



‘Man can enlarge the Way. It is not the Way that enlarges man’ .. (柯蔼蓝)
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Today I would like to elaborate on this aspect of rectification through the broadening of meaning. I will attend to the dialectic of expansion and condensation which I detect in the book, focusing on the differing attitude to words (in prose) and in poetry, and specifically, to the Master's reverent attitude to (or delight in) poetry when contrasted to his reservations, sometimes even abhorrence to words (in prose). While suspicious and distrustful of prose-words to the extent of sometimes wanting to abandon them altogether and be silent, Confucius turns for help to the words of poetry, which he believes to be more dependable and amenable.

But we may ask, what is it in the words of poetry that makes them so much safer? Quotations from the Book of Poems and references to them in the Analects, always point to their ways of resonating and inspiring. The poetic simile, metaphor, analogy - the beauty of their brevity and immediacy as well as their rich traditional background - will drive the disciple on in his understanding of things to hand and in his moral learning.

Juxtaposing words (in prose) and poetry illuminates other dichotomies, emphasizing that which is explicit and what is implicit, the abstract and the concrete, the external and the internal, public and private. Their intermingling reflects a lively process demanding of disciple and reader actively to connect the cognitive and the applied. The building up of a system of thought and its simultaneous internalization and application are tightly enmeshed and inter-dependent.

Quotations from the Book of Odes are not abundant in the Analects, but the few references to the older text and by implication to poetry as such, are most emphatic in their purport and tone of voice: ‘To be a man and not to study the Chou nan and the Shao nan [the opening sections of the Book of Odes],’ says Confucius to his

son Bo Yu, ‘is [I would say], to stand squarely facing the wall’ . (D.C. Lau). And in a conversation between Chen Kang and Bo Yu, the latter quotes his father as saying: ‘Unless you study the Odes, you will be ill-equipped to speak. I retired and studied the Odes...’ (Lau).

The actual quotations from the Book of Poetry are partial, short, and taken out of context, but poetry in the Analects is always associated with broadening out and unfolding. In ch. I.15 Zi Gong replies to the Master's words with a quotation of a poem. The Master, although amending the disciple's interpretation, responds: †

‘Ah, One can really begin to discuss the Poems with you! I tell you one thing, and you can figure out the rest’ . (Leys)

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