

Chapter 9

Confucian and Aristotelian Ethics: A Global Model for Leadership

Marianna Benetatou

Abstract The paper focuses on a model for leadership inspired by Confucian and Aristotelian theories of the virtuous person. It addresses its descriptive and normative aspects and outlines the necessary training in order to become such a leader. Confucian and Aristotelian ideas of the cardinal virtues outline a recast profile for the contemporary leader that underlines both moral integrity and enhanced ability to act contextually. The leader's conduct aims at creating the proper conditions for global harmony and collective and individual well-being. The training consists of empowering individuals to realize their interconnectedness with collective, even planetary, interests and acquiring the skill to implement their theoretical knowledge into creative works.

9.1 Introduction

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, has recently stated that the emerging trend in world market economy as well as in international policies requires globalization with a human face. Shifting interest from impersonal institutions to the persons involved, either as policy makers or as potential beneficiaries, seems, at first glance, flimsy. Under duress, the appeal to humanitarian principles has always exonerated the oppressor or the self styled “helpless” bystanders, from serious criticism. If we think that progress needs some decisive and innovative measures that break entirely from established practices, then, we may start by reexamining our assumptions concerning leadership of all kinds and its impact on real society. In this respect, I investigate an alternative model, based on Confucian and Aristotelian moral theories of the virtuous person that contributes to recast in a new perspective our current ideas on the subject.

M. Benetatou (✉)
University of Paris-Sorbonne, France.
e-mail: m.benetatou@yahoo.com

The questions of leadership and of the leader's profile have focused the attention of philosophers, moralists, politicians, even theologians from time immemorial. Historical evidence suggests that reflections on good government and proper guidance have been at the root of systematic ethics. For example, the Chinese character *dao*, or "way", originally depicted a path and a human head representing the leader guiding his followers on the (right) path. In historical documents, and later in philosophical speculation, *dao* has been conceived as the ultimate guiding instance, the way the natural world works and hence, provides man with the appropriate patterns of conduct. Understandably, the determination of human *dao* (*ren dao*) has pervaded Chinese moral and political speculation of all schools throughout the ages.

The contemporary Western model of leadership is an offspring of the Enlightenment ideas of law and order and of progress achieved by the implementation of proper structures in any desirable field, be it political, economic, social, cultural, or even interpersonal. The basic tenet advances that if the proper institutions work smoothly, then the goal is attained. Obstacles are considered less as the inevitable interaction of humans with real life and more as intrusions from some alien factor, human or institutional, that must be overcome by defensive mechanisms or aggressive initiatives. The general optimism underpinning the declaration of human rights is rooted in confidence in the individuals' capacity and will to get things right on their own, provided they comply with the norms reflected in the socio-political structures of the modern States. Leadership is entrusted to the three "orders": deliberative, executive and judiciary, which are constitutionally empowered by the electorate to deliberate, implement, supervise and execute national policies emanating directly from the Bill of Rights. On a smaller scale, corporations and all human associations in general tend to reproduce the same pattern. The leader embodies a clearly defined set of prerequisites, for example, capability to inspire, formulate and promote policies, to overcome contrarities and, in general, to dictate the appropriate objectives and means for producing success, profit and benefits of all kinds within the limits circumscribed by the declaration of human rights. In one word, the leader is primarily considered a manager.

In recent years the rational model's shortcomings have been greatly challenged first by the facts and secondly by theoreticians. The two disastrous World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century, the increasing concern of public opinion with regard to worldwide social inequities and the ascending influence of the markets on national policies, in varied degrees, have conditioned a new theoretical trend, known as virtue ethics. Setting aside the Enlightenment assumptions, virtue ethics have tried to define morality in terms of personal excellences, or the virtues. In consequence – and this is crucial for our discussion – the focus is transferred from the impersonal institution of leadership to the leader's person, his/her character, excellences and appropriate training (Nussbaum, 2001). Most of the works involved are essentially inspired by the Aristotelian theory of virtue as it has been handed down to us in the *Nicomacheian Ethics* (Crisp & Slote, 1997). Lately the movement has attracted attention from (Neo) Confucian specialists, particularly in the West. Confucian virtue ethicists argue for the need to go "global" (Angle 2009) by

enriching existing theories with Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideas of virtue as well as the concomitant reflection of the necessary learning in order to become virtuous.

