

# Chapter 9

## Uprightness, Indirection, Transparency

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Recent scholarship and the evidence of excavated texts calling into question the boundaries of traditional “schools” prompts us to reconsider the *Analects*.<sup>1</sup> A central issue in early Confucian thought is the problem of “straightness,” specifically issues of uprightiness, indirection and transparency in the *Analects*. A fundamental understanding of the “tradition” is the view that Confucius valued *zheng* 正 and completely rejected indirection in knowledge, language and ethics.

Many scholars (including the present author) have taken the *Analects* to recommend “uprightness” in this orthodox sense of moral correctness. I propose to examine this claim critically. Two stereotypes immediately affect our perception of “uprightness.” One is the expectation that Confucius was a “Confucian” in the specific sense that his views might be expected to align with those of Mengzi 孟子 or Xunzi 荀子. This we can dismiss *prima facie*. The other is the perception that Confucius valued *zheng*, understood as moral uprightiness or even orthodoxy, and rejected all indirection in knowledge, language and ethics. This claim warrants further examination.

The received view of the *Analects* draws on many references to two key terms – *zhen* 真 (“straightness”) and *zheng* 正 (“upright,” “to rectify”) – and takes them as broadly synonymous. I reconsider the use and meaning of these two terms in the *Analects*, and explore a reading that emphasizes the differences in their meaning, and a revised interpretation of *zheng*. I argue that *zheng*, understood as correct alignment, can refer to moral alignment (“uprightness”), but can also refer to

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<sup>1</sup>For important scholarship, see Slingerland 2000 and Csikszentmihalyi 2005. All translations from the Chinese in this chapter are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated. Pinyin transliteration for Chinese characters is used throughout, except in the cases of the names of authors who use other transliterations.

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“alignment” in broader physical, epistemological, and even cosmological senses. This understanding of *zheng* is linked semantically with *wuwei* 無為 (“acting without acting”), explicitly so at *Analects* 15.5.

This view of *zheng* as correct alignment is not unique to the *Analects*. This broader reading appears in pre-Confucian texts, specifically the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). It also appears in chapters of Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國) texts datable to a period of roughly contemporaneous to the earliest estimates for the composition of *Analects*, especially the “Inner Cultivation” (*Nei ye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子.

This revised understanding of uprightness/correct alignment in the *Analects* has several important consequences. First, it helps clarify what seems to be a sustained, but understated, interest in indirection in the *Analects*, which traditional readings do not account for well. In particular, it helps us account for his positive attitude toward *wuwei*, and helps us reconcile that attitude with his repeated account of the “transparency” of the gentleman or *junzi*. Second, this account also clarifies the *Analects* account of the effectiveness of correctly performed ritual (*li* 禮). Third, it sheds incidental light on the puzzling depictions of Confucius in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and highlights important differences between the *Analects* and later pre-Han Confucian works, specifically the *Mengzi* 孟子 and *Xunzi* 荀子.

I begin with an account of the two distinct senses of “uprightness” in the *Analects* represented by the two key terms *zhen* and *zheng*. In the second section I demonstrate the semantic continuity of this sense of *zheng* as alignment, drawing upon the *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*) and “Inner Cultivation” (*Nei ye*). In the third section I give an account of indirection in the *Analects*, including government and ritual. This account of indirection helps explain important differences between the *Analects* and later Confucian texts, and incidentally helps explain the puzzling portrayals of Confucius in the *Zhuangzi*.

## Two Senses of Uprightness: *zhi* and *zheng* in the *Analects*

The *Analects* repeatedly recommends uprightness or straightness. Straightness (*zhi* 直), by contrast, describes an attribute of a thing or person. Rightness in the sense of “correct alignment” (*zheng* 正) is typically the result of deliberate action either on external objects or one oneself. The etymological dictionary, the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, describes the two words as etymologically related, but they are not identical (*Shuowen* 2B/1a, 12B/45a). *Zhi* can be used as “the straight” (2.19, 2.22, 16.4), or “straightness” (13.18, 14.34, 17.8, 17.16), as well as an adjective (5.24, 8.2, 12.20, 22, 13.18, 15.7). Most refer to moral straightness. The differences between *zheng* and *zhi* become apparent when we turn to the semantic field of their respective antonyms. Antonyms for *zhi* are “crooked”: *wang* 枉 (2.19, 18.2, 12.22; *Mengzi* 3B1) and *qu* 曲 (*Xunzi* 1/1).<sup>2</sup> Antonyms of *zheng* have a wider range, and include *jue* 譎 “craftiness” (14.15), *pian* 偏 “slant” (*Xunzi* 23/37), and *qi* 奇 “indirect” (*Sunzi* 5 p.69).

