

# *An Explication of the Great Unity Through the Functioning of Propriety*

*-by Confucius*

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WHEN THE GREAT WAY PREVAILS, EVERYTHING UNDER HEAVEN IS PUBLIC. THOSE WHO ARE WORTHY AND CAPABLE ARE SELECTED FOR PUBLIC OFFICE. PEOPLE ARE TRUSTWORTHY AND HARMONIOUS TO THE POINT THAT THEY CHERISH NOT ONLY THEIR OWN, BUT ALL PARENTS, AND CARE FOR NOT ONLY THEIR OWN, BUT ALL CHILDREN. THE ELDERLY LIVE OUT THEIR YEARS IN PEACE; THOSE IN THEIR PRIME ARE USEFULLY EMPLOYED; AND THE YOUNG ARE BROUGHT UP PROPERLY. WIDOWERS, WIDOWS, ORPHANS, AND THE SOLITARY AS WELL AS THE CRIPPLED AND DISEASED ARE ALL PROVIDED FOR. MEN HAVE THEIR ROLES, AND WOMEN HAVE THEIR PLACE TO RETURN TO. NATURAL RESOURCES ARE NEVER WASTED. THEY ARE NOT APPROPRIATED FOR SELFISH ENDS. PEOPLE ONLY FEAR THAT THEY WON'T CONTRIBUTE ENOUGH OF THEIR OWN STRENGTH; THEY DO NOT ACT FOR THEIR OWN GAIN. THEREFORE, SCHEMING AND CONSPIRACY DO NOT ARISE, AND THEFT, ROBBERY, AND REBELLION CEASE TO OCCUR. GATES AND DOORS NEED NOT BE LOCKED. THAT IS KNOWN AS THE GREAT UNITY.

The teachings of the three schools of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism follow upon each other. They can be likened to elementary school, high school, and college. And just as with the levels of education, so too, these teachings are such that "the one below isn't able to know the one above." An elementary student is unable to fathom the state of a high school student. A high school student is unable to understand the state of a college student.

Confucius taught the principle of how to become a good person, how to mold one's character correctly. In Taoism, half of the teaching also involves developing a good character, and the other half involves cultivating transcendental dharmas. That is why the Taoist masters do not shave their heads, but keep long hair and beards instead. In that respect they are just like ordinary people. But the clothes they wear are like the clothes of the hermits of old--the same sorts of robes and hats.

Buddhist bhikshus shave their beards, and monks and nuns alike shave their heads and wear clothes of a neutral shade. Buddhist left-home people are not interested in wearing beautiful clothes because they do not place emphasis on externals. However, their kashayas never leave their bodies, so they always maintain the appearance of Shramanas.

Bhikshus and bhikshunis cultivate world-transcending dharmas. Since those dharmas transcend worldly dharmas, does that mean they are apart from worldly dharmas? Does that mean that apart from worldly dharmas there is something which is Buddhadharma? No. That is not the way it is. Rather, the Buddhadharma is simply recognizing worldly dharmas clearly and not being confused by them.

And so there are the three teachings--Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The analogy often used to describe them is of the red lotus, the white root, and the green leaves.

Red flower, white root, green leaves:  
The three teachings are originally one family.

Because of their sequential connection, the basis of Buddhism--the beginning of faith in Buddhism--can be found within Confucianism. What is that? It is because when you begin to study, you must first understand the principles that govern how to be a good person. Those principles are found within Confucianism. Then once your character is established, you can begin to seek a method with which to cultivate the Way. At that point, quite often people first encounter Taoism. That is how it happened to me when I was in Manchuria. I met up with many different kinds of cults and sects. However, I knew that they were not ultimate. Finally, I went into Buddhism. And so it is said that there are not two roads by which to return, yet the doors of expedients are many.

This particular essay contains the most essential principles upon which the Confucian School is founded. Confucius himself wrote this essay. In it he discusses

1. cultivating the person,
2. uniting the family,
3. governing the country, and
4. regulating everything under heaven.

To successfully do those things, he points out that we must

5. rectify our minds,
6. make our intent sincere,
7. investigate the nature of things, and
8. perfect our knowledge.

These Eight Conditions are all brought together in this short essay. Furthermore it contains Three Major Tenets:

1. brightening our virtue,
2. cherishing the people, and
3. perfecting our goodness.

"Brightening our virtue" refers not only to making one's own virtue shine but also to teaching and transforming other people so they too can brighten their virtue.

"Cherishing the people" means being concerned about them. It means informing all the citizens about the Proper Path, so that they can become people who truly understand principle.

"Perfecting our goodness" means the gathering together of everyone into the best of all possible places.

This essay is about how propriety functions. From the description of propriety set forth in this essay, people can understand the principles of propriety and can conduct themselves in accord with those principles. This means that each person should be able to transport himself or herself to the Proper Way. Everyone should be able to move from a place of not understanding to a place of understanding. There should be a ceaseless movement down the road that is proper. To be able to transport oneself in that way is to understand propriety.

TEXT: AN EXPLICATION OF THE GREAT UNITY THROUGH THE FUNCTIONING OF PROPRIETY.

THE GREAT UNITY is an ideal in which everyone in the entire world belongs to one family. Everyone regards everyone else as they do themselves. They don't try to cheat others. Everyone is extensively united. But we should not mistake the term "great unity" for Communism. Those who advocate Communism wish for others to join with them, but they do not want to join with others. They tell others, "You have to join up with me," but they will not unite with others. That makes the big difference between Communism and the "great unity." The ideal of the "great unity" maintains that you and I are the same. There are no discriminations between this and that, you and me, them and us, right and wrong.

