



‘Man can enlarge the Way. It is not the Way that enlarges man’ .. (柯蔼蓝)  
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Spring and Autumn period, the ability to use its contents for a sophisticated, indirect response, was a part of the speech culture and mainly of diplomatic exchange. All this is familiar.] But I would reiterate here that the Analects’ approach to the Poems, and the intermingling in the book of verse and pithy dramatic quotation with descriptive and prescriptive prose, constitutes a profound observation on the nature of the language of ethics. By their nature, words are communal, and wording forms an edifice created for the building up and communicating (among other things) our verbalized ethical systems. [However] Poetic words and phrases, in addition, communicate personal expression, in harmony with the inner self and thus more closely related to the individual. [‘...Metaphor,’ in the words of V.Y.C. Shih, ‘ transforms an abstract and elusive mental state into a concrete perception and intuitive experience.;’ ‘...metaphor is therefore able to transform abstract ideas into concrete things and present them intuitively to our senses, enabling us to perceive the essence of truth...’ ]

There is a further way of discourse in the Analects alluding to the same expanding-condensing, prose-poetic dialectic. It is the aim of summarizing important concepts or tenets by means of a saying or a single sentence (in Chinese 一言 - one word, one saying ).

I will mention four such cases here:

(1) In ch.II.2 the Master says: ‘ In the Book of Poetry are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in one sentence: Having no depraved thoughts’ (Legge). It is the shortest summary possible (three words in Chinese), but also the broadest.

(2) In ch.IV.15, the Master says, Shen, my doctrine has one single thread running through it. When Master Zeng Shen is asked by the other disciples what the Master meant, he replies: ‘ The doctrine of the Master is: Loyalty and reciprocity, and that

is all’ . (Leys). For another similar example, see ch.xv.3, where the Master says, ‘ I have one single thread on which to string all things’ .

(3) A further statement, (the same chapter as the Zheng ming paragraph(!)) points even more directly at the relation between language and reality. It emerges from Duke Ding s question: ‘ Is there such a thing as a single saying ( word ) that can make a state prosper?’ and again, ‘ Is there such a thing as a single saying that can make a state perish?’

Confucius answers: ‘ A saying cannot quite do that,’ and then refers to a popular saying ( a saying amongst men ), that may be used here .

This is a strange (if not altogether humorous) answer indeed, perhaps further emphasizing doubt as to the power of words.

(4) My last example is Zigong’ s request for a single word that could guide an entire life. To this the Master answers: ‘ Should it not be reciprocity? What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to

others' (Leys).

[It is also worthwhile noting that the one single word intended as a guide throughout life is a word which refers to a procedure derived by way of analogy - putting oneself in the place of the other in order to fathom what he might wish.]

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