<sup>2</sup>This analysis is indebted to, but differs somewhat from Loy 2008.

## *The Importance of Uprightness (zhi)*

The *Analects* clearly emphasizes the importance of the virtue of upright or straightness (*zhi*). At 6.19 he states that “people are born for uprightness” (*ren zhi sheng ye zhi* 人之生也直) and if they survive without it, it is merely good fortune. The *Analects* cites a certain Historiographer Yu 史魚 as an exemplar of straightness. When *dao* prevailed in his state, he was straight as an arrow. But when it did not prevail, he was also straight as an arrow (15.7).<sup>3</sup>

The *Analects* seems to oppose straightness and upright to indirection or craft. At two points, Confucius specifically recommends setting the straight over the crooked. At *Analects* 2.19:

Duke Ai 哀公 asked: “How can we ensure that the people will be obedient?” Confucius replied: “Promote [lit. raise up] the straight over the crooked [*ju zhi cuo zhu wang* 舉直錯諸枉] and the people will be obedient. Promote the crooked over the straight and the people will not be obedient.”

The same phrase occurs again as a response to a question about wisdom by Fan Chi 樊遲 (12.22). Similarly, *zheng* (straightforwardness) is opposed to craft (*jue* 譎), for example in the account of Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 and Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 at *Analects* 14.15 (discussed above); and *ren* 仁 (benevolence) is opposed to *qiao* 巧 (cunning) at *Analects* 1.3.<sup>4</sup>

But another passage has occasioned much debate:

葉公語孔子曰：「吾黨有直躬者，其父攘羊，而子證之。」孔子曰：「吾黨之直者異於是。父為子隱，子為父隱，直在其中矣。」

The Duke of She said to Confucius: “We have among us people of upright conduct [*zhi gong*]. If the father steals a sheep, the son bears witness to it.” Confucius replied: “Among us we understand upright conduct differently than this. Fathers conceal things for their sons and sons conceal things for their father’s; it is in this that uprightness is to be found” (13.18).<sup>5</sup>

In this case, strict straightforwardness is not to be recommended, and Confucius does not approve of the son who turns in his father. We can give several accounts of this passage.

- (1) The passage is a defense of filiality. Upright conduct is a virtue, but filiality – by both father and son – takes precedence. It is on this reading that Herbert Fingarette argued that there is no real conflict of values in *Analects* 13.8 (Fingarette 1972).
- (2) Upright conduct is a virtue, but it has been misunderstood by people who do not realize that it is not always the best course of action. An analogue would be the “noble lie.” This reading is compatible with (1).

<sup>3</sup> For Historiographer Yu see *Han Shih Wai Chuan* 7.21, in Hightower 1952: 245–46.

<sup>4</sup> The context is a quotation from the *Shijing* (2.3.2) that: “It is rare indeed for a person of cunning words and an ingratiating face to be benevolent.”

<sup>5</sup> The phrase *zhi gong zhe* 直躬者 could refer to people of a certain type, or to a certain man named “Straight body” or “Upright Gong.”

- (3) Upright conduct is only a virtue in some situations. In others, indirect or other kinds of action are called for, including the situation described in the passage. An analogue would be the claim in Sunzi's *Art of War* that straightforward (*zheng*) strategies are best for some situations and indirect (*qi* 奇) strategies for others (*Sunzi* Ch 5, p. 69).<sup>6</sup> This reading is compatible with (2) but not with (1).

Of these three accounts, (3) is significantly different from the other two. It raises the possibility that Confucius took a kinder attitude toward indirection than prevailing readings allow. It raises the possibility that Confucius was actively sympathetic to the use of indirection.

