



CONFUCIUS: THE MOST SAGELY ANCIENT TEACHER

- c. 551 B.C. Born
- c. 530 B.C. Opened his school in Lu
- c. 497 B.C. Voluntary exile
- c. 482 B.C. Returned to Lu
- c. 479 B.C. Died

Chinese civilization was already more than a thousand years old by the time of Confucius. In the middle of the second millennium B.C. the first historical dynasty, the Shang, established itself in the basin of the Yellow River and its tributary system. It was united by common ancestry, a common language and script, and a common religion based on the cult of ancestors and carried on through elaborate state rituals. In the late twelfth century B.C. a new dynasty, the Chou, under King Wu and his brother Tan the Duke of Chou, came to dominate the Shang lands. They adopted the Shang political and religious systems and raised both to new heights. But by the time of Confucius in the mid-sixth century B.C., the Chou dynasty was in decline. A Chou king still reigned, but the concept of the dynastic state had been successfully challenged by regional political leaders, quarreling and fighting among themselves. This is the age known in Chinese tradition as the "Spring and Autumn Period."

Confucius looked back to the age of the early Chou as a kind of formative golden age—the Duke of Chou was his cultural hero—and he diligently studied the accumulated wisdom of that golden age, which had been handed down in poetry, history, customary law, and ritual. He hoped to find in the traditional wisdom the fundamental principles on which to organize the life of the state, the family, and the individual. He hoped also to find an administrative position in the

state that would permit him to apply those fundamental principles. But he never attained a sufficiently powerful position to realize this hope. Failing to become a political force himself, he became a teacher—the first private individual in Chinese history to do so. If he could not apply his principles himself then perhaps his students could. That is precisely what happened. Confucius's teachings became for his students the essential blueprint for good government, order, public welfare, and peace; and Confucius himself became “the most sagely ancient teacher,” in the phrase of one of the Sung emperors of the twelfth century.

For more than two thousand years he has been regarded as China's great teacher, and his teachings have, for most of those two thousand years, been accepted as the orthodox way of life by both scholars and officials. One of his disciples wrote of him, “It would be as hard to equal our Master as to climb up on a ladder to the sky. Had our Master ever been put in control of a State or of a great Family it would have been described in the words: ‘He raised them, and they stood, he led them and they went. He steadied them as with a rope, and they came. He stirred them, and they moved harmoniously. His life was glorious, his death bewailed. How can such a one ever be equalled?’ ”¹

¹*The Analects of Confucius*, tr. and ed. Arthur Waley (New York: Random House, 1938), 19:25, p. 230.

Who Confucius Was

SSU-MA CH' IEN

Despite the reverence for Confucius that has made him indisputably the most famous person in Chinese history, almost nothing is known about the man himself. His name has been Anglicized from the Chinese *Kung fu-tzu*, "Master Kung," but we do not know the family to which he actually belonged—the legendary account is entirely fictitious on this point. The traditional date and place of his birth, 551 B.C. in the minor state of Lu, are probably reasonably correct, as is the fact that he belonged to the lower nobility, the *Shih* or gentleman class. His own statement informs us that his father died shortly after Confucius's birth and that he was raised in relative poverty by his mother. Given these circumstances, it is not known how he received his education. Mencius (*Meng-tzu*), an important Confucian scholar of the fourth century B.C., tells us that, as a young man, Confucius served as a clerk of the state granaries of Lu and was later appointed to check on the pasture land belonging to the state. At nineteen he married, but nothing is known of his wife's family. He had a son and a daughter.

He continued to study to prepare himself for state service, but high office eluded him. His studies convinced him that good government could only be achieved by the application of the principles that were becoming clear in his own thinking—and those principles were unacceptable to the men of power who might have employed him. Moreover, it is likely that Confucius himself was too honest, blunt, and forthright to flatter them for the sake of a position.

