

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

by Bryan W. Van Norden

**This paper introduces the Analects of Kongzi (better known to English-speakers as 'Confucius') to non-specialist readers, and discusses two major lines of interpretation. According to one group of interpretations, the key to understanding the Analects is passage 4.15, in which a disciple says that 'loyalty' and 'reciprocity' together make up the 'one thread' of the Master's teachings. More recently, some interpreters have emphasised passage 13.3, which discusses 'correcting names': bringing words and things into proper alignment. This paper argues that both approaches are mistaken, based on interpolated and unrepresentative passages. The paper closes with a brief suggestion that the Analects reveals a thinker who emphasises cultivating virtues that allow for the appreciation of complex individual contexts, rather than one who seeks systematic generalisations. An afterword to the paper suggests that we should avoid both 'methodological dualism' (which posits a radical incommensurability between Western and Eastern philosophies) and 'the perennial philosophy' (which ignores differences in favour of similarities).**

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I am charged with explaining to you the dao of Kongzi, the great Chinese sage better known in the West as 'Confucius'. Dao is usually translated as 'way', and that is not a bad translation, since dao and 'way' share a certain ambiguity. [2] On the one hand, 'way' and dao can refer to a physical path, as in 'Do you know the way to San Jose?' or in the modern Chinese compound daolu, 'road'. On the other hand, 'way' and dao can also refer to something a bit more abstract, like 'there's more than one way to skin a cat' or, as sergeants like to say in the military, 'There are four ways to do something: the right way, the wrong way, the army way, and my way. And here we do things my way.' It is in something like this latter sense that I shall talk about the dao of Kongzi, or the Way of Kongzi. By the Way of Kongzi, I mean the Way Kongzi thought that people ought to live.

Kongzi has been a subject of debate from his own lifetime, which was around 500 BC, to the present day. His opponents have criticised him harshly. One ancient Chinese philosophical school, the Mohists, describes Kongzi as a self-serving hypocrite. They claim that once, when Kongzi and his followers were short on food, Kongzi's disciple Zilu 'robbed someone of his robe and exchanged it for wine, and Kongzi drank the wine without asking where it had come from. But when he was received by Duke Ai of [the state of] Lu, Kongzi refused to sit down unless his mat was straight, and refused to eat unless the food was cut up properly'. [3] The Mohists conclude, 'Thus when Kongzi was starving and in trouble, he did not hesitate to grab at anything at all to keep himself alive, but when he was satiated he behaved hypocritically in order to appear refined. What greater vileness and hypocrisy could there be?' [4] The Mohists also described contemporary followers of Kongzi in most unflattering terms, saying that '[t]hey are greedy for food and drink and too lazy to work, but though they find themselves threatened by hunger and cold, they refuse to change their ways. They behave like beggars, stuff away food like hamsters, stare like he-goats and walk around like castrated pigs'. [5] Similarly, in the 20th century, some Chinese Marxists condemned Kongzi and his followers as reactionary defenders of the feudal system. [6] Even among those who consider themselves followers of Kongzi, there has been intense debate over how to understand Kongzi and his teachings. German philosopher Karl Jaspers grouped Kongzi with Jesus, Socrates, and the Buddha, as four individuals who have had immense historical influence by founding profound and important intellectual and spiritual traditions. [7] However, like Socrates, the Buddha, or Jesus, the significance of Kongzi is heatedly debated even among those who claim to be following his teachings.

Although there are a number of references to Kongzi in early Chinese texts, one of our most important sources of information about him is a work known in Chinese as the Lunyu, and in English as the Analects. The passages in the Analects are organised into twenty so-called 'books' (really more the size of chapters), and these books are subdivided into so-called 'chapters' (which range in size from one sentence, to a few sentences, to--at most--a few paragraphs in length). The Analects purports to be a collection of sayings by Kongzi, sayings by disciples of Kongzi, statements about Kongzi by those who knew him, and sometimes brief dialogues between Kongzi and contemporary government officials, disciples, and other individuals. Even here, though, we encounter controversy. At one extreme, many traditional scholars will insist that any interpretation of the Analects is dangerously incomplete unless it takes into account many other texts that, they claim, embody the thought of Kongzi. (In a moment, I'll discuss what some of these other texts are.) At the other extreme, many recent Western scholars would say that we have little reliable information about Kongzi outside of what we find in the Analects. Even worse, some scholars call into question the historical reliability of parts of the Analects itself.

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

Almost two hundred years ago, the Chinese scholar Cui Shu presented arguments that the last five 'books' of the Analects are inauthentic. In the early 20th century, the brilliant Sinologist and translator Arthur Waley suggested that only books 3-9 of the Analects are authentic. More recently, Bruce and Taeko Brooks have argued that only part of book 4, a mere 16 sayings, is authentic. [8]

Even if we leave aside the question of which parts, if any, of the Analects are reliable records of things that Kongzi said and did, we are left with significant interpretive problems. I think that most people, when they first read the Analects, have a feeling of bewilderment. Readers of the Analects are confronted with a text composed of a large number of seemingly disjointed passages. Of course, even the casual reader may notice a common theme among some groups of chapters. For instance, in book 4 there are a group of chapters that all discuss *ren*, a term I would translate as 'humaneness' that represents the summation of human virtue. And a few of the books seem, even at first glance, to have a common topic. Book 3, for example, seems to be about ritual and music. But these are exceptions in a text whose overall structure is, at the least, not transparent. Indeed, it is not clear if most of the Analects has any organisational principle at all. It is perhaps this apparent lack of structure that leads some people to be disappointed when they read the Analects. Herbert Fingarette, a Western philosopher who did some of the most provocative work in the last century on Kongzi, admits that when he first studied Kongzi, he 'found him to be a prosaic and parochial moralizer; his collected sayings, the Analects seemed ... an archaic irrelevance'. Fortunately, though, Fingarette persevered in reading the Analects, and he says, '[l]ater, and with increasing force, I found [Kongzi] a thinker with profound insight and with an imaginative vision of man equal in its grandeur to any I know' [9]. This sort of reaction to the Analects is apparently not confined to Western readers. The great Chinese philosopher Cheng Yi, who lived in the 11th century AD, observed,

When it comes to reading the Analects, there are those who read it and it has absolutely no effect; there are those who read it and find one or two sentences that they like; there are those who read it and know enough to be fond of it; and there are those who read it and then are 'unaware of their hands waving in accordance with it, their feet dancing in tune with it'. [10]

I believe that Fingarette and Cheng Yi are correct in thinking that the dao of Way of Kongzi, as revealed in the Analects, is something of great significance and profundity. But what is the key to uncovering it?