My objective is to outline a model of leadership – based on the above mentioned intellectual background – that advances the debate a few steps further. I argue that classical and Neo-Confucian ethics contribute significantly in its elaboration. In fact, virtue ethicists of all philosophical affiliations, East and West, take great pains in reconciling Confucian values with Aristotelian and contemporary Western moral and political preoccupations. However, I intend to explore a different venue in which Confucian values shape and, by that matter, influence the global theory. The word “global” refers to the integration of ideas and values originating from different intellectual traditions as exemplified by Confucian and Aristotelian virtue theories.

The interaction between values and current practices cannot be unilateral. In order to be meaningful and a key to progress, it must allow ideas to intermingle freely. China, being the most populous country on earth, has a leading role to play, not only in economic or international policies, but equally in the cultural and philosophical field.

The objective is not to describe a humanistic, albeit naïve, utopia. The majority of Confucians have been successful officials having held important offices in government and have influenced Chinese politics by their decisions and initiatives throughout the ages. Their views reflect their civil service experience. Their ideas potentially address all individuals, but most definitely, their fellow and future generations’ colleagues. Furthermore, Aristotle is well known as Alexander the Great’s tutor, a personality steeped in politics either in his homeland or in the vast empire he conquered in Persia. The Confucian and Aristotelian models of the exemplary man, the virtuous person, or the sage provide the ground material for the global model for leadership. Respectively, these ideals may be exceedingly difficult to attain but are facilitated by a wide range of accessible steps throughout the process.

9.2 The Leader’s Profile

A tentative description of the leader would read as follows: He/she embodies virtue and acts in all matters with the unique objective of creating harmony. His/her greatest mistake is to indulge in selfish desires. Selfishness includes not only personal greed, fear, or ambitions, but also those of the represented entities, such as company, market, shareholders, etc. This succinct description, far from being wishful thinking helplessly pleading the case of the ideal moral person, comprises a coercive power, virtue, or the ability to act in ways one thinks is right. In this respect, it diverges from Christian and Enlightenment ideas of virtue considered as an inner disposition, or pure intention, independent of its expression in particular acts. In the model under discussion, a specific and sustained training bridges the gap between inner disposition and moral conduct. Furthermore, the model does not make a

distinction between political, economic, commercial or simply professional type of leader. In varied degrees, all types need to embody the same set of qualifications.

A direct implication of the “strong,” as I call it, idea of virtue is summarized in the following statement: The leader has to be virtuous in order to lead successfully and conversely, the virtuous is able to lead, to govern or, simply to direct. Leadership and virtue are closely related. In the *Republic* Plato advances the idea that until the philosopher rules or the king philosophizes, all public (and private) affairs will continue to be precarious. This overstatement vividly illustrates the interconnectedness of leadership and moral integrity. Confucius stated that if one wants to govern the State, he must first regulate his family and in order to regulate his family, he must first cultivate his person. Inversely, if the person is being cultivated, his family is then regulated. The family being regulated, the State is rightly governed and thus, the kingdom enjoys harmony and peace (*Great Learning, I*).

The first question that comes to mind is: Why abandon the security and predictability of the rule of law for the hazardous endeavors of persons in power? What advantage does a person-centric model offer compared to an impersonal one? After all, the Enlightenment heralded the victory of rationality over theocratic tyranny and of freedom over despotic authoritarianism. Hence, the answer is not an either/or choice, but rather can be summarized in the statement: In order to be just, equitable, etc., institutions and procedures must be implemented by moral persons otherwise disorder, injustice, inequity and unrest is created. This is not an option, but, as current events abundantly make clear, is a strictly necessary condition for social prosperity and individual well-being.

Confucius maintains that the excellent person’s particular virtues are all rooted in *ren*, variously translated as benevolence, goodness, humanity, generosity, etc. I translate it as *humaneness*, meaning what infuses a human being with humanity. The gist of humanity, according to Confucius and his school, is the ability to feel and respond to the desires and needs of our fellow humans (*Analects: 6.30, 15.24*). We cultivate our humaneness while in contact with other humans and thus slowly learn to become human by mirroring and responding to others’ feelings and needs. Humaneness delineates an interactive and open community in which even animals, plants and inorganic matter, like stones and rocks, attract our sincere and whole hearted empathy. Mencius illustrates humaneness in the well known “argument of the well.” If a person, he argues, sees a baby falling in the well, he will spontaneously stretch out his arm to catch it thinking neither of praise, profit nor of annoyance at the child’s cries. If such calculations make him hesitate or refrain from catching the baby, then his humaneness is still immature (*Mencius, II, A.6*).

