occasion observe that although an act looks like *li*, it is really an element in some more complex but dissembled act; it is aimed at enhancing the actor's own importance at the expense of the other person and in a way not sanctioned by *li*.

Let us attempt finally to place Confucius's own way of seeing *jen* in focus by putting aside a subjectivist language of intent and attitude on the one hand and a logical-linguistic analysis on the other, and try to find an image that both distinctively and truly reflects Confucius's way of seeing *jen*. Such an image must suggest a power emanating from the actor—the person who is *jen* can by means of *li* allow his power to radiate everywhere under heaven. The power must emanate from the actor, but our image must not direct our attention to the "interior" of the man but to the act of the man. Yet the image must not identify the *jen* power with the act as overt; instead, the directional, aim character of the *jen* power must be stressed as distinct from the ultimate and actual course of the act. This is to be a matter of emphasis by language and imagery, not separation of two distinct events—for the aim cannot be determined except as a feature of the behavior in the context, and the behavior cannot be understood except as interpreted in terms of some aim. Finally, this power is to be essentially *human* power; that is, it is a power of human beings (when they *are* truly human) and it is directed *toward* human beings and influences them. The Chinese of Confucius has no

clear distinction between properties, qualities, definitions or essences. But we can say that *jen* is often directly associated with a *person* and suggested to be a possession of the person.

It seems to me that the Western image that would serve best is one drawn from physics—the vector. In the case of *jen*, we should conceive of a directed force operating in actions in public space and time, and having a person as initial point-source and a person as the terminal point on which the force impinges. The forces are human forces, of course, not mechanical ones.

The virtues that Confucius stresses are indeed all "dynamic" and social. For example, *shu* (mutuality in human relations), *chung* (loyalty) and *hsin* (good trust toward others)—all inherently involve a dynamic relation to other persons.⁸ On the other hand, such "static" and "inner" virtues as purity or innocence play no role in the *Analects*.

We easily see *li* in terms of the imagery of an external Way, and now we can do this with *jen*. The image calls our attention to the stance, the literal stand and spatial attitude of the actor. Just as in the ceremony, we see the taking of a ritual stand and attitude as the initiating source of this particular act's power—we sense it "radiate" toward us when we are committed participants or observers at the ceremony. "(The Emperor) sat facing the South (as was ritually proper), and everything (duly) took place." The sensation of magical power which we all feel emanating from a ritual gesture (or a hypnotist's gesture)

8. *Chung* has been rendered with the sense of "being true to oneself" and also of "loyalty." The translation "true to oneself" coincides more nicely with our Western ideas or Buddhist ideas of a key virtue. But the justification for this translation cannot be found in the text of the *Analects* or even in the other early classics such as the *Shu Ching* or *I Li* (portions of which, of course, are even later than Confucius). In these contexts either there is no clear clue or else it is clear that it is loyalty and not "being true to oneself" that is in question. The only linguistic basis for the meaning "true to oneself" is the structure of the written character—"center" over "heart"—and this is at most suggestive, whereas our other evidence is plain and solid.

when made by one who is felt to be authentic in that ceremonial role—this is the way in which we should feel *jen*. And *jen* is the complete and concentrated power of the separate vectors—perfect loyalty and good faith, complete respect for human dignity and so on. Each of these, in turn, is not an inner state but a virtue in the original sense—a power emanating from the person, a vector of human power. When one has used all one's energies in learning how to master *li* and has at last accomplished this, then, as Yen Hui said, "it looms up before me." At this point there is nothing further he can draw upon in order finally to *use* the power of *jen*. (9:10) One either takes one's stand in *li* and is thus *jen*, or one does not; being able to do so, it remains only to desire to do so. But man is often afraid, at the moment of decision, to put his faith in human power; he has for so long been relying on physical force and animal force. *Jen* just *is* the perfect giving of oneself to the *human* way. It is walking to the very edge—

In fear and trembling,
With caution and care,
As though on the brink of a chasm,
As though treading thin ice. (5:3)

4

Traditionalist or Visionary?

The Confucian ideal of *li* poses a fundamental problem. We of the twentieth century are aware of "culture conflict," aware of the conflicts of custom and value that can arise within a single culture. We, therefore, cannot help seeing a problem that Confucius never once entertains. Confucius seems to take for granted, without having questioned or even become aware of his assumptions as such, that there is one *li* and that it is in harmony with a greater, cosmic *Tao*. He assumes that this *li* is the *li* of the land in which he lives (other lands being barbarian), that the Ancients of his tradition lived this *li*. He assumes that this *li*, and the cosmic *Tao* in which it is rooted, are internally coherent and totally adequate, and that, finally, the only moral and social necessity is, therefore, to shape oneself and one's conduct in *li*. Each and every one of these interconnected and basic assumptions is initially placed in grave doubt when we take account of the now familiar fact of a plurality of great cultures each with its distinct history.

