

## IX. The Answers to the Questions

### 1. The Differences between Confucian Thought and the Traditional Thinking

We are now able to return to the essential characteristics which show what the difference between Confucian thought and traditional thinking that preceded it was, as asked in the introduction.

Confucius did not say a great deal about Heaven and its characteristics. Nevertheless Heaven was very important for him. His personal identity was based on Heaven. However, he left a space for intellectual agnosticism. He freed ethics from the bondage of Heaven's educative punishments, which was the general attitude in the Chou ideology. This created a freedom for human a being to think for himself and to become an intellectual ethical autonomous agent. Because Confucius's own identity was anchored in Heaven, his thinking about Heaven was that of a theologian.

Although Confucius's epistemology meant to leave a space for rational thinking, that Heaven did not dictate this human activity, he did not drastically renovate the contents of the concept Te. He discussed Te without the framework of Chou ideology and had a rationalistic element in it, which is to be found rather in the less reliable parts of the Analects. Nevertheless, compared with earlier traditions, he can hardly be recognized as a philosopher in connection with Te, but is rather a traditional thinker.

Confucius makes big changes to the concept of Tao as compared with Shu Ching tradition, by having a principle of automatic control in government and automatic improvement of the ethical behavior of the people. Confucius was here a traditional thinker who developed Tao to some extent in a rational direction. These developments are general Tao, universal Tao and Tao of ruling. However, Confucius's thought cannot be described as a Tao- philosophy, which would center on Tao. This is so even though Tao touches the core of Confucian thinking.

In Li, rites, Confucius had to consider which elements of it were more important than others. When solving these problems he had to choose between utilitarian, economic, traditional and sentimental considerations. This was combined with continuous learning of Li. In this way he was led to a new rational thinking compared with the traditions of Shu Ching and Shih Ching. In his thinking about Li, Confucius was clearly a rational philosopher. This was a step away from the given rules and beliefs toward an independent thinking which does not necessarily follow the traditional beliefs. As this is connected with Li, this can be called a Confucian Li-philosophy.

In the tradition of Shu Ching Yi appears in the Chou religio-ideological context, whereas in the Analects the term is discussed in a more philosophical framework. In this framework new issues are those of ethical neutrality, the social environment, utility and the flexibility of Yi in new circumstances. In Shih Ching the term is very rare; in

Shu Ching it is a governmental and ethical term. In the Analects it reflects Confucius's ethical thinking and is mostly an innovation compared with the traditions of Shu Ching and Shih Ching.

Jen was used very little in Shu Ching and Shih Ching. In Confucius's thinking it is mostly an innovation. However, it has certain similarities with Te in the preceding traditions. In addition, it has many new points of view: the theme of ignorance, the questions which it was not possible to answer were allowed to be asked, the definitive relationships between Jen and other terms, the elevation of ethics to an ultimate value in itself, the possibility of obtaining Jen by human effort and of understanding it by rational activity, one's psychological attitude or will in learning Jen, the theme of emotions and aesthetics and the theme of hedonism, the importance of the social environment, the choice in a dilemma situation. In Jen Confucius humanized and rationalized ethics and took ethics out of ideological bondage towards a freer rational thinking.

In the terms T'ien, Te and Tao, Confucius appears mostly as a traditional thinker, but in the terms of Li, Yi and Jen he shows himself to be a moral philosopher, who touches on many issues of ethical theory.

Confucius has much in common with the preceding traditions: many details coincide with each other as well as several more general lines of thought, for example the value given to antiquity.

In some respects Confucius has selected from the preceding tradition only one aspect, such as the non compulsive method of governing.

In several respects Confucius follows Shih Ching rather than Shu Ching and in some others vice versa.

All this seem quite natural. In his conception of Jen Confucius was an innovator. However, even in this concept we have found many points of contact with the traditional virtue of Te.

It seems that the contents or Confucian opinions about most matters were traditional, or followed some tradition. If we could have included more traditional materials, these common points would have shown up even more clearly.

*Confucius's innovation was his way of thinking, his method and his freedom from the ideological framework and his criticism and acceptance of new questions, and his stimulating others to follow similar lines of inquiry. It is noteworthy that this kind of approach is almost totally absent from the traditional sources of Shu Ching and Shih Ching.*

## 2. How did the Philosophy of Confucius begin?

Another question is, how did Confucius's thinking come to constitute a philosophy? The discussion above allows us to draw a number of conclusions about the mechanism which led to the start of this thinking.

