

Le in the Analects

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Abstract

After discussing the use of *le* 樂 in early texts, the paper goes on to consider the nature of the idealized state of *le* in the *Analects*. It is a state akin to a state of tranquility, and is anchored in one's following the ethical path and one's affirming such a way of life. Because the different elements of the mind are blended together in an ethical direction, there is a sense of harmony and of ease. There is also a sense of restfulness in that one is not inclined to move away from this state and, as a result, this state will endure. Furthermore, because the external conditions of life are viewed as of minor significance compared to the ethical, one is not subject to worries about such conditions.

Keywords: Confucius, *le*, Mencius, music, self-cultivation, sorrow, tranquility, worries, Yan Hui, Zhu Xi,

Le in the *Analects*¹

1. Introduction

In *Analects* 6.11, Confucius comments on his favorite student Yan Hui, referring to his *le* 樂 in straitened circumstances in which others would feel *you* 憂 (worries):

“The Master said, ‘How admirable Hui is! Living in a mean dwelling on a bowlful of rice and a ladleful of water would bring *you* (worries) that most people would find unbearable, but Hui does not allow this to affect his *le*. How admirable Hui is!’” (*Analects* 6.11)²

In 7.16, Confucius similarly comments on his own *le* in the midst of a simple life:

“The Master said, ‘In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, *le* is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.’” (*Analects* 7.16)

And in 7.19, Confucius gives a self-description of himself as someone who would *wang* 忘, that is, lose any sense of, *you* (worries) in the midst of *le*:

“The Governor of She asked Zilu about Confucius. Zilu did not answer. The Master said, ‘Why did you not say something to this effect: he is the sort of person who *wang* (forgets) eating when he fully exerts himself, who is so full of *le* that he *wang* (lose any sense of) *you* (worries), and who does not notice the onset of old age?’” (*Analects* 7.19)

The term *le* is often translated as “joy”, but I have deliberately left it untranslated as the first half of this paper will be devoted to a discussion of the connotations of this term. The *le* of Confucius and Yan Hui (*Kong-Yan zhi le* 孔顏之樂) has become a central topic of discussion among the later Confucians. The second half of this paper will be devoted to a discussion of the nature of this state of *le*.

There are a few observations that we can extract from the three cited passages. First, both 6.11 and 7.16 highlight that one can be in a state of *le* in the midst of a materially simple life or straitened circumstances, a point also found in other passages (e.g., *Analects* 1.15). Second, *le* is contrasted with *you* in 6.11 & 7.19. For convenience, I will translate *you* as “worries”; nothing hinges on this translation as I will be examining more closely the nature of the contrast between *le* and *you*. Third, *le* is presented as a desirable state of mind in the cited passages, a point reinforced by other passages such as 6.20, which ranks *le* above understanding (*zhi* 知) and being fond of (*hao* 好), and 4.2, which says that *le* is not available to, or at least cannot be maintained by, someone who is not humane (*ren* 仁). What, then, is this state of *le*?

In answering this question, I will proceed in two stages. In sections 2, 3 and 4, I will focus on the use of the term *le* in early texts. I will consider its differences from other terms that also refer to certain ‘positive’ states of mind, such as *xi* 喜 and *yue* 悅. In addition, the character

le 樂 is the same as the character *yue* 樂, which refers to music, and music is related to another term *he* 和, often translated as “blending” or “harmonizing”. In early texts, *le* is also related to *he*, as well as to other terms such as *an* 安 (ease, restfulness) and *wang* 忘 (lose attentive awareness of, lose a sense of). I will consider the relation of *le* to music and to these other terms.

In sections 5 and 6, I will build on the discussion of the previous sections and discuss the nature of the state of *le* as it is idealized in the *Analects*. In this connection, I will also consider Mencius’ use of the term to refer to an idealized state of mind. Mencius sees himself as elaborating on Confucius’ ideas, and considering Mencius’ views will help our understanding of the nature of *le* as presented in the *Analects*. For convenience, I will refer to the idealized state of *le* presented in the *Analects* and the *Mencius* as the early Confucian conception of *le*. In elaborating on that conception, I will also draw on the commentaries on these two texts by Zhu Xi.

In the first half of the paper, which concerns the use of *le* in early texts, I stay fairly close to the texts and base my conclusions largely on textual evidence. In the second half of the paper, which concerns the early Confucian conception of *le*, I still take into account but might at certain points also go beyond the textual evidence. The purpose of doing so is to see how this conception can be elaborated on in a way that is continuous with the texts of the *Analects* and *Mencius*, while at the same time intelligible and appealing to us nowadays. This elaboration is continuous with the texts in that it is consistent with, even if not fully supported in all its fine details by, the textual evidence; it does not contain elements that conflict with the textual evidence or require some forced reading of parts of the texts. It also fits in with the texts as a whole in that various aspects of this elaboration is corroborated by other ideas that can be ascribed to the texts on the basis of textual evidence.