He seems to have spent some time in the neighboring state of Ch'i but found no greater success there and returned to Lu. It was in this period that he established himself as a teacher. Between 501 and 495 B.C. he was employed by the government of Lu, though again not in a commanding position. He resigned in frustration and traveled in neighboring states for some ten years; virtually nothing is known of this period of his life. At the age of nearly seventy he returned to Lu, where he enjoyed some access to those in power because of his great reputation—though he still had no real authority. He continued to teach and to collate the ancient texts he had collected. Now old age was beginning to come upon him. He was grieved by the death of his son and several of his favorite disciples. There is no reliable account of his own death.

The foregoing sketchy account is gleaned from occasional personal references in the *Analects*, a collection of his sayings, and from the few credible details that can be sifted out of the legendary traditional account that is our only biographical source for Confucius. The following account is from a work entitled *The Historical Records*, written by Ssu-Ma Ch'ien about the turn of the second century B.C., some four hundred years after the time of Confucius. While it is called a work of history, it is far from our western notions of historical accuracy and relevancy. It does repeat most of the instances of personal reminiscence from the *Analects*, but it also reports as fact much of the miraculous lore and pure supposition that had already accumulated to obscure the historical character of Confucius. The English translators, George H. Danton and Annina Periam Danton, worked from an earlier German translation by the German scholar Richard Wilhelm, but collated it with an authoritative French translation by Edouard Chavanne, with the standard English text of the *Confucian Classics* by James Legge, and with the Chinese text itself.

Confucius was born in the State of Lu, in the District of Ch'ang P'ing, in the city of Chou. His ancestor was from the State of Sung and was called K'ung Fang-shu. Fang-shu begat Po-hsia. Po-hsia begat Shu-Liang Ho. Late in life, Ho was united in matrimony with the daughter of the man, Yen, and begat Confucius. His mother prayed to the hill, Ni, and conceived Confucius.² It was in the twenty-second year of Duke Hsiang of Lu that Confucius was born (551 B.C.). At his birth, he had on his head a bulging of the skull, whence he is said to have received the name "Hill" (Ch'iu). His style or appellation was Chung Ni, his family name K'ung. When he was born, his father, Shu-Liang Ho, died. . . . Confucius was poor and of low estate, and when he grew older he served as a petty official of the family Chi, and while he was in office his accounts and the measures were always correct. Thereupon, he was made Chief Shepherd, then the beasts grew in numbers and multiplied.

Therefore he was appointed Minister of Public Works. Finally he left Lu, was abandoned in Ch'i, was driven out of Sung and Wei, suffered want between Ch'ên and Ts'ai. Thereupon he returned to Lu. Confucius was nine feet six inches tall. All the people called him a giant and marvelled at him. Lu again treated him well; so he returned to Lu. . . .

People of Ch'i spoke of him with praise; Duke Ching thereupon

²This entire genealogy is fictitious.—ED.

questioned him regarding the government. Confucius said: "Let the prince be prince, the servant servant, the father father, the son son." Duke Ching replied: "That is an excellent answer: if the prince be not prince, and the servant not servant; if the father be not father, and the son not son; even though I have my revenue, how could I enjoy it!"

On another day, he again questioned Confucius about the government. Confucius replied: "Governing consists in being sparing with the resources." Duke Ching rejoiced, and wished to grant Confucius the fields of Ni Ch'i as a fief. Then Yen Ying interfered and said: "Scholars are smooth and sophisticated; they cannot be taken as a norm; they are arrogant and conceited; they cannot be used to guide the lower classes. They attach a great importance to mourning; they emphasize the lamentations, and waste their substance on magnificent funerals; they cannot be used as regulators of manners. They travel about as advisers in order to enrich themselves; they cannot be used in the ruling of the state. Since the great sages have passed away and the House of Chou has degenerated, rites and music have become defective and incomplete. Now Confucius splendidly forms the rules of behaviour, increases the ceremonies of reception and departure, and the customs in walking and in bowing, so that many generations would not be enough to exhaust his teachings. Years would not suffice to plumb his rules of decorum. If you wish to use him to change the manners of Ch'i, this is not the correct way to lead the common people." After that time, Duke Ching continued to receive Confucius, always, to be sure, with great respect, but he no longer questioned him concerning decorum. . . .

