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of
The Original Analects of Confucius

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A Non-Moral Interpretation
of
The Original Analects of Confucius

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ABSTRACT

I argue that the sayings attributed to Confucius by Bruce and Taeko Brooks in the sixteen chapters that constitute their reconstruction of Book Four of the *Analects* are *not* those of a moralist. After explaining some of the differences between morality and ethics, I address several problems with the moralistic translations of 4.1 through 4.7 given by three prominent sinologists. As alternatives, I propose non-moral translations which I argue are more accurate and intellectually satisfying. I further claim that 4.10 and 4.16, understood by most translators to be moral pronouncements, can (and should) be read as flexible ethical evaluations that vary relative to differing situations, needs, and interests. I then sort out and assess moral and non-moral translations of the uses made by Confucius of ‘道’ in 4.5, 4.8, and 4.9. I side with non-moral readings for each of these uses. Finally, I argue that Confucius’s use of ‘賢’ in 4.17 describes exceptional competence but not moral virtue, as is widely assumed.

Keywords: 仁, Goodness, benevolence, humanity, 義, moral, right, righteous, appropriate, 道, the proper way, the way of Heaven, 賢 supreme competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Was Confucius speaking as a moralist in Book Four of the *Analects*? The answer, I argue, is no. My case presupposes the basic outlines of the “accretion theory” of the *Analects* proposed by E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks. In particular, it assumes the accuracy of their claim that the words attributed to “The Master” in Book Four “...are literally authentic sayings of Confucius, transcribed after his death, preserving something like his actual voice...” ([4], 11).¹ None of these sayings, I contend, are the words of a moralist.

This is a controversial contention. It is incompatible with numerous translations by experts in classical Chinese linguistics and history. In the nineteenth century, James Legge, the father of Western sinology, read the *Analects* as a work containing moral themes familiar to English men and women. He chose ‘virtue,’ ‘virtuous,’ and ‘benevolence’ as English equivalents for ‘仁,’ a term that occurs as many as a hundred times throughout the *Analects*. The assumption that Confucius was a moral teacher has continued to influence the translations of many post-Legge sinologists.

In this essay I analyze some of the moralistic translations that have been given of certain chapters, if they may be called such, of Book Four of the *Analects*. In particular, 4.1 through 4.7 have been infused by Arthur Waley, a leading figure among post-Legge *Analects* translators, with iconic moral words, the monotonous reoccurrence of which in his translations brings to mind the frequent occurrence of the words ‘good’ and ‘goodness’ in G.E. Moore’s perplexing answer to the question, “What is GOOD?” This very question is raised on the faceplate of the 1962 edition of *Principia Ethica*, first published in 1903. Both Moore (1873–1958) and Waley (1889–1966) were associated with the Bloomsbury Group. According to Francis A. Johns, “Though Waley was not in the inner circle of Bloomsbury, he knew all its members and shared some of their preoccupations, having been exposed inevitably to the work of their members such as G.E. Moore and Lowes Dickinson, who became a friend.” ([8], 177). Waley certainly must have known of Moore’s ideas about the nature of what is morally good, and, as I will show, he seems to have incorporated some of them into his translations.

¹ The bracketed number in the citation in the text, e.g., ([4], 11), indicates the source marked with the same bracketed number in the bibliography, followed by the page number. In this case the citation is to bibliography item 4, i.e., Brooks and Brooks, p. 11.

As alternatives to such moralistic translations, I propose non-moral ones, which I argue are more accurate and also more intellectually stimulating. I grant that in some cases Confucius was proffering what may be called ethical advice. But his words are not, nor were they intended to be taken as, moral pronouncements. Of course, a plausible ethical *non-moral* reading of Confucius's sayings depends on there being a viable distinction between ethics and morality, a distinction that I defend in the next section. Translations of sayings attributed to Confucius that have been purged of moral language, I will show, enhance rather than diminish the wisdom of the master's teachings. A demoralized Confucius remains the multitalented warrior, scholar, educator, and aspiring courtier that intellectual historians have long rightly held him to be. But based on what he says in Book Four, he was no moralist.

2. WHAT IS ETHICS AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM MORALITY?

An early usage of the graph '仁' that predates the *Analects* is found in the song 叔于田 "Shu Goes Hunting" in *The Book of Poetry*. It describes Shu as being 美且仁, which Legge translates as "admirable and kind." ([12], 127) In a footnote to his translation of the *Analects* Edward Slingerland agrees with Legge that the use of '仁' here functions as an adjective, but, instead of describing a caring disposition, it is being used, he thinks, to describe features of the virile aristocratic men of the period. Such men, according to Brooks and Brooks, showed "strength, courage and steadfastness in crisis, consideration for others, [and a] capacity for self-sacrifice." ([4], 15) They suggest "manly" as an English equivalent for this early usage, and Slingerland agrees. In the glossary to his translation, under the heading "*Goodness, Good* (ren 仁)," he further claims: "One of Confucius's innovations was to transform this aristocratic martial ideal into an ethical one: *ren* in the *Analects* refers to a moral rather than a physical or martial ideal." ([15], 238) Slingerland is correct to claim that, by transforming this martial ideal, Confucius enriched the meaning of '仁,' but he skates over thin ice when he uses the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' interchangeably.

In his book *The Moral Fool: A Case for Amorality*, Hans-Georg Moeller summarizes attempts by three thinkers, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Niklas Luhmann, and Drucilla Cornell, to distinguish ethics from morality. He concludes that none of the distinctions drawn by these thinkers correspond to

distinctions made by English speakers when they use the words ‘ethics’ and ‘morality.’ He comes to this conclusion, however, based on a commonly held but false assumption that there is a “traditional synonymy of the two terms.” ([13], 24)

Although they are different, ethics and morality are similar enough that the words ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ are sometimes used interchangeably. Both words suggest norms, values, standards, and rules of behavior and speech, as well as duties and obligations. But ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ and their declensions are anything but synonymous. They have different etymologies and uses and fail miserably the substitutivity test of synonymy. It is true, for example, that Ezekiel Emanuel is an ethicist but false that he is a moralist.² We often hear or read about business and medical ethics, but business and medical morality are rarely if ever mentioned, since there are no such things. A commitment by the employees of a corporation to follow its code of ethics does not thereby commit them to follow a moral code. Publishing unbiased data is an ethical ideal held by most scientific researchers, but it is not a moral one.