### **Zheng 正 as “Correct Alignment”**

The term *zheng* has often been translated by the normative terms such as upright, rectify, straight, etc. In most cases, the text supports a descriptive reading of “pragmatically correct alignment” in several senses. Alignment refers literally to the correct orientation of one's physical person (*shen* 身) or a physical object.<sup>7</sup> For example, according to Confucius, a gentleman (*junzi*) must align his stance (*zheng li* 正立), that is assume an upright posture, before entering a carriage (10.17).

In other cases it refers to aligning an object. For example, a *junzi* maintains a dignified appearance by straightening his robe and cap (20.2); and does not sit if his mat is not aligned correctly (*bu zheng* 不正, 10.12). Similarly, if sent a gift of meat, he straightens his mat before accepting it (10.13). In the case of the mat, it is not clear whether the action described is smoothing wrinkles or, more likely, repositioning the mat to a correct alignment in a room or geographic orientation.

*Zheng* can also have extended meanings concerning the correct alignment or disposition of material objects. At 8.4 the *junzi* is advised to regulate or rectify his countenance (*zheng yanse* 正顏色) – literally to rectify his facial coloring – in order to encourage sincerity and trustworthiness in others. According to 10.8, if meat is not served with the right sauce or cut correctly (*ge bu zheng* 割不正), a *junzi* does not eat it. Finally, a *junzi* associates with others who follow *dao* in order to himself be set right by them (1.14).

### **Good Alignment and Good Government**

Several passages in the *Analects* identify good government with correct alignment. At 12.17, Ji Kangzi 季康子 asks Confucius about government. He replies that government consists of correct align; he said to govern means to align correctly.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion see Raphals 1992.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the semantic range of *shen* term see Lo 2003.

政者，正也。子帥以正，孰敢不正？

To govern [*zheng* 政] means to align [*zheng* 正]. If you set an example by [your own correct] alignment, who will dare not to be [correctly] aligned?

The subject returns in Book 13, when three students ask Confucius about government. At 13.3, Zilu 子路 asks what Confucius would take as his first priority if the Duke of Wei were to employ him in his government. Confucius responds: “It would, of course, be to align names correctly (*zhengming* 正名).” He elaborates by explaining that if names are not aligned correctly (*ming bu zheng* 名不正), speech does not will not accord with reality (*yan bu shun* 言不順), and things are not brought to completion successfully (*shi bu cheng* 事不成). As a result, ritual practice and music fail to flourish, punishments and penalties miss the mark, and the common people are at a loss as to what to do with themselves.

Other passages link correct alignment to effective government. At 13.6, Confucius says: when the ruler’s physical person is correctly aligned (*qi sheng zheng* 其身正), he does not give commands, but his orders are obeyed (*bu ling er xing* 不令而行). If he is not correctly aligned (*qi bu zheng* 其不正), no matter how many orders he issues, they will not be followed. Similarly another passage (13.13) advises government service requires no more than aligning oneself correctly (*zheng qi shen yi* 正其身矣). But those who cannot align themselves cannot correct (align) others.

At *Analects* 14.15, Confucius compares Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公, who was crafty but not correctly aligned (*jue er bu zheng* 譎而不正) with Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公, who was aligned correctly and not crafty (*zheng er bu jue* 正而不譎). Duke Huan (r. 681–643 BCE) and Duke Wen (r. 636–628 BCE) reigned as the first and second official hegemony, respectively. The traditional explanation is that Duke Wen treated the King of Zhou 周王 with arrogance to display his own power, while Duke Huan put public service above his private interests.<sup>8</sup> A different way to read the passage is as descriptive, rather than normative references to straight and crooked alignment in behavior, with clear preference for the former.

Finally, *Analects* 15.5, describes the sage-ruler Shun 舜 as governing without interventive action, simply by aligning himself to face south:

子曰：「無為而治者，其舜也？夫何為哉，恭己正南面而已矣。」

The Master said, “As for one who ruled by means of *wuwei* was it not Shun? How did he do it? He made himself reverent and aligned himself [in the ritually correct way] facing south, and that was all.”<sup>9</sup>

This last passage raises the possibility that correct alignment is itself a form of indirect action. But is such a speculation justified?

<sup>8</sup> On this point see Slingerland 2003a, b: 160.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Slingerland 2003a, b: 175: “[he] took his proper [ritual] position facing south, that is all.”

