

Lapland Manifesto of Confucianism

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This Manifesto discusses the Confucian tradition and ways of preserving its merits and restoring its relevance. The word ‘Confucianism’ is a European coinage, which associates the tradition with the person of Confucius and his teachings, and labels the tradition as an “ism”. However, our understanding of this rich tradition is much better conveyed by the equivalent Chinese word *rujia* 儒家, which means ‘The School of the Learned’, or the word *ruxue* 儒學, which means ‘The Learning of the Learned’. The Confucian tradition, as it is understood and promoted in this manifesto, is not a fixed system of thought that can be defined in terms of a certain number of dogmas, but rather an ongoing discussion of the human predicament that started about three thousand years ago, even before Confucius (孔子, d. 479 BCE). In this discussion, we may identify a number of themes and questions as key elements: among them the nature of ‘Man’ (*ren* 人) and ‘Heaven’ (*tian* 天), the meaning of good and evil, the cultivation of humanity, the question of how to bring about a harmonious society and world order, as well as various relationships such as the relationship between knowledge and action and that between morality and scholarly inquiry.

These different themes, which go back to formulations in classical texts written during the first millennium BCE, can be thought of as a language or a discourse, which can be – and has been – used to articulate different points of view and which, in its totality, constitutes an intellectual and moral universe that we think of as Confucian.

One hundred years ago, during China’s New Culture Movement, Confucianism was condemned as being the root of everything backward and feudal. Historically, Confucianism has indeed often manifested itself as an ossified ideology which has served to legitimize the prevailing oppressive social order – the very antithesis of the Confucian outlook that we seek to promote. Much of the critique during the New Culture Movement was actually directed at the practices of state-sponsored Confucianism rather than the spirit of the teachings of the founding fathers of Confucianism: Confucius and Mencius (孟子, c. 390–305 BCE) and others.

There have also been those who consider Confucianism as liberal and democratic by nature, and, in our own time, there are those who see Confucianism as a viable “collective” and “meritocratic” alternative to the supposedly defective “Western” democracy.

We disagree with all the above views. We consider it necessary to recognize that early Confucian thought was burdened by hierarchic, sexist and conservative, even backward looking elements, and we do not think that the early ideal of regarding ‘the people as the basis’ (*minben* 民本) can be equated with the democratic notion of regarding ‘the people as masters’ (*minzhu* 民主). Moreover, to regard Confucianism as a Chinese or an Asian “alternative” is, in our opinion, to mystify Chinese culture by assuming an inherent fundamental difference between the East and the West, a difference which does not exist.

Our outlook is humanistic and based on the belief that humans are social creatures endowed with the capacity to develop their innate gifts for moral action and for improving themselves and the society in which they dwell. It is open-ended and encourages the search for new insights. In the long history of Confucian thought, we find truly valuable elements: For example, the

early tradition emphasized ‘personal cultivation’ (*xiu shen* 修身) as a means of attaining ‘inner sagehood’ (*neisheng* 內聖) and ‘becoming a complete and mature person’ (*cheng ren* 成人), capable of exercising ‘outer kingship’ (*wai wang* 外王) by promoting goodness and fighting injustices such as nepotism and corruption. Through self-cultivation, a fully developed person avoids being reduced to mere a tool in the service of others. In the early tradition, we also find a recognition of the great value of education for all.

Although hardly visible in state-sponsored Confucianism, the idea that good governance is governance for the material and spiritual well-being of the people, and the idea that a ruler relies for his legitimacy on the support of the people, are traceable throughout the Confucian tradition. While these ideas do not amount to a full-fledged democratic ideology, they are certainly aspects of democracy. Arguably, the Confucian tradition also contains ideals of subsidiarity and decentralization of power at the local level (*fengjian* 封建), introduced by, *inter alia*, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682). Finally, in Confucian thought as expounded by thinkers such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), we find the embryo of a scientific spirit in the insistence that knowledge must be based on the study of external reality and on rigorous analysis.

In order to preserve the merits and restore the relevance of Confucianism, we must reclaim it from the perfidies of the past and present.