That there is a difference between ethics and morality is suggested by comparing immoral deeds with unethical ones. Richard Garner observes, “*Immoral* actions seem worse than *unethical* ones. A merchant who overcharges or a used car salesman who turns back the odometer is unethical, but that criticism is too mild for a mass murderer, a rapist, or a sadistic torturer.” He says, “‘morality’ suggests non-conventionality or universality. ‘Ethics,’ on the other hand, implies a kind of relativity—as in medical or Hopi ethics.” ([7], 17). It is especially the universality of moral judgments that distinguishes them from ethical ones.

Being relative to people’s needs, interests, purposes, and situations, a wide variety of phenomena that are deemed “good” can also be deemed “bad.” On the one hand, for example, the burning of fossil fuels has resulted in previously unimaginable advances in personal mobility that have been good for many people. On the other hand, climate science has made it clear that the result of our combustion-driven mobility has been bad for the health of the biosphere. Another example of something that can be both good and bad is low interest rates. They are good for the economy in some situations but bad for it in others.

² Dr. Emanuel is a professor in the Department of Medical Ethics and Health Policy in the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine.

Since the goal of any business is to make a profit, its ethical code, if it has one, will likely require a commitment from employees to work cooperatively toward that end. There might be rules governing hiring practices and salaries, standards for job advancement, taboos against harassment, and so on. Other organizations are motivated by different goals and values: the National Security Agency, for example, by the collection of foreign intelligence, the New York Yankees by winning World Series championships, and the academy of Confucius by securing influential positions at court for its mentees. To facilitate adherence to their goals and values, different organizations endorse different ethical codes relevant to their specific needs. Where the goals and values of different organizations overlap, some of their ethical rules, for example, against harassment of cohorts, might be virtually identical. Shared values and codes of behavior, however, are not necessarily moral values and codes.

Moral judgments about good and evil, right and wrong, virtuous and vicious, express a kind of absoluteness, imperative urgency, and universality that ethical judgments lack. This is because moral values and rules are not tethered to individual or collective goals, purposes, and situations. To be morally good is to be good no matter what anyone wants or believes and no matter what else is true. People are deemed morally good when they do not neglect their moral duties in order to accommodate their personal beliefs, creeds, cultural practices, situations, needs, or interests. They “do the right thing” without veering from the path that morality requires. Did Confucius expect his charges to meet these sorts of requirements for being morally good people? Surprisingly, Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont suggest that he did. They claim that the six Confucian arts³ “...were directed more at cultivating the moral character of his charges than at any set of practical skills.” ([2], 3)

In 5.26 Confucius asks *Yen Hui* to share what his heart is set on. He replies, “願無伐善。” Lau translates this passage as “I should like never to boast of my own goodness.” ([10], 80) This rendering of ‘善’ as “goodness” suggests that *Yen Hui* is in possession of a kind of moral virtue about which he hopes to remain humble. But ‘善’ can also be read as a non-moral evaluation of ability. A person who is said to be 善 “good” is good *for* or *at* something, such as music, in 3.25, or interacting with others, in 5.17. Slingerland avoids burdening ‘善’ with moral implications by translating its occurrence in *Yen Hui*’s

³ These include the observance of ceremony and the performance of music, as well as proficiency in archery, charioteering, writing, and calculation.

reply as “abilities.” ([15], 50) Yet he and Lau both agree on ‘good’ for the use of ‘善’ in 3.25, a passage in which the master is commenting on the music of two former kings. Slingerland explains in a footnote that in this passage ‘善’ means good *for* people in the sense of “having a good effect on them.” He then goes on to warn the reader that ‘good’ in “good effect,” “is to be distinguished from ‘Good’ (*ren* 仁) in the sense of morally good, good as a person, [and] the highest moral virtue.” ([15], 28) Like his predecessor Arthur Waley, Slingerland translates almost every occurrence of ‘仁’ in the *Analects* either as ‘Good’ or as ‘Goodness.’

3. ‘GOOD’ AND ‘GOODNESS’ AS TRANSLATIONS OF ‘仁’

As it stands, Slingerland’s glossary explanation for his translation of occurrences of ‘仁’ in the *Analects* as ‘Good’ or ‘Goodness’ is simply nonsense. In the entry under “Good, Goodness (*ren* 仁),” he says, “In the *Analects*, Goodness refers to the highest of Confucian virtues.” ([15], 238) But Goodness is neither a person making a reference to something nor a word being used to refer to it. Goodness is a vague abstraction that does not *refer* to anything! Moreover, the notion that Goodness is *in* the *Analects* is problematic. It is obviously not a word in the text. Perhaps Goodness was an idea in Confucius’s mind. But what would be the evidence for such a claim? What Slingerland apparently meant to say, and perhaps should have said, is that he uses “Good” and “Goodness” as English equivalents for occurrences in the *Analects* of the term ‘仁,’ which refers to the “highest of Confucian virtues.”

This claim that ‘仁’ refers to the *highest* of Confucian virtues prompts Slingerland to capitalize, à la Waley, the “g” in “good” and “goodness.” But the suggestion that nothing is higher than the Goodness of 仁 is not without its problems. In *Analects* 8.13, Slingerland translates “守死善道” as “hold fast to the good Way until death.” ([15], 82) Yet if the goodness of the good Way is moral goodness, it cannot be the Goodness of 仁, which is as good as it gets, and so, by definition, better than the kind of moral goodness designated by lower case “good.” By giving ‘善道’ a non-moral translation, to wit: “efficacious way,” ([2], 123), Ames and Rosemont avoid being led off track by this sort of red herring.

The fundamental problem with Slingerland’s proposal to translate occurrences of ‘仁’ in the *Analects* as “Good” and “Goodness” is that he provides no plausible explanation for it, and the explanation of it given by his predecessor is not only incoherent but also embraces mysticism. Waley claims that ‘人’ “in earliest Chinese means freemen” or “men of the tribe,” as opposed to ‘民’ which he

says designated "the common people," who were the "subjects" of 人. ([16], 27) The *uncommon* people, that is: the tribe of freemen designated by '人,' were members of the ruling aristocracy during the late Shang and early Zhou dynasties. But Waley thinks that by Confucius's time the old distinction "between *jen* ['人'] and *min* ['民'], freemen and subjects" had been "forgotten." The result was that the extension of '人' was inflated by the inclusion of the extension previously restricted to '民.' So '人' "became a general word for a 'human being,'" and in its use as an adjective, "it came to be understood in the sense of 'human' as opposed to 'animal.'" ([16], 27) All of this seems quite plausible. Unfortunately, Waley never explains how this analysis of '人' pertains to the function and semantics of '仁' as it is used throughout the *Analects*.