In his conception of Heaven, Confucius left a free space for rational thinking, in a way he limited the power of Heaven. Heaven does not dictate what one thinks. Shih

Ching speaks about inexplicable terrifying Heaven which causes suffering, but the reason for this suffering is not known. Confucius took a step further. Heaven is in transcendence, far from a human being, and a human being can think about these matters by using his own brain without asking Heaven. This motive was by no means in contradiction with Confucius's feeling of dependency upon Heaven and Heaven's importance in his personal self identity.

The meaning of Te was very well defined in the preceding traditions. If Confucius had put his innovations into this term, it would hardly have been accepted. He had to use much less familiar terms as a vehicle for his thinking, especially the term Jen.

Tao does not clearly show how Confucius's philosophy started. However, the concept of Li reveals quite clearly why and how this philosophy started. Confucius widened the usage of Li. Li was important in all spheres of life. The practical situation required him to consider several matters. He had to decide which characteristics of Li were important, and which were not. The practical need led him to think about the matters of preference and choice in Li.

In addition the practical situation required Confucius to take a stand in Yi; how to solve the contradiction between axiology and deontology and under which conditions one can accept rewards.

In addition to the actual practical challenge, Jen includes an issue which is hypothetical, whether to save a good man from the well. Because Jen was a new concept, Confucius was asked whether certain persons were Jen. When he showed ignorance, this caused an increasing interest in what Jen is.

*In all, Confucian philosophy was started mainly in answer to a practical need, to solve the practical problems in government and moral behavior. From this the thinking proceeded towards hypothetical situations.*

The Confucian Analects present the ideas in the reverse order however: the general principles are presented first and then the practical appraisals of people. This is simply a way of presentation and does not need to mean that the general rules were invented independently of the practical situations and needs.

### 3. The Philosophy of Confucius

The third question to be answered is how is Confucius's philosophy defined?

This study defines Confucian philosophy only in relation to the terms discussed. The definition can be seen above in the summaries of Confucius's conception of the terms and in a concise form as follows:

Heaven is an autonomous functioning subject which maintains the whole of the natural world. Although Confucius spoke little about it, he felt strongly that he is dependent upon Heaven. His own identity was based on Heaven in the sense that heaven recognizes him and has given him the mission to preach his doctrines to those in authority. In his personal intellectual growth, after reaching the knowledge of T'ien Ming, Confucius developed moral freedom towards becoming an intellectual ethical autonomous agent.

Te for the ruler is his charismatic ability, inherited from the past, to govern and to unite and to keep the country in peace and harmony in a non-coercive way. Te of the people is to respect the dead and practice the "middle use" and obey their superiors. Te of Confucius is his protective force given by Heaven, and secondly ethical Te, which could be cultivated by his personal effort.

"General Tao" is the conservative model for the contemporary people who have to be loyal to their superiors and to follow the "Golden rule" by their own effort. Confucius's Tao is the only right and most important Tao, a goal of life. "Universal Tao" prevails in the country when everything in government functions harmoniously and well. The kings of antiquity gave a good example of "Tao of ruling"; one has to rule by Te and Li. The gentleman learns his Tao, is filial and obedient to superiors and takes care of the common people, loves his fellow men, is not violent and is modest in appearance.

Li is used in governing the people, unites the gentlemen who study it, harmonizes the society and nature. It performs the task of law. Its inner content is essential. Confucius chose the essential aspects of Li and took the traditional, pragmatic, economic and sentimental factors into consideration. This led to a philosophy of choice.

A gentleman who is Yi is neutral with an egoistic overtone through the variable conditioned Yi. He has authority and courage and carries out Yi by Li. He communicates with those who are Yi and regards axiology as more important than duty.

Jen is the "Golden rule" expressed in the negative and positive way. It is wisely calculated egoistically motivated altruism of the gentleman. A small man was not Jen, but common people could be Jen when they are incited to it by the good example of the gentleman or the ruler. In this way Jen is the uniting and harmonizing tissue of the empire. Jen includes filiality and fraternity, practice of Li is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. As an inclusive virtue it includes a list of other good ethical qualities, but also certain faults and defects are tolerated in it, mainly in the aesthetic and outer areas. Latitude is allowed and the end result is important, but the end does not justify the means. Certain rules normally belonging to Jen must not be followed if the consequence is harmful. The ethical agent has to assess different results and to choose the best way of action in an ethical dilemma situation. Jen is the ultimate value in itself and not a means for something else, except the right attitude towards adversity and hedonism, to enjoy prosperity. Jen can be obtained by the elaborate process of teaching and learning and with the influence of a good social environment and good rulers. One must be well motivated to learn Jen. The teacher teaches his student to a higher level than himself. Education is not a mechanistic determinism, but also the students contribute to the educational encounter. Sometimes Jen causes suffering, but gives an emotionally balanced attitude towards all kinds of people.

