

IX. Choosing disciples

Another important choice of persons, despite the fact that it is dealt with in much less detail, is Confucius' way of choosing pupils or students. According to Szu-ma Chien he had three thousand pupils. Seventy-two of them 'were versed in all Six Arts': ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing and mathematics. (YANG & YANG 1975: 22.)

In the chapter of choice and utility we paid attention to some of the general utilitarian criteria according to which Confucius chose students. In the following we will try to determine what kinds of persons were eligible as Confucius' students. We will discuss here only some of his most influential disciples. The Analects contain enough reference to these disciples for us to be able to see what kinds of disciples Confucius preferred and what characteristics of them he most valued. In the following we will try to place the most important disciples in the order of preference Confucius held them in. We will examine those passages from the Analects which reflect Confucius' assessment of them and their relationships with Confucius. In practice this means that we have to refer most of the passages where the names of these disciples occur.

1. YEN HUI

Humanly the most distinctive of the disciples are Yen Hui and Tzu-lu, who are perfect examples of the contrasted types of character that psychologists call introvert and extravert. Both of them died before Confucius, and were thus unable to influence the subsequent development of the school. (WALEY 1964: 20.)

Confucius preferred Yen Hui to all the others and the description of his personality is well documented in the Analects. The main characteristics will suffice for our purposes.

In chapter 2 on voluntarism and eudaimonism we discussed Yen Hui as an agent of Goodness. We found that Confucius valued Hui's personality as a good moral agent and thus approached eudaimonism, according to which the agent is important. However, we found that Hui's choices of thoughts and attitudes, and especially the emphasis upon his talent and progress as a student suggest that Confucius valued him also in a voluntaristic way. We may collect the sayings about him and form a general picture about him as follows:

Yen Hui was remarkably intelligent. In this respect he was better than Confucius himself and better than the other disciples of Confucius. However, according to his own opinion he was not clever. (AN. 5:8, 12:1.) He had a thirst for knowledge, a good motivation to learn, was fond of learning, and he listened to Confucius attentively. (AN. 6:2, 11:6, 12:1, 15:10, 9:19.) He could assimilate and develop ideas and not just imitate

his master (AN. 2:9). He was willing to put into practice what he had learned (AN. 12:1). Once Confucius criticized him for accepting everything Confucius had said (AN. 11:3; Yü Ying-shih 1977: 107–111). In all this we see the Confucian preference for intelligent students.

Another main point in the description of Yen Hui's personality is his moral characteristics. According to Confucius' opinion, he was the living person closest to Goodness, *jen*. In this respect, too, he was superior compared with Confucius' other disciples. (AN. 6:3, 11:18.) Yen Hui belonged to the group of disciples who 'worked by moral power', *te*. This, however, is not based upon any statement by Confucius. (AN. 11:2b.) Yen Hui was unpretending (AN. 5:25), accepted poverty and a simple life (AN. 6:9). He did not cause difficulties to others because of his faults and he had a balanced temper (AN. 6:2). He understood himself that it was not possible to attain Goodness, after all (AN. 9:10). Confucius was interested in seeing the result of Yen Hui's progress, but it was not possible, because Yen Hui died (AN. 9:20).

Yen Hui himself was well motivated to live (AN. 11:22), but his early death was a great personal disappointment and sorrow to Confucius (AN. 6:2, 11:8–9; HO Yu-shen 1979: 783). Confucius' attitude towards Yen Hui's death, despite the sorrow, was slightly cynical, because he strictly followed the prescriptions of ritual (AN. 11:7). The social and financial status of Yen Hui was low (AN. 11:7–10; WALEY 1964: 154–155, 246; HSIAO Kung-chuan 1979: 82).

In short, Confucius preferred a person who was eager to learn, capable and intellectually and morally superior and able to make intellectual and moral progress. It is noteworthy that Confucius had only one such disciple. This emphasis on talent, improvement and capability indicates the attitude of Confucius, who valued Yen Hui in a voluntaristic manner.

2. TZU-CH'IEN

Another disciple, who was valued by Confucius, was Min Tzu-ch'ien. The Analects do not tell much about him, but we get at least some idea of why he was preferred by Confucius.

He worked by moral power, *te* (AN. 11:2). He was reluctant to become a governor of Pi (AN. 6:7). He was a good son. (AN. 11:4). 'When Min Tzu-ch'ien stood by the Master's side in attendance upon him his attitude was one of polite restraint.' (AN. 11:12A.) Confucius placed value in his conservatism (AN. 11:13). His family was not wealthy (HSIAO Kung-chuan 1979: 82).

