

# CONFUCIUS

THE UNWOBBLING PIVOT



THE GREAT DIGEST

# EZRA POUND



# STONE-CLASSICS TEXT

(Chinese Ideogram)

## OF CONFUCIUS'

### The Unwobbling Pivot & The Great Digest

TRANSLATION & COMMENTARY BY

**EZRA POUND**

*Introduction by Achilles Fang*

Chinese civilization rose and renewed itself on the principles which Confucius learned from life, from the early great odes, and from the historic documents. He said that he had invented nothing. He had two thousand years record to learn from.

The principles cannot be understood from any single English translation. No great Chinese poem can be understood from any single translation any more than you can understand the Venus de Milo from a single profile. The more any man understands of the English text the more insistent he will be to look at the original. The history and pre-history of China is in the ideogram itself. Fenollosa and Frobenius have both shed light and given us power to penetrate more deeply into the root meaning than was possible for earlier Western sinologues.

The existence of the stone tablet inscriptions, repeatedly renewed by great emperors, is inescapable testimony that they considered the "Digest" and the "Pivot" more than just a few books.

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Stone Editions by  
*ACHILLES FANG*

TRANSLATION & COMMENTARY BY  
*EZRA POUND*



# CONFUCIUS

THE GREAT DIGEST



UNWOBBLING PIVOT

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK



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The Chinese system of spiritual values is so different from our own that it is very hard to find an adequate equivalent for any of the classical Chinese moral concepts in Western speech which do not deprive them of their religious associations or spiritual atmosphere & it is only too easy to translate what the Confucians regarded as a profound expression of spiritual wisdom into an arid moral platitude. In the first age of Confucianism however there is no doubt that the attitude of the teacher towards moral training & social duty & knowledge was more comparable to the attitude of the monk towards the Holy Rule & the Divine Liturgy than it is to the attitude of a Western scholar towards humane letters & philosophy.

C. Dawson, Religion & Culture  
p. 164



## CONFUCIUS' TEXT

I.

The great learning [adult study, grinding the corn in the head's mortar to fit it for use] takes root in clarifying the way wherein the intelligence increases through the process of looking straight into one's own heart and acting on the results; it is rooted in watching with affection the way people grow;

- 46. 167, 169.

it is rooted in coming to rest, being at ease in perfect equity.

2.

Know the point of rest and then have an orderly mode of procedure; having this orderly procedure one can "grasp the azure," that is, take hold of a clear concept; holding a clear concept one can be at peace [internally], being thus calm one can keep one's head in moments of danger; he who can keep his head in the presence of a tiger is qualified to come to his deed in due hour.

Confucius'  
Text

of coming to rest xx. 16th

3.

Things have roots and branches; affairs have scopes and beginnings. To know what precedes and what follows, is nearly as good as having a head and feet.

*Mencius' epistemology starts from this verse.*

4.

The men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government



2.

You do not depart from the process even for an instant; what you depart from is not the process. Hence the man who keeps rein on himself looks straight into his own heart at the things wherewith there is no trifling; he attends seriously to things unheard.

*Tsze Sze's  
First  
Thesis*

3.

Nothing is more outwardly visible than the secrets of the heart, nothing more obvious than what one attempts to conceal. Hence the man of true breed looks straight into his heart even when he is alone.

4.

Happiness, rage, grief, delight. To be unmoved by these emotions is to stand in the axis, in the center; being moved by these passions each in due degree constitutes being in harmony.

*(Note by Chu Hsi continued from page 93)*

to its utmost; his work to effect changes (land improvements, bettering of seed for example); all this stretching to an efficient life. The author wants the student to seek not a surface or single stratum of himself but to find his plumb center making use of himself.

Thus he would abandon every clandestine egoism and letch toward things extraneous to the real man in order to realize to the full the true root.

That axis in the center is the great root of the universe; that harmony is the universe's outspread process [of existence]. From this root and in this harmony, heaven and earth are established in their precise modalities, and the multitudes of all creatures persist, nourished on their meridians.

