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a very good summary

A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF CONFUCIUS

In order to understand Confucius' doctrines more clearly, one should know his background and his environment. Confucius was born into a troubled China. China was then in an age of great internal upheaval, of social unrest, intellectual anarchy, moral disorder and political disintegration. From this we see that it was quite natural that the chief problem of Confucius should be the reform of society. He sought the way of ordering the world.....his Tao.

Confucius noticed that within the empire there was lacking a central authority for the standardization of the beliefs and rites and duties of all classes. This, he thought, was the cause of all the disorder, degradation and unrest about him. He came to the conclusion that when rules of conduct, music, and primitive expeditions proceeded from the 'Son of Heaven', order prevailed; but when 'rules of conduct, music, and primitive expeditions proceeded from the feudal princes', order did not prevail.

The cause of the moral and political disorder was not found in a 'day or a night', said Confucius. The process of degradation was a gradual one and the present evils were due to a lack of timely detection and rectification. He believed in causal relationship...that there was a natural sequence of events. In other words, the causes of the moral and political disorders lay deeper

than those unnatural acts of violence committed at that time. There has been a long and gradual process of intellectual disorganization, decadence of beliefs and convictions, and relaxation of duties and relations.

How was the world to be restored to law and order? By the rectification of names, replied Confucius. This is a task of intellectual reorganization, thinks Hu Shih.

Said Confucius: 'If names be incorrect, speech will not follow its natural sequence. If speech does not follow its natural sequence, nothing can be established. If nothing can be established, no rules of conduct or music will prevail. Where rules of conduct and music do not prevail, law and punishments will not be just. When law and punishments are not just, the people will not know where to place their hands and feet. Therefore, a superior man requires that names must be capable of being spoken, and that which is spoken must be capable of being put into practice. A superior man is never careless of words.'

Hu Shih remarkably translated the above thusly:

The object of the rectification of names is, first, 'to make the names stand for what they ought to stand for, and then to so reorganize the social and political relations and institutions as to make them what their names indicate they ought to be. The rectification of names thus consists in making the real relationships and duties and institutions conform as far as possible to their ideal.'

meanings which, however obscured and neglected they may now have become, can still be re-discovered and re-established by proper study and, literally, 'judicious' use of the names. When this intellectual reorganization is at last effected, the ideal social order will come as night follows day,---a social order where, just as a circle is a circle and a square a square, so every prince is princely, every official is faithful, every father is fatherly, and every child is filially pious; where law is law, where prohibition actually prohibits, and where rewards and punishments are meted out in just proportion to actual deserts. In short, the logical outcome of such a rectification, as Confucius conceived it, would be an ideal society in which every member of the community would faithfully discharge the duty proper to his or her status.'

The cornerstone of his entire ethics was his belief in Jen (仁). Jen, Confucius' fundamental virtue, meant sympathy, loving kindness, friendly feeling or feeling of fellowship. This feeling of fellowship, or Jen, was the foundation of society and the road to all human virtues. This was his Tao, the way of life. Jen was his guiding principle.

This feeling of Tao is the reason of the Golden Rule...that you should not do unto others what you would not have done unto you.

He believed that human nature was essentially good. Because of this he thought that man would follow those who had established themselves through Tao. 'A man who has Jen, wishing to establish himself, will have others

established; wishing himself to succeed, will have others succeed.'...Confucius.

Since he thought that human nature was innately and potentially good...that goodness will out...he had no idea of original sin, and the total depravity of man. If this were so, he said, there would be no use in trying to be good, and that it would be the end of all moral endeavor. If this were so, only miracles would change Man's ways, a fact which was to him highly improbable.

'By nature men are nearly alike,' said Confucius, 'by habituation they get to be wide apart.' Believing this he established a scheme of education based on the thesis that the character of man should be educated with a view to self-perfection. Good character was a result of good training and good habituation. A man was good or bad according to his training and habituation. But habituation is only a means to an end. The end of habituation is the making of moral choices. Habituation does not lead to determinism; it only makes the art of right choosing more certain but not absolutely certain. In fact, the very idea of habituation presupposes a will that is free to choose. For unless the will is free, habituation itself would be at once a superfluity and an impossibility. His conception is that man is placed within the bounds prescribed by heavenly destiny. But within those bounds, man is, nevertheless, free. Will is in the power of man, and it cannot be deprived.

The first step which a man, according to Confucius, must take to realize and perfect a feeling of fellowship, or Jen, is to guard himself in his solitary moments; that is, to be sincere with himself, not to play the hypocrite and to manifest freely the feeling as it moves within. This is his doctrine of the Mean...or being sufficient unto oneself. This is the most difficult task of life. Said Confucius, 'Perfect is the virtue which is according to the Mean. Rare have they long been among the people who could practice it.' The Mean meant 'nothing too much'. This is not a principle of negation or contraction. On the contrary, it is definitely a principle of expansion or more correctly a principle of perfection, of working according to excellence. The mean concerns itself with quality no less than quantity. This cannot be determined by Man itself but by an objective standard.

Ancestor worship and filial piety, though Confucius was not the propagator and originator of the beliefs, received a decided boost from the great Sage. He believed in duty to parents, a duty which must be performed even after the parent's death. Respect for elders also ^{took} takes a leading place in the religion and ethics of the Sage. Loyalty both to prince and friend is inculcated, as also conscientiousness in all one's doings.

In conclusion, Confucius thought that neither pleasure nor honors, nor wealth ^{was} were the greatest good, but virtue, ^{was} for it was the foundation of true happiness; and virtue ^{was} is to be attained through the energy of the individual will.

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