2. Use of *Le* in Early Texts: Preliminary Observations

Let us start with some preliminary observations about the use of *le* in the *Analects* and in three other texts, *Shijing*, *Zuozhuan*, and *Guoyu*, parts of which can be dated to before or during the time of the composition of the main parts of the *Analects*. *Le* can be used transitively to refer to a state of mind directed to an object (e.g., *Analects* 6.20, 6.23, 16.5) or to a state of mind without specifying an object (e.g., *Shijing* 126/3). It refers to a positive state of mind, which is contrasted with other negative states such as *you* (worries) (e.g., *Shijing* 132/2; *Analects* 6.11, 7.19) and *ai* 哀 (sorrow), where the contrast between *le* and *ai* is often presented in parallel to the contrast between *xi* 喜 (joy) and *nu* 怒 (anger) (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 25.11a; *Guoyu* 8.8a-8b). As a positive state of mind, *le* is often associated with *xi*, sometimes occurring in the combination *xi le* 喜樂 (e.g., *Shijing* 115/3). Probably related to the fact that *le* refers to a positive state of mind, it can also be used to describe something that one aspires to or some kind of ideal object, that is, something that can potentially be the object of this positive state of mind (e.g., *Shijing* 113/1,2,3). And though occurring less frequently, *le* is sometimes mentioned along with another positive state of mind, *yue* 悅 (e.g., *Analects* 1.1).³ And as a positive state of mind, *le* is a state that one can maintain despite straitened circumstances (e.g., *Shijing* 138/1; *Analects* 6.11, 7.16).

Le can be outwardly expressed in different ways. It can lead to one's smiling (*xiao* 笑) (e.g., *Analects* 14.13) and to song and dance (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 25.11a), and it is associated with other forms of musical expression (e.g., *Shijing* 172/3, 161/3). *Le* 樂 is the same character as *yue* 樂, which refers to music, and the association of *le* with music is quite common in early texts. *Mencius* 4A:27 presents *le* as the state one is in when immersed in musical activities, while *Analects* 17.21 describes how sorrow at the passing of a parent might lead to *le* not being present despite hearing the sound of music.

Music is related to *he* 和 (blending, harmonizing) (e.g., *Shijing* 161/3; *Guoyu* 3.14a-14b), and in *Analects* 7.32, Confucius is described as *he* (harmonizing with) the singing of another. *Le*, the state of mind under consideration, is also related to *he* (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 3.25a; *Guoyu* 6.5b). In addition to *he*, *le* is also associated with the term *an* 安 (ease, restfulness), and the combination *an le* 安樂 occurs from time to time (e.g., *Guoyu* 10.2a). Another term with which *le* is associated is *wang* 忘, a state of losing attentive awareness of or losing a sense of certain things. We saw earlier that in *Analects* 7.19, Confucius describes himself as being in a state of *le* to the extent that he *wang* (loses any sense of) *you* (worries). The linkage of *le* to *wang* occurs quite often in the *Zhuangzi*.

To summarize, *le* is a positive state of mind that can be directed to an object or that one can be in without specifying an object. It is often mentioned along with other positive states such as *xi* (joy), and contrasted with negative states such as *you* (worries) and *ai* (sorrow). It can be outwardly expressed in one's facial expression such as smiles, and in musical activities such as song and dance. The fact that it is the same character as the character that refers to music suggests that it has some affinity to the state of mind of someone immersed in musical performance or appreciation. *Le* is also related to *he* 和, *an* 安, and *wang* 忘, where *he* also characterizes music. To further understand the use of *le*, I will examine the difference between *le* and *xi*, the relation between *le* and music, and the relation between *le* and *he*, *an* and *wang*. In this connection, I will also draw on other early texts going beyond the *Shijing*, *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, and *Analects*.

3. *Le* 樂 and *Xi* 喜

Let us consider the use of *xi* 喜. Like *le*, it refers to a positive state of mind and can be used transitively with an object (e.g., *Shijing* 175/2). It can also be used intransitively without specifying an object; even when the state of mind it refers to is triggered by some occurrence, the occurrence itself need not be specified as the object of that state of mind (e.g., *Shijing* 176/2; *Analects* 5.7, 16.13; *Mencius* 1B:9, 2A:8, 2B:10). Generally, as made explicit in the *Zhuangzi*, *xi* is triggered by things going in accordance with one's wishes, by contrast to *nu* 怒 (anger), which is triggered by things going against one's wishes (*Zhuangzi* 9.18a). One difference between *le* and *xi* is that, unlike *xi* which is often triggered by specific occurrences that come about independently of oneself, *le* is a response to more enduring states of existence that one participates in, such as interaction with friends (*Analects* 1.1) or immersion in musical performance or appreciation.

Xi can be manifested in one's facial expressions (e.g., *Guoyu* 11.5b; *Analects* 5.19). It can also be manifested in one's actions, such as by giving generously to others; this contrasts with *nu* (anger), a negative state of mind that can lead to fighting or taking things away from others (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 25.11a; *Xunzi* 1.12b). As we saw, *le* is often contrasted with negative states of the mind such as *you* (worries) and *ai* (sorrow). *Xi* is also contrasted with *you* (worries) (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 10.15b, 11.11b-12a; *Mencius* 5A:2), and in addition, also with *ju* 懼 (fear, fearfulness) (e.g., *Guoyu* 15.8a). Although *ju* can be used in the sense of fear directed to some situation that one currently encounters, it can also be directed to possible future occurrences that one prefers not to see happen, such as the aging and declining health of parents (*Analects* 4.21), and can lead to preemptive action such as being very cautious in approaching affairs (*Analects* 7.11), avoiding incorrectness when deliberating about what is correct (*Xunzi* 15.10a), and consciously staying away from disgrace (*Xunzi* 1.12b). When used in this manner, *ju* is closer to the attitude of fearfulness than to fear as such, and bears an affinity to *you*, a state of concern or worry directed to possible future occurrences. The two terms are often conjoined in the *Analects* (e.g., *Analects* 9.29, 12.4, 14.28). One interesting difference between *le* and *xi* is that, while *le* often precludes negative contrary states such as *you* (e.g. *Analects* 7.19), *xi* can coexist with contrasting states such as *ju*, with the two states being directed to different objects (e.g., *Zuozhuan* 5.9a-9b, 12.10a-10b; *Guoyu* 8.9b, 15.4b; *Analects* 4.21).

