

1-16 子曰：「不患人之不己之，患不知人也。」

1-16 The Master said: “Do not be concerned that no one recognizes you. Be concerned that you may not recognize others”

A junzi does not worry that others do not recognize his ability. If you have the ability, others will naturally recognize that you are capable. Instead, you should be concerned that you are not able to recognize the abilities of other people. Historically, a junzi’s purpose was to contribute to the development and leadership of a country. By being unable to recognize other people of ability, this would instead hinder a country because you are unable to utilize the people to the best of their ability.

2-4 子曰。吾十有五而志於學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。

2-4 The Master said: “At fifteen my heart was set on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty I was without confusion; at fifty I knew the mandate of heaven; at sixty my ear was open to all opinions; at seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing what is right.

- 15 - Studied how to be a Junzi, wholistic viewpoints, trained in school around other kids in ethics and ceremony. “Learning” here is not just book study, but moral cultivation, understanding human relationships, and aligning with virtue.
- 30 - Understood his lifetime goal of learning li. By 30, he had established himself — meaning he had found stability in character, values, and career.
- 40 - Had a clear view on all types of things right and wrong in society (all things like politics, phenomena will not delude him)
- 50 - Understood his destiny, had wisdom on everything in the world and could complete God's will.
- 60 - Had a great capacity, can tell mindset of others around him and could

not be influenced from the truth

- 70 - Achieve harmony inside and out - He could do what he wanted without worrying about breaking moral or social rules, because his desires naturally aligned with Virtue.

2-11子曰。溫故而知新，可以為師矣。

2-11 The Master said: “By reviewing what you have learned and learning anew, you are fit to be a teacher.”

Henry 的筆記 (Henry's note):

Confucius is not only talking about studying hard but also emphasizing reflection and growth. True learning is not just memorizing facts but constantly connecting old lessons with new insights.

Confucius believed that knowledge should not stay static. When we review what we've learned, we deepen our understanding. As we encounter new experiences, we reinterpret old ideas in a fresh way. This process turns knowledge into wisdom.

For example, imagine reading a book you loved as a teenager and reading it again as an adult. The words haven't changed, but your understanding has — because you've grown. That's “reviewing the old and learning the new.”

Confucius says that someone who can do this is ready to teach — not just because they know a lot, but because they understand how knowledge evolves. A good teacher never stops learning.

In our modern world, this idea is still very relevant. Technology, science, and culture change rapidly. If we only rely on what we learned years ago, our knowledge becomes outdated. We must constantly “review the old” — reflect on past experiences — while “learning the new” — staying curious and open-minded.

For students, this means connecting what you've learned before with new topics. For teachers and professionals, it means lifelong learning — staying

humble and adaptable.

Even in relationships or self-growth, reflecting on the past helps us make wiser decisions in the future. That's the spirit of this teaching.

So, “溫故而知新” reminds us that wisdom comes from a balance between remembering and discovering — between the old and the new. When we keep learning with reflection, we not only improve ourselves but also become capable of guiding others. That is the heart of Confucius message — and a timeless lesson for all of us.

課長補充的部分 (Supplement from the predecessor):

From the perspective of self-cultivation or spiritual practice, this saying has an even deeper meaning.

“Reviewing the old” is not only about recalling knowledge from books — it also means reflecting on past experiences, emotions, and actions. In spiritual practice, this reflection helps us see our own patterns: our attachments, mistakes, and progress. By understanding our past clearly, we gain wisdom about how we've grown and where we still need to improve.

“Learning the new,” then, means renewing our understanding in the present moment. Each day gives us new lessons through our thoughts, relationships, and challenges. When we face them with awareness, our old experiences transform into new insights.

In this way, Confucius reminds us that real wisdom is not fixed; it is alive. Self-cultivation is a continuous cycle of reflection and awakening — looking back with honesty and moving forward with clarity.

When a person can do this consistently — reflect deeply and keep learning — they naturally become a guide or a teacher to others. Not because they want to lead, but because their life itself becomes an example of growth and understanding.