(1) In order to restore the relevance of Confucianism, we need first and foremost to re-establish the position of the Self as the basis of human behaviour and relations. This opens the way for recognizing the value of the individual as the foundation of equality, liberty, and democracy. Mencius said that the Self is the very basis of everything else in society:

(^a) 孟子曰、人有恆言、皆曰天下國家。天下之本在國、國之本在家、家之本在身。(IV.A.5)

This idea, which has often been suppressed and forgotten because of its subversive potential, is repeated in the Classical text *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學):

(^b) 古之欲明明德於天下者、先治其國、欲治其國者、先齊其家、欲齊其家者、先修其身。(禮記：大學 2)

Even Confucius himself linked the betterment of the world directly to the individual:

(^c) 顏淵問仁。子曰、克己復禮為仁。一日克己復禮、天下歸仁焉。為仁由己、而由人乎哉。(XII.1)

^a Mengzi said: ‘There is a common saying among the people: “All Under Heaven, the state, the family.” The states form the basis for All Under Heaven, the families form the basis for the states, and the basis for the family is (the head of the family) himself.’ (*Mencius* IV.A.5) – The quotations from other sources than *Analects* or *Mencius* are mostly from *Chinese Text Project* (ctext.org), edited by Donald Sturgeon. Provisional translations for the marked quotations (a...ff) given in these footnotes are for reference only.

^b Men of the yore who wished to brighten their enlightened virtue over All Under Heaven took first control over their states. In order to gain control over their states, they first regulated their families. In order to regulate their families, they first had to cultivate themselves. (*Liji*: *Daxue* 2)

^c Yan Yuan asked about *ren* [here perhaps: respectability]. The Master said: ‘To control oneself and to remain faithful to propriety, that is how one becomes *ren*. When the (knights) one day can control themselves and remain faithful to propriety, All Under Heaven returns to *ren*. *Ren* originates from oneself; who else could it possibly originate from?’ (*Analects* XII.1)

With the Self back in its rightful place, we must next address the most serious defects of Confucianism, for example the erroneous belief that people are determined by their preordained nature and do not themselves have the freedom and responsibility to define who they are.

(2) Although not discussed by Confucius, the notion of ‘human nature’ (*renxing* 人性) is central in the Confucian tradition and refers to that aspect of the Self that is innate (notice that the Latin word *natura* is also derived from the verb *nascor*, ‘to be born’). In the Confucian discourse, Nature it is said to be endowed in all human beings by Heaven (*tian* 天) providing us with certain essential capacities (d). Mencius argued that we are born with a sense of compassion (e).

(d) 天命之謂性、率性之謂道、修道之謂教。(禮記：中庸 1)

(e) 人皆有不忍人之心。……無惻隱之心非人也。(II.A.6)

Also Xunzi (荀子, d. c. 230 BCE), a critic of Mencius, maintained that humans have the potential for goodness, although it needs to be properly cultivated to develop. Both Mencius and Xunzi anchored their ethics in human psychology rather than in an otherworldly deity. We find these ideas very inspiring and consider them as a possible foundation for a global ethic in today’s world.

Most regrettably, the idea of human nature has often been misused. Especially in Confucianism as a state ideology, human nature was described as an entity that should exhaustively destine the Selves of all human beings, leaving individual people little or no freedom to determine the meaning and content of their own lives. This was an oppressive and fettering use of the notion of human nature, and we consider it necessary to discard any such interpretations.

We find that the focus that Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and others place on the function of the ‘Heart’ (*xin* 心) to control the Self is liberating and opens the way for ridding Confucianism of patriarchalism, male chauvinism, blind obedience and other defects. Wang said that the ‘Way’ (*dao* 道) manifests itself as the ‘Decree of Heaven’ (*tianming* 天命), endows humans with their Nature and governs one’s Self as Heart; thus Decree, Nature and Heart are all one.

(f) 經、常道也。其在於天謂之命、其賦於人謂之性、其主於身謂之心。心也、性也、命也、一也。(尊經閣記)

Nature, Heart and Decree may all be reflections of the same Way, but when Nature moves the Self, it is governed by the Heart. Or, like Mencius said, the bursts of one’s conviction are under the command of the ‘Will’ (*zhi* 志) (g). Mencius said also that the Heart is conscious (h). This means that while it may be in our nature to favour our relatives at the expense of other people, we can also choose to act otherwise.