From this discussion, we can draw two main conclusions about the differences between *le* and *xi*. First, *xi* is a response to an occurrence that accords with one's wishes, where that occurrence need not involve one's active participation. One's mind is positively stimulated by the external occurrence, and such positive stimulation subsides with the passing of the occurrence. In this sense, *xi* is a more immediate response to one's environment that can come and go as one's environment changes. By contrast, *le* is a response based on one's active participation in some ongoing activity, such as appreciation of music or interaction with friends, and so is by comparison a more enduring state of mind. For example, *xi* would describe one's reaction to learning about an upcoming visit of friends, while *le* would describe one's state while being in their company and interacting with them (cf. *Analects* 1.1).

Earlier, we mentioned another term *yue* 悅 which also refers to a positive state of mind. *Yue*, like *le*, refers to a more enduring state of mind, as when one *yue* what one has learnt and the practice of what one has learnt (*Analects* 1.1), certain moral qualities (*Mencius* 6A:7), or a virtuous ruler (*Mencius* 2A:3). *Yue* can be a response to a specific occurrence, such as the people's response to someone coming to relieve them of their plight under their present ruler (e.g., *Mencius* 1B:10, 1B:11, 3B:5), or one's response upon hearing a certain teaching (e.g., *Mencius* 3A:4, 6B:4). Even so, *yue* is not just a reaction of the moment but is a more enduring state that involves one's endorsing, and continuing to be moved by, what triggers it. Thus, the people endorse and are moved by the action of the relieving party, and one endorses and is moved by a certain teaching, just as one endorses and is moved by what one has learnt or by certain moral qualities. Correspondingly, being not *yue*, or *bu yue* 不悅, is not just a matter of not liking something or being displeased, but also involves one's not endorsing, or disapproving of, something (e.g., *Analects* 6.12, 11.4, 6.28, 17.4).⁴

Thus, while *yue* is like *le* and unlike *xi* in being a more enduring state, it differs from both *le* and *xi* in being a more reflective kind of response; it involves a reflective endorsement of what

prompts *yue*. This does not mean that *le* cannot be based on some kind of reflectivity; the point is only that such reflectivity is part of the connotations of the term *yue* but not of the term *le*. For example, *le* can refer to a state of mind, such as the state of immersion in musical performance or appreciation, which does not involve such reflectivity. Though reflectivity is not part of the connotations of the term *le*, *le* can nevertheless refer to a state that is based on some reflective stance. As we will see, this is true of the state of *le* that Confucius and Mencius idealize.

The second main difference between *le* and *xi* is that *le* is not just by comparison more enduring than *xi*, but also permeates one's mind in such a way that it tends to preclude other contrasting states of mind. We noted that *xi* and *ju*, though contrasted, can coexist if directed to different objects. One example is:

“The Master said, ‘A person should not be unaware of the age of his parents. It is a matter, on the one hand, for *xi* and, on the other, for *ju*.’” (*Analects* 4.21)

Here, *xi* is directed to the present situation of one's parents having lived to an old age, while *ju* is directed to the future continuing aging and eventually declining health of parents. *Xi* is directed to a specific situation and can coexist with contrasting states directed to other situations; in that sense, it is by comparison more ‘localized’. *Le*, on the other hand, is more ‘pervasive’ in that it permeates one's mind to the exclusion of contrary states such as *you* (worries). For example, being in a state of *le*, one no longer attends to one's straitened circumstances (*Analects* 1.15, 7.16) and as a result does not worry about (*you*) these external conditions of life (*Analects* 6.11, 7.19).

Our discussion of the differences between *le* and *xi* is based on the use of these two terms in early texts. A study has been conducted by Ye Zhengdao in relation to later usages of the terms, using the *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 as the basis of the study. As might be expected, the basic differences between the two terms carry over to later usages, and some of Ye's observations parallel the above observations. For example, he observes that *xi* is a response of the moment to external occurrences, while *le* is more absorbing and lasting, leaving little room for one to think about other things.⁵ He elaborates on the differences in greater detail and in a number of other directions. According to him, *xi* is sudden and is a passive response to unforeseen external occurrences; it is an up-lifting feeling that is momentary and intense, resulting from being stirred by external stimuli. By contrast, *le* is expansive and absorbing, and is rooted in human effort. It is something that one can attain and seek to attain, and hence something over which one has more control, and it involves someone, whether the person experiencing *le* or someone else, doing something, especially one's doing something with others. Also, *xi* is expressed through non-actions including facial expressions, such as dancing eyebrows and smiling eyes, while *le* is expressed through smile and laughter, which involve human activity.⁶ Ye's analysis is detailed and his examples convincing, and I can see that the later usages of the two terms do have some of the connotations he describes.⁷ Still, I have not elaborated on the differences between *le* and *xi* in these directions as there is not sufficient textual evidence in early texts to support these observations. Indeed, the evidence goes against some of these observations – for example, as we saw, *xi* can be expressed through actions and not just facial expressions.