Most interpreters have focused on one of two passages that could be seen as presenting the key to understanding the Analects as a whole: book 4, chapter 15, or book 13, chapter 3. There are vexing questions about how to interpret the key terms (and sometimes even the syntax) of each of these passages. To give us something to start out with, let's look at D.C. Lau's interpretation of the former passage, 4:15. [11] Lau's translation is in the Penguin paperback classics series. It is inexpensive, widely available, and (despite being inexpensive and widely distributed) Lau's translation is actually very good overall. Analects 4:15 begins with Kongzi shouting to his disciple, Zengzi, using Zengzi's informal, personal name, 'Can': 'Can!' [12] Kongzi shouts, 'There is one single thread binding my way together'. Zengzi responds, 'Yes' Without asking anything else of Zengzi, Kongzi leaves the room. Immediately, the other disciples of Kongzi who were present rush up to Zengzi and say, 'What did [Kongzi] mean?' Zengzi replies, according to Lau's translation, 'The way of the Master consists in doing one's best and in using oneself as a measure to gauge others'.

This is puzzling and intriguing for a variety of reasons. For one thing, Kongzi said that there was 'one' thing that binds his way together, but Zengzi, in explaining what Kongzi meant, mentions two things. You will be even more puzzled if you actually read the Classical Chinese text that Lau is translating here. Zengzi's final explanation of the Way of the Master is much briefer and more elliptical than Lau's translation suggests. Literally, Zengzi says, 'The Way of the Master is *zhong* and *shu*, and that's all'. 'Using oneself as a measure to gauge others' is a long-winded but nonetheless defensible translation of one Chinese term: *shu*. The translation is defensible, because elsewhere in the Analects, Kongzi gives a characterisation of *shu* that fits this meaning (more or less). In Analects book 15, chapter 24, Kongzi's disciple Zigong asks Kongzi, 'Is there one word that one can follow to the end of one's life?' Kongzi replies, 'Would it not be *shu*? That which you do not like, do not inflict on others' (translation mine). So *shu* seems to be something like a negative version of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule says, 'And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise' (Luke 6:31, KJV), whereas Kongzi's formulation says, 'That which you do not like, do not inflict on others'. (It is a tasty question whether these two formulations are equivalent, but I do not have the space to pursue that in my comments here. [13])

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

I agree with Lau about the basic sense of shu, even though I prefer a more concise translation for it, like 'reciprocity'. More troubling, though, is Lau's handling of the other key term in the passage, zhong, which he translates as 'doing your best'. If you look up zhong in any standard Chinese-English dictionary, the translation you will find for zhong is 'loyalty'. Given how Lau translates 4:15, he clearly understands zhong as having a much broader meaning than this. Lau amplifies his interpretation in the introduction to his translation, where he says the following:

Having found out what the other person wants or does not want, whether we go on to do to him what we believe he wants and refrain from doing to him what we believe he does not want must depend on something other than shu. As the way of the Master consists of chung and shu, in chung we have the other component of benevolence. Chung is the doing of one's best and it is through chung that one puts into effect what one has found out by the method of shu. [14]

Thus interpreted, one could see how shu, 'using oneself as a measure to gauge others', and zhong, 'doing one's best', constitute the Way of Kongzi.

So Lau regards 4:15 as being central to understanding the Analects as a whole. In order for this hypothesis to make sense, Lau must give an unusual meaning to zhong in this passage. I say that Lau has to read zhong as having a special meaning, because the ordinary meaning of zhong, 'loyalty', is simply not broad enough to cover all of the rest of what Kongzi says in the Analects besides what is covered by shu. Lau is not alone either in regarding passage 4:15 as central to understanding the Way of Kongzi, or in assigning a special, broad meaning to zhong. I believe that the first interpreter to make 4:15 central to understanding the Analects was Zhu Xi. Zhu Xi is hardly a household name in the West. However, in East Asia, his philosophical and cultural influence is immense. He lived in the 12th century, from 1130 to 1200 AD to be exact. Zhu Xi identified 'four books' as the foundation of the Confucian educational curriculum: The Greater Learning, the Analects, the Mengzi, and The Mean. The Greater Learning is a work that Zhu Xi took to consist of two parts, a brief text written by Kongzi himself and a commentary explaining that text, written by Zengzi (the same Zengzi whom Kongzi talks to in Analects 4:15). The Mean is supposedly a brief essay written by Zisi, the grandson of Kongzi. The Mengzi (also known in English by the Latinization Mencius) is named after a Confucian philosopher who lived about a century after Kongzi himself. (According to one tradition, Mengzi studied under Kongzi's grandson Zisi, which would mean that The Four Books recorded the teachings of Kongzi, the teachings of one of Kongzi's most important immediate disciples, the teachings of Kongzi's grandson and the teachings of a student of Kongzi's grandson. Very tidy.) Zhu Xi argued that these four works complement one another, together presenting the same, coherent philosophical, ethical and cosmological worldview. (I said earlier that some traditional scholars think the Analects must be understood in the context of other works. This is the sort of thing I had in mind.) Zhu Xi would have been famous if his only contribution had been to shift the Confucian educational curriculum so that it focused on The Four Books. Zhu Xi not only did that, but he also wrote clear, insightful commentaries on The Four Books. The Four Books and Zhu Xi's commentaries on them became the basis of the civil service examinations in China for almost 600 years. Any Chinese person who hoped to attain a powerful (and potentially lucrative) government position had to pass these demanding examinations, and passing them required essentially memorizing The Four Books and Zhu Xi's commentaries on them. Consequently, Zhu Xi's influence has been immense, even up to the present day. For example, when I was in Taiwan just a few years ago, I picked up a modern edition of The Four Books in a bookstore. [15] The text I bought includes the original text of The Four Books, plus a translation of them into modern, colloquial Chinese. [16] The contemporary edition of The Four Books that I bought also includes footnotes explaining how to interpret various difficult passages. These footnotes cite Zhu Xi incessantly. Furthermore, they sometimes quote Zhu Xi without even acknowledging the fact that they are quoting his commentary. So Zhu Xi's influence very much lives on.