Tsze Sze's  
First  
Thesis

*Yang Shih calls this chapter the essential marrow, the true meridian of the work. In the ten following chapters Tsze Sze cites certain phrases of Confucius in order to bring out the full sense of this initial statement.*

## II

I.

Chung Ni (Confucius) said: The master man finds the center and does not waver; the mean man runs counter to the circulation about the invariable.

*The two ideograms chung and yung represent most definitely a process in motion, an axis round which something turns.*

2.

The master man's axis does not wobble. The man of true breed finds this center in season, the small man's center is rigid, he pays no attention to the times and seasons, precisely because

*Why not? The man of true breeding is the mean in action!*



he is a small man and lacking all reverence.

*highly - moral cautious  
in "the fear of the Lord"*

Tsze Sze's  
First  
Thesis

### III

He said: Center oneself in the invariable: some have managed to do this, they have hit the true center, and then? Very few have been able to stay there.

### IV

I.

Kung said: People do not move in the process. And I know why.

Those who know, exceed. (The intelligentia goes to extremes). The monkey-minds don't get started. The process is not understood. The men of talent shoot past it, and the others do not get to it.

but in its utmost not even the sage can know all of the process; the simple and sub-mediocre can follow some of the precepts, but in its utmost not even the sage can realize all of it. Great as are heaven and earth men find something to say against them in criticism; when the man of breed uses the word "great" he means something which nothing can contain; when he defines the minute he means something which nothing can split.

Tsze Sze's  
Second  
Thesis

也 ( )  
道 tas.  
善 good  
者 extensive  
博 application  
施 but  
而 simple  
約 keeping  
守

也 ( )  
言 words  
善 good  
者 遠 far  
指 signification  
而 but  
近 near  
言 words



至也雖聖人亦有所不知

but in its utmost not even the sage can know all of the process; the simple and sub-mediocre can follow some of the precepts, but in its utmost not even the sage can realize all of it. Great as are heaven and earth men find something to say against them in criticism; when the man of breed uses the word "great" he means something which nothing can contain; when he defines the minute he means something which nothing can split.

Tsze Sze's  
Second  
Thesis

	也 ( )		也 ( )
y menchu	道 tas	言 words	
VII. 11. 22	善 good	善 good	
	者	者	
	博 extensive	遠 far	
	施 application	指 significations	
	而 but	而 but	
	約 simple	近 near	
	守 keeping	言 words	

## XVI

1.

Kung said: The spirits of the energies and of the rays have their operative *virtu*.

Tsze Sze's  
Second  
Thesis

The spirits of the energies and the rays are efficient in their *virtu*, expert, perfect as the grain of the sacrifice.

2.

We try to see them and do not see them; we listen and nothing comes in at the ear, but they are in the bones of all things and we can not expel them, they are inseparable, we can not die and leave them behind us.

3.

They impel the people of the whole empire to set in order and make bright the vessels for the sacred grain, to array themselves for the rites, to carry human affairs to the cognizance of the gods with their sacrifice, they seem to move above (the heads of the officiants) as water wool-white in a torrent, and to stand on their right hand and left hand.

4.

These verses are found in the *Odes*:

*The thought of the multitude  
Can not grasp the categories  
Of the thoughts of the spirits  
Circumvolving, but the tense mind  
Can shoot arrows toward them.*

—*Shi King*, III, 3, 2, 7.

盛矣乎視之而弗見聽之



He who understands the meaning  
and the justice of the rites to Earth and  
Heaven will govern a kingdom as if he  
held it lit up in the palm of his hand.

## DUKE NGAI'S QUESTION

### XX

1. The Duke Ngai asked about gov-  
ernment.

2. Kung replied: The government of  
Wen and Wu is clearly recorded on the  
square wooden tablets and on the strips  
of bamboo. Produce such men and a  
government will spring up in their style,  
forget such men and their form of gov-  
ernment will shrivel.

3. If men proceed in sane manner,  
government will spring up quickly, you  
will see how swift is the process of earth  
that causes straight plants to rise up; an  
eminent talent for government will cause  
government to rise as rushes along a  
stream.