2-12 子曰：「君子不器。」

2-12 The noble man is not a utensil.

What does he mean by a utensil? A utensil is something that serves only one or a few specific purposes — like a fork or a spoon. Each has a limited function; it can only do certain things and nothing beyond that. When Confucius compares a person to a utensil, he's pointing out that someone who can only perform one task, or has a narrow range of skills, is limited in their potential.

A Junzi, however, should not be like that. A Junzi is meant to be well-rounded — someone who can adapt, learn, and grow in many different areas of life. It means developing oneself not just in one skill, but in many aspects: learning how to communicate, how to host and interact with people, how to manage responsibilities, and how to cultivate both wisdom and compassion. This idea reminds us that personal cultivation is about becoming a complete person — flexible, balanced, and capable in many dimensions.

If we confine ourselves to only one function, we reduce our own potential. But as human beings, we have immense creativity and ability; we can shape and achieve far more than what a single “utensil” could ever do. To live as a true Junzi, then, is to continually expand our knowledge, character, and understanding — never allowing ourselves to be limited by a single role or label.

2-13 子貢問君子。子曰：先行其言、而后從之。

2-13 Zi Gong asked about the character of the noble man. Confucius said: First he practices what he preaches and then he follows it.

孔子強調言行一致的重要性，並把行動置於語言之前，認為這是建立君子誠信的基礎

Confucius emphasizes the importance of consistency between words and

actions, placing deeds before speech, as this is the foundation for establishing the trustworthiness of a junzi.

A junzi cultivates himself by acting before speaking

A noble man does more and speaks less. He works quietly, revealing his achievements only once they are complete.

A person of genuine virtue observes matters calmly along the way, rectifying what is lacking and supporting what is incomplete.

He doesn't flaunt what he has done, he simply acts in silence

2-14 子曰。君子周而不比、小人比而不周。

2-14 The Master said: "The noble man is all-embracing and not partial. The inferior man is partial and not all-embracing."

The junzi can view things with an unbiased mind and does not give preference or advantage to other people based on a personal opinion. The junzi is focused on the good of all and is not focused on petty gains and losses or on his own personal gain. In comparison, the inferior man is more likely to be biased and partial to those who will benefit him or to those he favours. The petty man prioritizes his personal gain and does not view situations impartially.

2-15 子曰。學而不思則罔，思而不學則殆。

2-15 The Master said: "To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous."

Complimentary relationship of:

1. Thinking - reflection, internal process of learning
2. Learning - acquisition knowledge about life

"To study and not think is a waste"

- Meaning:

If you only memorize or absorb information without reflecting on it, you won't truly understand. You'll become confused or misguided, knowing facts but not their meaning or application.

- Modern parallel:  
It's like cramming for a test without understanding the material, you can recall data, but you can't use it wisely.

“To think and not study is dangerous”

- Meaning:  
If you rely only on your own thoughts without learning from others or established knowledge, your reasoning may go astray. You might develop wrong conclusions or become arrogant, believing your opinions are correct when they're not grounded in real knowledge - no base in your thinking and leading to incorrect conclusion and dead ends.
- Modern parallel:  
It's like trying to reinvent scientific principles without studying what's already known, you risk making big mistakes.

2-18 子張學干祿。子曰：『多聞闕疑，慎言其餘，則寡尤；多見闕殆，慎行其餘，則寡悔。言寡尤，行寡悔，祿在其中矣』

2-18 Zi Zhang was studying the ways of civil service work. Confucius said, “Listen more but hold back where you have doubt. Speak cautiously about what you truly understand, and you'll make few mistakes. Observe broadly but avoid what seems risky. Act carefully on what is certain and you'll have few regrets.”

干 is a verb, 求取。祿: 應有的俸祿。

Listen widely and speak cautiously, it is not easy to do it well. People nowadays don't verify rumors E.g. when someone is gossiping, if you just agree without checking, you may lead to a wrong action. Another example is

when you hear something from news, because you cannot confirm if it's true or not, you'll have to listen more and hold back where you have doubt.