In his commentary on Analects 4:15, Zhu Xi presents the exchange between Zengzi and Kongzi as being almost like a koan exchange between a Zen Master and his disciple. According to Zhu Xi, Kongzi knew that Zengzi 'had truly piled up effort for a long time'. [17] However, according to Zhu Xi, Zengzi 'did not yet realize that the substance' of the universe is one. Consequently, Kongzi catches Zengzi off-guard by shouting to him, hence the unusual emphatic form of address at the beginning of the passage, 'Can!' as if Kongzi were yelling out of the blue, 'Hey Bryan!' Kongzi then tosses a patently cryptic comment at Zengzi: 'My Way is threaded together with one thing'. Zengzi understands this Confucian koan immediately. Indeed, it jolts him into enlightenment. We may be reminded here of Zhu Xi's commentary on part of The Greater Learning:

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

... the first step of instruction in greater learning is to teach the student, whenever he encounters anything at all in the world, to build upon what is already known to him of the pattern [of the world] and to probe still further, so that he seeks to reach the limit. After exerting himself in this way for a long time, he will one day become enlightened and thoroughly understand; then, the manifest and the hidden, the subtle and the obvious qualities of all things will all be known, and the mind, in its whole substance and vast operations, will be completely illuminated. [18]

This sounds precisely like what happened to Zengzi. Having become enlightened, Zengzi is now a Master in his own right. However, when the other disciples rush up to him, asking for an explanation of Kongzi's words, Zengzi cannot convey to them the deep understanding of the Confucian Way that enlightened people like himself and Kongzi have. Instead, Zengzi puts the Way of Kongzi into a simplified form that they can understand. 'The Way of the Master is zhong and shu, and that is all', he tells them. For us today (as for Zhu Xi's contemporaries) this is still rather obscure, so Zhu Xi helpfully explains Zengzi's meaning for us: 'Fully realizing the self is what is meant by zhong. To extend oneself is what is meant by shu.' We might paraphrase Zhu Xi's interpretation by saying that 'extending oneself' into the situation of another person, putting ourselves in another person's shoes, is shu, and 'fully realising' all of one's potential to do this, making one's best effort at being ethical, is zhong.

Zhu Xi's interpretation is brilliant, because it not only ties Analects 4:15 into Zhu Xi's general philosophy of education (as illustrated by his commentary on The Greater Learning), it also explains certain otherwise puzzling aspects of 4:15. Why does Kongzi yell to Zengzi out of the blue? To shock him into awareness. Why does Zengzi list two things in explaining what Kongzi said was one thing? Because Zengzi is trying to explain Kongzi's way in simple terms to those not yet enlightened. How do zhong, 'loyalty', and shu, 'reciprocity', together cover all of Kongzi's Way? 'Loyalty' is really an intense commitment to realising the Way in oneself. 'Reciprocity' is realising one's community with others.

Here, then, we see the ancestor--not only of D.C. Lau's interpretation of the Analects--but also the ancestor of the interpretations of Herbert Fingarette, David S. Nivison and P.J. Ivanhoe. [19] All of them see 4:15 as a key passage for understanding the Analects, and all of them, in one way or another, give some special, esoteric meaning to zhong, 'loyalty', in order for their interpretation to make sense of the whole text.

There are some significant problems with any reading like this, though. The details of Zhu Xi's interpretation must be mistaken, because they are too heavily tinged with Buddhist metaphysical concepts that would have been completely alien to the thought of Kongzi himself. [20] Worse, any interpretation that follows Zhu Xi in privileging 4:15 faces two fatal difficulties. First, there is considerable textual and circumstantial evidence that 4:15 is an apocryphal interpolation. In other words, 4:15 records a mythical encounter, one that never actually occurred, and it was inserted into the text of Analects book 4 long after the death of Kongzi and long after the composition of the rest of book 4 (whenever that was). I have argued for this claim in tedious detail elsewhere. [21] Here I shall merely summarise my key arguments.

The Chinese text of 4:15 is lexically anomalous, in that it includes the only occurrence in all of the Analects of the character hu being used vocatively. This suggests that the author of 4:15 spoke a slightly different dialect of Chinese than did whoever originally recorded the rest of book 4.

The Chinese text of 4:15 is syntactically anomalous. Generations of scholars have reached no consensus about how to parse it. Lau's translation follows that of Arthur Waley, but this is not close to the syntax of the original Chinese. [22] Notice that part of Zengzi's comment in 4:15 seems to quote a phrase from Analects 15:3 (yi yi guan zhi). But the phrase is perfectly intelligible in 15:3, yet quite awkward in 4:15. It starts to look as if someone took a phrase from one context and tried to force it to fit into a very alien context. This is hardly something that Kongzi would do if he were simply explaining his own views.

The story recounted in 4:15 is historically implausible. Zengzi was one of the younger disciples. There is no record in the Analects, outside of 4:15, of him even having a direct conversation with Kongzi. Furthermore, Zengzi is described in the Analects as 'stupid' (11:18). Why would Kongzi toss a patently cryptic comment at a younger, and not particularly bright, disciple and then leave the room without checking to make sure that he understood it? And why do the other disciples rush up to this junior disciple to ask for an explanation?

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

Zengzi's explanation of what Kongzi meant is implausible. Kongzi spoke of 'one' thing, but Zengzi mentioned two things.