## **Zheng as Correct Alignment Before and After the *Analects***

This meaning of *zheng* as “correct alignment” appears in texts that predate and recently postdate the *Analects*. It first appears in the *Book of Odes*. One poem seems clearly to use *zheng* in the sense of moral rectification. Poem 191 laments injustices that seem to come from Heaven, and trouble the king, but adds that “he [the king] does not correct his heartmind [*bu cheng qi xin* 不懲其心] and is angry at those who correct him [*fu yuan qi zheng* 覆怨其正]” (*Shijing*, Poem 191 (*Jie nan shan* 節南山)).<sup>10</sup>

But several other poems in the *Book of Odes* use *zheng* to refer to correct alignment. Poem 106 uses *zheng* in the context of archery, and describes a noble who shoots at the target all day and “never departs from correct alignment” (*bu chu zheng* 不出正). The poem concludes its praise by stating that this prince is someone able to withstand disorder or rebellion (*yi yu luan* 以禦亂) (*Shijing*, Poem 106 (*Yi jie* 猗嗟)).<sup>11</sup> Poem 152 refers to a *junzi* 君子 “whose fine deportment is without fault” (*qi yi bu te* 其儀不忒) and who correctly aligns the countries of the four quarters (*zheng shi si guo* 正是四國) (*Shijing*, Poem 152 (*Shi jiu* 鳴鳩)).<sup>12</sup> Poem 207 is addressed to a *junzi*, here the aristocratic predecessor of Confucius’ “gentleman.” The *junzi* is enjoined not to view his office as permanent, but to fulfill his functions efficiently and quietly. To be heard by the spirits (*shen* 神) and receive felicity from them, he should “associate with the right [correctly aligned] and straight” (*zheng zhi shi* 正直是興) and “love the right [correctly aligned] and upright” (*hao shi zheng zhi* 好是正直) (*Shijing*, Poem 207 (*Xiao ming* 小明)).<sup>13</sup> Poem 253 remonstrates to the ruler of a kingdom in decline, and recommends that he “repress robbers and tyrants, do not let the straight be ruined [*wu bei zheng bai* 無俾正敗]” and “repress robbers and tyrants; do not let the straight be reversed” [*wu bei zheng fan* 無俾正反] (*Shijing*, Poem 253 (*Min lao* 民勞)).

In summary, we find the use of *zheng* as correct alignment in the *Shijing*, a book that clearly predates the *Analects*. The situation for later texts approximately contemporary to the *Analects* is more complex because of debates about the dating of the *Analects*. Contemporary Chinese scholars date the existence of the *Analects* as a book to the early to middle Warring States period, roughly 475–350 BCE. On BAN Gu’s 班固 (32–92 CE) account that the *Analects* was compiled by Confucius’ disciples in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*History of the Han*) Bibliographic Treatise (*Hanshu* 30), the compilation would have been made no earlier than 429 BCE, 50 years after the death of Confucius. John Makeham has argued that the *Analects* was compiled

<sup>10</sup> Trans. modified from Karlgren 1950: 133–134. Several other poems use *zheng* in senses unrelated to the present discussion, e.g., Poem 189 (the main parts of a house), Poem 192 (the first month), Poem 194 (the established heads of state offices), and Poem 244 (determining the site of a capital).

<sup>11</sup> I read *bu chu zheng* 不出正 as “to not depart from correct alignment” which makes it possible to hit the target, in other words, to hit the target exactly and unerringly. Cf. Karlgren 1950: 69, who takes the phrase as “never hitting outside the (central) mark.”

<sup>12</sup> Karlgren (1950: 95–96) reads *zheng* as “corrects” in the sense of “sets an example to.”

<sup>13</sup> Karlgren (1950: 159) translates *zheng zhi* as “correct and straight ones.”

by later hands, and did not exist as a book prior to about 150–140 BCE, and was based on early “collected sayings” of the Master (Makeham 1996: 1–3).

This usage also figures importantly in the “Inner Cultivation” (*Nei ye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi*. The dating of both the *Guanzi* and the *Nei ye* are complex, but there is evidence that this chapter dates to the mid-Warring States, possibly no later than the beginning of the fourth century (ca. 400 B.C.E.). This date is less than a hundred years after the death of Confucius, and only a few decades after the 429 B.C.E. dating for the *Analects*. It is also contemporary to the oldest parts of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (See Rickett 1998: 32–39; Roth 1999; Graziani 2001).