Zi Zhang (a disciple of Confucius) was learning civil service work—that is, worldly success or recognition.

Confucius did not tell him to flatter others or seek favors.

Instead, he replied that virtue and discernment naturally lead to good outcomes.

- “Hear much and put aside what is doubtful” — Be widely informed but discerning. Don't spread something which you don't confirm it is true.
- “Carefully speak of the rest” — Speak with care, truthfulness, and integrity.
- “See more and put aside what is dangerous” — Observe widely but avoid risky or morally compromising behavior. “Carefully act on the rest” — Act prudently, doing only what is right and proper.

When speaking without faults and acting without causing regrets, the way of civil service work is there and then honor and success will naturally follow.

3-13 王孫賈問曰：「與其媚於奧，寧媚於竈，何謂也？」  
子曰：「不然，獲罪於天，無所禱也。」

3-13 Wang Sun Jia asked: “What do you think about the saying ‘It is better to sacrifice to the god of the stove than to the god of the family shrine.’?”

Confucius said: “Not so. If you offend Heaven, there is no one you can pray to.”

## Background

### 1. Wangsun Jia (王孫賈)

Wangsun Jia was a noble and political figure from the **state of Wei (衛)** during the Spring and Autumn period. As a descendant of the royal house (“王孫”), he possessed both status and influence, often acting as a political intermediary between the duke and the court.

At the time, **the state of Wei was ruled by Duke Ling (衛靈公)**, whose duchess was **Nanzi (子/)**—a woman known for her beauty, ambition, and controversial reputation. Ancient texts describe Nanzi as politically manipulative and morally lax, often interfering in state affairs and contributing to internal conflict.

During Confucius's travels to spread his teachings on benevolence (仁) and virtue (德), he visited Wei. Nanzi invited Confucius to meet her and offered him an official position. Though Confucius accepted out of courtesy, he felt uneasy about the situation and chose not to engage deeply.

Wangsun Jia, who was at odds with Nanzi, seized the opportunity and invited Confucius to his residence—implying that **he**, not Nanzi or the Duke, could grant Confucius a position. This sets the stage for the famous exchange found in this passage.

## 2. 奧 (ào)

In ancient Chinese architecture, the 奧 referred to the *deep inner chamber* of a house—the southeast corner, which was considered **the most sacred and spiritually powerful area** of the home.

It was believed that this part of the house was inhabited by a deity known as the 中 (Zhōng Liū Shén), who oversaw and monitored all household activities. This deity's position was **higher than the Kitchen God (灶)**, holding broader authority and serving as a moral overseer of the family.

The 中 was associated with the direction of the southeast because traditional homes faced south; the north wind was cold, so the southeast corner was symbolically linked to warmth, life, and spiritual oversight.

While the Kitchen God reported household affairs to the **Jade Emperor (大)** once a year—usually before Lunar New Year—the 中 was believed to constantly observe the households' conduct.

Therefore, in this passage, “媚於奧” ( “to flatter the inner chamber” ) does not only mean to please the Duke of Wei (衛靈公), but also carries the imagery of **flattering the highest authority or sacred power**—whether human or divine.

### 3. 竈/灶 (zào)

The 灶, or hearth, symbolizes the **Kitchen God (灶)**, who was viewed as a close, familiar deity watching over daily family life and reporting moral conduct to Heaven annually.

In political metaphor, “媚於灶” ( “to flatter the stove” ) means to seek favor with **lesser but more immediately powerful figures**—in this context, **Wangsun Jia himself**, who wielded practical authority even though he was not the official ruler.

#### Literal Meaning

**Wangsun Jia asked:** “It is said that rather than flatter the one in the inner chamber (奧), it is better to flatter the hearth (灶). What does that mean?”

**Confucius replied:** “Not so. If one offends Heaven, there is nowhere one can pray.”

On the surface, Confucius is rejecting a folk proverb that suggests it is more practical to please nearby, lesser powers than distant, higher ones. He counters that **if a person violates Heaven’s moral order**, even the sincerest worship or political flattery cannot help them.