Even if 4:15 were historically authentic, it does not give an insightful interpretation of the rest of the Analects. Again, I have argued for this in detail elsewhere. [23] Here, I shall limit myself to two salient points: zhong is not used in the rest of the Analects in the manner that Zhu Xi, Lau and others think it is being used in 4:15. In other passages in the Analects, zhong means what we would normally expect it to mean in Classical Chinese: loyalty. [24] Furthermore, there is no evidence outside of 4:15 that zhong and shu are a privileged pair of terms in the Analects. Indeed, if it were not for 4:15, I do not think it would have ever occurred to anyone that zhong and shu were the 'one' thing that binds together the Way of Kongzi. 'Loyalty' and 'reciprocity' are certainly two important values for Kongzi, but in the Analects as a whole they seem no more important than humaneness (ren), righteousness (yi), wisdom (zhi), courage (yong), and filial piety (xiao). [25]

Well, if 4:15 doesn't explain to us what the Way of Kongzi is, which passage does explain it to us? More recently, some interpreters have suggested that the key to the Analects is book 13, chapter 3:

[Kongzi's disciple] Zilu asked, 'If the Lord of [the state of] Wei were to employ you to serve in the government of his state, what would be your first priority?'

[Kongzi] answered, 'It would be, of course, to assure that names were being applied correctly!'

Zilu said, 'Is this really a matter of concern? It would seem that [your] suggestion is rather wide of the mark. Why worry about correcting names?'

[Kongzi] replied, 'How boorish you are, Zilu! When it comes to matters that he does not understand, the gentleman should refrain from flaunting his ignorance. If names are not correct, speech will not be in accordance with actuality; when speech is not in accordance with actuality, things will not be successfully accomplished. When things are not successfully accomplished, ritual practice and music will fail to flourish; when ritual and music fail to flourish, punishments and penalties will miss the mark. And when punishments and penalties miss the mark, the people will be at a loss as to what do with themselves.' [26]

This is obviously a very intriguing passage. But even with his explanation to Zilu, we may still not be entirely sure what Kongzi meant by 'correcting names', or why he thought it was so important.

One early Chinese line of interpretation, which goes back at least to the great ancient historian Sima Qian, is that 13:3 refers primarily to a specific historical situation in the state of Wei (which is, after all, the state in which this discussion between Kongzi and Zilu is supposed to have taken place). It turns out that there were some very nasty intrafamilial military and political intrigues in Wei at this time. The reigning duke's son, Kuai Kui, tried to have his mother (the duke's wife) murdered, after which he had to flee to another state. While he was away, the duke died, and Kuai Kui's son acceded to the throne. Kuai Kui then attempted to return from exile and take the throne himself, but troops were dispatched to stop him. Seen in this context, it may very well be that Kongzi's comment was a critique of the current political situation in Wei, in which sons were not acting like sons should, and in which someone had the title of 'duke' who was not entitled to it. [27] If this interpretation is correct, the significance and application of correcting names is actually fairly limited in scope.

However, there have been interpreters, both in China and in the West, who have seen correcting names as having a much broader significance. Here is a sketch of one possible way of understanding that broader significance. Consider a name like 'father'. What does it mean? We might consider either a 'thick' or a 'thin' understanding of what the word 'father' refers to. In a 'thin' sense, a father is the biological sire of offspring. This specification carries with it no assumptions or implications about how fathers ought to act. However, there could also be a 'thick' conception of what a father is. On a 'thick' conception, a father is a male caregiver, nurturer, role model and protector of his children. The doctrine of correcting names takes the 'thick' understanding of names and then insists on two things: (1) that names only be applied to things that actually live up to the relevant thick descriptions; (2) that people live up to the thick descriptions that should

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

apply to them. Examples will help to illustrate this point. When Duke Jing of the state of Qi asked Kongzi about the key to running a state well, Kongzi replied, 'Let the ruler be a ruler, the ministers be ministers, the fathers be fathers, and the sons be sons' (12:11, translation mine). At first glance, we might wonder whether this advice has any content. How can rulers fail to be rulers? How can sons fail to be sons? The answer is that Kongzi is working with thick conceptions of what a ruler, minister, father, or son is. So Kongzi is saying that if you want society to function well, rulers have to live up to their obligations as rulers, ministers have to live up to their obligations as ministers, fathers have to live up to their obligations as fathers and sons have to live up to their obligations as sons. This could be understood as one half of correcting names: demanding that people live up to the norms implied by the thick descriptions of the names that apply to them.

The second aspect of correcting names is well illustrated by a passage from the writings of Mengzi (whose sayings, as I noted earlier, became part of The Four Books that Zhu Xi made central to Chinese education). In one passage, Mengzi is asked by a ruler about a historical account in which a sage of a former era had led an army that overturned a tyrannical king, whose name was Zhou. The ruler asks Mengzi whether this story is true. Mengzi replies that it is. The ruler then asks whether the actions of the supposed sage were justified. In other words, is regicide (killing one's king) justified? Mengzi coolly responds, 'One who violates benevolence should be called a "thief". One who violates righteousness is called a "mutilator". A mutilator and a thief is called a mere "fellow". I have heard of the execution of a mere fellow "Zhou", but I have not heard of the killing of one's ruler.' [28] In other words, Mengzi responds that the actions of the sage were justified, but in order to see why they were justified, we have to realise that because of his cruel, tyrannical rule, Zhou no longer lived up to the obligations implied by the term 'ruler'. Because Zhou no longer lives up to the obligations implied by the term 'ruler', he should not be called a ruler, nor is he entitled to any of the privileges or immunities associated with a ruler. This is an illustration of the second aspect of correcting names: names should only be applied to things that, to at least a significant degree, live up to the standards embodied in their thick descriptions.

