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3-2021

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No serious scholar today denies the close relationship between politics and ethics in Confucian thought and practice. Political matters are among the wide ranging concerns and issues addressed by Confucian teachings centered in cultivating *ren* 仁 (authoritative conduct), *yi* 義 (appropriateness), *li* 禮 (ritual propriety), *zhi* 知 (wisdom), *xin* 信 (trustworthiness), and other excellent characteristics of exemplary persons. The best government is that of a sage, the highest ethical achievement of humanity. The exact nature and significance of the relationship between the political and the ethical is however open to debate: at one extreme, one could view Confucian philosophy as advocating the inseparability of the political and the ethical, with the former completely subsumed under the ethical. John Dewey, for example, observed in *The Public and its Problems* that, in traditional China "Politics is not a branch of morals; it is submerged in morals. All virtues are summed up in filial piety."[1] One of the most important twentieth century Confucian thinkers, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995), distinguished pre-modern Confucian concern with government as "administrative" (*zhidao* 治道)—answering the question of how best to bring about social order—contrasted with the "political" (*zhengdao* 政道) concern answering the question of "Who rules" and what legitimates a particular political regime.[2] More recently, the inseparability of the political and ethical, denying the political any privileged status, is among the reasons Sungmoon Kim cites for the inapplicability of Michael Walzer's "dirty hands" dilemma in Confucian virtue politics: Confucian sage rulers handle problematic situations of governing with moral virtues that are not qualitatively different from those that the common people are to acquire and practice in their daily lives.[3]

In contrast, some have identified concerns with procedural matters and norms of "order" that they argue are not subordinated to ethical ends.[4] They gesture towards a distinctive political domain or dimension that fits better with the modern assertion of the autonomy of the political. However, the asserted autonomy requires a specific conception of the political that arose only in the modern era, since the Enlightenment and its legacies in subsequent centuries.[5] Chris Thornhill notes that arguments for the political as an autonomous, even *sui generis*, category explain the political by reference to assumed but contestable philosophical anthropologies—be it Carl Schmitt's assumption of human predisposition for "competitive conflict" over power or Hannah Arendt's account of authentic human life in terms of a specific capacity for freedom.[6] It is highly questionable whether the political in the Confucian canonical texts is autonomous, or even whether it is justifiable to "modernize" Confucianism by reconstructing its philosophy to accommodate the autonomously political. One is probably distorting Confucianism (if not all ancient Chinese thought) by reading into its texts a historically and culturally specific category from an alien civilization of different times.

Acknowledging the procrustean danger of imposing modern theoretical frameworks and concepts when approaching Confucianism should nevertheless not blind us to the possibility that contemporary theories and concepts about the political raise issues and highlight problems pertinent to contemporary life that are relevant to the application of Confucian cultures to real

practices in order to save us from today's predicaments. The discussion that follows will focus on the worry that moralism (of which Confucian subordination of the political to the ethical is a version) will get in the way of solving problems that need political solutions, and moreover in non-ideal political arenas, the good intentions of moralists almost invariably end up being manipulated by those whose interests have little to do with ethics, but who see advantages in dressing them up in moralistic aspirations.[7] This concern is not new. Some might say that, in retrospect, it summarizes the "fate" of Confucianism in traditional China. It might explain why the Confucian ideal community was never realized even though Confucian teachings were widely accepted and practiced, with numerous officials attempting to govern the empire according to Confucian ideas of good government, and prominent Confucian scholars trying hard to persuade those in power to act like Confucian sage rulers. Granted that one should not exaggerate the failures and forget the many impressive achievements of Sinic civilization, at least some if not most of which owe something to Confucian practices and values, it remains a valid concern whether one might repeat the mistakes of the past by not recognizing what went wrong. Could contemporary Confucians do better than their distinguished predecessors in putting Confucius's ideas into practice, in "bringing peace to all under heaven"?