*Zheng* appears in nine passages in the *Nei ye*. They are important for the present discussion because they clarify the meaning of “correct alignment” in its extramoral senses. One passage uses *zheng* in the sense of “correct” by advising the reader to “correct foolishness and disorder” (*yu luan zheng zhi* 遇亂正之) (*Guanzi* 16.5a4–7). All the others use *zheng* to refer to correct bodily alignment. Importantly, they link *zheng* to *dao* and *de*, to cultivation of the mind (*xiu xin* 修心), and to beneficial changes that come of themselves once correct alignment has been mastered. These passages, though later than the *Analects*, are important to Warring States understandings of indirect action because they make explicit the relationship of correct alignment (*zheng*) to effective ordering of the heartmind, the body and the state. These passages indicate four points. First, the ruling principle [literally “lord” *zhu* 主] of Heaven is correct alignment (*zheng*) (*Guanzi* 16.2a2–4).<sup>14</sup> Second, the means by which humans cultivate the heartmind and align the body is *dao*. This passage also explicitly links *dao* to *zheng* (*Guanzi* 16.2a2–4).<sup>15</sup> Two other passages specify that correct alignment is the precondition for stability, and for the arrival of power or virtue (*de* 德) (*Guanzi* 16.2a9–2b1; *Guanzi* 16.4a2–7).<sup>16</sup> Third, this alignment is explicitly physical. Only when the four limbs are correctly aligned and the blood and *qi* [in the body] are tranquil, is it possible to unify the awareness and concentrate the mind (*Guanzi* 16.4a2–7).<sup>17</sup> Another passage seems to describe a physical breathing technique to achieve balance and alignment (*ping zheng* 平正), and also longevity. The passage goes on to explicitly state that this balance and alignment is the source of human vitality (*sheng* 生) (*Guanzi* 16.4a11–b7). Finally, when the body is correctly aligned (and the heartmind is cultivated), benefits occur to the individual and the state. The myriad things appear in proper perspective (*Guanzi* 16.2b9–3a1).<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the evidence of the *Book of Odes* and the *Nei ye* show that Confucius’ use of *zheng* in the *Analects* is not unique to that text.

<sup>14</sup> “The lord [ruling principle] of heaven is alignment; the ruling principle of earth is balance (天主正,地主平).”

<sup>15</sup> “Dao . . . is that by means of which we cultivate the mind and align the body (道 . . . 所以修心而正形也).”

<sup>16</sup> “If you can be aligned, if you can be tranquil, only then can you be stable (能正能靜,後能定). If the body is not aligned, *de* will not come (形不正,德不來) . . . if you align your body and enhance your *de*, then it will gradually come of itself (正形攝德).”

<sup>17</sup> 四體既正,血氣既靜,一意搏心。

<sup>18</sup> 正心在中,萬物得度。

## Indirection in the *Analects*

We may now return to *Analects* 15.5, and the statement that Shun governed simply by aligning correctly and facing south (*zheng nan* 正南). This passage indicates that correct alignment is a form of indirect action. The passage is also the one occurrence in the *Analects* of a more familiar term for indirect action: *wuwei* 無為 or “acting without acting.” *Analects* 15.5 specifically describes Shun as “one who ruled by means of *wuwei*” (*wuwei er zhi zhe* 無為而治者). It shows that *zheng* is part of the same semantic field as a *wuwei*. This account of correct alignment also explains effective government, understood as a mode of indirect action. *Analects* 12.17 (discussed above) explicitly equates government (*zheng* 政) with correct alignment (*zheng* 正).

