

The analects of  
confucius trans. by  
arthur waley . pp. 83-  
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The Analects of Confucius Arthur Waley Order No: 83 No: of pages: 2 One of the most brilliant, yet confounding of books are “ The Analects of Confucius” which serves as a fulcrum around which all other Chinese thought and literature revolves. It has been skillfully interpreted and translated by the outstanding scholar cum writer Arthur Waley, who not only enlightens us on the important events and passages in the book but also gives us the political and social background of this huge body of work.

Confucius was a great Chinese philosopher and thinker whose philosophy and teachings made an impact on the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese way of life. His emphasis lay on the morality aspect of life that is based on sincerity, justice and the right way to lead ones life. His system of philosophy came to be known as “ Confucianism”. In his Analects, Confucius takes himself to be a sort of “ transmitter who invented nothing”. (The Analects, 479 BCE – 221BCE, VII. 1)

Since he belonged to the ancient ordered society, he was very conservative and had a high vision of personal as well as social perfections. He wanted to create a revival that was based on a unified royal state where its rulers earned their power on the basis of their own sincere moral merit, not their parentage. “ The Way” that Confucius speaks about is the exemplification of ones own self by sheer virtue of morality and not by any set rules or regulations. His ideals and teachings are not conveyed in a direct manner because he made use of allusions, tautology and innuendo. As Arthur Waley explains his famous anecdote – When the stables were burnt down, on returning from court, Confucius said, “ Was anyone hurt?” He did not ask about the horses. (Analects X. 11, tr. A. Waley) Even though the horses were much more expensive than stablemen, yet he chose to ask about the  
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stablemen instead proving that he valued humans much more than property.

In ancient Confucianism, there are two terms “ Yi” and “ Li” that are closely related to each other and is translated to mean righteousness. Both these terms compliment each other and means doing the right thing for the right reason. The term “ Yi” is again complimentary to the term “ Ren” which is based on the virtue of completing one’s responsibilities perfectly to other human beings. Arthur Waley denotes this as “ Goodness” with a capital “ G”.

Confucius desired that all the people should follow the Way or the Path that enhanced goodness and selflessness instead of just following the set of rules of “ Yi”. Both “ Yi” as well as “ Ren” have to work in tandem in order to produce a world of harmony and peace. Arthur Waley translates Confucius Golden Rule which says, “ One must always treat others just as one would want others to treat oneself”. (Analects, Arthur Waley) This explains why Confucius based his moral ideals on understanding and showing empathy towards others.

Therefore, the Way or Path of Confucius was to build good human relationships based on honesty and respect for each other and a moral social order where one treated his companions in the way he wanted to be treated himself. He intended that man be judged according to the moral values he owns and not by his parentage because he wanted to bring about a new social order of peace and harmony in the world.

References:

The Analects 479 BCE -221, VII. 1

The Analects, 479 BCE-221 BCE, XIV. 9

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Zhang 2002, p. 208

Confucius

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