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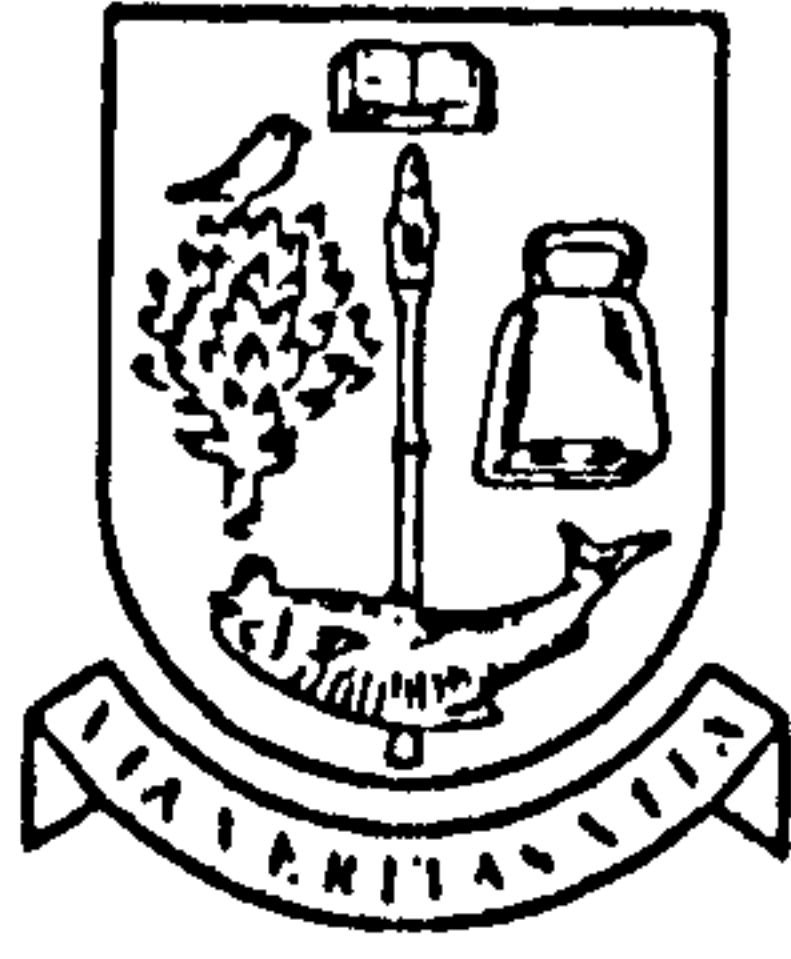
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**Just State and Just Man —**  
A Dialogue Between Plato and Confucius

Hsei-Yung Hsu

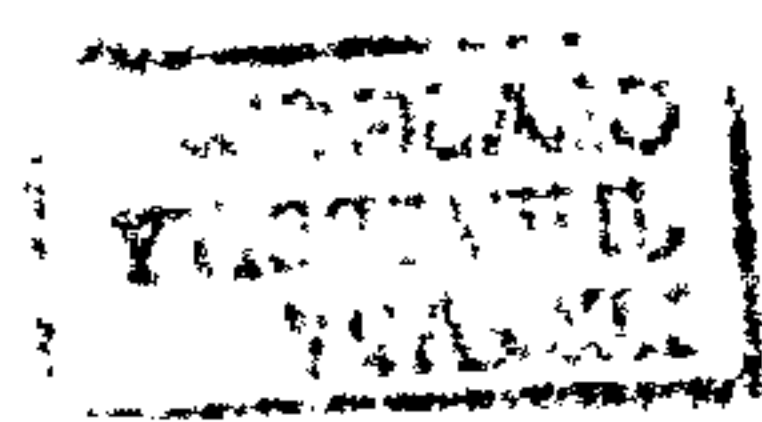
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Hsei-Yung Hsu



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## Summary

In this thesis, I propose to explore Plato's moral and political thought in the *Republic*, and comparing it with similar ideas in Confucian thought, and in modern liberal thought.

In Part I, I deal with Plato's notion of 'doing one's own job' in the just state (ch. 1), and with the Confucian approach to achieving an orderly society (ch. 2). In Chapter 3 the idea that both the Platonic just state and Confucian orderly society are communitarian by nature will be discussed. It is noticeable that although both Plato's and Confucius' accounts of the just state have the colour of communitarianism, yet their accounts are in one way or another different from the modern communitarian's account of the just state. In addition, there are also important differences between Plato and Confucius. Take the relation between personal good and the common good as an example. Both Plato and Confucius hold that in the ideal state one's own good is identical with the good of the state as a whole. But communitarians hold that the common good is prior to personal good. That is, for the communitarians, there is a distinction between personal good and the common good (Section 3).

In Part II, I shall consider a problem which arises from the discussion of Plato's notion of the tripartite soul that there is a sub-division in each part of the soul, which leads to infinite regress. I argue in Chapter 4 that this problem can be avoided. So long as there is no 'degree of rationality' among the three parts. That is, only reason is capable of calculating, and the other two parts do not have the capacity of reasoning. This account of the tripartite soul makes sense of why Plato puts such strong emphasis on education. For through education, spirit and appetite are willing to be under the control of reason. The unity of the soul is not achieved by force but by education. Although in the *Analects* Confucius never discusses the notion of the human soul, he urges people to cultivate their character. A superior man is morally superior to the public. The superior man, in Confucius' view, cannot be understood only in terms of his character. His possession of good character has to be understood within social context. This difference between Plato and Confucius leads them to

different ways of understanding the individual (Chapter 6).

In Part III, I shall argue that the orderly state depends upon each person doing one job, but that to *maintain* the order in the state depends upon education. In Chapter 7 I discuss how by education the harmonious soul and state can be achieved. In Section 3 I argue that order and harmony can be achieved in both the state and the soul, but it does not mean that there is an exact parallel between the state and the soul. For Plato proposes different kinds of education or training in the state and the soul. Moreover Plato does not see appetite in the soul as exactly correspondent to the third class in the state. Confucius, like Plato, emphasizes the importance of education, i.e. self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is the process of the realization of human-heartedness. However the realization of human-heartedness can only be achieved in social context. Thus the notion of 'inner sage' and of 'outer king' can never be properly understood separately. The notion of 'authority-as-model' is central to Confucian moral and political thought. I oppose Weber's account of Confucius' sage-king as having charisma by showing that there are inconsistencies in Weber's argument, and that the sage-king does not gain his authority by having superior power but by being virtuous (Chapter 8, Section 3). Both Plato and Confucius emphasize the importance of education in the cultivation of character, so the problem whether or not education and training have the same meanings for both of them, and whether they apply the notion of 'treat unequals unequally' to education in the same way, will be the issues in Chapter 9.

In Part IV, several issues concerning social role are discussed. First of all, whether morality can be properly understood merely in terms of role-performance? (Chapter 10) Second, we in society occupy more than one roles, so how do we decide what to do when our roles are in conflict with one another (Chapter 11). Third, in the liberal thought we have our roles by choice. That is, most of roles we have, except, perhaps, for those we have by birth, are contractual roles. We enter into a role by signing the contract (Chapter 12). In fact, we have come across these questions in previous chapters. However, the purpose of re-introducing them here is to consider whether Plato and Confucius would be troubled by these questions, and discuss how they would give answers to them.

Finally, in Part V, two issues will be discussed. First, it is commonly held that in



Book I of the *Republic* Plato shows his interlocutors the inadequacies of giving an account of justice in terms of the agent's external behaviour, and then from Book II to Book IV Plato sets up an agent-centred morality, and claims that just man is one who has a balanced soul. I argue that Plato right from the outset of the *Republic* is interested in an agent-centred view of morality. Secondly throughout the *Analects* Confucius seems to give his readers an impression that he is interested in act-centred morality. For the Confucian emphasis on the fact that one has to act in accordance with rules of proper conduct makes his readers think that Confucius' primary concern in the *Analects* is how man should behave. However, I would like to argue that Confucian ethics is a combination or union of agent-centred and act-centred theory in that acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct requires an inner dimension, human-heartedness. Thus a person can be identified as a superior man only when he is able to satisfy these two criteria: rediscovering human-heartedness from within, and expressing his possession of human-heartedness by acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct.

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## Preface

Unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes, passages from Plato's *Republic* and those from Confucius' *Analects* in the thesis will be quoted from,

D. Lee, *Plato: The Republic*, London: Penguin Books, 1987.

R. Dawson, *Confucius: The Analects*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

## Introduction

The notion of ‘ doing one’s own job ’ is central to the political and moral thought of Plato’s *Republic*. In the just state each citizen willingly performs the role for which he is by nature suited and sees his own interests as identical with those of the state. Plato, unlike Adam Smith who claims that one’s nature is formed by the division of labour,<sup>1</sup> thinks that in the ideal state the division of labour is determined by the diversity of individual nature (415a-c). Thus, for Plato, each person doing one job for which he is naturally suited is essential for a state being just. The just man is, likewise, the one whose soul is orderly and balanced, with each part playing its own proper role. Plato’s conception of the highest good is thus an ideal of unity and order.

There appears to be a parallel to Plato’s notion of ‘ doing one’s own job ’ in Confucian ethics. An orderly society, in the Confucian view, can be achieved only when the members of the society play their roles. Confucius in the *Analects* says that “ [l]et a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son” (XII, 11). In other words, a good ruler is not simply one who happens to occupy the role of ruler. But he is able to translate duties and obligations prescribed by the role into action. Confucius’ conception of the highest good, the Way, consists, like Plato, in order.

Men are social animals. Morality can thus be seen as a matter of fulfilling the duties and obligations prescribed by the roles one occupies in society. As F. H. Bradley says, “ ... a man’s life with its moral duties is in the main filled up by its station in that system of wholes which the state is, and ... this, partly by its laws and institutions, and still more by its spirit, gives him the life which he does live and ought to live.”<sup>2</sup> Morality in this sense is concerned with one acting in accordance with rules and laws which define the duties or obligations of the role one occupies. This in

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<sup>1</sup> R. S. Downie, “ Moral Problems In A Market Economy: *A Reappraisal of Adam Smith*”, *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 57, 1977, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> F. H. Bradley, “ My station and its Duties ”, in his *Ethical Studies* (London, 1876), p. 157.

turn would appear to mean that morality is primarily concerned with action rather than with character. It may therefore seem that the morality of 'doing one's own job' must imply what we would now call an act-centred, rather than an agent-centred, view of morality.

Plato's account of 'doing one's own job' at first sight seems to bear this out, i.e. it sees morality in terms of role-performance and thus implies an act-centred morality.<sup>3</sup> However, what Plato is most concerned with in the *Republic* is the inner harmony of the state and the soul. A just state is not one which has a harmoniously diplomatic relationship with other states, but one in which each person does one job for which he is by nature suited. A just man, likewise, is not one who merely does just acts, but one whose soul is in a state of harmony, i.e. each element of the soul performs their functions properly. It is thus clear that Plato's conception of 'doing one's own job' yields a very different account of morality from the simple role morality I have just described. In his theory the connections between action and character and between the individual and the state are complex and subtle. One aim of this thesis is to explore these complexities.

On the surface, Confucius' account of the principle of Rectification of Names<sup>4</sup> may likewise seem to imply a morality of role-performance. To be a morally good son is to be filial to his parents. That is, a good son fulfills the duties prescribed by the role of son. However Confucius is not simply saying that the ruler should carry out the tasks appropriate to a ruler, that the father should carry out the tasks appropriate to a father and so on, but that the ruler should *be* a ruler, that the father should *be* a father and so on.<sup>5</sup> Moreover he does not claim that those who are able to stick to their social roles, and do not stray from their stations can be called the superior men. For a superior man is the one who possesses a well-cultivated character, and is able to actualize his character in the social context by acting in conformity with ritual (*li*), rule of proper conduct. Thus, for Confucius, the connection between role and character is more complex than one might suppose.

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the relation between role morality and act-centred morality, see Part IV, Chapter 12.

<sup>4</sup> See my discussion at Part I, Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>5</sup> See the *Analects*, II, 7; III, 3; XVII, 9.

It is worth noting that the salient feature of the modern liberal account of morality in terms of social role is the agent's freedom of choice. One only enters into a role when one chooses to. However for both Plato and Confucius having a role is not a matter of choice. For Plato, one's social role is determined by one's nature and aptitude. Thus in the ideal state, as mentioned, the division of labour depends upon the theory of human nature proposed by Plato in the *Republic*. Confucius, unlike Plato, does not see human nature as an important factor for the division of social class. Confucius, as a feudalist, holds that one's social role is mainly determined by birth, inheritance, and consanguinity. Thus, although it is possible to see some similarities between Plato and Confucius and modern philosophers who have stressed the importance of roles in morality, the contrasts are perhaps even more striking.

**Part I**  
**Just State**

## Chapter 1

### Plato's Just State

We are told in the *Republic* that in order to find justice in the individual, it would be easier for us first to look for it in the state. For “ [j]ustice can be a characteristic of an individual or of a community ” (368e). This premiss is accepted by Adeimantus, thus to see justice in the society or state we have first to know what the nature of a society is. What is the essential factor for a society coming into being? From 369b onwards Plato describes at length the evolution of the society from the primitive one to the ideal one, and leads his interlocutors, after establishing his ideal state, to see how the ideal state is a just one. In the just state each individual does one job for which he or she is naturally suited. In this chapter I would like to discuss three topics to explore Plato's account of the notion of ‘ doing one's own job ’: first of all, the rise of society; secondly, justice and *sophrosune*, and finally, the unity of the state.

#### 1. The rise of society

Plato says at 369b that it is due to the fact that the individual is not self-sufficient, that society originates. The existence of a society is to fulfill the individual's varied needs he cannot supply himself. In a minimal society, for Plato, people's basic needs, i.e. food, shelter, clothing and shoes, can be satisfied. Thus a minimal society would consist of at least four men, that is, a farmer, builder, weaver and shoemaker (369d). Each of them is specialized in one trade and will devote all his time to producing enough product to fulfill the needs of all of them. For instance, a shoemaker will spend all his time making shoes, and exchange his product with the weaver, who spends all his time making clothes. This system of barter forms a basic model of economic society. And the principle applied to ‘ one man should do one job ’ is commonly called the Principle of Specialization. However it would be wrong to think here that Plato is only interested in economic efficiency, as Cross and Woosley point



out, “ [e]very time we are faced with a strike of sufficient proportions or duration, we are given a reminder of Plato’s point, that the meeting of economic needs comes first, and that without that no other needs can be met at all.”<sup>1</sup> For, firstly, what Plato says here is not only that quantity and quality of products would be more easily produced when each individual in the society does one job and devotes all his or her time to it, but also that each individual does one job which is suitable for his or her aptitude or nature (*phusis*).<sup>2</sup> It is the latter which interests Plato, since later in the *Republic* the Principle of Specialization will turn out to be the basis of class division in the ideal state. For Plato it is *by nature* that each individual has to stick to one job for which he or she is fitted.

Secondly, is it not the case in the first city that in order to meet the needs of the body, the needs of the soul have to be met first? For, in Plato’s view, the farmer can provide enough food for all four of them in the first city only when he or she devotes all his or her time to producing food. And the devotion to producing food, for the farmer, is to fulfill his or her nature and to perform his or her function as a farmer properly. Thus, it follows, I think, that the fulfillment of one’s nature is prior to the fulfillment of one’s economic or bodily needs. That is to say, only when each individual in the first city can fulfill their natures, i.e. performing their social functions for which they are naturally suited, can their bodily needs be met. So it follows from this that what Wilson claims, when he discusses the formation of the first city, that “ [what] the initial picture really omits is the needs of the soul ”<sup>3</sup>, would

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato’s Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London, 1994), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> The sentence at 370b is translated by Lee as “ we have different *natural aptitudes* (*diapheron ten phusim*), which fit us for different jobs ”, but the term italicized is also translated by scholars as we have different ‘ natures ’ (Shorey 1994, Grube 1992, Waterfield 1994, and Jowett 1892). It is also translated by Cornford as ‘ innate differences ’ (1945). However the sentence at 433a is translated by Lee as “ .... that in our state one man was to do one job, the job he was *naturally* most suited for ”, and all the scholars mentioned above use the same term ‘ nature ’. In both contexts the word is *phusis* ‘ nature ’. Lee’s introduction of the word at 370b is unnecessary. At 433a the claim is that each person should perform one job for which his nature is most suited. Here the words ‘ perform ’ *epitedeuein* and ‘ most suited ’ *epitedeiotate* are related. So something like the concept of aptitude may come in here.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. S. Wilson, “ The Basis of Plato’s Society ”, *Philosophy* 52, 1977, p. 316.

be suspicious. For if one person by nature is able to make shoes, then to be a shoemaker and making shoes will be to fulfill his nature and perform his function as a shoemaker in the city. Therefore so long as people in the first city, i.e. farmer, builder, weaver, and shoemaker, can fulfill their natures and perform their social functions well, they fulfill the needs of their souls. I am inclined to think, opposing both claims of Wilson and Cross and Woozley, that even in the first city Plato is not only concerned with the needs of the body but also those of the soul.

Furthermore, in Plato's account of the rise of society there are two points worth noting. Firstly, a society coming into being because of the fact that each individual is not self-sufficient seems to suggest that the individual is prior to society. Whereas in Aristotle's *Politics* we are told that "the city is prior in the order of nature to the family and the individual" (1253a18-9).<sup>4</sup> The reason for Aristotle's assertion is that "the whole is necessarily prior to the part" (1253a20-1).<sup>5</sup> For the part cannot be understood unless there is the whole existing before it, and the part can perform its function only when the whole is existent before it.<sup>6</sup> It follows from this that an individual can achieve his or her fulfillment and completion only when he or she is in the society, outside the society the individual is "either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man" (1253a6).<sup>7</sup> It is clear that for Aristotle it would be impossible for an individual to perform his or her function properly if he or she is outside society. While some might argue that it would not be the case for Plato. For although society results from lack of self-sufficiency, Plato does not take lack of self-sufficiency to mean that without society people cannot perform their functions well. We may imagine that a shoemaker can still perform his function as a shoemaker well despite the fact that he lives without society and has difficulty in getting everyday commodities. What Plato says is that without society people's varied needs will not be fulfilled.

However, the suggestion that a shoemaker can perform his function properly even though he is outside society is only superficially correct. If we refer to a passage

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<sup>4</sup> E. Barker, *Aristotle: The Politics* (Oxford, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

in the *Republic* where Plato tells us that the definition of function is that one's function is what one can do or *does best* (352e), then we can see why it would be impossible for a shoemaker living outside society to perform his function well or to do his best. For he would spend a lot of time looking for his subsistence, and spend little time making shoes. Thus in spite of the difference between Aristotle and Plato, there is still one thing they have in common. That is, although Plato does not explicitly say that without society men cannot perform their functions well, we still can find the clue to prove that Plato does think implicitly that only in a society men can perform their functions well, which will fulfill both each individual's bodily needs and the needs of their souls. Therefore both for Plato and Aristotle, society exists for men to have a good life, that is, in a society each individual can fulfill his needs and perform his functions well. Nevertheless, one thing has to be pointed out that although both Plato and Aristotle claim that men can only seek their completion within society, yet Plato, unlike Aristotle, does not claim that a man living outside society and not being able to perform his function well is a "subhuman"<sup>8</sup>, but is an unhappy man. In other words, for Aristotle man is essentially social, while for Plato it is a contingent matter that we need to live in society.

Secondly, the division of labour in the minimal society is in accordance with each individual's aptitude or nature, and each individual has to do only one job since that will enable them to do their best. Plato's emphasis on natural difference is not to tell us that each individual according to his or her natural tendency has to do this or that job in terms of social contract theory, as Hobbes would claim, but to tell us that the individual's natural tendency is a means for cooperation or mutual aid in a society. For the contractarian claims that one takes on a social role only when one chooses to do it. One's consent to fulfill the obligations prescribed by the role is important. However, individual natural tendency is the basis for Plato's economic division of labour which is a model for his political structure. For in Plato's view men are by nature suited for certain job, in other words, men are born with obligation. For instance, one's being a shoemaker, for Plato, is determined by one's nature. Thus one is born to be a shoemaker, and can do nothing but fulfill the obligation prescribed by

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<sup>8</sup> T. J. Saunders, *Aristotle: the Politics* (London, 1981), p. 59.

the role, making shoes. So Plato seems to assume that things go better for the individual and the society if each sticks to his own job. People are not self-sufficient without society, so within a society people can meet their needs by fulfilling their potentials or functions for which they are fitted. That is the reason why Plato has to stress the importance of specialization in job. For if the shoemaker wants to spend some of his time in building houses, then the need of people for shoes will not be fulfilled. It follows that the chain of cooperation in the society will be broken by the shoemaker's not spending all his time making shoes. As Annas points out,

[Plato] thinks that someone who follows his or her own personal inclinations, rather than the inclinations that spring from the social role for which they are best fitted, is always irresponsible and immature, and that the person who is unwilling to co-operate as fully as possible in producing the common good is always selfish.<sup>9</sup>

We can further see that Plato's appeal to the idea that one has to do one's own thing for which one is naturally suited, is opposed to a liberal individualist view, such as Mill's, that I can do whatever I want as long as my action does not do harm to the others. On the contrary, Plato's view assumes the value of cooperation<sup>10</sup> in the sense that it requires people to act in conformity with the rules prescribed by their social roles whether they choose to or not. Thus what Cross and Woosley's claim that Plato is not only stressing that "the basic principle of a community's life is economic, but also that the basic fact about economic life is that it is self-interested"<sup>11</sup>, is doubtful. For, as mentioned, both bodily needs and the needs of the soul can be fulfilled if each individual does his or her own job. And doing one's own job is not only to do good to oneself but also to the society as a whole.

As the dialogue proceeds, the division of labour becomes more elaborate in accordance with the Principle of Specialization. In the minimal society smiths and

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<sup>9</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> See, Wilson. *op. cit.*, p. 315. It is said in the *Republic* that although the members of the society have different natural aptitudes (370a-b), yet they have to be in cooperation with one another (371b).

<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*

other craftsmen are needed to provide tools for farming and building (370d), and there is also a need for merchants to deal with the import and export business. If this trade is overseas then the experts on ships and seafaring will be needed (371a). There also need to be retailers and manual labourers to deal with goods. So far, the minimal society has been established, and it is within the minimal society that people's necessary appetitive and spiritual needs can be met. Thus people who live in it will be happy. But Glaucon says ironically that it is " a community of pigs " (372d). Glaucon is not satisfied with Plato's account of the minimal society and wishes for a more luxurious society in which people can have more than what they can get in the minimal society. Thus the size of the city has to be enlarged because in the luxurious society there will be more population since there will be more occupations added in. The enlargement of the territory of the city will inevitably cause conflict with its neighbours (373d-e). So in addition to hunters, fishermen, artists, doctors ... and so on, there is still one occupation needed in the city, namely, the guardians. The guardians are able to protect the city's possessions and property from being plundered. They will also be able to seize the new territory for city needs to support its large population.

Plato, at 375a, employs an analogy to give an account of the qualities required in the guardians. He says that a guardian, like a well-bred watch dog, " must have keen perceptions, and speed in pursuit of his quarry, and also strength to fight if need be when he catches it." In addition to these physical qualities, the guardians also need to be high-spirited in character (375b). Here Glaucon is worried that the guardians' high-spirit might lead them to be aggressive to their fellow-citizens as well as to their enemies. Plato here employs the analogy again to assure Glaucon that the problem he is concerned with can be resolved. It is just like the well-trained watch-dog who will be gentle to the one it knows, and will be fierce to a stranger (375d-376a). Similarly, the guardians will be gentle to their fellow-citizens and be fierce to their enemies, and it is by the knowledge they have that they can discriminate between fellow-citizens and enemies. Since philosophy is the love of knowledge (376b-c), the guardians should have the philosophic disposition.

Plato proceeds at length to describe the education of the guardians (376c-412a).

Here I will not discuss in detail Plato's educational programme<sup>12</sup>, but will skip directly to the third state, i.e. the ideal state.

In the luxurious city, there exist two classes of people, the guardians and the producers and artists ... and so on. However, the guardian class is subdivided into the Guardians and the Auxiliaries by selection or elimination through education. Thus the state in its final form has three classes, that is, the Guardians, the Auxiliaries and the farmers and artisans, etc.. The Guardians, says Plato, who possess " the greatest skill in watching over the community " should be the rulers (412c). The function of the Auxiliaries is to enforce the Guardians' decision (414b). Both the Guardians and the Auxiliaries live simple lives, that is, they do not possess private property and do not have family life. For, in Plato's view, the service of the Guardians and the Auxiliaries to the state will be impeded by possessing private property and family. They will be housed and eat common meals provided by the lower class people. So, with the basic structure of the third state is ideally established, from 427d onwards Plato proceeds to look for justice in the state.

Plato's first city rises because of the individual's lack of self-sufficiency. I argue, in this section, firstly that the rise of the society is not only to meet the individual's bodily needs but also the needs of the individual soul. Only when the Principle of Specification is in practice, can the individual's bodily needs be fulfilled. The claim, secondly, that individual is not self-sufficient seems to suggest that society comes into existence for the benefit of individual, to which Aristotle is opposed. For, in Aristotle's view, society is by nature prior to individual. Men are born into society, not vice versa. In spite of the difference between them, both Plato and Aristotle would agree that men within society would be better off. Men living in the society will be able to reach their own completion. Finally, Plato's view that we are fitted by nature for certain positions or roles differentiates his position both from the contractarians and liberals who see us as being able to choose roles and from those who see tradition on family background as establishing our roles.

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion on the education of the soul, see Part III, Chapter 7, Section 2.

## 2. Justice and *sophrosune*

It is said in the *Republic* that one can find the cardinal virtues, i.e. wisdom, courage, *sophrosune*, and justice in both the ideal state and the balanced soul (427e, 440c-d). It would be easy for readers of the *Republic* to appreciate that the state is wise because one class of its citizens, namely, the Guardians, are wise; similarly, the state is brave because a second class of its citizens, namely, the Auxiliaries, are brave. The same principle, according to Plato, can be applied to the individual (441c-d). When an individual is called both wise and brave it is because his reason is in control in his soul, and the spirited part of his soul is in alliance with the reason, which enables him to know what sort of things he ought or ought not to fear (442e). However, there are no exact locations for *sophrosune* and justice in the state and the individual. For there are no specific elements which correspond to these two virtues in the way that the Guardians and the reason correspond to wisdom, and the Auxiliaries and the spirit correspond to bravery. In this section I shall firstly explore the role of *sophrosune* in the *Republic*, in the course of discussion I will refer to relevant passages in the *Gorgias* and the *Laws*; and secondly I shall proceed to discuss the issue of the relation between justice and *sophrosune* to show that justice and *sophrosune*, for Plato, are not synonymous.

It is said at the *Republic* 427e that the four cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, *sophrosune*, and justice. *Sophrosune*, like the other virtues, is “one of the cornerstones of the Greeks’ cultural and moral heritage.”<sup>13</sup> The etymological meaning of *sophrosune* is ‘soundness of mind’ (*sain d’esprit*).<sup>14</sup> However, according to De Vries, the notion of *sophrosune* can be treated in two ways: firstly, in an intellectual sense, the meaning of *sophrosune* may be ‘reasonableness’ (*epieikeia*), reasonable judgement, or reasonable reflection, etc.. Secondly, in a moral sense, the meaning of

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<sup>13</sup> D. Watt, *Charmides*, in *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues* (London, 1987), (ed.) T. J. Saunders, p. 165. See also G. J. De Vries, “*Sophrosune en Grec Classique*”, *Mnemosyne*, vol. 11, 1943. De Vries says at the outset of the article that “Pour tout lecteur de cette littérature il est évident que la qualité indiquée par ces mots (*sophrosune, sophron*) doit avoir occupé dans la vie spirituelle des Grecs une place particulière.” p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> De Vries, *Ibid.* p. 84.

sophrosune can be ‘ modesty ’ (*aidos*), ‘ self-control ’ (*egkrateia*), discipline (*eutaksia*), or ‘ propriety ’ (*kosmiotes*), etc..<sup>15</sup> Although the intellectual sense is often attached to the moral sense, or vice versa, yet the divergence makes the meaning of sophrosune vague. In what follows I shall go through the *Republic* to see how Plato makes use of sophrosune.

(1) *Sophrosune* as self-control and moderation. The notion of *sophrosune* is first brought out by Cephalus in the *Republic*, 329d, when he is asked by Socrates whether old age is a kind of burden. Cephalus replies that if men are sensible and *good-tempered*<sup>16</sup> then old age is easy enough to bear. Cephalus thinks that overcoming desires is important. However Cephalus as a money lover does not have any philosophical insight into the importance of *sophrosune*, and Plato at this stage does not give his readers any information more than a hint that to be good-tempered is one of the factors which will enable people to have a tranquil life. While as the dialogue proceeds the importance of *sophrosune* increases. Towards the end of Book II, Plato starts to set up the first stage of education for the young guardians. Plato proposes that the first stage of education be divided into two parts: literary<sup>17</sup> and physical education. Regarding literary education, Plato, firstly, thinks that the subjects of stories, poetry, and narratives should be supervised. Only those suitable for moulding the young guardians’ minds and characters can be used (377b-c). Most existing poetry, narration, and music are unsuitable for the training of the guardians’ minds, since they are not useful in encouraging the guardians to be *self-controlled*. Plato says that inappropriate prose or verse cannot be used in the education “ [f]or they are hardly suitable to encourage the young to self-control (*sophrosunen*)” (390a). Secondly, when Plato talks of the form of narrative he says,

The decent man, when he comes in the course of a narrative to a speech or action by a man of good character will be willing to impersonate him and feel no shame at this kind of representation. (396c)

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<sup>15</sup> De Vries, *Ibid.* pp. 82-3.

<sup>16</sup> Although Cephalus at 329d does not use the word ‘ sophrosune ’, he clearly has this concept in mind.

<sup>17</sup> D. Lee, , *Plato: The Republic* (London, 1987), p. 129.



What Plato proposes here is that poetry which involves imitation of unsuitable characters should be restricted. Only the imitation of good man can be used in the training of character. One thing worth noting is that Plato in this passage seems to assert that to imitate the good man can be useful in the guardians' moral cultivation. This is, I think, parallel to the Confucian idea that superior men have to be the objects of emulation for the ordinary people. However later on in the *Republic* it is clear that the difference between Plato and Confucius rests upon the fact, firstly, that for Plato human beings are by nature different from one another, so it is impossible for people of lower class to become Guardians or Auxiliaries. For each has to do one job for which he or she is naturally suited. Whereas, in the Confucian view, superior manhood is accessible to everyone so long as they are willing to make their efforts in self-cultivation, in that by nature men close to each other (the *Analects*, XVII, 2). Secondly, although Plato thinks that imitating a good man is good to the guardians' moral cultivation, imitating a character while reciting a poem is different from trying to model oneself on a real person. It is notable how little Plato says about emulation. His treatment of poetry emphasizes the need to get rid of harmful elements rather than encouraging good ones.

In addition to poetry and narrative, Plato thinks that music should be restricted to some extent. Modes and rhythms, in Plato's view, have to be suitable to cultivate the guardian's character. Plato says,

I'm no expert on modes, but leave me one that will represent appropriately the voice and accent of a brave man on military service or any dangerous undertaking, .... And I want another mode to represent him in the voluntary non-violent occupations of peace-time: for instance, persuading someone to grant a request, praying to God or instructing or admonishing his neighbour, or again submitting himself to the requests or instruction or persuasion of others and acting as he decides, and in all showing no conceit, but moderation (*sophron*) and common sense and willingness to accept the outcome. Give me these two modes, one stern, one pleasant, which will best represent sound courage and moderation (*sophron*) in good fortune or in bad. (399b-c)

And,

After mode we should presumably deal next with rhythm. We shan't want very elaborate or varied combinations, but merely need to find which rhythms suit a life of courage and discipline (*kosmios*). (399e)

It is apparent from these passages that to educate the guardians to be *moderate* and self-disciplined is the aim of literary education. There is the other half left untouched in Platonic educational system, that is, physical education.

Plato holds that physical education, like the education of character, has to be simple. Plato says,

Elaborate music produces indiscipline, and elaborate food produces disease. But simplicity in music produces discipline (*sophrosune*) of character, and simplicity in physical education health of body. (404e)

It can be seen that Plato claims that physical education, like literary education, is really concerned with the soul (411e-412a). The guardians will maintain self-discipline as long as the simple form of education Plato proposes is in practice. And these self-disciplined guardians will have no need of 'judicial treatment' because they have practiced the kind of 'music' which creates *sophrosune* (410a).

After setting up the systems of literary and physical education Plato proceeds to look for justice in the state and the individual. At 430e Plato says that *sophrosune* is a kind of *order*, a control of certain desires and appetites. It is the first time in the *Republic* that Plato gives a clear picture of what *sophrosune* is. However, the idea that *sophrosune* is a kind of order is not a new invention for the same idea is also expressed in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates says,

[W]hat is the quality which order and proportion create in the soul? .... and the means which produce order and proportion in the soul are called 'regulation' and 'law'; these are what make men law-abiding and orderly,

and so we have righteousness and moderation (*sophrosune*). (504c-d)<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the idea that *sophrosune* is a kind of control of certain desires and appetites is mentioned not only in the *Republic*, but also in both the *Gorgias* and the *Laws*. Plato says in the *Republic* that to be self-disciplined is to ‘ be master of oneself ’, which means that in one’s soul the better element is in control of the worse element. We are told in the *Gorgias* that “ ...; we can win happiness only by bending all our efforts and those of the state to the realization of uprightness and self-discipline (*sophron*), not by allowing our appetites to go unchecked, ... ” (507c-d).<sup>19</sup> In the *Laws* the self-disciplined man is ‘ conqueror of ’ his appetites or desires (626d-627b).<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that I do not here mean that Plato has two distinct accounts of self-discipline in the *Republic* for to have an orderly soul is to put one’s desires into reason’s control. And the life of the self-disciplined man, as the Athenian describes it in the *Laws*, will be gentle in all respects, with mild pleasures and pains, light appetites, and desires without frenzy (734a-e). In the *Republic*, only the genuine philosophers are self-disciplined (*sophron*) and not grasping about money (485e). The philosophers are self-disciplined because they are capable of seeing mentally the Forms, and their dealing with the divine order will make them acquire the characteristics of order and divinity (500d).

(2) *Sophrosune* as agreement. In addition to the fact that *sophrosune* is a kind of order, Plato takes it to imply a kind of *agreement* among the three classes. As Plato says,

And so we are quite justified in regarding self-discipline as this *unanimity* in which there is a natural concordance between higher and lower about which of them is to rule in state and individual. (432a)

[W]e call him self-disciplined when all these three elements are in friendly and harmonious *agreement*, when reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule and there is no civil war among them. (442c-d)

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<sup>18</sup> W. Hamilton, *Plato: Gorgias* (London: 1971), p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> T. J. Saunders, *Plato: The Laws* (London: 1975), pp. 48-9.

Therefore, a state is called *sophron* when the members of it reach an agreement as to who should rule and who should be ruled. It should be noticed that the ruled are not forced by the rulers to accept or recognize their leadership, since this reading might render Plato's ideal state authoritative. Rather the ruled are brought up (442a-b) or *directed* (519b-d) to believe that to be ruled by those wise men is not only good to themselves but also to the state as a whole. That is, the reason why only a small number of people should be the rulers is that they are lovers of knowledge and know what is best for each individual of the state and the state as a whole. Plato gives a similar account of *sophrosune* in the soul. In a harmonious soul the unnecessary desires are left unattended, and only the necessary ones can be fulfilled (588e-590a). Thus the reason will never be enslaved by those frenzy desires.

Let us move on to Book VIII and IX where Plato is dealing with imperfect societies and individuals. As North fairly points out, the fundamental cause of corruption in the state and in the individual is 'the absence of sophrosyne.'<sup>21</sup> The rise of timarchy is the result of the loss of harmony among the ruling class (545d). The salient feature of timocracy is ambition and competitive spirit (548c), and it also shares the characteristic of money-loving with oligarchy. The main characteristic of oligarchy is the love of money, so unity disappears and the state is divided into the poor and the rich (550c-d). The sharp division between the poor and the rich gives rise to democracy when the rich are overthrown by the poor, which is incompatible with sophrosune. Tyranny is the product of corruption of democracy when the obsession with liberty leads to anarchy and finally to the rise of a despot (564a, 566a).

The corruptions in the soul happen in a similar way to the corruptions of the ideal state. That is, the balance in the soul breaks down because the harmony among the three elements disappears. The timarchic man is in love with honour (550b), but "has lost his best safeguard", reason (549b). The oligarchical man is keen on money-making, and enslaves reason and spirit in his soul (553b-c). The democratic man has both necessary and unnecessary desires, and finally the tyrannical man is full of lawless and violent desires (571b). It is clear that the corruption both of the state and of the soul comes about not only because the elements do not stick to the jobs for

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<sup>21</sup> H North, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca, 1966), p. 175.

which they are suited, but also because the agreement among them as to who should rule is broken. For if we take the chronicle of the corruption seriously a breakdown of harmony within the ruling class leads to a wide breakdown of harmony in the state. This has a domino effect on the corruption of the state. Thus we can see the force of *sophrosune* in keeping a stable and unified state and soul.

So far I have roughly run through the passages relevant to *sophrosune* in the *Republic*, *sophrosune* is taken by Plato to be self-control, moderation, and agreement. It is undoubted that *sophrosune* is taken by Plato as the cornerstone of the unity of the state and that of the soul. One question might be asked here: If *sophrosune* alone can guarantee the unity both of the state and the soul, then why Plato has to introduce justice? In what follows I shall proceed to discuss the relation between *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune* to find the answer to the question.

In the pre-Platonic period the usages and meanings of *sophrosune* and justice are not intermingled.<sup>22</sup> The former, according to Larson, has three facets: sound judgement (wisdom), restraint of passion, and the opposite of overweening arrogance and outrage. And the latter has two senses: one is to mean lawfulness, legality and justice in connection with judging in government; the other is to mean faithfulness and reliability.<sup>23</sup> Plato's usage of *sophrosune* seems not too far from the usage of *sophrosune* in the pre-Platonic period, but Plato's usage of justice is quite different from the pre-Platonic usage of justice. For justice in the city, according to Plato, means that everyone does his or her own job (433a). This account covers more than just the legalistic field, for Plato extends it to psychological field, and argues that the individual is just when each part of the soul does it's own job.

However, in an early dialogue, the *Charmides*, *sophrosune* is defined by Charmides as "doing one's own job" (161b).<sup>24</sup> Although Charmides' definition is rejected by Socrates who later on in the same dialogue defines *sophrosune* as the knowledge of good and bad, nevertheless, in ordinary usage, 'doing one's own job'

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<sup>22</sup> C. W. R. Larson, "The Platonic Synonyms, *Dikaiosune* and *Sophrosune*", *American Journal of Philology*, vol. LXXII, 1951, p. 400.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 398-399.

<sup>24</sup> Watt, *op. cit.* p. 187.

is an aspect of *sophrosune*.<sup>25</sup> Therefore it might not be unreasonable to assert that Plato's usage of justice in the *Republic* does bear some attributes of *sophrosune*. As North points out,

[the fact that] Plato now defines justice as doing one's own work and applies this definition to the virtue of the soul and of the State, each in its ideal condition, shows that he is widening the hitherto narrow and legalistic scope of *dikaiosyne* by endowing it with some of the attributes of *sophrosyne*.<sup>26</sup>

Now that Plato has endowed justice with some attributes of *sophrosune*, it would be better if we can see how these two virtues, or one as some scholars would suggest,<sup>27</sup> work together. In the *Meno*, it is said that if human beings, both men and women, are going to be good, they need both qualities, justice and temperance (73b). Whereas it might be asked why both, for it is shown in the *Republic* that *sophrosune* alone seems able to guarantee the harmony and the unity both in the state and the soul. The answer to this question, I think, can be found in the *Laws*, where the Athenian says that due to the fact that courage is in need of *sophrosune* as a companion, "in the absence of self-control, justice will never spring up" (696c).<sup>28</sup> Although *sophrosune* and justice are defined in different terms, one as order and self-discipline, the other as doing one's own job, the close relationship between the two is obvious. For "in both terms there are these two factors, agreement and doing."<sup>29</sup> *Sophrosune* by definition means agreement (*symphonia*), arrangement (*taxis*), order (*kosmos*), and compromise (*systasis*),<sup>30</sup> but also implies the idea doing one's own. Justice by definition means doing one's own but also implies that doing one's own is not to be meddling in that harmony would be spoiled by one's being meddling (the *Republic*, 444b). It is worth noting that the relation between justice, *dikaiosune*, and *sophrosune* is different

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<sup>25</sup> North, *op. cit.* p. 156, no. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *op. cit.* p. 173, no. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Larson, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Saunders, *op. cit.* p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> Larson, *Ibid.* p. 406.

<sup>30</sup> North, *op. cit.* p. 152.

in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Justice is more emphasized in the *Republic*, because only if each part does its own job could the agreement be reached. However, in the *Laws* *sophrosune* is more emphasized because Plato in the dialogue is mainly concerned with the harmony between passion and reason.<sup>31</sup>

This relation between *sophrosune* and justice reminds us of the relation between human-heartedness and ritual in Confucian ethics. For, in the Confucian view, to be a superior man is not only a matter of acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct, ritual, but also of possessing human-heartedness (the *Analects*, III, 3). It seems to me that both human-heartedness (to love people) and *sophrosune* point to the existence of an 'other', that is, the notion of *sophrosune*, as harmonious *agreement*, presupposes that there are certain *interactions* among different classes in the society and different elements in the soul. Although both justice and ritual imply a kind of interaction among different elements, justice means not being meddlesome, and ritual acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct, yet without *sophrosune* and human-heartedness as foundations, both justice and ritual might be practiced in the wrong way. For example, in Confucian humane society a person without possessing human-heartedness might express his love to others in a mechanical way, that is, when he deals with people he acts in accordance with ritual but without any feeling for them. And in Plato's just society one's doing his own might turn one into an anti-social man because what one will do in the just state is to do his own job and never work in cooperation with others. In other words, a just state can never be called unified and stable unless both doing one's own job and *sophrosune* go hand in hand with each other. For the latter presupposes a kind of agreement among people which will enable people to work cooperatively. It is notable that ritual is very like the older Greek idea of *sophrosune* as 'knowing your place', 'doing your own job', 'quietness', etc.. But Plato treats it as something internal. For in Confucian ethics there is no division in the soul, and when he talks of ritual Confucius puts emphasis on how to conduct oneself properly in a given situation.

The analysis above shows that both Plato and Confucius think that the unity of state cannot be achieved only by practising the idea that each sticks to his or her own

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<sup>31</sup> R. F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis, 1983), pp. 54-6.

job. For the unity of society is different from that of machine, that is, the unity of society cannot be understood in a mechanical sense. It is only when sophrosune is brought into play that unity can be achieved. It would be easier to understand my argument here if we take a company as an analogy to the state. It is common sense that each member of a company should stick to their departmental jobs if the company is to be run properly. However, if each one in the company does stick to their own jobs but lacks the sense of sharing feelings and the concept of common good, it will be hard to imagine how they can be in cooperation with one another. In other words, for a company to be run well it is not enough that each one should merely do his own job. It is only when each department can reach an agreement as to how to cooperate with one another in order to reach a common goal that this company can be said to be well-run.

Therefore, there is no surprise that sophrosune and justice appear at the same time in several passages in the *Republic*. For example, the philosophers are the only ones who can see the Forms, so

[I]f the philosopher is compelled to try to introduce the standards which he has seen there, and weave them not into himself only, but into the habits of men both in the private and public lives, will he lack the skill to produce self-discipline and justice and all other ordinary virtues.

Certainly not. (500d)

A few lines below, Plato says that the philosophical artist will look frequently in both directions, that is, at justice and beauty and self-discipline and the like in their true nature (501b) and at the copies he makes of them in society. It is undoubted that Plato regards both justice and sophrosune as equally important. However Plato, as an intellectualist, would say that without wisdom, that is without seeing the Forms, the philosophers will not be able to know what sophrosune and justice are in their true senses. Consequently, we can see that for Plato virtues are interlocked with one another.

Finally, the question: Whether sophrosune and justice are synonyms will be briefly considered. Throughout my discussion one might have an impression that



*sophrosune*, for Plato, seems to mean more than just self-control, it also means order, harmony, agreement, and doing one's own job, and self-knowledge. It seems reasonable to say that *sophrosune* expresses "the all-embracing order and the morality of restraint and limitation."<sup>32</sup> In spite of some scholars' assertion that *sophrosune* and justice are synonyms, I would be inclined to think that the relation between *sophrosune* and justice is more than just being synonymous. For, as mentioned earlier on in this section, an ideally unified state demands something more than doing one's own, in that only each member of the state does their own works without the aid of *sophrosune*, there will never be a harmony or agreement in the state. Without *sophrosune* there will never be interactions among the members of the state. Moreover, although justice, doing one's own job, can be the first step towards harmony, yet it would be hard to imagine how justice alone can obtain a long term stability in the state, if each member of it does his or her own job but does not reach an agreement as to who should rule. Thus, the interdependence between *sophrosune* and justice is crucial, one cannot exist without the other if the state is to be unified.

The purpose of running through the *Republic* to explore the role of *sophrosune* is to show that the meaning of *sophrosune* can be manifested in many different ways, such as self-control, order, moderation, harmony, and agreement. I in this section pick up 'agreement' (432a) as an important aspect of *sophrosune* because a unified state cannot be achieved only by appealing to the idea, doing one's own. A unified state, in Plato's view, is a state with inner harmony, which can be achieved when the members of it agree about who should be ruled and who should rule. Hence people share feelings and work towards the same goal — maintain the stability of the state. Furthermore, the aim of the idea doing one's own is to put each individual in their proper places in the state, and the aim of *sophrosune* is to create inner harmony based upon some sort of agreement. Therefore, these two terms, justice and *sophrosune*, can by no means be synonymous.

### 3. The unity of society

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<sup>32</sup> North, *op. cit.* p. 150.

Plato has completed his task in searching for the justice in the state, and throughout his account of the justice in the state we can see that a just state is a unity. That is to say, it is by justice and sophrosune that a state can be unified. I shall proceed to examine now what unity means in Plato's view.

For Plato a good or just city is a unified city, while Aristotle says in the *Politics* that " a city which goes on becoming more and more of a unity, will eventually cease to be a city at all " (1261a18).<sup>33</sup> For a city, in Aristotle's view, is a sort of plurality, not a one. A unified city, for Aristotle, can be achieved when the diversity of people who compose the city are tied up together with friendship and reciprocity. Aristotle says,

A real unity must be made up of elements which differ in kind. It follows that the stability of every city depends on each of its elements rendering to the others an amount equivalent to what it receives from them. (1261a34-8)<sup>34</sup>

However Plato's appeal to unity of the city is not to propose a kind of super-individual, as Aristotle thinks, which is over and above each individual who composes it. Some modern commentators,<sup>35</sup> who follow Aristotle, claim that Plato's account of unity of the state does lead to a view of organic state. That is, in an organic state each individual who composes it is only a part of the state and without genuine life of his own. A unified state for Plato is a state whose inner state is harmonious. That is, in Plato's ideal state each one does his or her own job for which he or she is naturally suited. The three classes are in harmony, they agree about who should rule and who should be ruled. The three classes would identify their own interests with the common good of the state as a whole, but this does not mean that a state is an organism which has its own interest over and above the different kinds of people's own interests. The state is " the context in which different kinds of people can attain

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<sup>33</sup> Barker, *op. cit.* p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> R. Demos, " Paradoxes in Plato's Doctrine of The Ideal State ", *Classical Quarterly*, vol. VII, 1957, P.167. And Cross and Woosley, *op. cit.* p. 76.

the excellence appropriate to them.”<sup>36</sup> It is noticeable that for Plato the notion of ‘ doing one’s own job ’ is essential to the unity of the state. For without each member of the state doing their own jobs there is no order in the state. It would be impossible for people to reach an agreement as to who should rule and to be in harmony with one another in a disorderly state.

Moreover, although it is forbidden for the lower classes to take on the job of the higher class, it might not be impossible that Plato would allow the lower class people to have private property and exchange their jobs with the others in the class, which also shows that the individual to some extent, though not fully, have their autonomy. Therefore, Aristotle might misunderstand what Plato means by unity. Unity for Plato is an inner harmony of the state which is composed of different kinds of people. What Aristotle thinks of Platonic unity is that there is only one kind of people in the unified state.

In addition to the fact that a unified state has inner harmony, the citizens in the state have the same feelings towards each other, in Plato’s view, which can also be a basis for a unified state. At 415a-d where Plato tells us a tale to show that all citizens in the state are brothers. However this does not suggest that Plato is emphasizing the value of family; on the contrary, we can see in the *Republic V* where Plato proposes to abolish the family in the upper classes for both the eugenic reasons (459c) and promoting unity. What Plato means by the claim that all citizens are brothers is that he thinks that family members are bound together by mutual love, and it is mutual love or friendship which is important, not the family. Therefore, one loves someone because he sees his own good being bound up with the one he loves. Plato says that “ the deepest affection is based on identity of interest, when we feel that our own good and ill fortune is completely bound up with that of something else ” (412d). It follows that the mutual friendship or love can only take place when all citizens in the state identify their interests with one another, and as long as the common interest can be recognized by each one of the members of the state, the state will be a unity. Consequently, it is clear why Plato proposes to abolish the family and private property, for they hinder people from recognizing what the common good is, and why he

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<sup>36</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 179.

regards the mutual friendship as a means to preserve the unity and stability of the state.<sup>37</sup>

Aristotle agrees with Plato's view that friendship is crucial for the state, as he mentions that " [f]riendship, we believe, is the chief good of cities, because it is the best safeguard against the danger of factional disputes " (1262a50-2).<sup>38</sup> Where Aristotle disagrees with Plato is that abolishing the family and private property will not improve mutual love among the citizens. For without genuine familial relations as a basis it would be difficult to see how each one of the citizens can appreciate the real meaning of father and son, or mother and daughter. And without private property for Aristotle there will be no friendship, since " friendship consists in part in the free bestowal of one's goods upon another."<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from all this that the Principle of Specialization in the *Republic* II and doing one's own job in *Republic* II and IV, are very factors which help a state to remain unified. Of course, as I argued above, without the aid of sophrosune the unity of society cannot be achieved by the idea doing one's own job. The idea of the division of labour being one of the reasons for the unity of the state is echoed by E. Durkheim. When Durkheim discusses the benefit of the division of labour in the state, he says,

Men obey the same law. In the same city, different occupations can co-exist without being obliged mutually to destroy one another, for they pursue different objectives. The soldier seeks military glory, the priest moral authority, the statesman power, the businessman riches, and the scholar scientific renown. Each of them can attain his end without preventing the others from attaining theirs.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> It is noticeable that Plato in the *Laws* does not propose to abolish the family, but thinks that the state is the union of families (680a-e). See Stalley, *op. cit.* pp. 103-4, and G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 112-31.

<sup>38</sup> Barker, *op. cit.* p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> R. F. Stalley, " Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's *Republic* ", *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford, 1991), p. 196.

<sup>40</sup> A. Giddens, *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 154.

What Durkheim means here is that the division of labour can prevent internal conflict between citizens from happening in the state because every citizen can obtain his or her own goal through the division of labour. Although Durkheim's language of describing the benefit of the division of labour is full of liberal-democratic meanings, which are not a salient feature in Plato's politics, yet the function of the division of labour both for Plato and Durkheim is the same. It is employed to maintain the solidarity of the state. Thus, in Plato's ideal state each class does their own jobs. The Guardians rule, the Auxiliaries do military service and police, and the farmer and artisans, etc., produce. All members of the ideal state stick to their own jobs and without trespassing on the others' (443d). It is by this division that all members of the state can have their proper places and perform their respective functions well.

Although Plato's account of the unity of the state depends heavily on the idea that the different classes have different functions, he does not have the kind of organic view of the state which implies that individual citizens stand to the state as the parts of a body stand to the whole body. It is essential to his view that the citizens are held together by justice, sophrosune, friendship, and mutual love. If any of these is lacking the unity of the state will be threatened.

To put this chapter briefly. The reason for a society coming into being, says Plato, is the individual's lack of self-sufficiency. In order to fulfill their bodily needs, the individuals gather together, and each one has to do one job for which he or she is by nature suited. As the society expands the importance of the notion of 'doing one's own job' increases. The notion is essential to maintaining the order of the society. However, for Plato, the notion of 'doing one's own job' cannot be understood in a sense of mechanism, nor of organism. For, in Plato's view, although the social order can be achieved by appeal to 'doing one's own job', a unified society requires the citizens to reach an agreement (*sophrosune*) as to who should rule, have a shared conception of the good, and have mutual love towards one other. In both mechanical and organic unity there is no need for the parts to have mutual feeling and the shared conception of the good. In other words, Plato, on the one hand, puts emphasis on the importance of 'doing one's own job' to the order of the society; on the other hand, he thinks that in addition to doing one's own job, a unified society requires the harmonious human relation, and the shared conception of the good which are absent

**in both mechanic and organic unity.**

## Chapter 2

### Confucius' Humane Society

We are told in the *Analects* (XVIII, 6) that it is impossible for man to associate with birds and beasts, as though they were the same class as human race; if man does not associate with mankind, with whom man should associate? Although in this passage Confucius does not overtly mention society, it is undoubted that in Confucius' view men are not isolated from one another, that is, men have to live with and to depend upon each other. Society will be the best place in which people can interrelate with one another and have mutual aid, and it is in society, for Confucius, that man can achieve human-heartedness (*jen*). In this chapter I would like to discuss Confucius' humane society by exploring three topics: first of all, the role of propriety or ritual (*li*) in society; secondly, the Golden Rule as the principle of dealing with human relations; thirdly, the unity of society.

#### 1. The role of propriety in society

The word human-heartedness (*jen*) is the cardinal concept and constantly appears in the *Analects*. In etymology, human-heartedness consists of two parts, that is, man + two. It is often taken to mean that in Confucius' view man is social animal, and *jen* is primarily regarded as a concept of human relation. There is however a deeper meaning of human-heartedness underneath the surface. As Wei-ming Tu points out, human-heartedness is “ basically linked with the self-reviving, self-perfecting, and self-fulfilling process of an individual.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the first step for a man to be a genuine man or a superior man is for him to undergo a process of self-cultivation.<sup>2</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> Wei-ming Tu, “ The Creative Tension Between Jen and Li ”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XVIII (1), 1968, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that for Confucius, self-cultivation requires proper education.

is noticeable that the self, in Confucius' view, is not something individual but identical with the human nature that all people share. Human nature for Confucius is the same to everyone and bestowed from Heaven. To undergo the process of self-cultivation is to find inwardly one's true self, and to dig out the covert human-heartedness in oneself. It is in this sense that human-heartedness is linked with self-cultivation. Confucius says: "Is humaneness really so far away? If we ourselves wanted humaneness, then humaneness would arrive" (VII, 30). Human-heartedness is not something outside ourselves, it is something in ourselves. As long as we will it, it will appear. Mencius says that human-heartedness "is man's mind" and "the distinguishing characteristic of man" (VI, a, 11; VII, b, 16).<sup>3</sup> These passages indicate the point that human-heartedness cannot be merely regarded as a kind of social relation, it should also be regarded as an innate spiritual entity inside every human being. However I am not inclined to contend here that the etymological meaning of human-heartedness is not important in that if one only possesses human-heartedness without expressing it in one's behaviour, then it would be difficult for others to recognize the fact that one is well self-cultivated. The embodiment of human-heartedness has to be in society in that the highest development of human-heartedness entails a harmonious social relation.