^d What is allotted by Heaven is called nature, to accord with one’s nature is called the way, to cultivate the way is called learning. (*Liji*: Zhongyong 1)

^e Everyone has a heart that does not bear (to see the suffering) of others. – One who lacks a compassionate heart is not human. (*Mencius* II.A.6)

^f The scriptures are the unchanging Way. Its (character) in Heaven is called the decree (of Heaven), its (character) in a person is called nature, and its master in one’s body is called the heart. The heart, nature and decree are all one and the same. (*Zunjingge ji*)

(^g) 夫志、氣之帥也。氣、體之充也。夫志至焉、氣次焉。故曰、持其志、無暴其氣。(II.A.2)

(^h) 心之官則思、思則得之、不思則不得也。此天之所與我者。(VI.A.15)

As for Decree and Heaven, about which the views of Confucius also cannot be known, Xunzi's understanding is more helpful in today's world than that of Mencius, which was adopted by Zhu Xi, among others (i). Xunzi called into question Mencius' view of Heaven as a moral agent as well as the meaningfulness of the so-called signs of Heaven (j)

(i) 莫之為而為者、天也。莫之致而至者、命也。……盖以理言之谓之天、自人言之谓之命、其实则一而已。(孟子集注：万章章句上 6.1)

(j) 治亂、天邪。曰、日月星辰瑞麻、是禹桀之所同也、禹以治、桀以亂。治亂非天也。(荀子：天論 6)

Following the restoration of the Self as the basis of human behaviour and relations, we must next liberate Confucianism from the tyranny of traditional hierarchies and social categorizations.

(3) Although Confucius did not talk about 'Principle' (*li* 理) and Mencius barely mentioned it, generations of later Confucians have been obsessed with the concept. Principle became a central concept for the 'School of Principle' (*lixue* 理學), which served as ideological orthodoxy from the fourteenth century up to the early twentieth century and was used as a tool of oppression for the emperor and his mandarins. In the words of Dai Zhen, "Principle was used to kill people" (*yi li sha ren* 以理殺人). In his view, the main reason why the School of Principle could be used as a tool of oppression was that Zhu Xi and his followers defined Principle as a subjective entity, so that anyone with authority could claim that his 'subjective opinions' (*yijian* 意見) were expressions of Principle.

Dai Zhen was one of the harshest and most effective critics of the School of Principle, but he still held on to the notion of Principle as a key concept. In his view, Principle referred to the structure of being, including both the natural and the human world. He argued that knowledge of Principle is objective and accessible to anyone and, thus, cannot be arbitrarily defined by powerholders so as to suit their special interests (k). For us, Dai Zhen's views represent the presence of a scientific spirit within the Confucian tradition.

(^k) 人莫患乎蔽而自智、任其意見、執之為理義。吾懼求理義者以意見當之、孰知民受其禍之所終極也哉。(孟子字義疏證 1.4)

^g The will is the commander of one's *qi* [here perhaps: temperament or spirit]. *Qi* is what fills the body. The will comes first, and *qi* second. Therefore, it is said that one should adhere to one's will and not let one's *qi* burst out. (*Mencius* II.A.2)

^h The task of the heart is to become conscious. What it becomes conscious of, it finds; what it does not become conscious of, it does not find. This is the kind of heart that Heaven has given to us. (*Mencius* VI.A.15)

ⁱ When something becomes what it (should) become, that is (of) Heaven. When something follows its cause, that is (Heaven's) decree. -- From the point of view of Principle, this is called Heaven; from the point of humans, it is called decree, but both are one and the same in essence. (*Mengzi jizhu*: Wanzhang zhangju 6.1)

^j Are order and chaos caused by Heaven? I say: The rotations of the Sun, the Moon, and the stars were the same for both Yu and Jie. Since Yu brought order and Jie brought chaos, order and chaos cannot be caused by Heaven. (*Xunzi*: Tianlun 6)

^k A man can have no greater fault than to consider himself wise although he is obscured and to give free rein to his opinions and hold on to them as if they constituted *li* and righteousness. I am afraid that those who seek *li* and righteousness take these to be represented by their opinions – who knows the end of the calamities that this will cause the people? (*Mengzi ziyi shuzheng*, 1.4.)

Let us now re-examine the nature of the concepts Propriety and Heavenly Principle, as well as preordainment. A useful starting point is what scholars like Yin Tun 尹焞 (1071–1142 CE) said, quoting more ancient texts: Propriety is Principle.

