

4.9 The Master said, “There is no point in talking to a man with professional aspirations [*shi*] who sets his heart on the Way but who is ashamed of poor clothing and poor food.”

Most *shi* (士) study with an eye to an official career because their livelihood and their social station are dependent on it. But here, Confucius is referring to a person who “sets his heart on the Way,” someone who wishes to serve in government because he aspires to a higher goal. To such a man, poor clothing or poor food should not matter, Confucius says, unless, of course, he is a fake.

Liu Baonan says that most of the young men who studied with Confucius would not have had any experience in government, and so they were aspiring professionals (*shi*) with the hope of having a political career. For this reason, Confucius “spoke repeatedly” about the life and goal “of a *shi*.” “It was his way of rectifying names”—his attempt to tell his disciples that “it is important for a *shi* to know what he intends to do with his career before he sets out.”

4.10 The Master said, “A gentleman, in his dealings with the world, is not predisposed to what he is for or against. He sides only with what is right.”

Scholars from the Qing and the Republican period agree that it is possible to understand “dealings with the world” as referring to either human affairs or human relationships. Still, their commentaries offer us several ways of considering the remark Confucius makes here. The examples Liu Baonan cites from the Han sources are particularly illuminating. One says: “There are cases where the person who swims against the current gets it right while the person who swims with the current is far from being right. There are also cases where what one likes turns out to be harmful and what one despises turns out to be beautiful. How do we explain this? The difference between getting it right and missing it altogether is the difference between seeing something with clear eyes and seeing something with an opaque mind. Thus in his handling of any thing, any matter, the gentleman ‘is not predisposed to what he is for or against.’ He looks into it by way of what is right.”

4.11 The Master said, “The gentleman [*junzi*] worries about the condition of his moral character, while the common man [*xiaoren*] worries about [whether he can hold on to] his land. The gentleman is conscious of [not breaking] the law, while the common man is conscious of what benefits he might reap [from the state].”

Xiaoren here has a broader meaning—not just the small-minded, the petty, man, but the common man, the man whose livelihood depends on the land and whose circumstances do not allow him to brood for any extended period about the condition of his moral life. Of such a man, Confucius seems to say that it is natural for him to worry about the possibility of losing his land because having to move to somewhere else is not an easy matter. Yet this does not stop Confucius from reflecting further on the difference between such a man and a gentleman, whose aspirations are higher and nobler. The gentleman, Liu Baonan explains, “aims at putting himself in order so that he can put other people in order,” while the common people “await being governed”: they do not brood about the greater good but put the safety of their abode and any extra benefit they might collect from the state above the public interest.

Several scholars point out that *junzi* could also refer to the ruler. If that is the case, then Confucius is making a different statement. Which says: “If the ruler worries about the condition of his moral character, then the common people will need to worry only about their land. But if the ruler thinks endlessly about how to govern his people by means of penal law, then the common people will think constantly about how to reap benefits [from a governing system based on reward and punishment].”

4.12 The Master said, “If in your action you think only of profit, then you will incur much unhappiness [with yourself and with the world].”

Qian Mu says that the object of *duoyuan*, “to incur much blame or unhappiness,” could be the self or other people; I feel that it could be both if profit becomes the point of a man’s action. Liu Baonan, however, believes that the subject of Confucius’ remark is the ruler, and,

for support, he cites chapter 27 of the *Book of Xunzi*, which says, "Thus the person who lets the love for rightness overtake the drive for profit will bring order to the world, whereas the person who lets the drive for profit overpower the love for rightness will create disorder in the world." Following Liu's interpretation, the translation thus reads: "If your approach [in government] is driven by the idea of profit, this will create a lot of hostility [among your people]."

4.13 The Master said, "If a person is able to govern a state by means of the rites and with fostering a deferential attitude [among his people] as his goal, what difficulty will he have? If he is unable to govern the state in this way, what good are the rites to him?"

Liu Baonan thinks that we should look upon "deference" (*rang*) as "the tenor and the point of ritual practice [*li*]" and the rites as "the vehicle for cultivating a deferential attitude." He says that "the former kings were concerned about the frequent occurrences of conflict in the world and so established the rites" in order to foster a sense of respect in their subjects. Understanding the ritual institution in this way, Qian Mu says, is quite different from regarding it as purely a means to enforce the distinction between the superior and the inferior in a hierarchy. But here Confucius could also be asking the ruler to be the example of ritual propriety: If the ruler behaves in such a way and is deferential to others, what trouble will he have in governing his people?