The inner demand of human-heartedness is to undergo the process of self-cultivation, and the paramount point of self-cultivation is to enable man to find out his inner self, i.e. to actualize the potential of his being.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the inner self-realisation, man has also to undergo the process of learning to be a superior man, and this process of learning cannot be isolated from the society in which one lives. For in Confucius' view a genuine or a superior man cannot be regarded only as someone who is able to find out his 'ontological sufficiency',<sup>5</sup> that is, someone who is able to find out his possessing human-heartedness which gives meaning to his existence. What is more important for a genuine man is that he is able to harmonize his relationships with others within a society. Therefore detachment from one's society

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<sup>3</sup> J. Legge, *The Four Books* (Hong Kong, 1966), p. 268, and p. 334.

<sup>4</sup> Wei-ming Tu, "Li as a Process of Humanization", *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XXII (2), 1972, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



will be a detriment to one's achieving genuine manhood. Wei-ming Tu says,

Indeed, a Confucian tries to be social for the sake of self-realization. His personal authenticity is inseparable from his sociality. If he fails to relate himself to others in a meaningful way, he does violence not only to his social relations but also to his authentic self. Unless he cultivates himself in the context of human-relatedness, no matter how high a spiritual level he is able to attain, from the Confucian point of view, his claim to self-realization is inauthentic.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the dichotomy of self-cultivation and human relations is not for Confucius a game of 'either-or' but a game of 'both'. If either of them is lacking man's authenticity would be in jeopardy. Moreover, the fact that man's authenticity is expressed both in his self-cultivation and in harmonious human relations means that there is no self-regarding behaviour in Confucian ethics. Whatever one does is something to do with someone else or with some group of people. The contrast with the ethics of, for example, J. S. Mill, is striking here. Mill claims that one's other-regarding actions should be regulated and supervised by government, but the government has no business in interfering one's self-regarding actions.<sup>7</sup> Thus in the realm of self-regarding morality, we can do whatever we want as long as our actions do not do harm to others. The *Great Learning* however tells us that "the superior man must be watchful over himself when he is alone"<sup>8</sup>, since even when a superior man is alone he is still thinking that he has to act in accordance with human-heartedness. It is an effort of taking precautions against wrong doings, and even when one is alone one is still watched by Heaven and Earth.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Analects* we can see the embodiment of human-heartedness mainly lies in the five relationships or what are sometimes called 'the five constancies'<sup>10</sup>. That is,

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 4 (London, 1992), (ed.) H. B. Acton, pp. 143-62.

<sup>8</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on private and public morality, see Part IV, Chapter 11, Section 3.

<sup>10</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (New York, 1989).

1) ruler and minister, 2) father and son, 3) husband and wife, 4) sibling and sibling, 5) friend and friend. For example:

Filial piety and fraternal duty — surely they are the roots of humaneness. (I, 2)

If he appreciates men of quality, if he makes light of sexual attraction, if in serving his father and mother he is capable of using his strength to the utmost, if in serving his lord he is capable of offering up his life, if in his dealings with friends he is trustworthy in what he says, I would certainly call him learned .... (I, 7)

Rulers in employing ministers do so in accordance with ritual, and ministers in serving rulers do so in accordance with loyalty. (III, 19)

From these passages we can see the human-heartedness is embodied in the five relationships, and it is in dealing with these *particular* cases that the notion of propriety or ritual (*li*) makes its appearance. What is *li*? The word *li* has a socio-religious meaning. Etymologically *li* means a sacrificial act. The word *li* (禮) consists of two parts: (示) spiritual body, (豊) liquor container. These are necessary elements for conducting a religious sacrifice in ancient China.

*Li*, apart from its etymological meaning, means respect and reverence.<sup>11</sup> To treat people in accordance with *li* means to respect and reverence them. Thus, *li* does not imply an isolated individual but an *other*. *Li* is the basis of one's dealing with his social relations. Mencius says,

According to the way of man, if they are well fed, warmly clothed, and comfortably lodged but without education, they will become almost like animals. The Sage (emperor Shun) worried about it and he appointed Hsieh to be minister of education and teach people human relations, that between father and son, there should be affection; between ruler and minister, there

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p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> The *Mencius*, in Legge, *op. cit.* pp. 258-9.

should be righteousness; between husband and wife, there should be attention to their separate functions; between old and young, there should be a proper order; and between friends, there should be faithfulness. .... (3A, 4)<sup>12</sup>

The five moral principles of human interaction, namely, affection, righteousness, separate functions, proper order, and faithfulness are predicated on propriety. Without propriety as a basis people's practice of the five moral principles might either go too far or not go far enough. Confucius says,

If one is courteous but does without ritual, then one dissipates one's energies; if one is cautious but does without ritual, then one becomes timid; if one is bold but does without ritual, then one becomes reckless; if one is forthright but does without ritual, then one becomes rude. (VIII, 2)

Thus we can see the force of propriety in one's dealing with his social relations. Without propriety the harmony of human interrelation and orderly society will diminish. Furthermore, propriety (*li*) can bring about, in Wei-ming Tu's word, a fiduciary society.<sup>13</sup> In a society governed by ritual or propriety, our behaviour regulated by ritual is more predictable. Ritual, as a guidance of proper conduct, enables us to know or predict how people would behave in a given situation. Thus when we deal with people we do not have to worry what people would react when we say so-and-so. For every human relation is defined by ritual, there is no room for panic and suspicion. Ritual creates an atmosphere in which people can rely on one another.

To put this section briefly, it is clear from the etymological meaning of human-heartedness that men are born into society. For Confucius' humane society coming into existence members of the society have to engage themselves in a process of self-cultivation and a process of learning to harmonize their social relations with others. It is the latter gives rise to the role of ritual or propriety in the society. *Li*, on the one

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<sup>12</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 69-70.

<sup>13</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *op. cit.* ch. 3, pp. 39-66.

hand, is the standard of moral conduct, it has the function of moderation or regulation; on the other hand, *li* is the rule which is needed to establish the social order, that is, it is the rule with which each individual in society has to comply.

## **2. The Golden Rule as the principle of dealing with human relations**

The ‘ five relations ’ form the general structure of Chinese society. It should be noted that in the ‘ five relations ’ the first three together are called ‘ Three Bonds ’, that is, father and son, ruler and minister, and husband and wife. It is commonly held that the ‘three bonds ’ implies a kind of authoritarianism or paternalism, since the stronger, such as father, ruler, and husband, can employ their authority over the weaker, such as son, minister, and wife. It is undoubted that Confucian society is a hierarchical and feudal one, that is because, although Confucius asserts that by nature men are close to each other, yet he does not advance a step towards abolishing the class division in ancient Chinese society.<sup>14</sup> For Confucius did not intend to build a new society from without, which is totally alien to the existing one, but intended to reform the society on its original basis. It would be hard to deny that Chinese society is a paternal society, however it does not mean that the weaker people or those in the lower position should follow blindly the order of the stronger or higher position people without any question. Nor does it mean that the authority of the higher position cannot be questioned. For that will stray away from the principle of propriety.

In the Confucian ethical system, human love is not one-way but mutual. Human interaction is *reciprocal* — not giving without receiving or vice versa. The principle of reciprocity is the result of development of human-heartedness in that “ the humane man, wishing himself to be established, sees that others are established, and wishing himself to be successful, sees that others are successful ” (VI, 30). One treats oneself

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<sup>14</sup> In Chou dynasty (1027-256 BC) the socio-political system is patriarchal, and social division is roughly as follows: the Son of Heaven, duke of prince, minister, scholar, the common people, artisan and producer, and slave.

in the same way as one treats others, one is always considerate and puts oneself in someone else's position when one is dealing with him. Thus Zigong says in the *Analects*,

If I do not want others to inflict something on me, I also want to avoid inflicting it on others. (V, 12)

Confucius says,

Do not inflict on others what you yourself would not wish done to you. (XV, 24)

Reciprocity is the principle which one can practice in one's whole life and can be the basis for treating others. If men can get along with one another in accordance with the principle of reciprocity, then the mutual relationship between man and man will be in peace and not in conflict. Thus the value of reciprocity is obvious, it enables man to think not only from his own standpoint but also from the others' standpoints as well. Social conflicts would be diminished if each individual can practice reciprocity. It might be asked why I have to introduce the Golden Rule, and does it do any help to resolve the problem of a paternal society, we encountered above? I think it can.

Although an ideal Confucian society is paternal in character, yet it is not an *absolute* paternal one. What I mean is that although the weaker have to show their respect to the stronger, they do not do so blindly. For a minister has to serve his ruler in accordance with the Way, if it is impossible to do so then he should resign (XI, 22). Likewise, for example, if a husband does not pay attention to his proper function in the family, that is, say, he has the duty to support the family by working hard, then it would be proper for his wife to divorce her husband. Although it would be impossible to renounce the relation between father and son, since it is derived from biological factor, nevertheless " [i]n serving father and mother, one remonstrates gently " (IV, 18). Remonstrations, resignation, and divorce indicate that the relations between man and man are not unidirectional but two-way or mutual. In Confucian society, unlike *absolute* paternalism, there is room for the lower position people to bring their ideas

into play when the higher position people's words and deeds or deportment are in excess of the standard of propriety. Therefore when Confucius says that "do not look at what is contrary to ritual, do not listen to what is contrary to ritual, do not speak what is contrary to ritual, and make no movement which is contrary to ritual" (XII, 1), the harmonious society is not based on absolute authority, but on the principle of propriety and reciprocity. That is, people in Confucian society are aware that what I do not want others do to me I should not do to others. It is not only an expression of altruism but also an expression of self-cultivation, because through self-reflection we will ask ourselves the question: If I were my wife, how would I like to be treated? The answer to it is helpful to build up harmonious relationships with people, and is essential to self-cultivation.<sup>15</sup>

In Confucian society men are born into social roles<sup>16</sup>, and playing one's role properly and having a harmonious social relationship require one to put the other's situation or feeling into account before one acts. As Confucius says in the *Doctrine of the Mean*,

In the way of the superior man there are four things, to not one of which have I as yet attained. To serve my father, as I would require my son to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my prince, as I would require my minister to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my elder brother, as I would require my younger brother to serve me: to this I have not attained; to set the example in behaving to a friend, as I would require him to behave

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<sup>15</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *op. cit.* p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> Here I disagree with professor Tu's assertion that "[i]t is difficult to assume the role of the father or the son or any of the other roles in basic dyadic human relationships. As we grow and mature into a community, each role we assume requires the tender care that characterizes one of the central concerns of Confucian ethics. Yet Confucian terminology does not describe the assumption of a social role. It seems unreal and somewhat distasteful to describe fatherhood, motherhood, or friendship as roles we play on a social stage. Rather, we realize ourselves as full-grown human beings through our actual experiences as fathers, mothers, friends, sons, daughters, brothers or sisters". *Ibid.* p. 105. For it seems to me that professor Tu's assertion cannot give a full account of Confucius' principle of the rectification of names. One's obligations or duties are prescribed by the roles one occupies.

to me: to this I have not attained. (XIII)<sup>17</sup>

This passage shows that Confucius' emphasis on reciprocity calls our attention to the fact that we always have to be aware of the thinking or feeling of the other. If we fail to do so, we fail in our self-cultivation. Confucius urges us to reconsider seriously our moral activities and says,

Earnest in practising the ordinary virtues, and careful in speaking about them, if, in his practice, he has anything defective, the superior man dares not but exert himself; and if, in his words, he has any excess, he dares not allow himself such license. Thus his words have respect to his actions, and his actions have respect to his words; is it not just an entire sincerity which marks the superior man? (XIII)<sup>18</sup>

For the superior man “ is shamed that his words have outstripped his deeds ” (VIV, 27). The root of the harmonious society does not merely depend upon a cluster of rules which prescribe rights and duties of those relations, but each individual makes an effort to engage not only in self-cultivation but also to have harmonious relations with the others. For, as mentioned above, a superior man would not be recognized if he is detached from society, and the actualization of human-heartedness cannot be achieved outside society. “ [I]t is through the achievement of excellence in interpersonal relations that one is transformed from the biological level of human *qua* beast to the high levels of personhood in which the human *qua* social being is himself the determining factor in bringing about a harmonious social order.”<sup>19</sup>

To put this section simply, ritual or propriety requires us to act in conformity with rules that means a kind of conformism; on the other hand, it does not mean that we have to act acquiescently in accordance with the order of the stronger if the stronger are wrong in giving orders. For the notion of reciprocity enables us to have

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<sup>17</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *The Doctrine of the Mean, Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> R. P. Peerenboom, “ Confucian Justice: Achieving a Humane Society ”, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XXX, 1990, p. 23.

our say when the higher or stronger are giving a wrong order or acting in an immoral way. Therefore Confucius' humane society will be able to avoid the label of absolute paternalism.

### **3. The unity of society**

The starting point of Confucian society is self-cultivation since for a society to be humane requires the members of the society to make it humane, and they can do this only by making an effort to recover human-heartedness in themselves. Simultaneously, they have to behave virtuously in accordance with ritual or propriety for the virtuous behaviour is the embodiment of human-heartedness. The person who can unfailingly stick to human-heartedness is a superior man. Confucius' appeal to the superior man has political relevance because in Confucius' time the socio-political system was patriarchal, and the class of ministers of feudal lords became hereditary and they gradually gained political power over their feudal lords. Thus the state was under their control. The result of this is that the appointment of the minister was not dependent upon his ability and virtue but upon his family status, so the state tended to lapse into chaos because it was run by incompetent people. Confucius' appeal to the superior man is an attempt to rescue the state from this danger.

Confucius' political views are based on 'the rule of virtue', he does not think that law is the best remedy for curing a disorderly society, which is contrary to the Legalist claim. Confucius says that " [a]t hearing legal proceedings I am no different from anybody else, but what is surely necessary is to bring it about that there is no litigation " (XII, 13). In the Confucian view an orderly society can be achieved not by severe law but by setting up exemplars for people to emulate. The emulation plays an important part in Confucius' political thought, since the objects of emulation are the superior men whom Confucius endows with the influence<sup>20</sup> that enables them to transform people. As Confucius says,

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<sup>20</sup> For a view on whether Confucian superior man possesses 'magical power', see my discussion in Part III, Chapter 8, Section 3.



If you promote the straight and set them above the crooked, then the people will be obedient. If you promote the crooked and set them above the straight, then the people will not be obedient. (II, 19)

The nature of the gentleman is as the wind, and the nature of the small man is as the grass. When the wind blows over the grass it always bends. (XII, 19)

If one's character is rectified, then things will get done without orders being issued; but if one's character is not rectified, then although orders are issued they are not followed. (XIII, 6)

Confucius' assertion that an orderly or unified society can be achieved only through the rule of virtue, and the emulation of exemplars is explicitly expressed in the *Analects*, he says that " [i]f you lead them by means of government and keep order among them by means of punishments, the people are without conscience in evading them. If you lead them by means of virtue and keep order among them by means of ritual, they have a conscience and moreover will submit " (II, 3). It should be noticed that here Confucius does not propose anarchism or the notion of inaction as the Taoists claim, what Confucius claims is that the person who possesses political power or holds the office should be virtuous because it is not his possessing political power but his possessing virtue that makes people obedient. Thus the unity of society in Confucius' view can be achieved by the emulation of the superior man.

The unity and stability of society can also be achieved by the Rectification of Names. This is shown in a conversation in the *Analects* between Confucius and his disciple, Zilu:

Zilu said: ' If the Lord of Wei were waiting for you to run the government, what would you give priority to?' The Master says: ' What is necessary is to rectify names, is it not?' Zilu said: ' If this were to take place, it would surely be an aberration of yours. Why should they be rectified?' The Master said: ' How uncivilized you are. With regard to what he does not understand the gentleman is surely somewhat reluctant to offer an opinion. If names are not rectified, then words are not appropriate. If words are not appropriate, then deeds are not accomplished. If deeds are not accomplished, then the rites and

music do not flourish. If the rites and music do not flourish, then punishments do not hit the mark. If punishments do not hit the mark, then the people have nowhere to put hand or foot. So, when a gentleman names something, the name can definitely be used in speech; and when he says something, it can definitely be put into practice. In his utterances the gentleman is definitely not casual about anything. (XIII, 3)

Confucius' argument of the connection between the rectification of names and people being able to find a place to put hand or foot is interesting. It would be easier for us to see the connection if we have the aid of logical principle.<sup>21</sup>

- $\sim A \rightarrow \sim B$  If names are not rectified, then words are not appropriate.
- $\sim B \rightarrow \sim C$  If words are not appropriate, then deeds are not accomplished.
- $\sim C \rightarrow \sim D$  If deeds are not accomplished, then the rites and music do not flourish.
- $\sim D \rightarrow \sim E$  If the rites and music do not flourish, then punishments do not hit the mark.
- $\sim E \rightarrow \sim F$  If punishments do not hit the mark, then the people have nowhere to put hand or foot.

This shows the fact that the rectification of names is a reason for people being able to find a place to put hand or foot, but it does not tell us that the former is the prerequisite for the latter. For there might be other reasons which enable people to find a place to put hand or foot. However if we use the principle of denying the consequent (  $A \rightarrow B, \therefore \sim B \rightarrow \sim A; \sim B \rightarrow \sim A, \therefore A \rightarrow B$  ), then it would be clear why the rectification of names is the prerequisite for the orderly society.

$F \rightarrow E$

$E \rightarrow D$

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<sup>21</sup> Wei-hsin Hsiang and Fu-tseng Liu, *Reading in Chinese Philosophy and Thought: Pre-Chin Dynasty*, ch. 3, (Taiwan, 1977), p. 42-3.

D → C

C → B

B → A

So the rectification of names is a necessary condition of people having somewhere to put hand and foot. That is, only when people in the society know their stations and are able to fulfill duties and obligations prescribed by those stations, can the stability of society be preserved.

Confucius insists on the fact that the rectification of names is closely linked to the order of the society, because he sees that one's deeds and words should be in accordance with each other. This is why Confucius says that when " a gentleman names something, the name can definitely be used in speech; and when he says something, it can definitely be put into practice. In his utterances the gentleman is definitely not casual about anything." And " the gentleman is ashamed that his words have outstripped his deeds " (XIV, 27).

But, what does the rectification of names mean? The rectification of names means that the name has to match the reality. It is explicitly expressed at XII, 11 where Confucius says that " [l]et a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son." The first words of the four pairs are nouns in Chinese, i.e. ruler, subject, father, and son, which illustrate the status or roles of the individual, and the second words of the four pairs are verbs, i.e. ruler, subject, father, and son, which are to indicate the moral obligations required by the roles. The moral requirements of the roles are duties and obligations. Thus to understand the noun, that is, to understand one's social role and status is to rectify the name, and to fulfill the moral obligation, the verb, is to practice. The rectification of names is used by Confucius as the process from understanding to practicing, that is, to understand one's station and to fulfill the obligation prescribed by the station one occupies. Therefore, by the rectification of names the order of society can be achieved.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Although the rectification of names may sound strange to us there are certain parallels in Plato's thought. In *Republic I* Thrasymachus insists that the genuine ruler does not make mistakes. The thought here seems to be that only those who behave as rulers are entitled to be called rulers. Similarly in the *Republic IV* Socrates insists that we must not make the Guardians happy in such a way that they will no

For Confucius, as mentioned, the family bears an analogy with society. Confucius emphasizes filial piety because he thinks that there is a similarity between filial piety and government. Confucius says,

Only be dutiful towards your parents and friendly towards your brothers, and you will be contributing to the existence of government. These virtues surely constitute taking part in government, so why should only that particular activity be regarded as taking part in government? (II, 21)

To engage in political affairs in Confucius' view one does not necessarily have to hold an office in that what one does in the family is exactly the same as what one does in the society. In other words, the family is society writ small. If in the family one can be filial towards one's parents, then in the state one can be loyal towards one's ruler; if one can be friendly towards one's siblings, then one can be friendly towards one's fellow countrymen. Here we can see the social function of filial piety. For it would be impossible to break off the tie between father and son under any given circumstance, and when the social order is concerned the filial piety will be strongly emphasized. A filial son will mind his behaviour and pay attention to his family affairs, and also he will be responsible for his duties and obligations. Many Chinese believe that the dutiful and filial son must be the loyal minister. Therefore the stability of the political system will be preserved in the same way as the stability of the family is preserved.

The emphasis on the family does not mean, as mentioned, that the filial son and the loyal minister have to be obedient, in an authoritarian sense, without any condition. While some might argue that the emphasis on the family obliterates the individual. This charge might be right at the first sight, but one moment's reflection we could find out that it seems not to be the case for Confucius. For the purpose of the Confucian emphasis on the family is to actualize each individual's human-heartedness. In Confucian ethics the origin of human-heartedness lies in the family, and the way to cultivate or develop it requires one to put filial piety in practice. It is

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longer be Guardians.

the reason why Confucius says that “ Filial piety and fraternal duty — surely they are the roots of humaneness ” (I, 2). It is by practicing filial piety that the individual can actualize his human-heartedness, and orderly society can be obtained. Thus the emphasis on filial piety does not obliterate the individual but helps the individual to achieve self-realization. However it would be a mistake to confer the Confucian individual with the individuality in the liberal sense. For the liberals claim that although human beings share common set of capacities, they can be developed in quite a different ways. Consequently, each one’s identity or individuality will be different from others’. Whereas in Confucius’ society each one has to undergo a process of self-cultivation, looking for human-heartedness. The rediscovery of human-heartedness is, on the one hand, to find out one’s true self and obtain self-realization; on the other hand, it seems to create a group of people with the same individuality, that is, all of them are called humane men. If the diversity is the trait of liberal society then identicality will be the trait of Confucius’ society.

The process or step of obtaining an orderly and humane society is clearly marked in the *Great Learning*: self-cultivation, the regulation of the family, the orderly state, and the peaceful world. The attainment of the orderly society is not to be accomplished in a move, but to be accomplished in an orderly way and step by step. Then what would be the picture of Confucian humane society, we are told in *Li Chi* (the *Book of Ritual*) that

When the great *Tao* (Way) prevails, all the people of the world will work in the light of public spirit (*Kung*). The men of talents, virtues, and ability will be selected, and faithfulness will be the constant practice and harmony the constant objective of self-cultivation. Consequently, mankind will not only have their parents and care for their children. All the elderly will be provided for and all the young will be employed in work. Commiseration will be expressed toward the widows and the widowers, the orphans and the children, the disabled and the sick in such wise that all are properly cared for. Men have their work and women their homes .... In this way, selfish scheming will be repressed and find no room for expansion, and thievery and disorder will not appear. Therefore, the gates of the houses are never closed. This

state is called the Grand Unity and Harmony.<sup>23</sup>

Confucian humane society is the highest development of human-heartedness, it cannot be achieved unless man is willing to engage himself in self-cultivation. For “ [m]an can enlarge the Way, but it is not true that the Way enlarges man ” (XV, 29), that is, a humane society is only an empty place<sup>24</sup> for it to come into being will depend upon the members of it make efforts to make it humane, that is, to make it meaningful. This will require people to engage in self-cultivation and acting in accordance with ritual or propriety. For Confucius, it is not society which makes people humane but the society derives its name as humane where each individual in the society is humane. Therefore what kind of society one wants to live in will depend upon what kind of person one wants to be.

To sum up then, the unity of Confucius’ humane society can be maintained mainly by the following three ways: firstly, by emphasizing the rule of virtue Confucius appeals to the notion of the superior man as the object of emulation for the public. Secondly, by proposing the principle of the rectification of names Confucius claims that one has to live up to the role one occupies by fulfilling duties and obligations prescribed by the role. Finally, Confucius sees politics as an extension of morality. What one does at home will be no different from what one does in politics. Therefore a filial son, in the Confucian view, will never fail to be a loyal minister.

Finally, to put this chapter in a nutshell. The term ‘ human-heartedness ’ (*jen*) implies that men are born into society. Thus to have a harmonious social relation with others, for Confucius, is essential to both individual self-cultivation and the social order. The function of ritual serves to be a guideline for one’s conduct, and the principle of reciprocity enables one to take the other person’s standing point into account when one is dealing with him. The principle shows that Confucian society cannot be an absolute paternalistic one. A unified society can be achieved when it is ruled by a virtuous man whose behaviour is exemplary; and when each member of the

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<sup>23</sup> A. S. Cua, “ Confucian Vision and Human Community ”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol 11, 1984, p. 236.

<sup>24</sup> J. Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York, 1971), note 28, p. 302.

society plays his or her role or roles properly, i.e. the rectification of names. Moreover, for Confucius, the smallest unity of a society is the family, so a unified society is achieved when each family is in a state of harmony.

## Chapter 3

### Communitarianism or Individualism

Plato's discussion of the just state can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage is the rise of society. Due to the fact that men have varied needs and cannot fulfill their needs by themselves, society originates. Then in society each individual has to do one job for which his or her aptitude is most suitable. For in this way each will work most efficiently and consequently both the varied needs of the city and, as I have argued in chapter 1, those of the soul will be met. At the third stage Plato employs both the principle of specification, which is the key issue at the stage two, and the allegorical human nature theory, the myth at 415a-c, to set up his ideal state. Plato claims that justice can be found in the state only when people of each class do their own jobs and do not trespass on the business of the other classes. However, the picture of Confucian humane society coming into being is quite different from that of Platonic just society. For, in the Confucian view, men are born into society, that is, society is prior to the individual. Furthermore men derive their social roles not from their nature but from inheritance and the extension of a personal social web. Confucius thinks that the stability of society can be achieved only when each individual plays his or her social role properly, i.e. the rectification of names, and engages in self-cultivation to develop his or her human-heartedness. In this chapter I would like to discuss three topics to show that although both Plato and Confucius are not individualists, yet it would be wrong to see them as communitarians in the same way as modern communitarians. Firstly, the priority: society or individual; secondly, a brief discussion of individualism, and finally, Plato and Confucius as communitarians.

#### **1. The priority: society or individual**

In order to find justice in the individual, says Socrates, it would be easier for us first



to “ find justice on a larger scale in the larger entity ” (368e), that is, to find justice in *polis* or society. For justice is a character which can be found both in an individual and in a society. This suggestion is endorsed by Adeimantus. Socrates goes on to say that we are able to see how justice and injustice originates in a society, only when we look at it coming into being (369a). Thus Socrates starts to give an account of how a society comes into existence. At 369b-c Socrates says that due to the fact that no individual is self-sufficient, and each has many needs, society comes into being. It would be better for individuals to get together in society in which each individual can fulfill his or her own needs by receiving from the others and also contributes something to satisfy the others’ needs. Such mutual exchange of taking and giving is made possible because “ each believes that this is better for himself ” (369c).<sup>1</sup>

Why is the mutual interchange of giving and taking good for the individual? Two reasons might be implicitly suggested by Plato<sup>2</sup>: first, “ it increases production and thus satisfies the material needs of all individuals better.” For in a society each individual will do his own business better, if he is to exercise one skill and to devote most of his time to his business. Thus the farmer will devote most of his time to producing food, which can fulfill the needs of all individuals. Second, “ it increases the inherent satisfaction every man finds in his own work.” For each individual has different aptitudes, which fit him or her for a different job (370b). So a shoemaker is one who is by nature suitable for making shoes, and will be *happier* in doing his job than doing something else. The term italicized is to indicate that Versenyi’s use of *satisfaction* is suspicious for the term satisfaction seems to mean that people’s desires can be satisfied. What Plato says however is that in the first city each one does his or her work for which he or she is by nature suited. The division of labour fulfills the needs of the soul as well as of the body. To perform one’s function is to live well and to live well is to be happy. It is, however, misleading to talk, as Versenyi does, of satisfaction here. Moreover, it follows from the above that the stability of the society can be achieved for if the individual’s bodily and mental needs can be met then there will be no scrambling and striving against one another. Therefore, the idea that each does his own job for which he is naturally suited, is not only good for the individual

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<sup>1</sup> G M. A. Grube, *Plato: Republic* (Indianapolis, 1992), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> L. G Versenyi, “ Plato and His Liberal Opponent ”, *Philosophy*, vol. XLVI, 1971, p. 224.

but also for society.

Plato's assertion that society comes into being, owing to the fact that the individual is not self-sufficient seems to suggest that the individual is prior to society. However, it is noticeable that the myth of human nature at 415 a-c seems to suggest a different view, society is prior to the individual. For, in the myth each individual is born into the society and their social status is determined by their nature. And from this passage onwards Plato seems to take it for granted that people are made for a role. Thus it might not be unreasonable to hold that Plato changes his view on the problem: whether society is prior to the individual, or vice versa, as he moves from the first to the ideal society.

In spite of the different views ascribed to Plato, the language used at 369b does indicate that the society comes into being for the benefit of men. A few pages before this passage a similar idea is brought out by Glaucon when he gives an account of the origin of justice (358e-359c). Glaucon says,

What they say is that it is according to nature a good thing to inflict wrong or injury, and a bad thing to suffer it, but that the disadvantages of suffering it exceed the advantages of inflicting it; after a taste of both, therefore, men decide that, as they can't evade the one and achieve the other, it will pay to make a compact with each other by which they forgo both. They accordingly proceed to make laws and mutual agreements, and what the law lays down they call lawful and right. This is the origin and nature of justice. (358e-359a)

Glaucon's account of the origin of justice is full of the contractarian sense. In this it resembles, for example, Hobbes who holds that society originates because people in the society can live without being in "a state of war, a state of constant fear and danger of a violent death".<sup>3</sup> Human nature is essentially competitive, and in the state of nature two people who want the same kind of thing will desire to have the same thing. So the war between them begins. In order to avoid the cruelty of war the contractarians hold that people have to consent to the protection of the government.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 1996), p. 9.

Therefore justice can be achieved only when people sign the contract with the government, and both for Glaucon and Hobbes the just men are those who perform their contracts made.<sup>4</sup>

The contractarian view, that men live in a state of nature before society originates, suggests that the individual is prior to society. At the first sight, it seems to be parallel to what Plato says at 369b. However, a moment's reflection, the difference between the contractarian view and Plato's one is obvious. Plato does not regard the theory of contract as essential to the orderly and just society, for, unlike the contractarians, Plato appeals to human nature to pave the way for achieving the just society. In the contractarian view, the division of labour and the basis of social arrangement relies upon contract. People can freely choose what they want to do, so long as the contract between the employee and the employer is signed. In other words, people's obligations must result from their free choice. Whereas for Plato, the basis of social arrangement is human nature, one man does one job for which he is naturally suited. In the Platonic society, people do not have the chance to choose what they want to do, and their social positions are decided by their different aptitudes. That is to say, for Plato, people are born with obligations. Therefore, although both Plato and Glaucon and the contractarians agree that the individual is prior to society, yet the way of maintaining social order adopted by them is different.

Confucius, on the one hand, unlike Plato and the contractarians, holds that men are born into society, or more precisely, into a family. In other words, society is prior to the individual. Society, in the Confucian view, is the place in which one can achieve one's genuine manhood.<sup>5</sup> Separation from society would do harm to one's self-realization. For human-heartedness can be achieved only through constant self-cultivation and having a harmonious relationship with others in society. If either of them is lacking, then the claim of possessing human-heartedness would be in vain. Without the former the person who has a harmonious relationship with others might be a hypocrite, and without the latter the well self-cultivated person might not be

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<sup>4</sup> R. E. Allen, "The Speech of Glaucon: On Contract and the Common Good", *Justice, Law and Method in Plato and Aristotle*, (ed.) P. Spiro (Alberta, 1987), pp. 51-62.

<sup>5</sup> J. Macmurray's claim that "I exist as an individual only in a personal relation to other individuals", seems to echo the Confucian idea. See J. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London, 1995), ch. 1, p. 28.

recognized by the public as a superior man. Thus one should cultivate oneself in the context of social relations and these two conditions supplement each other.

On the other hand, Confucius, like Plato, is not a contractarian, although for a different reason. Confucius does not regard the theory of contract as the cornerstone of the stability of society either. For, as a feudalist, Confucius holds that people's social roles are derived either by inheritance or consanguinity. It follows from this that the notion of family is essential to a stable society. People's roles in the family are not contractarian by nature; they derive their familial roles by biological factors. The familial roles cannot be defined in terms of contract for they are unrenounceable.<sup>6</sup> If we take this account together with Confucius' claim that politics is the extension of morality then it is not difficult to see why Confucius will regard the theory of contract as meaningless to the stability of society. For society is the family writ large what happens in the family will be the same as what happens in the society. An orderly family will assure an orderly society.

In addition, Confucius, unlike Plato and Aristotle, who regard society as the place in which man can perform his *function (ergon)* properly without distractions, does not see the notion of function as important. Function, for Plato, is something by which one can do best (352e, 353a), so the function of a shoemaker is to make shoes well. Plato's notion of function, as mentioned, is closely connected with his assertion that people have different natures or aptitudes which fit them for different jobs. A person's natural aptitude fits him for being a shoemaker, which means that he is able to perform the function of the shoemaker well since he is by nature suitable for making shoes and capable of making shoes well. It is noticeable that Plato's definition of function is distinct from the ordinary one according to which our function is a job assigned to us. So effectively Plato defines function in terms of natural aptitude. Whereas the linkage between function and nature seems difficult to find in Confucius' thought. For Confucius says in the *Analects* that "[b]y nature men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart" (XVII, 2).<sup>7</sup> If we were to apply Plato's notion of function to this passage then it would be difficult to see how

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on contractual and non-contractual roles, see Part IV, Chapter 13, Section 1.

<sup>7</sup> J. Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of The Mean* (New York, 1971), p. 318.

different persons could have their own particular functions since by nature people are close to one another. For Confucius, as mentioned, one's self-realization can be achieved only by engaging in constant self-cultivation in the context of human-relatedness, not merely by performing one's particular function well.

Moreover, Confucius tells us at II, 12 in the *Analects* that “ [a] gentleman does not behave as an implement.” The happy life of the gentleman or the superior man does not merely depend upon whether he, like a machine, can perform his function properly, but also upon how far he can develop his moral qualities. Confucius, unlike Plato, does not regard function as equivalent to human nature, but as something equivalent to duty or obligation prescribed by social role. Thus to perform one's function is to fulfill one's duty to which one's social role gives rise. To merely vest the superior man with a function will make him like a machine which can only perform the function assigned, but for Confucius the superior man is *ad omnia paratus*.<sup>8</sup> For the nature of the superior man is not only defined in terms of function, viz. the fulfillment of his duty or obligation, but also of the development of his moral quality, human-heartedness, which enables the superior man to have the sense of responsibility in his fulfillment of duty and obligation.

To summarize this section. Although Plato and Confucius have different views on whether society is prior to individual, or vice versa, yet what they agree on, I think, is that society is the place in which individuals can seek their own fulfillment. That is, they regard society as a need. Moreover, both Confucius and Plato do not see the theory of contract as essential to the stability of the society. For the former holds that the social arrangement is by and large based upon the feudal system, inheritance, and consanguinity; and the latter that it is mainly based upon human nature and the theory of function. It is emphatic that Plato's appeal to natural aptitude or function to be the basis for division of labour in the society is alien to Confucius who thinks that by human nature everyone is the same.

## 2. A brief discussion of individualism

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<sup>8</sup> Legge, *Ibid.* note 12, p. 150.

Both Plato and Confucius emphasize the importance of society as required for people's self-fulfillment, which leads us to see how, as scholars often claim, both Plato and Confucius' ideal societies are communitarian in nature. To understand this point it will be useful to first bring out some features of individualism.

Socrates' description of the origin of society, at first sight, seems similar to D. Gauthier's description of society.<sup>9</sup> In Gauthier's view, the basis of a society is cooperation for mutual advantage. However, this similarity is only superficial, in that if we go into the detail of what Gauthier says, then we will find Socrates and Gauthier offer very different pictures. Although Gauthier asserts that a society is based on cooperation for mutual advantage, yet he does not assert, like Socrates, that each individual has to stick to one job for which he is naturally suited. On the contrary, Gauthier asserts that the liberal individual is capable of choosing freely, although she is living in a society, " [s]he is not bound by fixed social roles, either in her activities or in her feelings."<sup>10</sup> The capacity of choice is the most important feature in liberal thought, for instance, the thinkers Taylor calls atomists hold the view that to be an individual is to be free to choose one's own mode of life.<sup>11</sup> The capacity of choice cannot be bound up with obligations or duties. For the affirmation of obligation or duty implies that the individual's freedom of choice would be to some extent restricted. In other words, the capacity for choice is prior to all obligations and duties in the sense that they result from our choice. When we talk of social roles, we are talking about a kind of duty or obligation. Different social roles have different obligations which have to be fulfilled by the person who plays those roles. Thus in Plato's ideal state, for example, one is a natural born shoemaker. One has no choice but fulfills the duty prescribed by the role, that is, to make shoes. It means that the freedom of choice of the individual will be restricted. Similarly, for Confucius, men are born into roles so the freedom of choice is somewhat limited.

It is worth noting that Plato and Confucius, and the individualists have different views on the questions: Who am I? and What are my interests? For Plato, both

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<sup>9</sup> D. Gauthier, " The Liberal Individual ", *Communitarianism and Individualism*, (ed.) Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (Oxford, 1995), pp. 151-164.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> C. Taylor, " Atomism ", *Ibid.* p. 34.

questions have to be decided by one's nature. To be a shoemaker, for example, means that one is naturally suitable for and interested in making shoes. Whereas, for Confucius, both questions are determined largely by one's family, that is, if one's father is a shoemaker then one will be a shoemaker by inheritance. In the individualist view both questions are neither determined by human nature nor by inheritance, but by freedom of choice. Each individual has his or her personal interest and is able to pursue what he or she wants to do. Thus one can choose who one is and pursue what interests one.

The individualist asserts that there is no so-called final end or common good, each individual has his or her own independent conception of good. It follows that the denial of the final end suggests that "what makes the just society just is not the *telos* or purpose or end at which it aims."<sup>12</sup> What makes the just society just is that according to its constitution and law, the just society provides a framework within which each individual can pursue his or her own good, and the freedom of pursuing one's own good is equally open to others. Thus, the individual's right to pursue his or her personal good is prior to the common good. It is noticeable that the individualist claim that each has a conception of the good and that there is no common good are at odds both with Plato and Confucius. Plato holds that there is *right* conception of the good, which can only be obtained by those who are well educated, i.e. the philosophers. So the philosophers have to be in office to make sure that each individual stands in their proper station in that each does one job, not only for the benefit of the individual but also for that of the state. In other words, the good of the individual is the same as that of the state.

Confucius' emphasis on the family illustrates that the individual's personal good coincides with the good of the family as a whole. For Confucius says in the first chapter of the *Hsiao Ching* (the *Book of Filial Piety*),

Seeing that our body, with hair and skin, is derived from our parents, we should not allow it to be injured in any way. This is the beginning of filiality. We develop our own personality and practice the Way so as to perpetuate our

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<sup>12</sup> M. Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and The Unencumbered Self", *op. cit.* p. 13.

name for future generations, and to give glory to our parents.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that in Confucius' view, one's well being will be coincident with that of the family as a whole. This is true no matter what one does one has to take one's family into account. Unlike the individualist view, Confucius does not see the common good as an obstacle preventing the individual from practicing the freedom of choice. For if the individual's own conception of the good is coincident with the common good then what is good for the family is also good for the individual.

Furthermore, as M. Sandel points out, when he describes the picture of the unencumbered self, understanding an individual as prior to and independent of purposes and ends means that there is always a distinction between the values I *have* and the person I *am*.<sup>14</sup> To understand what a person is, is not to understand his aims, ambitions, and interests, but to understand the person 'him' behind those aims, ambitions, and interests. To understand what a person as a shoemaker is, is always to imply that there is a 'person' behind the attribute, i.e. shoemaker. Thus the person 'him' will be prior to the attribute he has. Again, this assertion rules out the possibility that the individual can be completely defined or identified by virtue of referring to their social roles or commitments. For the distinction between what I am and the values I have puts 'the unencumbered self' beyond the experience the self has.

This distinction is originally emphasized in a different way by J. Rawls, who says that a just society is one whose basic principles could be agreed by people in the original position, for "the effects of specific contingencies"<sup>15</sup> will "put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage."<sup>16</sup> That is to say, to avoid this exploitation, each individual has to be situated behind a "veil of ignorance". Rawls says,

[T]he reason why the original position must abstract from and not be

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<sup>13</sup> L. M. Makra, *The Hsiao Ching* (New York, 1961), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Sandel, *op. cit.* p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford, 1973), p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



affected by the contingencies of the social world is that the conditions for a fair agreement on the principles of political justice between free and equal persons must eliminate the bargaining advantages which inevitably arise within background institutions of any society as the result of cumulative social, historical and natural tendencies.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, we can see that people in the original position, for Rawls, are able to choose rationally principles of justice which define the basic structure or framework of society, without knowing their past and natural tendencies. For the dependence upon those factors, the individual will not be able to choose principles of justice rationally, but also the equal distribution can not be put into effect. Furthermore, Rawls' assertion of the veil of ignorance depicts the idea that the identity of each individual cannot be dependent upon his social status, natural tendencies, and the general good. For one's own self is not defined by one's social roles, nor by one's natural capacities. One's own self is defined by one's capacity of practice the freedom of choice. It is obvious that Rawls' claim is not accepted by both Plato and Confucius under different considerations. The former holds that the just society can come into existence only when each individual does one job for which they are naturally suited. The basis of the just society is human nature. The latter claims that the humane society can come into being only when each practices the filial piety in the family. The practicing filial piety suggests that one's social positions are decided by one's social, historical, and cultural background.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize this section briefly. I have picked up some features of individualism, which I think are in contrast with both Plato and Confucius. These features are: 1) in liberal society each individual is able to exercise their freedom of choice, and 2) values their personal goals. 3) Only in the original position can the individual chooses rationally a suitable principle or principles of justice which define the basic structure of the society.

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<sup>17</sup> J. Rawls, "Justice As Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", *op. cit.* p. 200.

<sup>18</sup> Some commentators claim that Rawls' theory of the original position does not necessarily entail that individuals are prior to society. See *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford, 1994), ed. S. Mulhall and A. Swift, p. 96.

### 3. Plato and Confucius as communitarians

Once we return to the *Republic* and the *Analects* we will find the picture of the just society is different from what has been described. For both Plato and Confucius the just society is not individualistic in nature. The Platonic notion of a just society is that 1) everyone does his or her own job; 2) he emphasizes the different nature of each citizen, which is the basis for the division of labour, and 3) the common good is the good at which each citizen aims. In what follows I shall mainly discuss these three aspects in turn, and in the course of the discussion Confucius' ideas will be referred to.

First, Plato's ideal just society would be achieved if and only if each citizen of the just society played his or her social role properly. That is, in an ideal state "one man was to do one job, the job he was naturally most suited for" (433a). The notion of social role presupposes the fact that there are duties and obligations corresponding to social roles. Thus the farmer's duty is to produce food, the shoemaker's duty is to make shoes, and the doctor is to heal the sick. Different people can be identified by their different professions for which they are naturally fitted. The same idea is expressed in Confucius' *Analects*, where Confucius is asked by Duke Jing of Qi about government, Confucius replies: "[l]et a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son. ..." (XII, 11). Each individual who occupies a social role has to play that role well, so that an orderly society can be achieved. What has to be noticed here is that, though both Plato and Confucius assert that an orderly society can be achieved only when each individual in the society plays his or her role well, yet, as mentioned, the way in which each individual obtains his or her own social role to Plato and Confucius is different. For Plato, people obtain their social roles by their nature, but for Confucius people obtain their social roles partly by inheritance and partly by the extension of their personal social web. Confucius thinks that the smallest unit of society is the family, so within the family people can have their basic social roles, such as father and son, husband and wife, and brother and sister. Moreover, people can also obtain their social roles, thus by inheritance, for example, a carpenter's son may be a carpenter in the future by inheriting his father's business, irrespective of whether he is naturally suited for being a carpenter.

In spite of the difference between Plato and Confucius, the assertions of both Plato and Confucius are not compatible with individualists' assertion that the individual, as a free agent, cannot be bound by social roles. The only way, for Confucius, to achieve the orderly society is that everyone engages in self-cultivation and performs his or her social role in accordance with ritual. Otherwise, it would be like what Duke Jing of Qi says that " if a ruler be not a ruler, a subject be not a subject, a father be not a father, and a son be not a son, even if there is grain, shall I manage to eat it? " (XII, 11). That is to say, living in a disorderly society people's lives and everything else of value would be in danger. Similarly, for Plato, the basis for the just state is that everyone should do his or her own job. That is the reason why when Plato plans his ideal state he emphasizes that three classes of people have to keep in their positions and cannot trespass on the other classes. It would do great harm, says Plato,

[I]f someone who belongs by nature to the class of artisans and businessmen is puffed up by wealth or popular support or ..., and tries to enter our military class; or if one of our military Auxiliaries tries to get into the class of administering Guardians for which he is unfit, ..., I think you'll agree that this sort of mutual interchange and interference spells destruction to our state. (434a-b)

The non-interchangeability among the three classes is based not only on the fact that each citizen should do his or her own job, but also on the fact that it is by nature that a particular person has to be placed in this or that job and class. This leads to the second aspect of Plato's just state.

Second, at 415a-c Plato tells us a tale about that the people's nature in different classes are composed of different metals. The Rulers' nature are composed of gold. the Auxiliaries are composed of silver, and the farmers and artisans ... etc. are composed of iron and bronze. If a child with gold in its nature is born within the lower class, then it should be promoted to its appropriate class. Similarly, if a child is born with silver or iron in its nature within the top class, then it should be degraded to its appropriate class. In Plato's view, a person's social class in the just state is

determined by his or her nature. A similar idea has been shown at 370b, “ we have different natural aptitudes, which fit us for different jobs.” Plato’s appeal to each individual’s nature to give an account of how a just state can be sustained is quite different from individualists’ appeal to individual’s rights, and also different from Confucius’ appeal to the family.

It is clear that Plato’s appeal would be incompatible with Rawls’ ‘ veil of ignorance ’, in that under this assumption the procedure of choosing the principles of justice cannot be just if people are not in the original position without knowing their natural tendencies and social background. And people in the original position are able to choose rationally the principles of justice defining the structure of the society. If we apply this assumption to Plato’s just state then the different metals which represent different social classes will have to be unknown to each individual citizen, they will have their own rights to choose the principles which define the framework of the ideal state. Whereas this absolutely cannot be the case for Plato. Firstly, it would be a disaster, in Plato’s view, if people in the ideal state can choose what kind of society in which they would like to live. For, except the philosophers, people of the other two classes do not possess the right conception of the good. Therefore their decisions on what kind of society in which they want to live may not be the right decisions for them.

Secondly, the individual’s behaviour and moral point of view, for Plato, have to be understood through his or her nature by which his or her social context is decided. For Confucius they have to be understood in individual’s social, historical and cultural context irrespective of human nature. Moreover, it would be impossible for one, in Plato’s just state, to choose his own way of life. What kind of life one leads will be decided by what kind of nature one was born with. In the *Republic* VIII, the description of four types of imperfect societies suggests that different types of societies are the results of different types of individual characteristics. To know a democratic man, for example, we have to refer to his nature of characteristic. Therefore, for Plato, it is impossible for us to understand a person’s behaviour without considering his or her nature. For, in Plato’s view, how a person behaves in the society is determined by his or her nature.

It is noticeable that Plato’s emphasis on human nature is not only in contrast

with the Confucian view but also with the communitarianism. For throughout the *Republic* the individual identity is mainly decided by their nature irrespective of their social and historical background. We are told in the *Timaeus* that the visible world, the universe, is a copy of the *real* world (30a-d). Thus the arrangement of the social order in the ideal state in the *Republic* might be a replica of the universe made by the Creator. Due to the fact that the universe in the *Timaeus* is governed by Reason so the ideal state has to be governed by the philosophers whose reason is in control in the soul. It is clear that Plato's ideal state, unlike Confucius' humane society and the communitarian society, is not based upon historical or cultural factors, but upon reason. Therefore, in this sense, it might be wrong to classify Plato as a communitarian.

I would like now move to the third aspect of Plato's just state, that is, the common good is the good at which each citizen should aim. Karl Popper says in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*<sup>19</sup> that Plato prepares his collectivist doctrine by quoting the proverb "all things in common between friends" (424a, 449c). Plato claims that there are two things, wealth and poverty, which can ruin the stability of the society (421d, 422a). For the former will make potter a worse potter by becoming idle and full of desires. The latter will prevent the potter from getting tools and other necessities for his trade, so the quality of his work will deteriorate (421d-e). So Plato here asserts that for a state to be unified and stable wealth has to be well distributed to each member of the state, the unbalance between the rich and the poor will do damage to the state. In addition to wealth and poverty, Plato thinks that the size of the just state has to be compatible with its unity (423b, 460a).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that even the expansion of the state has to be compatible with the maintenance of the

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<sup>19</sup> K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1991), p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> A similar idea, I think, is illustrated in the *Laws* where the Athenian says that "[e]veryone who legislates should have sufficient appreciation of arithmetic to know what number will be most used in every state, ..." (737e-738a). T. J. Saunders, *Plato: The Laws* (London, 1970). It is apparent that the Athenian here is concerned with the size of the population, nevertheless "[h]e (Plato) must believe that around five thousand households will produce a state small enough to have a real sense of unity and to permit decisions to be made and officers to be appointed on the basis of a real personal knowledge and at same time large enough to bestow the full benefits of civilized life." R. F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis, 1983), p. 100.

unity of the state.

Furthermore in order to keep the unity of the state Plato proposes that the family has to be abolished in the upper classes (457d), and marriage and procreation have to be regulated (458d-e). They will have no private home or property, and eat common meal provided by the other citizens (416d-e, 458c). Plato thinks that the whole arrangement of the state has to aim at the good of the state as a whole so people have to share everything they can to maintain the unity of the state.

A just society consists of rulers and common people, the rulers regard the land as their mother, and regard their fellow-citizens as brothers and sisters (415d-e, 463c). Thus, their mother's interests will be the rulers' interests, and the interest of the individual fellow-citizens will be the rulers' interests. All members of the just society are devoted to a common interest, that is, they identify their own goods as the good of the society as a whole. Furthermore, due to the fact that the philosophers are capable of seeing the good itself, no one loves the society more than they do. For

... the deepest affection is based on identity of interest, when we feel that our own good and ill fortune is completely bound up with that of something else. .... So we must choose from among our guardians those who appear to us on observation to be most likely to devote their lives to doing what they judge to be in the interest of the community, and who are never prepared to act against it. (412d)

However, the identity of individual interest or good with common good cannot be accepted by individualists, in that they deny that there is the conception of the common good, for the individualists see the society as nothing but a social structure within which people can exercise their free choice and choose their own conceptions of good. The individualist might claim that Plato's using human nature as the basis for achieving social stability is to obliterate the individual's freedom of choosing what is in his or her interest. Thus the conception of the common good implies a kind of restriction of freedom of choice, and the only route to, in the individualist view, achieve a just society is to secure each person's right to pursue his or her own good or interest. Therefore, the conception of the individual person's good cannot be

*identified with that of the common good.*

Plato's appeal to the common good causes him to be criticized by scholars as proposing totalitarianism. However, I would be inclined to think that Plato is unfairly criticized. For although the example at 420b-421a shows superficially that Plato holds the organic view in the account of the relation between the whole and the part. In other words, the part cannot live without the whole, so what is good for the whole is good for the part. While it is wrong to ascribe the organic view to Plato because Plato, unlike Aristotle, does not regard a man living without society as a sub-human. What Plato tells us in this example is that the good of the individual coincides with the good of the state as a whole, and he does not propose that the individual's interests have to be suppressed, the individuals work towards a common goal because they identify their own interests with the interests of the state by the mutual agreement (432a, 442c-e) . The message from the passage referred shows that the good of the part coincides with that of the whole. The happiness of the whole is based upon that each part of it gets its proper portion under the mutual agreement.

Plato's claim that the good of the individual is coincident with that of the state is similar to Confucius' claim of the coincidence between the good of the individual and that of the family which is the society writ small. However, the communitarians' emphasis on one's identity resting upon one's social, cultural, and historical context, and on the common good might suggest that the good of the individual has to *subordinate* to that of the state. Therefore, Plato and Confucius, in this sense, is different from the communitarians. For both Plato and Confucius do not see that the subordination of the individual good is necessary for the individual person to make his or her commitment to the common good. What causes one to make commitment to pursue the common good, for both Plato and Confucius, is not because the individual good is inferior to the common good but because they are coincident with each other. To pursue the common good is at the same time to pursue the individual good, and vice versa. Therefore, in terms of common good, it would be odd to say that Plato and Confucius embrace the communitarian idea of the common good.

Although Plato and Confucius are not individualists, yet it does not mean that their views are exactly the same as the communitarians'. For both Plato and Confucius are in one way or the other different from the communitarians. Two more

cases can be presented: first, Plato thinks that for the state to be unified the philosophers should rule. For the philosophers' long-term education suggests that Plato regards government as a science and science should be left to experts.<sup>21</sup> The analogy of ships and the crew at 488a-e is a good example to illustrate Plato's idea. Plato says that a navigator is good only when he possesses knowledge of navigation; similarly the philosophers will be good rulers because they have insight into the good itself; their knowledge enables them to concentrate on the reality rather than on the resemblances which share in it. Therefore, the possession of absolute knowledge of good gives the philosophers the right to rule. The analogy also suggests the fact that "it is as absurd to govern by popular vote as it would be to conduct medicine or navigation by popular vote."<sup>22</sup>

Popper thinks that Plato's *Republic* is anti-democratic, his assertion might be true, but what is more important is that Plato at 488a-e points out a blind spot of democracy. That is, "democracy denies the possibility of science in government".<sup>23</sup> In modern democratic society, through election everyone who possesses the qualification for standing for election, is capable of being elected to be in office. It does not matter whether the candidate possesses relevant knowledge or not. Therefore, we can see that in America an actor can be the president, and in Poland a shipbuilder. However, if Plato were alive today, these men would be regarded by Plato as lower class people. They do not possess proper knowledge of how to rule, and their being in power, in Plato's view, would be the kind of absurdity which happens in democratic societies.

