

THE USE OF THE WORD JEN IN THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS

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THE problem connected with the use of Jen in the Analects is altogether different from that involved in the use of Tao. Compared with most of the other important words in Chinese thought, Jen is easy to translate. There is nothing mystical about it, and all writers use it in approximately the same sense.

The Hsueh Wen says that Jen is composed of two characters, Jen, or man, and Erh, or Two. Chinese commentators agree that Erh has the significance of Lin, or neighbor. In other words, the whole character is concerned with the relations between a man, and the other men with whom he comes in contact. This relation is defined by the Hsueh Wen as Ch'in. The word Ch'in as a noun means relatives or family, but here it seems to be a verb, meaning "to treat as a relative." The word, then, not only stands for a man's relations or attitude toward others, but also signifies what that attitude ought to be. One should treat all men as if they were members of his own family, that is, he should love them. In this sense it has become the chief Confucian virtue. Ch'en Hsuan, a scholar of the 18th Century, explains Jen as "to love others equally."

In the Analects, Jen is used as an adjective and as a noun. The usual verb is Ai, to love, but the two are equated. Jen, unlike the English word love, applies only to the virtue of benevolence, and not to the affection between the sexes, but Ai is used in both senses. Confucius sometimes uses Jen in such a sweeping way as to include in it all the virtues, and so Legge and other translators occasionally translate it by virtue, but the fundamental meaning of the word is love, or benevolence. Chu Hsi points out that love does include all the virtues.

The *Tsu Yuen*, a modern source book of words and phrases, gives three uses of the word.

1—It is the principle that makes man man, the essence of humanity. To love men unselfishly is Jen.

2—A kernel.

3—A negative use. When a man is unable to use his limbs, his body is not Jen.

These last two uses need not be considered. The *Tsu Yuen* also gives thirty common phrases in which Jen occurs.

In the *Analects* the word is used 109 times. It is the central word of Confucian ethics, the keystone of the arch. This is in direct opposition to the Taoists, who belittle the virtues in general and Jen in particular, Chuang Tzu even going so far as to say that to love men is the way to injure them. Jen really comes into its own in the *Analects*, so much so that an American writer has recently said that in Jen, Confucius introduced a new concept into Chinese thought. This is hardly accurate, for the word occurs eight times in the *Tao Teh Ching*, as well as in earlier classics, but its use before Confucius is not so frequent, nor so important.

When used as an adjective, the word is translated as good, benevolent or virtuous.

"The Jen man first considers. . . ." (6, 20).

"The Master said, 'Yu is not Jen. . . .'" (17, 21, 6). This was because Yu did not have the right attitude toward his parents.

"The Jen man will not seek to live by injuring Jen." (15, 8). Here the meaning could be freely rendered by, "The benevolent man would rather die than do anything unkind." The word is used both as a noun and as an adjective in the same sentence.

The interesting point in the way that Confucius uses Jen is this. He very seldom speaks about it without being asked, and when he uses it unasked, he says very little about it except that it is a fine thing. The last quotation is a good example. To say that a Jen man would rather die than injure Jen really does not tell much about what Jen is. Jen is used so often in the *Analects*, and is so important in the history of Confucian doctrine, that western scholars have paid little attention to the evident reluctance of Confucius to define exactly what he meant by the word. This reluctance was brought out even more clearly when he was forced to speak on the subject. Evidently the definition of Jen was a matter of vital importance to the disciples. Again and again they questioned Con-

fucius about it. Confucius was too honest to avoid the question, but usually, instead of attempting a clear cut definition, he applied the word to the needs of the one who had inquired. The result was that each time he was asked about Jen, he gave a different answer.

Fan Ch'ih asked concerning Jen. He asked three times, and received the following answers.

"The Jen man first considers the difficulty of his task, and afterwards thinks of acquisition." (6, 20).

"The Master said, 'It is to love men.'" (12, 22). The subject of this sentence is Jen, while the predicate is Ai.

"To be grave at home, reverent in business, and loyal to men." (13, 19, 1).

Of these replies, only the second gives much satisfaction to one seeking a definition.

Yen Hui asked concerning Jen.

"The Master said, 'To subdue oneself, and restore propriety.'" (12, 1, 1).

Yen Hui was persistent and asked what the steps in this process were. He was told not to look, listen, speak nor act except according to Li, which may be inadequately translated as propriety.

Chung Kung asked concerning Jen, and was told:

"When abroad, (to behave) as if receiving a guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; that which you do not wish for yourself, do not give to (other) men." This last is the Confucian version of the Golden Rule, which in the Chinese is positive as well as negative. (12, 2).

Szu-ma Niu asked concerning Jen.

"Jen is to be slow and cautious in speech." (12, 13, 1). It is explained that this is because the Jen man realizes the difficulty of acting correctly.

Tzu Chang asked concerning Jen. The form of the reply is, "Confucius said," instead of the usual "the Master said," which may indicate a different source for this section. The answer was:

"To be able to practice five things everywhere." (17, 6) These five are humility, generosity, sincerity, earnestness and kindness.

Tzu Kung asked, "If a man confers benefits on the people and is able to assist all, is this Jen?" (6, 28, 1).