Instead of giving a linguistic analysis of the use and etymology of '仁,' Waley offers up for comparison a tribe, a clan, and a nation. They are alike, he observes, in so far as those who identify as their members show more "forbearance" for one another than they show to outsiders. From this observation, he comes to the conclusion that '仁' means what 'kind,' 'gentle,' and 'humane' mean in English. Although his inference is suspect, given that the combinatorial form of '人' is the signfic of '仁,' the proposal that '仁' means something like what 'humane' means in English holds considerable promise. Waley, however, abandons this proposal for a definition that is broader in scope. He says, "*Jen* in the *Analects*, means 'good' in an extremely wide and general sense."⁴ ([16], 28) The "Good man," he goes on, measures other's feelings by his own, is courteous, diligent, and loyal. Having so conjectured, however, Waley immediately takes it all back! He says, "At the same time, it cannot be said that *jen* ['仁'] in the *Analects* simply means 'good' in a wide and general sense. It is, on the contrary, the name of a quality so rare and peculiar that one 'cannot but be chary when speaking of it.'" Here, Waley quotes a passage from 12.3 in which the master touts the importance of being 伋 "chary" when speaking about 仁. Despite this warning to speak cautiously, Waley takes aim at the "mystic entity" that he says is designated by Confucius's use of '仁.' He says, "It is a sublime moral attitude, a transcendental perfection attained by legendary heroes such as *Po I*, but not by any living historical person." ([16], 28)

⁴ The graphs '仁' and '人' are both spelled 'ren' in the modern *Pinyin* romanization system used by Ames and Rosemont, Dawson, and Slingerland. Legge, Waley, Chan, and Lau all use the Wade-Giles system, in which these graphs are spelled 'jen.'

4. A PLEA FOR ‘HUMANITY’

The combinatorial form of ‘人’ is an element of ‘仁.’ Not only is ‘人’ a guide to the pronunciation of ‘仁,’ it is its semantic root. The graph ‘仁’ consists of the graph ‘人’ on the left side and the graph for the number two, namely ‘二,’ on the right side.⁵ In his 9553-character dictionary 說文解字, *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, the Eastern Han dynasty scholar *Xu Shen* 許慎 classifies ‘仁’ as a 會意字 “compound ideograph.” Compound ideographs have more than one semantic component. These components consist of pictographs positioned next to or on top of one another, thereby forming another graph, the ideograph, which derives its sense from the combination of its pictorial components. A lucid example of a compound ideograph is the graph ‘明,’ which variously is translated as bright, clear, and so on, depending on the context of its use. It is constituted by the pictographic forms of ‘日’ on the left side, denoting the sun, and ‘月’ on the right side, denoting the moon. Taken together as one graph, the ideograph ‘明’ suggests light and clarity.

In its early instantiations as a pictograph⁶ in oracle bone inscriptions, ‘人’ is a stick figure of a person, the pictorial John Doe of humanity, designating any human being at all, and so, all people in general.⁷ According to *Xu Shen*, the signific or 部 of ‘仁’ is ‘人.’ He then notes, “从人从二,” which is to say that the meaning of ‘仁’ comes from the meaning of ‘人’ and ‘二.’ The ideograph ‘仁’ suggests the

⁵ Ames and Rosemont present an interesting alternative. They agree that the combinatorial form of ‘人,’ meaning person, flanks the left side of ‘仁,’ but they claim that ‘二’ on the right side should be read as ‘上,’ which means above or over. So, the meaning of ‘仁’ is derived from the idea of a person who is in some way over or above others. This suggests an accomplished person prominent in the minds of others, and it is the basis for their unusual translation of ‘仁’ as “authoritative person,” and depending on context, “authoritative conduct.”

⁶ According to William Boltz, “When a graph is primarily a depictive representation of a thing, it is a pictograph and is not writing.” ([3], 110) Writing, he insists, is the graphic representation of speech. Ames and Rosemont strongly disagree. Among other things, they argue that many important characters in the *Analects*, such as ‘和’ and ‘信,’ were never intended to have phonetic analogues, although each eventually acquired one. They claim that “...of the 2200-odd characters found in the *Analects*, the great majority of the philosophically significant among them are either pictographs or ideographs...” ([2], 41) This issue is too complicated to settle here. For the purposes of this essay I side with Ames and Rosemont in treating ‘仁’ as an ideograph, but I treat it as being composed of ‘人’ and ‘二,’ not of ‘人’ and ‘上.’

⁷ By ‘people in general’ I mean the people in a user’s universe of discourse: family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, strangers, enemies, and so on, but not every member of the human race.

idea of more than one human, that is: human beings in general, or humanity. *Xu* further remarks, “仁親也,” which I translate as “仁 is intimate feeling.” The intimate connection people can have with each other is fundamental to the sense of ‘仁.’ In contexts where it connotes intimacy it can also be translated as the adjective ‘humane’ or the abstract noun ‘humaneness.’⁸

I propose to take the word ‘humanity’ as the baseline English equivalent for occurrences of ‘仁’ in *Analects* Four. One reason for doing so is its flexibility. Some occurrences of ‘仁’ function adjectivally and are best translated into words or phrases that can function adjectivally, such as ‘human’ and ‘humane.’ Other occurrences function as nouns designating abstract ideas. Raymond Dawson, for example, translates some occurrences of ‘仁’ as ‘humaneness.’ ([6], 13) Waley and Slingerland, we have seen, prefer the abstract nouns ‘Good’ and ‘Goodness,’ and D.C. Lau, following Legge, settles on ‘benevolence.’