Confucian thinking in these definitions is a combination of traditional thinking and his innovations. His philosophy is not an isolated neutral phenomenon.

#### 4. Taoist and Mohist Criticism

Confucius's philosophy is criticized by Lao Tzu and Mohism in the following ways:

Lao Tzu's Heaven is a part of nature and is subordinated under the supreme Tao. For Lao Tzu Heaven acts according to non-contention but Heaven does not mean anything supreme as it does for Confucius.

Confucian Te as a principle is more practically active, authoritative and ethical, although Confucianism has also a transcendently founded Te. In Taoism Te is more yielding, mysterious and closer to the ultimate essence of existence, the Tao.

Tao for Taoism is a indefinable essence of existence, a monistic unity, the ultimate ontological basic element. For Lao Tzu ethics, as far as it consists of moral virtues as in Confucianism, is anti-value, against the only value, Tao, which is a natural course of everything that happens and is. Attempting to follow certain principles strenuously is unnatural and against Tao. Confucius is in sharp contradiction with this by evaluating ethics by moral virtues which it is possible to reach by learning a highest value.

For Confucius Li is important for harmony, whereas Lao Tzu opposes the whole idea, not even wanting to understand it. According to Lao Tzu Li contributes to disorder. Similarly, Lao Tzu does not value the Confucian Yi but regards it as a weak substitute for Tao. Lao Tzu opposes Jen too, since those who are Jen must have action. In Confucianism Jen is to be highly recommended and even necessary for the sage.

Mo Tzu legitimizes ethics through Heaven. The virtues come from transcendence, but Confucius is more education centered. Mo Tzu has a relationship to the spirits, but Confucius has this relationship directly to Heaven, which is more important for his identity than for Mo Tzu's identity.

Te for Mo Tzu is a given, unproblematic, generally understood concept, but for the Analects, at least in the later parts, it is more important to define it, to discover what belongs to it and what does not. Confucius's Te of the ruler is a more static end in itself. The social aspect can be seen in both, but Mo Tzu has a royal team-work aspect in which the ruler uses the Te of others. Mo Tzu sides with Chou ideology where the new good dynasty overcomes the old, whereas Confucius has no such reference.

Tao of Confucius and Mo Tzu resemble each other, but Confucius is more rational because he sees problems to be discussed in Tao. When Tao does not prevail, Confucius wants to resign, but Mo Tzu wants to fight. Mo Tzu is more utilitarian in the economic considerations. For Confucius Li is important in connection with Tao, but Mo Tzu overlooks this.

According to both Li contributes towards harmony. Mo Tzu opposes Confucianism as too ritualistic, whose Li contributes nothing to the needs of society. Despite some appreciation of Li in principle, Mo Tzu's general attitude to Li is the same as that of Lao Tzu, although his reasons for this link up with his own system of thought.

Yi for both has similarities. For Confucius its position is a central moral value with some rational characteristics, but for Mo Tzu it serves his other favorite doctrines and he links it more strongly with transcendence.

Mo Tzu speaks about Jen only on a general level without touching personal matters

as Confucius does. For Confucius Jen is purely human, but for Mo Tzu it is originated by Heaven. For Mo Tzu Jen is one element in his favorite doctrines, for example in the exaltation of the virtuous, universal love and condemnation of offensive war and anti fatalism. Mo Tzu ignores the issue of learning which is important for Confucius in Jen.

Confucius was more of a philosopher than Mo Tzu, who handled several concepts in an unproblematic way, whereas Confucius saw problems in these and did not take them as self evident.

The greatest differences between Confucius and Lao Tzu are in the concepts of Tao, Li, Yi and Jen. Between Confucius and Mo Tzu the greatest difference is in Li. Taoism represents a basically different system of thought from Confucianism and Mohism. One can say that Confucianism and Mohism have a common language, but Taoism is almost incommensurable with Confucianism and Mohism, with very little common language.

## 5. The Whole Summarized

We may encapsulate each system of thought as follows:

**The Shu Ching tradition is an ideology of supreme Heaven and obedient hierarchy in order to have a harmonious mechanism of government and nature.**

**The Shih Ching tradition means people longing for something under a severe Heaven.**

**Confucius is learning to walk in the philosophical world with contradicting issues under Heaven in order to produce harmony.**

**Lao Tzu wonders about Tao and is in a natural harmonious ease.**

**Mo Tzu believes he knows for certain that his is the best system with no problems.**

**All aim at the harmony which prevailed once in ancient times.**