Confucius, second, is not a supporter of democracy either but a supporter of a feudal system. However, unlike Plato, who thinks that the person in power should possess knowledge, Confucius thinks that a state should be ruled by a virtuous man. Instead of appealing to 'rule by knowledge', Confucius is more interested in 'rule by virtue'. The ruler, for Confucius, is the object of emulation to the public, and the public would be affected by the ruler's virtuous behaviour. That is why Confucius

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<sup>21</sup> R. Robinson, "Dr. Popper's Defence of Democracy", *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 1969), p. 82.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



says at XII, 19 in the *Analects* that “ the nature of the gentleman is as the wind, and the nature of the small man is as the grass. When the wind blows over the grass it always bends.” The reason why Plato and Confucius have different views on the characteristics that the ruler should possess in order to rule efficiently is, it seems to me, that Plato’s moral and political philosophy are based upon his epistemology, that is, on the belief that only the philosophers are capable of seeing the Form of the Good which enables them to make a proper judgement on the issues of everyday life. While Confucian moral and political thought are based upon the golden past, that is, upon tradition and custom practiced by his predecessors for a long time. What I am arguing here is not that virtue for Plato is not important and knowledge for Confucius is not important, in effect, both knowledge and virtue, for Plato and Confucius, are important elements for being an ideal ruler. What makes the difference is their different views on whether virtue is knowledge.

To sum up. In constructing his just state Plato emphasizes the importance of social roles, the nature of each citizen, and the common good. In a just society individual citizens should do their own jobs, and their social roles and classes are determined by their aptitudes and natures, namely, gold, silver, and iron and bronze. What is more important is that they all share a common interest, i.e. they identify their own interests with those of society. If society benefits then they benefit. In a society a certain level of mutual relationship should be granted, and the society, as a framework with common interests, aims, and values, within which each individual regards the common goods as his or her own, is a good in itself. It is by such mutual relationship that each individual is morally good.<sup>24</sup> Confucian society, though there are differences between Plato’s account of just society and Confucius’ account of humane society, is built upon tradition and social customs, i.e. the rules of proper conduct, and upon the idea that the duties of social roles have to be fulfilled by the persons who occupy them. Moreover, society is like a family writ large, the affection towards one’s family members is the same as that towards one’s fellow countrymen. Thus the good or stability of the society would be maintained by people’s playing their social roles properly and having the mutual affection towards and the

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<sup>24</sup> Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit, “ Introduction ”, *op. cit.* pp. 6-7.

harmonious relationship with others.

In conclusion. In contrast to Plato and Confucius, individualism is the politics of rights and emphasizes the freedom of choice on a basis of equality. The identity of each person cannot be his or her natural tendencies, social class, religion etc., in that

The conception of citizens as free and equal persons, need not involve, so I believe, questions of philosophical psychology or a metaphysical doctrine of the nature of the self. No political view that depends on these deep and unresolved matters can serve as a public conception of justice in a constitutional democratic state.<sup>25</sup>

What Rawls rejects here can all be seen in modern communitarianism, which asserts that human behaviour can only be understood in their social, historical, and cultural context. The image of the individual is not an ' unencumbered self ' but with ' constitutive ends ', which constitute who the individual is. Thus, if we want to know a person, then his aims and interests should be put under consideration. However, the differences between individualism and Plato and Confucius do not necessarily lead us to assert that both Plato and Confucius are communitarians in the same way as the modern communitarians. The difference between Plato and the communitarians lies upon the fact that the former does not take one's social context as the basis for deciding one's social status, but one's nature. Although Confucius, in this sense, is similar to the modern communitarianism, yet Confucius' assertion, shared with Plato, that the good of the individual is coincident with the good of the state is different from the communitarian assertion that the individual good has to subordinate to the good of the state. And the claim of the coincidence between the individual good and the common good can save both Plato and Confucius from being criticized as proposing totalitarianism for there is no subordination and suppressing.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.* p. 194-5.

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive table to this chapter, see appendix.

**Part II**  
**Just Man**

## Chapter 4

### Plato's Notion of Just Individual

It is well-known that in the *Republic* Plato proposes that the human soul has three parts, i.e. reason, spirit, and appetite. By using this theory of the tripartite soul Plato gives an account of how man can be virtuous. A virtuous man is one in whom the three parts of his soul play their proper roles and are in harmony with one another. It is clear that the notion of 'doing one's own job' is not only essential to the just state but also to the just man. For, in Plato's view, the just man cannot be identified without the orderly and harmonious soul. Thus human virtue will be dependent upon how these three psychological elements interact with one another.

I propose in this chapter to investigate the idea of virtue as an order or harmony in the soul and state in which every part does its own work. Clearly to understand what is meant by order and harmony we need to know what the elements are and how they are related to each other. Plato deals with these points in great detail in the middle books of the *Republic*. So the main purpose of this chapter will be to examine this account and to investigate whether there are any significant parallels between Plato's account and Confucian ethics. Thus, I have divided this chapter into three parts related to Plato's notion of order or harmony in the soul and state: firstly, the tripartite soul, in this section I will confine my discussion mainly to the different characteristics of the three parts of the soul; secondly, the unity of the soul, how the three parts interacting with one another will be considered. Finally, the analogy between individual and state. Plato says that in a just state we can find four virtues, i.e. wisdom, courage, sophrosune, and justice. It follows that if the individual is the state writ small then these four virtues can also be seen in the just individual.

#### 1. The tripartite soul

In order to show that we perform each of the three functions with different parts of our soul, Socrates puts forwards a principle that "one and the same thing cannot act

or be affected in opposite ways at the same time in the same part of it and in relation to the same object ” (436b). This principle is called by scholars the Principle of Opposites or Principle of Conflict.<sup>1</sup> According to this principle, it is impossible for a thing to be at rest and in motion at the same time and in the same part of it (436c). Plato at 436c-e deals with two likely objections to the principle to remove ambiguities in using it. One is that it is wrong to say that a man, who is standing still and moving his hands, is at rest and in motion simultaneously. Rather we should say that a part of him is standing still and another part of him is moving (436c-d). The other one is that we should say that a spinning top whose circumference is in motion, but whose axis is at rest (436d-e) is moving in one respect but not in another. Plato now thinks that the principle is valid so from 437b onwards he proceeds to demonstrate, by using the principle, that there are three different parts in the soul.

### **(1) reason**

Plato says that assent and dissent, impulse and aversion to something are opposite actions or states (437b). So hunger, thirst, and the appetitive desires can be classed as impulses to desire food and drink. However, men sometimes are unwilling to drink or eat even if they are thirsty or hungry (439b-c). Therefore, according to the Principle of Opposites, there is an element, different from the one driving men to crave for drink or food, preventing men from craving for it. The element preventing men from giving way to unhealthy cravings is reason (439c-d).

In addition to the function of ‘ prevention ’, reason is characterized by Plato in several different ways. At 439d reason is said to be the reflective or calculative element. Reason is also described as being able to make decisions and judgements (440b). In Book VIII in the oligarchic soul reason is forbidden to “ make any calculation or inquiry ” except about money making (553d). Reason, at 580d, is the part with which we learn. Therefore it seems reasonable for us to conclude that reason, in Plato’s view, is a power by which we reason, learn, and make judgement and decision. However it would be misconstruing Plato to suppose that he sees reason

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<sup>1</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p.137. R. Robinson, “ Plato’s Separation of Reason From Desire ”, *Phronesis*, vol. XVI, 1971, p. 39.

only as the capacity of calculation. For, as commentators point out,<sup>2</sup> Plato does not only regard reason as a power by which we learn and make judgement but also as motivation. Plato says,

Now, it is clear to everyone that the part with which we learn is always wholly straining to know where the truth lies and that, of the three parts, it cares least for money and reputation.

By far the least.

Then wouldn't it be appropriate for us to call it learning-loving and philosophical. (581b)<sup>3</sup>

The characteristic of reason is not only the capacity of calculation but the desire to learn. Thus reason is the motivation which leads us to learn and discover the truth, and causes us to participate in philosophical contemplation. It is noteworthy that Plato does not distinguish the difference between capacity to know and the desire to know, and the difference between the theoretical and practical wisdom. For, in Plato's view, they are two aspects of one and the same thing.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a philosopher is one whose reason is predominant in the soul. Reason is the ruling element in the soul for it is able to "reflect about good and evil" (441b-c), and has "the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole" (441e). Furthermore, reason motivates the philosopher to love the truth, and to love the truth, for Plato, is to love the good. Thus due to the fact that Plato does not distinguish the difference between the theoretical and practical wisdom, to love the good is not only to engage in contemplating the good but also able to seek to create the goodness and order both in the corporeal world and the soul.

## (2) appetite

Plato says at 436a-b that appetite is the element with which the soul "desires the

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<sup>2</sup> C. H. Kahn, "Plato's Theory of Desire", *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. XLI, 1987, p.81; and R. F. Stalley, "Virtue and the Tripartite Soul", 1997, unpublished paper.

<sup>3</sup> G. M. A. Grube, *Plato: Republic* (Indianapolis, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> Kahn, *Ibid.* p. 82.

pleasures of eating and sex and the like”, and at 439d that the appetitive part is “ the element with which it feels hunger and thirst, and the agitations of sex and other desires, the element of irrational appetite — an element closely connected with satisfaction and pleasure.” In Book IX Plato demonstrates how the life of the philosopher is happier than that of the unjust men, he recalls the theory of the tripartite soul and says,

As for the third, we had no one special name for it, since it's multiform, so we named it after the biggest and strongest thing in it. Hence we called it the appetitive part, because of the intensity of its appetites for food, drink, sex, and all the things associated with them, but we also called it the money-loving part, because such appetite are most easily satisfied by means of money. (580d- 581a)<sup>5</sup>

It seems obvious that Plato's language here indicates that the appetitive part is irrational. However some commentators hold that the appetitive part has rationality to a minimal extent. Moline, for example, asserts that Plato assigns a minimal level of calculative capacity to the appetitive part.<sup>6</sup> Kahn holds that “ this passage [437d-439a] has sometimes been thought to imply that the appetite (*epithymia*) in question is a ‘ blind craving,’ with no cognitive grasp of its object; but, of course, thirst must recognize its object as drinkable and *hence* as desirable. So a minimum of cognition is implied even for the most elemental appetite.”<sup>7</sup> Lesses comments that it is crucial to see that all three parts of the soul have the capacity of forming beliefs, in other words, the appetitive part has the cognitive capacity.<sup>8</sup> In what follows I shall argue that Plato does not see the appetitive part as having the capacity of forming belief.

Plato shows the appetitive part being irrational by virtue of discussing our

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<sup>5</sup> Grube, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> J. Moline, “ Plato on the Complexity of the Psyche ”, *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie*, vol. 60, 1978, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit.* p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> G. Lesses, “ Weakness, Reason, and the Divided Soul in Plato's *Republic* ”, *History of philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 4, 1987, p. 149.

craving for drink (437d-439a). When one is thirsty, there will be a desire for drink in one's mind. However, it would be wrong to say that one desires a hot or cold drink, when he is thirsty. For "for a particular *kind* of drink there will be a particular kind of thirst" (439a). Plato says, at 437e, that simple thirst is the desire for its natural object, drink, without qualification. From 438b to 439a, Plato proposes an argument to show that appetites are desires without qualification, that is, when one person is thirsty he desires a simple drink, not a hot or cold drink. Plato's argument is summarized as follows:

1) When two terms are correlative it seems that either both must be qualified or both unqualified. (438b)

2) What is larger must be larger than something smaller, and similarly, what is heavier must be heavier than something lighter. It will be the same for the various branches of knowledge. For knowledge of health is medical knowledge, but knowledge unqualified is knowledge simply of something learned. (438b-c)

So, 3) among correlative terms if the first is unqualified so is the second; if the first is qualified so again is the second. (438d)

Since, 4) desire in itself is without qualification. (439a)

And, 5) thirst is related to drink, and thirst is a sort of desire. (439b)

So, 6) thirst is the desire neither for cold or hot drinks, nor for good or bad drinks, but for drink simple.

Thirst in itself is the desire for drink without any qualification. It will not cease to be a desire even though there are no hot and cold drinks. For what thirst desires is drink, not hot or cold drink. The epithets, 'hot' and 'cold', are not essential for thirst to be the desire for drink. Therefore, Plato in the *Republic* claims that thirst and hunger as unqualified desires are not to crave for good drink or delicious food, but drink and food pure and simple. It is clear that Plato is not interested in the objects for which the desires crave but in the nature or essence of the desires.

Moreover, Plato's insistence on the fact that the desire for drink is neither for



good nor for bad drink (439a) seems to suggest that desire is “good-indifferent”.<sup>9</sup> And it is by this good-indifference that Plato is able to bring out the difference between reason and desire. Parry fairly points out,

Desires are not said to be desires for what is pleasant as opposed to what is good — the definition of good-independent. Indeed, the simple desire for drink is no more for pleasant drink than it is for good drink. Plato’s point is that desire, in itself, is not calculative; it is, let us say, good-indifferent. It is the job of reason to calculate.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it would be misleading to render the appetitive part as ‘foolish’ or ‘unreasonable’.<sup>11</sup> For the passage at 439d cannot be fitted in with this interpretation. The comparison between reason and appetite at 439d is the comparison between the rational and irrational, but not between the clever and the foolish.<sup>12</sup> It is impossible, as mentioned above, for the appetitive part, let us say, thirst to desire a good or pleasant drink. For it is unable to have any conception of the good. It is reason alone that can possess cognitive capacity. However, Annas asserts that the appetitive part has the ability to figure out the means to achieve the end it wants.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation seems to be supported by 580e where the appetitive part is said to be the money-loving part. That is to say, the appetitive part is able to use money as a means to acquire what it wants. While the claim that the appetitive part desires money for buying things it wants does not necessarily mean that this is the result of rational calculation. For it could result from association<sup>14</sup> or what I would call habituation without thinking. That is, money in one’s experience has been associated with the satisfaction of desires, buying things one wants, as, for example, is the case with a shopaholic, whenever one wants something one is habituated to buy it without any

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<sup>9</sup> R. Parry, *Plato’s Craft of Justice* (New York, 1996), p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Moline, *op. cit.* p. 11, and Lesses, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Stalley, *op. cit.* p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> Stalley, *op. cit.* p. 9.

further thought. In this case there is no need to assign the appetitive part the capacity of reasoning for in the situation of habituation reason is under the control of the appetite and serves to work out the means of satisfying the appetite's order.

Moline claims<sup>15</sup> that the passage at 571c which indicates that the appetitive part is able to unleash its beliefs while the rational part falls asleep, shows that the appetitive part can form belief or opinion. And the passage in Book X, 602c-603b, seems to indicate that the appetitive part can form its own opinion contrary to reason's measurement. However, according to Stalley, the interpretation of this passage depends upon how we understand the term *doxazein*.<sup>16</sup> Stalley says,

This [*doxazein*] is generally translated as 'have a belief' or 'have an opinion' but Socrates' argument will go through only if a mere appearance, to which we do not give full assent, counts as an opinion. The person who sees the apparently bent stick while recognising that this is an illusion does not literally have the opinion that the stick is bent, because he or she does not assent to the appearance. One could not even claim that appetite assents to appearances of this kind. If I see something which looks very much like a cream cake but realise that it is in fact only a realistic dummy, I do not feel a desire for the dummy cake. We thus have to take *doxa* as 'appearance' rather than 'opinion'. But to concede that the appetitive element in the soul may have *doxa* in this sense is not to allow it any substantial share in rationality.

Thus it is not necessary to designate the appetitive part as being able to form opinion, and the problem of that within the appetitive part there are sub-divisions will not arise.

### (3) spirit

Glaucon holds, at 439e, that spirit might be the same as appetite. Whereas Plato appeals to the example of Leontius whose appetitive part wants to see the corpses,

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<sup>15</sup> *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 10-11.

while his spirited part condemns his appetitive part for being immoral, to show that spirit and desire are different. In Leontius' case the spirit seems to take the side of reason to prevent the appetite from doing immorally. However, does this mean that spirit is also different from reason? Plato, at 441b-c, refers to children and animals to give an explanation why spirit and reason are different. Plato's argument is that children and animals lack reason but have spirit. Thus reason and spirit are distinct from one another. In our soul, like the ideal state, there are three elements, reason, spirit, and appetite. In the ideal state the Auxiliaries are always to be supportive to the Guardians, so in the soul spirit is "reason's natural auxiliary".

Although spirit, in Leontius' case, is identified as the part with which we are angry, it has wider role to play in the soul. At 375a-e the guardians are said to be spirited and gentle, that is, they have to be courageous and wise. The spirited part is by nature the helper of the rational part (441a, 441e). This claim enables us to see why in the first stage of education Plato concentrates on the education of the spirited part for the cooperation between the spirited and the rational part will secure the order and harmony of the soul. The spirited part, unlike the irrational appetitive part, has certain *passive* rational capacity.<sup>17</sup> To have passive rational capacity is not to mean to have the capacity of reasoning, but the capacity of listening to and accepting the instruction of reason without any reflection. Thus spirit is able to absorb the moral principles presented to it in the education programme laid down by Plato, and also able to stick to the Guardians' command.

In addition to having the passive capacity of reasoning, the spirited part is said at 581a to be the element that "is entirely devoted to the achievement of success and reputation", and that "its motives are ambition and love of honour." The spirited man enjoys the pleasure of honour. It is clear that the spirited element makes us seek self-esteem by competing with others. Participating in a tournament, when we win we feel proud and happy, but when we lose we feel shame and upset. Therefore Plato does not see the spirited part merely as anger, but as involving the emotions with which we feel shame, proud, and honoured. Although it has no capacity of forming its own judgement, yet its sticking steadfastly to the rational part secures the stability of

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<sup>17</sup> C. Gill, "Plato and the Education of Character", *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie*, vol. 67, 1985, p. 13.

the soul.

To put this section briefly, Plato's psychology is not only concerned with showing that there are three parts in human soul. What he aims to do in the theory of the tripartite soul is to give an account of how an orderly soul can be achieved. For, in Plato's view, to have an orderly soul is essential for a person to be virtuous and just. In the discussion I disagree with the claim that there is a 'degree of rationality' among the three parts. I argue that reason is not only able to exercise the capacity of calculation, but also a kind of motivation which motivates us to learn and seek the truth. Unlike the reason, the appetitive part is completely irrational. I have rendered the spirited part as having the *passive* capacity of calculation, but it is no better than the appetitive part because like appetite it is unable to form its own judgement. But it is able to recognize, after receiving proper education, what reason is approved of or disapproved of. The advantage of this interpretation is that it does not lead to the infinite regress as the homoculus theory does. That is, we do not have to face the problem of the sub-divided soul, which troubles many commentators.

## 2. The unity of soul

According to 439e, there was a conflict between Leontius' spirit and desire, when he noticed some corpses lying on the ground. '*stasiazein*' or '*stasis*' are the most common expressions used by Plato to describe the interaction among the three parts of the soul (440b, 442d, and 444b). Socrates in Book I claims that in a group of men the function of justice will produce harmony and friendly feeling, and the function of injustice will produce the opposite (351d-e). And he goes on saying that similarly injustice will produce the same effect in the individual, that is, "[i]t renders him incapable of action because of internal conflict and division of purpose" (352a). Socrates talks of the appetitive element as trying to force a person to do something his reason does not approve of (440a-b). An unjust man is one the three parts of whose soul are in a state of civil war (444b). In Book VIII where Socrates gives an account of the corrupted states and characters the language of civil war plays a dominant role (545d-547b, 554d, 556e, and 560a).

The internal conflict in the soul can be described, according to Bobonich,<sup>18</sup> on two different models, i.e. the ' Command Model ' and the ' Force Model '. On the Force Model the conflict between, let us say, reason and appetite is described as that of two forces pulling in opposite directions. It is just like two group of people playing tug-of-war; the stronger side will win the game. However, this interpretation gives rise to some problems. Firstly, as Bobonich himself points out,<sup>19</sup> if human action is determined by the strength of a desire then what would be the content of the strength. For without knowing the content of the strength it would be impossible to give a satisfactory explanation of why a person acts in this way but not otherwise. Secondly, the passages at 440b and 441a seem to suggest that reason without the aid of spirit is unable to combat appetite. Although the joint forces of reason and spirit can make sense of the Force Model, one could still question, as Stalley asserts,<sup>20</sup> whether the model can fit in adequately with what Plato says.

The second model Bobonich proposes is the ' Command Model '. This model, according to Bobonich, relies on the idea that the three parts can communicate with one another.<sup>21</sup> A similar idea was brought out by Moline twenty years ago. Moline claims that the three parts of the soul are like the three classes in the just state, they are persuadable agents. So " [t]he business of the wisdom-loving part is to guide the other parts by persuasion, to transplant into alien parts its own opinions, or, more accurately, opinions corresponding in content to its knowledge."<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is certainly more attractive than the Force Model in that Plato puts strong emphasis on the harmony of the soul. The three parts of the soul can be harmonious with one another. However if the discussion in the first section is correct then it would be difficult for us to see how reason can be in charge of the soul by persuasion. For the appetitive element is said to be irrational and has no capacity of calculation. Moreover, if each part of the soul has the capacity of reasoning then within appetite

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<sup>18</sup> C. Bobonich, " Akrasia and Agency in Plato's *Laws* and *Republic* ", *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie*, vol. 76, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *op. cit.* p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> *op. cit.* pp. 11-12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p 15.

there are sub-parts, i.e. reason, spirit, and appetite. For the term ' persuasion ' implies that conversation or dialogue takes place among the three parts of the soul. Therefore to persuade the appetitive part is to make it to do something by reasoning or arguing. It follows that the appetitive part has the ability to calculate whether it is or is not beneficial to follow reason's command. So there will be an inner conversation within the appetitive part, and the conversation among the sub-parts will lead to infinite regress. It follows from the regress that it would be difficult to give a sufficient account of what a single individual is, in other words, individual identity is at stake. For the individual character is shredded into pieces.

In addition to these two models, I suggest, following Stalley, a third model, the ' Educational Model '. The passage at 442c is taken by Bobonich as to mean that the agreement on who should rule is the result of the internal communication. However the term ' agreement ' does not necessarily mean that the lower part has the capacity of forming their own opinions. For, as mentioned, the term *doxa* may be taken to mean appearance and the translation of the term *doxazein* as ' share the same opinion ' is an over-translation.<sup>23</sup> So Socrates' saying, " when reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule and there is no civil war among them " (442c-d), does not mean that appetite sees that following the rule of reason will make it better off. It rather means that the appetitive element is *well trained* so they will only desire what reason approves of. The Educational Model is explicitly appealed if we refer to 554b-c where Socrates says,

I suppose that his [the oligarchic man] lack of education will breed desires in him, like the pauper and criminal drones, which his general carefulness will keep under restraint.

This passage, it seems to me, indicates that if the oligarchic man were properly educated then his ' unnecessary ' desires would be restrained or starved, and only those ' necessary ' ones can grow and be active.

Finally the Beast image at 589b shows that the appetitive element needs to be

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<sup>23</sup> Stalley, *op. cit.* p. 21.

trained, since neither the Force Model nor the Command Model fits in with this passage. The former, as mentioned, is incompatible with Plato's notion of harmony within the soul, and of the latter we cannot find any trace of persuasion in the context. The method of training the many-headed beast, says Socrates, is to look after it like the farmer looks after crops. Nursing and cultivating its tamer parts and restraining or preventing the wilder ones growing. Therefore, it can be seen that Plato sees education as the cornerstone for achieving the inner harmony of the individual soul. Without the proper education programme for the three parts of soul the inner conflict will never be eliminated.<sup>24</sup>

The question whether Confucius himself will accept or claim that human soul has parts is problematic, for he never says anything about it, but in the *Book of Mencius* some passages convey an idea of how to restrain the appetitive element similar to that mentioned in the *Republic*. Mencius says in the *Book of Mencius*,<sup>25</sup>

The disciple Kung-tu said, 'All are equally men, but some are great men, and some are little men; — how is this?' Mencius replied, 'Those who follow that part of themselves which is great are great men; those who follow that part which is little are little men.'

Kung-tu pursued, 'All are equally men, but some follow that part of themselves which is great, and some follow that part which is little; — how is this?' Mencius answered, 'The senses of hearing and seeing do not think, and are obscured by *external* things. When one thing comes into contact with another, as a matter of course it leads it away. To the mind belongs the office of thinking. By thinking, it gets *the right view of things*; by neglecting to think, it fails to do this. (VI, i, 15)

It is clear from this passage that Mencius seems to propose a theory of division of mind and body. For the great part of men, in Mencius' view, is mind or soul; and the little part of men is senses which belong to body. Therefore those who follow their souls will be great men and those who follow their senses will be little men. For the

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<sup>24</sup> The issue of how the three parts of the soul are educated will be considered in Part III, Chapter 7.

<sup>25</sup> J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, 1970), pp. 417-8.

five senses, in Mencius' view, are easily attracted to external objects without thinking. Whenever, for example, we see beautiful clothes we want to have them without further thinking whether they are suitable for us. Thus senses will arouse desires. The same kind of mind and body division can also be seen in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates talks of how the soul is corrupted by agreeing with the body (83d). Moreover, Mencius also points out that the body is irrational because it is incapable of thinking, but the soul is rational because by thinking the soul can get 'the right view of things'. Plato, I think, will agree with Mencius on this matter, for Plato too does not think that the appetitive element can have the capacity of reasoning, although Mencius, unlike Plato, does not see human soul as having parts.

Thus it is possible for the body and the soul to be in conflict with each other. How can a person prevent the body from getting the upper hand of the soul? Mencius says that " [l]et a man first stand fast in the *supremacy* of the nobler part of his constitution, and the inferior part will not be able to take it from him " (VI, i, 15).<sup>26</sup> Mencius later in the Book tells us how the soul can win over the body, he says,

To nourish the mind there is nothing better than to make the desires few. Here is a man whose desires are few: — in some things he may not be able to keep his heart, but they will be few. Here is a man whose desires are many: — in some things he may be able to keep his heart, but they will be few.<sup>27</sup>  
(VII, ii, 35)

To make the desires few does not mean that the soul tells the body no to do this or that, nor that the force of the soul is stronger than that of the body. But by education a person's bodily desires can be made few. For, in the Confucian view, only by education and self-cultivation one person can recover his true self, human-heartedness.

To sum up this section, although Plato treats justice and the other virtues as matters of the soul's internal constitution, he does not think that a man could be just outside society. We need education which is only available in society in order to

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<sup>26</sup> *op. cit.* p. 418.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 497.



achieve inner justice. In this respect there may be less difference than one would suppose between Plato and the Confucians. Although the latter have little to say about inner mental states, they would stress the importance of virtuous character and see this as possible only within society.

### **3. The virtues in state and individual**

After the discussion of the tripartite soul, Socrates, at 441d, draws a conclusion that “ the individual man is just in the same way that the state is just ”, since “ ... the individual is brave with the same part and in the same way as the state, and ... there is the same correspondence in all the other constituents of excellence.” Plato’s method of looking for justice in the state and the individual is weird, but the problem whether his method is legitimate I will leave aside for the moment. I shall try next to discuss how Plato can find out the four virtues, namely wisdom, courage, sophrosune, and justice, in the state as well the individual.

#### **(1) wisdom**

At 428b, Socrates says that it is obvious that the state we have described may fairly be called wise, since it has good judgement. The ideal state has wisdom and good judgement not because of the knowledge of farmers and artisans, but because everyone does his or her job under the supervision of the Guardians. It is worth noting that without having everyone doing his or her job the order of the state cannot be established. Subsequently, without the order it would be impossible to say that the wise Guardians are in control of the state. Thus only when each one does his own job under the guidance of the Guardians’ knowledge can the state be called wise. However one thing could be argued: Why cannot the other two classes, the Auxiliaries, and farmers and artisans etc., be in charge of the state? The answer to it seems to be found at 428c, where Glaucon says that carpenter’s knowledge can only make him good at carpentry. That is, the function of the carpenter, for Plato, is only to do carpentry well not for anything else. For everything which has a function has its own excellence (353b), so the carpenter has his own excellence which will be different

from the Guardians'. On the contrary, the Guardians' knowledge enables them to know what is good for the state as a whole. To put political power in the hand of the wise few seems to suggest that Plato is asserting an anti-democratic thesis that only the few who possess wisdom and knowledge can be good governors and make a state well-governed. Although Plato does commit himself to this anti-democratic thesis, what Plato is more concerned with are, firstly, everyone has to do one job for which he or she is naturally suited; and secondly, the state has to be ruled by the wise ruler, because the philosopher whose soul is in a state of harmony, i.e. reason is properly in control, understands what is good. Thus the philosophers have to take part in politics in turn to rule the state. Furthermore, Plato regards government as science so it should be left to experts. The analogy at 488a-e explicitly illustrates the idea that only the philosophically trained Guardians can be good rulers for they have the capacity to appreciate the good itself, and subsequently are able to make a judgement about what is good for the state as a whole.

When Plato compares his just man with just state, Plato asserts that reason ought to rule in the soul, since it is the only part "having the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole" (441e), whereas the other two parts, spirit and desire, have their eyes only on their own interests. Moreover, we are told, at 442c, that we call an individual wise in virtue of his reason which is "in control and issues the orders, knowing as it does what is best for each of the three elements and for the whole made up of them." It is clear from this passage that a wise individual is one in whom each of the three parts of the soul does one job for which it is naturally suited under the control of reason. Without each part doing its own the soul will be in a state of chaos. Thus it will be impossible for reason to rule.<sup>28</sup>

## (2) courage

The state's bravery is evidently shown in the bravery of the Auxiliaries. Although the other classes may be brave, it is not their bravery which constitutes "the ordinary citizen's courage" (430c). However the Auxiliaries' bravery cannot be said to be true bravery, but *citizen's bravery*, since their souls are not guided by reason. The

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<sup>28</sup> For a comparison between Plato's notion of wisdom and Confucius' notion of wisdom, see Part III, Chapter 5, Section 3.

Auxiliaries have right beliefs about what sort of things are and are not to be feared, whereas they lack ability to critically reflect on the contents of their beliefs. For this kind of ability can only be found in people who possess knowledge, and whose soul is dominated by reason. So “ [s]trictly speaking, only the Rulers can have true courage, because true courage must be based on full knowledge.”<sup>29</sup>

However, one question can be asked: If the Auxiliaries’ bravery is only a secondary bravery then how can a state be truly brave when its bravery depends upon the Auxiliaries who is not brave in the full sense? The answer to it, I think, is that, for Plato, only the just state can be truly brave for the Auxiliaries are brought up and educated with right kind of opinions which will enable them to stick to and execute the orders of the Guardians. While the Auxiliaries’ ability to listen to the orders of the Guardians means that the state’s bravery does not depend exclusively upon them. Since for a state to be just everyone of it has to do their own job, and the Guardians’ wisdom will ensure that everyone is in the right position and does his or her job. Therefore a just state needs the guidance of the Guardians; similarly, a state’s bravery is not because the Auxiliaries are brave, but because the Auxiliaries and the farmer and artisan, etc. are guided by the Guardians who make sure that the two classes cling steadfastly to the order of the Guardians. Thus the state’s bravery does not merely depend upon the Auxiliaries’ bravery but upon everyone standing fast to their stations and listening to the instructions of the Guardians.

At 441a, Socrates says that spirit is “ reason’s natural auxiliary ”, and we know in Book III that the Auxiliaries are in charge of military, police and executive duties under the control of the Guardians. It seems reasonable to relate spirit to the Auxiliaries. At 441e-442a where Socrates tells us that the spirit needs to receive a combination of intellectual and physical training, in order to obey and support the reason. Thus we can see that courage in the individual is the power of the spirit to stick to the dictates of reason with regard to what is and is not to be feared in all circumstances. Therefore we call a person brave because of his spirit obeying the orders of reason about what he ought or ought not to fear, in spite of pain and pleasure (442b11-c3). It is this internal motive which enables us to decide whether an agent’s

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<sup>29</sup> D. Lee, *Plato: The Republic* (London, 1987), p. 200.

behaviour is or is not brave. As we saw above, the claim that ‘ spirit obeys the order of reason ’ does not mean that spirit is able to form the opinion that it is good for it to obey the reason, but that since it has received proper education it is habituated to listen to reason’s command.

The notion of courage is also mentioned in the Confucian ethics. Confucius says in the *Doctrine of the Mean*,

To be fond of learning is to be near to knowledge. To practice vigour is to be near magnanimity. To possess the feeling of shame is to be near to energy.<sup>30</sup>

The term knowledge here is not Platonic knowledge of the Forms but knowledge which enables one to understand the detailed course of duty and obligation prescribed by social role. The term energy or courage means that a superior man should have sufficient strength and courage to maintain the task of being a superior man.<sup>31</sup> The superior man’s courage will enable him to sustain the permanence of his fulfillment of his duties and the practice of human-heartedness. Therefore,

[T]he superior man cultivates a *friendly* harmony, without being weak; .... He stands erect in the middle, without inclining to either side; .... When good principles prevail in the government of his country, he does not change what he was in retirement. .... When bad principles prevail in the country, he maintains his course to death without changing.<sup>32</sup>

Confucius, like Plato, does not see courage as a kind of animal impulse without the company of wisdom, but as a harmony between one’s nature and conduct. That is, for a person to be a superior man requires him to have the strength or courage to stick to uncovering human-heartedness, and acting in accordance with ritual. For Confucius to be courageous requires one to face oneself, self-examination, to see whether one is

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<sup>30</sup> J. Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York, 1971), p. 407.

<sup>31</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality* (New York, 1989), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 390.

loyal in one's designs for others, whether one is trustworthy in one's dealing with friends, and whether one has practiced what has been passed on him.<sup>33</sup> Even though the superior man is alone he will be watchful over his conduct. The courageous man will not feel fear because he has the strength to keep himself on track without going astray. The fundamental difference between Plato and Confucius in the account of courage is that the former thinks that only the philosopher's courage is real one for it is combined with wisdom, the knowledge of the Forms. In other words, Plato's distinguishing knowledge from belief leads him to hold that real courage is one with the company of knowledge. In the conversation with Polemarchus in Book I Plato points out Polemarchus' inadequate account of justice by showing that without proper understanding the term 'justice' it would be impossible to give a consistent account of it. The latter, Confucius, however emphasizes the importance of self-examination, a person has to examine himself whether he behaves rightly according to traditional wisdom or custom. Thus, Confucius' notion of courage is more like the courage of the Auxiliaries.

### (3) sophrosune

Socrates says at 432a that sophrosune is a harmony between all three classes in a city. So sophrosune is regarded as the "unanimity in which there is a natural concordance between higher and lower about which of them is to rule in state and individual." In saying this Plato seems to appeal to two of the many definitions of sophrosune. First, sophrosune is a kind of order, a control of pleasure and desire. People use the phrase "being master of oneself" as indication of sophrosune (430e). The expression "master of oneself" is intended to mean that the naturally better part controls the worse part. A similar idea is illustrated in the *Laws*, where the Athenian asserts that "each one of us is either 'conqueror of' or 'conquered by' himself" (627a), since "each man fights a private war against himself" (626e). And this private war can be clearly seen in the individual's counterpart, the state, when the inferior are subdued by the better people. In this case it may be said to be 'conqueror of' itself. Second, sophrosune is regarded as an *agreement* among the classes of the state (442c-d), and

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<sup>33</sup> The *Analects*, 1, 4.

this description of sophrosune involves two elements, as Annas points out.<sup>34</sup>

Firstly, all citizens in a state agree in their opinion that the right people are ruling. As Socrates says at 431e1-2, “ it will be true that government and subjects will agree about who ought to rule.” The basis for this should be that sophrosune is characteristic of both the rulers and the ruled (431e5-7). For the agreement between the rulers and the ruled results from the fact that the former know that they are the right people to rule, and the latter know that they are not. Secondly, there is the element of deference.<sup>35</sup> This element Plato fairly describes at 431b-d, that is, sophrosune in a state requires the rulers to impose control on their own appetitive desires from within, and the ruled to acquiesce in the imposition control on their appetitive desires from without,<sup>36</sup> that is, they accept the rule of the Guardians. However, two problems arise from the account of deference. The one is that the imposition on the lower class people’s appetitive desires seems to implicitly suggest that the deference of the lower classes to the rulers requires some sacrifice of their own interests or good.<sup>37</sup> In other words, Plato seems to suggest an autocratic element or totalitarianism<sup>38</sup> in his political system. It could be argued that Plato here is talking of an *ideal* state not a real state, it is only in the ideal state that the lower class people have to defer to the rulers who are wise and possess knowledge. Nevertheless, something still has to be explained: Do the lower classes willingly abandon what they themselves would prefer because they recognize that the decisions made by the wise rulers are the better ones? or although they recognize that the Guardians should be rulers, do they still feel sullen because their appetitive desires are thwarted to some extent? If the second suggestion were the case, then Plato’s account of the agreement among the three classes about who should rule could be challenged. Since the agreement involves the lower class people’s dissatisfaction with their desires or

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<sup>34</sup> *op. cit.* pp. 115-6.

<sup>35</sup> Annas, *Ibid.* pp. 116-7, pp. 172-4.

<sup>36</sup> M. C. Nussbaum, “ Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity ”, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, (ed.) Rorty, A. O. (California, 1980), p. 408.

<sup>37</sup> N. P. White, *A Companion to Plato’s Republic* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> Popper says that “ I believe that Plato’s political programme, far from being morally superior to totalitarianism, is fundamentally identical with it.” *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 1 (London, 1991, p. 87.

appetites being thwarted to some extent by the wise rulers, the stability of the state would be doubtful. It is superficially true that Plato seems to have no answer to this. For Plato's usage of the terms ' unanimity ' and ' agreement ' indicates that people in the ideal state are *not forced* to agree on who should rule and who should be ruled. They accept the rule of the Guardians because that is the way they have been brought up.<sup>39</sup> Therefore it would be difficult to see how in a happy and just state people will revolt against their rulers. White might be wrong to point out that people in the ideal state might have to sacrifice their own interests to some extent.<sup>40</sup> For people in the ideal state are trained to believe that their own interest is coincident with that of the state.

The other consequence of Plato's account of *sophrosune* is that the lower class people are deprived of liberty. We are told in Book III that the life of the three classes are different and that they have different kinds of education and upbringing. Although Plato emphasizes the unity of the state, there seems to be no common culture among the three classes. The values endorsed by the state depends on the values of the rulers, not on the other classes. Furthermore, people in the ideal state lack freedom. At 434a-b, we are told that it is forbidden for the three classes to interchange their jobs, since it will do the greatest harm to the state. The lower classes lack all autonomy over their life, since they lack the capacity of reasoning. They are unable to decide what to do or what goals are appropriate for them. Their life has to be dependent on the rulers' decisions. They are not free to change their style of life, for that will go against their rulers. Therefore Plato's requirement for conformity seems to make the lower classes slaves of the Guardians (590c-d), they are lacking any self-respect and self-worth. However, although it would do great harm to the state if people of the different classes interchanged their jobs, Plato never says that it is forbidden for people in the same class to interchange their jobs. In fact, at 434a, we find that the interchange of jobs between a shoemaker and a builder would not do so much harm as the interchange of jobs between different classes people might do, likewise in the first

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<sup>39</sup> Plato, at 588c-589b, gives us a clue of how the appetitive part can be trained. However, I am aware of the point that if Plato claims that the lower classes are trained to obey, then he has to say something about the education of the third class, which Plato says nothing about.

<sup>40</sup> White, *op. cit.*

minimal city, we saw in chapter 1, there is no prohibition against job interchange, as long as each one does his or her job for which he or she is naturally suited, and with all his or her effort. So, we can still find some sort of individual autonomy in the lower class, although when the state is considered as a whole the conformity still makes an appearance. That is because Plato is not interested in whether one has equal chance to pursue one's goal, but in whether by nature one is suitable for this or that job.

Sophrosune in the state is described as a harmony among the three classes, which can be identified with the harmony among the three parts of soul. That is to say that the unanimity among the three parts that reason should rule. However, as mentioned, to say that the three parts of the soul agree on who should rule is not to say that the lower parts of the soul, like the lower classes in the state, have reason, spirit, and appetite within themselves. For the issue whether Plato himself would take the isomorphism seriously is problematic, and it would be a mistake to apply too much political language to the three parts of the soul. I would be inclined to think that Plato is aware that the situation is different in state and soul, and has different treatment for them.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the two meanings adopted by Plato at 430e can also be applied to the individual. A sophron person who is 'master of' or 'conqueror of' himself and whose certain desires are under control. In his soul there is an agreement among the three parts on who should rule. Thus sophrosune can both be seen in the individual and the state.

It is noticeable here that in a reason-ruled and sophron soul each part of it has not only to perform its function well but also can enjoy its own pleasure to its proper extent. Plato says,

Then if the mind as a whole will follow the lead of its philosophical element, without internal division, each element will be just and in all other respects perform its own function, and in addition will enjoy its own particular pleasures, which are the best and truest available to it. (586e-587a)

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<sup>41</sup> For further discussion on this issue see, Part III, Chapter 7, Section 3.



It is clear that the harmony among the three parts does not suggest the idea of asceticism. That is, appetite has to be suppressed or forbidden to enjoy any pleasure. On the contrary, the notion of *sophrosune* provides a basis for reason, spirit, and appetite to work together as a team striving towards a common goal and at the same time each of them can enjoy their own pleasure to the truest extent.

A similar idea is found in the *Analects*, where Confucius says,

Riches and honours — these are what men desire, but if this is not achieved in accordance with the appropriate principles, one does not cling to them.

(IV, 5)

Confucius holds here that not all appetitive desires have to be restrained but those are exceeding and not in accordance with ritual. For the decay of social order is the result of people's not being able to practice moderation, but having too much unnecessary desires. Confucius says that “ [s]upreme indeed is the Mean as a virtue, but for a long time it has been rare among the people (VI, 29). Both Plato and Confucius do not propose to suppress all the appetitive desires but only those unnecessary ones. For one's having excessive desires not only does damage to one's personal life but also to the stability of the state.

#### **(4) justice**

The introduction of justice is different from those of the other three virtues. Socrates tells us that in fact justice has already been introduced in the course of discussing the other virtues. Then what is justice? Justice in a state consists in the fact that each citizen has to do one job and sticks to what is appropriate for him (433a, 435b, 443c). It should be noticed that Plato's notion of justice is not to designate each member of the state for one type of job, and ‘ doing one's own job ’ and ‘ keeping what is appropriate for him ’ do not suggest that one cannot exchange jobs with others within the same class, as mentioned above. What is important here is that “ a city cannot be just unless it recognizes and institutionalizes basic natural differences between

people.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, each class must stick to its own job. Since it is our nature which determines which class we belong to.

In the state, wisdom and courage are identified respectively with the Guardians and the Auxiliaries. And sophrosune is regarded as an agreement among the three classes. Justice may seem to have no object to which it corresponds, and in the state there seems to be no role for justice. But without justice a state cannot become orderly in the first place, since justice is a virtue of the state, which makes the state orderly. It requires every member of the state to recognize his or her own role as contributing the common good to the state as a whole. For a state to be just requires citizens to realize their roles in the state, do their own jobs, and stick to what is appropriate for them. The definition of justice in the state is called by Vlastos “social justice”.<sup>43</sup> It means that in a just state each citizen performs his or her function well. This is not only emphasized in Book IV, but originally in Book II, where Socrates says that each citizen has a different natural aptitude, which fits him or her for different job, and each citizen should do better to exercise his or her skill or function (370b). Thus the state will be a unity, and each class can share the general good they produce.

A just individual is the one in whom the three parts of the soul do their own jobs. Like the just state, an individual is just, not because of his relation with others, but because each part of his soul does its own job. This definition of individual justice is called “psychological justice”. Or we can say that justice in the individual is “psychic harmony” or, in Kenny’s word, “mental health”.<sup>44</sup> It means that an individual is just, if his reason is ruling, spirit is backing up reason’s adequate decision, and appetite is under the control of the other two. It should be noticed that to say that reason is ruling is not only to say that an individual can plan his life rationally. For we shall see in Book VIII and IX, the unjust men, namely the timocratic man, the oligarchy man, whose reason is not in control, are nevertheless capable of planning their life as a whole. So to say that a man is just we must say

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<sup>42</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1981), p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> A. Kenny, *The Anatomy of The Soul*, ch. I (Oxford, 1973).

something more than rational planning, he must have a “well-rounded personality.”<sup>45</sup> For a reason-ruled soul, it is not just a matter of the desire of money making profits. Reason enables an individual to make a critical and informed decision, rather than letting the strongest desire win the day.<sup>46</sup>

It is noticeable that Plato thinks that a just man is not one who is merely able to observe the laws and act rightly, but has to have inner harmony, i.e. reason is in control with the help of spirit over appetite. For Confucius a humane man is one who engages in self-cultivation as well having a harmonious relation with others. That is, for Confucius, the superior man has to possess both qualities, human-heartedness and harmonious social relationships at the same time. However, Plato in the *Republic*, unlike Confucius, puts strong emphasis on the individual's inner harmony for in Plato's view one's psychological harmony is the basis for behaving morally and rightly. Without possessing the harmonious soul, i.e. reason is in control, it would be impossible for one to be a just man. Confucius thinks that for a person to be virtuous both his internal harmony and external behaviour have to complement to each other. For Confucius, unlike Plato who says that the real concern of justice is with a person's inner self (443c-d), sees a person's having harmonious relationships with others as being essential to his seeking human-heartedness.

To put this section simply, both Plato and Confucius have an ideal of a state guarded by wisdom and embodied in the persons of wise rulers. This wisdom, as it were, ‘flows down’ and penetrates every part of the state. In Plato what brings about this conformity to wisdom is primarily the educational process. This ensures that although members of the lower classes may have limited rational powers they nevertheless cling to the opinions taught by the rulers and model themselves accordingly. Confucius' ideal differs from this in two respects: firstly, in a Confucian society the driving force is rather the citizens' decision to emulate the ruler. Secondly, due to the fact that Confucius does not draw Plato's distinction between rational knowledge and belief, even members of the lower classes may have a share in wisdom. They display this in discharging well the duties of their roles and in directing their own families.

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<sup>45</sup> Parry, *op. cit.* p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 135.

To summarize this chapter briefly. The notion of ' doing one's own job ' is essential to the order of the soul and the society. For without each part of the soul doing its own job there will never be order in the soul. In a disorderly soul the three parts are in conflict with one another. Thus to establish order in the soul each part has to do one job for which it is naturally suited, and they have to reach an agreement (*sophrosune*) as to who should rule. The notion of *sophrosune* does not imply that there is a degree of rationality or an internal conversation among the three parts of the soul. It rather means that receiving proper training or education spirit and appetite are habituated to listen to reason's direction. Thus the Command Model and the Force model cannot properly explain how the three parts of the soul interact with one another and achieve harmony. The connection between the virtues in state and soul shows that the fulfillment of the inner harmony of the state requires each citizen to receive training or education. For, like the soul, by education the lower classes are habituated to be under the control or direction of the philosopher-king.

## Chapter 5

### Confucius' Notion of the Superior Man

Confucius says in the *Analects* that “ [a] sage it is not mine to see; could I see a man of real talent and virtue, that would satisfy me ” (VII, 25).<sup>1</sup> The ‘ man of talent and virtue ’ in Chinese means *Chun-tzu*, which is often translated by scholars into English as ‘ the superior man ’ or ‘ gentleman ’. The sage is in Confucius' mind an ideal, which is difficult to find in real world. This is the reason why Confucius modestly says that “ [a]s for being a sage or a humane man, I would surely not presume to be such ” (VII, 34). However, it would be relatively easier, for Confucius, to find a superior man or gentleman in the real world. This can be seen from the frequent usage of the word *Chun-tzu* in the *Analects*. In this chapter I would like to explore the Confucian notion of the superior man by discussing three topics: firstly, the meaning of the superior man in the *Analects*; secondly, the comparison between the superior man and inferior man, and finally the requisites for being a superior man.

#### 1. The meaning of the superior man in the *Analects*

The notion of the superior man can be found in four features in the *Analects*: Confucius himself, the civil servant, the virtuous man, and the virtuous civil servant.<sup>2</sup> I shall discuss them in turn. Firstly, Confucius does not regard himself as a sage, whereas it may not be implausible that he regards himself as a superior man, as can be seen in the *Analects*. For example,

The Master wished to dwell among the nine wild tribes of the East. Someone

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<sup>1</sup> J. Legge, *The Four Books* (Hong Kong, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Yih-jing Lin, “ Confucian Notion of Chun-tzu ”, *The Exploration of Confucian Thought*, Lin, Yih-Jing, (Taipei, 1987), pp. 69-70.

said: ' They are uncivilized, so what will you do about that?' The Master said: ' If a *gentleman* dwelt among them, what lack of civility would they show?. (IX, 14)

It is obvious according to this passage that Confucius sees himself as a superior man, and as a model for the emulation of the uncivilized. Moreover, to be a superior man cannot be " ashamed of bad clothes and bad food " (IV, 9). For a superior man " does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it " (IV, 5).<sup>3</sup> Thus wherever the superior man goes he is always virtuous.

Secondly, the word *Chun-tzu* is often in the *Analects* taken to mean those who are in office. For example, Confucius' disciple, Tzu-yu, in a conversation with Confucius, says,

When the superior man has studied the Way, he loves men. When the inferior man has studied the Way, he is easy to employ. (XVII, 4)<sup>4</sup>

The difference between the superior man and inferior man here rests on the fact that they occupy different social status. In J. Legge's translation of the *Analects*, he translates the superior man as " the man of high station ", and the inferior man as " the man of low station ".<sup>5</sup> It seems to me that Legge's translation exactly reveals the meaning of the superior man in this passage.

Thirdly, the word *Chun-tzu* can also mean those who possess virtue. For example, Confucius says,

The superior man does not seek fulfillment of his appetite nor comfort in his lodging. He is diligent in his duties and careful in his speech. He associates with men of moral principles and thereby realizes himself. Such a person

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<sup>3</sup> J. Legge, *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *op. cit.* p. 153.

may be said to love learning. (I, 14)<sup>6</sup>

The superior man thinks of virtue; the inferior man thinks of possessions. (IV, 11)<sup>7</sup>

It can be seen that a superior man only pays attention to virtue, and only associates himself with virtuous men. Bodily pleasure is out of his concern, in that the superior man “ plans for the Way and does not plan for food ”, and “ is concerned about the Way and is not concerned about poverty ” (XV, 32).

Finally, the fourth meaning of the word *Chun-tzu* is the virtuous man who is in office. For example,

The Master said that there were four of the ways of the gentleman present in Zichan: in his conduct of himself he was courteous, in his service of his superiors he showed veneration, in his provision for the needs of the people he was generous, and in his employment of the people he was righteous. (V, 16)

Zichan was a great politician in Zheng, also, according to Confucius, Zichan was a politician who possesses virtue. It is worth noting here that the third and fourth meaning of the superior man seem to overlap one another. For in Confucius' view to be a good or virtuous ruler is not merely a matter of being capable of administering, but a matter of being a virtuous ruler who is able to be a model people can follow. Confucius says that “ [a] ruler who governs his state by virtue is like the north polar star, which remains in its place while the other stars revolve around it ” (II, 1).<sup>8</sup> Confucius, unlike legalists who prefer law and force, thinks that having a virtuous ruler, as a model of emulation, is important for achieving an orderly society. Since, for Confucius,

[T]he important task of government was to transform the people through

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<sup>6</sup> Wing-tsit, Chan, *Ibid.* p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

education, and since this involved the study and imitation of models, it followed that Confucius thought of the person in political power, not primarily as a man who could cope skillfully with administrative problems, but as one who would act as an example to the people because of his moral qualities.<sup>9</sup>

Thus we can understand why Confucius says that “ [t]he character of a ruler is like wind and that of the people is like grass. In whatever direction the wind blows, the grass always bends ” (XII, 19).<sup>10</sup> In a nutshell, government, for Confucius, is to transform people through education by exemplars or precepts. It is worth noting that ideally speaking, a virtuous man by nature is fitted for office. Confucius however does not think that every virtuous man has to take part in politics. For Confucius says,

The *Book of Documents* mentions filial piety, doesn't it? “ Only be dutiful towards your parents and friendly towards your brothers, and you will be contributing to the existence of government.” These virtues surely constitute taking part in government, so why should only that particular activity be regarded as taking part in government? (II, 21)

The order of society, for Confucius, is mainly dependent upon the order of the family. Thus as long as one is filial to one's parents and fraternal to one's siblings, one takes part in politics. The notion that politics is the extension of morality allows Confucius to claim that a superior man is not necessarily in office, since what he does in the family would be similar to what he does in the office.

Furthermore, although the word *Chun-tzu* has four meanings as we saw, yet in Confucius' mind to be a superior man, no matter which social status one occupies, is to be a virtuous man. That is to say, the primal concern of a superior man should be that he is one who possesses virtue. This concern has been revealed throughout the *Analects* (for example, XIV, 42). And in the *Great Learning*, which is a small book about Confucian educational, political, and moral programme, we can also see the

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<sup>9</sup> R. Dawson, *Confucius* (Oxford, 1981), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 40.



emphasis on the fact that a superior man should be concerned primarily with his own virtue. What follows is the text of the *Great Learning*, and we can see the great importance of appeal to human virtue in Confucian philosophy.

The Way of learning to be great (or adult education) consists in manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good.

Only after knowing what to abide in can one be calm. Only after having been calm can one be tranquil. Only after having achieved tranquillity can one have peaceful repose. Only after having peaceful repose can one begin to deliberate. Only after deliberation can the end be attained. Things have their roots and branches. Affairs have their beginnings and their ends. To know what is first and what is last will lead one near the Way.

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the mind is rectified; when the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world. From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation. There is never a case when the root is in disorder and yet the branches are in order. There has never been a case when what is treated with great importance becomes a matter of slight importance or what is treated with

slight importance becomes a matter of great importance.<sup>11</sup>

We see, from the sentence ‘ from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation ’, that the foundation or root of an orderly state is human virtue, and an orderly state can be achieved only when every member of it makes their own effort to manifest their virtues. That is, people have to cultivate their personal character, since the superior man is concerned with virtue. This passage seems to suggest a ‘ bottom up ’ view of virtue in the state. That is, although, in Confucius’ view, the virtuous ruler occupies an important role for achieving an orderly society, what is more important is that every member of the state has to make an effort to engage in self-cultivation, for by nature men are close to each other (XVII, 2). To be virtuous is not a privilege for the few. However, Plato, unlike Confucius, in the *Republic* proposes a ‘ top down ’ view of virtue. In the ideal state only the philosophers can be said to be truly virtuous, for Plato’s theory of human nature (415a-d) does not allow the lower classes have the opportunity to be truly virtuous. The maintenance of the social order is mainly in the hands of the philosopher-kings.

The word *Chun-tzu* (君子) in Chinese consists of two characters, i.e. *Chun* means ruler, and *Tzu* means son. Thus *Chun-tzu* originally means the son of ruler. The word *Chun-tzu* was often taken to mean a kind of social class, aristocracy, before Confucius’ time.<sup>12</sup> However at Confucius’ time the rules of social conduct were corrupted, the division of the social class was ruined, and the hereditary system no longer existed. Therefore the education which used to be a privilege of aristocratic class was available to everyone, and Confucius was the first person who popularized the aristocratic education. From the historical evidence we can know the reason for Confucius’ shifting from the original meaning of the superior man, the aristocratic class, to the virtuous person. For the popularization of education breaking up the social classes can fulfill Confucius’ ideal that everyone can be a superior man through proper education. Moreover, although Confucius does not think that the superior man is necessarily in office, nevertheless he would agree with both Plato and Aristotle that

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<sup>11</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, *op. cit.* p. 54.

ideally the wise and virtuous should be in power.