Often overlooked by translators is the fact that some occurrences of ‘仁’ function as a collective noun, or class term such as ‘humanity,’ which designates people in general. In the first of the “Textual Notes” to his translation, for example, Lau notes: “Read 人 for 仁. (I.2, I.6, IV.7, VI.26)” ([10], 234) In 1.6, for example, the ideograph ‘仁’ is used as a collective noun designating what the graph ‘人’ normally designates when *it* is used as a collective noun. Here, the master (probably 有子) is discussing how a young man should act inside and outside the family household. In a quatrain, the parallelism of which is notable, he says,

“出則弟”

“When outside respect [elders]”

“謹而信”

“Be earnest and sincere”

⁸ Brooks and Brooks comment: “*Rvn* [仁] is a way of interaction with those to whom one’s relationship is not fixed by family ties: it is family writ large but *not the same* as family. 1: 6 then tells us that *rvn* is not writ all that large: it is indeed a basis for association outside of kinship groups, but only with a select few. The rest of humanity one loves but keeps a certain distance from.” ([4], 300)

“汎愛衆”

“Broadly cherish the masses”

Line four is “而親仁.” How should ‘仁’ in ‘親仁’ be translated? Waley treats it as a collective noun designating people, but only people of a certain kind, namely: the Good ones. For ‘親仁,’ he proposes “the intimacy of the Good,” presumably the intimacy that Good people feel with one another. Slingerland’s translation of ‘親仁’ as “affection for those who are Good” also singles out a subset of people, as does Wing-tsit Chan’s translation, “intimate with men of humanity.” But none of these translations extend the scope of ‘仁’ to people in general. Lau’s translation, by contrast, does not limit the extension of ‘仁’ to a subset of people. For ‘親仁,’ he proposes “friendship of fellow men.” By treating this use of ‘仁’ as a class term designating people in general, he equates the extension of this use of ‘仁’ with that of ‘人’ when it functions as a collective noun. If that equation is correct, “而親仁” may sensibly be translated as, “And care for fellow men.”

Lau singles out 4.7 as another saying in which ‘仁’ should be read as ‘人.’ He translates, “人之過也各於其黨” as “In his errors a man is true to type.” But he misreads the phrase, “人之過也.” It is not the man but the *errors* of the man that are “true to type.” He translates the second line, “觀過斯之仁矣,” as follows, “Observe the errors and you will know the man.” ([10], 72) By treating ‘仁’ as a collective noun designating any man at all, I propose a slightly modified version of Lao’s translation of 4.7: “As for the errors a man makes, each is of a kind. Observe these errors, and you observe the man.”

Other occurrences of ‘仁’ function adjectivally as in the following couplet at the end of the 4.2: “仁者安仁. 知者利仁.” Waley, Slingerland, Lau, and Chan all treat its first occurrence as an adjective modified by the nominalizer ‘者’ thereby forming a compound phrase designating the kind of thing or person having the quality described by the adjective. Waley translates ‘仁者’ as “The Good Man” and Slingerland decides on “Those who are Good.” Predictably, they both translate the second occurrence of ‘仁’ as the abstract noun “Goodness.” This results in Waley’s, “The Good Man rests content with Goodness” ([16],102), while Slingerland ends up with: “Those who are Good feel at home in Goodness.” ([15], 29)

Does the idea that feeling “at home” and “content” with a vague abstraction such as Goodness make any informative sense? Both translations are a step away from a tautology. For one who is *not* Good

(who is "wicked," let's say) would presumably *not* feel "at home" and "content" with Goodness. So, one who *is* "at home" or "content" with Goodness must be Good. According to Waley and Slingerland's translations, however, one who is Good is "at home" and "content" with Goodness. Hence, one who is Good is Good.⁹

Lau's translation, "The benevolent man is attracted to benevolence because he is at home in it," faces a similar problem. ([10], 72) A stingy man presumably would *not* be attracted to benevolence, especially if he is never on the receiving end. So, one who *is* attracted to benevolence must be benevolent. But according to Lau's translation, one who is benevolent is attracted to benevolence. Hence, one who is benevolent is benevolent. If Waley, Slingerland, and Lau's translations accurately convey Confucius's teaching about 仁, he must have had a reputation among his students for vague abstractions and uninformative redundancy.

The problem with all three of these translations is that they treat the second occurrence of '仁' as an abstract noun. Wing-tsit Chan's translation is ambiguous on this point. He translates '仁' as "humanity." His full translation of "仁者安仁" is "The man of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity." ([5], 25) Translating '仁者' as "The man of humanity" is clearly in line with the nominalizing function of '者.' The phrase "the man of humanity," however, suggests that such a man is *more than* simply a member of the class of human beings. Here, '仁' functions to express a tone of approval. A man of humanity is someone with a commendable concern for the well-being of others, especially those with whom he interacts on a daily basis or with whom he is otherwise on intimate terms. He is a humane man. If '仁者' is translated as "A humane man," however, then the second occurrence of '仁' should *not* be read as an abstract noun standing for humaneness. For "A humane man is at ease with humaneness" would be just as vapid and repetitious as the three translations discussed above. But if the second occurrence of '仁' functions as a collective noun designating people, "仁者安仁" can then be translated as "A humane man is at ease with people." Unlike the vague and repetitious options proposed by Waley Slingerland and Lau, this translation is contingently, not tautologically, true.

Lau and Chan's translations of '知者' in "知者利仁" differ only in style. One proposes "The wise

⁹ According to G.E. Moore, "...good is good and nothing else whatever..." ([14], 122) The word 'good,' he claims, is "indefinable" and "...denotes one unique simple object of thought..." ([14], xiii), which for all we know is the mystic entity that Waley alludes to as the deep meaning of '仁.'

man”; the other chooses “The man of wisdom.” Waley agrees with “wise” for ‘知’ but interpolates an element not suggested by the phrase ‘知者’ into his translation, to wit: “He that is merely wise pursues Goodness in the belief that it pays to do so.” ([16], 102) But just what is it to be *merely wise*? Slingerland suggests ‘those who are clever’ for ‘知者’ and proposes that they “follow Goodness because they feel they will profit from it.” ([15], 29) Perhaps this captures the gist of the matter, but Slingerland’s proposal is more like a commentary on the passage than a translation of it. Where does the text suggest that clever people *follow* 仁, or that they do so *because* they think it will profit them? Surely there must be a more parsimonious way to translate “知者利仁” into English.

