



Confucius

THE ANALECTS

Adapted and illustrated by

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Translated by Brian Bruya

Foreword by Michael Puett

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Foreword

MICHAEL PUETT

It may seem odd at first to think of illustrating a truly great work of philosophy. Would this not reduce the brilliant philosophy found therein to a caricature? Would we ever think of illustrating, for example, Kant's second critique? Well, no, we wouldn't. But the answer to the previous question is no as well. The *Analects* is indeed a truly great philosophical work. But it is not a philosophical text in the way that we often use that term. The philosophy is provided through a series of dialogues between Confucius and his disciples. It portrays Confucius as a figure striving to be good, trying to educate his disciples, and hoping to create a better world. It is a philosophy focused on the art of living. The degree to which the *Analects* works as a philosophical text is tied directly to the degree to which we can picture this art of living in everyday practice—the situations in which Confucius will speak in certain ways to a particular disciple, the way Confucius will hold his body as he offers advice, the expressions Confucius will have when he utters a statement—the ways in which, in short, Confucius can sense those around him and sense what he can say or do that will inspire them to alter their lives for the better.

And what better way to help us envision this philosophy than by allowing us to see it in practice? Chih-chung "C. C." Tsai captures this perfectly; his illustrations bring the dialogues and conversations of the *Analects* to life. When we read Chih-chung Tsai's text, we avoid the danger that so many modern readers of the text fall into—the danger of simply looking for a

statement here or there that sounds philosophically profound, pulling it out of the context in which it appears, and ignoring the way the situation is portrayed. For the way to read the text and gain a full understanding of it is to focus precisely on the whole of it—the situations, the moods, the expressions of the utterances. The Confucius as portrayed in this text wants us to change for the better, but the change begins in the seemingly mundane ways we lead our everyday lives. Such a key lesson is lost when we fail to pay attention to the fact that the text itself is fully rooted in the everyday, in how Confucius will alter a situation for the better through, say, an expression or tone of voice. Chih-chung Tsai's rendering makes this wonderfully alive and accessible.

His illustrations also replicate, in a delightful manner, a way of reading the *Analects* that would have been common in earlier times. No one in pre-twentieth century China would have simply read the passages of the *Analects* one after the other without any contextualizing explication. The passages would have always been read through a web of commentaries providing key details concerning the situation and key pieces of background information, thus making it possible for the reader to understand the reasons Confucius speaks as he does to a certain disciple in a certain situation and to grasp the emotions and moods elicited by Confucius' utterances. Chih-chung Tsai's illustrations are based on these commentaries and do much the same work that the commentaries did—but in a very whimsical way.

And, precisely thanks to this whimsy, Chih-chung Tsai captures another aspect of the text that is so often lost on contemporary readers: the *Analects* is a wonderfully humorous text. Confucius is often described as a joyous figure, and among the traits his disciples are learning in the art of living is how to experience the joy that Confucius radiates. Unlike so many recent portraits of Confucius as a boring reciter of platitudes, Chih-chung Tsai captures the playful character of Confucius as portrayed in the text, the humor of Confucius' statements, the self-mocking annoyance that Confucius will express towards a lazy disciple before quoting some lines of poetry with a captivating smile. Far from reducing the brilliant philosophy of the *Analects* to a caricature, Chih-chung Tsai's rendering helps bring it to life.

The text is also superbly translated by Brian Bruya. Not only do Bruya's translations capture the nuanced language of the text beautifully, he also provides key pieces of background information on particular characters mentioned in the text so that Confucius' allusions make sense—thus giving us one bit of the information the commentaries would have provided to a reader that the illustrations alone cannot convey.

In short, Chih-chung Tsai has provided an illustrated version of the *Analects* that both replicates the contextualizing work of the commentarial apparatus and conveys the whimsy, humor, and joyousness of the text. This is a philosophy to be lived, a philosophical text to learn from and laugh with, and a version that captures such a sensibility delightfully.