## **2. The comparison between the superior man and the inferior man**

The superior man is an achievable ideal for Confucius in the real world, and he often in the *Analects* compares the superior man with the inferior man, or as R. Dawson's translation,<sup>13</sup> the small man. What is the difference between the superior man and the inferior man? This question can be treated in two ways:<sup>14</sup> firstly, the difference between the superior man and the inferior man rests on the fact that the former is the ruler and the latter is the ruled. Due to the fact that they are in different stations, they are concerned with different things. As Confucius says,

The gentleman cherishes virtue, but the small man cherishes the soil; the gentleman cherishes the rigours of the law, but the small man cherishes leniency. (IV, 11)

[W]hen a gentleman studies the Way, he loves his fellow-men; and when a small man studies the Way, he is easy to command. (XVII, 3)

[I]f a gentleman has courage but lacks a sense of right and wrong, he will cause political chaos; and if a small man has courage but lacks a sense of right and wrong, he will commit burglary. (XVII, 21)

The superior man who is in office is concerned with virtue and the firmness of law, and knows what is right and wrong. On the contrary, the inferior man is concerned with his personal interests. The superior man will put his eyes on the public interest, and act according to law, whereas the inferior man will only pay attention to his personal interest without thinking of law.

Furthermore, the difference between the superior man and inferior man cited

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<sup>13</sup> R. Dawson, *Confucius: The Analects* (Oxford, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Lin, *op. cit.* pp. 81-89.

above does not mean that everyone who is in office will automatically become a superior man, since there is a distinction between the virtuous civil servant and the vicious one. Confucius says,

The gentleman is easy to serve but difficult to please. If in trying to please him one does not accord with the Way, he is not pleased. But when it comes to his employing others, he takes account of their capacity. The small man is difficult to serve but easy to please. Although one does not accord with the Way when trying to please him, he is pleased. But when it comes to his employing others, he seeks perfection in them. (XIII, 25)

The gentleman cannot be appreciated in minor matters, but can be accepted in major matters. The small man cannot be accepted in major matters, but can be appreciated in minor matters. (XV, 34)

Here both the gentleman and the small man are in office, but what makes them different is whether they can cleave to the Way. As Zixia, Confucius' disciple, says, " [e]ven lesser arts are bound to have something noteworthy in them, but if they are taken too far, there is a fear that one could get stuck in the mud, and that is why the gentleman does not practice " (XIX, 4). The lesser arts here means farming, medicine, and divination, etc.. These arts might be valuable in their own fields, whereas those who practice them might not have a broader view over the state as a whole. And their practicing those arts might be only for their own interests. The superior man however is working for the Way and seeking the Way, which, for Confucius, is the highest goal of human being.

The other way of describing the difference between the superior man and the inferior man is that the former possesses virtue, but the latter does not. Confucius says,

The gentleman is familiar with what is right, just as the small man is familiar with profit. (IV, 16)

A gentleman, in his plans, thinks of the Way; he does not think how he is going to make a living. Even farming sometimes entails times of shortage;

and even learning may incidentally lead to high pay. But a gentleman's anxieties concern the progress of the Way; he has no anxiety concerning poverty. (XV, 31)<sup>15</sup>

The gentleman always acts in accordance with the Way, so he knows what is right and wrong, and also knows how to act properly in all circumstances. On the contrary, the inferior man cannot tell right from wrong, as long as he sees profit he will go for it. Whether it is legitimate is out of his concern. It is worth noting here, as Lin Yih-jing points out, Confucius' emphasis on propriety is not to preclude people from gaining profit, but to point out, people have to gain their profit legitimately.<sup>16</sup> Confucius says,

Riches and honours — these are what men desire, but if this is not achieved in accordance with the appropriate principles, one does not cling to them. Poverty and obscurity — these are what men hate, but if this is not achieved in accordance with the appropriate principles, one does not avoid them. (IV, 5)

Therefore the consideration of the appropriate principle, i.e. the Way, is nothing to do with profit, since to act in accordance with the Way is, in the Confucian view, much more valuable than gaining profit. Furthermore, the difference between the superior man and the inferior man will be clear when they are in a state of being poor. For Confucius says that “ [t]he gentleman remains firm in the face of suffering, but if the small man suffers, he is carried away on a flood of excess ” (XV, 2).

A passage in *The Doctrine of the Mean* can be referred to, to give an account of the situation we have here.

The superior man does what is proper to the station in which he is; he does not desire to go beyond this. In a position of wealth and honour, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honour. In a poor and low position, he does what is proper to a poor and low position. Situated among barbarous

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<sup>15</sup> A. Waley, *Confucius: The Analects* (Ware, 1996), p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> *op. cit.* p. 83.

tribes, he does what is proper to a situation among barbarous tribes. In a position of sorrow and difficulty, he does what is proper to a position of sorrow and difficulty. The superior man can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself. (Chapter 14)<sup>17</sup>

The superior man is always being himself because he does what is proper to his role, and can stick to the Way without abandoning it ‘ even for the lapse of a single meal ’. Thus the superior man always knows what to do, and how to do, and will not be affected by others. As Confucius says,

The gentleman is calm and peaceful; the small man is always emotional. (VII, 37)

The gentleman is dignified but not arrogant. The small man is arrogant but not dignified. (XIII, 26)

What the gentleman seeks in himself the small man seeks in others. (XV, 21)

The difference between the superior man and the inferior man, in my opinion, can also be seen in their dealing with people. Confucius says,

The superior man is broadminded but not partisan; the inferior man is partisan but not broadminded. (II, 14)<sup>18</sup>

In my view, neither Chan’s translation of the word *Jo* as ‘ being broadminded ’ nor Dawson’s translating the word as ‘ universal sympathy ’ can be properly fitted in with this passage. For both words *Jo* and *Bi* (partisan) in Chinese mean ‘ being close to or intimate with people ’, and Confucius’ use of them here implies the comparison between good and bad. Therefore the phrase ‘ the superior man is *Jo* but not *Bi* ’ should be translated as that the superior man is close to people but not partisan. The superior men’s being close to people is based upon the righteousness, “ they are sociable but do not form parties ” (XV, 22). The basis for this translation can be

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<sup>17</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 24.

found at IV, 16, where Confucius says that “ [t]he gentleman is familiar with what is right, just as the small man is familiar with profit.” Thus the inferior men’s forming parties is to seek their own interests without considering what is right or wrong.

The difference between the superior man and the inferior man in their ways of dealing with people can also be seen at XIII, 23, where Confucius says,

The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable.<sup>19</sup>

The affability (*Ho*) means that the superior man’s getting along with people is in accordance with morality and justice; on the contrary, the word adulation (*Tung*) means that the inferior man’s getting along with people is based upon gains and losses. Thus the superior man can get along with people harmoniously, and will not take advantage of others.

Furthermore, Confucius says,

The gentleman brings to completion the fine qualities in others and does not bring to completion the bad qualities in others. The small man does the opposite of this. (XII, 16)

Gentlemen do not promote someone because of what he says, and do not reject what is said because of who said it. (XV, 23)

We can see from the above that the superior man’s dealing with people is based upon the principle of impartiality and unselfishness. He gets along with people harmoniously without conflict of interests. He is close to people and willing to help them, but does not wallow in the mire with the evil people. What he is always concerned with is right and wrong, reasonableness and unreasonableness. All these characteristics of the superior man cannot be found in the inferior man.

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<sup>19</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p.114.

### 3. The requisites for being a superior man

So far, the differences between the superior man and the inferior man have been brought out, I shall proceed to discuss the requisites of being a superior man. A. S. Cua says, at the outset of his article “ Competence, Concern, and The Role of Paradigmatic Individuals (*Chun-Tzu*) in Moral Education ”,

From the perspective of Confucian ethics, learning to become an exemplary, autonomous moral agent, a *chun-tzu*, is a constant and unceasing process of self-cultivation (*hsiu-shen*). This process involves an acquisition and critical interpretation of an established cultural tradition, seen as an embodiment of a concern for human well-being (*jen*), as well as familiarity with rules of proper conduct (*li*), with due regard to reasoned judgment concerning their relevance to particular circumstances (*yi*). This process also involves a daily examination of the ethical import of one’s words and deeds. ....<sup>20</sup>

The first requisite of being a superior man is human-heartedness (*jen*), which is clearly expressed in two passages in the *Analects*, where Confucius says,

The gentleman never shuns humaneness even for the time it takes to finish a meal. If his progress is hasty, it is bound to arise from this; and if his progress is unsteady, it is bound to arise from this. (IV, 5)

The determined public servant and the humane man never seek to preserve life in such a way as to injure humaneness, but they will sometimes even sacrifice their lives in order to achieve humaneness. (XV, 9)

It can be seen that to be a superior man is to cleave to *jen*. A superior man who only possesses the name of the superior man without the reality of *jen* is not a superior man in the real sense of the term. That is, a true superior man never departs from

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<sup>20</sup> A. S. Cua, “ Competence, Concern, and The Role of Paradigmatic Individuals (*Chun-Tzu*) in Moral education ”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 42, 1992, p. 49.



human-heartedness, since

*Jen* is what makes us truly human, to abandon it is to give up a fully human life. *Jen* is worth sacrificing one's life for; it is the basis of all human value and worth. It is *jen*, ultimately, that makes life worth living.<sup>21</sup>

Thus we know why the superior man will cleave to *jen*, and never abandon it.

The second requisite for being a superior man is ritual (*li*). To be a superior man is to act in accordance with rules of proper conduct (*li*). Confucius says,

One is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music.  
(VIII, 8)

If you do not study the rites, you will have no way of taking your stand. (XVI, 13)

If one does not understand the rites, one has no means of taking one's stand.  
(XX, 3)

Confucius is in praise of *li*, because as long as one is in the society one has to learn the rules of social life. A person who deserves the name of superior man should conduct himself and get along with people in the society in accordance with *li*. The understanding of the rules of proper conduct enables the superior man to take his stand firmly. But what is the content of Confucian *li*? As J. M. Koller points out, Confucian *li* has three meanings.<sup>22</sup> It means religion; it means a customary code of social behaviour, and it also means that *li* conforms to the norms of human-heartedness. *Li*, firstly, is religious when it is concerned with rites for religious ceremony. That is the reason why when Confucius entered the grand temple, he asked about every single thing (III, 15). For the religious ceremony should be held in accordance with *li*, to hold a religious ceremony ritually one should understand every detail of the ceremony.

Secondly, *li* is the customary code of social conduct. *Li* in this sense takes the

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<sup>21</sup> J. M. Koller, *Oriental Philosophies* (Basingstoke, 1985), p. 266.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 267-268.

place of written law, it tells people what is right thing to do, which is different from the written law that tells people what they should not do. *Li*, unlike written law, does not entail punishment. Its function is to guide and regulate people's behaviour. The nature of *li* for Confucius is unchangeable, whereas the form of *li* can be altered according to different circumstances. From Confucius' praise of Lin Fang for his concern of the root of ritual (III, 4), we know that the nature of *li* is unchangeable, but institutions and implements can be changed in different circumstances. Thus Confucius tells us that *li* means something more than jades and silk (XVII, 9). Confucius' superior man is living in a real world, that is, he has to live with others, and cannot isolate himself from others. Thus in order to get along with people harmoniously, a reasonable social order is required to keep this interpersonal harmony going. And this reasonable social order is *li*. This interpersonal harmony leads to the third meaning of *li*.

In the *Analects* we can see that Confucius' talking of *li* emphasizes order and moral education.<sup>23</sup> For example,

Duke Jing of Qi asked Master Kong about government. Master Kong replied:

' Let a ruler be a ruler, a subject a subject, a father a father. (XII, 11)

Yan Hui asked about humaneness. The Master said: ' To subdue oneself and return to ritual is to practise humaneness. If someone subdued himself and returned to ritual for a single day, then all under Heaven would ascribe humaneness to him. For the practice of humaneness does surely proceed from the man himself, or does it proceed from others? Yan Hui said : ' I beg to ask for the details of this.' The Master said: ' Do not look at what is contrary to ritual, do not listen to what is contrary to ritual, do not speak what is contrary to ritual, and make no movement which is contrary to ritual.' Yan Hui said: ' Although I am not clever, I beg to put this advice into practice.' (XII, 1)

The first passage indicates Confucius' emphasis on order. Everyone should play his or

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<sup>23</sup> Chuen-hae Tzeng, " The Relations Among Li, Yi and Jen in The Confucian Analects ", *Fu Jen Philosophical Studies*, vol. V (Taipei, 1975), p. 55.

her own role properly. The language of ' return to ritual ' in the second passage means to return to an orderly state, and the content of mastering oneself is displayed in one's everyday conduct, i.e. looking, listening, speaking, and moving. If someone can master himself and return to order, then he can achieve the realm of human-heartedness. The importance of *li* is also stated at VIII, 2, where Confucius says,

If one is courteous but does without ritual, then one dissipates one's energies; if one is cautious but does without ritual, then one becomes timid; if one is bold but does without ritual, then one becomes reckless; if one is forthright but does without ritual, then one becomes rude.

For a superior man, who possesses the virtue of human-heartedness, will take his time in self-cultivation in order to be courteous, cautious, bold, and forthright. However, without the regulation of *li* these virtues would become dissipated, timid, reckless and rude.<sup>24</sup> If human-heartedness, possessed by all human being, implies that men by nature have affection for one another. Ritual then provides guideline for the expression of one's affection for others. Thus we can see why *li* is a requisite for being a superior man in that moral conduct requires *li* to be its foundation.

The third requisite for being a superior man is *yi*. The word *yi* is usually translated into English as ' righteousness ', which is also stressed by Confucius in the *Analects*. Confucius says,

Righteousness the gentleman regards as the essential stuff and the rites are his means of putting it into effect. If modesty is the quality with which he reveals it and good faith is his method of bringing it to completion, he is indeed a gentleman. (XV, 18)

*Yi*, as mentioned, is concerned with the right conduct in the specific situation. A superior man who possesses the virtue of *jen* and *yi* has not only the disposition to do what is right, but also the ability to know how to act rightly in a specific situation.

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<sup>24</sup> Tzeng, *op. cit.* p. 56.

Confucius says that “ [i]n his attitude to the world the gentleman has no antagonisms and no favourisms. What is right he sides with ” (IV, 10). *Yi* thus is the basis for the superior man’s moral judgment, the superior man is only concerned with what is right, but not with what is profitable (IV, 16). As Koller points out, “ [a] person who acts for the sake of *yi*, because that action is the right thing to do, is not far from *jen*.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the ability to make a judgement about what is right thing to do in the special situation, *yi*, as Tzeng Chuen-hae points out, can be treated in two ways: the negative meaning and the positive meaning.<sup>26</sup> The negative meaning of *yi* is to mean that one is never inflexible (IX, 4). The flexibility means that one should not be punctilious, otherwise one would be an inferior man. For when one is always true to his word and he always brings his deeds to fruition, he may appear to be an inferior man because of his stubbornness (XIII, 20). *Yi* is different from being stubborn, which enables us to do things rightly and appropriately according to different situations. The positive meaning of *yi* means the virtue of the mean. The word ‘ mean ’ in Chinese consists of two words, *Chung* and *Yung*. The former means doing thing appropriately, not going too far and not going not far enough; the latter means changelessness. Thus *yi* in this sense means that the principles of morality are unchangeable, but the applications of them have to take the actual situations into account. *Yi* in Confucian philosophy is full of the spirit of expediency. Confucius says, for example, that

When the Way prevails in the world, then be seen. When it does not, then hide. When the Way prevails in your own state, to be made poor and obscure by it is a disgrace; but when the Way does not prevail in your own state, to be made rich and honourable by it is a disgrace. (VIII, 13)

Confucius here expresses his way of conducting himself in society, he does not insist that he has to be in office, and become rich; nor does he insist that he has to be away from being in office, and become poor. What he is saying is that he will take the actual situations into account, and regard *yi* as the basis of his moral realization. Mencius says, in the *Mencius*, that “ [w]hen it was proper to go into office, then to go

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<sup>25</sup> Koller, *op. cit.* p. 270.

<sup>26</sup> Tzeng, *op. cit.* p. 49.

into it; when it was proper to keep retired from office, then to keep retired from it; when it was proper to continue in it long, then to continue in it long; when it was proper to withdraw from it quickly, then to withdraw quickly: that was the way of Confucius ” (II, i, 2).<sup>27</sup>

In addition to these three requirements for being a superior man, wisdom should be regarded as one of the requisites for being the superior man. Confucius says,

The wise are not perplexed, the humane do not worry, and the courageous do not feel fear. (IX, 29)

...: The gentleman is neither worried nor afraid. .... If when he looks within he is not diseased, then what does he worry about and what does he fear? (XII, 4)

The ways of the gentleman are three but I have no ability in them: the humane do not worry; the wise are not perplexed; and the courageous do not feel fear. (XIV, 28)

It is obvious, in Confucius' mind, that a gentleman should possess human-heartedness, wisdom, and courageousness. The wisdom is expressed in his constant reflecting on his words and deeds. Master Zeng's examining his character in three respects every day would be a typical example of the expression of Confucian wisdom (I, 4). It is noticeable that Confucius, unlike Plato who requires the philosophers to have theoretical wisdom, is mainly concerned with practical wisdom in the *Analects*. Moreover, for Confucius, the superior man is both humane and wise. Confucius says, “ [t]he wise delight in water, but the humane delight in mountains. For although the wise are active, the humane are at rest. And although the wise will find joy, the humane will have long life ” (VI, 23). No matter where the superior man is, and no matter what he is doing the life of the superior man is full of joy and happiness.

Finally, Confucius says at the end of the *Analects* that “ [i]f one does not understand fate, one has no means of becoming a gentleman ” (XX, 3). Confucius

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<sup>27</sup> J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, 1970), p. 194.

also says,

There are three things which the gentleman holds in awe: he is in awe of the decree of Heaven, he is in awe of great man, and he is in awe of the words of sages. The small man, being unaware of the decree of Heaven, is not in awe of it. He is rude to great men and ridicules the words of sages. (XVI, 8)

It can be seen that Confucius here regards understanding fate and the decree of Heaven as a requisite for being a superior man. However since Confucius seldom talks about fate (IX, 1), I shall not talk it in depth. For “ the principle of destiny is subtle.”<sup>28</sup> One thing however is worth noting that Confucius’ talking of destiny is to ascribe those things which man is unable to control and change. Confucius’ saying at XIV, 36 reveals this situation, he says: “ Is the Way about to make progress? If so, it is due to Fate. Is the Way about to be rejected? If so, it is due to Fate.” Whereas Confucius does not mean that one should acquiesce in one’s destiny and does nothing, since humaneness is the burden the superior man has taken on himself, and it is heavy and his way is long, only after death does his journey end (VIII, 7). Things ascribed to destiny might be out of one’s control, but what one can do is to seize the opportunity to practise human-heartedness. Therefore Confucius’ appeal to fate has its positive meaning, that is, recognition of fate is not to give up everything, but to make one’s effort to do things. Although we might fail in doing things, yet as long as we have done our best we still can set our heart at rest. For we do what we are able to do, let the result be decided by our fate. “ [D]eath and life are predestined, and riches and honours depend on Heaven ” (XII, 5). Confucius’ concept of fate has deeply influenced the Chinese outlook on life, and Chinese optimism is rooted in Confucianism.

In conclusion. Confucius’ superior man is a product of his time, since Confucius is in a disorderly society. He hopes that the superior men can be exemplars of society, and through their moral influence the disorderly society can be reformed. Therefore superior men have to possess four virtues, i.e. human-heartedness, righteousness,

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<sup>28</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 34.

propriety, and wisdom, and through constant self-cultivation they can reach a higher realm of moral sentiment. When they are in office, people live and work in peace and contentment; when they retire from office, they will pay their attention to their own moral uplift. Finally, the superior man should understand fate, since the understanding of fate can give the human mind a spiritual sustenance.

## Chapter 6

### Autonomy and Uniqueness

Plato's account of the just man appeals to the soul's inner structure, which consists of reason, spirit, and appetite. A just man is the person whose reason is in control; his spirit, reason's natural auxiliary (441a), is in support of reason, and his appetite is regulated by the two elements or parts. Therefore, the notion of 'doing one's own job' applied to the just man will be that each of the three parts of soul will not interfere with one another, and will perform its own function in harmony with the others' (443d).

Confucius' account of the superior man, unlike Plato, does not appeal to the soul, instead he emphasizes that to be a superior man is to cleave to human-heartedness (*jen*), to behave in accordance with the rules of proper conduct (*li*), to be able to know how to act in specific situation (*yi*), and to continue to develop one's learning through one's life. Thus the notion of 'doing one's own job' applied to the superior man will be that the superior man "does not stray from his station" (XIV, 26). Although Plato and Confucius' ways of giving an account of the just man and the superior man are different, yet the goal they want to reach is the same. That is, the social order would be easily maintained when, for Plato, philosophy and politics are combined. And for Confucius, when the superior man is in office, the social order would be easily restored. In this chapter I shall discuss three topics to compare the differences and similarities between Plato's and Confucius' moral and political thought: firstly, the different approaches adopted by Plato and Confucius towards human nature; secondly, the different ways of understanding the self between Plato and Confucius, and thirdly, the idea that the just man and superior man should be rulers?

#### **1. The different approaches adopted by Plato and Confucius towards human nature**



In Book IV of the *Republic* we are told that human soul consists of three elements, i.e. reason, spirit, and appetite (435a-440b). The notion of the tripartite soul underpins Plato's view that there are three main kinds of individual. The soul of the first kind of individual is dominated by reason, the soul of the second kind is dominated by spirit, and the soul of the third kind is dominated by appetite. And this in turn underpins the class division in the state. So far as the application of the term justice both to the state and the individual goes (441d-e), the three classes in the ideal state, the Guardians, the Auxiliaries, and farmers and artisans, etc., correspond to the three elements of the soul, reason, spirit, and appetite. It is clear that for Plato one's place in the ideal state is decided by one's soul or nature (415a-c).

In the *Analects* we are told by Zigong, Confucius' disciple, that " [t]he Master's accomplishments one can get to hear about, but what he has to say about human nature and the way of Heaven one cannot get to hear about " (V, 13). The tentative reason why Confucius rarely talks of human nature and the way of Heaven might be that at Confucius' time assumptions about human nature and the way of Heaven were distorted and somewhat mysterious. And we know in the *Analects* that " Confucius never discussed strange phenomena, physical exploits, disorder, or spiritual beings " (VII, 20).<sup>1</sup> However one passage does reveal, although vaguely, Confucius' view on human nature, at XVII, 2 where Confucius says, " [b]y nature close to each other, but through practice far apart from each other." Because Confucius has little to say about human nature it is not clear how exactly he thinks men are all alike. Traditionally scholars take the view that the Confucian school asserts that human nature is originally good, and that by nature we are equal. The notion of ' natural equality ' is not only mentioned by Confucius, though only once in the *Analects*, but also mentioned by his successors, such as Mencius (c. 372-289 B.C.) and Hsun Tzu (c. 298-238 B.C.). Mencius says in the *Mencius* that " Yaou and Shun were just the same as other men " (IV, ii, 32)<sup>2</sup>, and that " [a]ll men may be Yaous and Shuns " (VI, ii, 2).<sup>3</sup> Yaou and Shun were sage-rulers in the past time, and Mencius' claim implies that there is no difference between ordinary people's nature and sage-ruler's nature. Shun

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<sup>1</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* ( Princeton, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> J. Legge, *The Four Books* (Hong Kong, 1966), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 278.

Tzu says,

Although a man may be the descendant of kings, dukes, or high court ministers, if he cannot adhere to ritual principles, he should be ranked among the commoners. Although a man may be the descendant of commoners, if he has acquired learning, is upright in conduct, and can adhere to ritual principles, he should be promoted to the post of prime minister or high court official.<sup>4</sup>

It is noticeable that Shun Tzu is opposed to traditional Confucian notion of human nature being originally good, instead he holds the view that human nature is originally bad. Nevertheless he agrees with the Confucian view on the point that men by nature are equal. By receiving proper education, even a commoner can be as virtuous as the sage-kings.

In Plato's view human nature or soul consists of reason, spirit, and appetite. Among them spirit and appetite are shared with animals. For both men and animals feel hunger and thirst, and both men and animals feel indignant and angry. Reason is the only part of the human soul which is unique to men and not shared with animals. Similarly, in the Aristotelian tradition there are three kinds of soul, i.e. the vegetative soul is found in plants, the sensitive soul is found in animals, but the rational soul is found only in men. In spite of their differences it can be seen that both Plato and Aristotle regard reason as the main trait of human nature. What is Confucian view on human nature? The answer to this question is not clear in the *Analects*, whereas in the *Mencius* we are told that " [a]ll men have a mind which cannot bear to *see the sufferings* of others " (II, i, 6).<sup>5</sup> Men's being unable to see the sufferings of others because they have the feeling of commiseration, and the possession of the feeling of commiseration is the manifestation of human-heartedness (*jen*). Thus human-heartedness may be regarded as part of Confucian view on human nature. In fact, Mencius' notion of the feeling of commiseration, in my point of view, is the extension of Confucian assertion that human-heartedness is to love others (XII, 22). The

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<sup>4</sup> B. Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York, 1967), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> J. Legge, *op. cit.* p. 75.

affection for others, for Confucius, is inborn, it is not something which men have to obtain from outside. And the essence of human-heartedness is what Confucius calls 'reciprocity' (IV, 15), which means that do not do to others what you would not like others to do to you (XII, 2; XV, 24). In other words, if you do not want yourself to suffer, then do not make others suffer either. It is noticeable that there is a sharp contrast between Plato and Confucius on human nature. The former regards human nature as the basis for the division of labour. But the latter does not mention the notion of human nature, instead Confucius puts lots of emphasis on humanity, i.e. human-heartedness is to love people. However Mencius claims that goodness is the essence of human nature (III, I, 1)<sup>6</sup>, and being unable to see others' suffering and having affection for others are the manifestations of the goodness of human nature.

Furthermore the affection for others is expressed in the superior man's feeling towards others, Confucius says,

[T]he humane man, wishing himself to be established, sees that others are established, and wishing himself to be successful, sees that others are successful. To be able to take one's own familiar feelings as a guide may definitely be called the method of humaneness. (VI, 30)

It can be seen that "the criterion of human-heartedness", as Ru Xin mentioned<sup>7</sup>, "is to be found in oneself, in one's nature," and the practice of human-heartedness is not forced by external institutions or law, the practice of it should be spontaneous. What is worth noting here is that Confucius, unlike Plato who appeals to the inner psychic harmony to give an account of the just man, holds that a just man is the combination of engaging in continuous self-cultivation, self-development, and having harmonious social relationships with others. The goal of continuous self-development can be achieved provided that

[T]he development of the individual is in conformity with social and ethical norms which are universally recognized and accepted in society. In other

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<sup>6</sup> J. Legge, *op. cit.* p. 234.

<sup>7</sup> Xin Ru, "The Unity of Man in Ancient Chinese Philosophy", *Diogenes*, 1987, p. 7.

words, the harmony of human relationships is a necessary presupposition of the moral growth of the individuals. And in order to maintain the balance and harmony of the individual on the one side and society on the other, self-restraint is always required.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of self-restraint or self-mastery is mentioned both in the *Republic* and the *Analects*. However the account of it in the *Republic* is quite different from that of it in the *Analects*. In the *Republic* self-mastery is taken to mean that

... that there is a better and a worse element in the personality of each individual, and that when the naturally better element controls the worse then the man is said to be “master of himself”, as a term of praise. (431a)

In other words, one person’s soul or nature being good or bad depends upon whether the three parts of his soul are in harmony, that is, “reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule” (442c-d). If reason does not rule, then one’s soul will be in a state of disorder, and the one who possesses a disorderly soul would be an unjust man. Plato’s appeal to natural difference, again, in contrast to Confucius, entails the fact that only the Guardians’ nature can be said to be genuinely good. The other two classes people’s natures which cannot satisfy the condition that reason is in control cannot be said to be truly good.

Confucius says that “ [t]o subdue oneself and return to ritual is to practise humaneness ” (XII, 1). The meaning of the subduing oneself here is that through self-cultivation one can overcome selfishness in the self. According to Legge,<sup>9</sup> this ‘selfishness in the self’ can be treated in three ways: first, it can be taken to mean a person’s natural constitution and disposition of mind; second, the desires of the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, that is, the dominant influences of the senses; third, you and I, the lust of superiority. And Legge thinks that to overcome one’s selfishness, in the Confucian view, is to overcome the excessive desires of the senses. This suggestion is supported, I think, by the Confucian saying that “ [d]o not look at what

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<sup>8</sup> Ru, op. cit. p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> J. Legge, *The Life and Teachings of Confucius* (London, 1895), p. 191.

is contrary to ritual, do not listen to what is contrary to ritual, do not speak what is contrary to ritual, and make no movement which is contrary to ritual ” (XII, 1) which makes explicit reference to the senses. Plato, unlike Confucius, does not have a notion of selfishness<sup>10</sup>, but Plato thinks that one’s excessive bodily desires should not be left unchecked. Plato’s notion of self-mastery is a process of overcoming internal conflict, at the end of the conflict the better part of one’s soul will win over the worse part, if one is called self-mastering. That is, to overcome one’s excessive bodily desires the appetitive element of the soul should be under the control of reason. The picture of Confucius’ account of human nature is quite different, as Fingarette points out,

There is, ..., no inner machinery or equilibrium of psychic forces, no inner theatre in which an inner drama takes place, no inner community with rule and ruled.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, self-mastery, for Confucius, is not a matter of one’s inner conflict one part will be in control of the other, but a matter of overcoming the influences of one’s senses, and return to “ the ordinations of man’s moral and intelligent nature in the line of what is proper.”<sup>12</sup> This will be the manifestation of human-heartedness.

Confucius, in contrast to Plato, does not divide man into two parts, soul and body, and does not think that there is a subdivision in man’s soul.<sup>13</sup> Confucius regards man as a whole without part. When Confucius therefore talks of self-mastery and self-cultivation, he is not referring to any part of man’s soul or body, but to man as a whole, and this difference leads to different approaches to the understanding of the self.

Before I proceed to discuss the second topic of this chapter, one point should be

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<sup>10</sup> However, Plato’ saying in the *Laws* that we have to avoid excessive self-love (*phengein to sphodra philein auton*) (732b), indicates that selfishness is a serious vice in our soul (732a). For right actions will always serve our interests, but selfishness often leads us to mistake what our best interests are.

<sup>11</sup> H. Fingarette, “ The Problem of the Self in the *Analects* ”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 29, 1979, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> However, Mencius thinks that there is a distinction between mind and body, see Part II, Chapter 4, Section 2, and Part V, Chapter 15, Section 1.

made. Virtue for Plato is a kind of ‘ intellectual virtue ’, that is, to know what virtue is will motivate one to act virtuously. Thus Plato emphasizes the superiority of reason, and the second stage of education serves to lead the philosophers to know the Good. A different picture however can be seen in Confucian philosophy. Virtue for Confucius is ‘ moral virtue ’ or ‘ virtue of the will ’, it emphasizes the importance of self-consciousness and self-examination. And the ideal personality can only be obtained through constant self-cultivation, and through the interactions with people. It is said in the *Great Learning* that self-cultivation is dependent upon the rectification of the mind, since

[W]hen one is affected by wrath to any extent, his mind will not be correct. When one is affected by fear to any extent, his mind will not be correct. When he is affected by fondness to any extent, his mind will not be correct. When he is affected by worries and anxieties, his mind will not be correct. When the mind is not present, we look but do not see, listen but do not hear, and eat but do not know the taste of the food. This is what is meant by saying that the cultivation of the personal life depends on the rectification of the mind. (Chapter 7)<sup>14</sup>

What this passage means is that our wrong-doings result from the fact that we are unable to set our mind straight. Without having the mind rectified it would be impossible for us to concentrate on studying the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Book of Music* (VII, 18; VIII, 8). Moreover a superior man is one who not only engages in self-cultivation but has harmonious relations with others. As D. J. Munro says that “ [t]he difference between the early Platonists and Confucians can be stated as follows: the Platonists were more concerned with knowing in order to understand, while the Confucians were more concerned with knowing in order to behave properly toward other men ”<sup>15</sup>, and that “ [f]or the Confucians, the foundations of all human virtues are the *li*, the rites or rules of

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<sup>14</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> D. J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (California, 1969), p. 54.

propriety”, and “ [f]or Plato, ‘ wisdom ’ was the source of all the specific virtue.”<sup>16</sup>

This difference also has its application in politics. Confucius appeals to the superior man in the hope that the model of the superior man can be an object of emulation to common people, and can have influence on the people. Confucius says that “ [t]he nature of the gentleman is as the wind, and the nature of the small man is as the grass. When the wind blows over the grass it always bends ” (XII, 19). On the contrary, a person being in office for Plato has always to be the one who possesses knowledge and is a lover of wisdom. Therefore to be in office is always secondary to having knowledge, in other words, to be in office is the by-product of possessing knowledge. The idea that the people should emulate their leaders is foreign to Plato, since, unlike Confucius, Plato denies the fact that the lower class people have the same nature as the Guardians’.

## **2. The different ways of understanding the self between Plato and Confucius**

It can be seen that the just man, in Plato’s view, can be identified by his inner psychic structure. And Plato puts this point strongly at 443c where he says that “ [j]ustice, ..., is a principle of this kind; its real concern is not with external actions, but with a man’s inward self, his true concern and interest.” Plato’s account of the just man implies that human beings have the capacity for rational decision and choice, provided that the right part of their soul, reason, is in charge. It also implies that a man can be understood without referring to others. Man’s soul seems to have its own autonomy, that is, it is self-governing and able to manage or resolve the possible conflict within it. It is worth noting that the language used above, the capacity for rational choice, does not suggest that Plato regards the notion of autonomy as the moral agent’s freely choosing a moral policy. As Kant would say, “ the principle of autonomy is ‘Never to choose except in such a way that in the same volition the

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<sup>16</sup> *op. cit.* p. 58.

maxims of your choice are also present as universal law’.”<sup>17</sup> For Plato personal autonomy does not rest upon one’s ability to choose but upon one’s own apprehension of the Good. A just man, who has a balanced soul and is capable of understanding the Form of the Good, is an autonomous individual. The just man’s understanding the Good therefore will enable him to be self-governed and to manage his own affairs, and make a decision on the basis of rationality.

It follows that in Plato’s view what constitutes a person’s self cannot be regarded as merely corporeal. The criterion of bodily identity is, for brevity, that if we ask whether person A before us is John whom we met yesterday, it will be a sufficient condition of an affirmative answer to know that A’s body is John’s body.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that this bodily criterion, for Plato, cannot be exclusive, but only conclusive, for personal identity. Socrates in the *Phaedo* says, when he is asked by Crito how to bury him,

‘However you wish,’ said he; ‘provided you catch me, that is, and I don’t get away from you.’ And with this he laughed quietly, looked towards us and said: ‘Friends, I can’t persuade Crito that I am Socrates here, the one who is now conversing and arranging each of the things being discussed; but he imagines I’m that dead body he’ll see in a little while, so he goes and asks how he’s to bury me! ....’ (115c-d)<sup>19</sup>

Socrates’ sharp distinction between the soul and the body is obvious in this passage. And one’s ‘true self’ is one’s soul, which in its good condition constitutes one’s well-being.<sup>20</sup>

Confucius, as mentioned, talks of the human soul or nature rarely. He is more interested in the interactions between person and person. To be a superior man is not,

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<sup>17</sup> I. Kant, *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, ch. II, (trans.) H. J. Paton, (London, 1995), p.101.

<sup>18</sup> T. Penelhum, “Personal Identity”, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5, (ed.) P. Edwards (London, 1967), p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> D. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvi.



in Confucian view, to be an autonomous individual whom can be understood or analyzed without referring to others, but is to have a harmonious relationship with others. This can be seen in the *Analects* where Confucius constantly talks of families, friends, rulers, and subordinates. Confucius says,

Filial piety and fraternal duty — surely they are the roots of humaneness. (I, 2)

Young men should be filial when at home and respectful to elders when away from home. They should be earnest and trustworthy. Although they should love the multitude far and wide, they should be intimate only with the humane. (I, 6)

[I]f in serving his father and mother he is capable of using his strength to the utmost, if in serving his lord he is capable of offering up his life, if in his dealings with friends he is trustworthy in what he says, I would certainly call him learned. (I, 7)

These passages reveal how one can achieve good quality in one's relationships with others, and the reason for the absence of human soul here would be that "Confucianism disdains the sense of individual pride and hubris prominent in Greek thought from Homer onward. There is even less room in the Confucian way for the intensely personal, overtly self-preoccupying, autonomous emphasis in many other strands of western thought."<sup>21</sup>

### 3. The just man should be ruler

Plato's emphasis on the natural difference between men and on the individual soul precludes the lower class from being able to be promoted to the upper class. The philosopher-kings are not models of emulation for people, they are regulators of people's life. They are special in that they are the only people who are able to see, in

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<sup>21</sup> R. Ketcham, *Individualism and Public Life: A Moral Dilemma* (Oxford, 1987) , p. 79.

the sense of seeing in the mind, the Form of the Good. By virtue of this knowledge of the good they can lay down regulations for others. Confucius, unlike Plato, does not regard the superior man as one who regulates the lives of others. Rather Confucius regards the superior man as a model for emulation. The superior man thus sends forth his influence on people. For example,

When gentlemen deal sincerely with their kinsfolk, then the people are stimulated towards humaneness. (VIII, 2)

Ji Kang Zi asked Master Kong about government. Master Kong replied: ‘ To govern means to correct. If you take the lead by being correct, who will dare not to be corrected?’ (XII, 17)

If one’s character is rectified, then things will get done without orders being issued. (XIII, 6)

Suppose one rectifies one’s own character, what difficulty does one have in participating in government. (XIII, 13)

Politics for Confucius is a matter of teaching others by one’s own example. The responsibility of the superior men in society is not to intervene or regulate people’s everyday life, but to set an example for them to emulate, and eventually everyone will be a superior man. Thus the characteristics of the autonomous individual are not important for Confucius, what is important here is that the superior man should be recognized by virtue of his relations and their quality.<sup>22</sup> It is by having good character and having quality relationships with others that a superior man can be a model for emulation, which means that the superior man has nothing qualitatively in common with others. They are *unique* in the sense of being able to stick to human-heartedness, so they can be identified as humane. Furthermore, due to the fact that the word human-heartedness in Chinese is composed of *two* and *men*, the uniqueness of the superior man will be “ irreducibly social ”.<sup>23</sup>

Plato’s just man is mainly recognized by referring to his balanced mental

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<sup>22</sup> R. T. Ames, “ Reflections on the Confucian Self: A response to Fingarette ”, *Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, (ed.) M. I. Bockover (Illinois, 1991), p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 109.

structure, his external behaviour constitutes his personal identity merely conclusively; on the contrary, the Confucian superior man can only be recognized in a social context, and there is little room for the Platonic soul in Confucian thought. Nevertheless, one thing on which both Plato and Confucius will agree is that the just man *ideally* should be ruler or in office.

We are told in the *Republic*,

The society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed, my dear Glaucon, of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers.

(473c-d)

The philosophers, as mentioned, are the only persons who are truly just in Plato's ideal state. The philosophers are the lovers of wisdom, who are able to understand the Forms through proper education. Their understanding of the Forms enables them to have a broader view over society and state as a whole. Thus the philosophers can make rational decisions on what is good for people and what is good for society as a whole. It is obvious that the presupposition of being a ruler, in Plato's view, is knowledge, and the ability of seeing the Forms is the main trait of the philosopher-kings (486d).

Confucius says that “ [a] gentleman does not behave as an implement ” (II, 12). An instrument has its own particular use, such as lamp is used for illumination. The function of lamp is confined to a particular field, illumination. And a lamp can only be lit by someone, that is, it is always used by someone. While Confucius does not think that a superior man, like an instrument, is used by others. The extended meaning of this passage thus is that

[T]he gentleman's training should not be confined to particular skills so that he may become the tool or implement of others. It must instead develop his

moral qualities and powers of leadership.<sup>24</sup>

It is said in the last chapter that the superior men can be taken to mean virtuous civil servants, for example,

The gentleman is easy to serve but difficult to please. If in trying to please him one does not accord with the Way, he is not pleased. (XIII, 25)

[W]hen a gentleman studies the Way, he loves his fellow-men.(XVII, 3)

Both Confucius and Plato agree that just man ideally has to be in office, but the primal concern of being a ruler for Plato and Confucius is different. The former thinks that knowledge is the central theme for being a philosopher-king; the latter thinks that self-cultivation is the central theme for being the superior man. However, as mentioned,<sup>25</sup> Confucius does not see that the superior man has necessarily to be in office. Even though both Plato and Confucius think that sage-king would be an ideal for achieving orderly society.

Throughout this chapter, the differences between Plato and Confucius' approach towards the just man can be summarized as follows: first of all, Confucian natural equality is different from Platonic natural difference. The result of this difference is that for Confucius everyone, as long as he makes his effort to cultivate himself, can be a superior man; on the contrary, for Plato it is impossible for a person whose nature is iron to be a genuinely just man, since to be a just man is to mean that one's nature is gold not iron, and one has a balanced soul. Secondly, Plato's appeal to human soul to give an account of just man is different from Confucius' being unwilling to talk about the soul. The result of this difference is that the self of Platonic just man can be identified without referring to others, it is itself an autonomous entity; the self of Confucian superior man cannot be identified without referring to others. The superior man can be recognized only because he is the only one of his type among others. Finally, for Plato, the ideal state can be realized only by

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<sup>24</sup> R. Dawson, *Confucius* (Oxford, 1981), p. 58; and R. Dawson, *Confucius: The Analects* (Oxford, 1993), note 2.12, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> See, Part II, Chapter 5, Section 1; and Part III, Chapter 9, Section 1.

the combination of philosophy and political power; and for Confucius, the superior man does not necessarily take part in politics. For the family is the society writ small. In spite of this difference both Plato and Confucius would agree that it would be an ideal that if the philosophers and the superior men are in power.

**Part III**  
**Philosopher as Ruler**

## Chapter 7

# Philosopher-King

Plato argues in the *Republic* that the order of the ideal state has to be maintained under the supervision of the philosopher-kings. The ideal or just state can come into being only when political power is in the hands of the philosophers (473d-e, 499b, 540d). Under the control of the philosophers the rule of 'each doing one job' will not be violated so that the social order can be preserved. However without a proper educational system there will be no philosophers. Thus Plato's educational system in the *Republic* serves not only to turn the youths with philosophical potentiality into true philosophers but also as the cornerstone of maintaining the unity of the state. For without education there will be no philosophers, and without the philosophers the social order will deteriorate. Similarly, on Plato's account of the tripartite soul, a balanced soul is one whose reason is in control. Reason being in control in the soul is the result of having proper education.

In this chapter I propose to discuss three points: firstly I would like to discuss the origin of Plato's doctrine of philosopher-king, to show that the doctrine of philosopher-king is mentioned not only in the *Republic* but also implicitly in the *Gorgias*. And to some extent the doctrine is influenced by the Pythagorean society. Secondly, the philosophers, according to Plato, are those who have a balanced soul. In this part I would like to explore Plato's theory of education to see how by receiving proper education the three elements, i.e. reason, spirit, and appetite, can be in harmony with one another. Finally, the fact that harmony in both the soul and the state is achieved by education may suggest that there is an *exact* parallel between the two. This leads to difficulties which have been noted by commentators such as B. Williams. I shall argue that these difficulties can be avoided if we see that Plato does not take the analogy between state and soul literally.

### 1. The origins of philosopher-king

The idea of philosopher-king is first explicitly brought out by Plato in the *Republic*, where Socrates is asked to show how his ideal state can be realized. Socrates says that “ ..., till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands, ...” (473d). Although the idea of philosopher-king is first explicitly mentioned in the *Republic*, yet it is not a newly invented idea for Plato. The idea can be traced back to the *Gorgias* or even to the Pythagorean society.<sup>1</sup>

In an early dialogue, the *Apology*, Socrates tells us why he does not engage in public affairs but gives advice and busies himself in people’s personal affairs. Socrates says,

The reason for this is ... — that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. .... It is this that debars me from entering public life, and a very good thing too, in my opinion, because you may be quite sure, gentlemen, that if I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing any good either to you or to myself. Please do not be offended if I tell you the truth. No man on earth who conscientiously opposes either you or any other organized democracy, and flatly prevents a great many wrongs and illegalities from taking place in the state to which he belongs, can possibly escape with his life. The true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone. (31c-32a)<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from the passage quoted that Socrates is opposed to or refuses to lead a life in which he has to engage in political affairs. As J. S. Morrison points out, Socrates’ peculiar view on distancing himself from politics in the *Apology* seems to be endorsed by Plato in the *Gorgias*.<sup>3</sup> When Socrates asks Callicles to answer the

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Morrison, “ The Origins of Plato’s Philosopher-Statesman ”, *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. VIII, 1958, pp. 198-218.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton, 1994), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.* p. 200.



question which life is the best, the political or the philosophical one, Socrates says,

... how a man should live. Is he to adopt the life to which you invite me, doing what you call a man's work, speaking in the assembly and practising oratory and engaging in politics ..., or should he follow my example and lead the life of a philosopher; ...? (500c)<sup>4</sup>

Plato's full support of philosophic life is ridiculed by Callicles at 484c, where Callicles says that " [p]hilosophy, Socrates, is a pretty toy, if one indulges in it with moderation at the right time of life; but if one pursues it further than one should it is absolute ruin." Moreover, at 485a-c Callicles keeps on saying that " when a man of maturer years remains devoted to this study (philosophy) the thing becomes absurd " and " when I see an older man still at philosophy and refusing to abandon it, that man seems to me, Socrates, to need a whipping." For

... such a person, however great his natural gifts, will never be a real man; shunning the busy life of the heart of the city and the meetings in which, as the poet says, ' men win renown ', he will spend the rest of his life in obscurity, whispering with three or four lads in a corner and never uttering any sentiment which is large or liberal or adequate to the occasion. (485d-e)

Socrates here seems to be accused by Callicles of encouraging people to lead a kind of unmanly or secluded life. It would be interesting to see how Socrates can answer Callicles' accusation, and since the *Gorgias* might be regarded as a transitional dialogue from Plato's early dialogues to his dialogues of middle period, it is important to see what Plato has in mind about the notion of philosopher-king at this stage.

Socrates says at 507a-e in the *Gorgias* that " [t]he man who is disciplined will behave with propriety towards God and man; ....", and the man who is not self-disciplined " will win the love neither of God nor of his fellow-men; he is incapable

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<sup>4</sup> W. Hamilton, *Plato: Gorgias* (London, 1971). The rest passages of the *Gorgias* in this chapter are quoted from Hamilton's translation.

of social life, and without social life there can be no love.” It seems to follow from this that the philosopher who is self-disciplined and upright will not, as in Callicles’ description, lead an unmanly life; and the self-disciplined and upright philosopher will be welcomed by his fellow countrymen. Socrates goes on saying that “ the man who is to be an orator in the proper sense must be upright and understand right and wrong ” (508c). It might not be clear that Socrates here explicitly introduces the notion of philosopher-king, whereas the idea presented in this passage “ would seem to be the feeling that the activities of the philosopher and the statesmen should not be separate.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, we are told by Socrates in the *Gorgias* that geometry plays a great part in the orderly universe. Socrates says,

We are told on good authority, Callicles, that heaven and earth and their inhabitants are held together by the bonds of society and love and order and discipline and righteousness, and that is why the universe is called an ordered whole or cosmos and not a state of disorder and license. You, I think, for all your cleverness, have failed to grasp the truth; you have not observed how great a part geometric equality plays in heaven and earth, .... (507e-508a)

As W. Hamilton points out, the authority referred to in this passage is Pythagorean.<sup>6</sup> The influence of the Pythagorean society on Plato can be seen not only from Aristotle’s writings,<sup>7</sup> but also in the central part of the *Republic* where Plato lays out the subjects — arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, astronomy, and harmonics, and finally dialectic — which are to be used to produce the philosopher. In fact, except the dialectic the rest of subjects can be associated with the Pythagorean *paideia*.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the idea of combining philosophy and political power in one man’s hand seems to be embodied by Pythagorean philosopher and mathematician, Archytas, who

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<sup>5</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.* p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> *Metaphysics* I (A), 987a29-30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 212.

was elected general seven times.<sup>9</sup> In my brief account of the origins of Platonic philosopher-king we can see that the influence of Pythagoreans on the Platonic education programme for the future philosopher-kings is undoubted, and although the idea of philosopher-king is not overtly expressed in the *Gorgias*, yet we can still find the passages quoted as the transitional point from the *Apology*, “ the true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone ”, to the *Republic*, “ the transformation can be effected by a single change, but it’s hardly a small or easy one, though it is possible ” (473c). The small but hard change is Plato’s ideal that philosophy and political power have to be in one and the same hand.

## 2. The education of the soul

Before I enter into the discussion of the education of the tripartite soul, I would like to first discuss the point, whether in Plato’s mind the term ‘ character ’ and the term ‘ nature ’ are different from each other. R. S., Peters, says in “ Moral Education and the Psychology of Character ” that

Character-traits are shown in the sort of things a man can *decide* to be, where it may be a matter of forcing himself to do something in the face of social pressures or persistent temptations. In this way a man’s character is contrast with his nature. A man just is stupid or lacking in vitality; he cannot decide to be either of these. But he can decide to be more or less honest or selfish. His inclinations and desires, which are part of his ‘nature’, may suggest goals; but such inclinations and desires only enter into what we call a man’s ‘character’ in so far as he chooses to satisfy them in a certain

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<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, (ed.) S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford, 1996), p. 150. For a view on the relation between Plato and Archytas, and whether Plato is or is not influenced by the Pythagoreans see, G. E. R. Lloyd, “ Plato and Archytas in the Seventh Letter ”, *Phronesis*, 1990, pp. 159-174.

manner, in accordance with rules of efficiency ..., or in accordance with rules of social appropriateness ....<sup>10</sup>

Peters claims that a desire for money, for example, reveals a person's nature, but his character is revealed in the manner in which he carries out the desire for getting money. Therefore he might get the money he wants dishonestly, if his way of satisfying his desire is not in accordance with laws. However it might not be the case for Plato. For Plato would not distinguish between nature and character in the way that Peters does. He holds that in the ideal state each class needs both the right natural qualities and the right education. Right after his discussion of the first stage of education, at 415 a-d he says that those who possess gold in their nature should be the Guardians, those whose nature is silver should be the Auxiliaries, and those who possess bronze and iron in their nature should be the farmers and artisans, etc.. That is, how the three classes behave will be decided by their natures and upbringing. And in Books VIII and IX the different types of individuals, i.e. the timarchic man, the oligarchic man, the democratic man, and the tyrannical man, are distinguished according to what part of the soul is dominant. But this seems to be determined by nature and by upbringing. Therefore the difference between one's nature and character, for Plato, is blurred. A person who by nature craves for luxurious food will decide to get the food at whatever expense in that his reason is under the control of appetitive desire. Surely character is the product of the combination of nature and upbringing, and it is character which determines behaviour. Thus, in Plato's writing we can find an ambiguity about whether we require some kind of character from nature.

The term character or personality has two general meanings. First, a person is the combination of qualities which constitute some kind of cohesive unity. Second, the combination of qualities makes a person different from others, that is, he has some distinct individuality.<sup>11</sup> Plato's lack of interest in the concept of individuality is overtly expressed when Socrates is taken to task by Adeimantus for not making the

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<sup>10</sup> R. S. Peters, "Moral Education and the Psychology of Character", *Philosophy*, 1962, pp. 38-9.

<sup>11</sup> C. Gill, "Plato and the Education of Character", *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie*, vol. 67, 1985, pp. 1-2

Guardians happy (419a). As we saw in chapter 1, Plato says, the purpose in founding the ideal state is not to promote the particular happiness of one class, but of the community as a whole (420b, 466a, 519e). This would suggest that the educational programme proposed in the *Republic* is not to serve to develop each person's individuality, but to produce an integrated psychic whole. That is, in the soul the three parts can be in harmony with one another, and likewise, in the state the three classes can work harmoniously and cooperatively with one another. What follows I shall concentrate on the issue: How by education the three parts of the soul can be in harmony with one another?

#### (a) The education of the spirited part

Plato's educational system is divided into two stages: the first stage is literary and physical education, and the second stage is education of the philosopher or intellectual education. The aim of the first stage is to train the young guardian's body and to educate his mind and character (376e). With regard to literary education, an important part of this education is played by poetry, narrative, and music. Plato contends that the inappropriate verse and prose should not be used in educating the young guardians. For they are not useful in encouraging them to be *sophron* (390a). Does the first stage aim at educating the soul as a whole or it aim at a single part of the soul? The answer to this question can be found at 375a-376c, where the guardians are compared to watch-dogs. Plato says: " the natural qualities needed in a well-bred watch-dog have a certain similarity to those which a good young man needs for guardian-duty " (375a). What kind of qualities are needed both in a well-bred watch-dog and the guardians? They are high spirit, speed, strength, and philosophical disposition. As Gill claims, the first stage of education serves to educate the young guardians whose dominant tendency is the *thumoeides* element.<sup>12</sup> The spirited part is not only designated as the element with which we get angry (436a, 439e), but as the source of being courageous (375a), and as ambition or the love of honour (581a). The first stage of education is to educate the spirited part to listen to and cling fast to " the orders of reason " (442c), and to be the ally of reason (441a).

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<sup>12</sup> Gill, *op. cit.* p. 9.

However the requirement that the young guardians possess a philosophical disposition does not mean that at this stage the young guardians are required to be analytical and critical to the norms being presented. What they are required to do is to “retain principles laid down by the educator about what should, and what should not, be feared.”<sup>13</sup> Thus at this stage the young guardians can at best have belief, not knowledge, about what is right or wrong. To instill the right beliefs in the mind of the young guardians is to expose them in the right kind of music, poetry, and narrative. For

[A]ll man-made objects and cultural forms (including visible objects like paintings and buildings as well as the cultural forms whose effect was already being recognized) are representative, in some ways, of ethical qualities, and thus contribute to the formation of the child’s character.<sup>14</sup>

And at this stage of education the young guardians are not required to understand the principles laid down by the educator. Whereas through the education they become *habituated* to behaving in accordance with those principles. Thus the philosophical disposition required at this stage is no more than a passive rational capacity, the ability to appreciate the moral principles without any reflection presented in the first stage of education.<sup>15</sup>

#### **(b)The education of the calculating part**

This stage, unlike the first stage which is habitative in method, is intellectual in nature. The second stage of education is to enable the future philosophers to see the Forms and to give a coherent account of what they know. But why does Plato have to emphasize this stage of education? Plato thinks that without being able to see the Forms the philosophers are unable to lay down rules in *this* world about what is right and what is wrong. Plato says,

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<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Gill, *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13

But surely “blind” is just how you would describe men who have no true knowledge of reality, and no clear standard of perfection in their mind to which they can turn, as a painter turns to his model, and which they can study closely before they start laying down rules in this world about what is admirable or right or good where such rules are needed, or maintaining, as Guardians, any that already exist. (484d)

Thus it is necessary for the philosophers to see the Forms, because seeing the Forms will make them closer to reality (514c), and will enable them to make proper judgements about this-world affairs. It is clear that the faculty with which the philosophers are able to see the Forms is reason. So this stage is the education of reason. To see the Forms will actualize the potentiality of reason,<sup>16</sup> that is, it will have wisdom and foresight to act for the soul as a whole (441e). Similarly, the philosopher’s seeing the Forms will not make them interested in the special welfare of any particular class in the ideal state, but that of the state as a whole (519e).