(l) 子曰、禮也者、理也。(禮記：仲尼燕居 6)

When the School of Principle became the state philosophy, linking Propriety with Principle became a straitjacket. This was because in the realm of Propriety, nothing has been more important for Confucians than ‘the rules of human relationships’ (*renlun* 人倫). These predate Confucianism, as already Yanzi 晏子(c. 578–500 BCE) talked about them.

(m) 禮之可以為國也久矣、與天地並。君令臣共、父慈子孝、兄愛弟敬、夫和妻柔、姑慈婦聽、禮也。(春秋左傳：昭公：昭公二十六年 2.9)

Mencius taught that there is one “equal” relationship, the one between friends (n). However, it was also Mencius who said that a woman’s eternal lot is compliance (o) and that a heterosexual marriage, aimed at producing children, is the most important human relationship (p). It is thus no wonder that already during the Han dynasty, human relationships were all reduced to hierarchic ones, with a focus on the ‘Three Leads’ (*sangang* 三綱) (q).

(n) 父子有親、君臣有義、夫婦有別、長幼有序、朋友有信。(III.A.4)

(o) 以順為正者、妾婦之道也。(III.B.2)

(p) 男女居室、人之大倫也。(V.A.2)

(q) 三綱者何謂也。謂君臣、父子、夫婦也。……君為臣綱、父為子綱、夫為妻綱。(白虎通德論：卷七：三綱六紀 1)

By continuing and amplifying this trend, the School of Principle as a state philosophy did immeasurable damage to the Confucian tradition. However, this need not continue. We must distinguish between the Confucian tradition as an open-ended ongoing discussion and Confucianism as a state-sponsored, set ideology.

First, we must give precedence to the equality of all. Confucius said that all people are similar by birth (r). Also, Mencius said that there was no difference between ordinary people and the Sages (s).

(r) 子曰、生相近也、習相遠也。(XVII.2, 定州簡本)

^l The Master said: ‘Propriety is Principle.’ (*Liji: Zhongni yan ju* 6)

^m With Propriety it is possible to rule the kingdom for as long as Heaven and Earth exist. For the prince to give orders and for the ministers to respectfully (obey), for the father to be merciful and for the son to be filial, for the husband to be gentle and for the wife to be compliant, and for the mother-in-law to be merciful and for the daughter-in-law to be obedient – such is Propriety. (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan: Zhao gong: Zhao gong ershiliu nian* 2.9)

ⁿ Between father and son there should be affection, between ruler and minister there should be righteousness, between husband and wife there should be differentiation, between old and young there should be proper order, between companions and comrades there should be trust. (*Mengzi* III.A.4)

^o It is the lot of a wife or a concubine to acknowledge that compliance is the correct (way to behave). (*Mengzi* III.B.2)

^p The most important human relationship is to have a man and a woman reside together. (*Mengzi* V.A.2)

^q What are the Three Leads? They refer to (the correct roles between) ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife. – The ruler leads the minister, the father leads the son, and the husband leads the wife. (*Baihutong delun: Juan qi: Sangang liu ji* 1)

^r The Master said: ‘By birth (people are) similar; it is their practises that make them grow apart.’ (*Analects* XVII.2, Dingzhou fragments variation)

(^s) 孟子曰、何以異於人哉。堯舜與人同耳。(IV.B.32)

Second, we must consider the core of Propriety. Its function is to regulate social intercourse. The most fundamental value in social intercourse is the golden rule, embodied in the Confucian notion of *shu* 恕, which we may understand as ‘Consideration’ and denoting ‘empathy’ or ‘reciprocity’: “Do not do to others what you do not want others do to you” (t). Mencius recognized the central importance of this notion (u).

(^t) 子貢問曰、有一言而可以終身行之者乎。子曰、其恕乎。己所不欲、勿施於人。(XV.24)

(^u) 強恕而行、求仁莫近焉。(VII.A.4)

Mencius also said that our Hearts are all the same with regard to Righteousness and the principles of our nature.

