

**Ren (jen) 仁 (humanity, human heartedness).** The **Confucian** conception of *ren* was suggested by **Confucius** in the *Lun-Yü* and has occupied the central position in Confucian philosophy. It means *the* defining virtue of *jun-zi* (morally superior persons), the most fundamental virtue among others, and the ultimate commitment in Confucius' thought. The term '*ren*' has been translated into English in various ways: *benevolence, man to manness, perfect virtue, human heartedness, humanity*, etc. However, Confucius himself did not intend to give one single formulated definition of *ren* but gave various characterizations sensitive to situations and contexts. Generally, but roughly, speaking, *ren* as the fundamental virtue is a kind of fundamental moral sensibility which consists in appreciation and reverence for the fundamental human value; one's *ren* virtue would manifest itself as interpersonal love and care when treating others. In the Confucian tradition, *ren* as interpersonal love and care, on the one hand, is love for all humans. On the other hand, it is love with distinction or graded love (*ai-you-cha-deng* 愛有差等) in view of relations of kinship with oneself, in contrast to universal love/care for each (*jian-ai* 兼愛) as advocated by Mohism.

To fully achieve *ren* virtue, one needs to make serious efforts to cultivate one's moral character. Confucius suggests some characteristic ways to carry out moral self cultivation: "To master oneself and return to *li* 禮 are [joint ways to achieve] *ren*" (12:1); "A person of *ren*, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent. To be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing *ren*" (6:28). Once one has captured the spirit of *ren*, one would be able to find out what one should do in a given situation. Because each concrete situation is distinctive from another, one needs to customize one's characterization of *ren* to certain concrete situations. If Confucius did not make any attempt to give one formulated definition of *ren*, it is not because he did not have a coherent and systematic understanding of *ren* but because the complete meaning of *ren* is itself beyond one single formulated definition and because of its fundamental character.

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