Two points need to be noted. First, the language used here clearly indicates that for Plato theoretical wisdom will entail practical wisdom. As Kahn points out, Plato does not make the distinction between these two types of wisdom.<sup>17</sup> For in Plato’s view reason is not only a desire for the knowledge of the Good but a desire for the good. That is, to know the Form of Justice will motivate the philosophers to act justly. However although by not distinguishing between theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom Plato makes the philosophers perfect candidates for the government, one question still has to be answered. How is the philosopher who has theoretical wisdom able to know when, for example, to raise the interest rate better than an economic expert? I suppose that Plato might think that details of economic policy were a matter of *techné* rather than philosophical wisdom. In the *Gorgias* Socrates questions Gorgias about his professional expertise, rhetoric. Professional expertise or *techné* is said to be transmissible, that is, an orator can teach others to be able to practice the skill of rhetoric (449a-b). And a *techné* has its specific product. Weaving is concerned with the production of clothes, and music with the creation of melodies (449c).

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<sup>16</sup> Gill, *op. cit.* p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> C. Kahn, “The Theory of Desire”, *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. XLI, 1987, p. 82.

Philosophic wisdom however, for Plato, is not limited in a specific field. When the philosopher makes a decision he will take all situations into account. Thus the philosopher, unlike the economic expert who is only specialized in economic issues, will take the society as a whole into account when he makes a judgement on raising the interest rate. Second, Plato's emphasis on the capacity of knowing the Forms is not to lead the philosophers to criticize and reject the values and the norms by which they organize their state, but to uncover the meanings of moral terms, such as justice, courage, and wisdom, etc.. Gill asserts that this leaves Plato's psychological theory with an odd combination of emphasis. Gill says,

He [Plato] lays great stress on the idea that an individual should learn to think for himself (if his intellectual education is to be complete), but he does not seem to expect these thoughts to lead to any individual conclusions about the way to organize his life.<sup>18</sup>

I agree with the latter part of Gill's assertion, but the former part could be misleading. It is true that those destined to be philosopher rulers must see the truth for themselves (as opposed to accepting beliefs from others), but they are not expected to think for themselves in the sense of showing originality. Equally they are not supposed to think for themselves in the sense of paying special attention to their own private concerns. For after completing his intellectual education the philosopher has to take up the job of government when his turn comes (540b). Although the philosophers will be happier if they live the contemplative life, yet it is necessary for them to rule the state. For it would be disastrous that if the state is ruled by a worse man (347c). Thus the philosophers who have completed their intellectual education will not only think for themselves, but of the state as a whole. The philosophers' taking up the job of government is not only beneficial to themselves but also to the state as a whole. Due to the fact that the philosophers identify their own interests with those of the state as a whole, by taking up the job of government they do not sacrifice their own interests. For what is good for the state as a whole will be good for the

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<sup>18</sup> Gill, *op. cit.* p. 18



philosophers. Therefore the intellectual education will enable the philosophers to seek the goods of the state as a whole, and in the meantime their own goods are fulfilled..

### **(c) The education of the appetitive part**

What is the educational programme for the appetitive part? After discussing the two stages of education it seems natural to ask this question. If there is no educational programme for appetite then how Plato is able to say that after receiving the intellectual education the harmonious soul is achieved. It is said at 439d that the appetitive element is irrational, and it might get too large and strong to mind its own business and try to subject and control the other elements, and so wreck the life of all of them (442a-b). Thus the irrational appetite seems to be uneducatable. However if the inner harmony can really be achieved then there should be certain method to train or educate the appetitive part. The passage at 588c-589b gives us the clue how the appetitive part can be trained. The tripartite soul is presented by the Beast image. The man represents reason, the lion represents spirit, and the many-headed beast represents appetite. Thus to have a balanced soul is not only for reason to make an ally of the lion, but also to nurse and cultivate the beast's tamer elements and prevent the wilder ones growing. A balanced soul is one in which the unnecessary desires have to be starved away and the necessary ones have to be nurtured. In other words, the method of educating the appetitive part is to direct the attention to those necessary desires whereas allowing the unnecessary desires to wither away through negligence. The idea that appetite is educated by directing the attention to the necessary appetitive desires has already been mentioned at 485d, where Plato says,

But we know that if a man's desires set strongly in one direction, they are correspondingly less strong in other directions, like a stream whose water has been diverted into another channel.

Thus if a person's desires set in acquisition of knowledge, then his desires for physical pleasures, such as good food, sex, etc., will wither. Consequently, the inner conflict among the three parts of the soul will never happen. It is worth noting here that Plato's emphasis on the withering away of the unnecessary desires shows that he

does not assert a kind of asceticism. For Plato allows some healthy and necessary desires to be fulfilled to some extent. And if the soul as a whole follows the rule of reason, then each part of it “ will enjoy its own particular pleasures, which are the best and truest available to it ” (586e-587a).

In the soul, the appetitive part has to be controlled and directed by reason, for it is purely irrational. Similarly, in the ideal state the third class, the farmers and artisans, have to listen to the order or command of the philosopher-kings. In the ideal state everyone has to do one job for which he or she is suited. Thus both the Guardians and the Auxiliaries have received the proper education, which enables them to carry out their social functions properly. However what is the education for the third class? Is it possible for the farmers and artisans to perform their functions without giving them proper training? The answer to this is brought out by Socrates when he shows that the Guardians are the best citizens in the ideal state, Socrates says,

Then in our imaginary state which will produce the better men — the education which we have prescribed for the Guardians or the training our shoemakers get? (456d)

It is unclear whether the training for the shoemakers involves moral training. Hourani claims that the above passage is “ an example which shows that the craftsmen in general receive a technical education.”<sup>19</sup> However, it could be argued that the craftsmen need more than a purely technical education if they are to perform their functions well. The aim of education for Plato is to consolidate the order of the state, and only when all the three classes have received proper education which enables them to perform their distinct functions, can the happiness of the state as a whole and that of the individual be achieved. As Plato says,

If it is, our Guardians and Auxiliaries must be compelled to act accordingly and be persuaded, as indeed must everyone else, that it is their business to perfect themselves in their own particular job; then our state will be built on

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<sup>19</sup> G. F. Hourani, “ The Education of the Third Class in Plato’s *Republic* ”, *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. XLIII, 1949, p. 59.

the right basis, and, as it grows, we can leave each class to enjoy the share of happiness its nature permits. (421c)

This passage may offer an answer, I think, to B. Williams' question. When he talks of the analogy of city and soul in the *Republic* he says, " [i]nner peace is what Plato must want, but that in the political case requires the allegiance of the epithymetic element, and we are back to the question of how we are to picture that being secured."<sup>20</sup> The three classes will stick to their stations for which they are naturally suited. And to perform their functions well is to fulfill their natures, so they will have their shares of happiness and the happiness of the state as a whole can also be preserved. If the third class are trained to perform their functions that will enable them to fulfill their natural capacities. They will recognize that doing their own jobs and not being meddlesome will do both the state and themselves good.

### 3. The analogy of state and soul

However, the final sentence of the passage quoted above seems to cause some problem. That is, the sentence ' we can leave each class to enjoy the share of happiness its nature permits ' seems to tell us that the philosophers can enjoy the pleasures of contemplating the Forms, the Auxiliaries can enjoy the pleasure of competition, and the farmers and artisans can enjoy physical pleasures. If we take the analogy of the state and the individual seriously, then reason will enjoy itself in seeing the Forms, spirit will enjoy itself in pursuing honours, and appetite will enjoy itself in satisfying its appetitive desires to the full extent. If it were the case, then it would be hard to imagine how the harmonious soul and state can be possibly achieved. Therefore if Plato takes the analogy seriously he has to answer this question: How can the inner harmony both in the soul and in the state be achieved if the three elements are left to, following their natures, fulfill their desires?

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<sup>20</sup> B. Williams, " The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic* ", *Exegesis and Argument*, (ed.) Lee, Mourelatos, and Rorty, 1973, p. 202.

It might be easier to solve the problem in the political case. For in the ideal state one man has to do one job for which he is by nature suited. It follows that if a shoemaker can perform his function well, i.e. making shoes, then he can have self-fulfillment. Therefore what the sentence at 421c says is that as long as one man does one job for which he is naturally suited he can fulfill his nature. However it would be odd to say that as long as the appetitive part of the soul does its own job it can fulfill its own nature. For to fulfill the nature of the appetitive part will be to allow appetite to desire whatever it wants excessively. I think however that the oddity can be solved if we read this passage together with the passage 586e-587a, where Plato says,

Then if the mind as a whole will follow the lead of its philosophical element, without internal division, each element will be just and in all other respects perform its own function, and in addition will enjoy its own particular pleasures, which are the best and truest available to it.

The idea that the three parts of the soul, when each of them doing its own job, can enjoy its own pleasures which are *the best and truest* available to it, shows that the three parts of the soul, even though they do their own jobs, can only enjoy the happiness which is the truest available to them. The reason for this, I think, lies in the fact that although reason and spirit are functionally defined as their counterparts, the Guardians and the Auxiliaries, in the state, yet it is unclear what is the function of appetite. For in the state the third class, the farmers and artisans, have their different functions, whereas the function of appetite seems to be the desires for food, drink, and any physical pleasure. But it cannot be the function of appetite to pursue excessive pleasures. Plato, I think, is clearly aware of this oddity, and that is the reason why he has to emphasize that the three parts of the soul have to enjoy those of their own pleasures the *truest* and the *best* for them (587a).

B. Williams, in “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato’s *Republic*”, says that there are obstacles to make sense of Plato’s analogy.<sup>21</sup> However, as mentioned above, it is arguable whether Plato himself take the analogy seriously and literally. In the

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<sup>21</sup> *op. cit.* pp. 196-206.

state there is a degree of rationality existing among the three classes, for each individual possesses reason, spirit, and appetite in his or her mind. To what class he or she belongs will be determined by which part of soul is dominant in the soul. It does not mean however that the degree of rationality has to be applied to the tripartite soul. For in my account of the education of the tripartite soul only reason has rationality and the capacity of calculation, the other two parts, spirit and appetite, do not have any calculative ability at all. The first stage of education simply makes spirit listen to the voice of reason without any reflection, and the education of appetite is to nurture the necessary desires and wither away the unnecessary ones. Therefore on this account we do not have to face the problem of homunculi,<sup>22</sup> and to suggest that there is an internal communication<sup>23</sup> within the soul.

Without education the harmony of the soul and the state can never be realized. In the state although each individual's social position is determined by his or her nature, yet to make the individual's natural capacity fully function will need education. Each class has its particular educational programme to follow, which will enable people to perform their distinct functions properly. Therefore the orderly state can be realized when the three classes mind their own business and agree on who should rule. Similarly, the harmony of the soul can be achieved when each part of it receives education and does its own job. However, the three parts of the soul, unlike the three classes in the state, cannot have an internal communication to decide who should rule. The rule of reason is the result of proper education for by education the irrational appetite will be kept in control. Although Plato constantly appeals to the analogy of state and soul, yet it is not necessary to think that Plato takes it seriously in every respect. For if my analysis is right then the differences between Plato's education programme for the appetitive part in the soul and that for the third class in the state will make sense.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 142-6.

<sup>23</sup> J. Moline, "Plato on the Complexity of the Psyche", *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie*, vol. 60, 1978, p. 14.

## Chapter 8

# Inner Sage Outer King

We are told of the idea of the inner sage and outer king in the *Shu Ching (The Book of Documents)* that

Examining into antiquity, we find that the Emperor Yao was called Fanghsun. He was reverent, intelligent, accomplished, sincere, and mild. He was sincerely respectful, and capable of modesty. His light covered the four extremities of the empire and extended to Heaven above and the earth below. He was able to make bright his great virtue, and bring affection to the nine branches of the family. When the nine branches of the family had become harmonious, he distinguished and honored the hundred clans. When the hundred clans had become illustrious, he harmonized the myriad states. The numerous people were amply nourished and prosperous and became harmonious.<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt all the qualities embodied in Yao are required by Confucius for a ruler to be a Confucian ruler, that is, a good or virtuous ruler who loves the people, and possesses a reverent and thoughtful manner, intelligence, and modesty. Although Confucius humbly says at VII, 34 in the *Analects* that “ [a]s for being a sage or a humane man, I would surely not presume to be such ”, and “ [a] sage I have not been able to meet ” (VII, 26), yet the idea of the sage-king is deeply implanted in Confucian socio-political thought. In this chapter I would like to discuss three topics in the Confucian notion of the inner sage and outer king: firstly, self-cultivation is the prerequisite for the inner sage; secondly, outer king: the practice of the inner sage, and finally, the notion of authority-as-model.

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<sup>1</sup> Wm. Theodore De Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (compiled), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. I (New York, 1960), p. 8.

## 1. Self-cultivation is the prerequisite for inner sage

The notion of the inner sage and outer king is not an idea peculiar to Confucianism, it is also expressed in Taoism.<sup>2</sup> However, it is without any doubt the central idea in Confucian socio-political thought. In the text of the *Great Learning*<sup>3</sup> we are told that

The Way of learning to be great (or adult education) consists in manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good.

Only after knowing what to abide in can one be calm. Only after having been calm can one be tranquil. Only after having achieved tranquillity can one have peaceful repose. Only after having peaceful repose can one begin to deliberate. Only after deliberation can the end be attained. Things have their roots and branches. Affairs have their beginnings and their ends. To know what is first and what is last will lead one near the Way.

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. When things are investigated knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the mind is rectified; when the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world. From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> See Wing-tsit Chan's *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86-7.

There is never a case when the root is in disorder and yet the branches are in order. There has never been a case when what is treated with great importance becomes a matter of slight importance or what is treated with slight importance becomes a matter of great importance.

The purpose of running the text is to illustrate the consistency between the three requirements and the eight steps.<sup>4</sup>

The three requirements are: manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good.

The eight steps are: the investigation of things, extension of knowledge, sincerity of the will, rectification of the mind, cultivation of the personal life, regulation of the family, order of the state, and peace through the world.

It can be seen that both the three requirements and the eight steps are concerned with the balance between the individual on the one side and the society on the other. That is to say, manifesting a clear character, and the first five of the eight steps concern the inner sageliness; and loving the people, abiding in the highest good, and the last three of the eight steps concern outer kingliness.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the basis for an orderly society to be achieved is that "from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation." Thus the realization of the sage-king will primarily depend upon the individual's self-cultivation.

Self-cultivation, for Confucius, focuses on the realization of human-heartedness, which is basically linked with the self-fulfilling process of an individual. In other words, in order to achieve the ideal of inner sageliness one has to undergo a process of self-cultivation. To undergo the process of self-cultivation is for one to uncover the human-heartedness buried in one's nature. Therefore, Confucius says that "[w]hat the gentleman seeks in himself the small man seeks in others" (XV, 21). Human-

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<sup>4</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p.84.

<sup>5</sup> Shu-hsien Liu, "On the Confucian Ideal of 'Sageliness Within and Kingliness Without', *Proceedings of The International Symposium on Confucianism and The Modern World* (Taipei, 1987), p.402.



heartedness is not far away from us in that if we ourselves wanted human-heartedness, then it would arrive (VII, 30). Human-heartedness is not something alien to us, but it is something we possess at birth. Mencius says,

If man does evil, it is not the fault of his natural endowment. The feeling of commiseration is found in all men; the feeling of shame and dislike is found in all men; the feeling of respect and reverence is found in all men; and the feeling of right and wrong is found in all men. The feeling of commiseration is what we call humanity; the feeling of shame and dislike is what we call righteousness; the feeling of respect and reverence is what we call propriety (*li*), and the feeling of right and wrong is what we call wisdom. Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not drilled into us from outside. We originally have them with us.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, self-cultivation is to engage in the process of finding the four beginnings in human nature, i.e. humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. It would be worth noting that Mencius' assertion of the four beginnings is a development of the Confucian notion of human-heartedness. For, in Confucius' view, a humane man will naturally be a man who is righteous, self-restrained, and wise. As Tu Wei-ming says, the four beginnings can be regarded as “ a progressive articulation of the concept of humanity (*jen*) .”<sup>7</sup> Consequently, “ [i]f these four beginnings are allowed to reach their complete development in a man, he becomes a Sage.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Outer king: the practice of the inner sage

Rediscovering human-heartedness in oneself requires us to engage in self-cultivation,

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<sup>6</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p.54.

<sup>7</sup> Wei-ming Tu, “ The Fiduciary Community ”, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, 1989), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. I (Princeton, 1983), p. 121.

but the application of human-heartedness to others needs the practice of propriety. Human-heartedness and propriety are not two notions conflicting with each other, but supplementary to each other. Confucius says that “ [t]o subdue oneself and return to ritual is to practise humanness ” (XII, 1). That is, to practice human-heartedness requires people to not look at what is contrary to propriety, not listen to what is contrary to propriety, not speak what is contrary to propriety, and make no movement which is contrary to propriety (XII, 1). Thus, a humane man can act in accordance with the rule of propriety so he is not far from being a sage-king, in that

Humanity (*jen*) and propriety (*li*) are the two pillars of Confucius’ thought, they are inseparable from the practice of personal cultivation and the ideal of sageliness within and kingliness without. While humanity was Confucius’ ultimate concern and propriety its outward manifestation, Confucius’ ideal was none other than to realize the humanity within oneself (sageliness within) and extend this humanity to others (kingliness without) through the practice of propriety which has its origin in the self; and a sage is none other than a person who can realize the humanity in himself and extend this humanity to others.<sup>9</sup>

The consistency between the notion of the inner sage and that of the outer king is also expressed in the *Doctrine of The Mean*, where the Master says,

Love of learning is akin to wisdom. To practice with vigor is akin to humanity. To know to be shameful is akin to energy. He who knows these three things, knows how to cultivate his personal life. Knowing how to cultivate his personal life, he knows how to govern other men. And knowing how to govern other men, he knows how to govern the empire, its states, and the families. (Chapter XX)<sup>10</sup>

If we take for granted the Confucian idea that politics is the extension of morality,

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<sup>9</sup> Liu, *op. cit.* p. 403.

<sup>10</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 105. Also see the *Analects* XIV, 28.

then it will logically follow that social stability and harmony require that the true king be a sage. For Confucius disavows ruling by law or punishment, but advocates ruling by virtue. Confucius says in the *Analects*,

If you lead them by means of government and keep order among them by means of punishments, the people are without conscience in evading them. If you lead them by means of virtue and keep order among them by means of ritual, they have a conscience and moreover will submit. (II, 3)

How can a ruler rule by virtue? Or what method can a ruler adopt to rule by virtue? Confucius in the *Doctrine of The Mean* lays down nine standards, which have to be followed by all the rulers. The standards are: 1) cultivating the personal life, 2) honoring the worthy, 3) being affectionate to relatives, 4) being respectful toward the great ministers, 5) identifying oneself with the welfare of the whole body of officers, 6) treating the common people as one's own children, 7) attracting the various artisans, 8) showing tenderness to strangers from far countries, and 9) extending kindly and awesome influence on the feudal lords (XX).<sup>11</sup>

The nine standards of ruling can be discussed in the following three headings: firstly, the ruler has to set an example; secondly, the ruler should rule by virtue and propriety, and finally, the ruler should be able to promote the quality and talent, and treat his ministers in accordance with propriety.<sup>12</sup>

The ruler himself has to engage in self-cultivation because Confucius says in the *Analects* that "if one's character is not rectified, then although orders are issued they are not followed" (XIII, 6). Thus when Confucius was asked by Ji Kang Zi about government he says,

To govern means to correct. If you take the lead by being correct, who will dare not to be corrected? (XII, 17)

Confucius says again,

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<sup>11</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> Yih-jing Lin, *The Exploration of Confucian Thought* (Taipei, 1987), pp. 50-6.

Suppose one rectified one's own character, what difficulty does one have in participating in government. If one cannot rectify one's own character, what has one to do with rectifying others. (XIII, 13)

It can be seen that the idea of setting an example for the people to follow is important in Confucius' thought. For rectifying one's character is to require one to act in accordance with propriety, and if a ruler can rectify his character, and acts according to the rule of propriety, then "the people will be easy to command" (XIV, 41).

Secondly, the idea that the ruler should rule by virtue and propriety is also expressed strongly in the *Analects*, where Confucius says,

The practice of government by means of virtue may be compared with the pole-star, which the multitudinous stars pay homage to while it stays in its place. (II, 1)

You are running the government, so what is the point of killing? if you desire good, the people will be good. The nature of the gentleman is as the wind, and the nature of the small man is as the grass. When the wind blows over the grass it always bends. (XII, 19)

It is obvious that Confucius is opposed to ruling by means of punishment, and it would be even more difficult for Confucius to accept the idea that killing can be taken to be a means of ruling. For, in Confucius' view, society is the extension of the family. What is done in the society will be similar to what is done in the family.<sup>13</sup> If it is immoral for a father to kill his son, then equally it will be immoral for the ruler to kill his people. The ruler has to deal with the people as his own children, that is, the relationship between the two sides should have love and affection involved. Therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> See the ninth commentary of the *Great Learning*, where it is said that "[w]hat is meant by 'in order rightly to govern the State, it is necessary first to regulate the family,' is this: — It is not possible for one to teach others, while he cannot teach his own family. Therefore, the ruler, without going beyond his family, completes the lessons for the State", and that "[f]rom the loving *example* of one family a whole State becomes loving, and from its courtesies the whole State becomes courteous, ...." J. Legge, *op. cit.* p. 370.

Mencius says that the one who can unite a country “ has no pleasure in killing men ” (I, i, 6).<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the ruler should rule in accordance with propriety. For the order and stability of the society can only be achieved, for Confucius, when a ruler is a ruler, a minister a minister, a father a father, a son a son (XII, 11). Propriety is the cornerstone of social order, the decline of propriety indicates the decay of the society. If the ruler cannot act according to the rule of propriety then it will be the disaster for society; on the contrary, if the ruler can act or govern in accordance with propriety that will bring the well-being of society. Confucius says,

If one is courteous but does without ritual, then one dissipates one’s energies; if one is cautious but does without ritual, then one becomes timid; if one is bold but does without ritual, then one becomes reckless; if one is forthright but does without ritual, then one becomes rude. When gentlemen deal sincerely with their kinfolk, then the people are stimulated towards humaneness. When old friends are not neglected, then the people will not behave irresponsibly. (VIII, 2)

The true king should not be timid, reckless, and rude towards the people, but be kind and affectionate towards them. For the social order is not built on a one-way basis, that is, the ruler has absolute authority over the ruled, but on a reciprocal basis. That is, it is only when the ruler can exert himself to govern according to the rule of propriety that the authority of the ruler can be approved by the people who will follow the ruler and act accordingly.

Finally, the ruler should treat the ministers in accordance with propriety, and promote the quality and talent. It is said in the *Analects*,

Duke Ai asked: ‘ What action does one take so that the people will be obedient?’ Master Kong replied saying: ‘ If you promote the straight and set them above the crooked, then the people will be obedient. If you promote the

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<sup>14</sup> J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, 1970), p. 136.

crooked and set them above the straight, then the people will not be obedient.' (II, 19)

Duke Ding asked how rulers should employ ministers, and how ministers should serve rulers. Master Kong replied: ' Rulers in employing ministers do so in accordance with ritual, and ministers in serving rulers do so in accordance with loyalty.' (III, 19)

Zhonggong, being steward to the Ji family, asked about government. The Master said: ' Give a lead to your officials, pardon minor errors, and promote men of quality and talent.' (XIII, 2)

Although a good government requires, in Confucius' view, a virtuous ruler, yet without the help of good administrative ministers the governor will get half the result with twice the effort. Thus a true king is capable of promoting the men of quality and talent which will make his ruling get twice the result with half the effort. The ruler has to treat his ministers with kindness and respect so that his order can be implemented efficiently by them in return. Again, the relationship between ruler and minister is not that one issues command and the other carries out the command. Rather the relationship should be a reciprocal one, that is, the ruler should employ the ministers with respect and in accordance with propriety, and the ministers should in return serve the ruler in accordance with loyalty.

It should be noticed that through the discussion of the nine standards of ruling we can see that the underlying idea of the claim of the nine standards is the idea of reciprocity.<sup>15</sup> The true king does not gain his authority over the people by virtue of military force, but by being virtuous. And he always acts on behalf of the people so the people are willing to follow and obey him. Thus the difference between true king and despot is virtue. As Mencius says that " [a] ruler who uses force to make a pretense at humanity is a despot. .... A ruler who practices humanity with virtue is a true king " (2A:3).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Tu, *op. cit.* p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p.64.

### 3. The notion of authority-as-model

The terms 'inner sage' and 'outer king' are never used by Confucius in the *Analects*, nevertheless the ideas prevail implicitly in Confucian socio-political thought. The idea of the inner sage requires the rulers to dig out human-heartedness in themselves, i.e. to undergo the process of self-cultivation; and the idea of the outer king is to extend human-heartedness towards others. It is obvious, for Confucius, that the extension human-heartedness towards others is not by means of coercion, but by means of setting a model or exemplar people can follow (II, 1; XII, 17). Due to the fact that Confucius never mentions the term 'model' or 'exemplar', it would be worthwhile for us to see what it would mean to Confucius.

When we say that someone is a model or exemplar, we are meant to say that the person as a model will illustrate what others are to do or be. When we say, therefore, that someone is a model student, we do not encourage other students to merely imitate his behaviour, but try their best to share his characteristic. However, a model aeroplane, for instance, will never be a real one but an imitation. In addition to these two senses of model, there is a third one. For instance, students of art school might take a sculpture as a model, and observe it and practice their skill at sketching. The term 'model' in this sense is instrumental,<sup>17</sup> that is, the sculpture is to be copied and imitated by the students who want to improve their skill at sketching. The model, sculpture, has instrumental value. However, if we turn our attention to the *Analects*, where Confucius says that "[a] gentleman does not behave as an implement" (II, 12), then it should be clear that Confucius will not take the term 'model' in the instrumental sense. For if the sage-king were to act merely as a model in the instrumental sense then there would be no, in Fingarette's word,<sup>18</sup> *intrinsic significance* to the people who imitate him. In other words, the people would copy or imitate the sage-king not because the sage-king's virtue was desired by the people for its own sake and its consequence, but because by imitating the sage-king there might

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<sup>17</sup> H. Fingarette, "How The Analects Portrays The Ideal of Efficacious Authority", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 8, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>17</sup> H. Fingarette, "How The Analects Portrays The Ideal of Efficacious Authority", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 8, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



be a chance, let us say, for them to be promoted to the higher office. Moreover, it would be odd, for Confucius, to say that the sage-king, like the model aeroplane, is not a real king but an imitation of the real one. Therefore, the sage-king, like the model student, is the model for people to emulate and try to share his characteristic.

It is worth noting that although the idea of model as instrument is rejected by Confucius, yet the language used in the *Book of Songs* is by no means without ambiguity. It is believed that the *Books of Songs* is modified by Confucius, and in the *Books of Songs* the notion of model as instrument does appear to us. For example,

Cut an axe-handle? Cut an axe-handle?

The pattern is not far to seek.<sup>19</sup>

Here 'pattern' is taken to mean that the new axe-handle mirrors the old one, and the new axe-handle has to pattern itself upon the old one. The function of the axe-handle, as an instrument, is limited in certain area. It is overt that the language used in the *Books of Songs* seems to run counter to that used in the *Analects*. However, the ambiguity in the language does not suggest, I think, that Confucius is ignorant of this problem. It might be supposed that the language used in the odes do not exactly bring out what Confucius has in mind, and there might be no better vocabulary which is able to convey what Confucius has in mind. Confucius admires and loves the ancient texts and tradition of old, in doing so, he does not want us to merely imitate the good of old, but the imitated good is desired for its own sake and its consequence. The sage-king is a perfect human being, he embodies the goodness of human nature. Therefore, to 'imitate' the sage-king is to fulfill and realize human nature, it is in this sense that sage-king as a model is in itself worth desiring.<sup>20</sup>

It is noticeable that the notion of 'modelling oneself on' could take two meanings: 'imitating' someone and 'being like' someone. To imitate someone with good character does not necessarily entail that those who model themselves on the virtuous man will possess the same character. For they might merely copy the virtuous man's behaviour without having the good character. While to be like the virtuous man

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<sup>19</sup> A. Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York, 1996), p. 126.

<sup>20</sup> Fingarette, *op. cit.* p. 33-5.

might suggest that those who model themselves on the virtuous man can make themselves better men, i.e. having the good character. Plato, in the *Republic*, seems to think that imitating good man makes us better and he is sure that imitating bad men makes us bad (395c-d). Plato thus does not seem to have this distinction in his mind. Does Plato think that mere imitation can change the character? I think that Plato does. For at 444c-d Plato says that just acts produce just soul and unjust acts produce unjust soul, and that justice is produced by establishing the harmony among the three elements in the soul. It seems clear that for Plato by imitating the virtuous man, i.e. doing just acts, we can be like the virtuous man having the harmonious character. And the similar idea is expressed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle says, “ we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”<sup>21</sup> For moral virtue, says Aristotle, unlike intellectual virtue, is acquired by habituating ourselves to do the right acts. Confucius here will agree with both Plato and Aristotle that modelling oneself on the good man can make one better. However, for Plato, to be genuinely just is not merely a matter of doing the right acts but of having the knowledge of the Forms. This is perhaps a crucial difference between Plato and Confucius. For Plato to be genuinely just one would have to model oneself not on a person but on a Form. This is the reason why in the *Republic* only the philosophers are genuinely just since they are capable of seeing the Forms.

It is a common place, since the time of Max Weber, that Confucian sage-king is vested by commentators with ‘ charisma ’.<sup>22</sup> As Weber says,

The kings, even in the *Shih Ching* (the *Book of Songs*), no longer win simply because they are the greater heroes. And that is decisive for the spirit of the army. They win because before the Spirit of Heaven they are morally right and because their charismatic virtues are superior, whereas their enemies are godless criminals who, by oppression and trespass upon the ancient customs, have wronged their subjects’ weal and thus have foregone their charisma.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> D. Ross, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 1980), p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> See D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (London, 1979), p. 55; and Wm. T. De Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 1-23.

<sup>23</sup> M. Weber, *The Religion of China* (New York, 1968), p. 113. The parentheses is mine.

It is interesting to see whether for Confucius the sage-kings possess a sort of charisma which enables them to win the heart of the people. While first what is charisma? Weber gives us a definition of charisma in “ The Theory of Social and Economic Organization ”, where he says,

The term ‘ charisma ’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.<sup>24</sup>

It is disputable, I think, whether Weber’s notion of charisma can be applied to Confucian sage-king. I shall argue against this idea by discussing three points. Firstly, the Confucian ideal authority is not like the Weberian and the Christian idea of charismatic authority, though they all share the idea that people are attracted by the character of the ideal authority. In Confucius’ view, the sage-king is not the one who possess ‘ supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.’ For what the sage-king can achieve is ideally accessible to everyone, Confucius says that men are “ [b]y nature close to each other ” (XVII, 2), and Mencius says that “ [a]ll men may be Yaous and Shuns ” (VI, ii, 2).<sup>25</sup> Yaou and Shun were sage-kings in the old time, but the virtue they possessed were accessible to everyone. As long as one is sincerely to undergo the process of self-cultivation, and to achieve the fulfillment of human nature. The sage-king is not one who is isolated from and stands above, like a religious figure, all human beings. For “ [b]y the sages, the human relations are perfectly exhibited ” (IV, i, 2).<sup>26</sup> The consummate fulfillment of the sage-king has to be achieved in society. The sage-king can have people’s reverence and love only because he can extend human-heartedness to the people, that is, loving and caring for them.

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<sup>24</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1964), p. 358-9.

<sup>25</sup> Legge, *op. cit.* p. 424.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 292.

Secondly, if Weber means what he says that “ Confucianism was only interested in affairs of this world such as it happened to be ”<sup>27</sup>, then it would be odd to suggest that Confucius’ sage-king is a superhuman. For Mencius in the *Mencius* describes how the gentlemen make their effort to achieve and maintain the highest fulfillment. Mencius says,

When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man, it will exercise his mind with suffering, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him to poverty, place obstacles in the paths of his deeds, so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent. (6B:15)<sup>28</sup>

The sage-king is as normal as the ordinary people, what makes him different is his perseverance in acting in accordance with human-heartedness.<sup>29</sup> Human-heartedness is a heavy burden for one to take on; only with death can he put down his burden (VIII, 7).

Finally, Weber says that “ charismatic authority repudiates the past.”<sup>30</sup> Whereas on another occasion he says that “ [t]he whole of Confucianism became a relentless canonization of tradition.”<sup>31</sup> Weber seems to contradict his own words, and it would be difficult to see which view he is going to adopt. If the argument of authority-as-model above is correct, then it is obvious that the sage-kings will mirror their forerunners and see them as the patterns to follow. Confucius’ saying that “ I transmit but do not create. Being fond of the truth, I am an admirer of antiquity ” (VII, 1) does illustrate his belief that the well-being of the present and the future will be based upon the splendid achievement in the past.

It is clear that Confucian sage-king is not a charismatic leader, who establishes his authority by possessing some supernatural power. For Confucius, the sage-king

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<sup>27</sup> Weber, *op. cit.* p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> See the *Analects* IV, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Weber, *op. cit.* p. 362.

<sup>31</sup> *op. cit.* p.164.

establishes his authority by having great reverence for tradition, and by being virtuous and affectionate to the people. The idea of traditional authority and that of moral authority do not require the leader to be superhuman or have supernatural powers. Thus unlike the notion of charismatic authority, which is incompatible with the idea of the king as model, the sage-king is the model for emulation. For in Confucius' view everyone has the potentiality to be virtuous. However, Plato's philosopher-king is different from Confucian sage-king in the way in which the philosopher-king does not canonize tradition, but sees it as an obstacle for training the young guardians. The philosopher-king, being genuinely just, is able to see the Form of the Good. Thus the philosopher-kings establish their authority by being rational and virtuous. It is this emphasis on the knowledge of the Forms that marks the difference between Confucius and Plato. In short, both Plato's philosopher-king and Confucian sage-king are not charismatic rulers. Although both of them would agree that the ruler should be virtuous, in the *Republic* Plato's being in defiance of tradition and emphasis on rationality differ from Confucius' reverence for tradition.<sup>32</sup>

One thing is worth noting that Confucian sage-king, as mentioned, is a model for emulation. However Platonic philosopher-king, it seems to me, is not a model for emulation. For Plato's theory of human nature (415a-c) does prevent the lower classes from having any opportunity of being just by emulating the philosopher-kings. Furthermore Confucius' notion of the sage-king as model seems to make a sharp contrast with modern democratic society. In modern democratic society political leader often tries to model himself after the ordinary people's way of life to show that he knows what people need. And the leader's personal morality seems to make no impact on people's behaviour, for they often do not see their leader as a model for emulation. What concerns people in the modern democratic society is whether the leader and the whole body of officers have the administrative efficiency. The American president, Bill Clinton's sex scandal, for instance, seems to be a good example. I am sure that the Americans by and large will not take the president as a moral model for emulation. Nevertheless according to the opinion poll president

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion on the different types of authority, see J. Hampton, *Political Philosophy* (Colorado, 1997), ch. 1.

Clinton still wins 73 percent of the American people's support.<sup>33</sup> This result obviously runs counter to Confucius' assertion that only by being virtuous can the ruler win the support of people. What makes the difference between Confucius and modern democratic society, I think, is that for Confucius there is no distinction between private and public morality. A morally good ruler should be virtuous publicly and privately. Whereas in modern democratic society people are inclined to think that there is no continuity between private and public morality. Thus a good president being competent in dealing with administrative affairs may have a licentious private life.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, what is the inner sage and outer king? Fung Yu-lan says precisely that

The Inner Sage is a person who has established virtue in himself; the Outer King is one who has accomplished great deeds in the world. The highest ideal for a man is at once to possess the virtue of a Sage and the accomplishment of a ruler, and so become what is called a Sage-King, ....<sup>35</sup>

To put this chapter in a nutshell. Confucius' ideal of inner sage and outer king might be a moral standard beyond our reach and remote from the modern socio-political thought. While what can be appreciate of this ideal is that the demand of moral standard, may be not as high as that Confucius would require, may be the remedy for the decline of morality in politics in the modern society. Although it might be argued that politics and morality have their own spheres of autonomy, yet the minimum moral standard required in the politics would be necessary. After all, no one wants to live in a society full of hypocrites.

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<sup>33</sup> I am indebted to Professor A. Broadie for this idea.

<sup>34</sup> For a more detailed discussion on ' private and public morality ' see Part IV, Chapter 11, Section 2.

<sup>35</sup> Fung, *op. cit.* p. 2.

## Chapter 9

# Training and Education

It is said in the *Republic* that philosophers who are able to see the Forms should be rulers (473d). The philosopher's ability to mentally see the Forms is the result of proper education. In the *Republic* the educational system is designed by Plato as two stages (376c-412b, 521c-534e): the first stage serves to train all the young guardians, and the second stage serves to train or educate the philosophers. Education, for Plato, has the power to transform the society. As R. F. Stalley says that " education, in Plato's eyes, is not just one among many functions of the state but in some sense embraces all the other functions."<sup>1</sup> For the ideal state Plato proposed can be realized and the order of the state be maintained only when philosophers become kings, or vice versa. It is through proper education that philosophers can be produced. Thus it is clear that without education there would be no philosophers, and without philosophers the social order would be at stake. The emphasis on the importance of education also appears in Confucian thought. Confucius thinks that the orderly society can be achieved only when everyone within the society can act in accordance with human-heartedness and propriety (*li*), which requires each individual to undergo the process of self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is primarily based on education.

In this chapter, I shall leave aside the discussion of the differences or similarities between Plato's and Confucius' educational system, but concentrate on three topics which will lead us to see why Plato and Confucius have different attitudes towards socio-political problems, in spite of their common emphasis on the order of society. Firstly, when Plato says that the philosophers should return to the cave after they have seen the Forms, and Confucius says that " ...; and if one has more than enough energy for study, then one holds office " (XIX, 13), both of them seem to suggest the point that education can be regarded as a means to an end, i.e. the superior men and the philosophers are educated or trained to be the rulers or ministers. In this part of the chapter I would like to discuss whether both Plato and Confucius are aware that there

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<sup>1</sup> R. F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis, 1983), p. 123.

are differences between education and training, and whether the aim of education for Plato and Confucius is to produce the rulers. Secondly, the education in the *Republic*, especially the second stage, seems to be a privilege of the minority, whereas for Confucius education is not a privilege of the minority but accessible to everyone (XV, 39). In this part I would like to discuss the point that although the difference between Plato and Confucius is apparent, yet the principle of 'treating unequals unequally' seems to be adopted by both of them for different reasons. Finally, both Plato and Confucius regard the philosophers and the superior men as wise and virtuous, but the fundamental difference between the two lies in the point that for the latter the society is the extension of the family, thus Confucius puts a lots of emphasis on family education, that is, filial piety. A filial son will be a virtuous minister. On the contrary, Plato in the *Republic* abolishes the family, and puts the responsibility for children's education in the hand of the state. In the final part of this chapter, I will argue that although in the *Republic* the abolition of the family is proposed, yet in the *Euthyphro* and the *Laws*, similar ideas to Confucian thought seem to be expressed.

## 1. The differences between training and education

The terms 'training' and 'education' are usually used interchangeably in our everyday life. For instance, we might say that a lawyer is 'well trained' or 'properly educated'. The meaning of these terms thus is understood in a broader view. However, the distinction between education and training has been explicitly drawn out by R. S. Peters who proposes that there are three criteria by virtue of which an activity can be judged whether it is called 'education' or not.<sup>2</sup> The three criteria are as follows:

1) For an activity to be called education there must be something worthwhile for its own sake transmitted to those who are committed to it. The study of psychology, let us say, might enable a student of psychology to be a psychologist, but this does not

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<sup>2</sup> R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London, 1979), pp. 23-45.



make the study of psychology count as an educational activity. Rather the intrinsic value of the behavioural sciences which are essential to the study of psychology makes it an educational activity. For they provide ways of understanding the complexities of human behaviour which are valuable in themselves.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, under this criterion the *purpose* of studying psychology is to be a psychologist, but the *aim* of it is to understand the complexities of human behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

2) Education must involve understanding and a cognitive perspective, that is, an educated man is the one who is not only able to 'know how', but to 'know why'. In other words, an educated man will have understanding of the 'reason why' of things. Furthermore, a well-trained psychologist might know the principles of psychology well but he will not be called educated. For the psychologist might only exploit his knowledge of psychology to make money, but is unable to appreciate that the subject he knows can be related to other sciences which together can form a better understanding of human beings. Education cannot be regarded as the acquisition of a specialized competence, it is concerned with the whole man which requires a cognitive perspective.

3) The third criterion by which an activity is called education is that those who take part in it must show interest in the activity. For it would be possible for a student of psychology to complete his courses without showing any interest in those courses. Thus we might call him a well-trained psychologist but not well-educated.

In addition to these three criteria we might add the following:

4) Education is concerned with the development of intellect and character. For we would not call a man educated, if he is ignorant and has lots of deficiencies of character. While training is more concerned with skill and efficiency.

5) Education should be two-way process, that is, it should be "creative interaction".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> K. C. Calman, and R. S. Downie, "Education and Training in Medicine", *Medical Education* 22, 1988, p. 488.

<sup>4</sup> For the difference between 'purpose' and 'aim' see R. S. Peters, *Ibid.* p. 28

<sup>5</sup> E. Dale, "Education or Training", *Programmed Learning and Educational Technology* 22, 1985, p. 72

A man educated not only receives information but is also capable of reflecting on what he has received. Whereas training is rather one-way process because a well-trained typist, for instance, just acts according to what he or she is told without reflection necessarily involved, indoctrination.

6) The results of education, unlike those of training which are more immediate, may not be known for a long time.<sup>6</sup>

I shall not be concerned here with the issue of whether the distinction between training and education is or is not justifiable. What I shall proceed to do is to see whether these criteria mentioned can be applied to both Confucian and Platonic notion of education.

For Plato, real knowledge, not mere belief, comes from the understanding of the unchanging Forms which are valuable and worthwhile themselves. They are the paradigms of the mutable world. The philosophers who are in contact with the Forms are able to ‘ know why ’, that is to say, they are able to give an account of what something is. Thus the philosopher’s understanding of the Forms will enable him to make proper decisions or judgements. Furthermore, The philosopher is the lover of truth and wisdom (485c), and it is the term ‘ lover ’ which clearly indicates the point that he is interested in and enthusiastic about what he is doing. And the philosopher who receives proper education will be self-disciplined, courageous, and just (485e, 486a-b), because he possesses a balanced soul, that is, in his soul reason is properly in command. The process of the philosopher’s education lasts a lifetime, the results of the education are not like those of training in making shoes and carpentry which can be identified by their skills and products. For, in Plato’s view, a well-educated philosopher is a just man, and justice cannot be properly identified merely in terms of external behaviour. Thus a just man has to be identified by virtue of his “ inward self ”, balanced soul (433d). Justice, for Plato, is *indirectly* concerned with the external behaviour. If we are just, having a balanced soul, we will tend to do just acts. Although Plato does say at 444c-d that healthy activities produce health and so just activities produce justice, he does not mean that a just man can be identified by his

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<sup>6</sup> Calman, and Downie, *op. cit.* p. 489.

external behaviour. For few lines below Plato says that “ justice is produced by establishing in the mind a similar natural relation of control and subordination among its constituents ” (444d). So a man who is genuinely just has a balanced and harmonious soul. This seems to be compatible with what Donald P. Ely says that the results of education are less measurable.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that the criteria listed above can be applied to the second stage of education, i.e. the education of the philosopher-king. However, there is still a question: Is the first stage of education training or education? The purpose of the first stage of education is to train all the guardians to be spirited and have true belief as to what should or should not be feared by undergoing two kinds of education: literary and physical education. It is worth noting that although the first stage of education is to train the soldiers, the young guardians, there is no specific programme for soldierly training, i.e. military technique. Even the physical education does not merely serve to strengthen the soldiers’ bodies, but to train the mind. Plato says that the main aim of both literary and physical training is to train the mind (410c). In other words, the aim of the first stage of education is to train the young guardians to possess the balance and harmony between spirit and reason in their mind (411e-412a). However it does not mean that rationality is necessarily involved at this stage. For the young guardians at this stage are not required to have theoretical understanding of the codes of conduct laid down by the educator, but required to habituate themselves to act in according to those codes. That is, the young guardians can at best have belief about what is right and wrong, and what should and should not be feared. To have the capacity of retaining knowledge of what is right and wrong, for Plato, will require the second stage of education. Therefore, the first stage of education tallies with criteria (1), (3), and (4). The first stage is mainly concerned with the development of character and so is valuable in itself. The guardians also show interest in this stage of education. For the first stage of education is to develop the young guardians’ character and natural capacity, and in the tripartite society only those who can fully develop their natural capacity can perform their social functions well. To perform their social functions well is to fulfill their nature. If receiving proper education can lead the young

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<sup>7</sup> D. P. Ely, “ Education and Training: Two Paths or One?”, *Programmed Learning and Educational Technology* 22, 1985, p. 76.

guardians to fully develop their natural capacity and be able to perform their social functions properly. They will surely show interest in taking part in both literary and physical education.

However, the first stage of education cannot be regarded as 'education' in the strict sense. For it does not accord with criteria (2) and (5). This stage does not involve understanding and a cognitive perspective, for as mentioned the guardians are not required to 'know why', but only to act in conformity with the rules of proper conduct. The guardians are not required to reflect on what they have received either. For the purpose of this stage of education is to implant in the guardians' mind what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, it can be seen that the first stage of education seems to be in a state of between training and education.

Although there is no systematic discussion of education in the *Analects*, Confucius' emphasis on education prevails in it. For Confucius, the superior man's knowledge or wisdom comes from the study of antiquity (VII, 1;20). It is said in the *Analects* that "[o]ne is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music" (VIII, 8). Antiquity, like the Platonic Forms, is regarded by Confucius as the ideal pattern for the disorderly society of his time. However, Confucius does not encourage people to study without reflection on what they study, in that "[i]f one studies but does not think, one is caught in a trap. If one thinks but does not study, one is in peril" (II, 15). The equal importance of learning and reflecting on what one has learned is overt in Confucius' thought. Thus it would be natural to hear Master Zeng say that "[e]very day I examine my character in three respects: am I disloyal in my designs for others, am I untrustworthy in my dealings with friends, have I failed to practise what has been passed on to me?" (I, 4). Moreover, an educated man is the one who loves studying and never feels bored (VII, 2), and it would be a pleasure for the well-educated man to learn something and at times to practice it (I, 1). It is this enthusiasm about study which can lead people to re-discover their human-heartedness, Confucius says,

If one loves humaneness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is folly; if one loves understanding but does not love learning, the consequence of this is unorthodoxy; if one loves good faith but does not love

learning, the consequence of this is damaging behaviour; if one loves straightforwardness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rudeness; if one loves courage but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rebelliousness; if one loves strength but does not love learning, the consequence of this is violence. (XVII, 7)

An educated man should be human-hearted, wise, trustworthy, righteous, courageous, and firm. Similarly, education, for Confucius, is a life-long task, for human-heartedness is heavy burden for one to take on, only with death can he put down his burden (VIII, 7).

It might be argued that both Plato and Confucius propose that the philosopher and the sage should be rulers. It follows that education, like training, has the short term effect that the efficient rulers are produced through proper education. It seems to me, however, that this problem can be met in two ways. Firstly, both Plato and Confucius are well aware of the differences, though under different considerations, between training and education, in that Plato's theory of knowledge leads him to regard the knowledge of the skillful practitioner as subordinate to the philosopher's knowledge. In Plato's view, the knowledge of the skillful practitioner is restricted in one area, to heal the sick, and the immoral practitioner might misuse his expertise.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the philosopher's knowledge, knowledge of the Good, is not restricted in one area, which enables the philosopher to consider matters concerning the society as a whole, and it will never be misused. Thus we see that Socratic 'knowledge is virtue' is endorsed by Plato. Likewise, in Confucius' view, the superior man's education is not instrumental which will make them competent in doing things (II, 12). Education, for Confucius, is to re-discover the human-heartedness in man's nature, that is, a humane man is not only wise but a virtuous person who whenever he acts will act in accordance with human-heartedness and propriety. And the humane man will be an exemplar for the emulation of the masses.

Secondly, education, for both Plato and Confucius, is of the whole man, since both the philosopher-king and the sage-king are wise and virtuous. But to be rulers

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<sup>8</sup> The *Republic* 333e-334a.

might just be an *inevitable result* of receiving proper education and not what education *directly* aims for. For in the *Republic* it is said that the philosophers will be better-off if they do not rule and concentrate on philosophical contemplation. While they are compelled to rule because, firstly, if they did not rule then they would be ruled by a worse man (347b-c); secondly, since the philosophers' everyday needs and commodities are supplied by the masses, thus fairness requires them to rule in return. It can be seen from both cases that the philosopher's ruling is not a direct result of their education. For they take on the task of ruling because they do not want to or are fearful of being ruled by the worse man, and because they have to pay the debt. Ruling can only be seen as an inevitable result of the education, that is, the philosophers' knowledge of the Forms will lead them to see that their ruling will do good to the society as a whole and to themselves so the philosophers rule. The aim of education is to produce harmony in one's soul, that is, reason with the help of spirit rules over appetite. It is not the aim of education to produce rulers and one does not have to be a ruler to complete one's education.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Confucius, I think, would not think that ruling is the direct result of education. For Confucius says,

Only be dutiful towards your parents and friendly towards your brothers, and you will be contributing to the existence of government. These virtues surely constitute taking part in government, so why should only that particular activity be regarded as taking part in government. (II, 21)

A humane man does not necessarily participate in politics, since, for Confucius, society is the family writ large. Therefore what one does in the family will be the same as what one does in the society. Although it would be argued that Confucius' appeal to the superior men is to restore the order of the society thus it would be natural for them to be in office, yet if people can be "filial when at home and respectful to elders when away from home. They should be earnest and trustworthy. Although they should love the multitude far and away, they should be intimate only

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion on the issue whether the philosophers should rule, see Part IV, Chapter 11, Section 1.

with the humane ” (I, 6), then without the superior men being in the office the order will prevail in the society. For “ [w]hen you come across a superior person, think of being equal to him ” (IV, 17; VII, 22), the superior man is not necessary to be the one who holds the office. Equally, a sage is not necessary to be a king, but the combination of these two would be an ideal for the government.

If my argument is right then it is clear that education, for both Plato and Confucius, is not merely a kind of preparation for the future rulers, but a matter of shaping the individual’s character. Therefore, the distinction between education and training seems to be recognized by both Plato and Confucius. An issue raised here through my discussion is that Confucius’ emphasis on the close connection between the family and society seems to be absent in Plato’s mind. For Plato thinks that the society is the individual writ large. However this issue I will leave aside for a moment, and I will return to it in the third part of this chapter. Now I would like to proceed to discuss the notion of ‘ treating unequals unequally ’ both in Plato’s and Confucius’ education.

## **2. The principle of ‘ treating unequals unequally ’**

Readers of the *Republic* will find that throughout the book there seems to be no mention of education for the masses but only of that for the young guardians and the philosophers. However, it has been suggested by scholars<sup>10</sup> that the masses might be able to participate in the first stage of the education in that

It is an obvious inference that some aspects of the primary stage of education outlined for the Guardians must apply to the majority too. For if the city is to exhibit the virtues of moderation, and if the governed must therefore consent to the rule of the philosopher-kings, the majority must share at least the moral upbringing of the Guardians. It is therefore a reasonable surmise that

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<sup>10</sup> R. Barrow, *Plato and Education*, ch. IV (London, 1976), p. 28; and *Plato, Utilitarianism and Education*, ch. VIII (London, 1975), p. 180.

the education in 'mousike' and gymnastics is common to all.<sup>11</sup>

This might be a reasonable inference but the passages Barrow refers to might be somewhat ambiguous. For what is said at 420d is that the ideal state will promote not only the happiness of the Guardians but also that of the rest of classes. It would follow that in the ideal state education is not only available for the minority but for the majority. But it is doubtful whether this inference is legitimate. At 414d Socrates seems to imply that all classes have received an education. But unfortunately if we take the myth at 415a-d seriously then people who are born with bronze or iron in their nature will be placed in the class of artisans and farmers whereas the educational proposals are explicitly aimed at the soldiers and rulers, and so their chance of receiving the first stage of education seems to be denied. However, Plato does mention at 456d that the third class, by implication, will receive professional or technical training. Shoemakers have to be trained to make shoes. Therefore Barrow's assertion that the third class will participate in the first stage of education seems to be wrong. It can be seen that in the tripartite society people of each class receive education which is suitable for them, my aim here is to see why the notion of 'treating unequals unequally' is closely related to Plato's idea of education.

Plato says in the *Republic* IV that justice is doing one's own job (433e-434a), which means that people of each class have to do their own jobs for which they are naturally suited, and do not trespass on the jobs of other classes. Plato's treatment of education, it seems to me, is on a par with the notion of justice in that it would be unjust for the farmers, let us say, to do the job of the Guardians, so equally it would be unjust to treat the distribution of education without considering the differences between people. Thus when Plato says with irony that "[i]t's an agreeable anarchic form of society (democratic society), with plenty of variety, which treats all men as equal, whether they are equal or not" (558c), he implies that it would be unjust to treat unequals equally, so treating unequals unequally would be just in that the differences between people should be taken into account when these differences are relevant to the distribution of something, i.e. education, thus people should be treated

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<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*



differently.<sup>12</sup> The myth at 415a-d does indicate the point that for Plato the differences between people are dependent upon their different natures, it is the natural differences which lead Plato to concentrate on the design of the higher education of the philosophers. As mentioned, without the philosophers, the social order will not be maintained, and only those who are born with gold in their nature can be philosophers. Therefore Plato's concentration on the philosopher's education can be appreciated since these well-educated philosophers are the cornerstone of maintaining the social order.

Furthermore, the claim that the philosopher is the lover of truth and wisdom seems to imply the point that the pursuit of knowledge is a privilege of the philosopher, and thus not desirable for all men. For, in Plato's view, to possess knowledge is to see the immutable Forms, and it is the philosopher alone who has a balanced soul and thus can see the Forms. As Barrow points out,

[D]espite the hints in the writing that the reasoning faculty is the divine element in man, it is absolutely clear that he (Plato) does not see the activity of the pursuit of knowledge as necessarily desirable for man. He does not advocate it for all men. He is anxious only the some shall engage in the activity in order to find the truth.<sup>13</sup>

It is only the minority group, the philosophers, who are able to see the Forms and find the truth.