A first response to such objections to the Confucian ideal might well be that the objections are anachronistic. One could admit they apply devastatingly enough to the Confucian ideal if it is considered as a possible universal human ideal, but one could argue that the objections are anachronistic if offered as criticisms of Confucius, the fifth-century B.C. teacher from the

principality of Lu. He could not have known of other great civilizations, whether of the contemporary Greek or Israelite civilizations, or of earlier ones such as the Egyptian. What the people of Lu knew was an unusually great deal about some of their own predecessors in their immediate region of Asia, and they also knew of various border tribes which clearly had no such elaborate civilization as that of Lu. Without access to additional anthropological and historical information, without any reasonable grounds for supposing such information existed, how can Confucius be legitimately criticized for supposing that there was only one great civilization, at the "center" of things, a center surrounded by border areas containing semi-civilized or barbarian peoples? How could he have reasonably entertained the possibility of other civilizations of a grandeur equal to that of his own?

A "defense" of Confucius along these lines, though legitimate as far as it goes, nevertheless pays a great price. It reduces the significance of his teaching from that of a universal, philosophical teaching to that of a historical datum. It does make it possible for us to see, as a fact of history, how his compatriots, working within similar limits of knowledge could have taken his teaching as a living option; but in the same gesture it makes it impossible to conceive of his teaching as a teaching for us. This may indeed be the upshot of the matter. Perhaps the Confucian teaching can be no more than a historical specimen to the informed citizen of the twentieth century (though my remarks in this book are designed to show precisely the contrary).

Yet there are problems that such a historical approach still leaves unsolved. The principal unsolved problem is that of the internal conflict, the intraculture conflicts. There is no question that any sophisticated resident of Confucius's time and region was all too aware of the existence of a number of different, often warring principalities. He was aware that customs

differed to some extent among these peoples, differed at times very much between the small central principalities and the larger states on the periphery. Even more, a sophisticated citizen of the times could not help noticing that old ways were not infrequently being abandoned, new ways introduced. If ever there was an area beset with intracultural conflict of every kind from genteel doctrinal dispute to Machiavellian politics, plain murder and brutal warfare, surely Lu and its neighboring states were such a one. It was a time of great turmoil—including an intense *consciousness* of turmoil.

In the face of this turmoil, how could Confucius have ignored the possibility that the *li* of his land was inherently a network of often conflicting paths, a body of practices inadequate to meet the challenges of the real world? Though in the *Analects* he never raises precisely this question, he did of course teach that the turmoil was the result of moral-political degeneration through time of the original, perfect *li* of the Ancients. But the question we must raise is: *Why* should this answer appear so compelling as to prevent his ever raising the question of alternative answers? How did he arrive at *this* answer rather than one that was at least equally or (to us) even more forcefully suggested by the everyday evidence? It will not help to ascribe it to a limited imagination. We must, at least initially, presume that a thinker and a teacher of great stature has some more compelling and universal basis for the way he frames and answers his central questions. We shall understand Confucius better if we try to see what such a basis might be. We must try to see Confucius's teaching as an imaginative and creative response to social conflict and turmoil, not as merely unimaginative, as persistent blindness to the nature of the crisis of his times.

In the remarks that follow, I do not claim to come up

with new facts—only to tell a familiar story in a new and, I hope, illuminating way.

We must begin by seeing Confucius as a great cultural innovator rather than as a genteel but stubbornly nostalgic apologist of the status quo ante. Just as we have noted elsewhere that he transformed the concept of *li*, so now we must take note that in doing so he transformed the whole concept of human society. He was the creator of a new ideal, not an apologist for an old one.

Let us for a while look at him as the proponent of a new ideal. Let us—initially at least—look at the historical role of his teaching objectively, rather than through his eyes and the surface idiom of his language. He talked in terms of restoring an ancient harmony; but the practical import of his teaching was to lead men to look for new ways of interpreting and refashioning a local tradition in order to bring into being a new, universal order to replace the contemporary disorder.