4. Le and Music; Le 樂, An 安, He 和, Wang 忘

To further probe the use of *le* in early texts, I turn next to its association with music and its relation to the terms *an*, *he*, and *wang*. The association of *le* 樂 with music (*yue* 樂) can be found in both the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. In *Analects* 17.21, Confucius observes how, because of one's sorrow at the passing of one's parents, one would not experience *le* upon hearing the sound of music (*wen yue bu le* 聞樂不樂), the implication being that *le* is the typical response to music. In *Mencius* 4A:27, the nature of *le* is described in terms of how, as one's *le* grows, one cannot refrain from stepping with one's feet and waving with one's arms, presenting the imagery of music and dance as an expression of *le*. And in *Mencius* 1B:1, Mencius discusses with a king the *le* of music, pointing out that such *le* would be enhanced by the king's sharing the enjoyment of music with his people. The close association between *le* and music can also be found in other early texts, such as the *Xunzi* and the *Liji*. The *Xunzi* explains music as a way of channeling *le*; the proper forms of music are those that provide an appropriate channel for *le* in accordance with the Way (*dao* 道) (14.1a, 14.3a), the same point being repeated in the *Liji* (11.15b-16a).

Thus, in early texts, the state of *le* is conceived of as akin to the state of mind when one is engaged in musical activities, whether performance or appreciation. This relates to the features of *le* that distinguish it from *xi*. *Le* is not a mere response to external stimuli but involves one's active participation, if only through the way one directs one's attention such as the way one attends to a musical performance. Accordingly, it is a more enduring state of the mind by comparison to *xi*. And just like the state of immersion in music, to be in a state of *le* is to be immersed in some activity in a way that makes one not attend to aspects of one's environment that one might have attended to otherwise. I will elaborate further on these two features of *le* by considering, respectively, its relation to *an* and *he*, and its relation to *wang*.

He 和, often translated as “blending” or “harmonizing”, is used in relation to music to describe how sounds respond to one another in a mutually supporting and reinforcing manner. It is also used in relation to the preparation of food to describe a similar relation between different tastes. Thus, *he* presupposes the existence of different things belonging to the same category, such as different sounds or different tastes, and describes this kind of mutual relation between them.⁸ *He* is presented as a key function of music in the *Xunzi* (14.3a) and the *Liji* (11.7a). The *Xunzi* (14.3a) presents music as making possible *tong* 同 (unity), where *tong* is not a matter of literally making things the same, but of bringing different things of the same category together in such a way that they blend into a unitary whole.

Returning to *le*, we noted earlier that *le* is often mentioned along with *he*, suggesting that the state of *le* also has to do with *he*. That is, it is a state in which different elements of the mind blend together in a mutually supporting and reinforcing manner. That the state of *le* has to do with *he*, or blending, of the mind is stated explicitly in the *Lushichunqiu* (5.10a). This also accounts for the earlier observation that *le* permeates the mind in a way that it leaves no room for contrary states – since the different elements of the mind have blended together in a mutually supporting and reinforcing manner, there will not be any aspect of the mind that pulls in a different direction.

The proper forms of music, through the blending of sounds, can also bring about the blending of the different elements of the mind, thereby contributing to self-cultivation. Thus, the *Liji* (11.23a) describes music as instrumental to bringing order to the mind (*yue yi zhi xin* 樂以治心), and *Analects* 8.8 even describes music as the culmination of the self-cultivation process. That the proper forms of music play a role in moral cultivation is something also recognized and explored in western philosophical traditions.⁹

The association of *le* with *he* is also related to the association of *le* with *an* 安. When different elements of the mind blend together, they no longer pull in different directions and so enter into a stable relationship, resulting in the mind being at ease and at rest, not being inclined to move away from such a state. When the mind is in such a state, it will also endure. Such a condition of the mind, a state of being at ease and at rest, is described in terms of *an* 安, and its enduring quality in terms of *jiu* 久 (*Liji* 11.23a). This relation between *le* and *an* is reflected in the idiomatic combination *an le* 安樂 (e.g., *Guoyu* 10.2a; *Mencius* 6B:15), and the association of *le* with *jiu* can also be found in other early texts (e.g., *Zuo zhuan* 17.10a). The relation between *le* and *jiu* explains why *le* is, by comparison, a more enduring state of the mind than *xi*.

I turn next to the relation between *le* and *wang* 忘. The state of immersion in music can lead one to not attend to aspects of one's environment that one might have attended to otherwise. For example, *Analects* 7.14 describes how listening to a superior form of music has led Confucius to not attend to the taste of meat for three months. The same is true of the state of *le*. In *Analects* 7.19, Confucius describes himself as someone whose *le* has led him to not notice the onset of old age, and to *wang*, or lose any sense of, *you* (worries). In *Mencius* 7A:8, Mencius comments on how *le* in the Way can lead one to *wang* the authority that others have by virtue of their superior social positions. And in *Mencius* 7A:35, having described how the ancient sage king Shun carried away his father, who had committed a crime, and abandoned the Empire. Mencius comments on how the *le* of Shun led him to *wang* the position of being ruler over the whole Empire.