Earlier we discussed Analects 4:15, and I said that I thought Zhu Xi was responsible for the tendency to view that passage as the key to understanding the thought of Kongzi. I am less sure who is responsible for the recent trend to view 13:3 as the cipher to the Analects. However, my best guess is that it is Fung Yu-lan. Fung Yu-lan was a great, 20th-century historian of Chinese philosophy and an important philosopher in his own right. His two volume A History of Chinese Philosophy was, for many years, the standard history of Chinese philosophy (although it is now quite out of date). Professor Fung had a very special intellectual background. On the one hand, he was intimately familiar with the native Chinese philosophical tradition. On the other hand, he went to the USA to study, and obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy from Columbia University. Consequently, his thought is a fascinating amalgam of Western and Chinese ideas. This is reflected, I think, in his interpretation of Kongzi. In volume one of A History of Chinese Philosophy, Fung emphasises the importance for Kongzi of the project of correcting names, which Fung sees as very similar to the project of Socratic definition that we find illustrated in Plato's dialogues. [29] In many of the Platonic dialogues, Socrates is represented as attempting to find the definitions of key evaluative terms--such as courage, piety and justice. Part of the Socratic project seems to be finding the correct definitions of these terms, so that they can properly guide one's life. One cannot help but wonder about the extent to which Fung's interpretation of correcting names and the importance that Fung attaches to it in the thought of Kongzi, were due to his exposure to Western philosophical ideas while in the USA. In any case, Fung has heavily influenced the interpretations of Kongzi of several more recent philosophers. The most notorious of these is probably Chad Hansen. Hansen disagrees with Fung Yu-lan in several respects. In particular, Hansen does not think that Kongzi wished to find definitions for his key ethical terms. (I think he would also be uncomfortable with the distinction between thick and thin senses of terms that I used to elucidate correcting names.) However, Hansen does follow Fung in taking correcting names to be central to the thought of Kongzi and in seeing correcting names as having the sort of action-guiding functions that I identified earlier. [30]

Unfortunately, Analects 13:3, and its 'correcting names', is just as problematic for interpreting the thought of Kongzi as is Analects 4:15, with its 'loyalty' and 'reciprocity'. More than 50 years ago, Arthur Waley presented what I take to be some definitive arguments against the historical reliability of 13:3 as a representation of Kongzi's thought: [31]

Analects 13:3 is written in a distinctive 'chain argument' style: if A, then B. If B, then C. If C ... This style is found nowhere else in the Analects itself, and is not characteristic of early Chinese texts. This style is, however, reminiscent of the opening of The Greater Learning, which was probably composed no earlier than the third century BC.

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

If correcting names is a key notion in Kongzi's thought, why does Zilu (a disciple whom we know to have frequently talked with the Master) seem so shocked by Kongzi's invocation of it? One simple explanation is that 13:3 is a fabrication and its author anticipated that his readers would be surprised to hear that Kongzi advocated this doctrine, and hoped to blunt their incredulity by having Zilu swatted down by Kongzi for expressing a similar surprise.

About the late 4th century BC, there was what Waley has aptly called a 'language crisis' in Chinese philosophy. The language crisis concerned the issue of whether language could adequately describe reality and guide behavior. This crisis (which is reflected in a variety of works, including the Dao De Jing, Zhuangzi, the Mohist 'dialectical chapters', and the Xunzi) was often phrased in terms of the relationship between ming, 'names', and shi, 'things'. The relative centrality of issues about language, and their phrasing in terms of the vocabulary of ming and/or shi is not found in the Mengzi or in any text plausibly dated earlier than it. Analects 13:3, if genuine, would be the only exception to this.

I would add two additional considerations to Waley's arguments.

The term ming, 'name', is seldom used in the text of the Analects (a mere eight times), which is surprising if correcting names is a central notion for Kongzi. Furthermore, of these eight occurrences, three are in 13:3 itself and one is in 17:9 (which is in the set of chapters shown by Cui Shu to be late in origin). In every other occurrence in the Analects, ming means 'fame' or 'good reputation'. So, in this respect, 13:3 is more like late texts such as Analects book 17 or Xunzi's essay 'On Correct Naming' than it is like the rest of the Analects.

The most detailed and carefully argued defence I have yet seen of the importance of correcting names for Kongzi is in an unpublished Master's thesis written at the National University of Singapore by my friend Loy Hui-chieh. By assiduously combing through the Analects, Loy was able to find 24 chapters that he thinks deal with correcting names. This is actually not very many, when you consider that the Analects has approximately 500 chapters. In other words, only about 5 per cent of the chapters in the Analects (at most) are clearly connected with correcting names. [32] For a guy who is supposed to have been deeply concerned about correcting names, Kongzi does not talk about this topic very much!

So I am not convinced that either Analects 13:3 or Analects 4:15 is the key to understanding the Way of Kongzi. But then what is the key? I propose a radical suggestion: there is no one passage that wraps all of the Way of Kongzi into a nutshell. Generally speaking, some philosophers produce neat, tidy, systems of thought in which everything is derived from a handful of basic principles. Other philosophers think that the best way to approach the world is through recognising its infinite variety and complexity, which resists simple formulations. I think Kongzi is one of this latter group of philosophers. Kongzi is not interested in giving us a neat, tightly organised worldview, because he does not think that reality is neat and tightly organised. Instead, Kongzi thinks that we must develop a number of virtues: humaneness, righteousness, wisdom, courage, loyalty, faithfulness and filial piety. To the extent that we have these character traits, we will have a subtle, situational appreciation that goes beyond any simple verbal rule, formula, or practice. This situational appreciation will allow us to respond appropriately to the complex and ever-changing world in which we live. There are actually a number of passages in the Analects that suggest Kongzi's own situational adaptability. One of my favourites is book 11, chapter 22, which I would like to close my paper with:

[Kongzi's disciple] Zilu asked, 'Upon learning something, should

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

one immediately put it into practice?’

[Kongzi] replied, ‘As long as one’s father and older brothers are still alive, how could one possibly put what one has learned immediately into practice?’

As Edward Slingerland explains in the footnote to his translation of this passage, Kongzi’s point is that Zilu should, out of filial respect for his father and older brothers, defer to their judgement on whether he should put into practice a new ethical teaching he has learned. The Analects passage then continues,

{On a later occasion, [Kongzi’s disciple]} Ranyou asked, ‘Upon learning something, should one immediately put it into practice?’

[Kongzi] replied, ‘Upon learning something, you should immediately put it into practice’.

[Kongzi’s disciple] Zihua, {having observed both exchanges}, inquired, ‘When Zilu asked you whether or not one should immediately put into practice what one has learned, you told him one should not, as long as one’s father and elder brother were still alive. When Ranyou asked the same question, however, you said that one should immediately put into practice what one has learned. I am confused, and humbly ask to have this explained to me.’