What Confucius saw were in historical fact the newly *emerging* similarities in social-political practices, the newly *emerging*, widespread sharing of values that had once been restricted to a small region which included Lu. He saw the emerging of widely shared literary forms, musical forms, legal forms and political forms. We, who look at the situation in the light of historical evidence, see that rather than a devolution from some great past civilization, an evolution toward a new and universalistic civilization was taking place. There had been a recent and vast increase in population in the region. There was in progress a leap forward in the techniques of productivity and in the expansion of communications. Numerous previously isolated and culturally differentiated peoples were now in more intimate contact. The interchange and syntheses of ideas, styles, customs and language were taking place on a grand scale.

In short, what Confucius's idiom and imagery portray as the

increasing chaos of a civilization in course of degeneration was, in fact, the inevitable disorder attendant upon the evolution of a new, larger and greater single society out of various older, smaller, culturally separate and more primitive and provincial groups. How natural it was that Confucius should take note of the dominance of his own culture—the culture of Lu and a few surrounding principalities—over the cultures of the much larger and more populous regions which had formerly been more or less isolated and alien societies but which were now merging into a great and growing geopolitical comity. Given the relative physical weakness of tiny Lu, it was a natural tactic for a man of Lu to turn attention not to military conquest but to cultural conquest as the primary basis for order and unity.

We must suppose, in short, that Confucius looked around him and found among the powerful states much conflict but also some signs of acceptance of a culture derivative from the culture of the region of Lu. Next we must suppose that he saw—as an *ideal*—the possibility that all the known peoples might be unified and pacific if all adopted a single, humane set of practices and ideas. Finally, as a man of Lu, he saw that the latter ideal might be achieved by vigorous proselytizing to stimulate and to maximize the tendency, already manifest, to accept the culture of Lu as the framework for the new society.

Confucius's vision was in fact, more than any other, the true vision of the actual future of China. It was a vision of the emergence of a grand and powerful unified culture rooted in a unified polity, the whole deriving its inspiration from a unified literature, language and ceremonial forms of the region of Lu and its environs.

In the circumstances, how could such a *new* ideal be formulated and persuasively taught? Immediately a paradox presents itself. The ideal is of a grand society sharing the same practices and ideas. But what is the source of conventional practices and

ways of thought? How are they generated, justified, maintained? Here the Confucian answer is fundamentally twofold. First, there is the emphasis on tradition.

In general terms, there are three ways in which conventional practices may be established: by effective command, by common agreement and by inheritance through accepted tradition. All three are implicitly acknowledged as important by Confucius: the true king leads the way; the people consent and voluntarily follow; what is taught and followed is the *tradition*, the way of the Ancients. Even if the content of tradition is conceived as Heaven's Will (another form of "command") it coincides with the Way of the Ancients, for Heaven's will is not fickle. Recognizing all these, Confucius still gave primacy in his teaching to the Way of the Ancients, to tradition.

Why should he have finally given primary emphasis to tradition? We may note at once some important yet secondary types of reasons. The common people could only follow, never lead—this seemed self-evident because of their obvious lack of knowledge and culture and because of the absence of any tradition suggesting otherwise. Hence consensus of the community could only be a background factor. The rulers, on the other hand, were in historical fact too often arbitrary and power-mad at this period. A good ruler was needed, was indeed conceivable; but to be good the ruler had to have some impersonal standard of goodness. The only candidates for an impersonal standard are tradition or a Divine Command.

Although Confucius did speak of Heaven, its role is not too clear and is unelaborated in the *Analects*. At this point we come to the decisive influence of Confucius's philosophical insights into *man* rather than his insights into politics. He was not impressed with the possibilities of metaphysical speculation and "theology," as we know. But he was deeply concerned

with man's life on earth. One of Confucius's chief substantive insights was precisely that man's humanity could be comprehended through the imagery of *li*. He saw that it is well-learned conventional practice that distinguishes man from the beasts and from the inanimate. He saw how miraculous a power, how humane a power was inherent in well-learned conventional practices as distinguished from force, threats and commands. Finally he saw that the dignity peculiar to man and the power associated with this dignity could be characterized in terms of holy rite, of ceremony. For ceremony is a conventionalized practice in which are emphasized intrinsic harmony, beauty and sacredness.

Thus Confucius's new ideal was envisioned explicitly in terms of the imagery of holy rite and ceremony, and these, in turn, are forms of conduct which more than most others are rooted in ancient tradition. Whatever the ultimate psychological or other explanation for it, there is no doubt that the ultimate solemnity of which rite is capable, the deep, archaic response it evokes in man's soul, are never present insofar as any pattern of conduct or gesture is felt to be new, invented, or utilitarian. Although we may with occasional success modify a complex rite, at least the materials or elements of it will be traditional.