Though *wang* is often translated as “forget”, it is in these contexts not a matter of forgetting things or even of losing awareness of things. Rather, what one *wang* is something that one no longer directs attention to even if one might be aware of it; what one loses is not awareness as such but attentive awareness. The *Zhuangzi* repeatedly refers to this state of *wang*. For example, the proficient swimmer *wang* the water (*Zhuangzi* 7.3a). Just as fish *wang* each other in the lakes and oceans (*Zhuangzi* 3.4b, 5.25a), human beings should also *wang* each other in the practice of the Way (*Zhuangzi* 3.12a). Yan Hui is presented as having *wang* humaneness (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義), rites (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂), and eventually everything (*Zhuangzi* 3.14a-14b). This state of *wang* shows that one fits comfortably (*shi* 適) into what one dwells in; one would *wang* one's feet if the shoes fit comfortably, or one's waist if the belt fits comfortably (*Zhuangzi* 7.7b). There will be comfort of the mind if it *wang* the distinction between right and wrong, and one should get to the point when one *wang* such comfort itself (*Zhuangzi* 7.7b).

In these examples, while *wang* has to do with non-attention, that is, one's not attending to certain things, what accounts for the non-attention can be different. There are at least three ways

in which it can come about. First, the non-attention to certain things might result from the absorption of attention in some other things. For example, when immersed in musical performance or appreciation, one's attention is taken up by a piece of music in a way that one no longer attends to other things in one's environment. Presumably, this is true of Confucius' non-attention to the taste of meat after hearing a superior form of music, this resulting from his constantly thinking back to the musical performance.

Second, the non-attention to certain things might result from these things not coming to one's attention, not because of the absorption of one's attention in other things, but because there is nothing that occasions one's attending to these things. For example, when the shoes or belt fit comfortably, one's feet or waist would not draw one's attention and so one would not attend to them. This can also account for the proficient swimmer's not attending to the water; because of one's proficiency in swimming, the water is not viewed as something to be coped with and so it does not draw one's attention. At the same time, the first account might also be applicable to this example. The non-attention to water can also be attributed in part to the absorption of one's attention in swimming, thereby precluding attention to the water as such.

Third, the non-attention to certain things might result from one's not viewing these things as significant because of one's evaluative stance. This differs from the second account in that, in the second account, certain things just do not come to one's attention because nothing occasions one's attending to them, not because of one's evaluating them as insignificant. For example, one's feet or waist just do not take up one's attention because of the comfortable fit, not because one regards one's feet or waist as insignificant. By contrast, someone who follows the Way and is in a state of *le* would regard one's ethical qualities as of greater significance than social positions, and so would *wang* others' superior social positions in the sense of not viewing them as significant and as something to defer to. Similarly, Shun viewed rescuing his father, in a way that prevented him from further criminal activities, as more important than being ruler over the Empire, and so would *wang* the latter in the sense of not viewing it as significant and as a consideration against what he did. In these two examples, *wang* involves not paying attention to something because one does not view it as significant.

All of these three accounts of non-attention might be at work in *Analects* 7.19:

“The Governor of She asked Zilu about Confucius. Zilu did not answer. The Master said, ‘Why did you not say something to this effect: he is the sort of person who *wang* (forgets) eating when he fully exerts himself, who is so full of *le* that he *wang* (lose any sense of) *you* (worries), and who does not notice the onset of old age?’” (*Analects* 7.19)

Because Confucius fully exerts himself, presumably to learning, his attention is fully absorbed in a way that he *wang* (forgets) eating; this is a phenomenon familiar to us when we are fully absorbed in a certain kind of activity. Absorption of attention could also account for his not noticing the onset of old age. At the same time, his non-attention to eating or aging might also relate in part to his viewing these matters as of minor significance compared to learning, and so an evaluative stance might also be at work. Because of such an evaluative stance, certain considerations such as the material conditions of life that carry significance for and would have caused worries to others do not have the same significance for him, leading him to *wang*, that is,

lose any sense of, such worries. Comfortable fit might also partly account for his losing any sense of such worries; because of his immersion in learning and because he is at ease in doing so, other considerations such as the material conditions of life just do not come to his attention.

This discussion of *Analects* 7.19 is only intended to suggest some possible ways of accounting for the instances of non-attention presented in the passage. The passage itself does not contain enough details to support any specific account, though each of these accounts is consistent with the textual evidence. In the next two sections, I will consider the idealized state of *le* presented in the *Analects*. In doing so, I might occasionally go beyond the textual evidence in this same sense – my elaboration on this idealized state of *le* is consistent with, though at certain points not definitively supported by, the textual evidence.

5. *Le* as an Idealized State of Mind: *Le* 樂 and *Dao* 道

To summarize our discussion of the use of *le* in early texts, *le* refers to a positive state of the mind that, by contrast to *xi*, is more enduring and more permeating. *Xi* is typically a response to an occurrence that accords with one's wishes, involving one's mind's being positively stimulated by the occurrence, such positive stimulation subsiding with the passing of the occurrence. It is thus a response to one's environment that comes and goes as one's environment changes, and it can coexist with other contrary states, such as *you* (worries) and *ju* (fearfulness), that are directed to other objects. *Le*, by contrast, is a state of mind akin to the state of immersion in musical activities, and involves one's participatory engagement with one's surroundings. Just like the proper forms of music in which different sounds blend together in a mutually supporting and reinforcing manner, namely, *he*, the state of *le* also involves different elements of the mind being similarly blended. The absence of any internal discord between different elements of the mind leads to a state of ease and restfulness, namely, *an*. And because the different elements are blended together in this stabilizing manner, the state of *le* is by comparison more enduring, namely, *jiu*. Finally, as a result of the absorption of attention, comfortable fit, or one's evaluative stance, one no longer attends to aspects of one's environment that one would have otherwise attended to, making one *wang* these aspects of one's environment.