4.14 The Master said, "Do not worry that you have no official position. Worry about not having the qualifications to deserve a position. Do not worry that others do not know you. Seek to be worthy of being known."

"Worry about how to get yourself qualified for the position" is a closer rendering of the second sentence, but in my reading I follow Liu Baonan, who thinks that a slight modification of the text—"Worry about not having the qualifications to deserve a position"—is what Confucius intended to say and that the minute change in wording would "convey a greater sense of urgency" about learning. Liu notes that Xunzi, in his essay "Contra Twelve Philosophers,"

expressed a similar idea when he wrote, "A gentleman is able to strive to become respected, but he cannot make others necessarily respect him. He is able to strive to become trustworthy, but he cannot make others necessarily trust him. He is able to strive to become a person of use, but he cannot make others necessarily use his talents. Thus a gentleman is ashamed about not having cultivated himself, but he is not ashamed about being humiliated by others. He would be ashamed of not being trustworthy, but he is not ashamed if others do not perceive him as trustworthy. He would be ashamed if he has no abilities, but he is not ashamed if his talents are not seen as useful."

4.15 The Master said, "Can [Zeng Can], my way has a thread running through it." Master Zeng replied, "Yes."

After the Master left, the disciples asked, "What did he mean?"

Master Zeng said, "The Master's way consists of doing one's best to fulfill one's humanity [*zhong*] and treating others with an awareness that they, too, are alive with humanity [*shu*]."

Here, Zeng Can, Master Zeng, explains to other disciples what Confucius meant when he said, "my way has a thread running through it." *Zhong* and *shu*, in the view of most traditional scholars, represent an accurate summary of Confucius' teaching—a position that the *Analects* could easily support. Thus Zeng Can was probably right in this regard, but whether his idea of *zhong* and *shu* concurs with that of Confucius is another question. Zeng Can's teaching gravitates toward self-cultivation, while Confucius' covers more ground and is inseparable from government and politics. Thus the Qing scholar Jiao Xun was right to associate Confucius' idea of *zhong* and *shu* to the latter's perception of the sage ruler Shun. He writes,

What is *zhong* and *shu*? To fulfill oneself and others. Confucius said [in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, section 6], "Shun indeed possessed great knowledge. He liked to ask questions and to look into ordinary and accessible words. He tried to conceal what was bad in others and disclose what was good in them. He had a grasp of the two ends [of a

question] and aimed to achieve a balanced and measured approach [in governing] his people. It was in this way that he was [the great] Shun!”

Jiao Xun goes on to quote Mencius, saying, “Shun was ready to fall into line with others, giving up his ways for theirs and glad to learn from others that by which he could do good.” This, Jiao suggests, is the single thread, the *zhong* and *shu* that characterize Shun’s conduct. But since “being unequal is the nature of things,” a great man like Shun “would not gauge the nature of everyone in the world by what he understands about his nature,” and he would not “dictate that the whole world should learn and know what he has learned and known.” Instead, this man “would give full realization to his potential and thereby help others realize their potential” because he is aware of the fact that every person has his own desires and capabilities. Jiao Xun’s reading of *zhong* and *shu* is not the same as that of most scholars, which regards the act of empathy or reciprocity as the moral outcome of using oneself as a measure for gauging other people’s likes and dislikes because it assumes that everyone has similar propensities. Jiao Xun’s idea of *shu* is larger, and he believes that this is how large Confucius wanted it to be, so he employs Shun as an example of someone who had truly embraced it. And, he says, a great man like Shun was “ready to fall into line with others, giving up his ways for theirs” because he knew that his cultivation and his learning would be “incomplete” if he “could not connect with others” and let “a single thread run through their humanity.” Jiao Xun refers the reader to 15.3 for further clarification on this point.

An account in a recently excavated text, dated to around 300 BC, seems to agree with Jiao Xun’s argument regarding Shun’s greatness. It says, “Formerly when Shun was just an ordinary man, as he personally plowed the field at the foot of the Li Mountain, he was already trying to find the middle [*zhong*], a balanced approach [to all kinds of human predicament]. He examined his own intentions and tried not to be at odds with the many wishes and desires of the multitude, and he carried out this principle in matters high and low, far and near.”

4.16 The Master said, “The gentleman [*junzi*] understands what is morally right. The petty man [*xiaoren*] understands what is profitable.”

