

Confucianism on Humanity

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Eastern Philosophy

Asking who we are or ought to be is a question asked across time, uniquely in Confucius' teachings, he asked who we are in relation to each other and the world we live in. Confucius was a man of many words as well as an interpreter the Six Classics, six ancient Chinese texts, as described in *A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy*, translated and compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan. Confucius was one of the few men who revolutionized society, imploring acts and feelings of love, care, and benevolence. He called this humanity, or *jen*, and the root to which is having respect for oneself, one's family, friends, society, universe, and transversely one's *jen*.

The *Analects*, a compiled book of Confucius' teachings and discussions, has been written and rewritten over the past 2,000 years. And for this reason, nearly every word used in the *Analects* has been taught to have a multitude of meanings. For instance, humanity (*jen*) can also be translated into words that are synonymous to nature and/or human nature, as well as the aforementioned love, care, benevolence, and respect.

Defining *jen* in English may be difficult, but comparing it to other non-English words is advantageous to understanding *jen*. Shortly after Confucianism, also within Eastern Philosophy, Daoism further reflected on the nature of the Way (*Dao*). *Jen* is the adjective/noun as the *Dao* is the verb/noun. *Jen* is how one ought to be as the *Dao* is the way one is going; one cannot follow the *Dao* if they are not one with *jen*. In addition, the Danish philosophy of *hygge* is roughly translated to living in and expressing outwardly feelings of positivity, comfort, freedom, as said by CEO of the Happiness Research Institute, Meik Wiking, "the art of creating nice atmosphere." All of these philosophies have to do with being one with the world, with nature, with *jen*.

While the term *Dao* was not coined until after the passing of Confucius, he often spoke of the Way, the *Dao*, in the same relation that Daoist works do. To have humanity and one's will (*chi*) focused on the Way (7:6), is the answer to all questions. Within the *Analects*, there are many thoughts from Confucius as well as questions posed by his disciples and then his answer. When presented hypothetical questions on humanity, Confucius would generally answer that the man within the questions would do as he ought to because with humanity he will not know what he ought not to do. These vague, poetical responses are open to interpretation but predominately point to one answer: follow the *Dao* through *jen* with *chi*. And this is the way that Confucius, Daoists, the Danish, view nature as to be an autonomous will, as Nature.

Often times the answers Confucius gave answers were formed negatively, to what a man would not do, as in without *jen*. For instance, a man without *jen* would not appreciate or recognize formalities or works of art (3:3), for these are within *jen*. In dealing with metaphysical questions of humanity, nature, human nature, giving a direct (formulated positively) answer would only be the right answer for the person answering the question. This is due to the chaoticness of Nature, a tree will not fall down just because it does not feel like standing anymore, a tree only knows *stand*, a tree only knows "follow the *Dao* through *jen* with *chi*." But it will fall is Nature chooses it so, be it lightning or heavy snow, and that is where we find chaos. Nature will seemingly go against the tree when it is true with the tree; Nature will cause the tree to fall because the tree will decompose, feed the ground, and many small earth-crawling insects. Just as Nature is with the tree, giving it sun and water and animals to appreciate it. That is the *Dao* of Nature, and without love, care, relations, *jen*, Nature would be without beauty, an impossible existence.

Man is as a tree, both seemingly with and in defiance of Nature, but is merely moving with Nature. It is Man's *jen* that allows us to (attempt to) be in harmony with Nature; through good relations and respect for oneself, family, friends, society, and one's universe, we find the harmony that permits us to live on the path of the *Dao*. Differing from Western Philosophies and religions, Confucianism does not employ badness or evilness. "If you set your mind on humanity, you will be free from evil," (4:4). Nature, humanity, *jen* may not recognize evilness or goodness, for, within nature, a tree growing and a tree falling is neither good nor evil. Although in a Western sense, *jen* is only good because every action will lead to the *Dao*, so to be with *jen* is to be good.

Nature and the *Dao*, as an autonomous will, cannot be controlled. That is why the tree cannot be upset when it falls because it is bound to fall. Likewise, with Man, a man ought not to be upset if he finds he will die, for he already knew it is inevitable. With *jen* this man cannot be upset, for he will know it is his time. He will respect his doctor the same, himself the same, the universe the same. In asking who we are in relation to the world, Confucius found that it is our relation to the world that makes who we are.

Works Cited

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