Historically, Confucians are no strangers to imperfect situations, starting with Mencius advising the use of *quan* 權 (discretionary judgment) when ethical ritual norms in specific circumstances result in ethically unacceptable consequences.[8] Even Confucius, in his own attitude towards legalistic governance—despite his desire to rid the court of cases altogether, "in hearing cases, he is no different from others"—displayed a realistic attitude to social and political life.[9] As pragmatic realists, Confucians would be open to investigating the best ways to solve any problem, including fully leveraging the latest means of producing new knowledge—including those of natural and social sciences—unknown to the ancients. Today's predicaments, often of global scale, have no easy escape. A great deal of hard work, fact finding, hard thinking about complex connections among dynamic factors, difficult decisions in weighing priorities, and much more is required to achieve even some progress. Contemporary Confucians should not deny that, or naively believe that one could "govern the world with half of the *Analects*." The World Consortium for Research in Confucian Cultures (WCRCC), an academic body initiated by Roger Ames in 2014, is dedicated to fostering the collaboration among international scholars studying Confucian cultures and their application to real social practices. In promoting research into Confucian cultures, the WCRCC expands the horizon for today's Confucians, as the idea of cultures implies entire ways of life with their diverse and complex dynamics. The WCRCC project will live up to its global promise if it accommodates diversity and remains open to new ideas and open critical discussions in its inquiries into how Confucian cultures could help solve the world's problems. The task is not one for philosophers alone, for the inquiries must be multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary; nor is it one for academics alone, for the calm reflection facilitated by ivory towers should attend to real problems of the world and must pass the test of actual practice.

What Confucians would not and should not compromise on is the need for appropriate ethical perspectives to guide the inquiries needed to solve problems. This does not mean imposing some form of absolutist morality on everyone. In a pluralistic environment, Confucian interested in practical impact should also welcome critical debates in which varied interpretations of Confucian ethics engage one another and other ethical perspectives. In insisting on the inseparability of ethics and politics in the sense that some kind of ethical framework is always already assumed in political decisions and actions, Confucians would argue that the

philosophical anthropology assumed by theorists such as Schmitt (i.e., that human nature is dominated by "competitive conflict"), which underlies contemporary claims about the autonomy of the political, is itself as much an ethical framework as is the Confucian assumption that harmony is the basic potential of the cosmos and human flourishing. The assumptions that competitive conflict and the pursuit of self-interest (if not selfish interests) are inevitable and perhaps desirable have arguably driven modern political economy into its present predicaments, the suggestion of changing track by experimenting with a different set of assumptions and working out what they require in real practice to change our ways should hold some appeal for many audiences.

Roger Ames remarked in an interview in 2015, "collaboration between academy and the government in China," which has been part of normal Confucian practice through the ages, is constantly looked upon with suspicion by many American academics.[10] Confucius himself sought political influence either in office or through giving advice to those in power, and in the process, was willing to associate with ethically dubious characters, including Gongshan Furao and Bixi, who were plotting rebellions, and Duke Ling's notorious concubine, *Nanzi*, if it would allow him to put his teachings into practice.[11] Although Confucius's teaching eventually had much more influence than Confucius had during his own lifetime, in subsequent centuries it was still hard to find persons who united ethical character and ideals with political aspirations and power. The real impacts Confucian values and ideas had in social and political life probably owe a considerable debt to Confucians' collaboration with political (and other forms of) power. In any such collaboration, the risk that ethical aspirations might fall victim to unethical political motives and goals is ever present.

The Confucian response to the risk of being made use of by cunning and unscrupulous politicians could be found in *Analects* 6.26:

> Zaiwo inquired, "If an authoritative person (*ren* 仁) were informed that there is another authoritative person down in the well, would he go in after him?"
> The Master replied, "How could this be? The exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) can be sent to save him, but not to jump in after him; he can be deceived (*qi* 欺), but not duped (*wang* 罔)."[12]

Confucians, as fallible human beings even if they are authoritative and exemplary persons, can be mistaken and therefore can be deceived, but such errors would neither undermine their own reasoning capacity about reasonable and appropriate conduct in any given situation nor lead them to commit a wrong against their own ethical ideals and standards.

When reproved by Zilu about his willingness to answer the summons of Bixi, Confucius' response in *Analects* 17.7 is illuminating.

> Zilu said, "In the past I have heard you, Master, say, 'Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) will have nothing to do with someone who personally behaves badly (*bushan* 不善).' Bixi is plotting rebellion with the Zhongmou stronghold. How could you justify going to him?"
> "You are right," said the Master. "It is as you say. But is it not said, 'With the hardest, grinding will not wear it thin.' Is it not said, 'With the whitest, dyeing will not turn it black.' Am I just some kind of gourd? How can I allow myself to be strung up on the wall and not be eaten?"

In collaboration with those whose characters and motives might fall below one's ethical standards, one must be steadfast enough in one's ethical commitments to avoid being led astray. One must remain vigilant and know where and when to draw the line before the attempt to influence another towards goodness results in one's own ethical downfall.