3. TZU-LU

Tzu-lu played a considerable part in contemporary history and is mentioned in the chronicles from 498 down to the time of his death in 480. (WALEY 1964: 20.)

Confucius spent a lot of time with Tzu-lu. He was an important disciple of Confucius. However, Confucius did not prefer him compared with the other disciples. He did not know whether Tzu-lu was Good or not: 'In a country of a thousand war-chariots Yu could be trusted to carry out the recruiting. But whether he is Good I do not know', Confucius said (AN. 5:7). There are many passages which contain Confucius' criticisms as well: 'He sets far too much store by feats of physical daring' (AN. 5:6); 'his words were lacking in the virtue of cession' (AN. 11:25); he pretended that Confucius had retainers, although he had none (AN. 9:11); he chanted verses in which the wisdom was 'not worth treasuring to that extent!' (AN. 9:26); he was fanatical about Goodness (AN. 11:21). Confucius did not rate him high as a minister (AN. 11:23) or as a counsellor (AN. 16:1), and once did not value a person employed by Tzu-lu (AN. 11:24). Confucius criticized him for not understanding the importance of correcting the language (AN. 13:3).

Confucius rated certain aspects of Tzu-lu's character very highly. 'Yu is efficient. It goes without saying that he is capable of holding office.' (AN. 6:6.) 'Those who surpassed in handling public business were Jan Ch'iu and Tzu-lu.' (AN. 11:2B.) 'That (the character) of Tzu-lu was one of impatient energy... the Master was pleased.' (AN. 11:12A.) 'Tzu-lu never slept over 宿 (or left 留, CHU Hsi 1952: 82) a promise.' (AN. 12:12.) Waley explains: 'He never agreed to do anything that could not be done till next day; for during the night circumstances might alter and prevent him from carrying out his word.' (WALEY 1964: 167.)

On two occasions Confucius did not follow Tzu-lu's advice not to go to take up a position (AN. 17:5, 7). Moreover, Tzu-lu was critical towards Confucius. According to Tzu-lu, Confucius should not have visited the wicked concubine of Duke Ling of Wei (AN. 6:26). Tzu-lu passed on other people's criticism to Confucius, which were to the effect that Tzu-lu should not follow a man who flees from this man and that, but that it would be 'better to follow one who shuns this whole generation of men.' (AN. 18:6.)

In spite of all this, Tzu-lu was eager to know things. The Analects record several occasions when Tzu-lu asked Confucius questions about central matters: about serving ghosts and spirits and about the dead (AN. 11:11); about government (AN. 13:1); 'what must a man be like, that he may be called a true knight of the Way?' (AN. 13:28); what was meant by 'the perfect man' (AN. 14:13); 'how to serve a prince' (AN. 14:23), and 'about the qualities of a true Gentleman' (AN. 14:45).

Tzu-lu wanted to emphasize religious matters. For example, 'when the Master was very ill, Tzu-lu asked leave to perform the Rite of Expiation.' (AN. 7:36.) Tzu-lu was not wealthy. For example, he ate goose foot which was a poor man's food (HSIAO Kung-chuan 1979: 82).

Confucius preferred Yen Hui to Tzu-lu. It seems that his admiration of Yen Hui was genuine. However, since Yen Hui died when still quite young, the picture Confucius retained of him almost certainly took on rosy tones. Moreover, although Confucius could see Tzu-lu's faults as an administrator, he could not possibly see which faults Yen Hui might have committed had he survived. In a responsible position Tzu-lu had ties which caused him sometimes to act in ways which were not acceptable according to Confucius.

Another matter which might have influenced Confucius' opinion about Tzu-lu, was psychological. Tzu-lu criticized Confucius, passed on other people's criticism to him and emphasized religious matters, which Confucius was not very interested in. Because of this criticism Confucius' attitude towards Tzu-lu could not be as positive as it was towards Yen Hui. As an older person, Tzu-lu was more independent than the young Yen Hui.

These historical and psychological reasons alone, however, cannot explain why Confucius preferred Yen Hui. The most important reasons are moral and intellectual, as seen above. Tzu-lu was, however, by no means a failure in Confucius' mind. He can be regarded as a normal disciple who had his shortcomings.