Confucius who stands on the opposite side from Plato claims that “ [i]n teaching there should be no distinction of classes ” (XV, 38).<sup>14</sup> Confucius, unlike Plato, thinks that education should be accessible to each individual. For if “ [b]y nature, men are nearly alike ” (XVII, 2),<sup>15</sup> then it would be possible through proper education for everyone in society to be the superior man. It can be seen that the different claims on

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<sup>12</sup> Barrow, *op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Barrow, *op. cit.* p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> J. Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York, 1971), p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> Legge, *Ibid.* p. 318.

human nature — For Plato, people's social classes are determined by their different natures, while for Confucius, human nature is the same — lead to different views on the distribution of education. However in spite of the difference, the notion of 'treating unequals unequally' can also be applied to Confucian teaching method. It is obvious that in the *Analects* Confucius teaches students in accordance with their habitual way of life. For instance,

Zilu asked whether, if one hears something, one practises it. The Master said: 'Since your father and elder brothers are still alive, how would you, if you heard something, put it into practice?'

Ran You asked the same question and the Master said that when one hears something one practises it.

Gongxi Hua said: 'Zilu asked whether, if one hears something, one practises it; and you, Master, said that his father and elder brothers were still alive; but when Ran You asked the same question, you, the Master, said that when one hears something one should practise it. I am perplexed and venture to question this.'

The Master said: 'Qui is back-ward and so I urged him on, but You is an over-enthusiastic person and so I held him back.' (XI, 20)<sup>16</sup>

Confucius' answers to the same question might seem inconsistent but what is more important is that Confucius as a teacher can notice the different habitual ways of life of his students and give them different instructions accordingly. It is in this sense, I think, the notion of 'treating unequals unequally' can be applied to Confucian education. In the *Republic*, the class of the Guardians have the same nature and aptitude, thus a fixed curriculum might be suitable for the aim of the education, that is, the fixed curriculum could help the philosophers to see the Forms. Unlike Plato, Confucius' students come from different classes they have different habitual ways of life, in spite of this they all naturally possess human-heartedness. Thus Confucius has to treat his students differently in accordance with their habitual way of life. For to

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<sup>16</sup> Qui is Ran You's another name, and You is Zilu's another name.

force people with different habitual way of life to accept the same idea will be like indoctrination which runs counter to Confucian education by enlightenment. Confucius says,

To those who are not eager to learn I do not explain anything, and to those who are not bursting to speak I do not reveal anything. If I raise one angle and they do not come back with the other three angles, I will not repeat myself. (VII, 8)

Confucius requires his students to reflect on what they have been taught, and his teaching method is not to give the students the correct answers but to encourage them to find the answers themselves.

Both Plato and Confucius agree that we should not treat everyone alike. But Plato believes that there are fundamental differences between people while Confucius sees differences as relatively superficial and capable of being overcome. So class distinctions are essential for Plato but not for Confucius. The different attitudes between Plato and Confucius towards education lead them to quite a different solutions for the disorderly society. In the *Republic* due to the fact that the education is only accessible to the minority the task of ruling and maintaining social order will be passed on to them. On the contrary, in the *Analects* the education is accessible to everyone thus as long as one engages in self-cultivation and studies diligently it would not be impossible for one to be a superior man. For ideally everyone can be the sage-king ( the *Mencius* IV, ii, 32; VI, ii, 2).<sup>17</sup> Thus social order can be achieved.

### 3. Family education: filial piety

Now I would like to turn my attention to the issue left untouched at the end of the first part. Confucius' emphasis on the importance of the family can be seen by his constantly appeal to filial piety in the *Analects*. For instance, filial piety and fraternal

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<sup>17</sup> J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, 1970).

duty are regarded as the roots of human-heartedness (I, 2), filial piety is avoiding breaking the rules (II, 5), and filial piety and fraternal duty can be applied to the government (II, 21). Confucius' view of politics as the extension of morality is clearly expressed in these passages. Thus one's family education would be important because the harmony of the society will depend upon that of the family, and the harmony of the family will depend upon the individual's self-cultivation. Family is valued as a means of maintaining harmony of the society as a whole. It is said in the *Great Learning* that "when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order."<sup>18</sup> However, for Plato, the family seems to be an obstacle which will distract the philosophers from concentrating on ruling (416d-417b, 464c-e). Unlike Confucius, in the *Republic* Plato does not see any intrinsic value of the family, so there is no word for filial piety and family education. Despite Plato's silence on filial piety in the *Republic*, however, we can see that in the *Laws* Plato does mention that children should respect their parents, if they do not respect their parents they will be chastised with whipping and imprisonment (932c). In the *Crito* Plato mentions that children have to be obedient to their fathers (50c-d), but at 51c he regards being loyal to the state as more important than being loyal to the family. Both dialogues seem to emphasize the point that law and order in the society are more important than the harmony in the family, i.e. the obligations to the state come first; on the contrary, Confucius, on the other hand, thinks that the harmony of the family will affect the society and makes it harmonious.

However, one passage in the *Euthyphro* seems parallel to Confucius' emphasis on the family tie. When Socrates heard that Euthyphro was going to prosecute his father for manslaughter, he said that

Then is the man who died at the hands of your father one of your household?  
I suppose it's obvious; you wouldn't have prosecuted him merely for the sake of an outsider — not for murder. (4b)<sup>19</sup>

In the *Analects* the similar idea is expressed:

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<sup>18</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1963), p. 86-7.

<sup>19</sup> H. Tredennick and H. Tarrant, "Euthyphro", *Plato: The Last Days of Socrates* (London, 1993), p. 9.

The Duke of She told Master Kong: ‘ In my locality there is a certain paragon, for when his father stole a sheep, he, the son, bore witness against him.’ Master Kong said: ‘ In my locality those who are upright are different from this. Fathers cover up for their sons and sons cover up for their fathers. Uprightness is to be found in this.’ (XIII, 18)

Both passages place the importance of the family over the state. Socrates, like Confucius, is skeptical about whether one should prosecute one’s father for wrongdoing. For Socrates may believe that non-family member is less important than family members, and the life of a slave is not equal to that of a free man. So Socrates, at 4e, says to Euthyphro that “ [a]ren’t you afraid in taking your father to court that you too might turn out to be doing an unholy deed?”<sup>20</sup> Socrates therefore recognizes the conflict between public justice and filial piety. However Socrates as usual proceeds to find out the definition of piety and leaves the issue of the conflict between public morality and private morality unsolved. It may be because of such conflicts that Plato abolishes the family in the *Republic*. For the philosopher-kings, without family, will not have to face the same dilemma which troubles many people.

In a nutshell, the difference between Plato and Confucius is fairly pointed out by Greg Whitlock,

A striking difference in the philosophical personalities of the two figures is that Confucius spends a tremendous amount of effort thinking about the family in realistic, concrete situations. Plato, in contrast, spends little time on the family, but when he refers to it, does so with occasionally draconian strokes. This shows itself in the *Euthyphro* as Socrates ignores the two important principles of the dilemma while chasing Euthyphro around a circle of definitions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> G. Whitlock, “ Concealing the Misconduct of One’s Own Father: Confucius and Plato on a Question of Filial Piety ”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 21, 1994, p. 135.

Socrates, as mentioned above, is not unaware of the conflict between public and private morality, and seems to think, together with Confucius, that it would be wrong for one person to prosecute his own father for wrongdoing. Nevertheless, the difference, mentioned by Whitelock, causes them to have the different views on how the rulers gain their authority. For Plato the philosophers' knowledge of the Forms is the source of their authority. Man, in Plato's view, is not just mortal creature, but possesses an immortal element in his soul. It is this immortal element which is able to see the Forms. Thus Plato's being in favour of the philosopher-kings has a metaphysical and epistemological basis. Confucius, on the other hand, who never talks of the problem of human soul, adopts a this-worldly doctrine, since for Confucius the sage-king loves the people just as the father loves his children, so the authority of the sage-king will be based on his loving and caring for the people, and especially on his virtue.

Both Plato and Confucius would agree on the point that there is a distinction between training and education. However, their different views on human nature lead them to the different attitudes towards the distribution of education, in spite of the fact that both of them would prefer a hierarchical society. As regards the family, most of the time Plato is silent on the problem, especially in the *Republic* he proposes to abolish the family. Although in the *Laws*, and the *Crito* the family is mentioned, Plato is more interested in maintaining the order of the state by laws than in the value of the family, and in the *Euthyphro* Plato turns his attention on the definition and drops the family and filial piety all together. On the contrary, Confucius equates the activities in the family with those in the society, which leads him to pursuit the family value with all his effort. Plato, unlike Confucius, tries to build an ideal state from without the ideal state is conceptual rather than being realistic. Thus the analysis of the concept leads him to look for definitions. Confucius is trying to reform a disorderly society according to the pattern of the old time, thus restoring the social order in accordance with the ancient rules of propriety leads him to constantly look back in the history.

**Part IV**  
**Role Morality**

## Chapter 10

### Role and Morality

Plato says in the *Republic* IV that in a just state each citizen does his or her own job (433e- 434a). To understand what justice means, we need, in Plato's view, first to know how a state or society comes into being. Society, says Socrates, comes into being because people are not self-sufficient, and have varied needs which they cannot supply themselves. We have a society when we have got enough people to meet our needs (369b-c). Socrates goes on to describe how in this society the economy consists of mutual exchanges among different professions. A minimum state will consist of four men, namely, a farmer, a builder, a weaver, and a shoemaker. They are competent and specialize in their own work. Thus the farmer devotes most of his time and labour to food production to satisfy the needs of all four, and does not interfere with the business of others. This is what Annas calls "the Principle of Specialization".<sup>1</sup> It means that one man should do one job, since people have different natural aptitudes, which fit them for different jobs (370b). It is this Principle which is the basis for the structure of Plato's just state. In this chapter I propose to discuss two issues: firstly, I would like to explore the relation between Plato's notion of 'doing one's own job' and the notion of social role. And a similar idea in Confucian ethics will be considered. Secondly, I shall discuss the problem whether, for Plato and Confucius, morality is only a matter of performing one's social roles by acting in accordance with laws or custom.

#### 1. Doing one's own job: social roles

In describing the just state, Plato often says that everybody should do their own job. The phrase 'doing one's own job', at first sight, seems to suggest that in a society the individuals should lead the kind of life or do the kind of job which they have freely

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<sup>1</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p. 73.



chosen. They are not living or doing a job according to others' expectations and desires. This viewpoint suggests individuality, since everybody has their own aptitudes, they are different from one another. So 'doing one's own job' seems to encourage the development of diversity. However this is absolutely not the case for Plato. In Plato's view, 'doing one's own job' implies a kind of conformity and identification with a role shared by others.<sup>2</sup> Differences of people's aptitudes, for Plato, are not differences that can be used to tell one person from everyone else. The differences of people's aptitudes mean that there are different *types* of people, and different types of people are suited for different kind of life. As Laszlo G. Versenyi points out,

The *arche* or *genesis* of the polis, the reason why it comes into being at all, lies in human nature. It lies in the facts that no individual is self-sufficing (*autarkes*) but we are all creatures of many needs, and that no two individuals are alike but we have different needs, desires, talents and abilities.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for the rise of the society is, for Plato, that no individual is self-sufficient. However Versenyi's claim that 'no two individuals are alike', it seems to me, cannot be accepted by Plato. For, as mentioned, Plato in the *Republic* is concerned with different types of people, not with the differences between individuals. People in the ideal state are classed by their different natures, so, for example, a person who was born with golden nature will be placed in the class of the Guardians. Thus people in this class are alike, since they all have the same kind of nature which distinguishes them from the other classes.

We have seen that for Plato people's not being self-sufficient is the cause of the society coming into being, so each individual needs to find a place or role in the society and to be cooperative. It is by cooperation that he or she can fulfill his or her needs. In the first city the reason why people cooperate with one another is that it is in practice difficult to survive without society. Therefore, people, in the first city, have

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<sup>2</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> L. G. Versenyi, "Plato and His Liberal Opponents", *Philosophy*, vol. XLVI, 1971, p. 224.

to be social in order to survive. However, when Plato moves on to talk of the ideal state, he seems to have quite a different view on why men have to be social.

In the ideal state, the differences in people's aptitudes mean that each individual understands that his or her aptitude is different from others', will be disposed to an appropriate place or role in the society, and devotes his or her time to perform his or her role well. The differences in people's aptitudes seem to be used by Plato as a means towards the good of a state as a whole. That is to say that a just society can come into being only when all the individuals within it can find their own natural or proper roles, and finding of their proper roles is not dependent upon their personal inclination, because that would lead people to care only for their own interests and become selfish, but upon the inclinations that spring from the social role for which they are fitted best.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a just city each individual should perform their own parts properly. The Guardians, the Auxiliaries, and farmers and artisans, etc., all know their parts well, and perform them well. It is this 'doing one's own job' by which an ideal state can be achieved. And, on the other hand, doing one's own job for which one is naturally suited enables one to fulfill one's function (*ergon*); and to perform one's function well is to fulfill one's own nature. Therefore the existence of society, in this sense, is not merely for people's survival, but for their well-being. In other words, society, as Aristotle thinks, is an essential condition of the good life. Men are social because without society men cannot perform their natural functions properly, and performing our natural functions well, for Plato, is not only for the good of the society as a whole but also for that of the individual.

We can find a parallel to this in Confucianism. In the time of Confucius, the authority of the House of Zhou dynasty has been drastically declining, and it was superseded by nobles and ministers. At that time there was a society without order. The disorder of society resulted from the disorder of the social institutions. Confucius says in the *Analects*,

When the Way prevails in all under Heaven, the rites, music, and punitive expeditions emanate from the Son of Heaven.<sup>5</sup> When the Way does not

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<sup>4</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> The expression 'the Son of Heaven' is a respectful form of addressing the emperor. In ancient China

prevail in all under Heaven, the rites, music, and punitive expeditions emanate from the feudal lords. If they emanate from the feudal lords, surely it is rare for them not to be lost within ten generations; and if they emanate from their grandees, it is rare for them not to be lost within five generations. If their subordinate officials have control of state commands, it is rare for them not to be lost within three generations. When the Way prevails in all under Heaven, government is not in the hands of the grandees. When the Way prevails in all under Heaven, ordinary people do not hold discussions. (XVI, 2)

Confucius believes that the degeneration of political and social institutions and of states starts from the top. He thinks that the only way to restore the order of society is to arrange affairs so that the Emperor will continue to be Emperor, the nobles to be nobles, the ministers to be ministers, and the common people common people.<sup>6</sup> This theory is called 'the Rectification of Names'. For Confucius the names have to match the actuality and vice versa. The name is the essence of a thing, such as, an emperor, to which the name is applied. Thus, the phrase 'let the emperor be emperor', the first word 'emperor' is a material actuality, and the second 'emperor' is the name of the emperor, which not only depicts the concept of the emperor, but also defines the duties and rights of the emperor.<sup>7</sup> Therefore to be a good emperor is to perform the role of the emperor according to its name, and to fulfill the duties and obligations which have their rise from the role. So when Confucius was asked by Duke Jing of Qi of government, he said,

Let a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son. 'Excellence', said the Duke. 'Indeed, if a ruler be not a ruler, a subject be not a subject, a father be not a father, and a son be not a son, even if there is grain, shall I manage to eat it?' (XII, 11)<sup>8</sup>

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people believed that the authority of the emperor is from the Heaven.

<sup>6</sup> Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. I, (trans.) Derk Bodde (Princeton, 1983), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Fung, *op. cit.* p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion on 'the Rectification of Names' see Part II, Chapter 2, Section 3.

We can see here that the cause of the disorder of the society is that the material actuality and the name do not correspond to one another. Therefore Confucius thinks that the remedy for a disorderly society is to rectify the names. Through the process of the rectification of names everyone can find their proper stations and roles, and everyone performs only their duties and obligations according to the institutions which determine their roles. Confucius says that “ [i]f one is not in a certain office, one does not plan the government involved in that office ” (XIV, 26), and his disciple Master Zeng says that “ a gentleman does not stray from his station ” (XIV, 26). Therefore, fulfilling the duties and obligations which arise from the roles one occupies is essential to the social order.

In brief, Confucius, like Plato, believes that an orderly or just society can be achieved only when people are able to perform their social roles properly. Although they have different approaches — one puts it in terms of ‘ doing one’s own job ’, the other in terms of the Rectification of Names — what they are aiming at is the same, a just or orderly society.

## 2. Morality and social roles

However can we confidently say that a man is morally good because he performs his social roles properly and fulfills his duties and obligations? This is the issue I shall discuss in this section. Before I proceed to discuss it, I would like to say something about the notion of society.

People often say that human beings are social animals. It is quite impossible for a man to live all alone, that is, to isolate himself from a society within which people live together. Society is an obscure term, and it is not easy to give a precise definition of it. But if we refer society to a social system then it may be described or defined more precisely. According to the viewpoint of a social system, “ society is not just the aggregate of individuals who happen to occupy a geographical area, but is the complex network of institutions which gives structure to the life of the community.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. S. Downie, “ Social Roles and Moral Responsibility ”, *Philosophy*, vol. XXXIX, 1964, p. 29.

In short, a society involves a structure of laws, organizations, etc., which make it possible for a group of people to live together. Thus, in a social system we can find libraries, universities, commercial activities, trade unions, political parties, legal institutions and lots of organizations, which together bring a society form and order. However a social system will not operate on its own, it is each individual who lives in the society operating the system. In other words, a social system is like, let us say, a computer consisting of hardware and software, the computer like the social system will not work by its own without an operator, a human being. The difference is that the operator stands outside the computer whereas the social system is operated by those within it. Due to the fact that in a social system every activity has to be determined by certain rules to which the activity is connected, the individuals' actions are to some extent confined by those rules. They have to act in accordance with the rules which determine their roles in a social system. That is, in order to act in social roles properly they have to understand the duties and rights defined by rules. Thus when a man is playing his role, say, a policeman, in the social system, he is acting as a policeman. His duties and rights are closely connected with the role of police. This, at first sight, seems to echo the ideas of Plato and Confucius.

For, firstly, both of them regard human beings as social animals. Although in the *Analects* Confucius does not explicitly mention it, we still can find plenty of evidence. The most obvious evidence is the word 'jen' (human-heartedness). The basic idea of the word 'jen' in Chinese, in etymological sense, consists of 'two' and 'man'. It indicates one's relation with others in society. Secondly, both of them, Confucius and Plato, think that in order to achieve the good of a society as a whole, each individual has to perform their social roles properly. However can we say that for Confucius and Plato, a man is morally good simply because he performs his social roles well? Can morality be explained simply in terms of role performance? The problem, it seems to me, can be put in this way: What is the connection between being a moral agent in a society and performing a role in accordance with the rules which define the duties and rights of the role?

In R. S. Downie's article "Roles and Moral Agency",<sup>10</sup> he gives a clear account

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<sup>10</sup> R. S. Downie, "Roles and Moral Agency", *Analysis*, vol. 29, 1969, pp. 39-42.

of this problem. Downie tackles this problem by analyzing Mayo's two views. On the first view, Mayo claims that the connection between being a moral agent and performing a social role is one of identity. In other words, to be a moral agent is simply to fulfill the rights and duties of a great numbers of roles. And a person's moral responsibility is expressed in the morality of the role itself. Thus, in this account, we might say that one person is a good teacher, it does not matter who the teacher is, but what he is. That is, a good teacher has to give lessons on a regular bases, and meet the expectations of his students. In this sense, morality is nothing to do with the moral agent himself, but consists in fulfilling duties and obligations, and meeting people's expectation. However, says Downie, there is an obvious deficiency in this account. For it cannot explain how a moral agent is to choose which role he has to accept, nor can it account for situations in which two or more roles may conflict. As Dorothy Emmet points out, within a society, "there are constellations of roles, e.g., in family relations and in professional relations, and these are not necessarily coherent; in fact their obligations can and do conflict."<sup>11</sup> For example, a policeman's duty is to maintain the public security, but suppose, his father commits a crime. On the one hand, if he is to be a policeman, it is his duty to arrest his father and deal with according to the law; on the other hand, to be a son he has to be filial. Thus he seems to be in an awkward situation. The first assertion does not tell us how to make a rational decision when one encounters superimposed roles which conflict with one another.

On the second view, Mayo claims that moral agency is itself a particular role which is distinct from that of professor, police, etc.. Without saying one is for or against this assertion, several deficiencies should be pointed out. Firstly, it is not compatible with the first assertion, since in the first assertion there is no distinction between a moral agency and particular roles, but in the second assertion every moral agent always has two roles, the role of police, etc., and that of moral agent. And we have mentioned that one may have two or more roles which conflict with each other. So the question arises, when the demands of the moral roles and those of the particular roles conflict with each other, which would be the priority? There seems to

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<sup>11</sup> D. Emmet, *Rules, Roles and Relations* (London, 1966), p. 146.

be no answer to this question. Secondly, if moral agency were itself a specific role then it would be chosen or rejected. In the sociological view, social roles, not biological roles, can be chosen and rejected. Whereas it would be odd to say that one can choose to reject to be moral agent, since no man can choose not to be moral. As long as he is living in a society and remains a rational member of the society, he still has duties and obligations to fulfill. In ordinary morality, the act of fulfilling one's duties can be regarded as moral agency. So Downie claims that the second assertion seems to be untenable, and that " [p]ersons are necessarily moral agents, and can accept or reject roles."<sup>12</sup>

If we turn our attention back to both Plato and Confucius, it seems to me then that both Plato's appeal to ' doing one's own job ' and Confucius' appeal to the Rectification of Names cannot be fully explained by Mayo's first view, i.e. the idea of the role performance as that has been understood by modern writers, such as Downie. Central to their view is that roles are a matter of what we *do* rather than what we *are*. But both Plato's and Confucius' ideas cannot be fully explained only by such an act-centred theory. For an act-centred theory focuses on the notion of *right act*, i.e. what is the right thing to do? Thus the right thing for a police to do is to fulfill his duty, e.g. to keep society safe. In this point of view, the answer to ' what is the right thing to do?' would be a list of duties and obligations. If we go on to ask what is a good man, then the answer to it would be that a good man is the one who does what he or she ought to do, and does it in the right manner on the right occasion. We identify a good man as a person who is capable of fulfilling his or her duties, and the morality can be found in their doing the right thing.

It is worth noting that for both Confucius and Plato there is no ' fact and value ' distinction, and ' is and ought ' distinction. The factual statement that I am a student, for Plato and Confucius, implies evaluative statements about how a student ought to behave. Thus for Plato to say that someone is a farmer by nature is to imply that he ought to perform the function of a farmer and not some other function. Similarly for Confucius to say that someone is a father is to imply that he ought to fulfill the duties and obligations which arise from the role, father. For Plato and Confucius, however,

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<sup>12</sup> *op. cit.* p. 42.

to be a good man is something which is more than fulfilling his duties. In the *Republic* IV Plato claims that for a man to be just he needs to have a balanced soul. Plato is not interested in people's external actions, but in their inner mental states. It is only when the three elements (reason, appetite, and spirit) of one person's soul are in a state of balance, he can be called a just man. Thus the basis for a man to be just does not merely depend upon how he acts, but upon what kind of person he wants to be. Moreover, in the *Republic* I Plato points out the deficiencies of the idea that justice is a matter of a list of duties and obligations. Therefore at the beginning the role-set morality may be superficially applied to Plato's 'doing one's own job', but if we go further to see what Plato is saying, then we will find out that the basis for being a just man is not to be concerned with the external behaviour, but with his balanced inner state.

In the *Analects* lots of passages seem to suggest that we can tell whether or not one person is a good man by his external behaviour, for example,

The master said: 'Young men should be filial when at home and respectful to elders when away from home. They should be earnest and trustworthy. Although they should love the multitude far and wide, they should be intimate only with the humane. ....' (I, 6)

Duke Ding asked how rulers should employ ministers, and how ministers should serve rulers. Master Kong replied: 'Rulers in employing ministers do so in accordance with ritual, and ministers in serving rulers do so in accordance with loyalty.' (III, 19)

Here we get an impression that Confucius' account of morality seems to be based on people's behaviour in everyday life. To be a good ruler or a good minister is a matter of performing their social roles. However, this cannot be the case for Confucius, in that there is one passage in the *Analects* which doubts the idea that morality can be fully explained in terms of role-performance.

Zixia asked about filial piety. The Master said: 'It is the demeanour that is difficult. If the young people bear the brunt of their elders' labour when



there is work to be done, and if the elders are provided with sustenance when there is wine and food available, then does one consider that this constitutes filial piety?' (II, 8)

The filial demeanour, for Confucius, cannot be explained only in terms of bearing the brunt of the elders' labour or providing sustenance, it must emanate from one's inward character. That is to say, one cannot be said to have filial demeanour unless one *wills* to behave in that way. Only when a person understands what it is to be filial, and is aware that he is willing to do it, can his behaviour be called filial. This is what I understand F. H. Bradley's assertion that "you can not have the moral world unless it is willed; that to be willed it must be willed by persons; and that these persons not only have the moral world as the content of their wills, but also must in some way be aware of themselves as willing this content."<sup>13</sup> In short, a filial son, for Confucius, does filial acts willingly not only because he has to act in conformity with laws and custom, but being filial to his father is the expression of human-heartedness (I, 2).

Furthermore, for both Plato and Confucius men are born into a role or roles. To have a role, in Plato's view, is not a matter of personal choice but of nature. Plato says in the *Republic* that we are born with certain nature according to which we are disposed in certain social class and act in certain role (415a-c). Similarly, for Confucius, one does not choose to act or not to act in a certain role, but derives one's roles either by being born into the family or by inheritance. Both Plato and Confucius, unlike modern liberals, would disagree with Downie's assertion that men can choose or reject roles. For if a person, in Plato's ideal state, could choose or reject his role then the social order would be in danger. It would do great harm to the state if a person who by nature belongs to the third class chooses or wants to do the job of the philosopher-kings (343b). Likewise, for Confucius, the social order would be destroyed if a ruler is not a ruler, a subject is not a subject, a father is not a father, and a son is not a son.<sup>14</sup>

Men are born into certain kind of roles, so we are inevitably subjected to moral dilemma, i.e. two roles are in conflict. The example mentioned above about the

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<sup>13</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (London, 1876), p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> See my discussion in Part I, Chapter 3, Section 3.

conflict between a policeman's duty and a son's duty, when the policeman faces the problem of whether he has to arrest his father who commits a crime. Which role should be the priority? Plato and Confucius have different answers to this question. Plato, who sees the state as prior to the family, may think that a citizen's, *qua* citizen, duty is to be loyal to the state and be obedient to laws. Thus the policeman, in order to maintain the social order, has to arrest his father. Moreover, it is worth noting that role conflict might be a reason why Plato proposes to abolish the family in the *Republic* since abolishing the family would help to prevent conflicts of role from happening. Confucius, unlike Plato, thinks that the family is prior to the state. For there will never be an orderly society if there is no order and harmony in the family. A son's, *qua* son, duty is to love his father, so he has to cover up his father's wrongdoing. It is interesting that both Plato and Confucius seem to propose that there is a hierarchy of roles, but they have different views on which role should be primary.

To put this chapter in a nutshell, giving an account of the fact that in a just state one does one's own job, and that in an orderly society the actuality and the name have to match one another, Plato and Confucius start from an act-centred theory, morality is identified as a kind of role performance. But what they are really concerned with is not only people's external behaviour but their inward character. For Plato the inner balance of soul is the basis for being a just man; and for Confucius a humane man is one who not only mechanically performs his social roles well but is willing to perform those roles well. Both Plato and Confucius would agree that one could not fulfill a role, let us say, the wise ruler, unless one is a right kind of person.

## Chapter 11

### Role Conflict

In the developed society we all play more than one role. We are often drawn into a state of loss when our two different roles are in conflict. The purpose of this chapter is to see whether the problem of role conflict, and the conflict between private and public morality arise for either Plato or Confucius. I shall argue that this is not a problem with which Plato and Confucius would be concerned by discussing three topics: first, role conflicts: ruling or contemplation; second, morality and law; and finally, private and public morality.

#### 1. Role conflict: ruling or contemplation

Why should the philosophers rule? The answer to this question can be found in the *Republic* in two passages. The first one is in Book I, where Socrates says that if the philosophers refuse to rule, then we must “bring compulsion (*anagken*) to bear and punish them”; and the worst penalty for their refusal is to be ruled by a worse man (347b9-c5). Therefore, in order to avoid being ruled by a worse man, the philosophers should take the responsibility of ruling. This seems to imply that the philosophers rule out of self-interest, otherwise they will be harmed as a result of being ruled by the one who is worse than themselves.

The second one is in Book VII, where Socrates says that from age thirty to thirty-five, the philosophers in training are engaged in studying dialectic and in philosophical discussions. Then they must be sent back to the Cave again, and be compelled (*anagkasteoi*) to hold the military and political offices for which they are suitable for fifteen years. At the age of fifty, those who have undergone all the relevant practical and intellectual tests, are able to see the Good itself. And they will spend most of their time in philosophical discussion and contemplation, but they are not allowed to do so all the time, since “when their turn comes they will, ..., do their

duty as Rulers, not for the honour they get by it but as a matter of necessity (*anagkaion*)” (539d-540b). Here the reason for the philosophers to rule is that it is *necessary* for them to rule. One might ask whether Plato is talking of two different reasons, compulsion and necessity, for the philosophers to rule. In Greek, the adjective *anagkaios* and the verb *anagkazo* can be taken to mean both compulsion and necessity.<sup>1</sup> So in Greek there is no verbal contrast between compulsion and necessity. One cannot therefore assume that there are two distinct reasons for the philosophers to rule in the *Republic*. In an ideal state the philosophers receive better education than their fellow citizens, and also their everyday needs and commodities are provided by other citizens, it is their duty and obligation to rule the state. Moreover their seeing the Good itself enables the philosophers to lead the state and individual to be in order (519a-520a). Therefore the philosophers’ taking the responsibility of ruling in this sense would be that it is essential for the well being of the state as a whole that the philosophers rule. In short, the philosophers must be compelled to rule because it is necessary for them to rule if the state is to be in order.

It appears from these two passages that the reasons for the philosophers to take on ruling are two: self- or private interest and state’s or public interest. However, one question could be asked: Whether or not private and public interest will be in conflict with one another? The question raised by Glaucon in Book VII appears in a different form but, it seems to me, has the same meaning as that I propose here. Glaucon says at 519d7 that it will not be fair that we make the philosophers’ lives worse, when it is possible for them to live a better life. What makes the philosophers’ lives worse? Their being forced to rule would make their lives worse, in that ruling is not their own interest, it is philosophy with which they are primarily concerned. Therefore in order to perform their duty in ruling a state, the philosophers have to *sacrifice* their own interest to some extent.

In addition, in Book IV Plato says that it is just to do one’s own job. It could be asked which one, studying philosophy or ruling a state, would be the job for the philosophers, or would both be. If the answer to it were one of the two jobs, then the problem would not arise. If it is both, it might be that Plato ought to see a problem

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<sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1997), p. 53.

here. For to be a good philosopher is to do one's job well, i.e. to study philosophy and attend philosophical discussions most of his time; and to be a ruler is to do one's job well, i.e. one has to perform the role of ruler in accordance with the laws and institutions which give rise to the role. However it seems to me, on the surface, that the duties and obligations of these two roles are difficult to reconcile; if one person wants to do both of them properly, one of them must be sacrificed to some extent. For it would seem that, in Plato's view, one can only be either a philosopher *qua* philosopher or a ruler *qua* ruler. Also one person doing two jobs in an ideal state is incompatible with Plato's notion of justice. A moment's thought, however, suggests that Plato must see philosophizing and ruling as part of the same job. For Plato may think that the essential task common to both is that of knowing the Good. To know the Form of the Good motivates the philosophers to bring the good to the state as a whole. It is said in the *Timaeus* that the Maker of our universe sees the eternal model, so the universe is beautiful and good. For the Maker's wisdom enables Him to make things around Him good. Similarly we might say that the philosophers' wisdom both enables and motivates them to make the state good.<sup>2</sup>

If this is right the role of the philosopher and the role of the ruler would be indistinguishable. But it might still be argued that it is against the philosopher's interest to rule. R. Kraut, in his article "Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato"<sup>3</sup>, gives an account of Socrates' insistence. He appeals to an analogy of father and son and says that a father loves his son, and he will see his son as an extension of himself. So when he considers his interest he will consider his son's interest as well. It is not because whatever benefits his son will ultimately affect him, but because his son's benefit is his benefit. The consideration of his son's benefit is described by Kraut as a consideration of his own 'extended interest'. Whereas when one considers his own interest, he is considering his 'proper interest'. When the father deliberates he takes into account both his extended and his proper interest, and weighs their relative importance, and then acts in his own interest, all things considered. The father's act

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Timaeus*, 29e; also J. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 14, 1977, pp. 151-57, esp. pp. 155-57.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kraut, "Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato", *Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXXII, 1973, pp. 333-35.

may be contrary to his proper interest or contrary to his extended interest, which will depend on the circumstances. But one thing can be sure is that he never acts against his interests, when both his proper and extended interests are taken into account. In short, the father somehow combines the two to form a single judgement of his overall interest.

It is clear that if we draw an analogy with the relation of the philosophers to the state, the father will be the philosopher and the son will be the state. Therefore when the philosopher decides to take the responsibility of ruling he is considering his extended interest — the interest of the state. It may be argued that the philosopher makes a choice at the expense of his own interest. But so far as the argument of proper and extended interests goes, whatever the philosopher decides, he decides on the basis of his interest — taking both his proper and extended interests into consideration. One issue which may be considered here is that Kraut's notion of proper and extended interest seems to suggest that the philosophers *want* to rule, but in the *Republic* Plato does not use the language of 'want' but of 'compulsion'. If we take 'compulsion' as being afraid of being ruled by the worse, then when the philosophers decide to rule under this consideration they are thinking of their own proper interests. At the same time, the philosophers might realize that their being in office would be good for the state as a whole. However we cannot regard this as compelling the philosophers to rule against their will. For we have to assume that the philosophers see the need to rule and are therefore willing to rule. But they do not enjoy it and therefore see it as an unpleasant necessity. The motivation for the philosophers to rule, as mentioned, is that to love the Good is to want to make things around them good.

It is worth noting that Kraut's distinction between one's proper interest and one's extended interest could be applied to Confucius. A sage, in Confucius's view, need not to be a ruler. Confucius in the *Analects* says that being dutiful towards one's parents and friendly towards one's brothers constitute taking part in government (II, 21). Therefore the sage does not have to choose between ruling and self-cultivation. Moreover, the state, for Confucius, is the family writ large. So an orderly state depends upon each family within it being orderly. It is said in the *Great Learning* that "[w]hen the individual families have become humane, then the whole country will be

aroused toward humanity. When the individual families have become compliant, then the whole country will be aroused toward compliance ” (Ch. 9).<sup>4</sup> In the family the interest of the father would be identical with that of the family as a whole. That is, the father’s proper interest is identical with his extended interest. In other words, the Confucian sage does not have to face the dilemma, which troubles the commentators of Plato, because the identification of the father’s proper interest with his extended interest, i.e. the interest of the family as a whole, and the analogy of the family and the state make Confucian sage free from the conflict between private and public interest.

Although the sage is not necessarily a ruler, nevertheless Confucius in the *Analects* advises the superior man to take part in politics. In the *Analects*, Zixia, Confucius’ disciple, says that “ [i]f one has more than enough energy for office, then one studies; and if one has more than enough energy for study, then one holds office ” (XIX, 13). In Chinese tradition, scholars and civil servants are in some way interrelated. For receiving proper education used to be a shortcut for the ordinary people to get into office. It is worth noting that Confucius does not, like Plato, assert overtly that it will be very harmful if people of the lower class try to get into the military class or even the Guardian class (434b). But Confucius does hold the view that it is harmful if unsuitable people gain political office. Nor does Confucius assert that it will be unjust for one person to do more than one job at the same time. Moreover Confucius admires the political system in San Wong, that is, in the reigns of three rulers, Yao, Shun, and Yu. Yao was the first really humane ruler in ancient China, he did not hand his political power to his son, but to Shun who was said to be a man of virtue and wisdom. Shun followed the example of Yao, and handed his political power to Yu, who was famous for his regulating rivers and watercourses. After Shun’s death, Yu became the emperor of the first dynasty in China — the dynasty of Hsia. And it was from Yu that the empire became hereditary.<sup>5</sup> Confucius’ admiration for the golden age in the past implies that one’s gaining political power should depend on one’s ability and being virtuous rather than heredity.

For Confucius an ideal ruler should be a person who possesses virtue and

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<sup>4</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1973), p. xvi.

wisdom, and the best way of possessing virtue and wisdom is to engage in studying. So Confucius often, in the *Analects*, encourages people to engage themselves in studying. This can be seen at the outset of the *Analects*, where Confucius says that “ [t]o learn something and at times practise it — surely that is a pleasure? ... (1, 1). However, Confucius does not, unlike Plato, regard the scholar’s being in office as a kind of compulsion or necessity. For there is no difference between being a good father and a good ruler. Both of them are the exemplars or models for emulation.

It is noticeable that both Plato and Confucius agree that in existing states, philosophers or scholars are free to choose whether they would like to stay in office or not. In a totally corrupted state, Plato says,

[T]hey (The philosophers) live quietly and keep to themselves, like a man who stands under the shelter of a wall during a driving storm of dust and hail; they see the rest of the world full of wrongdoing, and are content to keep themselves unspotted from wickedness and wrong in this life, and finally leave it with cheerful composure and good hope. (496d-e)

And Confucius says,

Be of sincere good faith and love learning. Be steadfast unto death in pursuit of the good *principles*. One does not enter a state which is in peril, nor reside in one which is rebellious. When the *order* prevails in the world, then *appear* (*you should take a role in office*). When it does not, then *hide* (*you should resign from the office and retire from political life*). (VIII, 13)<sup>6</sup>

Confucius, like Plato, seems to suggest that in a corrupted state, when one’s private interest or moral view is in conflict with public interest or moral view. One should primarily consider one’s own interest, staying away from political power, although the country is in need of one’s help. For a totally disorderly state is beyond help. This may seem to introduce a kind of egoism. In the *Republic* the same idea is introduced,

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<sup>6</sup> *italics* are mine.



as we saw at 496a-d. However, for Plato and Confucius, staying away from the office cannot be regarded as the expression of egoism, in the disorderly state philosophers will have no influence on evildoers who hold sway. Conversely, their moral qualities might be destroyed by those evildoers. Therefore, the philosophers had better withdraw from politics.

## 2. Morality and law

I have given a brief introduction to the conflict between private and public interest both in the *Analects* and the *Republic*. I shall proceed in this section to discuss the relation between morality and law to see whether, for Plato and Confucius, moral obligation and political or legal obligation are distinct.

In a role-performance model, morality is regarded as a matter of fulfilling one's duties and obligations according to the laws and institutions which determine the roles. The function of the laws or institutions is to sustain a society and keep it in order. The role-performance model thus seems to hold that being a morally good citizen requires one to act in accordance with the laws passed by the government. However does this mean that people have moral obligation to obey the laws irrespective of whether they are good or bad? For it is possible for a dictator to pass a law, for example, requiring every adult male to do military service, on the pretense of self-defence, when in fact the dictator wants to invade his neighbouring country. Does it mean that one has to obey the law which is at odds with one's moral conviction? Invading a neighbouring country is immoral and unjust.

A positive law theorist may think that legal and moral obligation are quite distinct. For law can be explained and accounted for without being dependent upon any thesis about moral principles or values.<sup>7</sup> Positive law theory thus claims that "law can be defined without any reference to its content"<sup>8</sup>, that is, law is laid down by the

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<sup>7</sup> N. MacCormick, "Natural Law and the Separation of Law and Morals", *Natural Law Theory: Contemporary Essays*, (ed.) R. P. George (Oxford, 1994), p.107.

<sup>8</sup> A. Flew (ed.), *A Dictionary Of Philosophy* (London, 1984), p. 197.

government. On this theory, legal obligation is simply a matter of government coercion and lacks any moral content. It thus remains an open question whether or not there is a moral obligation to obey the law. In other words, legal obligation and moral obligation are quite distinct concepts.

However is it true to say, as the Positivists would claim, that there is a clear distinction between law and morality? Although it is often argued, in a Positivist view, that bad law is still law, because its being law depends purely on certain social institutions. The Japanese Emperor, for example, passed the law which made Japanese invasion of China in the World War II lawful. It is no doubt a bad law but “ [i]ts being law is an issue of social fact, not one of moral value.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless it is difficult to deny that there are some connections between law and morality. As N. MacCormick points out: first, laws are intelligible only by reference to the ends and values they have to achieve. And those who participate in making or implementing the laws should have these ends and values in mind. Although the laws’ validity does not essentially depend upon these moral criteria, “ it does involve acknowledging the moral quality of the relevant ends and values, namely justice and the public good.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, one does not obey a law just because it is a law, or because the law maker’s sincerity in enacting it. One only obeys laws because they promote some kind of social order under a rational basis. It is this rationality<sup>11</sup> which motivates one to obey the laws. And “ [t]he fundamental principle of moral thought is simply the demand to be rational: .... ”<sup>12</sup> It is in this sense that law and morality can be related with each other.

Third, the vocabulary used in moral judgement, such as obligation and rights, right and wrong, and duty and responsibility, is common to legal judgement. For both moral and legal judgement serve to guide our behaviour. To form a moral or legal judgement involves reasoning. The function of reason, says MacCormick, is to universalize and check particular objects, and weigh them in the setting of an

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<sup>9</sup> MacCormick, *op. cit.* p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> J. Finnis, “ Natural Law and Legal Reasoning ”, *op. cit.* p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

aspirationally coherent way of life.<sup>13</sup> In this sense there is a common trait between moral and legal reasoning, i.e. both reasoning are practical.<sup>14</sup>

The issue whether there are different kind of duties, political or legal, and moral duties, is closely connected with conflict between natural law theory and positive law theory. The former claims that it is by human nature that men act towards what is good.<sup>15</sup> The Aristotelian concept of teleology is an example of this. It might be asked however how men can know what is good. It is through the use of *reason* that men can know what is good. Therefore, according to natural law theory, for example, stealing money from someone is morally wrong even if there is no positive law in existence. For it is against human nature which inclines towards what is good. Similarly one might argue, in the view of natural law theory, that it is wrong to obey a bad law.

According to Confucianism, human nature is originally good. Although the notion of the original goodness of human nature is not explicitly mentioned in the *Analects*, it is mentioned by Confucius' successor Mencius, who says in the *Mencius* that in all men there are the feeling of commiseration, the feeling of shame and dislike, the feeling of respect and reverence, and the feeling of right and wrong. These four virtues are called human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, which are not drilled into us from outside, but exist in us at birth (6A:6).<sup>16</sup> The development of these four virtues requires the individual to engage in self-cultivation. Similarly in the *Republic* Plato appeals to human nature to establish and maintain social order in an ideal state (415a-c). Plato also asserts that for a man to be just is to have a balanced soul; his reason is in control, spirit backs up reason's decision, and desire is subdued to reason and spirit. Does this mean that both Plato and Confucius are natural law theorists? To answer this question we need a more explicit account of natural law. I shall list four components as follows:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> For a different view on this issue, see Finnis, *Ibid.* p. 141-3.

<sup>15</sup> For a view on the relation between natural law and human nature, see R. P. George, "Natural Law and Human Nature", *Ibid.* pp. 31-41. Also Finnis, *Ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> J. Boyle, "Natural Law and the Ethics of Traditions", *op. cit.* pp. 11-3.

- 1) There are moral principles which all mature human beings can know, and the naturally known principles are written on the human heart.
- 2) Some specific moral norms follow from these principles in such a way that it is possible for people to see their truth. Although people are often ignorant of them.
- 3) How moral principles and norms can be applied to the more complex circumstances of difficult cases depends upon those who are wise in moral matters.
- 4) The characteristic of natural law is practical reasoning. For there are many important moral judgements within a person's life which cannot be known on the basis of analysis and deduction alone, and there are very many situations in life in which the morally correct course of action cannot readily and confidently be discerned unless one's capacity for moral judgement is highly developed and perfected.

Let us see whether both Plato and Confucius stand on the side of natural law theory. Plato's claim that both in the individual and the state there are four virtues, wisdom, courage, sophrosune, and justice; and Confucius' claim that a humane man is wise, courageous, and trustworthy (IX, 29), seem to match with (1) and (2). That is, there are some basic moral principles which are written in man's heart. Plato clearly believes that there are standards of right and wrong which can be known by reason. But it is not clear whether he would accept that they can be known by all mature human beings. It might be argued that his claim that in the *Republic* only the philosophers can have knowledge of the Good, and the lower class can at best possess belief of it, seems to suggest that these four virtues are not accessible to every individual. However Plato says that we all have some divine conception of the Good and strive for it (505d-e), and in the *Laws* Plato does think that through proper education "the gold in us may prevail over other substances" (645a).

Although Plato does not have the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom in mind, he holds that the philosophers' knowing the Good motivates them to make things good around them. In other words, for Plato, having theoretical wisdom entails that the philosophers are able to make proper judgements about this world. So, unlike Aristotle for example, he pays very little attention to the kinds of thinking

involved in applying basic moral principles to the particular circumstances.

Confucius pays much less attention to the role of reason than does Plato. Confucius' notion of human-heartedness (*jen*) implies that men are social. A superior man therefore is one who is able to have a harmonious social relations, which is the expression of practical wisdom, (4). It is apparent that both the philosophers and the superior men are the experts in moral matters, (3). Therefore though their different conceptions of human nature lead them to understand it in different ways. It seems reasonable to conclude that both Plato and Confucius are in favour of natural law theory.

### **3. Private and public morality**

#### **(a) conflicts between government actions and individual moral beliefs**

In an ideal state all laws would be just and all government decisions would be correct. But, of course, we do not live in ideal states. Some laws are not just and governments do make mistakes. So two questions arise: 1) Should we obey bad laws? 2) Should we take part in a government or serve a government whose policies we believe to be wrong?

Firstly, should we obey bad laws? The positive law theorist, as mentioned above, would say ' Yes ', we have a legal obligation to obey laws. But as we have seen ' legal obligation ' in the positivist means ' coercion '. The positivist can deny us that we have a moral obligation to obey law. But the natural law theorist would put the same point differently. He would argue that since there are connections between law and morality, a morally bad law is legally invalid, i.e. it is not a law at all. It is not entirely clear what Plato would say here. In the *Crito* he makes Socrates argue for obedience, but in the *Republic* he is very scathing about existing government. Perhaps he would say that we should obey laws in so far as they have some tendency to promote justice and in so far as we can do so without actually being unjust ourselves.

It is difficult to see what Confucius would say about this question. For in the *Analects* he is not at all interested in rule of law. Nevertheless I assume that he would say that we should not obey bad laws. For if merely obeying good laws does not make

us have a sense of shame, and a good character, obeying bad laws clearly cannot achieve this. Laws for Confucius are not essential to making people morally good and maintaining social order. He says in the *Analects*,

Lead the people with governmental measures and regulate them by law and punishment, and they will avoid wrongdoing but will have no sense of honor and shame. Lead them with virtue and regulate them by the rules of propriety (*li*), and they will have a sense of shame and, moreover, set themselves right. (II, 3)<sup>18</sup>

An orderly society, in the Confucian view, might be achieved by rule of law. However, obeying laws does not make people have a sense of shame, nor does it make people have a good character. Thus Confucius, like Plato<sup>19</sup>, thinks that law is the second best means to run a state. The best way to govern a state is to have a virtuous ruler as a model for emulation, and to regulate people by the rules of proper conduct.

Secondly, in a modern society there may be problems when government actions conflict with an individual minister's own moral views. Thus should we take part in a government, or serve a government whose policies we believe to be wrong? This question can be tackled in two ways.<sup>20</sup> The first one would be: How far a politician would allow his own moral view to affect the fulfillment of his social role? R. S. Downie suggests two views on this question: one is 'resign-if-you-disagree', and the other view is 'ignore-your-own-attitude'. The latter implies that a public servant should not have his own policy, since if the public servant only enacts the policies with which he agrees, then the operation of the government would be thwarted. However, there are several disadvantages in holding the resign-if-you-disagree view. Firstly, frequent resignation will lead to political instability. Secondly, the consequences of resignation might go beyond those of policies for which the person resigned. Thirdly, resignation may lead to the fact that the role or the policy may be

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<sup>18</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 22

<sup>19</sup> The *Statesman*, 297e4-5. For Plato the ideal ruler is the best means to run a state.

<sup>20</sup> R. S. Downie, *Government Action and Morality*, ch. IV (London, 1964), pp. 101-13. Also in Downie's book, *Roles and Values*, ch. 6 (London, 1971), pp. 138-45.

carried out by the person who is worse than the person who resigned.

The problem of conflict between government actions and minister's own moral views in modern liberal societies does not arise for either Plato or Confucius. For as mentioned in the ideal state there is no distinction between private and public morality. Nevertheless something like it does arise when they consider existing corrupt societies. The first view seems to be endorsed by Confucius in the *Analects*, where he says that when the order prevails in the world, then you should take a role in office. When it does not, then you should resign from the office and retire from political life (VIII, 13). For if a gentleman remains in office in a disorderly society, his own moral integrity would be devastated by wickedness. Therefore he should resign from his office, and only pays attention to his own moral character without thought of others. Similarly, for Plato if the philosophers live in a disorderly society not in an ideal one, they should be far away from politics. Conversely it is clear that the ignore-your-own-attitude view would not be accepted by Confucius, neither will it be accepted by Plato. Since in the ideal state the people in office are the philosophers. They are the only ones who can have an insight into the Good itself, and know what is good for the state as a whole and for individuals. Against this one might point out that in *Republic I* Plato suggests that the just men should rule for fear of being ruled by worse men. Thus it would seem that, provided the society is not utterly corrupt, Plato should concede that the philosopher should play some part in politics. There would be a parallel here with the arguments about the disadvantages of resignation.

#### **(b) self-regarding and other-regarding conduct**

Thinkers in the liberal tradition have been much concerned with question of public and private morality. The question: Whether a person's being fit for a public office or not should depend on his private moral life? can be treated in two ways. Firstly, public office and private morals are separated. For what a politician does after his office hour would be his business, so long as his choice of doing things would not put the national security in danger. J. S. Mill claims that there is a distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding conduct. Thus our actions are not accountable to

society in so far as they are not prejudicial to the interests of others.<sup>21</sup> The American president Clinton's sexual scandal might be a good example. The president's sexual activities are his personal matters which are no one's business but his. So far as he can perform the duties and obligations of the president, it does not matter whether in private he is zealous in having sex. However, his using the presidential power to obstruct the judicial justice or committing perjury in order to cover up the so-called Zippergate scandal may lead the president to be impeached. For his abuse of the presidential power and perjury are not matters of self-regarding conduct, but of other-regarding conduct. They do harm to the judicial system and are unlawful.

Second, there is a continuity between the public office and private morals. But this view will stand only when it is considered in a restricted sense, i.e. if a politician never tips the waiter, his failure of doing so will not affect his political life, although people will call him mean. If a politician however commits an adultery, it might affect his political career. For example, the woman with whom he has an adultery might exploit him to get the documents of national security, if so, then the politician's adultery will put the country in danger. Moreover it might be argued that the politician is a public example, his behaviour of adultery will set a bad example for the society.

This is again a problem in modern liberal societies, I think nevertheless that both Plato and Confucius would take the continuity view, since for them to be a ruler does not only mean that one person can fulfill the role of the ruler, but also that he has the kind of character of being ruler. When Confucius was asked by Ji Kang Zi

[H]ow the people might be induced to be respectful and loyal so that they might be properly encouraged. The Master says: If you oversee them with dignity, they will be respectful. If you are dutiful towards your parents and kind to your children, then they will be loyal. If you promote the good and instruct the incompetent, then they will be encouraged. (II, 20)

Thus, a good ruler not only performs his role properly, but also possesses the kind of

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<sup>21</sup> J. Riley, *Mill: On Liberty* (London, 1998), chs. 5 and 6.



character which enables him to lead the public and to be an good example of the society. The same idea appears in the *Republic*: before taking on the task of ruling the philosophers would receive a long-term education, which consists of physical, intellectual, and moral education. When they pass all tests, then they will not only be competent but also have a good character for ruling. In other words, the philosophers would be not only socially but psychologically just.

To put this chapter in a nut shell. The problems of role conflict which confront modern liberal philosophers do not arise for both Plato and Confucius. Firstly, both Plato and Confucius think that the interest of an individual is identical with that of the state as a whole. What is good for the state is good for the individual. Thus the philosophers do not worry about which one they have to choose, ruling or contemplation. Secondly, as natural law theorists, they do not distinguish law from morality. All legal and political obligations have to be explained on the basis of morality. However, Confucius and Plato do not see law as the best means to govern a state. Thirdly, the conflict between public and private morality is a problem for modern liberal societies, not for Plato and Confucius. For Plato rejects the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding conduct, partly because he sees it as the main purpose of the state to promote virtue and partly because he has an agent centred view of virtue. What matters for him is not primarily the sort of acts one does but the sort of person one is. Confucius rejects the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding conduct, partly because the superior manhood can only be achieved within society, and partly because any sensible account of moral agency should involve both agent-centred and act-centred view of morality. One's inner character is revealed as much (or more) by one's private actions as by one's public ones.

## Chapter 12

### Roles and Communitarianism

Human beings are like actors, says P. Morea, in that “ [f]rom womb to tomb we are influenced by our fellow actors and we act the way they expect us to.”<sup>1</sup> Society, in the language of the theatre, can be said to provide the script for all the *dramatis personae*. Each individual actor has to fulfill the role to which he is assigned. As long as the individual actors play their roles in the light of the provided script, the play of society can be on track as planned. In this chapter I propose to discuss three topics: firstly, I would like to discuss the relation between roles and social control to see how by acting in one’s role social order can be maintained; secondly, I shall discuss the sociological view of a role to show how for the sociologists we acquire our role or roles; and finally, the issue of the similarities between the role-performance analysis of society and communitarianism will be considered.

#### 1. Roles and social control

We are all familiar with the analogy between the individual citizens in a society and actors in a play. Morea’s statement, however, may overstate the case, since actors in a play have no choices at all about what they do or say, but have to follow their scripts. But people in a society may still have a considerable number of choices. They have more freedom to choose what they want to do. Only when they make their choices, i.e. they consent to take up a role, do they have to fulfill the duties or obligations which arise from the role.

Social stability can be achieved by social control.<sup>2</sup> It would be hard to imagine that a society can harmoniously exist without social control. In our everyday

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<sup>1</sup> P. Morea, *Personality: An Introduction to The Theories of Psychology* (London, 1990), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> P. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (London, 1963), pp. 83-94.

experience, even in a video rental shop, for example, we can find a mechanism of control, if the shop is to be run properly.

There are three different ways in which social control can be observed. 1) The first and the oldest method of social control is physical violence. This can be seen in most modern democratic societies in which policemen are armed. Although in some societies policemen are not armed, such as Britain, yet the last step in dealing with someone who evades tax, for example, might be that policemen show up at the door with a warrant and take him to the court. The action of taking someone into custody may be seen as a kind of physical violence, which is one of the methods of social control. Moreover, capital punishment in some societies is regarded as a method of preventing people from committing crimes. For the authorities in those societies believe that the abolition of capital punishment will lead to the increasing of criminal rate and cause social instability.