Let us now consider the use of *le* in the *Analects* to refer to an idealized state of the mind. *Le* is also used in this manner in other early texts. For example, the *Guoyu* speaks of the *le* of virtue (*de* 德) and righteousness (*yi* 義), contrasting it with other kinds of *le* (*Guoyu* 13.6a). And the *Mencius* speaks of the *le* of the Way (*dao* 道) (2B:2, 5A:7, 7A:8) and of righteousness (*yi* 義) (7A:9), and presents *le* as a state of ethical accomplishment (4A:27, 7A:4). In the ethical context, just as in other contexts we have considered, *le* is related to a state of ease and restfulness (*an*) and has an enduring (*jiu*) quality. For example, the *Zuozhuan* relates *le* to these qualities in the context of discussing virtue (*de*) (15.11b, 17.10a-10b). And the *Analects* also presents the humane (*ren*) person as dwelling in humaneness (*ren*) with ease and restfulness (*an*) and as residing in *le* in an enduring manner (*Analects* 4.2). In the *Mencius*, humaneness (*ren*) is described as the restful (*an*) dwelling of human beings (2A:7, 4A:10; cf. 4B:14).

What distinguishes this idealized state of *le* is its relation to the ethical; that is, it is through one's residing in the ethical that one is in this state of *le*. One flows along with the ethical and, in doing so, one's state of mind exhibits the characteristics of *le* that we described earlier. Being completely oriented in an ethical direction, the different elements of the mind blend together into a unitary whole. Thus, *Mencius* 7A:4 presents *le* as following from *cheng*, where *cheng* involves the complete ethical orientation of one's mind. As a result, there is a sense of ease and restfulness, and such a state will endure. To further explore the relation between the idealized state of *le* and the ethical, let us consider Zhu Xi's comments on this state of *le* and its relation to the Way (*dao*).

Zhu Xi describes such *le* as a state in which one flows along with the Way, at ease and without effort. In his comments on the *le* of Yan Hui in *Analects* 6.11, he cites Master Cheng's remark:

“Master Cheng said, ‘The mind of Yan Hui ... is at ease (*cong rong* 從容) and contented (*zi de* 自得), and it is in a state of *le* wherever he is. It is not that he regards the Way as worthy of *le* and have *le* as a result.’” (*Lunyu Huowen* 11.12a)

He uses *cong rong* 從容 to describe the state of *le* in this comment and in his comment on *Mencius* 4A:27 (*Mengzi Jizhu* 4.15a-15b), and this echoes the way the *Zhuangzi* describes the *le* of a fish swimming freely in water (*Zhuangzi* 6.15a). And in his comments on *Mencius* 4A:27 and 7A:4, he also describes *le* as a state in which one follows the ethical without effort (*Mengzi Jizhu* 4.15a-15b, 7.2b).

In addition, commenting on *Analects* 6.11 and 7.16, which concern Yan Hui's and Confucius' *le* in the midst of straitened circumstances, he cites Master Cheng's comment that these individuals' *le* is not directed to their straitened circumstances; instead, their *le* persists despite such circumstances (*Lunyu Jizhu* 3.13b, 4.5a). This is a reasonable observation, but in his comment on *Analects* 6.11, he also cites with approval Master Cheng's remark that “it is not that he (Yan Hui) regards the Way as worthy of *le* and has *le* as a result.” (*Lunyu Huowen* 11.12a) This does not mean that one's *le* is not directed to the Way, as Zhu Xi explicitly opposes this idea. According to him, to say that one's *le* is not directed to the Way would collapse the Confucian position into the view that *le* does not have any object, a view that is found in the *Zhuangzi* (*Lunyu Huowen* 11.12a) and that characterizes the Daoist and Buddhist positions (*Lunyu Huowen* 12.13b). After all, what differentiates the ideal state of *le* in the *Zhuangzi* and that for the early Confucians is that, for the former, *le* is based on freeing the mind of any conception of the proper way of life, while for the latter, *le* is based on the mind's having such a conception and on one's leading one's life accordingly. Indeed, Zhu Xi cannot be opposed to the idea that *le* is directed to the Way since such a position is explicitly stated in the *Mencius* (2B:2, 5A:7, 7A:8), which sometimes also presents righteousness (*yi*) as the object of *le* (7A:9). Zhu Xi himself, in commenting on *Analects* 6.20 and 7.19, uses *le* transitively presenting its object as what one has attained (*de* 得), namely, the Way (*Lunyu Jizhu* 3.15b, 4.5b).

So, his point is not that *le* is not directed to the Way, only that it is not the case that one is in a state of *le* because one regards it as an appropriate response to the Way. This is also true of the *le* in music. One is in a state of *le* as one listens to a musical performance, and it is not the

case that one is in that state because one regards it as an appropriate response to the musical performance. But one's *le* is still directed to the musical performance in the sense that it is the performance that provides its basis. Similarly, one's *le* as one follows the Way is itself directed to the Way in the sense that it is following the Way that provides its basis, even though it is not the case that one is in that state because one judges it to be an appropriate response.