After a while, Confucius departed from Lu and held a number of distinguished positions in neighboring states. These are recounted in great detail and are completely fabricated. Finally, hearing of the death of the ruler of Lu, Confucius decided to return.

Confucius gave instruction in four subjects: Literature, Conduct, Conscientiousness, and Loyalty. He was free from four things: he had "no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism." The matters in which he exercised the greatest caution were the periods of fasting, of warfare, of illness. The Master seldom spoke of fortune, of fate, of "perfect virtue."

He gave no help to him who was not zealous. If he presented one corner of a subject as an example, and the pupil could not transfer what he had learned to the other three corners, Confucius did not repeat.

In everyday life, Confucius was altogether modest, as though he

were not able to speak. In the ancestral temple and at court, he was eloquent, yet his speeches were always cautious. At court, he conversed with the upper dignitaries in exact and definite terms; with the lower dignitaries he was free and open. Whenever he entered in at the duke's door, he walked as though bowed over, with quick steps; he approached as if on wings. Whenever the Prince commanded his presence at a reception of guests, his appearance was serious. Whenever a command of the Prince summoned him, he left his house without waiting for the horses to be put to his chariot. . . .

Confucius was ill. Tze Kung asked permission to visit him. Then Confucius walked back and forth in the courtyard, supporting himself on his staff, and said: "Tzu, why are you so late?" Then Confucius sighed and sang:

"The Sacred Mountain caves in,
The roof beam breaks,
The Sage will vanish."

Then he shed tears and said to Tze Kung: "For a long time the world has been unregulated; no one understood how to follow me. The people of Hsia placed the coffin upon the east steps, the people of Chou placed it on the west steps, the people of Yin placed it between the two pillars. Last night I dreamed that I was sitting before the sacrificial offerings between the two pillars. Does that mean that I am a man of Yin?" Seven days later, Confucius died. Confucius had attained an age of seventy-three years, when he died, in the fourth month of the sixteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu (479 B.C.).

What Confucius Said

THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS

There is no convincing evidence that Confucius wrote anything at all. Quite the contrary: he himself is reported to have said, "I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own."³ Nevertheless, stubborn tradition ascribes to his authorship or editorship a list of so-called Confucian Classics—the Classics

³*Analects*, 7:1-3, Waley ed. p. 123.

of Poetry, History, Changes, Spring and Autumn Annals, and the Rites. This tradition holds that he wrote the Spring and Autumn Classic, that he selected the 305 poems in the *Book of Poetry* from some 3,000 items, that he edited the *Book of History*, and that he perhaps collated the *Book of Rites*. But the book called the *Analects* of Confucius, *Lun Yü*, is probably closer to the authentic words of Confucius than any other. It is a collection of his "sayings" compiled many years after Confucius's death from the recollections of his disciples. The traditional books of the work contain material from very different periods, but books III–IX represent the oldest part of the work. It is from these books that the following excerpts are taken.

The *Analects*—or at least some of their contents—were known to Mencius in the fourth century B.C., but it was in the second century A.D. that they received something like their present form at the hands of the Confucian scholar Cheng Hsüan. By this time many of the sayings attributed to Confucius were actually much older proverbial maxims or those of his disciples that had a Confucian flavor to them. Some of the older traditional sayings, however, may actually have been appropriated by Confucius and thus may be attributed to him, as the sayings of his disciples may contain a kernel of what "the Master" said. But with all their faults and textual problems, the *Analects* preserve the words of Confucius better than any other source we have.