[Kongzi] said, ‘Ranyou is overly cautious, and so I wished to urge him on. Zilu, on the other hand, is reckless, and so I thought to make him more cautious.’ [33]

So, in this passage, we see Kongzi showing situational adaptability by tailoring his comments to the specific needs of individual students. This, I think, is a paradigm for the flexible manner in which the Confucian Way operates in the world.

This interpretation of Kongzi is hardly original. Although I would not agree with him about everything, the great later Confucian Wang Yangming interpreted Kongzi in a similar fashion. [34] Furthermore, there are interesting similarities between the Way of Kongzi, as I have described it, and what Aristotle and his later followers refer to as *phronesis*, ‘practical wisdom’. [35] More recent philosophers such as Iris Murdoch and Martha Nussbaum have also defended similar notions of situational adaptability. [36] These points all deserve exploration, but my allotted space draws to a close. [37] So if I wish to follow the Way of Kongzi, I must respond to the demands of my situation by ending here.

### Afterword

When I originally presented this paper, I had the opportunity to listen to several other challenging presentations on Chinese thought. In the spirit of ongoing dialogue, I thought I would share some of my reflections based on these talks.

There are two extremes in discussions of comparative philosophy, and both were in evidence among my co-presenters. At the one extreme, Shigenori Nagatomo drew a sharp boundary between ‘the Western’ and ‘the Asian’ worldviews. He described the West as having a ‘disjunctive Cartesian dualist’ perspective on the world, and argued that many of the problems facing the contemporary West are caused by this worldview, and are insoluble unless the West abandons it. In contrast, Asia has a non-dualist worldview, which is more accurate to the world and encourages a more harmonious manner of living. Ironically, then, Nagatomo advocates metaphysical non-dualism, but he does so based on a sort of ‘methodological dualism’. His methodology is dualistic in that it distinguishes two things categorically (‘the West’ and ‘Asia’) and then gives a much higher value to one of the two (‘Asia’) than the other.

In contrast, Ashok Gangadean, one of our commentators, presented a more thoroughgoing non-dualism. In fact, Gangadean presented one version of what is sometimes called ‘the perennial philosophy’. Those who believe in a ‘perennial philosophy’ hold that, in the words of George Bernard Shaw, ‘There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it’. In other words, underlying every great philosophical and religious tradition is the same worldview, which turns out to be a form of non-dualism. If this interpretation is correct, Plato, Aristotle, Jesus, the Buddha, Confucius,



## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

Nagarjuna, and many others are all saying essentially the same thing (with some differences in vocabulary or emphasis that tend to obscure the underlying identity of views). Indeed, Gangadean is so passionate about this view that he initially found it hard to believe that I could really be disagreeing with him. He tried (out of charitable motives) to find a way of interpreting what I was saying that reconciled it with a perennialist interpretation of Kongzi. It was only through my own stubbornness that I talked this genial man out of agreeing with me.

As became clear during the discussion portion of the panel, my own approach is different from either the 'methodological dualist' or the 'perennialist' approach. Methodological dualism is problematic because both 'the West' and 'Asia' are much more multifaceted and evaluatively complex than dualism would allow. To begin with, one must ignore much of the Western intellectual tradition to believe that the West has been or is monolithically Cartesian. Even if we use the term 'Cartesianism' broadly to encompass a wide range of worldviews--some of which (like gnosticism) are importantly different from the views of Descartes himself--Cartesianism has only ever been one of an immense variety of positions in the West. Consider Aristotle, Democritus, Aquinas, Hume, Kant of Hegel--none of them are Cartesians in any deep sense. Although Descartes is certainly within the Platonistic tradition in some broad sense, Plato himself, Plotinus and Augustine are really importantly different from Descartes. In other words, the expression 'the Western worldview' is a non-referring expression, like 'the fish that lives in the water'. Neither expression picks out any one, unique thing. The same can be said, perhaps to an even greater extent, of expressions like 'the Asian worldview' or even 'the Chinese worldview'.

Perhaps most importantly, Cartesianism is dead as a contemporary philosophical position. I know of no major contemporary Cartesians and it is, at the least, very disputable how influential Cartesian ideas are among most contemporary Westerners, either intellectuals or hoi polloi. My own view, based on years of teaching both Western and Chinese philosophy to undergraduates, is that most students (insofar as their ideas on the topic are other than inchoate) do not think there is any radical mind-body split that needs to be explained of explained away.

Even more problematic, I think, are the evaluative consequences of methodological dualism in discussions of 'East' and 'West'. I would be the first to admit that Western institutions often fail, sometimes shockingly, to live up to their high ideals. However, it is undeniable that many ideas, practices and institutions of great value have come out of the West. Any workable philosophical position will have to encompass the contributions that the West has made to feminism, political pluralism, democracy, scientific methodology and others.

The problems with perennialism are less obvious, but nonetheless significant. First, based on my study of several major Chinese and Western intellectual traditions, I think it is obviously not the case that all the great traditions are saying the same thing. Here is an example (which I can only quickly sketch). Mengzi says that all humans are possessed of incipient tendencies toward virtuous behaviour, which he refers to (using an agricultural metaphor) as 'sprouts'. Becoming a better person is a matter of recognising that we have these tendencies, and then cultivating them through reading, reflection and ritual. Ethical teachers can, and ideally should, play a role in this process, helping us to guide the process of self-cultivation, but, according to Mengzi, ethical cultivation is something that we are ultimately responsible for through our own agency. Contrast this with the view of Augustine. Augustine acknowledges that humans have tendencies toward virtue, but he is very clear that we are incapable of realising our capacity for virtue without the transforming power of superhuman grace. Because of the necessity for grace, a person needs not merely an ethical teacher, but rather a saviour. This difference between Mengzi and Augustine is central to their respective conceptions of ethical improvement, and it is grounded in fundamental differences in their respective worldviews. There is a transcendent aspect to Augustine's thought that could not be accommodated in Mengzi's philosophy. [38]