(^v) 心之所同然者何也。調理也、義也。聖人先得我心之所同然耳。故理義之悅我心、猶芻豢之悅我口。(VI.A.7)

Therefore, instead of equating 理 with 禮, like Yin Tun did, we should rather treat the notion of Consideration as a manifestation of Principle: “恕也者、理之本也”. We all act – or rather live – in different roles in different social settings, but these roles are not straitjackets that completely determine our behaviour. Instead, we propose that one’s inborn Self does not reside in any single role but rather in the intersection of one’s various roles. If a role seems to require us to break free from the principle of equality or disregard the golden rule, then we should reject it and also the Three Leads.

(4) Mencius and Xunzi concerned themselves with the question of good and evil of human nature, and they are commonly interpreted as holding opposite views on the subject. As noted above, rather than framing their views in terms of their differences, we should focus on where their views overlap – namely the idea that we all have the capacity to improve and become more mature. ‘Self-cultivation’ (*xiu shen* 修身) is necessary both to develop our goodness and to get rid of our evil.

Confucius spoke of ‘becoming a complete person’ (成人 *cheng ren*). Such a person is upright and unbiased, accepts mortality and does not lose his or her integrity in facing gainable profits or falter from her/his commitments when times are bad (w). Such an emphasis on the firmness of one’s character in social conduct is also present in *Xunzi* (x).

(^w) 見利思義、見危授命、久要不忘平生之言、亦可以為成人矣。(XIV.12)

(^x) 能定能應、夫是之謂成人。(荀子：勸學 18)

^s Mencius said: ‘Why would I be any different from other people? Even (the Sages) Yao and Shun were like everyone else.’ (*Mengzi* IV.B.32)

^t Zigong inquired if there is one word that is enough for the rest of one’s life to follow. The Master said: ‘It is *shu*. Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you.’ (*Analects* XV.24)

^u There is no shorter (road) to *ren* than to act uncompromisingly in accordance with *shu*. (*Mencius* VII.A.4)

^v What is it that is similar in the hearts of us all? It is the *li* [principle, here perhaps: orderliness], it is righteousness. The (ancient) Sages once found what my heart now similarly desires. Therefore, my heart rejoices of *li* and righteousness as my mouth enjoys (the taste of) grass-fed calves and grain-fed piglets.

^w Someone who thinks of righteousness when seeing gains, submits to one’s fate when seeing danger, and in good times does not forget the promises made in bad times, may become a complete person. (*Analects* XIV.12)

^x The one who can both retain (one’s character) and respond (to upcoming challenges) may be called a complete person. (*Xunzi*: *Quan xue* 18)

This completeness is not merely measured by the individual's internal qualities achieved through self-cultivation, but also through the way s/he mediates these qualities in society. Hence, whereas self-cultivation can be seen as an internal psychological process, becoming a complete person can be understood as a process that couples the internal psychological process of self-cultivation with the person's societal role and obligations. In the language of Confucianism, 'the inner' (*nei* 內) and 'the outer' (*wai* 外) must be combined moral properties which self-cultivation brings about.

Confucius wanted everyone to cultivate themselves into Noble Persons or Gentlemen (*junzi* 君子). Becoming a Noble Person who embodies the Confucian virtues is held up as an ideal for all people to strive for by means of self-cultivation and the love of learning. One aspect of the *junzi* ideal that we find very appealing is that a Noble Person is, in the words of Confucius himself (y), no 'utensil' (*qi* 器). We take this to mean that a fully developed person must not be reduced to a tool in the service of others.

(y) 子曰、君子不器。(II.12)

In our view, becoming a better person and a responsible member of society is one of the central aims that can be attributed to the Confucian tradition. People with innumerable differences can together constitute a well-functioning and harmonious society. In the words of Wang Yangming:

(z) 楊明子曰、古者四民異業而同道、其盡心焉、一也。士以修治農以具養工以利器商以通貨、各就其資之所近、力之所及者而業焉、以求盡其心。(王陽明全集：節庵方公墓表)

In the modern world, a well-functioning and harmonious society is a free and democratic society which offers its each and every member the opportunity to realize her/his potential.

A holistic outlook is central to the Confucian tradition. As Wang Yangming also said, "the ten thousand things are one body" (*wanwu yiti* 萬物一體). This all-inclusive "body", or community, comprises all organisms, human beings but also animals and plants. In the words of Zhang Zai (張載, 1020–1077):

(a) 民吾同胞、物吾與也。(張子全書：卷一：西銘宗論)

Implicit in this notion is a call to us all to extend our feeling of Consideration to every living being in our biosphere.