However this does not mean that the constant use of force in society is practical and effective. The use of force has to be on behalf of the majority of the people. It has to be accepted and understood by people that it is good for them and for society as a whole that force is employed. Take an example, there have been armed forces patrolling in London since the IRA started bombing. But people would feel strange or somewhat terrified by patrolling armed forces in the street if the bombing had never happened. The existence of armed forces in the street is accepted by people since they realize that it will bring social order back and their lives can be secured. It is in this sense that the role of force in social control can be introduced.

2) The second method of social control has three elements: a) morality, b) custom, and c) manners. (a) In a morality which emphasizes role-performance, to be a morally good bank clerk is to perform the role of bank clerk properly. If one who is a bank clerk fails to play his role properly, e.g. by embezzling public funds, he is immoral. As a result of his being immoral he may lose his job and even be put into jail. (b) Custom is also a powerful factor in social controllability. A few years ago, for example, it would be impossible to imagine that gay people dared to stand up to people's curious eyes and to claim their rights. For their behaviour went against social custom and their claim of gay people's rights might have caused them to lose their jobs or made it difficult for them to find other ones. (c) Bad manners will lead one to

be unpopular within a group. One might even be dismissed in a company because of one's bad manners towards one's superior.

It can be seen that all these three elements require people to be conformists. In other words, (a) the individuals' behaviour has to be in conformity with moral rules which give rise to the duties and obligations of roles. (b) The individuals' behaviour has to conform to the custom in their society, which is accepted and practiced by most people. (c) The individuals' manners have to conform to what most people think that is a good manners, since they live in a web of social relation.

It might be worth questioning here, in spite of the similarity between these three elements, whether morality, custom, and manners are identical with each other or not. It is obvious that custom is different from morality in that moral rules would not vary from society to society. But custom is regional, two different societies might have different customs. Therefore the requirements of morality and custom would be different. That is, morality requires people to act morally in all circumstances, whereas people might behave differently according to different social customs. Furthermore, if good manners is to mean etiquette, then it might be different from morality. For, in this sense, to have a good manners is merely to follow the formal rules of proper social behaviour. What is the difference between custom and manners? Custom is " [a] form of repeated rational action, in which past performance provides the reason for present practice, .... "<sup>3</sup> To act in accordance with custom is to perform an action which is practised by most people in society. The distinction between custom and manners is not always clear. We often say that it is customary to tip the waiter or waitress in a restaurant. However, *how* we carry out the action tipping the waiter would be a matter of manners. We might tip the waiter in a very rude or polite way. Manners is more specific about *how* we behave towards others. While custom tells us what kind of behaviour is commonly or customarily performed by people.

It is noteworthy that for Plato and Confucius, morality is something different from or more than acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct. To be genuinely moral, for Plato, is something to do with agent's inner mental state, i.e. reason is properly in control. For Confucius following the rules of social conduct cannot be

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<sup>3</sup> R. Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London, 1982), p. 110.

regarded as morality, since it lacks a kind of feeling for people. Both Plato and Confucius would agree that morality is a matter of what kind of person you are, i.e. having a good character, not merely of what kind of act you perform. For Plato without a good character reason might be subject to the control of desires, which makes it be unable to deliberate properly. The philosophers having a harmonious soul are able to make a proper judgement all things considered. Although Confucius does not have a notion of reason in the *Analects*, he claims that the superior man, who possesses a well cultivated character, is humane, brave, and wise (IX, 29).

3) The third method of social control is the human group; that is, one's family or personal friends can also constitute a control system. It is in the family or in the circle of friends that one has the most important and basic social ties. And it could be a disaster if one person is expelled from his family or the circle of his friends, since one would possibly be out of society and become a worthless nobody. Thus in order to keep oneself in this social tie, one's behaviour has to conform to others' expectations, and play one's social roles properly. It is worth noting that Plato, of course, in the *Republic* seeks to abolish the traditional family but to turn the state into a single family to replace it.<sup>4</sup> Confucius on the other hand sees the family as the foundation of social stability.

In sum, no matter which method of social control we refer to, we can find a common basis among them, that is, they all require people to play their roles properly in society. It is playing social roles properly that people can prevent themselves from being punished or expelled from families or groups.

## 2. The sociological conception of a role

From role-performance to social control: we can see that we are in society and play roles in the social system. In what follows, I shall proceed to discuss the sociological conception of a role, and individual identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Plato says at 414e that the Guardians must regard their fellow citizens as "brothers born of the same mother earth."

We all play some roles in society so we all arouse some expectations in others', and also expect something from others. As Berger points out,

[Social] institutions pattern our actions and even shape our expectations. They reward us to the extent that we stay within our assigned performances. If we step out of these assignments, society has at its disposal an almost infinite variety of controlling and coercing agencies.<sup>5</sup>

This seems to suggest that society is like a prison, "[t]here is no 'outside' I can climb over the wall and escape to".<sup>6</sup> For if I climb outside the wall, then I will be punished because of my breaking the sanctions of society.

In the view of sociologists, such as Berger and Mead, individual identity is socially given, socially maintained and socially transformed.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, other people's view or expectations of us would be the basis of our self, and our self is transformed in accordance with the different roles we occupy. In the former case a university lecturer's identity, for example, does not only depend on the fact that he plays the role of university lecturer well, i.e. he always gives lessons on regular basis, but also on his students. For if his students do not respect him, they talk through lectures, and stop attending lectures, then the identity of the university lecturer will be jeopardized. In the latter case a recently promoted manager, for example, might feel uncomfortable when his colleagues call him 'manager', whereas as time lapses he will get used to his new role and new title. Thus personal identity goes with our different social roles and other people's view of us, and Rawls' assertion that there is real self behind social roles we occupy is rejected by this kind of social behaviourism. For the "unobservable 'real self beneath' would not be scientific, and sounds a shade mystical."<sup>8</sup>

The process of finding our self is so-called socialization, and there is a good

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<sup>5</sup> Berger, *op. cit.* p.108.

<sup>6</sup> Morea, *op. cit.* p.116.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, *op. cit.* p.116.

<sup>8</sup> Morea, *op. cit.* p.122.

account of it given by Mead,<sup>9</sup> who asserts that human self emerges in three stages. First, there is a preparatory stage, in which the infant meaninglessly imitates others. In this stage there is no understanding involved in imitation. Second, there is a play stage, where a child goes on doing what others do, but with a gleam of understanding. At this stage, by playing others' parts, such as mother, father, brother, sister, the child has many 'selves', and each of them has its own behaviour. It shows that at this stage the child has no grasp of his or her own identity. Third, there is a game stage, in which as the child has contact with more and more people, he or she realizes "what different people expect of a particular child has many features in common." "So the child moves from many selves, each appropriate for one particular *significant others*, to a single core self which meets the expectations of a composite *generalized other*."<sup>10</sup>

In this interpretation, personal identity is neither something behind our social roles, nor something given by others. Personal identity has to go with social recognition. Each individual learns to play his or her own roles properly by virtue of imitating or playing others' roles at his or her early stage. It is through playing the roles of others that a child discovers the significance of roles which are assigned to him or her. Children's learning to play their own roles takes place in interaction with other human beings, such as their parents and siblings. In other words, a child's learning to play his or her own roles occurs in society. Only when the child can grasp the general concept of society, is he or she able to form the concept of himself or herself. Thus " ' [s]elf ' and ' society ', in the child's experience, are two sides of the same coin."<sup>11</sup>

The assertion of ' the two sides of the same coin ' seems to go hand in hand with Confucian philosophy. A person can understand his or her self only when he or she is in the society. A person outside society is unimaginable for Confucius. For, in Confucius' view, we are born into a family in which we acquire our basic social roles, son or daughter, brother or sister. Our personal identity would be largely determined by the roles we play both in the family and the society. Although Plato in the *Republic* proposes to abolish the family, he would agree that our individual identity is

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<sup>9</sup> Morca, *op. cit.* pp. 120-121.

<sup>10</sup> *op. cit.* p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Berger, *op. cit.* p.117.

intimately linked with our social roles. One man, for Plato, does one job for which he is naturally suited (370b). Who we are and what we do in the state are decided by our nature.

However, Plato's account of immortality of soul, in Book X of the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, seems to suggest that we are not primarily social, and we are independent of any society. For if it makes sense to speak of the same individual as having many lives then his identity cannot be constituted by any particular society. Nevertheless, Plato thinks that the society where we were born into has a great influence upon our characters. Plato's account of the corrupted societies in Book VIII and IX shows that in a corrupted society one might have a corrupted character. And in a corrupted society one's identity would not be one's true identity. For one's true nature or function is distorted by the corrupted society. So our true identity would be the identity we have in an ideal state. For, in Plato's view, each one has to do one job for which he or she is naturally suited. It suggests that one's identity is determined by one's natural function in the ideal society. Thus only in the ideal state can one have a true recognition of who one is.

### **3. The liberal and communitarian conception of a role**

The role-performance theorists' emphasis on the attachments to society seems to go against Gauthier's assertion, when he writes that the individual "is not bound by fixed social roles, either in her activities or in her feelings. Although social affective relationships are essential to the liberal individual, there are no essential social relationships."<sup>12</sup> However, the communitarians, such as Sandel and MacIntyre, assert that one cannot be properly understood unless we refer to one's social, cultural and historical context. The individuals are bound up with the sanction of social roles and they are members of society bound by moral ties.<sup>13</sup> Thus it would be difficult to

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<sup>12</sup> D. Gauthier, "The Liberal Individual", *Communitarianism and Individualism*, (ed.) Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (Oxford, 1995), p.155.

<sup>13</sup> M. Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and The Unencumbered Self", *Ibid.* p.19. S. Mullhall and A. Swift, "MacIntyre: The Morality After Virtue", in *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford, 1994), pp.



imagine that a person is completely detached from his social context, since, as mentioned, he would be a worthless nobody, or a person “ without character, without moral depth ”.<sup>14</sup> In objecting to Rawls’ account of ‘ the veil of ignorance ’ Sandel says,

As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense to distance myself from it, but the distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself.<sup>15</sup>

The existence of society is antecedent to us and we survive and flourish within it. Society existed before we were born and will continue to exist after we are dead. Thus society is a historical entity, one’s identity can only be found in a social, historical and cultural context. Beyond these one’s identity will not be secured. Here we find a similarity between role-performance and communitarianism, i.e. the emphasis on social attachment.

In addition to this view on how our selves are constituted, i.e. one’s identity is dependent upon the society where one lives, there is a second view. In Rawls’ account of ‘ the veil of ignorance ’ we are told that the individuals can be identified only by virtue of their capacity of choice. The individuals’ social, historical and cultural context are out of consideration here. For, in Rawls’ view, these factors would impede people from choosing rationally principles of justice which define the basic structure of the society. Thereby social justice can never be achieved. Individualists claim that one’s self is unencumbered. One is not bound up with social roles, and not necessarily to be understood in a social, and traditional context. One’s identity is constituted by one’s capacity to choose.

Both Confucius and Plato would think that the good of the society as a whole is prior to the individual right. However for the individualists, the situation should be reversed. J. Rawls says,

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70-100.

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

It is not our aims that primarily reveal our nature but rather the principles that we would acknowledge to govern the background conditions under which these aims are to be formed and the manner in which they are to be pursued. For the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it; even a dominant end must be chosen from among numerous possibilities. There is no way to get beyond deliberative rationality. We should therefore reverse the relation between the right and the good proposed by teleological doctrines and view the right as prior.<sup>16</sup>

Thus in Rawls' view one's identity is not bound up with aims and interests. Rather freedom requires that we be able to choose our aims and interests.

The relationship between freedom of choice and society is brought out by Taylor, who objects to the idea of atomism that to be a proper human is to have freedom to choose one's own mode of life. Taylor says that "freedom and individual diversity can only flourish in a society where there is a general recognition of their worth."<sup>17</sup> That is, one's freedom of choice is conditioned by the society in which one lives. In a monogamous society, for example, one can only marry a woman or a man as one's wife or husband. One's choosing to be polygamous would be unacceptable to the society. Furthermore, for example, once one decides to marry a woman whom one has dated for a long time, one's choice of getting married leads one to take the role of husband or the role of father in the future. What a man's wife expects of him is to support the family by working hard. Thus one's individual identity as a husband can only be recognized within a society where a husband's duty or obligation is to take care of the family by working hard. Since

the free individual can only maintain his identity within a society/culture of a certain kind, he has to be concerned about the shape of this society/culture as a whole. He cannot, ..., be concerned purely with his individual choices and the associations formed from such choices to the neglect of the matrix in

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<sup>16</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford, 1973), p. 560.

<sup>17</sup> C. Taylor, "Atomism", *op. cit.* p. 47.

which such choices can be open or closed, rich or meager.<sup>18</sup>

We can never maintain individual identity on our own, it is always dependent upon conversation with others, i.e. the expectation of other people, or upon the common understanding which is the cause of the practices of our society. Having a role in a social system always entails expectations of others. Thus our discovery of ourselves inevitably depends upon the views of others.

At the outset of this chapter I mentioned that the stability of society is partly dependent upon each individual's performing his or her role properly, and partly upon social control. It implies that each individual has to play his or her role well not only because it is good for each individual, i.e. they can keep their positions in the society, but also it is good for a society as a whole, i.e. it promotes stability and prosperity. Now that each individual's identity has to be found in society and in interaction with other people, it would be natural, it seems to me, to assert that only when the good of society as a whole is secured can the individual pursue his or her own good. Therefore when there is a conflict between what is good for the individual and what is good for the society as a whole, one has to give priority to the good of the society as a whole. For without the good of the society, social order, being secured the pursuit of the individual good is meaningless.

However, the individualists would deny that there is common good, they assert instead that each individual has his or her own conception of good, and he or she is free to pursue his or her own good. This view is disputed by the communitarians, such as MacIntyre, who insists on the need for

[... the notion of desert is at home only in the context of] a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and of the good of that community and where individuals identify their primary interests with reference to those goods.<sup>19</sup>

The shared understanding both of the good for the individual and of the good of

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.* p.47.

<sup>19</sup> A. MacIntyre, "Justice as a Virtue: Changing Conceptions", *Ibid.* p. 58.

society implies the constraints on freedom. For the conception of duties seems to construct the value of a common good that consists in a certain sort of ideal social life, a network of relationships, which can be defined in terms of social roles.<sup>20</sup> In a society it would be our duty to achieve the common good. Duties and obligations always entail some sort of limitations. To play a role is to fulfill the duties which are prescribed by the role, and to fulfill the duties is to come up to other people's expectations. Therefore the linkage between role-performance and the common good becomes clear.

The similarities between the role-performance analysis of society and communitarianism, in my point of view, can be presented in three aspects: 1) the individual is attached to society; 2) the individual's identity is constituted by society; and 3) the pursuit of individual good may be restricted to some extent for the sake of the common good. Both the role-performance analysis of society and communitarianism emphasize that an individual can only be understood in his social, cultural, and historical background. Human beings are social, each one is understood as 'a repertoire of roles', with which one's self is identified. In fulfilling one's roles one fulfills the duties and obligations of those roles, and meets others' expectations. One's identity is thus found in interaction with other people, and this interaction can only happen in society. Both the role-performance analysis of society and communitarianism would agree that individual autonomy would be better achieved within society rather outside society, in that an individual outside society would be difficult to be understood, and his or her life would be morally meaningless.

In conclusion. In order to maintain social order, people in the society have to perform their role or roles properly. However when the social order is in danger, the introduction of social control could keep people in their proper stations and bring the order back. Thus the notion of social control helps us to see why doing one's own job is essential to the stability of the society. The similarities between role-performance analysis of society and communitarianism show that the meaning of our existence can only be found in the society. For what role we play in the society constitutes the understanding of our own self. Detaching from the society would be impossible for us

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<sup>20</sup> P. Singer, *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford, 1994), p. 445.

to define our own identity. Both Plato and Confucius would be hostile to the liberal view. Confucius, as we saw in chapter 3, would have much in common with the communitarians. But, in spite of superficial similarities, Plato's position is fundamentally different because he believes that roles depend on our nature.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See appendix.

## Chapter 13

### Roles and Act-Centred Theory

It seems to be a commonplace that ethical theories can be distinguished, in a broad way, into two types: act-centred and agent-centred. Some scholars, such as N. J. H. Dent, might disagree with this distinction, since they hold the view that this distinction is ‘ far too facile ’ to give a full account of morality.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in this chapter I shall still make use of the distinction in order to explore the relationship between the act-centred theory and role morality. Meanwhile I shall refer to Plato’s *Republic* and Confucius’ *Analects* to help me to give an account of it.

#### 1. Role obligation and act-centred theory

Act-centred theory is mainly concerned with the right action or conduct. Its central notions are about obligation, duty, ‘ morally ought ’ and ‘ ought not ’, and right and wrong. It follows that the proper answer to the question ‘ What is the right thing to do?’, in an act-centred view, will be that one should conform oneself to those duties and obligations. That is to say, a good man is the one who is able to fulfill his duties and obligations, and perform the proper actions on all occasions. Therefore we can identify a good man as one who is capable of and willing to do his duty, and his virtue “ lies in conscientiousness about doing the right thing.”<sup>2</sup>

Another picture which is different from the act-centred theory is agent-centred theory. It is principally concerned with the good person or good agent. The central notions of agent-centred theory are of virtue, and goodness. So the question will not be the same as the one which is proposed by act-centred theory, but will be ‘ What kind of person should I be?’ And the proper answer to the question will not refer to

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<sup>1</sup> N. J. H. Dent, “ Virtue and Action ”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 25, 1975, pp. 331-2.

<sup>2</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p. 157.

agent's external actions, but rather to his or her internal state, that is, his or her character. On this view a person is identified by people as just, not because he or she does the right action at the right moment, on the right occasion, but because he or she possesses the very character which is relevant to justice. The just actions he or she does are only the expressions of the very character she or he possesses. Consequently, we can clearly see that act-centred theory is directly connected with action, agent-centred theory, however, is not. As J. Laird points out that "agent-ethics includes potentiality; act-ethics, directly at least, does not. Apart from that, agent-ethics is not restricted to willed action, but act-centred is so restricted."<sup>3</sup> The agent-ethics is not restricted to willed action only, because some involuntary actions can reveal one's character as much as voluntary ones. Furthermore, the 'potentiality', in my understanding, means that when we talk of character we are talking of potentiality or tendency. That is, a person who possesses the character of temperance has the potentiality to behave moderately and temperately. It is by his character that he will behave this or that way.

I hope that this brief account of the distinction between act-centred and agent-centred theory will be helpful in bringing out the main topic of this chapter. The concept of role morality presupposes that a social system will not operate on its own. Its operations are the products of individuals acting in social roles. The individuals are not to act as independent agents, rather they are acting in social roles, i.e. they are in a social web. Social roles entail duties and obligations prescribed or determined by the institutions which give rise to the social roles.<sup>4</sup> So a good person will be the one who is capable of fulfilling the duties or obligations of his or her social roles. Thus role morality gives a central place to role obligation, for role obligation is described by M. O. Hardimon as "a moral requirement, which attaches to an institutional role, whose content is fixed by the function of the role, and whose normative force flows from the role."<sup>5</sup> From this it follows that to be in a role or to play a role well is to fulfill the obligations of that role. Therefore a good husband is one who plays his role as a husband well, e.g. supports his family, is loyal to his wife, etc.. The same account

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<sup>3</sup> J. Laird, "Act-ethics and Agent-ethics", *Mind*, vol. LV, 1946, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> R. S. Downie, "Social Roles and Moral Responsibility", *Philosophy*, vol. XXXIX, 1964, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> M. O. Hardimon, "Role Obligation", *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XCL, 1994, p. 334.

can be found in the act-centred theory — that being a good husband is to fulfill the duties of being a husband.

Two points are noticeable: first, role obligations are obligations which fall on us as a consequence of our place in society. In other words, to be a student I have to fulfill the obligations prescribed by the role. However one might argue that there might be duties and obligations which apply to all men irrespective of their place in society. In the view of natural law theorists, for example, we are required to be honest irrespective of our place in society. But a footballer, for example, might have to make some false movements to cheat his opponents in order to score a goal. The natural law theorists might argue that the footballer is immoral because he is not honest, i.e. scoring a goal by *cheating* his opponents. Whereas the role moralists would argue that the footballer is morally good because he fulfills the obligations prescribed by the role he occupies. Thus whether one has to be honest, in the view of role morality, will depend upon occasion. That is, what role one occupies at the moment.

Second, according to my argument, role morality can be regarded as act-centred theory. However does it mean that there is no distinction between role morality and act-centred theory? If there is then what would be the distinction. Or put the question in this way: Is it justifiable to say that act-centred theory is role morality? The answer to this, I think, is controversial. For, as mentioned, role morality gives a central place to roles. By acting in a role, let us say, a fish monger, I have obligations to fulfill, and in the meantime can claim my right as a fish monger. That is, I have right to receive money from my customers as long as I give them the kind of fish they want. Therefore role morality is concerned with obligations and roles, rights and responsibilities. However it seems to me that act-centred morality does not necessarily give a central place to roles. I am alone in a desert island, for example, and there is an abandoned mansion. In order to keep myself warm in the cold weather I enter into the mansion and occupy it. Here I do not act in any role, so my action's, occupying the mansion, being right or wrong does not depend upon whether I fulfill the obligation prescribed by my role. The moral judgement of my action might depend upon what is the reason for me to occupy the mansion. My reason to occupy it is to survive. In other words, my moral belief tells me that to die in vain is shameful,



thus to survive I have to occupy the mansion.<sup>6</sup> It is clear, according to this view, that my action's being right or wrong depends upon my moral belief which enables me to make a judgement on how to act. And this, it seems to me, marks the difference between role morality and act-centred morality.

Role obligations are often divided into two kinds: contractual and non-contractual.<sup>7</sup> Contractual role obligations, taken literally, require persons who are in those roles to sign on for the roles. That is, a person who signs on as a teacher has to fulfill the duties or obligations of the role as a teacher, which are prescribed in the contract. The contractual roles are often chosen by people who would like to be in those roles. Non-contractual roles, on the other hand, are not matters of people's choices. They are acquired by birth. We are our (biological) parents' son or daughter, we do not choose to be their son or daughter but in our capacities as son or daughter we have to show filial obedience to our parents. Role obligations of this sort are not contractual, i.e. we do not sign on as someone's son or daughter. We are born to be our parents' son or daughter. It might be argued that there are non-contractual roles which do not depend upon birth. If I move to a new house, for example, I acquire the role of neighbour to those who live near me. At first sight this argument seems to be plausible. However the role of neighbour I acquire can also be seen as a kind of contractual role. For there is usually a *tacit contract*<sup>8</sup> within a community, which decides what is the right and responsibility of each member of it. Once I move into the community I tacitly agree that I have to be kind to and help my neighbours when they need.

The other kind of non-contractual obligation is citizenship. We are born to be citizen of this or that state, and we have to do our duties as a citizen of the state to which we belong. The citizenship we have is not acquired from the contract on which we signed. Of course it might be argued that citizenship could be contractual. For immigrants can have their citizenship by signing on as citizens of the country into which they immigrate. Nevertheless most people have their citizenship by birth.

The precise content of non-contractual role obligation and how it comes to exist

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<sup>6</sup> M. Smith, "Realism", *A Companion to Ethics*, (ed.) P. Singer (Oxford, 1993), pp. 399-410.

<sup>7</sup> Hardimon, *op.cit.* p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> "Voluntary acceptance may be tacit", see Hardimon, *Ibid.* p. 357.

may be unclear. Some people might be inclined to say that we just know we have such obligations (presumably by some kind of intuition). Others might argue that they are determined by the multitude of informal customs which we take for granted. Due to the fact that non-contractual role obligations are less clear than contractual ones, it might be suggested that those problematic role obligations should be abandoned. However, the cost of abandoning those non-contractual role obligations might be huge,<sup>9</sup> since, firstly, our self-conception might be radically changed. It would be odd for us to regard ourselves as family members but without being under any obligation to the family. “ [T]he idea of noncontractual role obligation is an essential element of conceiving of oneself as a family member and citizen. ”<sup>10</sup> Secondly, being a family member involves acting in conformity with the role we occupy. If non-contractual role obligation were to be abandoned, there would be a radical transformation of how we live our lives. For a large part of what is meant by ‘ son ’ is that one has certain duties. A society which did not recognize these duties could not have *our* concept of a son. Our attachment to family is so central to our self-identification, thus our moral lives are not only characterized by our institutional roles but also by our non-contractual roles. Both contractual and non-contractual role obligations are widespread in our moral life.

It is worth noting that for modern liberal thought whether people have contractual and non-contractual roles depend upon the acceptance of those who occupy that role. For example the obligations of a shoemaker do not apply to me unless I *reflectively accept*<sup>11</sup> that role. My accepting the role as a shoemaker depends upon whether I judge subjectively that it is desirable, or preferable. The main determinant in one’s having a role is one’s ability to choose. This ability to choose, I think, marks the difference between modern liberals and Plato, which I shall discuss in the next section.

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<sup>9</sup> Hardimon, *op. cit.* p. 346.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Hardimon, *Ibid.* p. 347-51.

## 2. The differences between Plato and Confucius on family and role obligation

In the *Republic* IV, Plato claims that in an ideal state justice is doing one's own job (433e). Thus Plato's account of justice *in the state* can be properly interpreted in terms of role obligation and act-centred theory. For doing one's own job requires people of the three classes to stick to their own business, and not to trespass or interfere with others' business. That is, being a good shoemaker, for example, is to play his role as a shoemaker well. To provide enough shoes for the needs of people. For Plato, doing one's own job implies a sort of conformity and identification with the roles.<sup>12</sup> The shoemaker is acting in accordance with an obligation which takes its rise in the role of shoemaker. The reason for the shoemaker to fulfill his obligations is not that he thinks that the role of shoemaker is *reflectively acceptable*, but that he knows or realizes that his aptitude is suitable for being a shoemaker (370b). It is noticeable that when Plato starts talking about the primitive society around 369, he clearly has an act-centred view of roles. Plato says that the farmer's obligation is to provide enough food for all the people and devote enough time to food production (369e). But as soon as Plato starts talking of aptitudes or nature (*phusis*) he begins to move away from this position. He seems to say that our duties depend upon our aptitudes, i.e. the kind of person we are. In an ideal state roles and aptitudes may coincide.

Therefore, the claim that 'the role of shoemaker is reflectively acceptable' cannot be accepted by Plato. For in the ideal state each individual cannot choose his or her role according to his or her interest, but each individual's social role is dependent upon his or her nature or aptitude. Moreover, not only does a shoemaker *play* his role, but also he identifies himself with the role. He is more than the occupant of the role of shoemaker, he is engulfed in the role. A shoemaker's life is valuable because his social role is dependent upon his personal aptitude which fits him for being a shoemaker, and his life style will be largely determined by his social role. In Plato's view, a society is a cooperative association, people's different aptitudes will dispose them to their natural places within the society. To fulfill one's

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<sup>12</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 74.

obligations prescribed by one's social role is to perform one's function (*ergon*) well, and to perform one's function well is to achieve the fulfillment of one's nature. For, in Plato's view, one has to do one job for which one is *naturally* suited.

In Book III of the *Republic* Plato tells us a story of how people of the three classes can be identified. It is by one's nature that one is determined to be in a particular class. The nature of the Guardians is gold, that of the Auxiliaries is silver, and that of farmers and artisans is iron and bronze (415a-c). This passage together with 370b seem to suggest that there are no contractual roles existing in Plato's ideal state. For people's jobs are determined by their own aptitudes or natures, and to be gold, or silver, or iron and bronze is decided by birth. Therefore one person is born to be a shoemaker, the other is born to be an Auxiliary, since their social roles, according to Plato, have to be determined by their aptitudes and natures. It is worth noting that in non-contractual societies one's role may be determined by some other ways: 1) by government decree: for example, one lives in a monarchical society, one's role may be determined by the king; 2) by religious doctrine: according to Tibetan Buddhism, for example, Dalai Lama is determined by one's being the incarnation or manifestation of buddhahood; and 3) by heredity: in a feudal society one's role may be determined by one's inheriting one's family business. All these three kinds of society and Plato's ideal state are in contrast with liberal societies of which contractual roles are characteristic.

Furthermore, Plato's abolishing the family (415d-417b, 457b-d) seems to suggest the same idea that there is no contractual roles existing in the upper class in the ideal state, since the starting point of a family is the marriage between a couple, thus the role of husband and that of wife will be derived from signing a contract, or certificate of marriage. The non-existence of the contractual role in the *Republic* arises from the fact that, in Plato's view, we have natural aptitudes and by performing the appropriate roles we bring about the good. For a shoemaker therefore performing his role properly is, on the one hand, to fulfill the activity of making shoes which is suitable to his aptitude; on the other hand, it is to do good to the society as a whole. In short, in Plato's ideal state contractual role obligations, it seems to me, do not have any existence, and there is no difference between individual's fulfillment of the duties of his or her social role, and the achievement of the good of the society as a whole.

The cardinal passage about role obligation in Confucius' *Analects* is, as I take it, in Book XII, 11, where Confucius is questioned by Duke Jing of Qi of government, Confucius replies,

Let a ruler be a ruler, a subject a subject, a father a father, and a son a son. Excellent! said the Duke. Indeed, if a ruler be not a ruler, a subject be not a subject, a father be not a father, and a son be not a son, even if there is grain, shall I manage to eat?

An orderly society can only be achieved when each individual fulfills their role obligations. Moreover, it is quite clear that in a society, according to Confucius, each individual is not only *performing* his or her own social roles, but they will regard themselves as the roles they play. For people are living in a role net, when their roles change, others' roles will change as well. That is, their personal identity will alter when their roles change. For example, one person will be a father and a son at different moment, when he is acting in a role as a father he is relating himself to a person who is his son. Equally, when he is acting in a role as a son, he is relating himself to a person who is his father. In Western contemporary moral philosophy it might be possible to consider the concept of the self in isolation. " [F]or the early Confucians ", however, " there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others."<sup>13</sup> This is the reason why scholars are inclined to hold the view that in the *Analects* individuals are role-bearing.<sup>14</sup>

The role obligation and act-centred theory in Confucius' *Analects* has political implications as is clear in passages such as " [i]f one is not in a certain office, one does not plan the governance involved in that office " (VIII, 14; XIV, 26), and Master Zeng says that " a gentleman does not stray from his station " (XIV, 26). Also there are many passages concerned with our everyday behaviour towards others, such as how are we related to others, and what is the right deed when we are related to such

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<sup>13</sup> H. Jr. Rosemont, " Rights-bearing Individuals and Role-bearing Persons ", *Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, (ed.) M. Bockover (Illinois, 1991), p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Whether this view is correct or not, see my discussion in Part V, Chapter 15.

and such a person. Some passages I shall quote as follows,

The Master said: ‘ Young men should be filial when at home and respectful to elders when away from home. They should be earnest and trustworthy. Although they should love the multitude far and wide, they should be intimate only with the humane. If they have any energy to spare after so doing, they should use it to study “ culture ”.’ (I, 6)

Zixia said: ‘ If he appreciates men of quality, if he makes light of sexual attraction, if in serving his father and mother he is capable of using his strength to the utmost, if in serving his lord he is capable of offering up his life, if in his dealings with friends he is trustworthy in what he says, I would certainly call him learned even if it is said that he has never studied.’ (I,7)

Someone said to Master Kong: ‘ Why do you not take part in government?’

The Master said: ‘ The *Book of Documents* mentions filial piety, doesn’t it? “ Only be dutiful towards your parents and friendly towards your brothers, and you will be contributing to the existence of government.” These virtues surely constitute taking part in government, so why should only that particular activity be regarded as taking part in government.’ (II, 21)

There are still many other passages which are concerned with right deed and with the fulfillment of role obligations in the *Analects*. What is interesting in the quoted passage, Book II, 21, is that Confucius seems to assume that the family is the smallest political or social unity in a society. And the principle of governing a state, in Confucius’ view, is no different from that of managing a family. They all have to ‘ do their own jobs ’, and they all have to fulfill their duties which are prescribed by their roles. It should be noticed here that the lack of a difference between governing a state and managing a family in Confucius’ thought is quite different from the picture we had above in Plato’s *Republic*. For the latter claims that the family will be an obstruction for the Guardians to rule the state so it would be better to abolish the family. Plato’s proposal to abolish the family in the *Republic* forms a clear contrast with Confucius’ emphasis on the family in the *Analects*. However, in the *Laws*, Plato, in contrast to the *Republic*, emphasizes the part of the family. He claims that a state

comes from the aggregation of families (680a-681c), so from 922b to 932e Plato sets out to establish family law. The shifting attitude towards the value of the family might be unclear, but what appears from the different treatments of the family in the *Republic* and in the *Analects* is, it seems to me, that Plato's ideal state is an imaginary one, he is trying to *reconstruct* a new state. Thus the method of his reconstruction would be radical. On the contrary, Confucius is not trying to reconstruct a new state but to *reform* the state in which he lives. That is, in the *Great Learning* it is said that to bring order to the state one has to engage in self-cultivation and regulate one's family. Thus reform for Confucius could be a gradual process, and the method of Confucius' reform would not be so radical as Plato's one.

I have mentioned that in the *Republic* Plato seems to regard every role as non-contractual, since we enter in our roles by birth or by nature. What would be the picture in the *Analects*? It is evident that in Confucius' account of right actions he refers to non-contractual roles, such as father and son, most of time. That is, he emphasizes filial conduct. However this is not exhaustive. Confucius throughout the *Analects* never mentions that we are born, or by nature, to be in such and such social class or social role. Instead he says that when we are in such and such social role we have to act in such and such way in which we can fulfill the duties of that role. Thus when Confucius is asked by Duke Ding how a ruler should employ ministers, and how ministers should serve a ruler, Confucius replies,

Rulers in employing ministers do so in accordance with ritual, and ministers in serving rulers do so in accordance with loyalty. (III, 19)

It might be true, at Confucius' time, the role of ruler was derived by birth, in that the rulership was hereditary. But it is arguable whether ministers were also hereditary. For the old social order, at Confucius' time, collapsed. Whether one can be a minister does not merely depend upon one's social class, but also upon his talent and ability. However this does not mean that one can choose to be a minister. For one can only be a minister under the ruler's command. Therefore although the role of minister is not hereditary, it does not mean that it is contractual.

Furthermore a passage in Book VIII of the *Analects* seems to indicate that

ministers can refuse the ruler's command when the state is in peril.

The Master said: ' Be of sincere good faith and love learning. Be steadfast unto death in pursuit of the good Way. One does not enter a state which is in peril, nor reside in one which is rebellious. When the Way prevails in the world, then be seen. When it does not, then hide. When the Way prevails in your own state, to be made poor and obscure by it is a disgrace; but when the Way does not prevail in your own state, to be made rich and honourable by it is a disgrace.' (VIII, 13)

This passage seems to superficially imply that ministers have their own choice to decide whether they would like to stay in office or not. And it is this choice which shows that there are contractual roles existing in Confucius' state. However this view, in my opinion, is wrong. For, according to Confucius, whether one wants to stay in office or not does not depend upon his ability to choose, but upon his belief in and understanding of ritual (*li*) and custom. It is ritual and custom which determine whether one should stay in the office or not when the state is in peril. That is the reason why Confucius urges people to study the antiquity which is the guidance for people's behaviour (III, 14; VII, 1).

It is interesting to see that although in Confucius' state, like Plato's ideal state, there is no non-contractual role, Confucius, unlike Plato, does allow ministers to resign from their offices. However their resignation is not the result of their choice but of following the rule of proper conduct (*li*). For it would be shameful for one to stay in office in a corrupted regime.

Both Plato and Confucius emphasize role obligation when they build up their own ideal states. Also they are concerned with the problem ' what is the right thing to do?'. When an agent acts in a role, what is right thing for him or her to do is to act in accordance with the rules which are derived from the role, and, moreover, to fulfill the duties which arise from the role. By comparing and analyzing these two philosophers' thought, I think that there is a common trait between role obligation and act-centred theory. Both of them are concerned with actions, behaviour, and with duties and obligations. Now that Plato and Confucius pick up the same method to



build up their ideal states, why the differences between them still exist. My understanding of it, as mentioned, is that firstly, their ideal states are based on different foundations; secondly, Plato draws our attention to human nature, but Confucius does not. In spite of these differences, what both Plato and Confucius intend to do, in my opinion, is to find a way in which we can improve our moral life. However, I shall argue in the next two chapters that unlike the modern contract theorists both Plato and Confucius see morality as depending upon 'who you are'. So with them there is a kind of agent-centred aspect to their account of roles.

**Part V**  
**From Act-Centre to Agent-Centre**

## Chapter 14

### Plato and Common Morality

It is commonly believed that Plato, in Book I of the *Republic*, considers inadequate accounts of justice in terms of doing certain kind of actions, while later in the *Republic* he moves away from the account of justice as doing certain kind of actions, and instead claims that justice is a state of human soul. That is, a just man is one who has a harmonious and balanced soul. It is said that “ the whole progress of Book 2 through 4 has been an attempt to build up a notion of the just *agent*.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to argue that it might be right, on the surface, that Plato in Book I concentrates on showing his interlocutors the inadequacies of talking of justice as a list of duties or obligations, or interest, or profit. But, under the surface, Plato sets up an outline for his discussion of justice in the rest of the *Republic*. Thus, Book I and the rest of Books are not inconsistent. In short, I propose to argue that Plato right from the outset of the *Republic* tries to build up an agent-centred morality. Plato therefore does not commit the fallacy which commentators think he does.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I will confine my discussion mainly in Book I to uncover its real purpose. I would like to argue that Plato does not commit a fallacy of irrelevance, as Sachs thinks he does,<sup>3</sup> by virtue of discussing three topics: firstly, I would like to examine Cephalus' and Polemarchus' accounts of justice in Book I; secondly, the relationship between the just act and the just soul will be explored; and finally, I shall proceed to look for some clues to prove that Plato in the *Republic* is not interested in the ordinary conception of justice but only in the Platonic sense of justice.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> D. Sachs, “ A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic* ”, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXII, 1963, pp. 141-58.

<sup>3</sup> I think that Sachs' question is related to Annas' claim that Plato attempts to build up an agent-centred morality from Book 2 to 4. For to prove that Plato tries to establish an agent-centred morality right from the beginning of the *Republic* is to prove that Sachs is wrong to claim that there is a fallacy of irrelevance in the *Republic*.

## 1. Cephalus' and Polemarchus' accounts of justice

Socrates and Glaucon are attending the festival at the Piraeus, and are jokingly forced to visit the house of Cephalus and his sons Polemarchus, Lysias and Euthydemus. Socrates is blamed by Cephalus for not coming frequently to his house to have conversation with him. Socrates says to Cephalus that he enjoys talking to old men and asks Cephalus whether old age is a kind of burden for him. Cephalus quotes Sophocles' saying that " I am glad to have ... escaped from a fierce and frenzied master ", i.e. sexual desire, and goes on saying,

[I]n old age you become quite free of feelings of this sort and they leave in peace; and when your desires lose their intensity and relax, you get what Sophocles was talking about, a release from a lot of mad masters. In all this, and in the lack of respect their families show them, there is only one thing to blame; and that is not their old age, Socrates, but their *character*. For if men are sensible and good tempered, old age is easy enough to bear: if not, youth as well as age is a burden. (329c-d)

It is apparent, from the term italicized, that the claim which Plato puts into Cephalus' mouth is whether one can have a tranquil life will be dependent upon one's character (*tropos*) not upon what one does. Unfortunately, Cephalus, who regards philosophy as something not very serious (328d) and has no philosophical reflection on the nature of character, thinks that a tranquil life is the combination of good-temper and fortune. For with the aid of fortune, Cephalus thinks that he can avoid both unintentional cheating or lying and the fear of some sacrifice to God unmade or some debt unpaid before he dies (331b). And the dialogue from 331c onwards is to show that whether a man is just or not cannot be identified only in terms of his external behaviour. For the action of returning what one borrows under certain circumstances might be regarded as immoral. In the case of returning the knife to its owner who has gone mad, no matter what Cephalus does, return the knife to its owner or not, he is in a position of being immoral. For if Cephalus returns the knife to his friend gone mad, he might use the knife to kill himself; and if Cephalus does not

return the knife as he promises he will, he will be regarded as going back on his word. So it seems to lead to the kind of situation B. Williams describes in his article "Moral Luck",<sup>4</sup> that these are circumstances in which no matter what you choose you will feel regretful. It is, I think, the reason why Plato would like to leave act-centred morality aside from the outset of the *Republic* and concentrates on agent-centred morality. And the discussion of justice as external behaviour in accordance with rules or precepts is part of Socrates' strategy which will prepare the way for his account of justice as psychic harmony.

Two points deserve our attention in Socrates' conversation with Cephalus: firstly, although Cephalus is unable to articulate the relation between having a good temperament and leading a tranquil life, and the nature of character, yet his reference to character implies that whether a person, old or young, can have a tranquil life will be dependent upon his character besides his fortune. A temperate man will not be greedy but be satisfied with what he has in hand. Cephalus is, under Plato's pen, a temperate, but unintellectual, man not only because he does not grudge his old age but also because as a money maker he is not "over-fond of money" (330c). Secondly, Cephalus is a businessman and resident alien who has no citizenship in Athens. It would be reasonable that, as a resident alien, Cephalus' account of justice should emphasize not the relation between *polis* and citizen, but rather the relation between individuals. Moreover, Cephalus, as a successful businessman (330b), might have to travel from one *polis* to another in order to get his business done. Rules or laws vary from one *polis* to another. Thus Plato's characterization of Cephalus in Book I, I think, serves to illustrate the point that justice cannot be defined as sticking to a set of rules, since rules would be different from place to place. It is only when a person possesses the right character that he is able to adapt his acts to different circumstances. However, at this stage, what is the content of man's character is still unknown to us. What we can know so far is that Plato points out that ordinary people, such as Cephalus, are insensitive towards the notion of character which plays an important role in the account of justice.

Polemarchus, from 331d, takes over the conversation and quotes the saying of

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<sup>4</sup> B. Williams, "Moral Luck", *The Aristotelian Society* (suppl.), 1976, pp. 115-35.

Simonides: “ it is right to give every man his due ” (331e) to support his father’s claim that justice is telling the truth and returning what one has borrowed. Socrates doubts whether Simonides is saying that it is just to return the knife to its owner even though he is mad (332a). Polemarchus denies that that is what Simonides says, and makes it clear by saying that what Simonides meant to say is that “ one friend owes it as a due to another to do him good, not harm ” (332a), and what is due to our enemies is harm (332b). So he draws a conclusion that “ it is right to give everyone what is appropriate to him ” (332c).

Socrates’ objection to Polemarchus’ claim starts first by asking what is the due and appropriate thing which the medical skill supplies? and to whom? Polemarchus replies that it supplies the body with remedies and food (332c). Similarly, cookery is the skill of supplying “ the flavour to our food ” (332d1). Then what does justice supply and to whom? Polemarchus replies, “ it must be the skill that enables us to help and injure one’s friends and enemies ” (332d4-5). Secondly, Socrates points out that there seems to be no sphere of activity for justice, since the best person to help you when you are ill is a doctor, and the best person to help you when you face the risks of a sea voyage is a navigator. But what about a just man? Polemarchus says that we can find a just man displaying an expertise of his own in times of war. That is, in war the just man will help his friends and harm his enemies. Socrates goes on asking, but a healthy body makes no use of a doctor, so in peacetime there is no use of justice. Polemarchus modifies his claim and says that the just man is useful in business (333a). Our money and goods can be deposited with him, since the just man’s honesty can be trusted. But according to this view, justice is useless when you want to use money or goods, in that someone else will be good at using them (333b-d). Polemarchus cannot help admitting the conclusion that justice can’t be a very serious thing (333e).

The notion of *techné* is prominent in this passage, and also plays a main part in Socrates’ conversation with Thrasymachus (341c-346e). The Greek word *techné* is translated into English as ‘ skill ’, ‘ craft ’ or ‘ art ’. The *techné* is an organized body of knowledge of the ways to achieve a certain end. Skills or *technai* can be divided into two sorts, some skills are practical, such as cookery, others are not, such as

mental arithmetic.<sup>5</sup> All practical *techne* have their defined domains to which they apply. A doctor's skill is to heal illness, a cobbler's skill is to make shoes. While justice seems to have no specific domain at which it aims, it does not exist as a means to an end, but, for Plato, as a state of human soul.

Although some commentators<sup>6</sup> think that Polemarchus does not have to accept the analogy of *techne*, yet the introduction of the notion of *techne* has two purposes: firstly, justice is not like a skill, such as medicine. For, as mentioned, there is a field with which medicine is concerned, namely healing the sick. While justice as non-instrumental has no field of concern. Plato does not think that justice is a matter of acting in conformity with certain kind of rules. For one might perform some kind of act in a way in which the rules demand in order to avoid punishment. Justice, for Plato, is not concerned with the fact that acting in accordance with rules will bring desirable consequences, i.e. reputation, fame, etc.. Justice does not serve as a kind of means to obtain some desirable ends. Justice, in Plato's view, is concerned with one's soul. A just man has a balanced soul. Justice is desirable for its own sake. Thus it would be inadequate to define justice in terms of its field, that is, it would be improper to define justice in terms of external behaviour. Moreover the inadequacy of defining justice in terms of its field is brought out at 333e-334a, where Socrates claims that a skillful doctor is able to heal the sick as well as to produce disease undetected. So the just man who is good at keeping money will also be good at stealing it. It leads to absurdity in that even common sense enables one to know that it is unjust to steal others' money, and it would be impossible, according to Plato, for a just man to act unjustly.

Secondly, justice is like a skill, since there is a more profound meaning underlying the skill analogy. A skillful navigator is the one who is able to take passengers from A to B safely. It should be noticed here that the goal or aim of the navigator and that of the passengers are different. For the goal of the former is to carry out a *safe passage*, but the goal of the latter is to move from A to B. The safe passage to the latter is external and instrumental, because whether the passage is safe

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<sup>5</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Annas, *Ibid.* p. 24. R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London, 1994), p. 12.

will depend on the need of each individual passenger. Passenger X who is seasick might feel that it is not a safe passage, but passenger Y who has not had seasickness might feel the opposite. Whereas the safe passage to the former, the navigator, is internal. That is, the activities of the navigator are good not because they are capable of moving passengers from A to B, but because they are successful as navigation; they are successful as navigation because they are good for producing safe passage. Thus the relation between the product of a skill, safe passage, and the goodness of the activities, navigation, constituting it is internal.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, if justice is a human quality then it would be improper to define justice in such a way that actions in accordance with rules or precepts are counted as just irrespective of *what kind of person* performed them. For the goodness of just acts must come from the good of justice which the just man perceives. It would follow that whether an act is just or not would not be dependent upon the fact that it is advantageous to one's friend or disadvantageous to one's enemy, but upon the good justice aims at. Therefore the relation between the goodness of just acts and the good justice aims at would be internal.<sup>8</sup> This is the reason why Plato prepares his readers right from the beginning of the *Republic* to talk of justice not in terms of what kind of act one performs but of what kind of person one is. For problems about what the specific aims of justice are and why they are good in themselves cannot be explained simply in the way in which ordinary people will regard, for example, shoemaking or food producing as good because people's needs can be satisfied. If we talk of justice in this way then justice will be instrumental and this is not what Plato wants.

At 334b Polemarchus reiterates his claim that justice is helping your friends and harming your enemies. While Socrates presses Polemarchus by asking the question: How do you tell who your friend is and who your enemy is? Don't men sometimes make mistakes? So it might be possible that when one makes a mistake in telling who one's friend or enemy is, one will possibly help one's enemy and harm one's friend (334c). This passage indicates something which relates to the development, later in the dialogue, of Plato's view on the notion of knowledge in connection with goodness. For Plato a just person must possess knowledge by virtue of which he is able to give

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<sup>7</sup> K. Lycos, *Plato on Justice and Power: Reading Book I of Plato's Republic* (Albany, 1987), p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.



an account of what he is doing and why.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge, in Plato's view, involves understanding and the ability to give an explanation of what something is. It is impossible for a just man to do right thing but be unable to give an account of what he does and why. Thus it would be impossible, according to Plato, for a just man to tell who his friend is and who his enemy is without being able to give an account of why.

It can be seen, from Plato's conversation with Cephalus and Polemarchus, that Plato carefully constructs his argument at the beginning of the *Republic* in order to lead his readers into a less known territory, i.e. justice is not merely a matter of acting in accordance with rules, but a matter of inner harmony. Although at this stage what is the content of one's inner harmony is not known, yet the direction of Plato's argument, it seems to me, is clear. The just man, who has good character, does not see acting justly as instrumental, but sees acting justly as internally connected to what he perceives to be just.

The question whether Plato in Book I is really interested in the ordinary conception of justice will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. What I shall proceed to do next is to, if merely acting in conformity with rules and precepts cannot be regarded as real or genuine justice, enquire how the Platonically just man will act. Or, to put the question in another way: Does the Platonic conception of justice entail the ordinary conception of justice? Will the Platonically just man act in accordance with the ordinary conception of justice?

## **2. The relation between the just act and just soul**

Towards the end of Book IV it is said, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, that the real concern of justice is not with external acts, but with the inner harmony of soul. And in the same passage a few lines down we are told by Socrates that a man who possesses a harmonious soul is ready for action of any kind,

[W]hether it concerns his personal or financial welfare, whether it is political

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<sup>9</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* pp. 30-1.

or private; and he will reckon and call any of these actions just and honourable if it contributes to and helps to maintain this disposition of mind, and will call the knowledge which controls such action wisdom. (443e)

This passage seems to indicate that Platonic justice has implications for just actions. As Weingartner<sup>10</sup> points out, reason is a sort of rational desire, and the only way in which a desire can be defined is in terms of its object. Thus, the object of the rational desire, reason, is the real truth, that is, the knowledge of the Good. He goes on to say,

What is true is what is right. Plato did not go in for making distinctions between fact and value. The ultimate object of reason is the Good (504d-509c). And the Good is not so called because *it* is valuable, in contrast with the forms and the world of sense and practice. Rather, the Good is given this name because it is the *ultimate* object of rational desire, whereas all more proximate objects of rational desire are good to the degree that they manifest that principle. Thus the forms, too, are good and so are things and states of affairs to the degree to which they participate in form.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the fact that the object of reason is the Good, the Platonically just man will always aim at what is true and what is true is right. Therefore, he will never embezzle, commit sacrilege or theft, or betray his friends or his country (443a). Weingartner thinks that the “ leap ”<sup>12</sup> from self-regarding justice to other-regarding justice in the *Republic* can be bridged by appeal to Plato’s knowledge of the Good and theory of the Forms. And this view is endorsed by Demos, who gives a similar analysis<sup>13</sup> to Weingartner’s and says conclusively,

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<sup>10</sup> R. H. Weingartner, “ Vulgar Justice and Platonic Justice ”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. XXV, 1965, p. 250.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> R. Demos, “ A Fallacy in Plato’s *Republic*? ”, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXIII, 1964, p. 396-97.

<sup>13</sup> for Demos’ analysis see *Ibid.* p. 397-98.

The concern for my self-fulfillment is analyzable into a concern that everyone should attain psychical fulfillment; that I am inwardly just means that I want everyone to have his due.<sup>14</sup>

However, although this approach seems to be able to bridge the gap between Platonic and ordinary justice, yet both Weingartner and Demos still have to answer the question arising from their approaches. That is, even though the Platonically just man will act in accordance not only with his own good but also with the good of others, there is still a gap between acting rationally and the ordinary conception of justice. For, as Annas points out,

It is true that the rule of reason will involve recognition of, and action in accordance with, the good of others as well as that of oneself, and that the examples cited by Plato are all examples of what we might call duty to others; but this is far from showing that the rule of reason will require one to do and refrain from doing precisely the acts of common morality which Plato presents as a touchstone.<sup>15</sup>

The passage at 485d-e, where Socrates describes the qualities of character required in the philosopher, could be taken as a solution for this problem. Socrates says that “ if a man’s desires set strongly in one direction, they are correspondingly less strong in other directions ”. The Platonically just man,<sup>16</sup> according to this passage, will act in accordance with the good of all, and will not act otherwise. For the Platonically just man’s rational desire, reason, flows towards the acquisition of knowledge and physical pleasure will pass him by. Thus, “ no philosopher entrusted with gold ”, says Kraut, “ would unjustly seek to embezzle it, since no philosopher is interested in

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<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.* p. 398.

<sup>15</sup> J. Annas, “ Plato and Common Morality ”, *Classical Philosophy: Collected Papers* (New York & London, 1995), vol. 3, (ed.) T. Irwin, p. 185.

<sup>16</sup> In the *Republic*, only the philosophers can be regarded as genuinely just. So here my use of ‘ the philosopher ’ and ‘ the Platonically just man ’ is interchangeable.

increasing his wealth.”<sup>17</sup> This is a ‘hydraulic account’ of justice. All injustice results from the fact that too much desire is directed into channels other than philosophy. However Kraut’s claim, it seems to me, cannot answer the question: Why the philosophers can tell lies? Telling lies, in the ordinary sense of justice, is unjust, but in the *Republic* Plato allows the philosophers to tell lies for the good of the state as a whole (389b-c). This seems to suggest that the Platonically just man will not always act according to the ordinary sense of justice. The Platonically just man does not stick to rules, he is expedient or flexible so that he is able to make a proper judgement about how to act in different circumstances. The reason thus for the Platonically just man to act in accordance with the ordinary sense of justice is not so straightforward as we at first think it is.

It can be seen that the approaches adopted by scholars, namely, Weingartner, Demos and Kraut, to prove that the Platonic conception of justice entails the ordinary conception of justice are in one way or the other inadequate. Let us proceed to see whether the ordinary conception of justice will entail the Platonic conception of justice.

It is obvious that in Book I Plato gives his readers a hint that genuine justice cannot be defined merely in terms of acting in accordance with rules and precepts. Whereas in Book IV the analogy of health and justice seems to indicate that healthy activities produce health, and similarly, just actions will produce a just soul (444c). However the sentence ‘just actions will produce a just soul’ raises two issues.<sup>18</sup> One is moral psychology, and the other is moral judgement. The issue regarding moral psychology is expressed in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle says,

This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and by being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the

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<sup>17</sup> R. Kraut, “Reason and Justice in Plato’s *Republic*”, *Ibid.* p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Annas, *op. cit.* p. 192.

appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. (1103a33-b25)<sup>19</sup>

It may be true, according to Dent,<sup>20</sup> that a man is called just because he has the disposition to perform just acts. For a just man, for the sake of the good, does those acts required to ensure that each man has his due. Thus, to talk of justice is to talk of moral justification, that is, whether this or that act is in accordance with society's moral consensus. But it would be odd to say that one is temperate because one is able to act temperately. For, in Dent's view, to be just is different from being temperate. The former requires one to act in conformity with rules irrespective of one's character, but the latter is primarily concerned with one's character. In short, justice is concerned with moral justification, but temperance is concerned with moral psychology. However, it might not be the case for Plato. Plato does not think that justice is merely a matter of acting with moral justification. Justice, like temperance, is concerned with one's character. Although the claim that just acts will produce a Platonically just soul may be right, yet a Platonically just man cannot be fully recognized merely through his external behaviour. For what actions are ordinarily just is decided by society's moral consensus, and, as mentioned above, the Platonically just man does not always act in accordance with the ordinary sense of justice.

