

Centrality of Learning in "The Analects" by Confucius, Translated by James Legge

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"The Analects" is a quasi-religious cultural treatise based on the ideals of virtue and propriety, surviving on filial piety (obedience), master-disciple/ student format that strives to prop the running of government based on ritual and learning. The work comprises of 20 books in 490 chapters rendered in a conversational tone and format.

While the definition of a superior man or a leader in the work is synonymous with virtue and propriety, it's equally sustained by constant learning and self-improvement. Acquisition of knowledge and its retention is underscored in book 2 chapter 17 that true knowledge is only possible if the bearer is aware of what they know and what they don't know at the same time; subsequently, the learner needs to keep the search for what they don't know. This is further mirrored by book 17 chapter 3 that there are the wise of the highest class and the stupid of the lowest class who cannot be changed.

How is learning attained? Learning is gained by observance of rituals and sticking to virtue and propriety while listening to the sages. However, the work stresses in book 2 chapter 15 that learning without thought is labour lost and that thought without learning is perilous. In addition, the principal role of learning in personal growth is observed in book 2 chapter 4 where the master says that at 15 he was bent on learning, at 30 he stood firm, at 40 he had no doubts, at 50 he knew the decrees of Heaven, at 60 he lived for the truth, and at 70 he could follow his heart without transgressing. This is in comparison with the observation in book 9 chapter 22 that if a man reaches 40 or 50 and nothing has been heard of him then he is not worth paying any attention.

In addition, scholarship and virtue go together as there is remonstrance against comfort and cowardice in the process of learning. In book 15 chapter 8 and book 19 chapter 1 a good scholar is defined as a person who while facing danger is ready to sacrifice his life and as well is ready to expand his knowledge; whereas in book 14 chapter 3 a scholar who cherishes comfort is not fit to be called a scholar. In book 1 chapter 8 gravity is given as a distinguishing feature of a good scholar, while a focus on the truth while downplaying material provisions is highlighted in book 4 chapter 8. These qualities are outlined in book 13 chapter 28 as earnest, urgency, and blandness.

Similarly, the reason for learning and duty is to leave something behind. Good legacy is the most important preoccupation of continuous self-improvement. In book 15 chapter 19 the master says that a superior man dislikes the thought of his name not being mentioned after his death.

According to "The Analects" there are two ways that the life of a person is spent: (1) work/ service, and (2) learning. We learn to get to work properly. After work/ retirement we continue to commit to learning: "... The officer, having discharged all his duties, should devote his leisure to learning. The student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be an officer." The essence of continuous learning is emphasized here as essential to the execution of tasks. This is further stated in book 17 chapter 4 that learning makes a master love his men and makes the men to be easily ruled. On the other hand, in book 17 chapter 8 poor learning leads to beclouding: foolish simplicity out of the love of being benevolent, dissipation of mind out of love of knowing, injurious disregard of

consequences out of love of being sincere, rudeness out of love of straightforwardness, insubordination out of love of boldness, and extravagant conduct out of love of firmness.

In conclusion, learning is one of the main themes in "The Analects". In book 19 chapter 7 the reason a superior man learns is for him to reach the utmost of his principles; whereas in book 20 chapter 3 section 3 without the force of words it's impossible to know men. In book 1 chapter 26 the master says that he will not be afflicted if men do not know him, he will be afflicted if he does not know men; and in book 6 chapter 2 learning is meant for the disciples not to repeat faults. Therefore, the work has succeeded in blending learning around human affairs.