Of the various considerations, tacit or explicit, that might well have influenced Confucius, his essentially secular vision of distinctively human nature as rooted in *li* seems to me to have been the decisive specific reason for his coming to apprehend the unity of a great civilization as based primarily on tradition rather than on consensus or command. As has been noted, the ideas of social consensus and of princely or Divine commands could still play a role in Confucius's thought in rationalizing the traditions that define a culture. Nevertheless, their practical role for Confucius would have to be secondary, less elaborated. The central emphasis on *li*—as it has for other

thinkers concerned with ceremony—led directly to tradition as the effective emotional-moral authority for *li*, whatever other ideological, philosophical or religious frame might be added.

Thus two great insights fused in Confucius's thought. Confucius, the political man, conceived that the social crisis required cultural unity as an essential ground of a civilized political-social unity. And Confucius, the philosophical anthropologist, affirmed life lived in the image of the authentic ceremonial act as the necessary and sufficient condition of authentic humanity. The implications of these themes taken jointly call for political-social unity to be ceremonial. And this in turn calls for a tradition-oriented culture as essential ground out of which ceremony is nourished.

The paradox faced by Confucius is therefore: How can one present a *new* ideal to people when the ideal is that they should accept a tradition as their own and as a sacred one at that? One has traditions; one does not choose or create them upon need. Clearly there is no way to press an ideal in the form of a tradition except by presenting the new ideal as simply a re-affirmation, an appeal to an ancient, legitimate but neglected tradition.

We must suppose that a thinker of Confucius's time and circumstances could have conceived a nontradition-oriented alternative. Such an alternative was clearly and forcefully expressed by the so-called Legalists as well as by other thinkers whose ideas were already formulated by Confucius's time and must have been known to him. The Legalists, for example, advocated a community governed by regulations enforced by the twin motives of fear and hope of profit. It is essential to see that Confucius was concerned not merely with communal order but with human dignity, with a culture that was founded in a sense of the beautiful, the noble and the sacred as distinctive dimensions of human existence. Cultural unity

was to be the consummation of humanity, not an order imposed upon sheep in human form.

We are now prepared to consider the second fundamental element in Confucius's handling of his new ideal of a universalistic community based upon shared conventions. The *content* of his proposal was to found the new community as a tradition. But he also found ready to hand a distinctively suited and powerful *formal* mode of discourse in which to propagate the ideal; indeed he used the most deeply rooted mode of discourse in human culture—the narrative and especially the narrative myth or anecdote of an ancient past.

Societies have varied in their characteristic way of formulating abstract and especially spiritual issues, but one approach is shared by all and is historically the earliest: the use of narrative. We have various names for such narratives—"history," "myth," "folktale." In these narrative forms, the moral, legal, spiritual or psychological aspects of birth, for example, are presented not by means of abstract concepts but in terms of a myth of birth—i.e., a narrative portraying events and personages. The narrative may be spoken, acted out or written. Death, mating, work, personal relationships, the place of man in the world—these issues are in every society approached in terms of narrative. In a few cultures, such as European, Indian and Chinese civilizations, we also find abstract, theoretical doctrine or analysis applied to these issues.

To cope with the *meaning* of life rather than its physical realities, man has always begun by apprehending that meaning not in the form of an abstract conception about this life but in the form of a narrative of events in some way parallel to it. This parallel world may be told of as concurrent with the present but going on in a different realm (Heaven, Mount Olympus). Or it may be presented as a narrative of events here near our home on earth but prior to our times; or it may be a narrative of events presented as both in an earlier time and

in some other realm. The shift of the narrative to another time or place, and the idealized (or extreme) character of the beings and their powers and deeds, have sufficed to free the narrative of inconsistency with the narrative drawn from recent and genuine memory of human beings and events. The interaction of the "other" realm and our own represents the way in which the meaning of our life both transcends and also is embodied in the day-to-day events of this life.

Since the memory narrative gives history as memory, and the other gives history as meaning, both can be in their way valid—what they tell is so. Memory narrative leads into the present, and so does the meaning narrative. Moreover meaning and memory cannot be kept entirely distinct; each requires the other and blends into it. Thus the distinction which we often make between history as true and myth as false is one to which many groups are blind. The distinction is in the first instance oversharpe, easily misleading. Insofar as the "myth" narrative is felt as distinctive from the memory narrative, this is often because the former is *more* significant, more enduringly valid. For the myth narrative explains, justifies, illuminates our life on earth. As that that gives meaning, that *is* the meaning, it is more important in its way than life as naïvely apprehended by one unacquainted with the relevant myth. The "other" realm is always the source of significance as well as the realm of being of significance.

