

**SELECTIONS FROM THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS:
ON HUMANENESS**

Introduction

Confucius (the Latinized version of Kong Fuzi, “master Kong”) or, to call him by his proper name, Kong Qiu (551-479 BCE) lived at a time of political turmoil and transition. The China of his time consisted of a number of small feudal states, which, although theoretically subject to the kings of the Zhou Dynasty, were actually independent. Confucius and many of his contemporaries were concerned about the state of turmoil, competition, and warfare between the feudal states. They sought philosophical and practical solutions to the problems of government — solutions that, they hoped, would lead to a restoration of unity and stability. Confucius had no notable success as a government official, but he was renowned even in his own time as a teacher. His followers recorded his teachings a generation or two after his death, and these teachings remain influential in China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan to this day. The anecdotes and records of short conversations compiled by his disciples go under the English title of the *Analects*. The excerpts from the *Analects* presented below are specifically concerned with Confucius’ ideas regarding the concepts of humaneness (*ren* or *jen*, also translated as “humanity”).

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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*Selections from the Confucian Analects:
On Humaneness*

4:5 The Master said, “Wealth and honor are what people desire, but one should not abide in them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. Poverty and lowliness are what people dislike, but one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. If the noble person rejects humaneness, how can he fulfill that name? The noble person does not abandon humaneness for so much as the space of a meal. Even when hard-pressed he is bound to it, bound to it even in time of danger.”

6:28 Zigong said, “What would you say of someone who broadly benefited the people and was able to help everyone? Could he be called humane?” The Master said, “How would this be a matter of humaneness? Surely he would have to be a sage? Even Yao and Shun were concerned about such things. As for humaneness — you want to establish yourself; then

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help others to establish themselves. You want to develop yourself; then help others to develop themselves. Being able to recognize oneself in others, one is on the way to being humane.”¹

12:22 Fan Chi asked about humaneness. The Master said, “It is loving people.” He asked about wisdom. The Master said, “It is knowing people.” When Fan Chi did not understand, the Master said, “Raise the upright, put them over the crooked, and you should be able to cause the crooked to become upright.”

Questions:

1. What kind of quality or virtue is *jen* or humaneness, and what kind of person could be called a person of humaneness?
2. Do you find any similarities between the humaneness of Confucius and the guiding principles of another religious tradition with which you may be familiar — for example, love or charity in Christianity, social responsibility in Judaism, or compassion in Buddhism? Any differences?
3. Can relationships within a family be based on the concept of humaneness (humanity)? Can a government be based on the same concept?
4. How does Confucius’ concept of humaneness compare to the way in which philosophers such as Han Fei and Lord Shang think about human beings and human society?

Longer Selection

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4:2 The Master said, “One who is not humane is able neither to abide for long in hardship nor to abide for long in joy. The humane find peace in humaneness; the knowing derive profit from humaneness.”

4:5 The Master said, “Wealth and honor are what people desire, but one should not abide in them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. Poverty and lowliness are what people dislike, but one should not avoid them if it cannot be done in accordance with the Way. If the noble person rejects humaneness, how can he fulfill that name? The noble person does not abandon humaneness for so much as the space of a meal. Even when hard-pressed he is bound to it, bound to it even in time of danger.”

¹ Literally, “The ability to take what is near and grasp the analogy may be called the direction of humaneness.”

4:6 The Master said, "I have not seen one who loved humaneness, nor one who hated inhumanity. One who loved humaneness will value nothing more highly. One who hated inhumanity would be humane so as not to allow inhumanity to affect his person. Is there someone whose strength has for the space of a single day been devoted to humaneness? I have not seen one whose strength was insufficient. It may have happened, but I have not seen it."

6:21 The Master said, "The wise take joy in water; the humane take joy in mountains. The wise are active; the humane are tranquil. The wise enjoy; the humane endure.

6:28 Zigong said, "What would you say of someone who broadly benefited the people and was able to help everyone? Could he be called humane?" The Master said, "How would this be a matter of humaneness? Surely he would have to be a sage? Even Yao and Shun were concerned about such things. As for humaneness — you want to establish yourself; then help others to establish themselves. You want to develop yourself; then help others to develop themselves. Being able to recognize oneself in others, one is on the way to being humane."²

7:29 The Master said, "Is humaneness far away? If I want to be humane, then humaneness is here."

12:22 Fan Chi asked about humaneness. The Master said, "It is loving people." He asked about wisdom. The Master said, "It is knowing people." When Fan Chi did not understand, the Master said, "Raise the upright, put them over the crooked, and you should be able to cause the crooked to become upright."

15:8 The Master said, "It does not happen that the dedicated officer and the humane person seek life if it means harming their humaneness. It does happen that they sacrifice their lives so as to complete their humaneness."

17:6 Zizhang asked Confucius about humaneness. Confucius said, "One who would carry out the five everywhere under Heaven would be humane." "I beg to ask what they are." "Respect, liberality, trustworthiness, earnestness, and kindness. If you are respectful, you will have no regret; if you are liberal, you will win the multitude; if you are trustworthy, you will be trusted; if you are earnest, you will be effective; if you are kind, you will be able to influence others."

² See footnote 1, above.