#### Political Context & Interpretation

In this exchange, the proverb is being used **metaphorically and politically**.

- 奧 (ào) represents the **Duke of Wei (衛靈公)** and, by extension, the distant seat of formal power.
- 灶 (zào) represents **Wangsun Jia (王孫賈)** himself, a man of influence who controls affairs more directly than the duke or duchess.

When Wangsun Jia quotes this saying, he is subtly suggesting to Confucius:

“Rather than align with the duke or Nanzi, it is wiser to align with me—the one who actually holds influence.”

Confucius immediately perceives the hidden meaning and responds:

“Not so. If one offends Heaven, there is nowhere one can pray.”

This is both a **moral correction** and a **philosophical rebuke**.

By invoking *Heaven* (天), Confucius warns that power, position, and influence mean nothing if one acts immorally or defies righteousness (義).

If someone “offends Heaven,” meaning they act against virtue or moral law, then **no amount of flattery, no alliances, and no rituals can save them.**

From the standpoint of spiritual cultivation (修行), Confucius's words emphasize:

**If you commit actions that offend Heaven, there is no mercy and no chance for repentance.**

This transforms a worldly proverb about political survival into a profound teaching on moral responsibility and divine justice.

### Summary of Meaning

This passage captures Confucius's rejection of opportunistic thinking and his belief that:

- Moral integrity (德) outweighs political convenience.
- Offending Heaven—violating the moral order—leaves no room for escape or forgiveness.
- A true Junzi (君子) aligns with righteousness (義), not with power or favoritism.

Through this subtle yet powerful exchange, Confucius delivers a timeless reminder: **Virtue is the only true refuge.**

4-10 子曰。君子之於天下也，無適也，無莫也，義之與比。

4-10 The Master said: “When the noble man handles all matters of the world he does not dislike or like them just acts in what is right.”

A junzi doesn't let personal bias or preference guide his decisions, he evaluates each situation according to the virtue needed. This reflects ethical adaptability: rather than being swayed by loyalty, profit, or emotion, he acts according to what is just and proper. This sets a Junzi apart from the layperson because he holds himself accountable to a higher order than just - personal like and dislike or attachments.

Example - When invited by rulers whose governments were corrupt or unjust, Confucius sometimes refused to serve, even though it meant losing prestige or comfort.

Confucius was not “for or against” any state or ruler out of personal loyalty; his only allegiance was to Yi (moral correctness).

Example - In every country's government there is a pattern of rulers/prime ministers/presidents bringing their buddies into positions(bias/like/dislike) and this causes corruption in every government. The only government that doesn't have this is when the ruler was a sage.

Example - Are we affected by those around us especially other Tao kin as a cultivator we cannot act on likes and dislikes - we must have a voice for what is right and speak out when something is wrong

4-11 子曰：「君子懷德，小人懷土；君子懷刑，小人懷惠。」

4-11 The Master said: “The noble man cares about virtue; the inferior man cares about material things. The noble man seeks discipline; the inferior man seeks favors.”

In this passage from the Analects, Confucius draws a clear distinction between two inner orientations of the human heart. When he says, “The gentleman

cherishes virtue,” he is describing a person whose thoughts naturally turn toward integrity, compassion, and moral growth. Such a person begins every decision with an inward question: Is this aligned with what is right? Does this action strengthen my character? The gentleman’s focus is not on external rewards but on cultivating a sincere and principled inner life.

By contrast, “the petty person cherishes the material” suggests a mindset centered on material comfort and personal convenience. The petty person’s first thoughts are often about gain and loss: Will this benefit me? Will it make my life easier? This mindset is not necessarily malicious, but it is limited, because it prioritizes immediate comfort over long-term development.

When Confucius adds that the gentleman “is mindful of discipline,” he highlights the noble person’s awareness of moral boundaries and consequences. The gentleman carries an inner sense of restraint—he knows that violating conscience harms the spirit, even if no one else notices.

Meanwhile, the petty person “cherishes favors,” acting with the expectation of reward or recognition. His kindness becomes transactional because his intentions are shaped by calculation rather than sincerity.