Such meaning narratives are typically doubly historical. Being narrative in form, they present us with the meaning of life displayed as a series of meaningfully connected events in time—a piece of history, in short. In addition, as we have noted, their "otherness" or "transcendence" is readily represented in the narrative mode by locating the total story either in a distant past, or in a distant place, or in both. For the man of modern European civilization who worships what I have called memory narrative as against meaning narrative, the

meaning is tacitly blended into the memory—that is, what we call history is, so to speak, our myth. And, as we learn increasingly, what are on the surface meaning narratives, myths, tend to be rooted in actual past events which had in some way impinged upon the society in which the myth plays its role.

When the narrative that gives significance is located in a distant past, it is usually a past that the narrative itself eventually links up with the historical past; the remembered historical past. Elaborate narrative and genealogy usually link the truly historical past with that "other" ("ancient") past; though not infrequently we find that the beings of the other realm continue their own history parallel to the emerging human history, though normally invisible during waking human life.

In spite of the invention of abstract theory and conceptual analysis, the inclination to this use of narrative has by no means disappeared in Western civilization. True enough, we have often been slaves to theoretical ideologies, doctrines and slogans ("free speech," "the rights of man"). Yet we remain dedicated not only to the study of what we call history (which puts remembered past into meaningful order), but also to religious narrative, political myth-making, commercial "personalizing" and "testimonials," and to drama, art and literature as modes of thought and sensibility for the exploration of life's meaning.

Confucius, on independent grounds, perceived humanity through the imagery of ceremony and hence of tradition. It was peculiarly appropriate for him to turn to the narrative mode of formulation in its most common form—the narrative of an ancient past. Thus the content of his teaching was perfectly congenial to the oldest and probably the most evocative of all forms of thinking about life's meaning. Although the narrative mode used in this way is an "archaic" form of thought, it is not any more an archaism in Confucius than it is in a contemporary novel or drama. Confucius used the

narrative of a mythic past in the service of a new ideal grounded in radically new insights into man's essential nature and powers.

Thus, in Confucius's thought, the formal mode (narrative of a meaning-generating "past") fused with the content of his teaching (the crucial role of tradition); he could talk in a way that was perfectly suited to arouse that deep reverence and loyalty to tradition that was the content of his ideal.

To see Confucius's teaching in this light is to rescue it from the status of a historical curiosity for Western man and to keep it as a teaching with relevance to all men. We began by considering the problem of culture conflict for one who teaches a "return" to the Ancient Way. But now we see that the teaching need not require having a tradition that is both authentically historical, internally coherent and totally adequate. Instead, the burden of the teaching can be what in effect it was as Confucius taught it: to seek inspiration in one's own traditions in such a way as to reveal a humanizing and harmonizing interpretation for the conflictful present. "He who by reanimating the Old can gain knowledge of the New is indeed fit to be called a teacher." (2:11)

The aim of "reanimating the Old" may seem to be a euphemism for irresponsible or self-serving tinkering with actual traditions, a species of hypocrisy and rationalization. Confucius certainly denied this. He claimed, "I have been faithful to and loved the Ancients." (7:1) That is, the interpretation of tradition had to be rooted in a genuine love and respect for one's past. Confucius, Jesus, Gautama Buddha are examples of men who genuinely and profoundly and self-consciously reanimated their traditions; but the many Confucians, Christians, and Buddhists who merely pick and choose among the bits of tradition for whatever saying or practice suits their present purposes represent the natural (but not inevitable) misuse of this approach. And those who hold rigidly and un-

critically to traditional forms and ceremonies, no matter how inadequate these may be to the present, are likewise to be contrasted with these three profound reanimators of their traditions.

The constant reanimation of the Old as a way of knowing what is new is not a parochial ideal. It has relevance for all men always. For it is an expression of a valid insight into what humanity is. Man has the peculiar power and dignity that he has by virtue of being able to act in intelligently conventional ways rather than out of instinct or conditioning alone. (This is no more than very many of our most influential philosophic analysts tell us today.) The forms of life, even when viewed in their aspect as intelligent convention, cannot be invented and accepted en bloc; they rest primarily on the inheritance by each age of a vast body of conventional language and practices from the preceding age. Only as we grow up genuinely shaped, through and through, by traditional ways can we be human; only as we reanimate this tradition where new circumstances render it otiose can we preserve integrity and direction in our life. Shared tradition brings men together, enables them to be men. Every abandonment of tradition is a separation of men. Every authentic reanimation of tradition is a reuniting of men.