Even if I am wrong about this particular comparison, there is another serious problem with perennialism. Consider Augustine again. Augustine passionately rejected several positions, which he saw as being in conflict with Christianity, one of which was Pelagianism. Pelagianism (which was later declared heretical, in part because of Augustine's efforts) teaches that humans do not need grace in order to become good, but can instead achieve goodness through the efforts of their own free will. (If my earlier discussion is correct, Augustine would consider Mengzi a sort of 'pagan Pelagian'.) If perennialism is correct, what are we to make of the disagreement between Augustine and the Pelagians? There seem to only be two options open to the perennialist. One possibility is that Augustine and the Pelagians are mistaken in thinking that they disagree, but if I am right in thinking that Augustine was a truly great thinker, how could he have been so fundamentally mistaken about what his own views and those of his contemporaries were? The other alternative is that Augustine and the Pelagians really do disagree, but if that is the case, then the perennialist must say that one of them has a position that is intellectually shallow. If all the great, profound traditions are saying the same thing and if the Pelagians

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

(or the Augustineans, or the Mengzians, or whoever) are not saying that thing, then they are not really great or profound. Personally, I am uncomfortable with either of these conclusions. I think that there are fundamentally different ways of seeing the world that are equally profound.

So my suggestion is that we reject both methodological dualism and perennialism. Neither is adequate to the actual diversity one finds among the world's great intellectual traditions and each has unpleasant implications. Instead, I propose that we look for what Lee Yearley has described as 'similarities within differences, and differences within similarities'. We will often find differences between particular thinkers and traditions at a certain level of analysis, but these differences may mask more significant underlying similarities that only become clear when we pursue a more finely textured comparison. On the other hand, we may find apparent similarities that turn out to conceal more profound differences. [39] Whatever we do, let the texts and the traditions speak for themselves in their detail and their diversity. Or, as a great Confucian philosopher of the sixteenth century put it,

Approaching what is the same, one understands that it may involve differences, and approaching what is different, one sees that it may involve sameness.... This is the all-encompassing approach that avoids one-sidedness. [40]

### NOTES

[1] This paper was originally delivered as a talk at a panel discussion hosted by the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium, at LaSalle University, in Philadelphia, PA, 20 April, 2002. I would like to thank the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium, the Department of Philosophy at LaSalle University and the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania for sponsoring this event, and for inviting me to start things out. I sincerely hope that their confidence in me has proven warranted. Most of all, I would like to thank Frank Hoffman, who was both fireless and genial in the tasks of organising that conference and getting the resulting papers together in this volume. I have written this talk as a largely popular exposition of the Way of Kongzi for non-specialists. Scholars should consult some of the works cited in the notes for more detailed discussion, as well as my 'Introduction' to VAN NORDEN, BRYAN W. (Ed.) (2002) *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (New York, Oxford University Press), pp. 3-36.

[2] On the etymology of the term 'dao', see ENO ROBERT (1996) *Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy*, in: KJELLBERG, PAUL & IVANHOE, P.J. (Eds), *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press), pp. 129-30 and 145nn9-10.

[3] 'Against Confucians', from WATSON, BURTON, (trans.), (1963) *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York, Columbia University Press), p. 134.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[6] Attitudes toward Kongzi in the last century in China were extremely complex and varied. See GOLDMAN, MERLE & OU-FAN LEE, LEO (2002). *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (New York, Cambridge University Press).

[7] JASPERS, KARL (1990 [1957]) *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus* (New York, Harcourt, Brace).

[8] For Cui Shu's arguments, see his *Kaoxin lu*. These arguments are summarised in English in LAU D.C. (1979) *Confucius: The Analects* (New York, Penguin), pp. 222-227. Waley makes his comment in passing (and without argument) in WALEY, ARTHUR (1938) *The Analects of Confucius* (New York, Vintage Books), p. 21. The Brookses defend their controversial views in BROOKS, BRUCE & BROOKS, TAEKO (1998) *The Original Analects* (New York: Columbia University Press). Scholarly reaction to the work of the Brookses has ranged from dismissal to high praise. My own view is that any serious scholar of the Analects must carefully consider their comments on particular books and passages, even if their overall interpretation is not compelling. For more on the Brookses' interpretation, see VAN NORDEN, *op.cit.*, note 1, esp. pp. 13-18.

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

[9] FINGARETTE, HERBERT (1972) *Confucius--the Secular as Sacred* (New York, Harper and Row), p. vii.

[10] Cheng Yi is cited by Zhu Xi in the preface to the latter's commentary on the Analects. Cheng Yi's final phrase is a quotation of Mengzi 4A27. Translation is my own.

[11] LAU, op. cit., note 8, p. 74.

[12] The construction we find in the original Chinese is 'Can hu!' This is the only passage in the Analects in which 'hu' is used vocatively like this. Elsewhere in the Analects, the construction is 'X ye', when Kongzi is addressing a disciple by his personal name, X. (See, for example, Analects 5:12.) As we shall see, this fact is important for understanding the significance of the passage.

[13] For one discussion, see NIVISON, DAVID S. (1996) Golden rule arguments in Chinese moral philosophy, in: NIVISON, D.S. (Ed.) *The Ways of Confucianism* (Chicago, Open Court Press), esp. pp. 62-63.

[14] LAU, op. cit., note 8, p. 16.

[15] XIE, BINGYING et al. (Eds) (1987) *Xinyi sishu duben* (Taipei, Sanmin shuju).

[16] It is important to understand, by the way, that the Classical Chinese in which texts like the Analects were written is importantly different from modern Chinese. A contemporary Chinese person who is fully literate in modern Chinese cannot read *The Four Books* without special training, any more than a typical speaker of contemporary English can read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the original 'middle English'.

[17] Translations from Zhu Xi's commentary on Analects 4:15 are my own. For a complete translation, see the Appendix to my paper, 'Unweaving the "One Thread" of Analects 4:15', in VAN NORDEN, op. cit., note 1, pp. 231-32.

[18] Translation slightly modified from GARDNER, DANIEL K. (1988) *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press), p. 105. Gardner's book translates and explicates Zhu Xi's commentary on *The Greater Learning*, and also includes a very informative introduction to the historical significance of Zhu Xi's educational program. I also strongly recommend Gardner, Daniel, K. (1990) *Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from The Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically* (Berkeley; University of California Press).