One way would be to treat ‘仁’ as a collective noun designating people. This would yield something like “Those who are wise benefit people.” But this translation expresses a Mohist theme alien to Confucius’s way of thinking. Another way is to treat ‘利仁’ as a conjunction of abstract nouns that function as contraries similar to the function of ‘義’ and ‘利’ in 4.16. How to translate ‘義’ into English will be discussed in the next section. Here, the point is that ‘利’ and ‘仁’ function as contraries, and if they do, the second line of this couplet might be translated as “The wise distinguish profiteering from humanity.”

In 4.1, Confucius says, “里仁為美.” Lau treats this passage as a topic-comment sentence: namely, “Of neighborhoods, benevolence is the most beautiful.” ([10], 72) But this translation contains a category mistake. Neighborhoods are groups of people living in proximity to one another. But benevolence is not a neighborhood, and moreover, only people not neighborhoods can be benevolent. Rather than functioning as an abstract noun designating the virtue of treating others with kindness and generosity, suppose instead that ‘仁’ is here functioning as a collective noun designating people in general. Accordingly, “里仁為美” can be translated as follows: “As for neighborhoods, it is people that make them attractive.” This reading not only makes good sense it sets up the rhetorical question that follows, namely: “擇不處 仁 焉得知?” Here, Confucius is questioning the wisdom of eremitism, the voluntary withdrawal from society by censored scholars and other hermits.¹⁰

Slingerland translates Confucius’s question as, “If one does not choose to dwell among those who are Good, how will one obtain wisdom?” ([15], 29) Here, he treats ‘仁’ as designating people, but

¹⁰ “No man is an island entire of itself,” wrote John Donne, and Confucius would have agreed.

only a subset of them, namely, the Good ones. Wisdom, however, is not likely to be acquired by limiting one's contacts only to those who are Good, benevolent, humane, or whatever. That would limit the sample size upon which one's wisdom can be based. Suppose instead that this use of '仁' functions as a collective noun designating people in general. In that case, the question being raised by Confucius can be translated as follows, "How can one attain wisdom if one chooses not to associate with people?"

In *Analects* 4.3, "唯仁者能好人能惡人," '仁' is again being used as an adjective nominalized by '者'. The phrases '好人' and '惡人' function as contraries expressing opposing passions. Chan's translation is close to the mark: "Only the man of humanity knows how [能] to love people [好人] and hate people [惡人]." Given this translation, the problem is how to translate the use of '惡' in 4.4, "苟志於仁矣無惡也." Chan's full translation is, "If you set your mind on humanity, you will be free from evil." ([5], 25) But it must be asked why he, like Lau, settles on "evil" for '惡'. Perhaps they thought that 4.4 would appear to be inconsistent with 4.3 if the occurrence of '惡' in both verses were translated as 'hatred.' After all, how can someone who knows how to hate others not hate anybody? The answer, it seems to me, is almost too obvious to mention. Knowing *how* to be hateful is different from *being* hateful, that is: actually thinking and acting in hateful ways.

Ames and Rosemont, Chan, Dawson, Lau, Legge, and Waley all treat 4.4, namely: "苟志於仁矣無惡也," as a conditional statement the antecedent of which, "苟志於仁矣," may be translated as something like, "If only you are mindful of 仁," or as, "One who is merely mindful of 仁." Slingerland by contrast translates this line in the imperative voice, to wit: "Merely set your heart sincerely upon Goodness and you will be free from bad intentions." ([15], 30) This suggests that Confucius was issuing a directive. Suppose he was, and that 4.3 and 4.4, as Waley suggests, are to be read as a single adage. I translate them as follows, "Only a man of human feeling can love people and hate them. Simply be mindful of people and you will be free from hatred." To be 志於仁 is to be mindful of others. It is to realize that they are more than cardboard cutouts; other people actually exist! To be mindful of them requires grace, a capacity to share and compromise, and in some cases a willingness to yield more to others than they are willing or able to give back in return. Those who put their own well-being above others, on the other hand, inevitably encounter push-back and create conflict. In 4.12 Confucius says, "放於利而行多怨," which the Brookses translate as, "Those who act with a view to their own personal advantage will arouse much resentment." ([4], 15)

In 4.6 Confucius complains that he has yet to meet someone who loves what is 仁 and hates what is not 仁. The first four occurrences of ‘仁’ as well as the sixth function as adjectives nominalized by ‘者,’ but the fifth occurrence is not nominalized and functions purely adjectively. The final occurrence of ‘仁’ functions as a collective noun designating people. Lau translates it as ‘fellow men.’ I prefer ‘fellows.’ There is a subtle difference between ‘fellow men’ and ‘fellows.’ One’s fellows are a subset of one’s fellow men, which include all those in one’s universe of discourse. To be a fellow is to be someone with whom one is on intimate terms, such as a family or clan member, or those with whom one must cooperate as a team member, such as a charioteer and his archer, a master craftsman and his apprentices, a prince and his courtiers, and so on. Below is my translation of 4.6.

“我未見好仁者惡不仁者。”

“I have yet to meet someone who loves what is humane
and hates what is inhumane.”

“好仁者無以尚之。”

“Those who love what is humane
place nothing above it.”

“惡不仁者其為仁矣。”

“Those who hate what is inhumane *are* humane.”

“不使不仁者加乎其身。”

“They do not allow what is inhumane to influence themselves.”

“有能一日用其力於仁矣乎。”

“Is there anyone who for a whole day
can exert his strength for his fellows?”

“我未見力不足者。”

“I have yet to meet someone
whose strength was insufficient.”

“蓋有之矣 我未之見也。”

“Perhaps there is such a person,
but I have yet to meet him.”

Now consider the functions of ‘人’ and ‘仁’ in 4.5. In the first line ‘人’ is used as a collective noun designating people in general.

“富與貴是人之所欲也。”

“Wealth and stature are what people want.”

This line is followed by a warning.

“不以其道得之不處也。”

“If you do not get them in proper ways,
you will not be at ease with them.”

In the next line ‘人’ again functions as a collective noun.

“貧與賤 是人之惡也。”

“Poverty and ill repute are what people hate.”

This line is followed by another warning.

“不以其道得之不去也。”

“If you get them in improper ways,
they will not go away.”

Even when ‘仁’ and ‘人’ are coextensive, as they are in 4.7, their intensions may vary slightly. Accordingly, I propose “fellows” and “cohorts” as translations for the occurrences of ‘仁’ in the next two lines.

“君子去仁惡乎成名”

“How can a gentleman who disregards his fellows
make a name for himself?”

