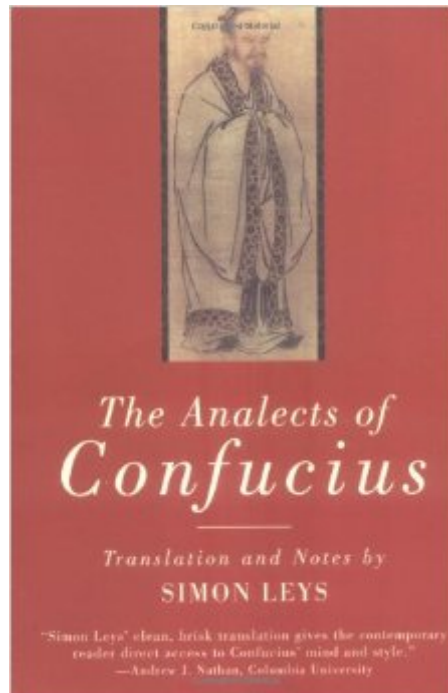


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The Analects Of Confucius (Norton Paperback)



Synopsis

"This is the Confucius translation for our time." •Jonathan Mirsky, The Times [London] In this terse, brilliant translation, Simon Leys restores the human dimension to Confucius. He emerges a full-blooded character with a passion for politics and a devotion to the ideals of a civilization he saw in decline. Leys's notes draw Confucius into conversation with the great thinkers of the Western tradition. In all, this volume provides new readers the perfect introduction to a classic work.

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed this book quite a bit. Granted, I haven't read other translations of the Analects, so my rating is for the book itself more than as a comparison to other translations. The fact that Confucius lived thousands of years ago is amazing to me ... the things he says apply to people throughout the ages, and they're full of wisdom. Having read the book, I find myself trying to be a bit more of a Confucian gentleman than I did before reading it. Confucius' teachings about humanity and being a gentleman span across the ages. I'm very glad I read this book. The only reason I didn't give the book 5 stars is because I can't compare it to other translations, and it seems a little improper to rate a translated book without comparing it to other translations. But I personally found Leys' lines to be easily understandable and interesting, even if I have no way of ascertaining their accuracy with the original text. **7/31/09 UPDATE** I was looking to buy a copy of the Analects for a friend when I came across my own review when trying to decide between versions ... which is a somewhat

strange feeling! I'm still not an "expert", but having read several more Chinese classics in the meantime, including a few versions of the Analects, I thought I would update this review. I think the Leys translation is a very good introduction to the Analects for someone who is looking for a starting point in Confucian thought. The translation is a little bit loose but flows well in English, the introduction gives a good amount of context without going overboard, and the notes are nicely situated at the end to prevent clutter. This makes it a good version for the Confucius novice, a comment I mean in earnest and not a backhanded compliment.

This book is delightful, irritating, and utterly sui generis; the personality of its author is on every page. As a translation it is sometimes inspired--Leys has a knack for avoiding the very un-Chinese verbiage with which Lau and, sometimes, the generally superior Dawson clutter their lines. But it cannot be relied upon as a translation. In the first book the words "Rich but loving ritual" become "Rich but considerate." Ritual (li) is one of the great themes of the Analects and it is either dishonest or shockingly clumsy to conceal its key presence in this important passage. At other times we descend from translation to mere paraphrase: "a state of a thousand chariots" becomes "a medium-sized state". I often found myself wishing that Leys had taken to heart Dawson's words: "I do feel that one should get as close to the original as possible....I do not think that it is entirely virtuous to produce a version which reads as if it were written at the end of the twentieth century."The notes, to the degree that they comment on the text itself or on the translation choices, are illuminating only for someone who has read other translations and has something to compare them to. But what quickly becomes apparent is that, under the guise of a translation with notes, what we have here is something like an anthology. Borges, Pascal, Stendhal, C. S. Lewis, Marcus Aurelius, Nietzsche, even Pancho Villa and many others are given long and full quotes. Sometimes they shed light on the original. Sometimes there is only a tangential relationship; one gets the impression that Leys was simply reminded of something and decided to share it, as in a conversation. They are always very interesting: this is the delight of the book.

The importance of the historical use and misuse of the teaching of Confucius throughout the centuries in China can hardly be understated. While Confucian thought was on the outs with Communist intellectuals, others such as Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore point to Confucius' principles as the secret to the Asian economic tigers' success. Leys, the translator of this volume, notes that Chinese familiarity and historical misuse of Confucius prejudices many, but taken without these prejudices, Confucius is thoroughly modern in his application today. Confucius is known for being a

great teacher, but it was politics and government that was his passion. Today, Confucius is a good source for leadership philosophy. Far from promoting authoritarian despotism, the teachings of Confucius point to a higher calling of leadership through service, character development, and self-abandonment - all sorely lacking in Chinese leadership today. To learn was Confucius' calling. He said he did not have much innate knowledge and studied literature and history to learn (6.27). The responsibility of learning was on the learner not the teacher: "I enlighten only the enthusiastic; I guide only the fervent. After I have lifted up one corner of a question, if the student cannot discover the other three, I do not repeat" (7.8). While that may sound harsh, Confucius practiced what he preached. "Put me in the company of any two people at random-they will invariably have something to teach me. I can take their qualities as a model and their defects as a warning" (7.22). Learning was to be put into practice; this showed integrity. The first verse of the Analects says, "To learn something new and then to put it into practice at the right time: is this not a joy?" (1.1).

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