"The Master said, 'Why speak of Jen only? Such a man would be a sage. The Jen man, wishing to establish himself, establishes

others; wishing to enlarge himself, enlarges others; to judge by what is near; this is the art of Jen."

In this quotation, Jen appears to be only a part of perfect virtue, or holiness, but this point depends upon whether the character Hu, which ends the first sentence, is to be interpreted as a sign of interrogation, or of exclamation. The passage is difficult to put into English, especially the words translated "establish" and "enlarge."

These passages show that Jen was a subject of intense interest to the disciples, mostly young men of noble families who came to Confucius for instruction in politics and ethics. They belonged to a class which considered the government of the country as their profession, and they regarded their instruction from the sage as a very practical preparation for an official career. Yen Hui was thirty-one when he died, and Tseng Tzu was twenty-six at the time of Confucius' death. No higher tribute could be paid to the best Chinese society of the time than that it regarded the kind of instruction which Confucius gave as the proper preparation for a life of government service.

The passages also show how Confucius varied his answers to the man he addressed, and the theory is advanced in this paper that they also indicate his reluctance to speak on the subject of Jen, or to give a definition of his position. On occasions where he does not appear to have been questioned, his remarks contribute little to an understanding of the word.

"I have not seen a person who loved Jen. . . . He who loved Jen, would value nothing above it." (4, 6, 1). He goes on to say that one always has the strength to be Jen, and then qualifies this by saying that if there were an instance where Jen was unattainable, he had never seen it.

"The Master said, 'Where Jen is involved, a man must not yield even to his teacher.'" (15, 35).

"The Master said, 'Firmness, endurance, simplicity and modesty, are near to Jen.'" (13, 27).

"Even if an ideal ruler arose, it would require a generation for Jen to prevail." (13, 12).

While these are valuable statements, they do not help much in determining what Confucius' idea of Jen was. Neither does the remark of Tseng Tzu, (8, 7, 2), that Jen is the life-long responsibility of the scholar.

The difficulty is, that here is what seems to be a relatively simple

word, yet it is necessary for the disciples to question Confucius about it over and over again, and except in one passage, they find it impossible to get a clear answer. That Confucius was really reticent on the subject is apparent from the following passage.

"The Master seldom spoke of profit, of the Decree, and of Jen." (9, 1).

This raises a serious problem, especially for those who have translated Jen by virtue. The word occurs in the Analects, which is a short book, 109 times. To say that Confucius seldom spoke of virtue is absurd, for he seldom spoke of anything else. Soothill and Legge translate the word here by "perfect virtue," meaning, probably, that he would not admit anyone to have been perfect. That he did not accept anyone to have completely realized Jen is true, but that is not what this passage says. It maintains that Confucius seldom discussed the word which is used in the book of his collected sayings 109 times. Soothill ignores the problem in his notes, but Legge is frank enough to admit that there is a problem, and that he does not know how to solve it. Why should Confucius be said to have seldom discussed the very word for which he is famous, the key to the system which goes by his name, especially when that word appears on nearly half the pages of the book which records his conversation?

There is only one explanation which is at all adequate. It is that Confucius was really reluctant to speak on the subject, but that he was forced to do so by his disciples. At the time he was teaching, the word must have been under constant discussion among the class of men from whom Confucius drew his pupils, but probably the exact meaning had not been determined, or a new content was being given it in a period of change and ferment. Lao Tze and Confucius were the leaders, but there must have been many men who were discussing and analysing the same problems with which they dealt. It was a time of intense intellectual activity and stimulus, and the content of the word Jen was of vital importance. Confucius realized the difficulty as well as the importance, and therefore he avoided the subject unless he was forced to consider it. The disciples rendered a great service by compelling him to discuss it, for in his answers he reached some of the highest points ever attained by the human mind.

The analysis of the character shows that it stands for the relation of a man to his neighbors. It is not unreasonable, then, for us

to interpret the question which the disciples asked so often in this way.

“What is my duty toward my neighbor?”

That question was discussed several hundred years later in Palestine. There also the Master refused to give a definition as an answer, replying by a story.

“Who is my neighbor?”

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. . . .”

Confucius gave answers which show that his view was strikingly like that of Christ. He applied the word to the man. For one, it meant devotion to his parents, for another, to be slow in speech, for a third, to gain self-control, for a fourth, to behave according to the recognized rules of society. Love, then, is a principle which each man must apply for himself. It is an attitude rather than a rule of conduct, and that is probably why Confucius was so reluctant to discuss it. His disciples, like the Jews, wanted hard and fast rules, such as to give a tenth of one's income to charity. Confucius, like Christ, tried to avoid saying anything that could be crystallized into such a rule. His answers show that he considered love to include all the virtues, even self-respect and self-control; that it was not sentimental, for it must be firm and just; that it did not obliterate the distinctions of society, for it included the proper treatment of parents and the recognition of moral obligations and customs. And above all, Jen was universal, since it meant to love all men. A man should love his neighbor as himself, or as Confucius put it, what he did not wish for himself, he should not give to others. It is not surprising that the ethical teaching of the Chinese should center about the word Jen, or that Confucius should be eulogized as “The teacher of 10,000 generations.”