Confucius – The Analects (excerpts)

Book I:

4. Tseng Tzu said, ‘Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself?’

11. The Master said, ‘Observe what a man has in mind to do when his father is living, and then observe what he does when his father is dead. If, for three years, he makes no changes to his father’s ways, he can be said to be a good son.’

Book II:

2. The Master said, ‘The Odes are three hundred in number. They can be summed up in one phrase,
   Swerving not from the right path.’

3. The Master said, ‘Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.’

4. The Master said, ‘At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was atuned; at seventy I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line.’

10. The Master said, ‘Look at the means a man employs, observe the path he takes and examine where he feels at home. In what way is a man’s true character hidden from view? In what way is a man’s true character hidden from view?’

15. The Master said, ‘If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.’

22. The master said, ‘I do not see how a man can be acceptable who is untrustworthy in word? When a pin is missing in the yoke-bar of a large cart or in the collar-bar of a small cart, how can the cart be expected to go?’

Book III:

23. The Master talked of music to the Grand Musician of Lu, saying, ‘This much can be known about music. It begins with playing in unison. When it gets into full swing, it is harmonious, clear and unbroken. In this way it reaches the conclusion.’
Book IV:

4. The Master said, ‘If a man sets his heart on benevolence, he will be free from evil.’

25. The Master said, ‘Virtue never stands alone. It is bound to have neighbors.’

Book VI:

20. The Master said, ‘To be fond of something is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it.’

21. The Master said, ‘You can tell those who are above average about the best, but not those who are below average.’

22. Fan Ch’ih asked about wisdom. The Master said, ‘To work for the things the common people have a right to and to keep one’s distance from the gods and spirits while showing them reverence can be called wisdom.’
   Fan Ch’ih asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘The benevolent man reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties. That can be called benevolence.’

Book VII:

10. On a day he had wept, the Master did not sing.

12. The Master said, ‘If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard holding a whip outside the market place. If it is not, I shall follow my own preferences.’

Book VIII:

8. The Master said, ‘Be stimulated by the Odes, take your stand on the rites and be perfected by music.’

Book IX:

4. There were four things the Master refused to have anything to do with: he refused to entertain conjectures or insist on certainty; he refused to be inflexible or to be egotistical.

14. The Master wanted to settle amongst the Nine Barbarian Tribes of the east. Someone said, ‘But could you put up with their uncouth ways?’ The Master said, ‘Once a gentleman settles amongst them, what uncouthness will there be?’
Book XI:

12. Chi-lu asked how the spirits of the dead and the gods should be served. The Master said, ‘You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?’
   ‘May I ask about death?’
   ‘You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?’

18. The Master said, ‘Ch’ai is stupid; Ts’an is slow; Shih is onesided; Yu is forthright.’

Book XII:

7. Tzu-kung asked about government. The Master said, ‘Give them enough food, give them enough arms, and the common people will have trust in you.’
   Tzu-kung said, ‘If one had to give up one of these three, which should one give up first?’
   ‘Give up arms.’
   Tzu-kung said, ‘If one had to give up one of the remaining two, which should one give up first?’
   ‘Give up food. Death has always been with us since he beginning of time, but when there is no trust, the common people will have nothing to stand on.’

23. Tzu-kung asked about how friends should be treated. The Master said, ‘Advise them to the best of your ability and guide hem properly, but stop when there is no hope of success. Do not ask to be snubbed.’

Book XIII:

6. The Master said, ‘If a man is correct in his own person, then there will be obedience without orders being given; but if he is not correct in his own person, there will not be obedience even though orders are given.’

Book XIV:

20. The Master said, ‘Claims made immodestly are difficult to live up to.’

24. The Master said, ‘Men of antiquity studied to improve themselves; men today study to impress others.’

34. Someone said,
   ‘Repay an injury with a good turn.
   What do you think of this saying?’
   The Master said, ‘What, then, do you repay a good turn with?
   You repay an injury with straightness, but you repay a good turn with a good turn.’
Book XV:

8. The Master said, ‘To fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefitting is to let a man go to waste. To speak to a man who is incapable of benefitting is to let one’s words go to waste. A wise man lets neither men nor words go to waste.’

13. The Master said, ‘I suppose I should give up hope. I have yet to meet the man who is as fond of virtue as he is of beauty in women.’

21. The Master said, ‘What the gentleman seeks, he seeks within himself; what the small man seeks, he seeks in others.’

31. The Master said, ‘I once spent all day thinking without taking food and all night thinking without going to bed, but I found that I have gained nothing from it. It would have been better for me to have spent the time in learning.’

39. The Master said, ‘In instruction there is no separation into categories.’

Book XVII:

2. The Master said, ‘Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge as a result of repeated practice.’

3. The Master said, ‘It is only the most intelligent and the most stupid who are not susceptible to change.’

26. The Master said, ‘If by the age of forty a man is still disliked there is no hope for him.’