[19] See FINGARETTE, HERBERT, (1980) Following the 'One Thread' of the Analects, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Issue S* (September), pp. 373-403; NIVISON D.S. (1996) op. cit., note 13, pp. 59-76; and IVANHOE, P.J. (1990) Reweaving the 'one thread' of the Analects, *Philosophy East and West*, 40(1), pp. 17-33. Although I believe that all of these interpretations are mistaken in emphasising 4:15, I think that Ivanhoe presents the most defensible interpretation of the group.

[20] Zhu Xi's influence has been so great that, even today, there are some traditional scholars who find it heretical to suggest that he might have gotten Kongzi wrong. But I think that it has been established beyond any reasonable doubt that the so-called 'Neo-Confucians' (the 'School of the Way' in Chinese) see their tradition through Buddhist lenses, which leads them to distort that tradition in important ways. This point was made forcefully by Dai Zhen in the 18th century (see EWELL, JOHN (trans.) (1990) *Re-Inventing the Way: Dai Zhen's Evidential Commentary on the Meaning of Terms in Mencius [1777]*, Ph.D. dissertation, History, University of California at Berkeley [University Microfilms International Order Number 9126550]). More recently, Ivanhoe has documented the differences between 'paleo-Confucianism' and 'Neo-Confucianism' at length. See Ivanhoe, P.J. (2000) *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, rev. edn (Indianapolis, Hackett).

[21] VAN NORDEN, *Unweaving the 'One Thread' of Analects 4:15*, op. cit., note 1, esp. pp. 219-224.

[22] BROOKS & BROOKS, op. cit., note 8, are the only translators I know of who, in my opinion, translate according to the syntax of the original Chinese.

[23] VAN NORDEN, op. cit., note 21, esp. pp. 224-230.

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

[24] For Kongzi, this loyalty is not 'blind loyalty', but blind loyalty is not considered genuine loyalty in Western discussions of virtue either.

[25] For typical passages that emphasise virtues other than zhong and shu, see 4:1, 4:2, 6:22 and 6:23 (in which Kongzi himself emphasises humaneness and wisdom), and see 9:29 and 14:28 (in which Kongzi himself emphasise, humaneness, wisdom and courage). If there is something or some group of things that binds together Kongzi's Way, why would not it be humaneness, or humaneness and wisdom, or humaneness and wisdom and courage?

[26] Translation modified from SLINGERLAND, EDWARD, (2000) *Analects*, in IVANHOE, P.J. & VAN NORDEN, BRYAN W. (eds), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (New York, Seven Bridges Press).

[27] For an excellent discussion of Chinese interpretations of 13:3, see MAKEHAM, JOHN (1994) *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany, State University of New York Press), esp. pp. 35-50.

[28] Mengzi 1B8, translated in IVANHOE & VAN NORDEN, op. cit., note 26.

[29] FUNG, YU-IAN (1952) *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans, by DERK BODDE, Vol. 1 (Princeton, Princeton University Press), pp. 59-62.

[30] See HANSEN, CHAD (1983) *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan press), and HANSEN, CHAD (1992) *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (New York, Oxford University Press), especially pp. 65-71. Also central to Hansen's interpretation is stressing a third sense of 'dao' that I have not mentioned yet: 'linguistic account'. Non-specialists should be warned that Hansen's general line of interpretation of Chinese philosophy is not well supported by textual evidence. See IVANHOE, P.J. (1987) *Review of Language and Logic in Ancient China*, *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles and Reviews*, 9, pp. 115-123, and VAN NORDEN, BRYAN W. (1995) *Review of A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, *Ethics*, 105(2), pp. 433-435.

[31] WALEY, op. cit., note 8, pp. 21-22.

[32] Furthermore, many of the passages that Loy cites may not be evidence for correcting names at all. Consider the passage I used earlier to illustrate one aspect of correcting names: 'Let the ruler be a ruler, let the minister be a minister etc.' This could be about correcting names, but it does not actually say anything about the names 'ruler', 'minister', 'father', or 'son' at all. (To invoke contemporary philosophical terminology, the *Analects* passage uses the words 'ruler', 'minister', etc., but it does not mention those words.) It is, therefore, tendentious to cite it as evidence for Kongzi's pervasive interest in correcting names. If you leave out of Loy's total the passages that are not fairly clearly about words in some sense, and if you leave out passages that occur in the late books 16-20, we are left with twelve passages that talk about language, of about what you should call something, in any way.

[33] SLINGERLAND, op. cit., note 26. Words in square brackets are my additions; those in curly brackets are Slingerland's. Another illustration of Kongzi's flexibility is 9:3, in which he responds to innovations in ritual practices.

[34] See IVANHOE, P.J. (2002) *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming*, rev. edn (Indianapolis, Hackett).

[35] See WIGGINS, DAVID (1980) *Deliberation and Practical Reason*, in: RORTY, A.O., (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, University of California Press), pp. 221-240.

[36] MURDOCH, IRIS (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul), and NUSSBAUM, MARTHA (1990) *Love's Knowledge* (New York, Cambridge University Press), esp. pp. 54-105.

[37] For a comparative discussion of Confucian and Western approaches to ethics, see VAN NORDEN, BRYAN W., (2003 forthcoming) *Confucianism and virtue ethics*, in MOU, BO (Ed.), *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy* (London, Ashgate Publishing).

[38] On these points, see YEARLEY, LEE H. (1985) *Teachers and saviors*, *Journal of Religion*, 65(2), pp. 225-243, and

## The Dao of Kongzi [1].

VAN NORDEN, BRYAN W. (2001), Mencius and Augustine on evil: a test case for comparative philosophy, in: MOU, BO (Ed.), *Two Roads to Wisdom?* (Chicago, Open Court Press), pp. 313-336.

[39] YEARLEY, LEE H. (1990) *Mencius and Aquinas* (Albany, State University of New York Press), esp. pp. 188-203.

[40] YI T'OEGYE, Letter to Kobong, KALTON, MICHAEL (trans) *The Four-Seven Debate* (Albany, State University of New York Press).

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