Edward Slingerland has argued that the concept of effortless and perfected action appears throughout the *Analects*, even though the term *wuwei* appears only once (Slingerland 2000, 2003b). The many occurrences of *zheng* in the sense of correct alignment are part of a semantic field of terms to express this concept.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional commentators give two distinct accounts of what ruling by *wuwei* might mean.<sup>20</sup> In what Slingerland calls “institutional *wuwei*,” the term refers to a ruler who need not act because he has chosen able ministers who administer government effectively without his intervention (Slingerland 2003a, b: 175–76).<sup>21</sup> This is clearly not the usage at *Analects* 15.5, because Shun ruled effectively by aligning himself and facing south, not by choosing able ministers. This passage describes a second possibility: a ruler has perfected himself and thus can transform others without deliberate action. In his commentary on this passage, the Ming scholar WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) likens Shun’s ruling by *wuwei* to Confucius’ claim at *Analects* 7.1 that he does not innovate.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, the term *zheng* in the sense of correct alignment appears not only in the *Analects*, but in several texts associated with the early layers of Warring States Daoism. If we examine the *Analects* independently of preconceptions about a

<sup>19</sup> Slingerland (2000: 294–296) emphasizes the need to distinguish between the existence of a concept and the presence or absence of a particular term because the absence of a term does not indicate the absence of the concept. On his account, *wuwei* was not an exclusively Daoist term, and had pre-Confucian roots and. Slingerland argues that the concept of is an early and central theme in Chinese religious thought and was central to all Warring States philosophical thought. He traces it through the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), and argues that the term *wuwei* was adopted by later commentators to describe this kind ideal mode of action. Action by *wuwei* was also linked to early accounts of ordering the world through efficacious virtue (*de* 德). For *de* see Maspéro 1933. For some of the problems arising from this view of *de* see Billeter 1984 and Nivison 1997: 31–58.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, he argues that the idea of “ruling by not ruling” is a constant theme, but especially at 1.12, 2.19–2.21, 12.17–12.19, and 13.6.

<sup>21</sup> This is the interpretation of HE Yan 何晏 (c.190–249 CE). He was one of the founders of the “Mysterious Learning” (*xuanxue* 玄學) school of Daoist thought.

<sup>22</sup> In commentary to *Analects* 7.1. See Cheng 1996: 13.431–436.



“Confucian” lineage of the *Analects*, *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, we may find unexpected common ground with texts traditionally classified as Daoist: the *Daodejing*, the *Neiye*, and the *Zhuangzi*.

This account of *zheng* as an aspect of indirect action in the *Analects* has explanatory force in two important respects. First, it clarifies the *Analects* account of the effectiveness of correctly performed ritual. Confucius repeatedly criticizes ritual performance that follows outward rules without understanding or correct orientation. He specifically comments on misunderstood ritual in the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記):

[One day] Confucius was standing among his followers, and he held his right hand placed above his left hand [before his chest]. His followers were also holding their right hands above their left hands [in the same way]. Confucius said: “My children, you are trying to imitate me. [I hold my right hand above the left because] my elder sister has died and I must accord with proper mourning ritual.” All the disciples placed their left hands above their right hands (*Li ji*, trans. after Couvreur 1913: vol. 1: 143).<sup>23</sup>

Here, the disciples imitated Confucius’ behavior without understanding the reason for it. In 16.13, Confucius advises his son Boyu 伯魚 to study the *Odes* in order to speak and to study the rites in order to “take a stand” (*yi li* 以立).<sup>24</sup> The passage does not clarify the meaning of the term “stand” (*li*). HUANG Kan’s 皇侃 (488–545 CE) commentary describes the rites as “the root of establishing one’s person” (*li shen zhi ben* 立身之本) (Cheng 1996: 1170). Establishing one’s person (*li shen* 立身) can be understood as “establishing oneself” in a social sense or as following correct formative models for behavior, but it also describes a basic orientation toward life. Herbert Fingarette argues that the rites are the basis of efficacious spontaneity. He defines them as magical in the sense of:

the power of a specific person to accomplish his will directly and effortlessly through ritual, gesture and incantation. The user of magic does not work by strategies and devices as a means toward an end; he does not use coercion or physical forces. . . .He simply wills the end in the proper ritual setting and with the proper ritual gesture and word; without further effort on his part, the deed is accomplished (Fingarette 1972: 3, cf. Fingarette 1991: 220).

In Fingarette’s account in a still influential book, Confucius understood that “the truly distinctively human powers have, characteristically, a magical quality” (Fingarette 1972: 6).<sup>25</sup> What Fingarette describes as magic could also be described as indirect action. On this account, the rites provide correct alignment in a moral and performative sense, and complement *zheng* in its sense of moral uprightness.