Even if this is the case, we shall labor in vain in the *Analects* to find a systematic statement of Confucius's philosophy. The *Analects* have neither unity nor logical order. They are a seemingly random collection of sayings. Some are autobiographical, some philosophical; some give practical advice, others relate trivial anecdotes. They often reflect genuine wisdom, insight, or compassion; almost as often they are perfectly ordinary in sentiment. Some are so cryptic as to be nearly incomprehensible. There are, to be sure, central themes, but the sayings that bear on them are scattered through the work and we are compelled to construct a system to set them in.

The Confucian system is fundamentally a moral philosophy with almost no reference to religion. Confucius apparently did not believe in a personal deity. Of course, he honored the "will of Heaven," the traditional gods, and the rituals of their worship—but he had no concept of life after death and he contemptuously rejected traditional belief in ghosts and prodigies. Yet he did believe in transcendental values, in love and righteousness as cosmic virtues, and in "the way of Heaven" as directive of the way of humans. The *tao* or "way" in its broadest implications refers to the entire sociopolitical order, with its public and familial roles, statuses, and ranks; the *tao* governs this order. But it also refers to the inner moral life of the individual. Confucius found that "the *tao* does not prevail in the

world"⁴ and saw himself as its restorer. It meant to him not only "the traditional" but "the good." A related concept is *li*, which refers to all the rites, ceremonies, and forms of behavior that join people to each other. One of the most important Confucian principles is *jen*, "true manhood" or "perfect virtue"—the quality of a "gentleman" or a "superior person." This was also a traditional idea, but Confucius opened it up to ordinary people and attached to it a moral rather than a hierarchical meaning. One could achieve *jen* by study, zeal, and self-cultivation whatever one's status in society. In an ethical sense *jen* is inner serenity and indifference to fortune and misfortune. It is, in Confucius's own phrase, "human heartedness," and it brings a happiness that comes only from the possession of virtue. Probably the most influential of Confucius's principles was filial piety. It is in the family that *li* and *jen* are found. It is there that one learns how to exercise authority and submit to authority, and from the family these virtues are translated to the state. Though Confucius saw himself as a political reformer, his concept of government was quite simple. Government should exist to serve the needs of its people. Government should not unnecessarily interfere in the lives of its people; it should allow them scope for their own moral autonomy. A ruling class that does not enjoy the trust of its people will not endure.

Most of these concepts and principles are represented in the following selection of the sayings of Confucius, from the *Analects*.

III.

3. The Master said, A man who is not Good, what can he have to do with ritual? A man who is not Good, what can he have to do with music?

4. Lin Fang asked for some main principles in connexion with ritual. The Master said, A very big question. In ritual at large it is a safe rule always to be too sparing rather than too lavish; and in the particular case of mourning-rites, they should be dictated by grief rather than by fear. . . .

18. The Master said, Were anyone to-day to serve his prince according to the full prescriptions of ritual, he would be thought a sycophant. . . .

26. The Master said, High office filled by men of narrow views, ritual performed without reverence, the forms of mourning observed without grief—these are things I cannot bear to see!

⁴*Analects*, 12:2, Waley ed. p. 204.

IV.

1. The Master said, It is Goodness that gives to a neighbourhood its beauty. One who is free to choose, yet does not prefer to dwell among the Good—how can he be accorded the name of wise?

2. The Master said, Without Goodness a man

Cannot for long endure adversity,
Cannot for long enjoy prosperity.

The Good Man rests content with Goodness; he that is merely wise pursues Goodness in the belief that it pays to do so.

3, 4. Of the adage 'Only a Good Man knows how to like people, knows how to dislike them,' the Master said, He whose heart is in the smallest degree set upon Goodness will dislike no one.

5. Wealth and rank are what every man desires; but if they can only be retained to the detriment of the Way he professes, he must relinquish them. Poverty and obscurity are what every man detests; but if they can only be avoided to the detriment of the Way he professes, he must accept them. The gentleman who ever parts company with Goodness does not fulfil that name. Never for a moment does a gentleman quit the way of Goodness. He is never so harried but that he cleaves to this; never so tottering but that he cleaves to this.