The vision of an emerging unity among men was thus not merely a political vision—though even as such this Confucian vision was one of the most grandiose—and successful—of any political vision in recorded history. But it was a philosophical vision, even a religious one. It revealed humanity, sacred and marvelous, as residing in community, community as rooted in the inherited forms of life.

Our contemporary world is only too understandably and justifiably oriented toward novelty, frenetic change and crisis. In such a world Confucius's fundamental vision of man may yet not be an anachronism. It may be that, for just such a

world, Confucius's perspective is more relevant, more timely, more urgent than it ever was in the later and all-too tradition-bound China which we see as its natural habitat. It is because it is so alien to our times that we need to penetrate the truth of Confucius's vision; it is because it is so alien to the times that we tend to be impatient with it and blind to its truth.

5

A Confucian Metaphor —the Holy Vessel

What is it that distinguishes man from the beasts and the inanimate? In what do man's peculiar dignity and power reside? Confucius offers an amazingly apt and generative image: Rite (*li*). But Rite and Ceremony would seem, off hand, to deemphasize the individual, whereas the tendency in much modern criticism is to stress the "discovery of the individual"¹ by Confucius. It is true that Hughes, who uses this particular phrase, adds a qualifying clause "man's ability to look at himself in relation to his fellows and in that light to integrate himself."

Wing-tsit Chan summarizes in a similar formula "the entire Confucian philosophy: . . . the realization of the self and the creation of a social order."² Although Hughes and Chan bring out the two poles "individual"—"society," Liu Wu-chi emphasizes even more the "individual" pole: "No matter from which angle we view it, the individual man is, after all, the hub of the universe. . . . Master K'ung discovered by a happy stroke of genius the ethical individual. . . . Individual man was now exalted to his new position as a social entity. . . . Thus for the

1. Hughes, *Individual in East and West*, p. 94.

2. Wing-tsit Chan, "The Story of Chinese Philosophy," *Philosophy—East and West*, ed., C.A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 27.

first time in the history of man, the dignity of the individual was asserted. . . . The flowering of the individual is to be one's ultimate aim."³ Creel, although he too elaborates on the social orientation of Confucius, nevertheless emphasizes in various contexts the "primacy and worth of the individual" in Confucius's thought.⁴ And Lin Yutang, while stressing the social, says " . . . the kingdom of God is truly within man himself."⁵

In short, in these passages from a representative sample of modern writers we see a broadly recurring pattern of interpretation. In citing such brief phrases, one wrenches the remarks from contexts in which there is essential qualification and amplification. My aim in quoting, however, is not to provide a rounded report of the commentaries, but rather to note that when a brief and summary formula is finally required, the formula often tends to be formulated in terms of "society" and the "individual," with relative emphasis on the "individual" as primary. Self-realization, self-integrity, "self-flowering," the "ultimate worth of the individual"—these are supposed to reflect the characteristic discovery of Confucius. It is the thesis of the present remarks that we would do better to think of Confucius as concerned with the nature of "humanity" rather than with

3. Liu Wu-chi, *Confucius*, pp. 155-56.

4. Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way*, pp. 136, 138. My own interpretation follows Creel (and in some ways Kaizuka) more than most in the way they stress the inseparability of man from society and the role of *li*. Without wishing to minimize this similarity or to enter into detailed comparative commentary, I might simply say that I have attempted to draw the philosophical and psychological implications of this view more stringently and more fully. I think that doing this puts Confucius's position in a new light. For one thing it helps to bring out the close logical connection between this view of man and the magical-reverential dimension of Confucius's thought—a dimension that I believe is seriously understated by Creel and "rationalized" (in spite of his evident feeling for it). See also: H.G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: New American Library, 1960), pp. 33-34.

5. Lin Yutang, *Wisdom of Confucius*, p. 17.

the polar terms "individual" and "society." The formulation in terms of individual and society reflects Western preoccupations and categories—and perhaps Taoist, Buddhist and neo-Confucian concerns.

Rather than arguing this point in the abstract, we cannot do better than to learn from Confucius himself, and more particularly from reflection on one of the illuminating images he presents to us.

Tzu-Kung asked: "What would you say about me as a person?"

The Master said: "You are a utensil."

"What sort of utensil?"

"A sacrificial vase of jade." (5:3)

This passage is usually read in the light of another passage in the *Analects* (2:11): "A noble man is not a utensil."

The general opinion among commentators, in the light of 2:11, seems to have been that Confucius is first putting Tzu-Kung in his place, and then, in his next response, softening the blow. These interpreters (whom I believe to be mistaken) might be supposed to read the cryptic passage along the lines of the following paraphrase.