In Yen Hui's and Tzu-lu's case we can see that Confucius assessed and preferred them according to their inner motivations and outer behavior, and it is also possible to estimate to what extent the outer behavior corresponds to the inner attitudes and motives. He also rated their capacities and talents highly, in a voluntaristic (KEKES 1989: 43) and utilitarian (CAMPBELL 1975: 65) manner. Nevertheless, the historical and psychological reasons also play their role in his preference of disciples.

Two other disciples well known to history are Jan Ch'iu and Tzu-kung.

4. JAN CH'IU

Jan Ch'iu appears as a lieutenant of the usurping Chi Family from 484 till 472. (WALEY 1964: 20.)

Confucius regarded Jan Ch'iu as suitable to hold office, because he was versatile 藝 (AN. 6:6). He 'surpassed in handling public business' (AN. 11:2B). Jan Ch'iu was 'genial and affable. The Master was pleased.' (AN. 11:12A.) Confucius valued his dexterity (AN. 14:13).

Confucius did not know whether Ch'iu was Good, *jen*. 'The Master said, In a city of a thousand families or a baronial family with a hundred chariots he might do well as Warden. But whether he is Good, I do not know.' (AN. 5:7.) He did not like Ch'iu's opinions about strength (AN. 6:10.), nor his way of increasing the revenues (AN. 11:16). In Confucius' opinion Ch'iu was backward. Because of this, Confucius said to him: 'When one hears the maxim, one should at once put it into practice.' (AN. 11:21.) Confucius did not rate him high as a minister (AN. 11:23) or as a counsellor (AN. 16:1). In this respect his attitude to Jan Ch'iu was similar with the attitude he had to Tzu-lu.

Jan Ch'iu also asked Confucius about essential matters, but less than Tzu-lu, or at least the Analects has more questions asked by Tzu-lu. Here is a short discussion between Confucius and Ch'iu:

When the Master was going to Wei, Jan Ch'iu drove him. The Master said, What a dense population! Jan Ch'iu said, When the people have multiplied, what next should be done for them? The Master said, Enrich them, Jan Ch'iu said, When one has enriched them, what next should be done for them? The Master said, Instruct them. (AN. 13:9.)

It seems that Tzu-lu was probably rated higher by Confucius than Jan Ch'iu. Confucius' attitude towards Ch'iu was quite critical, and Ch'iu showed less intellectual activity than Tzu-lu. Ch'iu did not try to advise Confucius, as Tzu-lu did. Tzu-lu talked with Confucius when Confucius had a crisis. Ch'iu seems to have been more remote from Confucius. However, in certain respects Confucius valued him, as seen above.

5. TZU-KUNG

The next disciple is Tzu-kung. He was active in inter-state diplomacy from 495 till 468 (WALEY 1964: 20). He is mentioned in the Analects several times.

Tzu-kung explains that Confucius gets information from people by behaving well (AN. 1:10). He mentions which topics Confucius speaks about and about which he is quiet (AN. 5:12). He speaks about Confucius' many accomplishments to the Grand Minister (AN. 6:28). He tells us where Confucius derived his learning from (AN. 19:22).

He rates Confucius very highly regarding him as a true Gentleman (AN. 14:30). He regards himself as inferior to Confucius, although some persons claim the opposite. His reply to this claim is truly eloquent, and worth quoting here:

Shun-sun Wu-shu talking to some high officers at Court said, Tzu-kung is a better man than Chung-ni. Tzu-fu Ching-po repeated this to Tzu-kung. Tzu-kung said, Let us take as our comparison the wall round a building. My wall only reaches to the level of a man's shoulder, and it is easy enough to peep over it and see the good points of the house on the other side. But our Masters' wall rises many times a man's height, and no one who is not let in by the gate can know the beauty and wealth of the palace that, with its ancestral temple, its hundred ministrants, lies hidden within. But it must be admitted that those who are let in by the gate are few; so that it is small wonder His Excellency should have spoken as he did. (AN. 19:23.)

The same discussion about other people claiming that Confucius is not superior to Tzu-kung and Tzu-kung trying to show the opposite, is continued in AN. 19:24 and 25.