As a philosophy of life, Confucianism is not a science. However, in the sense that we understand and promote it here, the Confucian outlook is not in contradiction with science. From its earliest times, the search for knowledge has been an important feature of Confucianism. Already in the *Daxue* 大學 the 'investigation of things' (*gewu* 格物) is discussed as an essential aspect of self-cultivation.

(a) 欲誠其意者、先致其知、致知在格物。(禮記：大學 2)

^y The Master said: "A gentleman is not a vessel."

^z Master Yangming said: In antiquity, people from four different strata were engaged in different occupations, and yet they followed the same path and thus their hearts were dedicated to one and the same thing. Scholars practiced cultivation to govern, peasants used tools to farm, artisans made use of utensils, and merchants supplied commodities. All of them were familiar of their resources and possessed the capacities of their professions, striving to follow their hearts' dedication. (*Wang Yangming quanji: Jie'an Fang Gong mubiao*)

^a All people are my siblings, all things are my companions. (*Zhang Zai quanshu: Juan yi: Ximing zonglun*)

^a In order to be sincere in their intentions, they first extended their knowledge. The extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things. (Liji: *Daxue* 2)

Throughout the Confucian tradition, this notion has played a key role. It has been interpreted differently, but especially in the current of Confucian thought that we associate with thinkers such as Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty, and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), Gu Yanwu and Dai Zhen in the Qing Dynasty, it has signified the importance of acquiring knowledge of the external world that we may characterize as proto-scientific.

The Confucian outlook that we wish to advocate is a rational one and promotes scientific inquiry. As the basis for a philosophy of life, values and goals are at the core of this outlook which, therefore, goes beyond science.

By taking the steps mentioned above, we will be able to reclaim Confucianism as a philosophy that is open to individualism, equality, liberalism, and science. All in all, this allows us to redefine the Confucian Noble Person in a way that is applicable to today's society.

Early Confucianism was without question elitist and male-dominated. The audience of both Confucius and Mencius consisted predominantly of their peers, male members of the class of 'knights' (*shi* 士), during the imperial era better translated as 'scholar-officials' or 'literati'. Our reclaimed Confucianism can only thrive in a democratic, open society, which allows for personal enlightenment.

That being the case, we need to find a modern equivalent for a scholar-official who finds resonance in the teachings of Confucius. In a modern open and democratic society, the equivalent of the scholar-officials are the citizens, irrespective of their gender or social status.

In old China, it was the scholar-officials who had the resources and ability to take an interest in the society and government. In today's democratic societies, all citizens can do that. Therefore, the modern equivalent of the Noble Person is an enlightened, righteous and responsible citizen. Likewise, the opposites of Noble Persons – 'the small people' (*xiaoren* 小人) as they are called in the language of Confucianism – are the populists (e.g. Trumpists, Putinists, "true Finns", Sverigedemokraterna, or the advocates of "Mainland New Confucian Religion", *Dalu Xin Rujiao* 大陸新儒教) of today. In old China, 'the common people' (*shuren* 庶人), were the ones without resources and ability, and their equivalent in today's society are the non-voters and others who have no interest in public affairs. To follow the way of the *wai wang* 外王 in today's world is to work consciously toward the betterment of society.

According to the *Analects*, Zengzi (曾子) compressed the Way of Confucius into 'Loyalty' (*zhong* 忠) and Consideration (ö). Loyalty may seem a foreign concept today, but when we remember that Confucius wanted his disciples to take office in ducal courts and advance righteousness, then we may see Zengzi's words having relevance to today's civil servants. They still need to be loyal, not so much to their superiors as to their societies and citizens need to be considerate towards others as much as knights of yore. This kind of an understanding echoes with a later interpretation, relating Loyalty to doing one's utmost for the sake of basic ethical principles, present in one's heart, or decreed by Heaven (aa).

(ö) 曾子曰、夫子之道、忠恕而已矣。(IV.15)

(aa) 盡己之為忠。……或曰、中心為忠。……又曰、維天之命於穆不已、忠也。(四書章句集注：里仁第四 15)

^ö Zengzi said: 'The way of our Master is nothing else than loyalty and consideration.' (*Analects* IV.15)

^{aa} Doing one's utmost is *zhong*. -- In other words, to steady one's heart is *zhong*. -- Or put yet in another way, *zhong* means solemnly adhering to the decrees of Heaven. (*Sishu zhangju jizhu*: Li ren di si 15)

Arguably the most important Confucian virtue is *ren* 仁. While it cannot be interpreted and translated in the exact same way in the early texts – the *Analects*, *Mencius* and *Xunzi* – there is one definition given in the *Mencius* that covers broadly all the early meanings: *ren* is an honorary title conferred by Heaven.