6. The Master said, I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for Goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness. One who really cared for Goodness would never let any other consideration come first. One who abhorred wickedness would be so constantly doing Good that wickedness would never have a chance to get at him. Has anyone ever managed to do Good with his whole might even as long as the space of a single day? I think not. Yet I for my part have never seen anyone give up such an attempt because he had not the *strength* to go on. It may well have happened, but I for my part have never seen it. . . .

9. The Master said, A Knight⁵ whose heart is set upon the Way, but who is ashamed of wearing shabby clothes and eating coarse food, is not worth calling into counsel.

10. The Master said, A gentleman in his dealings with the world has neither enmities nor affections; but wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it. . . .

14. The Master said, He does not mind not being in office; all he

⁵This translates as *shih*, or "gentleman".—Ed.

minds about is whether he has qualities that entitle him to office. He does not mind failing to get recognition; he is too busy doing the things that entitle him to recognition.

15. The Master said, Shên! My Way has one (thread) that runs right through it. Master Tsêng said, Yes. When the Master had gone out, the disciples asked, saying What did he mean? Master Tsêng said, Our Master's Way is simply this: Loyalty, consideration.

V.

5. The Master gave Ch'i-tiao K'ai leave to take office, but he replied, 'I have not yet sufficiently perfected myself in the virtue of good faith.' The Master was delighted. . . .

19. Chi Wên Tzu used to think thrice before acting. The Master hearing of it said, Twice is quite enough. . . .

27. The Master said, In a hamlet of ten houses you may be sure of finding someone quite as loyal and true to his word as I. But I doubt if you would find anyone with such a love of learning. . . .

VI.

16. The Master said, When natural substance prevails over ornamentation you get the boorishness of the rustic. When ornamentation prevails over natural substance, you get the pedantry of the scribe. Only when ornament and substance are duly blended do you get the true gentleman.

17. The Master said, Man's very life is *honesty*, in that without it he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life. . . .

20. Fan Ch'ih asked about wisdom. The Master said, He who devotes himself to securing for his subjects what it is right they should have, who by respect for the Spirits keeps them at a distance, may be termed wise. He asked about Goodness. The Master said, Goodness cannot be obtained till what is difficult has been duly done. He who has done this may be called Good. . . .

25. The Master said, A gentleman who is widely versed in letters and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

28. Tzu-kung said, If a ruler not only conferred wide benefits upon the common people, but also compassed the salvation of the whole State, what would you say of him? Surely, you would call him Good? The Master said, It would no longer be a matter of 'Good.' He would without doubt be a Divine Sage. Even Yao and Shun could hardly criticize him. . . .

VII.

6. The Master said, Set your heart upon the Way, support yourself by its power, lean upon Goodness, seek distraction in the arts.

7. The Master said, From the very poorest upwards—beginning even with the man who could bring no better present than a bundle of dried flesh—none has ever come to me without receiving instruction.

8. The Master said, Only one who bursts with eagerness do I instruct; only one who bubbles with excitement, do I enlighten. If I hold up one corner and a man cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not continue the lesson. . . .

11. The Master said, If any means of escaping poverty presented itself, that did not involve doing wrong, I would adopt it, even though my employment were only that of the gentleman who holds the whip. But so long as it is a question of illegitimate means, I shall continue to pursue the quests that I love. . . .

15. The Master said, He who seeks only coarse food to eat, water to drink and bent arm for pillow, will without looking for it find happiness to boot. Any thought of accepting wealth and rank by means that I know to be wrong is as remote from me as the clouds that float above. . . .

19. The Master said, I for my part am not one of those who have innate knowledge. I am simply one who loves the past and who is diligent in investigating it. . . .

21. The Master said, Even when walking in a party of no more than three I can always be certain of learning from those I am with. There will be good qualities that I can select for imitation and bad ones that will teach me what requires correction in myself. . . .

24. The Master took four subjects for his teaching: culture, conduct of affairs, loyalty to superiors and the keeping of promises.