Now what does it mean for leaders to cultivate humaneness? It is their specific and fundamental excellence to intuitively understand others’ needs and respond accordingly. It also entails that their first priority is to create the appropriate conditions for each and every person to exercise freely, within individual and social boundaries, their potential and to be able to pursue their individual aims. Understandably, leaders are not good natured benefactors; They are supposed to promote their company’s interests and thus, the community’s prosperity and well-being are removed from their intended or contracted responsibilities. Later, we shall see that

the condition of maximizing values motivates a real, constant and meaningful interaction with the wider community by noticeably attenuating the conventional boundaries of limited – at least moral – responsibility. First, the leader may well understand others’ ambitions, but he/she must contemplate the big picture, how these pursuits fit within the general context. If these pursuits clash with basic needs or if they are potentially destructive or disruptive, then the leader will be averse to their promotion. Empathy and humaneness seek to promote a general well-being of harmonious, prosperous and happy living and not just particularized, egotistic pursuits. The cultivation of humaneness enables the leader to perceive things contextually and, by the appropriate coordinated actions, promote social well-being. Contextualization, by that effect, is not limited to a specific group. It broadens the scope of action (perhaps also activities if we consider sponsoring, etc.) to increasingly larger groups and should, at least in principle, envisage activities and their consequences globally, as they eventually impact the planet.

Humaneness does not produce a contextual conduct on its own. Confucius pairs humaneness with appropriateness (*yi*), often translated as “rightness.” Appropriateness dictates what is right or wrong within a well defined context. For Confucians, the context is tradition. Therefore, the leader must adapt his/her strategy to standard norms, such as law and justice, institutions and, last but not least, accepted and prominent examples of personal and corporate conduct. Innovation is encouraged within the limits of adapting to current approved practices or, to put it differently, within the limits of not offending the public perception of what is right and proper. Perhaps it is difficult for us, living in an extreme individualistic society, to realize the intimidating force and the social pressure that appropriateness may exercise on a prominent public figure’s decisions and actions.

Aristotle thought that virtue is the inner disposition to perform actions of goodness. “*The virtue of man also will be the state which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work [ergon] well*” (*Nicomacheian Ethics*, 1106a21-23). If Confucius describes ethics in terms of interpersonal relations, Aristotle focuses on a character-centered morality in which actions are qualified as virtuous if and only if the person is virtuous. The moral person deliberates on the right course of action, evaluates the circumstances, waits for the appropriate occasion and then proceeds to carry out his/her intentions. Therefore, practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) is both the key virtue and the key to virtue. Deliberation (*bouleusis*) involves right judgment rooted in self restraint and discipline. Virtue (*aretê*) is defined as the middle between two opposed and excessive or defective tendencies, known as passions. For example, justice is the middle between afflicting and being afflicted by injustice. In this instance, the virtuous person deliberates in order to find the proper course of action between the two extremes and this deliberation is conditioned by self restraint. The classical cardinal virtues of practical wisdom or prudence (*phronêsis*), temperance (*sophrosunê*), courage (*andreia*) and justice (*dikaïosunê*) are all personal excellences and only justice determines interpersonal relations. These relations, however, are mediated by some kind of wrong doing that requires reparation.

Aristotelian personal excellences, the cultivation of the moral character (*êthos*) as the foundation of ethics, and the Confucian interpersonal virtues together circumscribe a significant and coherent pattern of conduct. Rational deliberation tends to favor analytic thinking over holistic comprehension. More often than not it fragments reality into convenient segments that can be dealt with more thoroughly. Contextual perception, adroitly handled, can correct the excessive fragmentation caused by analytic thinking and realign the vision and subsequent strategies with the complexity and fluidity of real life. These qualities are never sought for their own sake but must constantly refer to some well defined context, be it socially approved examples of conduct, institutions, etc. Contextualization does not limit creativity, imagination, personal initiative and preference. On the contrary, decision making is intertwined with community needs. The leader perceives the trends of the surrounding community and tries to respond creatively. Instead of introducing new needs, as the consuming society model does, he/she advances the existing aspirations one step further. For example, sustained growth advocates and responds to basic human needs, like the quality of natural resources, alternative sources of energy, strategies against global warming, etc. Such activities, on the entrepreneurial scale, reflect the will to cultivate self restraint and to envisage planetary changes globally.