(^{bb}) 夫仁、天之尊爵也。(II.A.7)

This means that *ren* is a civic virtue which may be possessed by someone who truly deserves to be called a Noble Person. If a good citizen is both honourable and fraternal, then s/he is following the Way.

Later, Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi construed *ren* as an amalgamation of the most important virtues in the Confucian tradition. He based his interpretation on Mencius who had said that *ren* refers to a central property of being a human, namely the ability to feel empathy and compassion. Mencius argued that a sense of compassion is a “sprout” we are born with and which – when properly cultivated – can grow to become the virtue of *ren* (^{cc}). Thus, *ren* can be understood as ‘Humaneness’.

(^{cc}) 惻隱之心、仁之端也。……凡有四端於我者、知皆擴而充之矣、若火之始然、泉之始達。苟能充之足以保四海。(II.A.6)

Humaneness is not only an inner psychological disposition, but also refers to the individual’s ability to relate to other people. Within the Confucian tradition, being human was not determined solely by the internal properties of an individual, but also by how s/he related to society and interaction. Therefore, we would also do well to find value in the Neo-Confucian idea that Humaneness is related to ‘common good’ (*gong* 公) and opposed to ‘self-interest’ (*si* 私).

(^{dd}) 仁是人心所固有之理、公則仁私則不仁。(朱子語類：程子之書一 161)

A related Neo-Confucian ideal is promoting ‘local rule’ (*fengjian* 封建) and opposing excessive centralized power (^{ee}), something that the European Union is ideally also committed to through its principle of subsidiarity. It also strikes a parallel with communalism, to be understood here as a system based on a federation of autonomous communes (units of local rule) and the harmonizing of human communities with the natural world.

(^{ee}) 古之聖人、以公心待天下之人、胙之土而分之國。(顧炎武：郡縣論一)

The goal of Confucian citizens regarding the betterment of their society, and the world in which they live, has been formulated in the *Book of Rites*, “What is under Heaven is for all” (天下為公). Originally, it meant that the kingdom should not be considered the hereditary property of any one clan.

^{bb} *Ren* is a noble title conferred by Heaven. (*Mencius* II.A.7)

^{cc} A compassionate heart is the sprout of *ren*. – Since everyone has these four sprouts within themselves, for them to understand (the importance) of developing and completing them is like a fire that starts burning or a spring that starts flowing. Who is able to complete one’s sprouts is good enough to protect all land within the four seas. (*Mencius* II.A.6)

^{dd} *Ren* [here: humaneness] is the steadfast principle of the heart. (To work for) common good is (in accordance with) humaneness, (to act out of) self-interest does not accord with humaneness. (*Zhuzi yulei*: Chengzi zhu shu yi 161)

^{ee} The ancient Sages treated the people under Heaven with a heart (filled with) common good, and (thus) requited them with land, dividing (the empire) into (feudal) states. (Gu Yanwu: *Junxianlun yi*)

(^{ff}) 大道之行也天下為公。選賢與能講信修睦、故人不獨親其親不獨子其子……皆有所養。(禮記：禮運 1)

Today, this can be considered both a democratic and cosmopolitan principle: Everyone should work for the common good. The country in which one lives belongs to the citizens, and the decisions regarding it cannot be dictated by any single person or organ. Similarly, our planet is a common heritage of humankind, for which we all share equal responsibilities and rights.

In the month of April, 2021,
孔子卒後二千四百九十九年春

by

(in alphabetic order)

Jyrki Kallio 高玉麒

Torbjörn Lodén 羅多弼

Matti Nojonen 馬迪

上

^{ff} When the Grand Way was followed, everything under Heaven was done for the common good. Noble and able men, whose words could be trusted and who cultivated their gentleness, were chosen (into office). Therefore, men did not only consider their (blood) relations as their relatives and their (own) sons as their offspring, – – and everyone was provided for. (*Liji*: *Liyun* 1)