"Master," we may suppose Tzu-Kung to be saying, "tell me where I stand with regard to the ideal." The Master replies, "You are still only a utensil, useful only for specific purposes. You are not the morally self-realized man, the man with broad (moral) capacities who is capable of governing or using the special (technical) capacities of others." Tzu-Kung, his eagerness and optimism shaken, does not give up. "But, Master, how do you mean that? Don't you have some qualifying or softening word with which you can give me more hope?" And the Master replies, in a paternalistic, encouraging tone: "Tzu-Kung, don't feel too bad about it. Even if you are still a man to be used and not yet one who is perfected and capable of using others, at least

you are a very fine utensil of your kind. Indeed you are among the most handsome and valuable."

In my own opinion, as I have indicated, a reading along such lines is quite wrong. The only element of it that is acceptable is that Confucius does initially intend to dash cold water on Tzu-Kung's too-ready optimism. Confucius wants to bring him up short, to shake him, disturb him, puzzle him; Tzu-Kung must be made to feel the necessity to *think* his way through to a new insight. Confucius puts his answer in a manner best calculated to accomplish this end with a man of Tzu-Kung's character. It seems that this disciple was the most facilely successful and worldly of Confucius's disciples. With his learning and his worldly success, he might well feel pride in his personal achievement, might well be surprised and shaken at Confucius's initial response. For Tzu-Kung is well aware of the metaphor of the utensil and of the saying that a noble man is *not* a utensil. Confucius's initial response, like others he makes, is the first element, then, in a pedagogically effective paradox.⁶

However, the second statement by Confucius—"You are a sacrificial vessel of jade"—is not a mere sentimental softening of the blow. It both completes and resolves the paradox. It contains in a highly condensed image the central teaching which Confucius wishes to get across to the glib and self-satisfied Tzu-Kung. What is this central teaching?

Consider the sacrificial vessel: in the original text Confucius merely names a certain type of jade sacrificial vessel used for holding grain in connection with ceremonies for a bounteous

6. For examples of Confucius's readiness to let an ironic comment stand without softening if irony is his intent and for his use of challenging, puzzling or paradoxical statements, see, for example, 3:8; 5:3; 6:1; 6:10; 6:22; 6:23; 7:10; 7:29; 10:26; 11:17; 11:21.

harvest. Such a vessel is holy, sacred. Its outer appearance—the bronze, the carving, the jade—is elegant. Its content, the rich grain, expresses abundance.

Yet the vessel's sacredness does not reside in the preciousness of its bronze, in the beauty of its ornamentation, in the rarity of its jade or in the edibility of the grain. Whence does its sacredness come? It is sacred not because it is useful or handsome but because it is a constitutive element in the ceremony. It is sacred by virtue of its participation in rite, in holy ceremony. In isolation from its role in the ceremony, the vessel is merely an expensive pot filled with grain.

It is therefore a paradox as utensil, for unlike utensils in general, this has no (utilitarian) use external to ceremony itself but only a ritual function. (Indeed some ceremonial pots had holes in them in order to emphasize their ritual rather than utilitarian value.)

By analogy, Confucius may be taken to imply that the individual human being, too, has ultimate dignity, sacred dignity by virtue of his role in rite, in ceremony, in *li*. We must recall that Confucius expanded the sense of the word *li*, originally referring to religious ceremonial, in such a way as to envision society itself on the model of *li*. If the teaching about *li* is thus generalized, it is reasonable to follow through and generalize the analogy between Tzu-Kung and the ceremonial vessel. We will then see how this image deepens our understanding of Confucius's teaching about man and human relations.

Social etiquette in general, the father-son relation, the brother-brother relation, the prince-subject relation, the friend-friend relation and the husband-wife relation—persons and their relationships are to be seen as ultimately sanctified by virtue of their place in *li*. Society, at least in-

so far as regulated by human convention and moral obligations, becomes in the Confucian vision one great ceremonial performance, a ceremony with all the holy beauty of an elaborate religious ritual carried out with that combination of solemnity and lightness of heart that graces the inspired ritual performance. It is not individual existence *per se*, nor is it the existence of a group *per se* that is the condition sufficient to create and sustain the ultimate dignity of man. It is the ceremonial aspect of life that bestows sacredness upon persons, acts, and objects which have a role in the performance of ceremony.