The cultivation of Confucian interpersonal virtues, notably humaneness and appropriateness, enables the leader to transcend the narrow limits of particular interests. As a leader, one's initiative positively promotes one's interests and constantly responds to the aspirations of the community (defined as the constantly changing, albeit real interactive forces any enterprise must contend with). On the other hand, Aristotelian character-centered ethics stress the need for rational deliberation, justice and measure.

Confucian appropriateness acts as much more of a compelling force than Aristotelian justice. Along with humaneness and propriety, it dictates the norms for a socially and individually healthy network of human relations that practically cover much of Aristotelian and Western civil rights based institutions. As such, integration of Confucian interpersonal and Aristotelian character-centered virtues is emblematic of the leader's core qualities: The inner disposition is readily expressed in community oriented conduct and, inversely, social values are rooted in the fulfillment of personal excellences.

9.3 The Leader's Conduct

According to the global model, the leader's efforts tend to create harmony in all situations. The Greek word for virtue, *aretê*, is etymologically related to such key-words as *aristos*, the best or supremely good and *armonia*, harmony. Confucian virtue (*de*) is equally the ability to seek and produce harmony. The Confucian gentleman never competes, which is to say that he avoids conflict and detrimental concurrence. To create harmony means to seek in all situations how things, events

and people fit together in a way that enables them to pursue their desires and ambitions within the socially and individually accepted boundaries. Self realization is not only rewarding but it contributes, by its very nature, to others' development and well being. The interconnectedness of personal pursuits and collective harmony relies on the constant effort to invent efficient methods, to seek unsuspected or unexploited connections and to bring about a state of equilibrium that provides a sound foundation for future endeavors. In this model, competition and concurrence are not necessarily motives of progress, because seeking harmony is not a closed circuit with limited chances of success. Responding to people's real needs and true expectations is the opposite of promoting universal objects of desire.

Harmony is realized by an innovative attitude to values.¹ In Western Christian ethics, persons are usually faced with heart-breaking dilemmas: Shall I close down my enterprise and dismiss all the employees, or shall I dismiss a few in order to save the many? In Christian logic, this is an honest deliberation. The dilemma, in its own phrasing, entails the "correct", moral answer: The socially minded employer dismisses a few in order to save the many. This is the basic premise of the least damage, or of the scapegoat. Possibly, from a strictly logical point of view, Aristotle would agree with the terms of the argument. It is significant, however, that when he defines, for instance, justice, as mentioned above, he avoids presenting it within an either/or paradigm. Justice is not a partial injustice, nor the injustice of least damage. It is an entirely different conduct not to indulge in impulsive proclivities but rather the mean of perfect equilibrium. Furthermore, the four cardinal virtues are complementary. The moral person possesses all of them, because they are different applications of one and the same virtuous disposition. Perhaps Aristotle did not think that the sage perceives situations as conflicting. Armed with rationality and uprightness, he/she perceives things in their intricacy. He/she does not have a preference for some values as evidenced by the solid group of the four cardinal virtues from which interchangeability is excluded.

Confucius and his school have consistently promoted an ideal of harmony based on the concurrent pursuit of all values. There are not some values more valuable than others. Indeed, values are not put on a scale and weighed as if they were commensurable. Consequently, there is no moral dilemma, in the sense of conflicting values from which a choice must be made. Values are all incommensurable due to the fact that the world is made up of non-reducible diversity. Confucians do not attempt to choose the least evil, but instead, to maximally actualize all values. What we usually perceive as conflicting moral choices, Confucians have perceived as an opportunity to create harmony. It may be of interest to investigate at this point how a sincere and well trained Confucian would respond to the current economic crisis. The structure of a Confucian minded enterprise would diverge in many ways from a Western one. The hierarchical

¹ S. Angle gives an account of the subject in the virtue ethics perspective. However, he addresses the issue of the Confucian response to dilemmas in terms of emotional reaction rather than in terms of structural organization (Angle 2009, pp. 93–111).

relation of the manager(s) to the subordinates would entail reciprocal personal attention. I avoid saying obligations or duties and rights because such vocabulary is conspicuously absent from Confucian philosophy.