“君子無終食之間違仁”

“A gentleman does not dismiss his cohorts
even for the time it takes to finish a meal.”

The next two lines amount to warnings attention to which require discipline and perseverance.

“造次必於是”

“In times of haste and disorder, it must be like this.”

“顛沛必於是”

“In difficulty and danger, it must be like this.”

5. THE MEANING OF ‘義’ IN 4.10 AND 4.16

The above translations show that Confucius can be absolved of moralizing in the first seven chapters of Book Four of the *Analects*. Waley, Slingerland, and Lau, however, would all concur (and others would

agree) that he *does* speak as a moralist in 4.10 and 4.16. It is to the assessment of this claim that I now turn.

In 4.10 Confucius says, “君子之於天下也, 無適也 無莫也, 義之與比” which Lau translates as, “In his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is [義] moral.” ([10], 73) But can someone who is *not* invariably for or against anything sensibly be said to be “on the side of what is moral?” Isn’t being invariably *against* something, such as laws restricting access to abortion, or invariably *for* something, such as the legal right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy, exactly what taking a moral side amounts to? Lau’s translation of “義之與比” as “is on the side of what is moral,” seems oddly out of place, if not inconsistent, with his translation of “無適也, 無莫也” as “not invariably for or against anything.”

According to Ames and Rosemont, the choice of words such as ‘moral,’ ‘morality,’ ‘right,’ ‘rightness,’ and ‘righteousness’ as English equivalents for different occurrences of ‘義’ in the *Analects* is problematic in other ways. They point out that these words, and others like them, are closely associated with words such as ‘freedom,’ ‘ought,’ ‘reason,’ and ‘choice,’ none of which “has a close analogue in classical Chinese.” ([2], 54) Their implication is that a reliance on words from the English lexicon of moral terms as equivalents for occurrences of ‘義’ in the *Analects* projects through translation a misleading picture of Confucius as someone who unknowingly embraced Western moral and metaphysical assumptions about moral facts, rational choice, free will, objective duty, and the like. Another problem is that words such as ‘good’ and ‘right’ are ambiguous.

In English the word ‘right’ can be used to mean many things among them being ‘moral,’ as in “He did the right/moral thing,” ‘correct,’ as in “He got the right/correct answer,” and ‘appropriate,’ as in “He lacked the right/appropriate tool.” Waley signals the moral sense of ‘義’ by translating its occurrence in “義之與比” as ‘right’ with a capital ‘r,’ to wit: “wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it.” ([16], 104) Although Slingerland, like Waley, generally treats Confucius as a moralist, his translation, namely: “He [the 君子] merely associates with those he considers right” ([13], 32) does not eliminate this tripartite ambiguity of ‘right.’ However, based on his translation of 4.16, to wit: “君子喻於義小人喻於利” as “The gentleman understands *rightness* whereas the petty person understands profit,” he most likely has in mind ‘right’ in its moral sense in 4.10. [(15), 35] Chan clearly assigns ‘義’ a moral sense by translating it as “righteousness” not only in 4.10 but in 4.16. ([5], 26 & 28) The Brookses hint at a moral

interpretation of ‘right’ in their own translation, namely: “When he regards something as right, he sides with it.” But ‘right’ in this translation can also be read as ‘correct,’ as in the right way to do something, such as to harness a horse to a chariot. Their laconic note that implicit in this passage “...is the universal in the feudal: a standard of right determined objectively...” ([4], 15) does not, at least in my mind, resolve this ambiguity.

Setting aside translations of occurrences of ‘義’ in 4.10 and 4.16 such as ‘moral,’ ‘right,’ ‘rightness,’ ‘righteousness,’ and the like, Ames and Rosemont argue that ‘appropriate’ is a closer semantic equivalent of ‘義’ than any of these terms. Accordingly, they translate “義之與比” as “They [君子] go with what is appropriate,” and they translate 4.16 as “Exemplary persons [君子] understand what is appropriate. Petty persons [小人] understand what is of personal advantage.” ([2], 92) Their choice of ‘appropriate’ as an English equivalent for these occurrences of ‘義’ is based their analysis of the graph’s etymology.

Originally, they claim, ‘義’ was an ideograph. On top is the graph ‘羊’ depicting animal horns and functioning as a pictorial synecdoche for a ram. Below is the graph for the pronoun ‘我’ variously used to mean I, me, we, and us. The graph ‘我’ was itself originally “...a picture of a human hand [手] holding a dagger axe (*ge* 戈).” ([2], 54) The idea of a hand holding a dagger axe in the presence of a ram suggests the ritual slaughter of the latter. Ames proposes that those who participated in these sacred communal rituals were called upon to act with *appropriate* solemnity and dignity in the performance of their prescribed ceremonial roles. He characterizes the use of ‘義’ in other contexts in more general terms. He writes, “*Yi* [義] is an achieved sense of appropriateness that enables one to act in a proper and fitting manner, given the specifics of any particular situation.” ([1], 421)

If this is correct, the occurrences of ‘義’ in 4.10 and 4.16 suggest flexible ethical evaluations that vary relative to differing situations needs and interests, not invariably fixed moral judgments about people and situations that satisfy specific conditions. Ames and Rosemont’s translation of 4.10, for example, as “Exemplary persons in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; they go with what is appropriate” is a useful piece of practical advice that falls short of imposing strict limits and unconditional demands on anyone. To get on in life you need to be flexible. The implication of 4.16, moreover, is that, in determining appropriateness, exemplary people (gentlemen) consider the points of view of others, whereas petty (little) people consider only their own

personal interests. This clearly differentiates exemplary from petty people; but that difference is not and should not be treated as a moral dividing line.

6. HOW SHOULD ‘道’ BE UNDERSTOOD IN 4.5, 4.8, AND 4.9?

Table 1 below shows that there is little agreement among translators concerning how the occurrence ‘道’ in 4.5 should be translated into English.