*Pauthier notes that the bamboo is both  
hard and supple.*

4. Government is rooted in men, it is  
based on man. And one reaches men  
through oneself.



You discipline yourself with ethics, and ethics are very human; this *humanitas* is the full contents of man, it is the contents of the full man.

Duke  
Ngai's  
Question

One orders a system of ethics with human qualities.

5.

This good will, *humanitas*, ethics, is man. The great thing is affection for relatives, the watching them with affection. Equity is something that springs up from the earth in harmony with earth and with heaven.

*Translator's Note: The ideogram represents the sacrificial vase. Ethics are born from agriculture; the nomad gets no further than the concept of my sheep and thy sheep.*

The great thing [in a system] is to render honor to the honest talent. The rites and forms of courtesy derive from the divers degrees of affection for our relatives and the proportionate honors due to the worthy.

6.

*Legge rejects the next verse and Pauthier translates it: "If the subalterns have not the confidence of their superiors they cannot govern the people." Legge finds that this does not lead to verse 7.*

*The ideogram in dispute shows a hunting dog and a bird under the grass. The hunt-*



不事親思事親不可人不知

*ing dog is a dog in whom one trusts, but he is also a dog who trusts and has confidence in the judgment of the hunter. As the phrase recurs in verse 17, I translate it tentatively in that place.*

Duke  
Ngai's  
Question

7.

Thence the man of breed can not dodge disciplining himself. Thinking of this self-discipline he cannot fail in good acts toward his relatives; thinking of being good to his blood relatives he cannot skimp his understanding of nature and of mankind; wanting to know mankind he must perforce observe the order of nature and of the heavens.

8.

There are five activities of high importance under heaven, and they are practiced with three virtues. I mean there are the obligations between prince and minister; between father and son; between husband and wife; between elder and younger brothers; and between friends. Those are the five obligations that have great effects under heaven. The three efficient virtues are: knowledge, humanity and energy;



言  
乎  
明  
友  
有  
道  
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負  
乎  
見

to attain confidence between friends there is a way or process to follow; if a man cannot get on with his relatives, his friends will not have confidence in him; there is a way to get on with your relatives; if, searching inside yourself, you cannot tell yourself the truth in plain words, you will not get on with your relatives; and for attaining this precision of speech with yourself there is a way; he who does not understand what the good is, will not attain a clear precision in defining himself to himself.

Duke  
Ngai's  
Question

18.

Sincerity, this precision of terms is heaven's process.

What comes from the process in human ethics. The sincere man finds the axis without

*Lin wei chi. Hist. of Confucian Philos. - translate this:*

*It is the way of heaven to be the real. (Cheng)*

*It is the way of ~~man~~ man to attain to the real.*

*To be real is to hit the mean without effort, to possess it without the exercise of thought, & to be centered in the way with natural ease*  
*— this it is to be a sage*



is called nature or inborn talent; sincerity produced by reason is called education, but sincerity [this activity which defines words with precision] will create intelligence as if carved with a knife-blade, and the light of reason will produce sincerity as if cut clean with a scalpel.

Tsze Sze's  
Third  
Thesis

*Tsze Sze takes up the theme of this 21st chapter and reaffirms it in the chapters that follow.*

## XXII

Only the most absolute sincerity under heaven can bring the inborn talent to the full and empty the chalice of the nature.

He who can totally sweep clean the chalice of himself can carry the inborn nature of others to its fulfillment; getting to the bottom of the natures of men, one can thence understand the nature of material things, and this understanding of the nature of things can aid

*Hughes - trans. Gr. Library. Chrys. Philon in Clinic. Pines. p. 42*  
It is only the man who is entirely real in his word of experience who has the power to give full development to his own nature. If he has that power it follows that he has the power to give full development to other men's natures. If he has that power it follows that he has the power to give full development to the natures of all creatures. Thus it is possible for him to be assisting in transforming & nourishing work of heaven & earth. That being so it is possible for him to be part of a turning of power - (heaven, earth & humanity)



and families that are about to rise will give, perforce, happy indications; kingdoms and families about to decay will give forth signs of ill augury. You look at the divining grass and at the turtle's shell; but look at the four limbs.