One might seek guidance for balancing ethical commitment with political involvement in Confucius's advice to his students and in the historical personalities he praised. For instance, in *Analects* 8.13 one finds the following:

> Do not enter a state in crisis, and do not tarry in one that is in revolt. Be known when the way prevails in the world, but remain hidden away when it does not. It is a disgrace to remain poor and without rank when the way prevails in the state; it is a disgrace to be wealthy and of noble rank when it does not.[13]

Similarly, in *Analects* 15.7 Confucius says:

> How true was Shiyu! When the way *(dao* 道*)* prevailed in the state, he was as true as an arrow; when it did not, he was still as true as an arrow. And Qu Boyu was indeed an exemplary person *(junzi* 君子*)*! When the way prevailed in the state, he gave of his service, and when it did not, he rolled it up and tucked it away.[14]

Yet, is withdrawing from public service, and perhaps contributing to "good government" by being filial and brotherly at home, the only appropriate response of a Confucian when the way does not prevail in the world? It would seem not. When commenting on other historical personalities whose "talents were lost to the people"—individuals who lived in times when the way did not prevail—Confucius is not judgmental about whether they "compromised their purposes or brought disgrace on their own persons" in their efforts to transform the world through political action. Confucius had "no presuppositions as to what may or may not be done."[15]

There is no universal rule in Confucian philosophy and practice for any ethical decision, no simple black and white answers as to whether, to what extent, and in what way one should involve oneself in politics or associate with others with political agendas who might not share one's ethical commitments. For Confucians who wish to make a difference in the real world, there will always be the risks: of being corrupted by worldly ambition; of being deceived and made use of by cunning manipulators; of making errors of judgment; of having good intentions produce disastrous consequences. Any of these would lead to failure, either in making things worse or at least in not positively improving the world. However, this is no excuse for hiding in the ivory tower, turning up one's nose at "dirty politics," and ignoring the predicaments that trouble the world. This illusion of personal purity, rather than an expression of the highest ethical ideals, is a form of vanity and cowardice. Such persons care more about their reputations than they do about improving the lives of people around them, and are afraid of failure bringing only blame and condemnation. In contrast, the most resolute commitment to the Confucian way expresses itself in the courage to do one's best to put Confucius' teachings into practice—which is not confined to political action narrowly defined—while always aware of the many pitfalls that await the ethically unwary, aware that failure, with its attendant blame and condemnation by future generations, remains ever likely.

[1] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, eds. Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman (Charlottesville: Intelex, 2003), electronic edition, vol. 2: 261-62.

[2] Mou Zongsan, "*Zhengdao yu Zhidao*," in *Complete Works* (Taipei: Lianjing, 2003), vol. 10.

[3] Sungmoon Kim, "Achieving the Way: Confucian Virtue Politics and the Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy East and West* 66.1 (2016): 156-58.

[4] Justin Tiwald, "A Right of Rebellion in the *Mengzi*?" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 7 (2008): 269-82; Loubna El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought: A New Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[5] Carl Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, trans. Georg Schwab (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007). Cf. the argument that the Enlightenment thinkers discovered the concept of the political "that clearly delineates political action as an autonomous sphere with its own self-sufficient criterion of legitimacy" in David William Bates, *State of War: Enlightenment Origins of the Political* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012), 12.

[6] Chris Thornhill, "The Autonomy of the Political: A Socio-Theoretical Response," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35.6 (2009): 711-12.

[7] There is no simple East-West or traditional-modern dichotomy: political realists have accused contemporary liberals, including John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, of political moralism that puts "ethics first" in theorizing political life. Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, "Political Legitimacy in the Real Normative World: The Priority of Morality and the Autonomy of the Political," *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (2015): 215-233, doi:10.1017/S0007123413000148.

[8] D.C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 4A17.

[9] Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 12.14; cf. 2.3.

[10] Rogelio Leal Benavides conducted the interview in Beijing, July 2015. Unpublished transcript.

[11] *Analects* 17.5, 17.7, and 6.28.

[12] See also oblique reference to this *Analects* passage in *Mencius* 5A2 where Mencius defended Shun with a different story involving Zichan of Zheng and his gamekeeper: A *junzi* "can be taken in (*qi* 欺) by what is reasonable, but cannot be hoodwinked (*wang* 罔) by the wrong method."

[13] *Analects* 8.13.

[14] *Analects* 15.7.

[15] *Analects* 18.8.