<sup>23</sup> For an example from the *Analects* see 2.7.

<sup>24</sup> Confucius’ son KONG Li 孔鯉 was also known as Boyu. He died at 50, and was the father of KONG Ji 孔伋, (ca. 481–402 BCE), better known as Zisi 子思.

<sup>25</sup> By contrast, David Hall and Roger Ames argue that ritual functions as a method for effecting order in the personal, the social, and the political dimensions of human life (Hall and Ames 1987: 157).

An account of indirection in the *Analects* also helps explain important differences between the *Analects* and later Confucian texts. One is its unmistakable sense of humor. As Christoph Harbsmeier remarked many years ago:

The *Analects* describe Confucius as an impulsive, emotional, and informal man, a man of wit and humor, a man capable of subtle irony with an acute sensibility for subtle nuances. It is hard to recognize this man from the *Analects* in the traditional commentaries, and it seems quite impossible to recognize him at all in the histories of Chinese philosophy (Harbsmeier 1990: 131).

If Harbsmeier's reading is right, Confucius was more impulsive, colloquial and even funny than most of the tradition credits. The account of *zheng* and indirect action presented here also explains some of his practicality. For example, at 5.10 he remarks:

I used to trust people's actions once I had heard their words. Now, when I have heard their words, I observe their acts (Cf. Lau 1992: 77; Harbsmeier 1990: 144).

The context is that he has found Zai Yu 宰予 in bed during the day, and he attributes the change to this encounter. Here he makes clear that Zai Yu's highly improper physical alignment provides the interpretive key to anything he might possibly say; you can't work rotten wood or sculpt dung!

The point is that this passage offers us a view of a Confucius who increasingly comes to prize physical configurations (of things and people) as more truthful than words. As he puts it at 17.19:

Confucius said: "I am thinking of giving up words." Zigong 子貢 said: "If you do not speak, what will there be for us, your disciples, to transmit?" The Master replied: "What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and round, and there are the myriad creatures, coming into being, yet what does Heaven ever say?" (Cf. Lau 1992: 46; Harbsmeier 1990: 155).

Harbsmeier reads this passage as remorseful irony, but our robust reading of *zheng* gives it a more coherent reading (which does not rule out remorseful irony!) Here Confucius acknowledges that "actions" – including the indirect action of correct alignment – speak louder than words. And if we follow the *Nei ye*, Heaven is specifically concerned with correct alignment (*zheng*).

Finally, an *Analects* that gives a strongly positive account of indirection also helps explain differences between it and the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, both of which emphasize transparency and direct action. *Zheng* as correct alignment is a far cry from the "Rectification of names" (*Zhengming* 正名) chapter of the *Xunzi*, whose title presumably derives from *Analects* 13.3. A spontaneous and flexible *Analects* also helps account for the Confucius of the *Zhuangzi*. This is the Confucius who restrains YAN Hui 顏回 from going to Wei and discourses to him on the fasting of the heartmind (Chapter 4), who follows obscure teachers of indirect action (Chapter 5), who points out his disciple Zigong's misunderstanding of the real nature of ritual (Chapter 6), who explains that the skillful cicada catcher has unified his spirit and the skillful swimmer has forgotten the water (Chapter 19), and discourses on *wuwei* with Laozi 老子 (Chapter 21).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For translation of these passages see Watson 1964: 54–58 (chapter 4), 71–74 (chapter 5), 86–91 (chapter 6), 199–201 (chapter 19), and 224–225 (chapter 21).

In conclusion, the readings of the *Analects* advanced here would tend to align the *Analects* more closely with the *Daodejing*, *Nei ye*, and possibly even the *Zhuangzi*; and to drive a wedge between the *Analects* and the later pre-Han Confucians, specifically Mengzi and Xunzi. The issue of humor is different from, but consistent with the approach to physical alignment and the ethics it implies that I have discussed here.<sup>27</sup> What if Confucius and his disciples lived in a social environment that was both heterogeneous and “un-Confucian” in any sense that later ritualists and Confucians would recognize? (Harbsmeier 1990: 159).

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<sup>27</sup> He, I think, correctly observes that “the smile is all over the place in the *Analects*” (Harbsmeier 1990: 160), and it is conspicuously absent in the works of Mengzi and Xunzi.

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