Early Confucian scholars, such as Dong Zhongshu and Zheng Xuan of the Han, think that *junzi* and *xiaoren* refer to the social positions of these men. Dong writes, “It is the intention of the ruling elite—the *junzi*—to pursue the idea of what is right because they are afraid of not being able to bring about a moral transformation of the common people. It is the business of the common people to find ways to make a profit because they are afraid of being destitute.” Most of the later scholars, however, regard *junzi* and *xiaoren* as moral distinctions, because they think that it was not unusual to find “petty men” among the ruling elite and “gentlemen” among commoners and that in Confucius’ view a man’s worth had to do with whether this man was alert to what was right. Jiao Xun in such an argument quotes the Warring States thinker Xunzi, who says, in the essay “On the Regulations of a King,” “In ancient times, even though a person might be a descendant of a king, a duke, a knight, or a grand officer, if he was not observant of ritual propriety and moral rightness, he would have been demoted to the position of a commoner. On the other hand, even though a person might be a descendent of a commoner, if he was able to accumulate his cultural capital and his learning, rectify his character and conduct, and be observant of ritual propriety and moral rightness, he would have been elevated to the position of a king, a duke, a knight, or a grand officer.” To distinguish a *junzi* from a *xiaoren* on the basis of moral worth is more in accord with Confucius’ teachings in the *Analects*, though the earlier reading is also possible.

4.17 The Master said, “When you meet a worthy person, think how you could become his equal. When you meet an unworthy person, turn inward and examine your own conduct.”

Liu Baonan thinks that the first two sentences of Xunzi’s essay on self-cultivation explain perfectly what Confucius means here. Xunzi says, “When you see good, collect yourself and make sure that you absorb what you have witnessed. When you see what is not good, let yourself feel distraught and make sure you look into yourself.”

4.18 The Master said, “In serving your parents, be gentle when trying to dissuade them from wrongdoing [*jijian*]. If you

puts it even more forcefully. Again the statement is attributed to Confucius, who says, “A gentleman will not use what a man says to gauge his character. When the moral way prevails in the world, there is more doing than words. When the moral way does not prevail in the world, there are more words than doing. When a gentleman is by the side of a mourner, if he is unable to assist this man with the funeral expense, he will not ask him how much it is; when he is by the side of someone who is ill, if he is unable to offer him the kind of food this man might want, he will not ask what he would like; if he has a guest and cannot put him up, he will not ask this man where he will be staying. The gentleman’s relationship with others is like water, while the petty man’s relationship with others is like wine. Yet the gentleman can let a relationship characterized by blandness attain its fulfillment while the petty man can let a relationship characterized by sweetness turn sour.”

4.23 The Master said, “Few are those who make mistakes by knowing to hold back.”

The Han scholar Kong Anguo says, “Neither extreme hits the mark. But excessive behavior suggests arrogance and depravity, which is the same as courting disaster. At least when a person knows to hold back, it is less likely for him to be in trouble.” The “Records of Exemplary Conduct” (*Biaoji*) chapter of the *Book of Rites* says, “Being modest closely embodies the idea of propriety; knowing to hold back closely embodies the idea of humaneness; being trustworthy means that one understands human feelings. Although a person could still err if he is respectful and yielding in his conduct, his mistakes would not be so serious. . . . And few are those who make mistakes by being modest and trustworthy, and by knowing to hold back.”

4.24 The Master said, “The gentleman tends to be hesitant about speaking but quick to act.”

This reinforces what Confucius says in 4.22, 12.3, and 14.27.

4.25 The Master said, “Virtue does not stand alone. It is bound to have neighbors.”

“The world is drawn to men of virtue”—this is how most scholars understand what Confucius was trying to say here. But Qian Mu feels that it is also possible to consider this statement in the context of someone who is trying to perfect his virtue: such a person would need friends and teachers—people close to him—in his quest for self-knowledge, and so “virtue also cannot be achieved in isolation.”

4.26 Ziyou said, “In serving your ruler, if your reproof is unrelenting and tiresome [*cu*], you will end up being humiliated. If you are that way with your friends, they will drift away from you.”

The word *cu* (數) means “tedious, oppressive, unrelenting.” But when the same word is pronounced as *shu*, it means “numerous, repetitive.” Hence the Han scholar Zheng Xuan suggests another reading: “[In serving your ruler,] if you talk about your own merits and accomplishments repeatedly [, you will end up being humiliated].”