He discusses with Confucius about moral matters (AN. 1:15). Tzu-kung asks Confucius about moral topics: about the characteristics of the Gentleman (AN. 2:13); why was K'ung Wen Tzu called Wen ('the Cultured') (AN. 5:14.); about the definition of Goodness (AN. 6:28); about the selling of a jewel, or obtaining office (AN. 9:12), and about preferences in government administration (AN. 12:7). He asked about friends (AN. 12:23), and 'what must a man be like in order that he may be called a true knight (of the Way)?' (AN. 13:20), and what would Confucius 'feel about a man who was loved by all his

fellow-villagers?' (AN. 13:24.) He discussed with Confucius whether Kuan Chung was Good (AN. 14:18). He asked how to become Good (AN. 15:9), and whether there is any 'single saying that one can act upon all day and every day? The Master said, Perhaps the saying about consideration: "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you." (AN. 15:23.) He spoke with Confucius about the hatreds of the Gentleman. They seem to have agreed about the matter. (AN. 17:24.)

Tzu-kung has some important sayings under his own name in the Analects:

Tzu-kung said, The tyrant Chou cannot really have been as wicked as all this! That is why a Gentleman hates to 'dwell on low ground.' He knows that all filth under Heaven tends to accumulate there. (AN. 19:20.)

Tzu-kung said, The faults of a Gentleman are like eclipses of the sun or moon. If he does wrong, everyone sees it. When he corrects his fault, every gaze is turned up towards him. (AN. 19:21.)

When they had a disagreement about sheep and ritual:

The Master said, Ssu! You grudge sheep, but I grudge ritual. (AN. 3:17.)

Confucius rated him very highly when he said that he is a sacrificial vase of jade (AN. 5:3). According to Confucius he was suitable to hold office, because 'he can turn his merits to account.' (AN. 6:6.) He surpassed in handling public business (AN. 11:2B). 'Tzu-kung was genial and affable. The Master was pleased.' (AN. 11:12A.) The following might include a kind of appreciation, though the statement may be ironical:

Tzu-kung was always criticizing other people. The Master said, It is fortunate for Ssu that he is so perfect himself as to have time to spare for this. I myself have none. (AN. 14:31.)

Confucius spoke to him concerning his personal matters, such as the problem of not gaining recognition. Confucius added: 'and perhaps after all I am known; not here, but in Heaven!' (AN. 14:37), and:

The Master said, I would much rather not have to talk. Tzu-kung said, If our Master did not talk, what should we little ones have to hand down about him? The Master said, Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby, the hundred creatures, each after its kind, are born thereby Heaven does no speaking! (AN. 17:19.)

Tzu-kung was intellectually inferior to Yen Hui (AN. 5:8).

Morally, according to Confucius, Tzu-kung had too high a conception of himself. He thought that he had fulfilled the Golden Rule but Confucius did not agree (AN. 5:11). He 'was discontented with his lot and has taken steps to enrich himself. In his calculations he often hits the mark.' This was said by Confucius without criticism. (AN. 11:18.)

In all, Tzu-kung's relationship with Confucius was rather close. He made more statements about Confucius to other people than other disciples. He rated Confucius very highly. He defended Confucius against himself and tried himself to be humble, which was Confucius' style as well.

The selection of moral topics discussed with Confucius is larger than in the discussions with any other disciple. In addition, Tzu-kung had statements in the Analects in his own name. Confucius rated him very high, although in Confucius' mind he was inferior to

Yen Hui, who was close to being an ideal person. Confucius and Tzu-kung also had some disagreements and criticized each other.

In terms of preference and choice, it is noteworthy that Confucius chose Tzu-kung as a person with whom he shared such a wide variety of topics and with whom he discussed even his personal matters. If we have a ranking list, we can say that Tzu-kung was second after Yen Hui. However, they are not totally comparable with each other, since Yen Hui died when young. Confucius' attitude towards him might have been something like his attitude to Tzu-kung, if Yen Hui had lived to a normal age. The third in the ranking list is quite clearly Tzu-lu. The third place appears especially clearly in that Confucius criticized Tzu-lu more than Tzu-kung. Jan Chiu's position is after Tzu-kung, as stated above.

Tzu-ch'ien represents those disciples, who were valued by Confucius, but about which the Analects say too little to be compared with those who are spoken about more.

In the two previous chapters we have seen what the characteristics of persons who were preferred as moral agents were. In these characteristics pluralism, voluntarism and utilitarianism were to be seen. In addition to these, the theme of emotions appears in several contexts. This theme was also mentioned in connection with Confucius' disciple Yen Hui. In the following we will see more closely the role of emotions in Confucius' moral preference and choice.