Table 1. Translations of ‘道’ in Chapter Four

	4.5	4.8	4.9
Waley	the Way	the Way	the Way
Brooks & Brooks	his [personal] principles	the Way	the Way
Slingerland	the proper way	the Way	the Way
Dawson	appropriate principles	the Way	the Way
Chan	moral principles	the Way	X
Legge	the proper way	the right way	truth
Lao	the right way	the Way	the Way
Ames & Rosemont	the way	the way	the way

Both Legge and Slingerland render ‘道’ in 4.5 as “the proper way.” A way is a manner of proceeding. The proper way to proceed may involve the practice of 禮 “ceremony” which might require participation in civic and religious rituals, adherence to the rules of court etiquette, or simply following unwritten rules of common politeness such as apologizing for stepping on a stranger’s foot. The proper way also can be read as the correct way. The correct way to do something requires following a kind of algorithm for accomplishing certain practical tasks such as calculating a sum or making a wheel for a war chariot. In addition to the ways of ritual propriety and practical correctness, Dawson gives an ethical sense to ‘道’ by translating it as “appropriate principles.” The Brooks also suggest “principles,” (“personal” ones), which are presumably aligned with a person’s social status, occupation, domestic situation, skill sets, goals, interests, and so on. One might have personal principles, for example, about

the foods one will and will not eat. Last, Chan leaps *beyond* the realms of the ceremonial, practical, ethical, and personal *into* the realm of the moral by translating ‘道’ as “moral principles.”

I suggest that ‘道’ in 4.5 should be translated as “the proper way.” As I have shown above, this phrase is multiply ambiguous. It can be read as the ceremonial, practical, personal, ethical, or even as the moral way. It is impossible to know just what Confucius had in mind here, and there seems to be no reason to favor any one of these alternatives, especially the moral way. No matter how one reads ‘道’ in this passage, however, Confucius seems to be issuing a kind of warning based on his own past observations. A failure to accord with the proper way to do things often results in fleeting wealth, a loss of personal stature, and even unavoidable poverty and ill repute. He is urging his charges to be careful about how they proceed. There might be unfortunate consequences for “improper” behavior.

In 4.8 Confucius says, “朝聞道夕死可矣.” Here, Legge translates ‘道’ as “the right way,” ([11], 168) which unfortunately harbors the tripartite ambiguity mentioned above. Ames and Rosemont treat ‘道’ as ‘the way’ with a lower case ‘w.’ They translate the verb-object construction ‘聞道’ as “learn of and tread the way.” The graph ‘耳’ depicts the human ear and is the signfic of the graph ‘聞,’ which means ‘to hear of’ as well as ‘that which is heard.’ So, a more accurate translation of ‘聞道’ would be “hear of the way.” But a lack of accuracy is not the problem with their translation. The problem is that the phrase ‘tread the way’ is an interpolation. The injection of it into their translation is apparently intended to be read as a metaphor for doing the work necessary to develop personal habits of excellence. Slingerland also injects his translation with a notion not implicit in ‘聞道,’ namely: “Having heard...that the Way was being put into practice...” But 4.8 is concerned *only* with hearing about (or, if you like, “learning of”) the way but not with metaphorically treading it or putting it into practice.

Given that the translations by Waley, Slingerland, Lao, and Chan of other chapters in Book Four show profound moralistic proclivities, there is reason to suppose that they understand ‘道’ in 4.8 as a moral notion. But as I have explained, ‘道’ can also be understood non-morally as the ways of ceremony, practical task completion, and so on. Whether a man has or has not followed one or all these ways during his lifetime, it must be asked how *hearing* about any one of them in the twilight of his years would free him from regrets about dying. Suppose one man has led a life of impeccable honesty and another has been a duplicitous con artist from early childhood. In either case, it seems unlikely that hearing about a moral way, one that prescribes fidelity to one’s word, for example, would erase the

regrets either man might have when facing death. In the case of the con man, hearing of such a principle might intensify his regrets about having led a deceitful life, especially if he recognizes that relying on deception has been a cause of unhappiness for himself and for others. In the former case, hearing of such a principle might make the honest man feel proud of the life he has led, yet cause him to feel even further regret in losing it.¹¹

If ‘道’ in 4.8 does not mean a moral, ceremonial, or practical way, how should it be understood? One possibility is that by ‘道’ Confucius had in mind 天道. But the only instance of ‘天’ in Book Four is in 4.10. There, it is part of the frequently occurring compound ‘天下,’ which is standardly translated as “the world.” Slingerland points out that 天 is “from the earliest times associated with the sky.” The idea seems to be that what is below the sky, or the heavens above, is the world. So, perhaps ‘天道’ can be read as “the way of the heavens.” Slingerland, however, rejects naturalistic interpretations of ‘天.’ He translates it as “Heaven.” Spelled with a capital ‘h,’ “Heaven” signals something cosmic that lies *beyond* the heavens above. He says, “‘Heaven’ is a fairly good rendering of *tian* [‘天’], as long as the reader keeps in mind that ‘Heaven’ refers to an anthropomorphic figure—someone who can be communicated with, angered, or pleased—rather than a physical place.” ([15], xviii) If this is correct, the occurrence of ‘道’ in 4.8 may be understood as “the Way of Heaven,” and ‘天’ may be thought of as some kind of transcendent deity possessing emotion, a will, and an ability to communicate with people.

According to 子貢, “[as for] our Respected Master’s explanation of nature [性] and the Way of Heaven [天道], we cannot in any way contrive to hear about it.” ([4], 167) Slingerland suggests that The Master was silent about these subjects because he “...focused on what was within human control,” whereas these Heavenly matters are “beyond human control.” ([15], 45) The Brookses speculate that, “5.13 leaves open the possibility that the Master *has* views on these subjects, which are merely difficult for the disciples to find out about.” ([4], 167) Unfortunately, they do not say just what these difficulties might have been. Assuming that a disciple has a keen interest in such matters, it might be concluded that after hearing of them he *can* die content, or at least more content than had he not heard about

¹¹ Similar problems attend the idea of hearing about the ways of ceremony, practical task completion, and so on. One can only wonder how hearing about any one of them might erase one’s regrets about dying.

them at all. This conclusion is obviously speculative. Whether or not it is correct, however, my claim still stands that The Way Confucius referred to in 4.8 was *not* a moral way.

Finally, what can be said about the occurrence of ‘道’ in 4.9? Here Confucius says, “士志於道而恥惡衣惡食者未足與議也,” which I translate as, “An officer who is mindful of the proper way but is ashamed of poor clothing and bad food is not fit to be consulted.” The Brookses suggest: “The Way here is shared principles,” ([4], 15), but they never say what those principles might be. Confucius no doubt laid down certain rules and conditions for his charges to follow and meet. His formulation of them depended on the roles he wanted them to play as well as the objectives he hoped they would meet both collectively and individually. His remark in 4.9 is best understood as an observation about the character of some of his followers and related practical advice derived from such observations. He was, however, not speaking as a moralist here.