Ultimately, this teaching is about one’s starting point of thought. The gentleman’s intentions arise from virtue and principle, while the petty person’s arise from personal benefit. Confucius invites us to observe our own hearts and notice whether our motivations come from integrity or from convenience, from sincerity or from expectation.

4-12 子曰：「放於利而行，多怨。」

4-12 The master said: “If you do everything with a concern for your own advantage, you will be resented by many people.”

Confucius teaches that once you let personal gain drive your behaviour, you lose moral discipline, damage relationships, and disrupt social harmony — leading naturally to resentment and conflict. The problem is not the gain itself, but the loss of Yi (義) when you let gain lead your actions.

4-16 子曰。君子喻於義、小人喻於利。

4-16 The Master said: “The noble man (junzi) is guided by righteousness, the petty person is guided by profit.”

This line comes from the Analects and captures one of Confucius core contrasts between the junzi (君子 - “noble person” ) and the xiaoren (小人 - “petty person” ).

### Meaning

- “The noble man is aware of (義 Yi)” : The junzi makes decisions based on rightness, justice, and moral principles — even when doing so is inconvenient or costly.
- “The inferior man is aware of advantage (利 Li)” : The xiaoren focuses on personal gain: money, status, convenience, or short-term benefit.

Confucius talks about a test all humans will encounter in their lives

When you’re forced to choose between what benefits you and what is right, which do you choose?

### Example

1. A junzi-like choice:  
A company refuses to falsify environmental reports even though competitors do and even though doing so would raise costs and reduce profits.
2. A Petty man like choice:  
Someone cuts corners or breaks rules at work because “everyone does it and it helps me get ahead.”

Mindsets are different

- Virtuous persons code of conduct is based on righteousness, they prioritize spirit values, benefit for others society,

- Petty people are easily driven by selfish desires, ignore long term consequences and larger effects to others around them or society at large.

Confucius did not believe all profit is bad, but our business and projects should be based on righteousness.

4-17 子曰：「見賢思齊焉，見不賢而內自省也」

4-17 The Master said: “When you see a good person, think of becoming like her/him. When you see someone not so good, reflect on your own weak points.

This teaching is about how we manage our inner reactions—the very first thoughts that arise when we encounter different kinds of people.

When we meet someone better than us—kinder, wiser, more disciplined, more capable—the usual instinct might be jealousy or insecurity. But Confucius tells us to flip that reaction. Instead of thinking, “They’re showing me up,” or “I’ll never be like that,” we should think, “What can I learn from them? What qualities do they have that I can cultivate too?”

In other words, seeing virtue in someone else should awaken inspiration, not comparison or envy. It should remind us of the kind of person we want to become.

On the other hand, when we meet someone who behaves poorly—someone rude, selfish, lazy, or irresponsible—the easy reaction is to judge them or look down on them. But Confucius again redirects the mind inward. He says we should ask ourselves: “Do I have a bit of this in me too? Have I ever acted like this before? Is there something in me that needs to be corrected?”

This doesn’t mean we excuse their behavior. It means we use the moment as a mirror. Instead of letting criticism point outward, we let it guide self-reflection.

Both sides of this teaching are about one thing: training our starting point of

thought.

Confucius wants us to turn every encounter—good or bad—into chances for growth.

Seeing the good in others becomes a reminder of what we can aim for.

Seeing the faults in others becomes a reminder to examine our own blind spots.

It's a very gentle, humble way of practicing self-improvement. Every person around us becomes a teacher—either showing us the path forward or showing us the traps to avoid. And the moment our mind reacts—whether it's admiration, jealousy, or criticism—that reaction tells us where our heart currently stands.

Self-cultivation begins with noticing those reactions and guiding them toward wisdom. When we can do that, every encounter becomes part of our inner practice.

4-22 子曰。古者言之不出、恥躬之不逮也。

4-22 The Master said: “In ancient times, people did not let their words exceed their actions; they would feel ashamed if their conduct fell short of what they said.”