If ill fortune or good be on the way, one or the other, the good will be recognizable before hand, the ill will be evident before hand, and in this sense absolute sincerity has the power of a spiritual being, it is like a *numen*.

Tsze Sze's  
Third  
Thesis

## XXV

1.

He who defines his words with precision will perfect himself and the process of this perfecting is in the process [that is, in the process par excellence defined in the first chapter, the total process of nature].

"Realization is self completing & the way of it is to be self directing." *Mythos. 41*

2.

Sincerity is the goal of things and their origin, without this sincerity

*Realization is the end as well as the beginning of things for without realization there would be no things at all; hence is the reason why the wise man prizes above everything concerning to be real.*



無  
物  
是  
故  
君  
子  
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之  
爲  
貴

nothing is.

On this meridian the man of breed respects, desires sincerity, holds it in honor and defines his terminology.

Tsze Sze's  
Third  
Thesis

3.

He who possesses this sincerity does not lull himself to somnolence perfecting himself with egocentric aim, but he has a further efficiency in perfecting something outside himself.

Fulfilling himself he attains full manhood, perfecting things outside himself he attains knowledge.

The inborn nature begets this activity naturally, this looking straight into oneself and thence acting. These two activities constitute the process which unites outer and inner, object and subject, and thence constitutes a harmony with the seasons of earth and heaven.

*Heart of the Book.*

(Jen) 仁  
"man-to-man-ness."

## XXVI

1.

Hence the highest grade of this clarifying activity has no limit, it neither stops nor stays.

*"The sequel is that entire nature never ceases for a moment."*

2.

Not coming to a stop, it endures; continuing durable, it arrives at the minima [the seeds whence movement springs].



徵則悠遠悠遠則博厚博

3.

From these hidden seeds it moves forth slowly but goes far and with slow but continuing motion it penetrates the solid, penetrating the solid it comes to shine forth on high.

*Tsze Sze's  
Third  
Thesis*

4.

With this penetration of the solid it has effects upon things, with this shining from on high, that is with its clarity of comprehension, now here, now yonder, it stands in the emptiness above with the sun, seeing and judging, interminable in space and in time, searching, enduring, and therewith it perfects even external things.

5.

In penetrating the solid it is companion to the brotherly earth [offers the cup of mature wine to the earth] standing on high with the light of the intellect it is companion of heaven persisting in the vast, and in the vast of time, without limit set to it.

6.

Being thus in its nature; unseen it causes harmony; unmoving it transforms; unmoved



而成天地之道可壹言而

it perfects.

7.

The celestial and earthly process can be defined in a single phrase; its actions and its creations have no duality. [The arrow has not two points].

*Tsze Sze's*

*Third  
Thesis*

There is no measuring its model for the creation of things.

*tse pu ts'e*

8.

The celestial and earthly process pervades and is substantial; it is on high and gives light, it comprehends the light and is lucent, it extends without bound, and endures.

9.

In the heavens present to us, there shine separate sparks, many and many, scintillant, but the beyond [what is beyond them] is not like a corpse in a shut cavern.

Sun, moon and the stars, the sun's children, the signs of the zodiac measuring the times, warners of transience, it carries all these suspended, thousand on thousand, looking down from above the multitude of things created,



it carries them, now here, now there, keeping watch over them, inciting them, it divides the times of their motions; they are bound together, and it determines their successions in a fixed order. The visible heaven is but one among many.

*Tsze Sze's  
Third  
Thesis*

This earth that bears you up is a handful of sand, but in its weight and dusky large, it holds The Flower Mount and Dog Mountain without feeling the weight of them; Hoang Ho, the river, and the oceans surge and the earth loses not a drop of their waters, holding them in their beds, containing the multitude of their creatures.

Mount Upholder that you now look upon is but a fold of rock amid many, a pebble, and on its sides grow the grasses and trees, sheltering wild fowl and the partridge, the four-footed beasts and stags; gems are hidden within it abundantly that were for delight or for commerce.

This water is but a spoonful

覆  
正  
焉  
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夫  
地  
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撮  
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