Even if it is not the case that one is in a state of *le* because one regards it as an appropriate response to the Way, this does not mean that one does not view the Way positively. After all, if one would not have endorsed the Way if one were to reflect on it as a guide to one's life, one's state of mind would not have exhibited the blending as well as the ease and restfulness that characterize *le*. Thus, the basis of one's *le* is not just one's actually following the Way, but also one's endorsing it as the direction of one's life. In this sense, the idealized state of *le* is grounded in a certain reflective stance, namely, one's awareness that one is following the Way and one's affirmation of such an orientation. This does not mean that one consciously reflects on one's way of life while in a state of *le*; it means only that, if one *were* to reflect on it, one would have affirmed the direction of one's life. And it does not mean that the term *le* refers to such a reflective stance; it means only that the state of mind that the term refers to is anchored in such a reflective stance. The state of *le* itself is just the state of mind with the characteristics described earlier. It has certain experiential qualities – there is a sense of harmony in that there is a blending of, and an absence of discord between, different elements of the mind, as a result of which one feels at ease and at rest, and does not wish to move away from that state. In that regard, it is like a state of tranquility, one that is based on a reflective sense that one's life as a whole is properly oriented.¹⁰

6. *Le* as an Idealized State of Mind: *Le* 樂 and *You* 憂

Another characteristic of *le* is that it leads to non-attention to certain things that one might have otherwise attended to. To better understand this aspect of the idealized state of *le*, let us consider an apparent tension in the way *you* (worries), the state with which *le* is often contrasted, is viewed in the *Analects*. We saw earlier that certain passages present *le* as leading to one's losing any sense of *you* (*Analects* 7.19, 6.11; cf. *Mencius* 4B:29). In other passages, however, it seems that *you* of certain kinds are idealized, such as *you* in relation to learning and self-cultivation (*Analects* 7.3) and *you* in relation to the Way (*Analects* 15.32). The *Mencius* presents the superior person as having *you* throughout his life, a kind of *you* directed to his own qualities (*Mencius* 4B:28). A similar concern with one's own qualities is also idealized in the *Analects*, conveyed through the term *huan* 患 – *huan* should be directed to one's own qualities rather than appreciation by others (*Analects* 1.16, 4.14, 14.30). Other passages in these two texts also present certain things as the proper objects of *you*, such as the health of parents (*Analects* 2.6) and, for those in power, the well-being of the people and order in the state (*Mencius* 1B:4, 3A:4, 6B:15). Since these two texts idealize certain kinds of *you*, what the idealized state of *le* precludes can only be *you* of certain kinds but not of other kinds.

In addition to a distinction between different kinds of *you*, a consideration of the relation between *le* and sorrow also suggests the need to distinguish between different kinds of *le*. For

example, in *Analects* 17.21, Confucius remarks that the sorrow that one feels upon the passing of a parent would, or ideally should, lead one to not feel *le* even upon hearing the sound of music. But sorrow and *le* of some other kind presumably can coexist. The idealized state of *le*, that which is anchored in the ethical, presumably would not be undermined by the sorrow one feels upon the passing of a parent, since such sorrow is part of an ethically appropriate response to the passing of parents. Wang Yangming makes exactly this point in response to a student's question about how one can still feel *le* when crying with sorrow upon the passing of a parent:

“There is *le* only if the son has cried bitterly. If not, there will not be *le*. *Le* means that despite crying, one's mind is at peace.” (*Chuanxilu*, no. 292)

His point is that crying bitterly out of sorrow is an appropriate response to the passing of a parent, and there will not be *le* unless one has responded appropriately. It follows that while sorrow upon the passing of a parent might preclude *le* of a certain kind, such as that accompanying the appreciation of music, it does not preclude, and in fact is required by, *le* of the kind idealized by the early Confucians.

Before considering the relation between *le* and *you*, let us first consider the difference between these two kinds of *le*. Sorrow upon the passing of a parent should involve a full engagement of one's attention in matters related to the parent; someone whose attention strays to other unrelated matters would not be feeling sorrow of the kind idealized by the early Confucians. On the other hand, the *le* of music appreciation also involves one's fully attending to the musical performance; simultaneously attending to some other event going on at the same time would detract from this state of *le*. The competing demands on one's attention, between sorrow and *le* of this kind, explains why the two cannot coexist.

But *le* as an idealized state grounded in the ethical does not engage one's attention in the same way that the *le* of music appreciation does. It is like the latter in many ways – the blending of the different elements of the mind in an ethical direction, resulting in a sense of harmony, ease and restfulness. But while the *le* of music appreciation is based on the absorption of one's attention in a musical performance, the idealized state of *le* is based on the reflective stance described earlier. That is, it is based on the reflective awareness that one is following the ethical path and the reflective affirmation of such a way of life. But, as we noted in the discussion of Zhu Xi, this does not require one to consciously attend to one's way of life or consciously affirm such a way of life. Instead, the idealized state of *le* is based on such a reflective stance only in the counterfactual sense that, if one *were* to reflect on one's way of life, one would have been aware that one is following an ethical path that one also affirms. Such a reflective stance need be present only in this counterfactual sense, and so one's being in the idealized state of *le* that is based on such a stance does not need to engage one's attention in the way that the *le* of music appreciation does. For this reason, it does not compete with the demands on one's attention that the sorrow upon the passing of a parent imposes, and so can continue to be present in the midst of such sorrow.

