

The Confucian View of “Morality”: Social Harmony

Li: is the socially prescribed forms of conduct essential to harmonious human interaction.

- (1)...requires guidance from tradition, a foundation of proper social values
- (2)...is actionless (or *wu wei*)
- (3)...must mean something (must have interpersonal, social significance)
- (4)...generates a magical power or “moral” force (*te*)
- (5)...establishes us as persons
- (6)...must be done with the proper spirit

Jen: tells us what that spirit of *li* is: the benevolent orientation expressed through civilized (ritualized) interaction with others (i.e., expressed through *li*).

- (1)...requires acting according to *li* (the formal dimension)
- (2)...requires “taking the analogy from what is near” or recognizing another as a person (the conscious or imaginative dimension)
 - (a) notice that this requires recognizing and responding to others in their distinctively social mode--in accordance with the social roles and contexts that define them as persons

Note: *Li* and *jen* are aspects of the same thing: *harmonious human(e) activity*. Notice that this activity, in being dynamic in nature, consists of an interdependency or interrelation between people (etc.), as well as between *li* and *jen* themselves. *Li* and *jen* regard how one stands in relation to another. In this respect, they define a person (or that person’s moral “character”).

Te: is the magical, moral power generated by harmonious human interaction (by *li* and *jen*)--that moves the human spirit to Goodness or that motivates others to want to be Good.

- (1)...a positive social influence
- (2)...leads us to want to be a valuable member of the human community in some context or another
- (3)...motivates us to identify with a social group (family, community, religion...)