In ancient times, people were cautious about speaking because they felt ashamed if their actions could not live up to their words. Confucius highlights a moral standard where one speaks only after ensuring one can truly practice what is spoken. Words were restrained not out of fear, but out of respect for integrity. This idea echoes the traditional saying: (話多不如話少，話少不如話好) — “Speaking less is better than speaking more; speaking well is better than speaking less.” In essence: True refinement is shown not in how much one speaks, but in how consistently ones actions align with ones words.

4-25 子曰。德不孤、必有鄰。

4-25 The Master said: “If you are virtuous, you will not be lonely. You will always have friends.”

This passage basically says that your character shapes the kind of life you end up living. If you build real virtue—things like honesty, kindness, and being a solid, good person—you won’t ever truly be alone. People are naturally drawn to that. So instead of chasing friendships or trying to force connection, focus on becoming genuinely good at the core. When you do that, the right people will just show up in your life on their own. Virtue is like a light that naturally draws others towards, People are attracted to others that make them feel good and have good conduct. Someone who acts with integrity and kindness - earns trust and builds harmonious relationships. If you can earn trust from others this is a blessing, especially in a world with so many scams and deceit. A Junzi associates with many types of people with virtue but doesn’t form factions; people are drawn towards him because of these qualities.

4-26 子游曰：「事君數，斯辱矣，朋友數，斯疏矣。」

4-26 Zi You said: “In serving your prince, frequent remonstrance will lead to disgrace. With friends, frequent remonstrance will lead to separation.

1. Good intentions can become pressure  
We often think we’re helping—giving reminders, offering advice, pointing out problems.  
But the other person may feel judged, controlled, or overwhelmed.
2. Saying it once is helpful; saying it ten times is forceful  
Confucius isn’t telling us to stay silent forever.  
He’s saying that mature people learn **when to stop**.  
Clear advice given once is respectful.  
Repeated advice becomes nagging or overstepping.
3. Respecting boundaries is a form of compassion

Spiritual maturity includes the ability to sense where someone's emotional or personal boundary lies.

Sometimes silence creates more space for growth than words.

4. Self-cultivation over “other-cultivation”

The impulse to constantly correct others often hide an unwillingness to examine ourselves.

Confucian often reminds us:

**The real work is refining your own character, not reshaping others.**

In short:

**Too much nagging, even with good intentions, pushes people away.**

**But expecting friends to be better is a way of friendship. We aren't staying silent forever. It's just the timing. Christine mentioned the five W for a good communication timing: When, Where, How, Why, What.**

5-14 子路有聞、未之能行、唯恐有聞。

5-14 Zilu, whenever he heard a teaching, would not rest until he could carry it out—and he feared hearing more before he had mastered what he already heard.

This emphasizes acting before accumulating more knowledge. Zilu is praised here as someone who is deeply action oriented. Whenever he learned something, he immediately put it into practice and worked on it earnestly. Only after he felt he could truly carry it out would he move on to the next teaching.

This highlights a key contrast Confucius is pointing to: many people today love acquiring knowledge but rarely apply it. They listen to the same lessons repeatedly, saying, “I've heard this before,” yet nothing in their life actually changes because they never implement what they learn. Their knowledge stays

in their head, not in their actions.

Zilu is the opposite. One of his core strengths is that he learns and does. His learning is never passive—he embodies it. Through praising Zilu, Confucius is also encouraging us: learning only has value when it is practiced. Knowledge without application is empty. True growth comes from doing, not from endlessly collecting information.

5-21 子曰：「甯武子，邦有道，則知。邦無道，則愚。其知可及也。其愚不可及也。」

5-21 The Master said: “When the Way prevailed in the state, Ning Wu Zi showed his intelligence. When the Way declined in the state, he played stupid. Some might be able to match his intelligence, but no one can match his stupidity.”