TEXT: WHEN THE GREAT WAY PERVAILS, EVERYTHING UNDER HEAVEN IS PUBLIC.

THE GREAT WAY is that which everyone together cultivates. It is the rules by which we conduct ourselves. Anyone can travel that Great Way: it is not a private road, it is a public highway, a freeway. It is a vast, extensive road. If you are cultivating the Great Way then you are taking a bright path. If I am cultivating the Great Way, then I am taking a bright path. In that case, our road is the same and is equally bright. There isn't any darkness on that road. That's how it is when everything in the universe is public. There is nothing in the universe that is the least bit selfish. There is no contention, no greed, no selfishness, no seeking, and no pursuit of self-benefit. Anyone who can penetrate through those Five Great Principles and bring them to accomplishment is someone public-spirited. The essay states that the function of the Great Way is to be public-spirited throughout the entire universe.

TEXT: THOSE WHO ARE WORTHY AND CAPABLE ARE SELECTED FOR PUBLIC OFFICE.

All of the rulers--the government officials, legislators, and cabinet members are elected on the basis of their moral virtue and capabilities. A country only thrives if it is governed by those who possess true wisdom.

TEXT: PEOPLE ARE TRUSTWORTHY AND HARMONIOUS TO THE POINT THAT THEY CHERISH NOT ONLY THEIR OWN, BUT ALL PARENTS, AND CARE FOR NOT ONLY THEIR OWN, BUT ALL CHILDREN.

Between countries there is mutual trust and fidelity, a spirit of cooperation among allies. Among people, too, there is harmony and accord. People don't fight. Countries don't go to war. Everyone values the righteousness of the Tao. Because the society is so public-minded, people are not just concerned with their own parents or their own relatives alone. Rather, an attitude of "I regard and care for all elderly people as I would my own parents; I provide for all young people as I would my own children" prevails. People cherish all young people as they would their own children.

TEXT: THE ELDERLY LIVE OUT THEIR YEARS IN PEACE.

The problem of providing for and nourishing the aged figures as an important issue in governing a country. A successful governing body will provide amply for the elderly and render them the respect that is due them. Rest homes should be peaceful and secure places where the aged can live out their natural lifespans in peace with their needs fulfilled so that they feel no loneliness, fear, or alienation.

TEXT: THOSE IN THEIR PRIME ARE USEFULLY EMPLOYED.

"Those in their prime" refers to ablebodied adults. They should be encouraged to take up their social responsibilities and utilize their skills to the fullest. They should not rely on welfare; they should be properly employed and encouraged to use all their abilities to help protect and benefit society. They should not be allowed to be idle and to just collect unemployment. People who collect unemployment may argue that it is due them, since they were taxed for it when then were employed. Of course there is nothing wrong with collecting unemployment if one suddenly and unexpectedly loses one's job. But one should not deliberately avoid work and make a habit of living off unemployment. Furthermore, if unemployment compensation is granted, it should be granted for one month at a time. By the end of a month, the person who is unemployed should be found another job. It shouldn't be the case that a person is allowed to remain unemployed for an indefinite period of time and at the same time to collect unemployment compensation to pay for his living expenses. To dispense unemployment in such a liberal and unrestrained manner is not a healthy way to run a country. In such a situation, people will develop attitudes of dependence and lose their sense of self-respect as well as their initiative. To allow that to happen is not to not in accord with the principle that "those in their prime are usefully employed."

TEXT: THE YOUNG ARE PROPERLY BROUGHT UP.

While people are young, they should be well-taught so that they learn how to be filial to their parents, how to be loyal to their country, to their employers, and to the society at large. These principles should be instilled in children while they are still young. The principles upon which Instilling Virtue and Cultivating Virtue Schools are founded accord exactly with the principles presented in this essay. In our elementary schools we advocate filiality. In the secondary schools we advocate loyalty to one's country. If all students everywhere could understand and embrace these principles, each country would certainly be a good one.

TEXT: WIDOWERS, WIDOWS, ORPHANS, AND THE SOLITARY AS WELL AS THE CRIPPLED AND DISEASED ARE ALL PROVIDED FOR.

WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS are people whose spouses have died. ORPHANS are children whose parents have died or who are separated from them for some other reason. THE SOLITARY refers to elderly people who are alone and destitute. THE CRIPPLED are those who are maimed and disabled and THE DISEASED are those who are sick. These four categories are considered the four major types of unfortunate people. When Emperor Wen of the Chou Dynasty (1122-255 B.C.) ascended the throne and drastically modified the administration in order to compassionately govern the people, he especially provided for these four major types of people.

TEXT: MEN HAVE THEIR ROLES, AND WOMEN HAVE THEIR PLACE TO RETURN TO.

The men all have their jobs and responsibilities and the women all have their places to be. Each of the sexes know their respective roles and they do not switch them around and get confused about their positions. The women do not try to usurp the positions of the men and the men do not try to take on the roles of the women. If that were to happen, they would all become upside down. Women should not try to be boss and strive for power and authority. The meaning of this sentence of the essay is that the men's jobs are performed outside the home; the women's jobs are performed inside the home. Each has a position appropriate to him or her. There is no rivalry or confusion.

*-continued next issue*

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