7. THE MEANING OF 賢 IN 4.17

In 4.17 Confucius says, “見賢思齊焉見不賢而內自省也.” As shown in Table 2 below, translators of this chapter do not all agree about how to render “賢” into English.

Table 2. Translations of 賢 in 4.17

Waley	good man
Brooks & Brooks	worthy man
Slingerland	someone who is worthy
Dawson	superior person
Legge	men of worth
Lao	someone better than oneself
Ames & Rosemont	persons of exceptional character

Paul Kroll glosses ‘賢’ as follows: “1. worthy, esp. in character and virtue, usu. considered 2nd in moral character and charisma only to a sage (*sheng* 聖) [and] 2. Having highest competence, excelling

others" ([9], 494) Kroll's second entry is in line with what is said in 說文解字 about '賢,' namely: 多才也, which I translate as "superior competence." Kroll's first entry treats '賢' as both an adjective and a noun. All the translators mentioned above take it as a noun referring to a person or persons possessing a certain character, which Ames and Rosemont call "exceptional." The four instances of '聖' in the *Analects* (7.26, 16.8, and 19.12) are all adjectival and always occur as part of the compound expression '聖人,' which the Brookses translate as "sagely man." ([4], 43) Granting that the use of '聖人' in the *Analects* refers to a *moral* sage, it should be noted that this compound is nowhere to be found in Book Four.

Predictably, Waley translates the occurrence of '賢' in 4.17 as "good man," presumably a *morally* good one. Lao's translation is also probably intended by him to be read as *morally* better, although there are many ways that one might be better than another *at* something—at charioteering, for example, or archery. The Brookses also seem to have a *morally* worthy man in mind here, as does Slingerland. But the worth of someone is not necessarily moral worth. Someone might be a worthy opponent, for example. After meeting him, one might strive to come up to his level of skill, whereas upon meeting an unworthy opponent, one might reflect not only on the ways one's skills are superior to his but also take stock of those that do not measure up. Someone might also be inspired to follow and support a worthy leader as well as sort out one's reasons for refusing to follow and support an unworthy one. A translator, in short, faces a choice concerning the translation of '賢.' One can assign it a moral sense à la Waley's "good man" or side with a non-moral reading such as Dawson's "superior person." I prefer a non-moral reading and translate '賢' as "supremely competent man." Reading it this way is not an iron-clad necessity, but it has the virtue of being consistent with all the other non-moral chapters in Book Four, which I list below.

8. NON-MORAL¹² TRANSLATIONS OF CONFUCIUS'S SAYINGS

- 4.1 As for neighborhoods, it is people who make them attractive. How can one attain wisdom if one chooses not to associate with people?

¹² I use 'non-moral' rather than the term 'amoral' because many people incorrectly conflate 'amoral' with 'immoral.' But 'amoral' does not mean 'immoral.' To be 'amoral' is to be morally neutral: neither good nor evil, right nor wrong, etc.

- 4.2 Those who lack humane feeling can neither abide for long in such privation nor enjoy enduring happiness. The humane man is at ease with people. The wise man distinguishes profiteering from humaneness.
- 4.3 Only the man of humane feeling can love people and hate them.
- 4.4 Merely be mindful of people and you will be free from hatred.
- 4.5 Wealth and stature are what people want. If you do not get them in proper ways, you will not be at ease with them. Poverty and ill repute are what people hate. If you get them in improper ways, they will not go away. How can a gentleman who disregards his fellows make a name for himself? A gentleman does not abandon his cohorts even for the time it takes to finish a meal. In times of haste and disorder, it must be like this. In difficulty and danger, it must be like this.
- 4.6 I have yet to meet someone who loves what is humane and hates what is inhumane. Those who love what is humane place nothing above it. Those who hate what is inhumane *are* themselves humane. They do not allow what is inhumane to influence them. Is there anyone who for a full day can exhaust his strength for his fellows? I have never met someone whose strength was insufficient. Perhaps there is someone, but I have yet to meet him.
- 4.7 As for the errors a person makes, each is of a kind. Observe these errors and you observe the man.
- 4.8 Hear of Heaven's Way at dawn and die content at dusk.
- 4.9 An officer who is mindful of the proper way but is ashamed of poor clothing and bad food is not fit to be consulted.
- 4.10 Exemplary persons in making their way in the world are neither bent on nor against anything; they go with what is appropriate. ([2], 91)
- 4.11 The gentleman cherishes excellence; the petty man cherishes rusticity. The gentleman cherishes corporal punishment; the petty man cherishes leniency.
- 4.12 Those who act with a view to their own personal advantage will arouse much resentment. ([4], 15)
- 4.13 If one can run a country by making use of the deferential attitudes induced by ritual, what difficulty will there be? But if one cannot run a country by making use of the deferential attitudes induced by ritual, then what is the point of ritual? ([6], 14)

4.14 Do not worry that you have no position. Worry whether you are qualified to hold one. Do not worry that no one knows you. Seek to be worth knowing.

...¹³

4.16 Exemplary persons understand what is appropriate. Petty persons understand what is of personal advantage. ([2], 92)

4.17 When you meet a supremely competent man, think of how you can be his equal. When you meet someone who is not superior to you, go home and examine yourself.

9. SUMMARY

Brooks and Brooks claim that Confucius inherited a martial service ethic "...based on ideals of duty, courage, selflessness, and comradeship." ([4], 3) Slingerland agrees but claims that Confucius transformed these "aristocratic martial ideals" into moral ones. This claim not only lacks plausible support, it also imposes Western moralistic biases on many of the Master's pronouncements, and in some cases results in problematic translations of his words. If Brooks and Brooks are correct in holding that 4.15 and 4.18 through 4.26 in the standard Legge version of the *Analects* are interpolations from later layers of the text, and if I am correct in opting for non-moral interpretations to chapters 4.1 through 4.14, 4.16, and 4.17, it must be concluded that Confucius was not speaking as a moralist in any of the sixteen chapters that constitute the original *Analects*.

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¹³ According to Brooks and Brooks ([4], 204), 4.15 was most likely added later, in the third century BCE, thus not part of the original and so omitted here.

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