25. The Master said, A Divine Sage I cannot hope ever to meet; the most I can hope for is to meet a true gentleman. The Master said, A faultless man I cannot hope ever to meet; the most I can hope for is to meet a man of fixed principles. Yet where all around I see Nothing pretending to be Something, Emptiness pretending to be Fullness, Penury pretending to be Affluence, even a man of fixed principles will be none too easy to find. . . .

27. The Master said, There may well be those who can do without knowledge; but I for my part am certainly not one of them. To hear much, pick out what is good and follow it, to see much and take due note of it, is the lower of the two kinds of knowledge. . . .

33. The Master said, As to being a Divine Sage or even a Good Man, far be it from me to make any such claim. As for unwearying effort to learn and unflinching patience in teaching others, those are

merits that I do not hesitate to claim. Kung-hsi Hua said, The trouble is that we disciples cannot learn!

VIII.

8. The Master said, Let a man be first incited by the *Songs*, then given a firm footing by the study of ritual, and finally perfected by music. . . .

10. The Master said, One who is by nature daring and is suffering from poverty will not long be law-abiding. Indeed, any men, save those that are truly Good, if their sufferings are very great, will be likely to rebel. . . .

13. The Master said, Be of unwavering good faith, love learning, if attacked be ready to die for the good Way. Do not enter a State that pursues dangerous courses, nor stay in one where the people have rebelled. When the Way prevails under Heaven, then show yourself; when it does not prevail, then hide. When the Way prevails in your own land, count it a disgrace to be needy and obscure; when the Way does not prevail in your land, then count it a disgrace to be rich and honoured. . . .

IX.

24. The Master said, First and foremost, be faithful to your superiors, keep all promises, refuse the friendship of all who are not like you; and if you have made a mistake, do not be afraid of admitting the fact and amending your ways.

What Confucius Meant

H. G. CREEL

As we have already seen, there is no inherent thematic unity in the philosophy of Confucius. This, in combination with the enormous authority of his name and his sayings, has made it possible for Confucius to mean many things to many people over the centuries. He has been a sage, a prophet, a magician, a teacher, a philosopher, even a religious figure. To some extent, of course, he was a multifaceted thinker who truly did mean many things. But when we ask

what his primary emphasis was, we can best answer that he was primarily a political reformer and that everything else in his thought stemmed from that emphasis. This view is reflected in the book, excerpted below, by H. G. Creel, *Confucius the Man and the Myth*. Creel was a longtime professor at the University of Chicago and one of the most distinguished American Sinologists. This book, among many that he wrote, is one of the seminal works of twentieth-century Confucian interpretation. Indeed, John K. Fairbank, himself a distinguished Orientalist, wrote that "there is no doubt that we have in this book the most scholarly, vivid, and all-around view of Confucius the man now available."⁶ It is as authoritative now as when it was written a generation ago, to a large extent because it is a fundamental reinterpretation of Confucius. Creel rejects the entire Chinese Confucian tradition as historically unreliable, and goes back to contemporary records and to his own expert evaluation of them. In the selection below he begins with the political environment of Confucius's own age and his reaction to it.

The rulers and their powerful ministers were scions of hereditary noble houses. With rare exceptions, they were prey to the degeneration usually suffered by families in which power and luxury are bequeathed from father to son for many generations. They needed two virtues, prowess in war and skill in intrigue, and these they cultivated to the utmost. The result was a world that no man who cared for human dignity and human happiness could contemplate with equanimity.

Confucius was such a man, and he was profoundly disturbed. He dedicated his life to the attempt to make a better world. . . .

Confucius himself said that he was the intellectual heir of King Wên, the father of the founder of the Chou dynasty. He also implied, in a passage which is somewhat vague, that he looked upon the Duke of Chou, a son of Wên, as his inspiration. Chinese tradition, from a very early time, has regarded the Duke of Chou as a source of Confucian ideas and sometimes even as the founder of Confucianism, notwithstanding the fact that he lived more than five hundred years before Confucius. . . .