Confucius does not see the individual as an ultimate atom nor society on the analogy of animal or mechanism, nor does he see society as a proving ground for immortal souls or a contractual or utilitarian arrangement designed to maximize individual pleasure. He does not talk in the *Analects* of society and the individual. He talks of what it is to be man, and he sees that man is a special being with a unique dignity and power deriving from and embedded in *li*.

Is it enough merely to be born, to eat, breathe, drink, excrete, enjoy sensual gratification and avoid physical pain and discomfort? Animals do this. To become civilized is to establish relationships that are not merely physical, biological or instinctive; it is to establish *human* relationships; relationships of an essentially symbolic kind, defined by tradition and convention and rooted in respect and obligation.

"Merely to feed one's parents well" . . . "even dogs and horses are fed." (2:7) To be devoted to one's parents is far more than to keep the parents alive physically. To serve and eat in the proper way, with the proper respect and appreciation, in the proper setting—this is to transform the act of mere nourishment into the human ceremony of dining. To obey the whip is to be not much more than a domestic animal; but to

be loyal and faithful to those who rightly govern, to serve them and thus to serve *in* the human community, to do this out of one's own heart and nature—this is to be a true citizen of one's community.

Man's dignity, as does the dignity of things, lies in the ceremony rather than in individual biological existence, and this is evident in the fact that we understand a man who sacrifices his biological existence, his "life" in the biological but not the spiritual sense, if the "rite" demands it. Confucius makes the point succinctly when he responds to his disciple's concern over killing a sheep as an element in a sacrificial rite: "You love the sheep, but I love the ceremony," says Confucius. (3:17)

"Virtue does not exist in isolation; there must be neighbors," says Confucius. (4:25) Man is transformed by participation with others in ceremony which is communal. Until he is so transformed he is not truly man but only potentially so—the new-born infant the wolf-boy of the forests or the "barbarian." Ceremony is justified when we see how it transforms the barbarian into what we know as man at his best. And, from the opposite direction, man at his best is justified when we see that his best is a life of holy ceremony rather than of appetite and mere animal existence. Whichever standpoint we take, we get a perspective on man and society which illuminates and deepens our vision of man's distinctive nature and dignity. When we see man as participant in communal rite rather than as individualistic ego, he takes on to our eyes a new and holy beauty just as does the sacrificial vessel.

Thus, in the *Analects*, man as individual is not sacred. However, he is not therefore to be thought of as a mere utensil to serve "society." For society is no more an independent entity than is ceremony independent of the participants, the holy vessels, the altar, the incantations. Society is men treating each other as men (*jen*), or to be more specific, according to the obligations and privileges of *li*, out of the love (*ai*) and loyalty

(*chung*) and respect (*shu*) called for by their human relationships to each other. The shapes of human relationships are not imposed on man, not physically inevitable, not an instinct or reflex. They are rites learned and voluntarily participated in. The rite is self-justifying. The beings, the gestures, the words are not subordinate to rite, nor is rite subordinate to them. To "be self-disciplined and ever turning to *li*" (12:1) is to be no longer at the mercy of animal needs and demoralizing passion, it is to achieve that freedom in which the human spirit flowers; it is not, as Waley's translation may lead one to think, a matter of "submission" but of the triumph of the human spirit.

Confucius's theme, then, is not the "discovery of the individual" or of his ultimate importance. The *mere* individual is a bauble, malleable and breakable, a utensil transformed into the resplendent and holy as it serves in the ceremony of life. But then this does not deny *ultimate* dignity to men and to each man; he is not a meaningless ant serving the greater whole. His participation in divinity is as real and clearly visible as is that of the sacrificial vessel, for it *is* holy. And unlike the way he appears in the Christian view, man is not holy by virtue of his absolute possession, within himself and independently of other men, of a "piece" of the divine, the immortal soul. Nor is the "flowering" of the individual the central theme; instead it is the flowering of humanity in the ceremonial acts of men.

Although the individual must cultivate himself, just as the temple vessel must be carved and chiseled and polished, this self-cultivation is no more *central* to man's dignity, in Confucius's views, than the preparation of the vessel is central. Preparation and training are essential, but it is the ceremony that is central, and *all* the elements and relationships and actions in it are sacred though each has its special characteristics.

Nor should we suppose that Nature is cast out unless shaped into artifact for ritual use. The raiment of holiness is cast upon

Nature as well as man, upon the river and the air as well as upon youth and song, when these are seen through the image of a ceremonial Rain Dance. (11:25)

The noble man is the man who most perfectly having given up self, ego, obstinacy and personal pride (9:4) follows not profit but the Way. Such a man has come to fruition as a person; he is the consummate Man. He is a Holy Vessel.