1. “When the Way (Dao) prevailed... he showed his intelligence.”  
When a society or government is righteous, orderly, and aligned with moral principles, a wise person like Ning Wu Zi displays his full capability.  
It’s safe and appropriate to act with clarity, skill, and intelligence when the environment supports virtue.
2. “When the Way declined... he played stupid.”  
When the state becomes corrupt, chaotic, or immoral, real wisdom may mean withholding your brilliance.  
Pretending to be “stupid” (or unimportant, uninvolved, non-threatening) can be a wise survival strategy.  
It’s a form of self-protection and moral preservation—not contributing to corruption.
3. “Some might match his intelligence, but none can match his stupidity.”  
Many can be smart when situations are good.  
But few have the discipline and wisdom to choose to act ignorant for the sake of integrity and safety.

This intentional “stupidity” is actually a mark of higher wisdom, not actual foolishness.

Confucius is praising Ning Wu Zi's ability to adapt his behavior to the moral condition of his society.

In good times: be openly wise.

In bad times: conceal your wisdom to avoid being complicit in wrongdoing or becoming a target.

True wisdom is not just intelligence—it's knowing when to use it and when to hide it.

5-27 子曰。已矣乎。吾未見能見其過、而自訟者也。

5-27 Confucius said: “Alas, I have never seen anyone who can recognize their own faults and truly take themselves to task.”

Confucius laments that he has never encountered someone who can truly recognize their own faults and sincerely hold themselves accountable. The statement expresses disappointment, not anger, at how rare genuine self-reflection is.

The key issue is not the absence of mistakes, but the absence of true self-examination. Many people may verbally admit fault, yet still excuse themselves, blame circumstances, or shift responsibility onto others. 自訟 does not mean casual self-criticism; it means rigorously judging oneself by moral standards and taking responsibility without evasion. Confucius is pointing out that this level of honesty and integrity is exceedingly rare.

Not just outward reflection but inner reflection. This is a passage Confucius said after Yan Hui passed away since he was the only one who could do it.

6-11 子曰：「賢哉，回也！一簞食，一瓢飲，在陋巷。人不堪其憂，回也不改其樂。賢哉，回也！」

6-11 The Master said: “How worthy Hui is! With a bamboo bowl of rice and gourd-cup of water he lived in a back alley. Others could not have endured his misery, but Hui never changed from his happy disposition. Hui was a worthy indeed!”

Yan Hui’s virtue and character: Confucius praises Hui as truly worthy, not because of status or wealth, but because of his inner quality.

Hui lives with very little—basic food, water, and poor surroundings—showing non attachment to material

Most people would feel bitter or broken by such conditions

Hui maintains a happy disposition because his fulfillment comes from True Nature and alignment with Tao, not external comfort.

The passage teaches that real worth lies in inner character and contentment, not material success.

A character established in virtue walking with Tao throughout his life, there was a lot of hardship but his heart was full of life. His materials were meager but joy was abundant, Yan hui had obtained the Tao.

Others failed to understand his joy, only Confucius understood him

6-18 子曰。質勝文則野、文勝質則史。文質彬彬、然後君子。

6-18 Confucius said: “When substance exceeds refinement, one becomes uncultivated (rustic/unpolished); when refinement exceeds substance, one becomes superficial; Only when substance and refinement are in graceful harmony can one be called a Jun-Zi.”

Confucius teaches that a person needs both inner substance (質, moral character and sincerity) and outward refinement (文, propriety, learning,

cultured expression). If substance overwhelms refinement, one appears rough and uncultivated (野). If refinement overwhelms substance, one becomes polished but hollow (史, superficial/fake). Only when both are balanced can one be called a true 君子 (Junzi).

質 is the inner root (virtue, sincerity, moral strength) while 文 is the outer form that expresses it (ritual propriety, manners, cultured speech, learning). Either extreme is a moral flaw: raw goodness without form fails to respect others, while beautiful form without inner virtue becomes empty performance. 彬彬 describes an interwoven harmony where inner virtue naturally appears through proper expression, creating integrity between inside and outside.

This passage defines Confucian cultivation as inner virtue expressed through proper form. It is not anti-culture and not anti-authenticity. It is a warning against two common distortions: being “real” but socially damaging, or being “proper” but insincere. The Junzi is the person whose character and conduct match, making them trust.