In China, the effect was to leave an ideal of kingship as a form of stewardship, in which the test of a good king was whether or not he brought about the welfare of the people. Since the Chou legitimized their title by the claim that they had replaced an oppressive sovereign, justice and kindness became the duty of every later ruler. The ac-

⁶*New York Times*, May 8, 1949, p. 7.

cepted theory was that every person in authority must regard his office as a sacred and difficult trust. As we have abundantly seen, it was almost universally honored in the breach rather than the observance. Yet the mere fact that such a code existed was of the highest importance. In it Confucius found ready to his hand much that was very useful for his undertaking. The fact that (like the teachings of Jesus) it was almost universally acknowledged to be right, though considered impracticable, gave to his doctrines a support they could have obtained in no other way. . . .

Since his own world was far from ideal, it is natural that he thought of the best state as one that had those things in which his own was conspicuously lacking; in which, that is, the whole people should enjoy peace, security, and plenty. When we speak of peace, it is not to be supposed that Confucius was a pacifist; clearly he was not. But needless war was against his principles, and since most of the war in his day was internecine and an aspect of the general lawlessness, the governmental reforms he advocated would, if successful, have automatically eliminated it.

"Tzū-kung asked about government. The Master replied, 'An effective government must have sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people.' 'Suppose,' Tzū-kung said, 'that one of these three had to be dispensed with; which should it be?' The Master said, 'Weapons.' 'And what if one of the remaining two must be let go?' 'Then,' replied the Master, 'let the food go. For, from of old, death has been the lot of all men; but if the people have no confidence in the government, the state cannot stand.' ". . .

This last statement is extremely important. It does not mean that a government should starve its people to death in order to maintain itself; that would be absurd and very un-Confucian. What it does mean is that rulers should not drive and exploit their people unmercifully for the sake of economic gain, while giving the excuse that it is "for the people's own good" although they are too stupid to realize it. Even more important, it is an assertion that a state is a cooperative enterprise in which all, rulers and ruled alike, must share in the understanding of its purposes and the enjoyment of its benefits. . . .

"The Master said, 'If one tries to guide the people by means of rules, and keep order by means of punishments, the people will merely seek to avoid the penalties without having any sense of moral obligation. But if one leads them with virtue [both by precept and by example], and depends upon *li* to maintain order, the people will then feel their moral obligation and correct themselves.' " Here is the essence of Confucius' political philosophy. Not negative punishment but positive example; not tirades about what the people should not do but education as to what they should do. Not a police state dominated by fear but

a cooperative commonwealth in which there is mutual understanding and good will between the rulers and the ruled. On this point he agreed with the most modern democratic theory. . . .

Once the people's poverty has been relieved, Confucius said, they should then be educated. We have already seen that he advocated at least some education for all the people. He once declared that if any man, no matter how humble, came to him seeking truth he was prepared to spend all the time that was necessary in helping him solve his problem. He boasted that he had never turned away a student, and in fact he seems to have accepted them, for training in the art of government, without regard to qualifications of birth or wealth, if only they were intelligent and industrious.

In thus advocating some education for all, and undertaking to make educated "gentlemen" out of ambitious commoners, Confucius was striking a blow that was ultimately fatal to the hereditary aristocratic order. . . . He undertook to take any intelligent student, of whatever background, and educate him to the point where he should be capable of making his own moral judgments. But he did not depend, to secure acceptance for his views, on any divine revelation or any claim of special authority for himself. Like the scientist, he believed that he could convince men through an appeal to their reason. This seems to be the sense of a somewhat obscure passage in the *Analects* in which he declares that the common people are the standard by which the justice of his actions may be tested.

Confucius conceived the highest political good to be the *happiness* of the people. This is of the utmost importance and is quite different from aiming merely at their welfare. . . .