Returning to the relation between the idealized state of *le* and *you*, such *le* is supposed to lead one to not attend to *you* of certain kinds. What our discussion shows is that it does so not via the absorption of attention. Instead, the idealized state of *le* is based on a reflective stance which

involves an evaluative outlook, and presumably it is this evaluative outlook that accounts for the non-attention. That is, the kinds of *you* that are precluded have to do with things that are viewed as of little significance on this evaluative outlook.

Consider now the kinds of *you* that are not precluded by the idealized state of *le*. These include *you* directed to ethical matters, such as learning and self-cultivation, and matters related to family and state, such as the health of parents and, for those in appropriate positions, order in the state. Concern with such matters are not only compatible with the evaluative outlook that underlies the idealized state of *le*, but such a concern is part of the ethical ideal that informs this evaluative outlook. So, *you* directed to such matters is not only compatible with the idealized state of *le*, but is itself required by it and hence idealized.

Consider next the kinds of *you* that are precluded by the idealized state of *le*. These include personal goods such as the material conditions of life and appreciation by others, and other considerations such as the superior social positions of others. Not all of these matters are irrelevant; presumably, some concern for basic needs for sustenance would be in order. But, in relation to these matters, anything going beyond the basics would, on this evaluative outlook, be of little significance compared to the ethical, and it is to the latter that our attention should be directed. Thus, *you* should be directed to the Way rather than poverty (*Analects* 15.32) and *huan* should be directed to one's own qualities rather than appreciation by others (*Analects* 1.16, 4.14, 14.20). Because the evaluative outlook directs our attention away from such matters, the idealized state of *le*, which is based on such an evaluative outlook, leads us to *wang*, or lose any sense of, *you* (worries) that have to do with such matters (*Analects* 7.19). And when the *Analects* describes the humane (*ren*) person or the superior person (*jun zi* 君子) as being without *you* (9.29, 12.4, 14.28), it is *you* of this kind that is precluded.

In this way, the idealized state of *le* precludes worries that are directed to certain conditions of life such as poverty or lack of appreciation by others. In addition, it contrasts with a general state of anxiety that is characterized not by specific worries, but by a persistent state of worrying. In *Analects* 17.15, Confucius describes the kind of person who, when not yet getting what one seeks, worries about (*huan*) not getting it and, after getting it, worries about (*huan*) losing it. A similar idea is found in the *Xunzi* (20.8a-8b), which presents Confucius as describing the inferior person (*xiao ren* 小人) as someone who, when not yet getting what one seeks, worries about (*you*) not getting it and, after getting it, worries about (*kong* 恐) losing it. By contrast, the superior person (*jun zi* 君子) is characterized by a persistent state of *le*. What is depicted in these passages is a general state of anxiety that is presumably grounded in an outlook that focuses on the external conditions of life that are not within one's control. As a result, there is a persistent sense of vulnerability, a sense that what is important to one's life is missing or could easily be lost. Such a general anxiety is opposed to the state of *le* grounded in an outlook that focuses on the ethical.¹¹

To conclude, we started with three passages in the *Analects* that presents Confucius and Yan Hui as being in a state of *le* in the midst of material deprivation, a state this is idealized and that directs one's attention away from certain things and precludes worries of certain kinds. What our discussion shows is that this idealized state of *le* is grounded in one's following the ethical path and one's affirming such a way of life. One is actively engaged with the ethical, and the

different elements of the mind blend together in an ethical direction. As a result, there is a sense of harmony and of ease. There is also a sense of restfulness in that one is not inclined to move away from this state and, as a result, the state of *le* will endure. Furthermore, the evaluative outlook that underlies this state of *le* focuses on the ethical, and various external conditions of life are viewed as of minor significance by comparison. This results in one's attention being not directed to such conditions of life, so that one is not subject to worries about such conditions. This, I have argued, is the nature of the *le* of Confucius and Yan Hui (*Kong Yang zhi le* 孔顏之樂), a central topic of discussion among the later Confucians.

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¹ I presented preliminary ideas on this topic at a graduate seminar that I taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in Fall 2010. I have benefitted from the seminar discussions, and from a paper Ms. Liu Ni wrote on this topic as part of the seminar.

² In citing from the *Analects*, I follow the translation in Lau (1992) with slight modifications.

³ Here, I follow the usual view that *shuo* 說 is used interchangeably with *yue* 悅 in certain passages in the *Analects*, including passage 1.1.

⁴ Again, I follow the usual view that *shuo* 說 is used interchangeably with *yue* 悅 in certain passages in the *Analects*.

⁵ Ye, 73-74.

⁶ For details, see Ye, 64-76.

⁷ To mention just one example, it is idiomatic in modern Chinese to speak of one's seeking *le* (尋樂) but not of seeking *xi*, echoing his point that *xi* is a more passive response while *le* often involves effort.

⁸ See Li Chenyang for a detailed analysis of the use of the term *he* and the Confucian appropriation of the term.

⁹ For example, David Carr, 104, notes that the superior forms of music are those that conduces to emotional discipline and ordered passions.

¹⁰ Cf. Griswold, 16-17, 22-24, which discusses a state of tranquility with similar characteristics, one that is based on a reflective sense that one's life as a whole is structurally intact and properly oriented.

¹¹ Griswold, 19-22, discusses a general anxiety of this kind, having to do with the sense that things are not stable and that the foundation of one's life is not yet complete and may crumble. According to him, tranquility is opposed to anxiety of this kind.