It is obvious, from the discussion above, that the relationship between the Platonic conception of justice and the ordinary conception of justice seems to be fragile. If the gap between these two conceptions of justice cannot be satisfactorily bridged, then how can Plato reply to the claim made by Thrasymachus and Glaucon that being unjust will be better off than being just. In what follows I shall proceed to argue the point that throughout the *Republic* including Book I Plato pays no attention to the ordinary conception of justice. That is, Plato in the *Republic* only concentrates on the discussion of agent-centred morality and takes act-centred morality as a kind of test to the former.<sup>21</sup> So there is no fallacy of irrelevance involved in Plato's *Republic*.

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<sup>19</sup> D. Ross, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 1980), p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Dent suggests that Aristotle's language fails to make this clear, see "Virtues and Actions", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 25, 1975, pp. 324-25.

<sup>21</sup> For the distinction between act-centred morality and agent-centred morality see J. Laird, "Act-Ethics

### 3. From act-centred theory to agent-centred theory?

The idea that to be just is to be wise or knowledgeable is also illustrated in Socrates' conversation with Thrasymachus. At 349b-d Socrates claims that "[t]he just man does not compete with his like, but only his unlike, while the unjust man competes with both like and unlike." From 349e to 350c Socrates is trying to show why Thrasymachus is wrong to think that the unjust man is good and sensible and the just man is the opposite. The summary of the argument is as follows:

- 1) Being musical involves intelligence. (349e)
- 2) Intelligence is good, lack of it bad.
- 3) A musician who is tuning a lyre tries to do better than an unmusical layman.
- 4) But he does not try to compete with another musician.
- 5) The man who has no knowledge will try to compete both with the man who has and with the man who has not. (350a)
- 6) The man with professional skill is wise. (350b)
- 7) The wise man is good.
- So, 8) The good man, who has knowledge, will not try to compete with his like, but only with his opposite.
- While, 9) The bad and ignorant man will try to compete with both his like and his opposite.
- 10) The unjust man tries to compete with everyone while the just man only competes with those unlike him.
- So, 11) The just man is wise and good and the unjust man bad and ignorant. (350c)

Commentators<sup>22</sup> have paid attention to the way in which Socrates trades on the ambiguity of language in this passage, whereas it seems to me that it is a preliminary

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and Agent-Ethics", *Mind*, vol. LV, 1946, pp. 113-32.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Annas, *op. cit.* pp. 51-52.

to the latter part of Book V (427a-480a). For the aim of the latter part of Book V is to find out the definition of the philosopher by virtue of pointing out the differences among knowledge, opinion, and ignorance. And by comparing the current passage and the passage referred to in Book V it is clear that from the start of the *Republic* Plato has already made up his mind that his philosopher will be a trinity of wisdom, justice and self-discipline. For what Socrates purports to show in this passage (349e-350e) is that goodness is not essentially competitive, and that the just man is the wise man, and the just and wise man will never be over-ambitious and acquisitive. What the just man wants or does will never be over the limit. Similarly, a skillful sculptor always aims at producing a perfect sculpture with right proportion, and not more. Therefore, the just man's knowledge will enable him to know what is required and within the boundary.<sup>23</sup>

Thrasymachus claims that injustice is a source of strength (351a-b). From 351b to 352d Socrates sets out to object to Thrasymachus' claim and says that since justice is wisdom the just state is stronger than the unjust one. He demonstrates this with the following argument: For a state to be strong each member of it has to be coordinated with one another and does no wrong to one another. Thus if they treat each other justly there will be a unity within the state; if, on the contrary, they treat each other unjustly there will be hatred and dissension within the state. Socrates goes on saying conclusively,

Injustice, then, seems to have the following results, whether it occurs in a state or family or army or in anything else: it renders it incapable of any common action because of factions and quarrels, and sets it at variance with itself and with its opponents and with whatever is just.

And it will produce its natural effects also in the individual. It renders him incapable of action because of internal conflicts and division of purpose, and sets him at variance with himself and with all who are just. (351e-352a)

These two passages seem to indicate that the character of a person or state will be

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<sup>23</sup> Lycos, *op. cit.* p. 120-25.

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<sup>23</sup> Lycos, *op. cit.* p. 120-25.



dependent upon whether the elements within them are in a state of harmony or a state of conflict. This is the main theme which Plato tackles in Book IV, where he claims that in a just state each member of which does his or her own job for which he or she is most suited (433a). And in a just soul each part does its own job, that is, reason is in command and spirit and appetite are obedient to reason's command (441e). Plato, in Book I, does not give his readers any more information than that there is a conflict or harmony in human soul. Nevertheless H. W. B. Joseph points out,

This is the first emergence in the *Republic* of the notion that there is a constitution in the soul of any man comparable to what may exist in any community of men, so that justice and injustice are the same in a man and in a community, and according to the degree in which either prevails in them different and corresponding types of man and of community arise.<sup>24</sup>

It is obvious that Plato thinks that to talk of a just man and a just state one has to refer to their inner constitutions. Although at this stage he puts little into Socrates' mouth about the nature of just man or just soul, yet the close relation between Book I and the rest of the *Republic* is certain.

Towards the end of Book I, Socrates shows why the just man is happier than the unjust man by appeal to the notion of function (*ergon*). The function of a thing, says Socrates, is that which only it can do and does the best (352e, 353a). So the function of eyes is to see and that of ears hear. Socrates goes on to say that everything which has a function has its own particular excellence (353b). Due to the fact that the eyes have a function, there is an excellence of the eyes. And it would be impossible for the eyes to perform their function well if they lack their excellence. Socrates continues his argument by saying that the function of human mind is to deliberate, control and pay attention, which is life (353d). The excellence of the mind will enable it to perform its function well, and justice is the particular excellence of the mind (353e). Socrates therefore concludes that the just man and the just mind will have a good life, and the man who has a good life will be happy.

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<sup>24</sup> W. H. B. Joseph, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ch. II (Oxford, 1935), p. 38.

Although Annas points out that there is no argument to prove the claim that justice is the excellence of the mind,<sup>25</sup> yet, I think, it does not affect my argument here. The passage at 353b-e suggests that virtue is a quality which enables one to live well. It does not consist in the acts which constitute living well. If we follow this line of thought then it will not be difficult to see why Plato is from the outset of the *Republic* interested in agent-centred morality. For in talking of the just soul Plato is talking of what sort of person one is not about what sort of act one should perform. A similar point can be inferred from the passage where Thrasymachus takes over the discussion at 336c, he asks Socrates to give a definition of what justice is. Thrasymachus says,

Give us an answer yourself, and tell us what you think justice is. And *don't tell me that it's duty, or expediency, or advantage, or profit, or interest.* I won't put up with nonsense of this sort; give me a clear and precise definition. (336c-d)

What Plato puts into Thrasymachus' mouth is clear, justice cannot be defined in terms of duty, expediency, advantage, profit, and interest. What else can be taken to be the definiens of justice, all I can think of or all Plato wants to say is character. It might be argued that Socrates in the next few speeches suggests that he might give one of the forbidden definitions if it happens to be right (337a-c). However what Socrates does here, I think, is to elicit the definition of justice from Thrasymachus to show that talking of justice in terms of duty, interest, and advantage is nonsensical. Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus on justice in terms of interest and profit is to tell his readers what he is actually interested in is agent-centred morality. As Schiller fairly points out,

[N]o fallacy has been committed because it was not Plato's intention to answer the problem posed by Sachs and Adkins. These critics clearly believe that Plato's proofs in the *Republic* are designed to show that vulgarly just

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<sup>25</sup> However, Desmond Lee seems to think that the premise of saying 'justice is the peculiar excellence of the mind' can be found at 350c. See D. Lee, *Plato: Republic* (London, 1987), note 2, p.100.

men are happy. If Plato is not particularly interested in this problem, we are being rather unfair to derogate his work as one based on a fallacy.<sup>26</sup>

Although Schiller expresses his discomfort with this reply to Sachs' problem later on in his article, yet if my discussion is right, this discomfort should disappear. For the passages referred to in Book I of the *Republic* do show that Plato is not interested in the relationship between the ordinary conception of justice and the Platonic conception of justice, but in the latter solely. It follows that in Plato's view justice cannot be defined in terms of "the nonperformance of acts of certain kinds"<sup>27</sup> either, i.e. the just man will not commit adultery, embezzle, and betray his friends, etc.. For both the ordinary sense of justice and the vulgar sense of justice are concerned with acts, and the inadequacies of talking justice in terms of external behaviour are fully exposed in Book 1. Thus from the beginning of the *Republic* Plato draws his readers' attention to that justice is not a matter of acting rightly, but of having a balanced soul.

Plato's appeal to agent-centred morality has three important corollaries:<sup>28</sup> firstly, we must have some independent way of saying what the just man is like. For example, if we say that the just man is one who is able to act justly, there is still a question for us to answer, that is, what the just man is like. Plato is fully aware of this, so he appeals to the agent-centred morality in that for Plato just acts can be identified only when the just man can be identified first. That is, the just man will come first and through the just man we will know what types of acts are just. Secondly, it follows from the first corollary that without knowing what the just man is like there is no way for us to identify what sorts of acts as just. Thus, it would be inappropriate, according to Plato, to draw a list of rules or precepts with which every member of the society has to act in accordance. The only guarantee one can get for acting justly is to have a harmonious and balanced soul because it would be impossible to make an exhaustive list of rules and precepts which people can follow. Thirdly, it would be clear why Plato says in the *Statesman* that the law is the second-best way of governing the state

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<sup>26</sup> J. Schiller, "Just Men and Just Acts in Plato's *Republic*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. VI, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Sachs, *op. cit.* p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Annas, "Plato and Common Morality", *op. cit.* pp. 191-93.

## Chapter 15

### Confucius and Behavioural Morality

Confucius is asked in the *Analects* by his disciple, Yan Hui, about human-heartedness (*jen*). The Master says that to subdue oneself and return to ritual (*li*) is to practise human-heartedness (XII, 1). The Confucian notion of 'to subdue oneself' cannot be merely understood as the suppression of one's bodily desires. Rather it is closely related with the concept of self-cultivation if we put the notion of 'to subdue oneself' in the moral context. The notion of 'return to ritual' does not imply that one should submissively act in accordance with rules of proper conduct, but that by acting in accordance with rules or laws one expresses one's well-cultivated nature or character, i.e. human-heartedness.

In this chapter, I would like to argue that although throughout the *Analects* Confucius seems to give his readers an impression that he is concerned with act-centred morality, i.e. how to act properly in a given situation, yet the inner dimension, that is, agent-centred morality, underlying proper acts or conduct is immanent in Confucianism. In the first section, I shall explore the notion of 'to subdue oneself' to see the agent-centred view of morality in Confucian ethics. And in the second section I would like to discuss the notion of 'return to ritual' to see the relation between ritual and human-heartedness and why moral actions, for Confucius, cannot be merely acting in accordance with rules or laws. Finally, the union of agent-centred and act-centred morality in Confucian ethics will be discussed.

#### 1. The notion of 'to subdue oneself'

To understand the Confucian notion of 'to subdue oneself' as something distinct from the suppression of one's bodily desires, I would like first to draw attention to the *Mencius*. Mencius is asked by Kung-tu Tzu: "Though equally human, why are some men greater than others?" Mencius replies,

He who is guided by the interests of the parts of his person that are greater importance is a great man; he who is guided by the interests of the parts of his person that are of smaller importance is a small man. (Kung-tu Tzu pursues:) Though equally human, why are some men guided one way and others guided another way? (Mencius replies:) The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think and can be misled by external things. When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it. The organ of the heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think; otherwise, it will not find the answer. This is what Heaven has given me. If one makes one's stand on what is of greater importance in the first instance, what is of smaller importance cannot displace it. In this way, one cannot but be a great man." (VI, A, 15)<sup>1</sup>

This passage shows that for Mencius there is a distinction between mind and body, and both perception and feeling can distract the mind. The Mencian emphasis on the function of human mind, thinking, seems to be parallel to Plato's emphasis on reason in the *Republic*. Plato says that reason should rule in the soul since it has "the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole" (441e), and that "a mind with a grace and sense of proportion that will naturally and easily lead it on to see the form of each reality" (486d). The second quotation implies that the mind must avoid distractions in order to contemplate the Forms. The mind, for Plato, concentrates on the world of the Forms. However for the Confucians the mind must avoid distractions in order to concentrate on affairs of this world. That is, the mind without distraction can perform its function properly which enables one to express one's feeling and enjoy pleasures to a proper extent. The problem of how to express one's feeling towards others depends upon one's acting in conformity with ritual. In a society the interaction among the members of it should be regulated by rules of proper conduct. Thus to act rightly one must understand those rules, which is the job of the mind.

It is said in the *Analects* that

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<sup>1</sup> C. D. Lau, *Mencius* (London, 1970), p. 168.

In the practice of the rites harmony is regarded as the most valuable thing, and in the ways of the ancient kings this is regarded as the most beautiful thing. It is adopted in all matters, both small and great. But sometimes it does not work. If you behave harmoniously because you understand harmony, but do not regulate your conduct with ritual, surely that cannot be made to work. (I, 12)

Having harmonious social relations with others is a precious thing, but it is not worthy of pursuing such harmony if one does not do so in accordance with ritual.<sup>2</sup> To act in conformity with ritual requires one to understand ritual. Only when one knows ritual is one able to take one's stand (XVI, 13). It is worth noting that the Confucians think that acting in accordance with ritual is helpful in shaping one's character. For one's love towards people is a kind of raw feeling. It needs ritual to shape and regulate it so that one can express one's love towards others properly. A similar idea can be found in the *Republic*, where Plato claims that doing just acts produces justice in the soul (444c-d). Both Plato and Confucius would agree that one's external behaviour has an impact on one's character. However, the difference between Plato and Confucius on this matter is that for the former, even though people of the lower classes, whose natures are silver, and iron, do just acts, it does not mean that they possess inner harmony in their souls. For only the philosophers, whose nature is gold, can be said to possess harmonious soul. On the contrary, the Confucian claim that by nature men are close to one another (XVII, 2), allows a road sweeper, for example, to have a good character by doing the right acts.

Furthermore, both ritual and music are concerned with harmony. Plato in Book 3 of the *Republic* claims that different types of music are associated with different types of character. Thus to educate the young guardians the Educator has to choose those kinds of music which can produce harmony and self-control in the young guardians' soul. Confucius, like Plato, thinks that music can perfect one's character. He says that " [o]ne is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music " (VIII,

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<sup>2</sup> Here I disagree with R. Dawson's claim that " the purpose of ritual (*li*) is to bring about harmony between man and nature, ....", *Confucius: The Analects* (Oxford, 1993), note 1. 12, p. 84. For ritual in this passage is understood as the measure of the interaction between man and man.

8).

In the Platonic tripartite soul the relation among the three elements, i.e. reason, spirit, and appetite, is that appetites have to be under the control of reason with the aid of spirit (442a-b). The expression 'under the control of reason' does not imply the suppression of appetitive desires. Neither Plato nor Mencius see the necessity of suppressing our feelings or physical desires. Plato in the *Republic* says,

Then if the mind as a whole will follow the lead of its philosophic element, without internal division, each element will be just and in all other respects perform its own function, and in addition will enjoy its own particular pleasures, which are the best and truest available to it. (586e-587a)

Plato in this passage claims that bodily desires are not necessarily to be suppressed. They should be guided by reason in the right direction. Although Mencius, unlike Plato, does not see that the soul is composed of three parts, he holds that our desires and feelings have to be fulfilled to a proper extent. Mencius says,

When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear *to see the sufferings of others*, my meaning may be illustrated thus: — even now-a-days, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. *They will feel so*, not as a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of *having been unmoved by* such a thing. From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man. The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. The feeling of approving and disapproving is the principle of knowledge. Men have these four principles

just as they have their four limbs. When men, having these four principles, yet say of themselves that they cannot *develop them*, they play the thief with themselves, and he who says of his prince that he cannot *develop them* plays the thief with his prince. Since all men have these four principles in themselves, let them know to give them all their development and completion, and the issue will be like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of spring which has begun to find vent. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas. Let them be denied that development, and they will not suffice for a man to serve his parents with. (II, i, 6)<sup>3</sup>

This lengthy quotation indicates that feeling and thinking, for Mencius, always go hand in hand in our moral life without one suppressing the other. And the Chinese character 心 (*hsin*) is translated in the first quotation as *heart*, and in the second quotation as *mind*. As Liu, Shu-hsien points out, “[i]n the Chinese tradition the mind and the heart have never been sharply distinguished from each other. Hence the conflict between cognitivism and emotivism has never become a serious issue for the Chinese philosophers.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, human desires, in the Confucian view, should not be suppressed but be fulfilled to a proper extent. As Confucius says that “[r]iches and honours — these are what men desire, but if this is not achieved in accordance with the appropriate principles, one does not cling to them” (IV, 5), and that “riches and honours acquired by unrighteous means are to me like the floating clouds” (VII, 16). Every human being has desires which should not be suppressed recklessly but be fulfilled to a proper extent.

The notion of righteousness here is essential to Confucian ethics. For righteousness in Chinese is 義 (*yi*) which means 宜 (*yi*), suitable, congruent, proper.<sup>5</sup> They are different characters with the same tone. The Confucian claim,

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<sup>3</sup> J. Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, 1970), pp. 202-4.

<sup>4</sup> Shu-hsien Liu, “A Philosophical Analysis of the Confucian Approach to Ethics”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XXII (4), 1972, p. 420.

<sup>5</sup> P. A. Boodberg, “The Semasiology of Some Primary Confucian Concepts”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. II (4), 1953, p. 331.



“ [l]et a ruler be a ruler, a subject be a subject, a father be a father, and a son be a son ” (XII, 11), is normally understood as a prescriptive norm of how one should act in different social roles. However in certain situations one’s different social roles might be in conflict with one another. The Duke She told Master Kong:

In my locality there is a certain paragon, for when his father stole a sheep, he, the son, bore witness against him. Master Kong said: In my locality those who are upright are different from this. Fathers cover up for their sons and sons cover up for their fathers. Uprightness is to be found in this. ( XIII, 18)

This is a typical example of role conflict in our everyday life. Confucius here suggests that one’s judgement about how to act in this situation should not blindly follow rules or laws. For in so doing, that is, if the son bears witness against his own father who steals a sheep, he violates or turns a blind eye to his own nature, human-heartedness. Filial piety is one of two roots of human-heartedness (I, 2). Thus, the problem of how the son has to act in this situation, according to Confucius, is the problem whether he is able to take three factors into account: 1) his role as the son, 2) the current situation (his father has stolen a sheep), and 3) the purpose of his, the son’s, action. According to the *Great Learning*, as a son he has to abide in filial piety,<sup>6</sup> so when there is a conflict between familial responsibility and social responsibility Confucius holds that the former should have priority over the latter in one’s decision making. For to cover up one’s father’s wrong doing is to practise filial piety and to practise filial piety is to undergo the process of self-cultivation, rediscovering human-heartedness in one’s self. Thus acting in accordance with rules of proper conduct should be based upon the principle of righteousness, and acting according to righteousness is to act humanely.

Throughout the argument above the notion of self-cultivation is prominent. For, in the Confucian view, undergoing the process of self-cultivation one can bring out

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<sup>6</sup> It is said in the *Great Learning* that “ .... The Book of Odes says, ‘ How profound was King Wen! How he maintained his brilliant virtue without interruption and regarded with reverence that which he abided (*chih*).’ As a ruler, he abided in humanity. As a minister, he abided in reverence. As a son, he abided in filial piety. As a father, he abided in deep love. And in dealing with the people of the country, he abided in faithfulness.” See Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 88.

the full development of one's character and possess virtues, such as wisdom, righteousness, and propriety. These virtues are internally linked to human-heartedness.<sup>7</sup> This is the reason why Confucius says that “ [t]hose who are humane rest content with humaneness and those who are wise derive advantage from humaneness ” (IV, 2). Psychologically speaking, every human being has the potentiality to embody human-heartedness. But in order to embody human-heartedness one does not have to seek human-heartedness from without. Mencius says,

Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not drilled into us from outside. We originally have them with us. Only we do not think [to find them]. Therefore it is said, ‘ Seek you will find it, neglect and you will lose it. (6A: 6)<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, ‘ to subdue oneself ’ cannot be understood as one element suppressing the other element in the mind, but as self-cultivation. That is to say that to be a humane man is to bring his four principles or beginnings into fully development. For “ [e]ach of these, when fully cultivated, *guarantees* correct moral behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

Human-heartedness as a unifying concept, like the Platonic notion of the Good, is not comprehended by Confucius purely intellectually. For Confucius tries to embody human-heartedness in the social context, that is, human-heartedness, by its etymological sense (two + men) requires concrete manifestations. It leads us to the second section ‘ return to ritual ’.

## 2. The notion of ‘ return to ritual ’

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<sup>7</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, 1989), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Hansen Chad, “ Freedom and Moral Responsibility in Confucian Ethics ”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XXII (2), 1972, p. 175.

Ritual in Chinese is 禮 which is composed of two parts: 示 (deity), and 皿 (ritual vessel). It is clear that ritual in its original meaning referred to rules of proper conduct in religious ceremonies. However Confucius extended the range of ritual from this original meaning to both good manner and an ideal of social order.<sup>10</sup> Ritual, according to Cua, can be interpreted both in a particular sense and a general sense.<sup>11</sup> I shall proceed to discuss first the particular sense of ritual.

Ritual in the particular sense may be regarded as a set of rules which govern human behaviour in different social contexts. It is said in the *Book of Ritual* that

Do not roll rice into a ball, do not leave rice on the table, do not let your soup run out of your mouth. Do not smack your lips, do not leave a bone dry, do not turn over the fish, do not throw bones to the dog, and do not persist in trying to get a particular piece of meat. Do not turn rice about to let it cool off, and do not take porridge with chop sticks. ....<sup>12</sup>

Ritual in this passage consists in the detailed regulation of manners of behaviour on the table. Although the prescriptive aspect of ritual is important, Confucius is primarily concerned with the relations between ritual and the other virtues as a whole. The following two points can be made. Firstly, Confucius is opposed to formalism. The Confucian notion of ritual cannot be understood merely as a set of prescriptive rules of conduct or etiquette. If someone by a fluke<sup>13</sup> acted kindly towards others in accordance with rules or laws, he would not be a just man. It is in this sense that Confucius says that “ [i]f someone is not humane in spite of being a man, what has he to do with ritual?” (III, 3) Secondly, it follows that ritual is the external expression of one’s interior life.<sup>14</sup> Human-heartedness (*jen*), for Confucius, means to love people. But how to express one’s love to others in a proper way depends upon ritual. That is,

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<sup>10</sup> Yutang Lin, *The Wisdom of Confucius* (London, 1958), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> A. S. Cua, “ Reflections on the Structure of Confucian Ethics ”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XXI, 1971, p. 132.

<sup>12</sup> Lin, *op. cit.* p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Cua, *op. cit.* p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Cua, *Ibid.* p. 132.

ritual is “ an external criterion of the morality of *jen* in the sense that it is a criterion that governs the concrete expression of *jen*.”<sup>15</sup> This leads us to the general sense of ritual.

We are told in the *Analects* that ritual plays an important role in the cultivation of moral character. For instances,

One is roused by the *Songs*, established by ritual, and perfected by music.  
(VIII, 8)

If you do not study the rites, you will have no way of taking your stand. (XVI, 13)

If one does not understand the rites, one has no means of taking one’s stand.  
(XX, 3)

What is established here is one’s *character*, and what is studied should be internalized in one’s self. For one’s being courteous, cautious, brave, etc. cannot be regarded as meritorious without ritual, Confucius says,

If one is courteous but does without ritual, then one dissipates one’s energies; if one is cautious but does without ritual, then one becomes timid; if one is bold but does without ritual, then one becomes reckless; if one is forthright but does without ritual, then one becomes rude. (VIII, 2)

Courtesy, caution, boldness, and forthrightness are regarded as merits of human character only when they are expressed in company with ritual. Even the practice of filial piety has to be in accordance with ritual and to “ [a]void breaking the rules ” (II, 5). The reason to avoid breaking the rules is not that in order to avoid punishment one has to submissively obey the rules, but that one obeys the rules with reverence (II, 7). As mentioned above, to be a superior man is not a matter of fluke or coincidence. For the practice of ritual requires an inner dimension, human-heartedness, and the outer expression of human-heartedness requires ritual performance.<sup>16</sup> As Cua points out,

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<sup>15</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Cua, *Ibid.* p. 133, and Wei-ming Tu, “ *Li* as a Process of Humanization ”, *Philosophy East and West*,

The Confucian view may be stated thus: without *li* or rules of propriety human actions would degenerate into mere movements — mere occurrences without normative significance. The normative significance of ritual actions ultimately lies in *jen*. But mere *jen*-feelings and dispositions are by themselves incapable of concrete fulfillment when they are expressed in inappropriate contexts. Thus if *jen* is to be properly regarded as an internal criterion for the moral relevance of feelings, *li* expresses the outward or external criterion for the relevance of the *expressions* of these feelings.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that it is the notion of ritual that marks the difference between Confucian altruism<sup>18</sup> and Mo Tzu's (468-376 B.C.) doctrine of Universal Love. Mo Tzu holds that the major calamities come from people's failure to love one another.<sup>19</sup> In answer to Fan Chi's question about human-heartedness, Confucius says that " [i]t is to love others " (XII, 22). The Confucian claims that ' to love others ' and all within the Four Seas being the superior man's brothers (XII, 5) do not have the same meaning as Mo Tzu's Universal Love. For, in the Confucian view, the raw feelings of love or affection should be restrained to some extent in accordance with ritual. Thus what Confucius proposes here is the principle of *differentiation* of love. The roots of human-heartedness are based upon filial piety and fraternal duty (I, 2). It would be impossible, in the Confucian view, for one who is not able to practise filial piety and fraternal duty properly at home to be able to love others. For social contexts of actions are the extension of the familial contexts of actions. And the harmonious familial relations are the first step of the manifestations of well-cultivated inner self.

It is noticeable that benevolence or universal love cannot be sufficient for a social morality because social life has to be structured by rules. A society without rules would be an impoverished society. For we need rules in the society to be the guidance for our interaction with others. Rules as the guidance to our interaction with

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vol. XXII (2), 1972, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.* p. 133-34.

<sup>18</sup> For an account of historical development of Confucian altruism, see H. H. Bubs, " The Development of Altruism in Confucianism ", *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 1 (1), 1951, pp. 48-55.

<sup>19</sup> Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1983), p. 95.

people enable us to predict how people would act in a given situation. The more complex a set of social rule is the easier for us to know how to interact with people. Confucius' appeal to the rules of proper conduct is to show that ritual plays an important part in holding both society and people together. Thus the absence of ritual in the *Republic* is an interesting phenomenon. Plato in the *Republic* thinks that the ideal state could dispense with law, because the basic element for the ideal state to come into being and the social order to be maintained is the philosopher-kings. And the philosopher-kings' interaction with people seems to be limited. They do not have family life, private property, etc.. These are distractions to the philosopher-kings' ruling the state. However in the *Laws* Plato sets up a complex code of laws to be the guidance to the interaction between man and man, and between man and the state.

The role of ritual as the criterion for expressing one's love or affection towards others is illustrated in the *Great Learning*, where we are told that

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. ...; when personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of this passage is that the fulfillment of peace in the world depends upon 1) the well-cultivated individual, 2) the regulated family, and 3) the orderly state. One can only manifest one's character through external behaviour which is guided by rules or laws. A well-regulated family requires each of its member to act in accordance with ritual, i.e. let a father be a father, and let a son be a son. Likewise an orderly state can be achieved only when the ruler acts as a ruler, and the ministers act as ministers.

The appeal to regard others as one's brothers in the *Analects* also appears in Plato's *Republic*. Plato says in Book III that the Guardians should regard their fellow-

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<sup>20</sup> Chan, *op. cit.* pp. 86-7.

citizens as brothers because they were born from the same mother earth (414e). It seems to me that the fraternal love (*philia*) appealed here by Plato seems to be more similar to Mo Tzu's Universal Love than to Confucian differentiation of love. Both Platonic fraternal love and Mo Tzu's Universal Love are utilitarian in nature. For both of them think that the kind of love they recommend will do great benefit to the society as a whole. However, the Confucian differentiation of love is more similar to Francis Hutcheson's universal benevolence. Hutcheson says in "An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good" that

The *universal benevolence* toward all men, we may compare to that principle of *gravitation*, which perhaps extends to all bodies in the universe; but increases as the distance is diminished, and is strongest when bodies come to touch each other.<sup>21</sup>

Confucius will agree with Hutcheson's claim in that for Confucius one's love towards people cannot be without differentiation. If human-heartedness is universalistic principle then ritual is the principle of *particularism*.<sup>22</sup> If to love others is what human-heartedness demands then loving others in accordance with the principle of differentiation will be the practice of ritual. "In other words, a Confucianist always carries out his moral self-cultivation in the social context."<sup>23</sup> Confucian self-cultivation does not make one refrain from active participation in society. For by human-heartedness itself one has, of course, to love others, while the realization of this love should be in accordance with different situations at different times. This is the expression of expediency or righteousness on which acting in conformity with ritual is based. Rules of proper conduct are important not only because they enable us to predict others' actions and coordinate our behaviour with them but because actions have meanings. The meaning of 'love one's parents' is different from that of 'love one's friends'.

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<sup>21</sup> R. S. Downie, *Francis Hutcheson: Philosophical Writings* (London, 1994), p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> Wei-ming Tu, "The Creative Tension Between Jen and Li", *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XVIII, 1968, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Tu, *Ibid*.

So far, the saying that ‘ to subdue oneself and return to ritual ’ is to practise human-heartedness has been discussed. It is clear that according to Confucius, one’s personal authenticity and sociality should always go together with each other. In other words, the reason for one to act morally can only be found in the union of one’s character and the outer expressions of one’s character, actions. In what follows I shall proceed to argue that in Confucian ethics the dichotomy of agent-centred and act-centred ethics does not exist.

### **3. The union of act-centred and agent-centred theory**

As we have seen, it is commonly claimed that ethical theories can be divided into two aspects: agent-centred and act-centred theory. The former is concerned with the question: What kind of person should one be? The latter is concerned with the question: How one ought to act? However in Confucian ethics neither of these two theories alone can give a complete account of morality. For, in the Confucian view, a moral agent’s self-cultivation cannot be isolated from society. To be social is to achieve self-realization. A moral agent, in Cua’s word, must aim not only at the cultivation of *right* feelings, but also at the right expressions of these feelings in proper context.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on seeking human-heartedness within, self-cultivation, leads Confucian ethics to an agent-centred theory, whereas the emphasis on ritual leads Confucian ethics to an act-centred theory. The ideal of the superior man is the embodiment of the combination or union of human-heartedness and ritual. Confucius says,

He (The gentleman) puts his sayings into action before adopting them as guidelines. (II, 13)

Only one who is humane is able to like other people and able to dislike other people. (IV, 3)

The gentleman never shuns humanness. (IV, 5)

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<sup>24</sup> *op. cit.* p. 134.



The ways of the gentleman are three ...: the humane do not worry; the wise are not perplexed; and the courageous do not feel fear. (XIV, 28)

Righteousness the gentleman regards as the essential stuff and the rites are his means of putting it into effect. (XV, 18)

The idea of these passages is that acting in conformity with rules of proper conduct requires an inner dimension for its foundation, i.e. human-heartedness. Otherwise, ritual will only be the mechanism of regulating people's behaviour. As Mencius says that " [a]ll the ten thousand things are there in me. There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence " (VII, A, 4).<sup>25</sup> To be true to one's human-heartedness is to have a harmonious social relation with others. Thus, the significance of the superior man as a paradigmatic individual lies in the fact that the actualization of human-heartedness cannot be understood only as purely intellectual or theoretical, for, according to Confucius, moral behaviour is a union of internal and external criteria in the concrete situations of the life of the moral agent.<sup>26</sup>

The question whether Confucius is aware of the modern dichotomy of moral theories can easily be answered. Confucius, I think, is not aware of this dichotomy in that the interdependence and intimate relationship between human-heartedness and ritual lead Confucius to think that a complete account of morality should contain both agent-centred and act-centred theories.

When Confucius says in the *Doctrine of the Mean*,

In the way of the superior man there are four things, to not one of which have I as yet attained. — To serve my father, as I would require my son to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my prince, as I would require my minister to serve me: to this I have not attained; to serve my elder brother, as I would require my younger brother to serve me: to this I have not attained; to set the example in behaving to a friend, as I would require him to behave

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<sup>25</sup> Lau, *op. cit.* p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> Cua, *op. cit.* p. 138.

to me: to this I have not attained. (Chapter XIII)<sup>27</sup>

What Confucius says does not only mean that one has to fulfill the duties which arise from one's social roles, but also means that one's duty-fulfilling acts are the manifestations of one's nature. Thus Confucius says that " [w]hen one cultivates to the utmost the principles of his nature, and exercises them on the principle of reciprocity, he is not far from the path " (Ch. XIII).<sup>28</sup> Moral action has to be complemented by moral attitude, and moral attitude has to be carried out by moral action. For Confucius the account of the moral action can never be completely appreciated without both.

Confucius says that " [a]t fifteen I set my heart on learning, at thirty I was established, at forty I had not perplexities, at fifty I understood the decrees of Heaven, at sixty my ear was in accord, and at seventy I followed what my heart desired but did not transgress what was right " (II, 4). In spite of the suspicion of the authenticity of this chapter,<sup>29</sup> it nevertheless shows that for Confucius the process of self-cultivation is a lifelong task. One's moral actions can only stem from one's proper cultivated nature, and one's proper cultivated nature can only be recognized or actualized through one's action. A humane man, as Confucius, will always subdue himself and return to ritual.

To sum up. The distinction between agent-centred and act-centred theories presupposes a distinction in psychology between the ' inner ' and the ' outer '. If my argument is right, Confucius does not make such distinction. A just or humane man cannot be recognized only by the former without the latter, or vice versa. For, in Confucius' view, to be just is to carry out the duties which arise from our social roles. A just action can never be meritorious unless it is underlined by right character; and a right character cannot be revealed unless the moral agent acts justly. In Confucian ethics the distinction between agent-centred and act-centred theories loses importance to the extent that who we are is defined by our social roles.

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<sup>27</sup> J. Legge, *Confucius* (New York, 1971), p. 394.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Dawson, *op. cit.* p. 85.

## Conclusion

This thesis began with a discussion of how, for Plato and Confucius, an orderly society can be achieved. Both Plato and Confucius hold that only when each person is doing his or her own job can an orderly society be achieved. However, this does not mean that they use the notion of 'doing one's own job' in the same way. The notion of 'doing one's own job', for Plato, is primarily concerned with the inner harmony of the state and the soul. That is, Plato has a 'psychological or agent-centred account' of 'doing one's own job'. For by using this notion Plato is able to illustrate how the three elements in the soul can be harmonious with one another. Thus the notion of 'doing one's own job', in Plato's view, does not have the import of how an individual should behave towards others.

Moreover, Plato's view of justice in the state mirrors his account of justice in the soul, and thus treats individuals as parts of a whole rather than an agent. For Plato the individual is just when each part of his or her soul does its own work. Plato does not suggest that justice for the individual consists in doing his or her own job (though, no doubt, he would say that the just man and woman do in fact do his or her own job in the state). Thus Plato has an agent-centred rather than act-centred view. The notion of 'doing one's own job' in the state therefore does not have the meaning of how a state should interact with other states, but of how the three classes can be harmonious with one another. In other words, Plato is concerned with the internal harmony of the state.

It might appear that for Plato in the *ideal* state the relation between the individuals and the state is understood in an organic sense. In other words, the relation between the individuals and the state is like, for example, the relation between my hand and my body. Once my hand is detached from my body it cannot perform its function properly, that is, it is not a hand at all. It would be true, for Plato, that only in the ideal state can each individual fulfill their needs and perform their functions well. However, Plato does not say that those who cannot perform their natural functions well are non-human. Plato instead says that if one is incapable of performing one's function, "life is not worth while" (406e-407a). It is not clear what Plato has in mind

when he says, ' life is not worth while '. But it might be interpreted in two ways: first, it could mean, from the standpoint of the state, that if one is unable to perform one's function, one does no good but harm to the state as a whole. So the state should get rid of such individual. For the stability and balance of the state would be in jeopardy. Second, it could mean, from the standpoint of the individual, that if one cannot perform one's function well, one cannot fulfill one's nature. Without fulfilling one's nature, one would have an unhappy life which is not worth living. I think, Plato would take the second view. That is, not being able to fulfill one's function does not make one non-human, but *unhappy*. The relation between the state and the individuals in the ideal state is in a sense of unification. That is, in a unified state the citizens share a common education, bring up their children in common, and have a common responsibility (466c). The citizens share the same feeling and strive towards the same goal, the happiness of the state as a whole (420b).

In Plato's account of the rise of society (369b-370b), he does not see the relation between the individuals and the state as organic. For men can survive outside society in a rather miserable way, but they are not sub-human or non-human. What Plato says, I think, is that men can perform their natural functions well only in the society, and to perform their functions well is to fulfill their natures. It follows that to fulfill their natures is to be happy. Men however outside society cannot perform their natural functions well, thus they would be unhappy. Thus the advantage of adopting the second interpretation, mentioned above, is that it avoids the inconsistency between the account of the origin of the city which implies a quasi-contractual view, and an organic view. For Plato an ideal state is not organic but unified.

For Confucius, on the other hand, it is an essential element in the virtue of the individual to do one's own job. The notion of ' doing one's own job ' seems to fit in with Confucius' notion of Rectification of Names. For the notion of Rectification of Names requires one to understand that a role is not merely the name of a social position, but a role entails duties and obligations which the occupant of the role has to fulfill. Only when one carries out the duties or obligations of the role of father, does one deserve the name of father. However, to fulfill the duties or obligations of one's role, in Confucius' view, needs an inner dimension, i.e. human-heartedness. For one's acting in accordance with rules or custom cannot be understood in a mechanical sense.

One's moral behaviour is the expression of one's well-cultivated character, human-heartedness. Thus Confucius proposes a 'combinational account' of the notion of 'doing one's own job'. That is, act and character are so closely interwoven that it is difficult to classify Confucius' theory as act-centred or agent-centred.

Confucius in the *Analects* says that human-heartedness means "to love others" (XII, 22). However Confucius does not propose the notion of Universal Love. One's affection towards others, in Confucius' view, should be restrained to some extent in conformity with rules of proper conduct, ritual. Therefore what Confucius proposes here is the principle of differentiation of love. If human-heartedness is the motive for one's action, to love people, then ritual regulates the expression of one's love towards others in an appropriate way. Although, for Confucius, a superior man possesses human-heartedness, the superior man's love towards his friends, according to ritual, cannot be the same as his love towards his parents. The well-cultivated character has to be complemented with the code of proper conduct. Thus the dichotomy of act- and agent-centred morality is irrelevant in Confucian ethics. For moral conduct, for Confucius, cannot be understood in either theory, but both.

The modern liberals, unlike Plato and Confucius who emphasize the importance of the agent's character, hold that a role is a matter of what one *does*, not of what one *is*. Thus the liberals have an 'act-centred account' of the notion of 'doing one's own job'. In other words, a morally good man is one who acts in accordance with rules and laws, regardless of what kind of person he is. Moreover, the liberals hold that one's having a role depends upon one's freedom of choice. One acquires a role as a result of one's choice. The contrast between the liberal thought and Plato and Confucius is obvious. For, in Plato's view, one's social role depends upon one's nature or aptitude, while for Confucius, one's social role depends upon one's birth, inheritance, and consanguinity.

The central claim of this thesis is that the different ways in which the liberal, Plato and Confucius answer the question 'How does one acquire one's role?' rest on their very different views of human nature. The differences in their conception of a social role lead, in their turn, to important differences on other issues especially, 1) the division of labour, 2) the understanding of the self, and 3) education.

1) Plato says that each man should do one job for which he is naturally suited

(370b). One's position in the society is determined by one's nature, and thus the division of labour for Plato goes hand in hand with the theory of human nature. Confucius, unlike Plato, does not think that men have different natures, but that by nature men are close to each other (XVII, 2). However all men being equal by nature does not lead Confucius to agree with liberals' view that one's role is determined by one's choice. For, in Confucian society, one's social position is determined by one's family and the extension of one's social relations with others. Furthermore, the liberals assert that besides one's biological roles, most of one's roles are contractual. That is, by accepting a role one *agrees* to fulfill the duties or obligations prescribed by the role. However, in a non-contractual society, one's role might be determined by the following ways: a) human nature, b) government decree, c) religious doctrine, and d) inheritance. Thus it is clear that in Confucian society, a non-contractual society, one's role might be determined by inheritance and government decree. For in spite of one's hereditary roles one might be summoned by the Emperor to be a minister. Plato's just state is not contractual either, since the principle of specification is built upon the theory of human nature. Thus, as mentioned above, we all have different natures which fit us for different jobs.

2) The liberals hold that people should have freedom to choose what roles they want, and have the capacity of living different kind of lives. That is, people should have freedom to develop their natural diversity. What is essential to one's self, in liberal thought, is the capacity to choose. Plato's assertion that justice is concerned with one's inner harmony (443c) implies that our true self is our reasoning power. There is a sense in which the human soul, in Plato's view, has its own autonomy. That is, it is self-governed and capable of resolving the possible conflicts within it. But it might be argued whether Plato has a concept of autonomy, for it is clear that Plato does not see the notion of autonomy (self-government) as consisting in freedom of choice. For him one's capacity for rational choice depends upon one's understanding of the Good, not upon one's preference. Only when reason is in command in one's soul is one able to understand the Good, and only when one desires what is Good is one genuinely autonomous. Confucius would also disagree with the liberals but, unlike Plato, he holds that one's self can only be understood in social context. In other words, one's relations with others can reveal what one's true self is. Confucius says

that filial piety and fraternal duties are the roots of human-heartedness (I, 2).

The liberals think that each individual has the right to form his or her own conception of good, and there is no one objectively right conception of good life. However Plato and Confucius do not see it in this way. For both Plato and Confucius think that there is one objectively good life towards which each individual strives, and the good of the individual is identical with the good of the state as a whole. Plato, unlike Confucius whose notion of the Good (the Way) is this-worldly, also thinks that there is a transcendent good, the Form of the Good. The good of the state is an imitation of it. The theory of Form is alien to Confucian ethics, because the highest good, the Way, in Confucius' view, is the order of the society. This notion of the Way is of paramount importance in his thought. For example he says, " [i]f one has heard the Way in the morning, it is all right to die in the evening " (IV, 8).

3) The liberals' emphasis on freedom of choice implies that the individual can choose what kind of education or training to give their children. It may be the fact that one's daughter is interested in music which makes one decide to send her to music school. However, in Plato's *Republic*, what kind of education one can receive mainly depends upon one's nature. Thus the first stage of education is for training the young guardians, the second stage of education is for educating the philosophers, and people of the third class receive technical or professional training (456d). Confucius says that " [i]n education there should be no class distinction " (XV, 38).<sup>1</sup> What this passage suggests, at first sight, is similar to the liberal thought that each individual can choose what kind of education or training he or she would like to receive. However, Confucius is mainly concerned with the idea that education should be accessible to everyone, not with one's capacity to choose.

The liberals, Plato, and Confucius have different views on what kind of education one should receive. Would they agree on the issue: What is the aim of education? Or put it in this way: What kind of individual is education intended to produce? The aim of education, for the liberals, is to encourage children to develop in whatever way they choose. To educate children to have the capacity to choose is important in modern society. For in our life we often stand at the crossroads, for

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<sup>1</sup> Chan, Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973), p. 44.

example, whether I should or should not take this job as a salesman. Receiving proper education widens our interests and in turn we are capable of choosing a way of life which is compatible with our interests. However, education for Plato serves to educate each individual to be able to perform their natural functions well. For the different kinds of education mentioned above aim at different classes people. If people receive proper education or training they will do their own jobs, and not be meddlesome. For Confucius, education is essentially a training in understanding tradition. That is, by receiving education one can acquire a proper understanding of ritual, which enables one to act in a proper way. In other words, the aim of education, for Confucius, is to train or educate people to express their feeling (human-heartedness) towards others in conformity with ritual.

In brief, the aim of education, for the liberals, is to train people to choose what interests them. For the liberals think that our roles are undetermined, so the more education one receives the more possible ways of life one can choose. For Plato, people's roles are determined by their different natures, education is to train the three classes to fit for their roles, and to enable them to act effectively with their roles. For Confucius, people's roles are determined by birth, thus the basic personal relations are familial ones, i.e. father and son, brother and sister, etc.. Ritual, the rule of proper conduct, is the guideline for the interactions between the family members, education is thus to train people to conform to ritual.

The differences among Plato, Confucius and the modern liberals also cast some light on moral problems, such as homosexuality and euthanasia, in modern societies. Homosexuality, for the liberal, is not a matter of public morality. It is a matter of individual sexual preference. One's being homosexual depends upon one's sexual preference, which is nothing to do with being moral or immoral. For the liberal any pattern of sexuality can be equally valid. However, for Confucius, there is a continuity between public and private morality, one's being a homosexual not only does harm to the reputation of one's family, but also damage the last of the family line. For the continuity of generation of the family is important to Chinese. The Chinese old saying, the most unfilial thing to do is not to have male offspring, shows how much harm homosexuality brings to the family.

In ancient Athens, the head (*kyrios*) of the household (*oikos*) can have a man as



his concubine. And in Aristophanes' play, the *Frogs*, when Dionysos says to his brother Herakles: " I am in love with someone ", Herakles asks: " with man or woman?".<sup>2</sup> These two examples shows that the practice of homosexual behaviour in ancient Athens is not uncommon. No surprisingly, Plato does not see homosexuality doing harm to the family. For, in the *Republic*, he proposes to abolish the family. And Plato thinks that homosexual love has its value if it can lead to love the Form. That is, if it is diverted in the right way, having sexual satisfaction in a moderate way, it has educational value (the *Republic* 403a-c, and the *Symposium* 210a-212a). Plato claims in the *Symposium* that the desire of a young man has to be aroused. Although the young man may mistakenly take it at first as physical, yet through proper guidance the same desire can help him ascend from the beautiful things of this world to the recognition of the true Beauty.

So far as euthanasia is concerned, Plato says that " .... a life in which one must give all one's attention to one's ailments and none to one's proper job simply is not worth living. .... " (406d). The point of this passage is that in the orderly state one person does one job for which he or she is naturally suited. Thus to do one's job well is to fulfill one's nature. If one cannot pay all attention to one's job because of some chronic disease, one is unable to perform one's function well. Without being able to perform one's function well one's nature cannot be fulfilled. Without being able to fulfill one's nature one does not have a happy life. A life like this is not worth living. This passage, I think, might suggest that Plato is in favour of the practice of euthanasia. For one's suffering from a long term disease prevents one from playing his role properly, which might in turn cause instability in the state. The reason for Plato to be in favour of euthanasia might be different from modern moralists. For Plato, an ideal state can be achieved and maintained only when each one does his or her own job. Thus Plato's main concern is the stability of the state. Moreover, a person who cannot perform his function well, i.e. he is unable to fulfill his nature, is not happy. An unhappy life is not worth living. However modern moralists who approve of euthanasia might think that it can relieve the burden of the patient's family and the society, or that people have right to choose when to die..

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<sup>2</sup> Barrett, D. (trans.), *Aristophanes: The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs* (London, 1964), p. 158.

Confucius, on the other hand, does not approve of the idea of euthanasia. It can be seen in the *Hsiao Ching* (the *Book of Filiality*), where Confucius says, “ .... Seeing that our body, with hair and skin, is derived from our parents, we should not allow it to be injured in any way. This is the beginning of filiality. ....”<sup>3</sup> The basis of Chinese society is the family. In the family one’s every decision on whether one wants to live should be made with the consideration of the family as a whole. For the family bond lays the emphasis on the interrelationship between family members, not on the individual’s autonomy. Thus suicide, for example, is commonly seen in Chinese society as an unfilial behaviour.

In brief, the examples of homosexuality and euthanasia show that for Plato the individual’s primary obligation is to the state. In the case of homosexuality, to practise it in a moderate way can lead one to love the Form, and to love the Form of the Good will motivate one to make things around one good; and in the case of euthanasia, a sick person, who cannot perform his or her function well, does no good to the state as a whole. Thus Plato’s primary concern is the state. For people for Plato are defined by their natural functions, and they would be no value to themselves and to the state when they cease to perform their functions well. For Confucius, one’s primary obligation is to one’s family. For the practice of homosexuality and of euthanasia do great harm or bring shame to the family. Thus whatever one does one has to take one’s family into account. People’s roles, in Confucius’ view, are not functionally defined. Rather people acquire their roles by birth, that is, people are tied up with their families. Whatever they decide to do they have to take the family as a whole into account. For the liberals, the practice of homosexuality and of euthanasia are matters of one’s personal choice. One’s right to choose cannot be infringed by any means. Thus social order seems to be secondary in value.

The contrast between Plato’s abolition of the family in the *Republic* and Confucius’ emphasis on the role of the family in the *Analects* is an interesting one. For it leads Plato and Confucius to have different thoughts on how a corrupted society can become an orderly one. Plato’s theory of human nature leads him to hold that radical change is necessary. A corrupted society can be corrected only when

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<sup>3</sup> Makra, M. L. (trans.), *The Hsiao Ching* (New York, 1961), ch. I, p. 3.

philosopher becomes king or the current king becomes philosopher (473d), and with the aid of the Auxiliaries (441e). For without the aid or support of the Auxiliaries the philosopher might be overpowered by the mob (588d-589b). Thus it might be suggested that the *first step* towards an orderly society is to use force. With the aid of the Auxiliaries the philosopher can carry out his plan of achieving a just and orderly society. Plato's ideal state is an imaginary one, he requires a radical transformation of society. In other words, Plato tries to reconstruct a new state.

Confucius does not see military force as a means by which the ruler can bring order to a corrupted society. The emphasis on the family leads Confucius to hold that a society can be ordered when the family is regulated. Without having order in the family there will never be order in the society. For family is the bedrock of society. If the relation between father and son can be restored in accordance with ritual, then the relation between ruler and minister can be restored, and if the relation between siblings can be restored, then friendship between friends can be restored. Confucius deeply believes that to display the virtues of filial piety and fraternal love is to play one's proper part in government (II, 21). Therefore, the order in the family is a crucial factor, for Confucius, of bringing order to the society. Confucius does not want to reconstruct a new society, but to reform the society in which he lives. In the *Great Learning* it is said that to bring order to the state one has to engage in self-cultivation and regulate one's family. Thus reform for Confucius would be a gradual process.

By contrast, the liberals do not to put much emphasis on the importance of the family. For people are seen as individuals rather than as members of a family. The emphasis on the freedom of choice in modern societies might be one of the reasons for having high rate of divorce. For the over-emphasis on freedom of choice makes people think that I can do whatever I feel like because I am entitled to choose, and makes marriage casual. If Confucius is right on emphasizing the family value then marriage should be treated seriously. After all, marriage is the bedrock of family.

A final thought. No one, of course, wants to live in Plato's imaginary world, although it is perfect and ideal. And no one wants to go back to live in Confucius' feudal society, although it is humane. Since Plato and Confucius lived in the remote past, what can we learn from Plato and Confucius? Two points might be suggested: first, in modern societies people have freedom to choose what they want to do.

However, the over-emphasis on freedom of choice might sometimes cause chaos or disorder in the society. Although Plato's ideal state requiring the people to be obedient to the ruler, and Confucius' humane society requiring people to be in conformity with ritual do not fit in with modern democratic society. Nevertheless, their appeal to the notion of 'doing one's own job' to bring order to the society may be a cure for the problem of social disorder in modern societies. We often say: 'I am entitled to do such and such', or 'It is my right to do such and such'. However, I am personally inclined to think that right and duty or obligation go hand in hand with each other. Only when one fulfills his duty or obligation, let us say, paying the income tax, is one entitled to enjoy the benefits provided by the government. For every right defines an obligation. It is apparent that both Plato and Confucius do not have the notion of right in their ethics. Nevertheless, the notion of 'doing one's own job' can be a reminder for us. Before you claim your rights you have to think: Have you fulfilled your duties or obligations? After all, the social order has to be built upon the balance between give and take.

Second, we live in a more complex world than Plato and Confucius did. In modern societies we have more complex rules and laws by which our certain activities are determined, and to which they are connected. We are habituated or educated to think, a good citizen is one who is law-abiding. That is, acting in conformity with rules and laws is moral. However, is it true to say that morality is merely concerned with what one does, not with what kind of person one is? Most of people in USA, for example, think that it does not matter what kind of person he is, as long as the president can fulfill his duties and obligations, and bring prosperity to the country. He is a good president. Both Plato and Confucius would think that the role of president can be well played only when one is the *right* person for the role. A good president, for Confucius and Plato, is not only able to fulfill his duties and obligations, but also has a right or well-cultivated character. The emphasis on character may be an antidote for hypocrisy. We often see a politician praising the family value in public, but not being able to practise it in private. Plato and Confucius would say, having a good character you not only know that being law-abiding is good or moral, but also are *willing* to obey the laws. What you are (inner) and what you do (outer) should be consistent.

## Appendix

A comprehensive table to Chapter III:

	Plato	Confucius	Individualism	Communitarianism
<b>Society and the individual</b>	The individual is prior to society*	Society is prior to the individual	The individual is prior to society	Society is prior to the individual
<b>Personal identity</b>	the balanced soul (reason is properly in control)	social relation	unencumbered self (freedom of choice)	is understood in social, cultural, and historical context
<b>The individual good &amp; The common good</b>	The individual good is coincident with the common good.	The individual good is coincident with the common good.	The individual good is prior to the common good.	The common good is prior to the individual good.
<b>Social role</b>	determined by human nature	determined by the family and consanguinity	acquired by freedom of choice	choices we can make are conditioned by society
<b>Tradition</b>	should be examined (in the <i>Republic</i> )	should be conformed to and respected	should be rationally and critically examined (tradition has no particular value in itself)	is necessary for personal identity (tradition has value in itself)
<b>Ruler</b>	virtuous and wise man (the philosopher-king)*	virtuous and wise man (sage king)	democratic election (seeing election as producing a result which satisfies the maximum number of people)	democratic election (seeing election as producing a result which satisfies what is best for the society)

\* In talking of the ideal state, Plato seems to think that the state is prior to the individual. It is noteworthy that although Plato asserts in the *Republic* that justice in the state is that each one does one job for which he/she is by nature suited, yet he does not mean that one's nature is defined by one's role in the state. That is, one's nature is not dependent upon society.

\* Although both Plato and Confucius claim that the virtuous and wise man should be the ruler in the ideal state, yet they put different emphases on the notion of the ideal ruler. The former emphasizes the philosopher's power of reason, and the latter the sage king's respect for tradition.

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