The claim that a government brings about the welfare of the people may mean anything. But happiness is something else. "The Duke of Shé asked about government. The Master said, 'When there is good government, those who are near are made happy and those who are distant come.'" Another time he said that when the people of other states heard of a really good government they would be so eager to live under it that they would "come carrying their children on their backs." The important point about such statements is that they make the common people, and nobody else, the judges of what is good and what is bad government. Men can be forced to be orderly and to be productive, but they cannot be forced to be happy any more than a horse can be made to drink. They can be made happy only by a government that is good by their own standards. . . .

He appears to have believed that:

The proper aim of government is the welfare and happiness of the whole people.

This aim can be achieved only when the state is administered by those most capable of government.

Capacity to govern has no necessary connection with birth, wealth, or position; it depends solely on character and knowledge.

Character and knowledge are produced by proper education.

In order that the best talents may become available, education should be widely diffused.

It follows that the government should be administered by those persons, chosen from the whole population, who prove themselves to have profited most by the proper kind of education.

It is evident that this is not the same thing as saying that the people as a whole should control the government. But it does say that every man should have the opportunity to show whether he is capable of taking part in its control and its administration, and that if he proves himself so capable he should be not only permitted but urged to participate. This is in effect an aristocratic system, of government by an aristocracy not of birth or wealth but of virtue and ability.

Review and Study Questions

1. Why do you suppose the teachings of Confucius came to play so fundamental a role in Chinese civilization?
2. How does Confucius's emphasis on regulation and order translate into a political philosophy?
3. Why was the family so central to Confucius's philosophy? Why has it remained so central in Chinese life?
4. What elements of moral philosophy stand out in the precepts of Confucius?
5. Confucius was convinced that the character and knowledge necessary to rule are produced by proper education. To what extent has this basic Confucian conviction been adopted by the rulers of China?

Suggestions for Further Reading

The standard English text of Confucius's *Analects* as well as of the other so-called Confucian classics is the massive seven-volume *The Chinese Classics*, ed. and tr. James Legge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893). This series also reproduces the Chinese text. There is a reprint of the first volume of this series, *The Four Books, Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius*, ed.

and tr. James Legge (New York: Paragon Books, 1966). *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, ed. Alfred Doebelin (London et al.: Cassell, 1948) is a brief selection of translated passages from most of the important Confucian texts. *The Analects of Confucius*, ed. and tr. Arthur Waley (New York: Vintage Books, 1938), excerpted for this chapter, is a more modern and readable translation, the best available. The only English version of the Ssu-Ma Ch'ien historical biography is the one used in this chapter, Richard Wilhelm, *Confucius and Confucianism*, tr. George H. Danton and Annina Periam Danton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972 [1931]).

On Confucius in Chinese literature, one of the most learned and readable works is Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1985). Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962) is one of the series "Companions to Asian Studies" and is an extremely useful handbook.

The best biography of Confucius is the one used in this chapter, H. G. Creel, *Confucius the Man and the Myth* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972 [1949]), which is also available in the "Harper Torchbooks" series under the title *Confucius and the Chinese Way* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960). Two important interpretive works are Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) and Pierre Do-Dinh, *Confucius and Chinese Humanism*, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969). D. Howard Smith, *Confucius* (New York: Scribner, 1973) and Liu Wu-Chi, *Confucius: His Life and Time* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955) are competent standard biographies, as is the briefer Raymond Dawson, *Confucius* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) in the reliable "Past Masters" series. An interesting book is Kam Louie, *Critiques of Confucius in Contemporary China* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), on how the Chinese Communists have dealt with the revered Confucian tradition. A book that goes to the other end of that tradition is John K. Shryock, *The Origins and Development of the State Cult of Confucius* (New York: Paragon Books, 1966 [1932]).

On the general history of the period, L. Carrington Goodrich, *A Short History of the Chinese People* (New York and London: Harper, 1943) is an excellent introduction to Chinese civilization and social history, largely based on original sources. Of the same sort is C. P. Fitzgerald and Norman Kotker, *The Horizon History of China* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969). Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) is a modern classic. John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, new impression (Boston et al.: Houghton Mifflin, 1978) is an authoritative and respected general survey.