7-25 子以四教：文、行、忠、信。

7-25 There were four things which Confucius taught: Literature, conduct, loyalty and trustworthiness.

Confucius taught through four core pillars: 文、行、忠、信. On the surface, these are literature, conduct, loyalty, and trustworthiness. Literature refers to the teachings of the ancient sages; conduct refers to ones actions; loyalty refers to carrying out ones responsibilities; and trustworthiness refers to keeping ones word. Together, they form the complete framework of Confucian cultivation.

At a deeper level, 文 does not merely mean texts or knowledge. It refers to the teachings that originate from Heaven, the Heavenly order and moral pattern transmitted through the sages. When one studies literature in this sense, it is not for information but for transformation. Thus, 文 can be understood

together with 化, indicating inner transformation. A Confucian scholar studies the teachings of Heaven so that life, character, and perception are refined and transformed.

行 is not only outward behavior, but deeds in their fullest sense. When paired with 業, it becomes 行業, encompassing both ordinary deeds and morally significant deeds. This includes how one acts in daily life, in work, in relationships, and in moral challenges. Conduct here concerns how one responds to circumstances, resolves past actions, and transforms previous causes into healthier future relationships. It is about meeting life's affinities correctly and resolving disorder through right action.

忠 means carrying out one's responsibilities with full sincerity and effort. To be loyal is to take a task and give one's utmost ability to it. Yet loyalty alone is incomplete unless it is directed toward what is right. When paired with 義, it becomes 忠義—loyalty guided by righteousness. This means loyalty is not blind obedience, but commitment aligned with the Dao. When something is morally right, one should act without hesitation. Loyalty, in its true form, is devotion to what is righteous.

信 on the surface is trustworthiness toward others, but at its deepest level it is trust in Heaven. When extended to 信用, it signifies being worthy of being entrusted by Heaven itself. True trustworthiness is alignment of one's heart and actions with the moral order, such that Heaven can rely on and put the person to use. This is not merely social reliability, but spiritual credibility. To be trustworthy is to walk in harmony with Heaven, sharing the same direction and intent.

Together, 文 transforms the person, 行 orders life, 忠 aligns effort with righteousness, and 信 unites the human heart with Heaven. These four teachings form the complete path of Confucian cultivation, shaping a person who is transformed inwardly, upright in action, righteous in responsibility, and trustworthy to both people and Heaven.

8-6 曾子曰：『可以託六尺之孤，可以寄百里之命，臨大節，而不可奪也。君子人與？君子人也。』

8-6 Zengzi said: "A person to whom you can entrust an orphaned young prince, and delegate the authority over a state, and who, when facing a critical crisis or moral test, cannot be swayed from their principles. Is such a person a true Junzi (a noble person)? Yes, indeed they are."

1. Protecting the Vulnerable (託六尺之孤): Being trusted to protect someone who is completely helpless (an orphaned child of a leader).
2. Handling Absolute Power (寄百里之命): Being trusted with immense power and the fate of an entire nation without becoming corrupted.
3. Unwavering Integrity (臨大節而不可奪): Remaining steadfast in your core values when facing extreme danger, immense temptation, or matters of life and death.

If you have someone who can be trusted to protect a completely helpless orphaned child, who can be handed the absolute power over an entire nation, and who, when faced with a massive crisis or life-and-death temptation, absolutely will not abandon their core principles... is that person a true Junzi, a noble person? Yes, indeed they are.

This passage is essentially about the test of human character. It's easy to have integrity when nothing is being challenged. But what happens when you are handed absolute power.

Example 1: The Duke of Zhou (周公輔佐成王)

Example 2: Zhuge Liang's Promise (諸葛亮 - 白帝城托孤)

What are our core principles, and how firm is our inner anchor when we are granted power or faced with immense temptation? Is there something within our hearts—deep within our core values—that remains unwavering? The trials and temptations we encounter in modern society continuously test our understanding of the true meaning of life. Ultimately, do we place greater

value on material pursuits, or do we prioritize our own spiritual integrity?  
Only those who live up to these standards can be trusted by God and entrusted  
with missions.