However, we must not jump to the conclusion that reciprocity does not induce two parties to conform and respect their bond. Appropriateness, as discussed above, exercises a real compelling force to reckon with. The leader ensures secure and stable conditions of work, promotes personal ambitions within the limits of his/her humane all-encompassing vision and in return, the employee reciprocates with loyalty and obedience. Although it appears moralizing and rather vague, it may better resist adversity than a rational duty-right contractual relation would.

When crisis strikes, the Confucian manager feels responsible for saving all the jobs. Let us imagine that first he/she sets an example by not only significantly reducing his/her own salary and profit, but also rescuing the business. The second step is also quite significant. The personal relation between manager and subordinate does not end when the contract expires. Confucian minded businessmen may create a kind of network for providing their employees with new professional opportunities. Training is an important component of Confucian culture, which means an employee will not be abandoned and left to seek a new job. He/she is properly trained in new skills in order to face any hardship. The initial dilemma of either dismissing a few in order to save the many or closing down the enterprise is mitigated in a series of intermediary steps conditioned by the personal engagement of everybody involved, manager and employees alike. Actually, the manager's reputation, credibility and professionalism are at stake and how such situations are handled reflects directly on his/her person. The perception of the irreducible diversity of the employees, not as characters but as indispensable parts, each in his/her particular post, entails a total solution to the crisis. The appropriate training of new skills ensures that all the employees are prepared to face new challenges. The business network, designed to facilitate the job search, does not consider employees to be simply social security numbers, left to the unemployment office after their term, but as persons seeking assistance from their company to find a new job. Personal relations, even if they lack the objectivity and professionalism of modern business, are more likely to reduce the difficulty involved in transitioning to a new job.

Confucian and Aristotelian ethics perceive harmony as a state of equilibrium brought about by resolute and committed efforts of the leader(s). In both philosophies, the leader does not perceive conflict as a dilemma but as an opportunity to search for new issues. However, Aristotelian ethics, well grounded in democratic institutions, might give rise to different interpretations of civil rights, for example, by equating legal obligation with moral duty. This, in turn, may lead to, for example, a lack of compassion towards the plight of unemployed workers and employees. The Confucian-minded leader is not restrained by rigorously defined limits of responsibility; therefore he/she can embrace unexpected and salutary courses of action beyond the scope of strict (legal) duty.

9.4 The Leader's Goal

Reality, made up of irreducible diversity, entails the maximization of values. Unity is not identified with uniformity and the divergent components of any given situation are all essential parts of the future. The leader must respect and comply with seemingly contradictory options and find a way to reconcile them. He/she must imagine the appropriate means to give voice to all without creating a cacophony, but rather a harmonious symphony.

Humans have never been notable for their generosity or devotion. Although our forefathers hammered virtue and honor into their contemporaries' (and our) minds, humanity, with remarkable consistency, has invariably opted for profit, wealth, power and fame. Unlike Christian moralists, the ancients have never despised or undermined the importance of material goods in living a productive and happy life. Virtue cannot be properly cultivated, argues Aristotle with common sense, without a decent material standard of living, like health, wealth, family, friends and, of course, a rich social life in the *polis*. Virtue, either in Confucian or Aristotelian ethics, is not an end in itself, but the necessary condition for attaining happiness. In the Christian context, happiness is understood as an inner disposition to feel well on a constant basis. It is often confounded with a vague feeling of well-being independent of external circumstances. Aristotle, following in the steps of ancient Greek philosophy, maintains that happiness is unobstructed living. The Greek word for happiness, *eutuchia*, means good luck, or the luck bestowed by the gods. A happy person favored by the gods lives according to his/her wishes without contrarities. Happiness is less an inner disposition and more a way of living, the life stream flowing easily and smoothly. In order to live happily, Aristotle emphasizes, we need to cultivate the inner disposition to goodness and virtue.

In this sense, harmony sought by the leader has a very positive meaning, the well-being for all. Well-being is to be understood in the Aristotelian sense of prosperity, peace and a positive satisfaction resulting from the unimpeded exercise of various activities. It is both individual and collective.

Confucianism has emphasized social coherence and political stability as the goal of all human activity. Starting from the family and integrating broader social units, individuals learn to consider the socio-political reality as their "natural," therefore correct, milieu. Their activities and ambitions align with existing socio-political structures by complying with pre-existent exemplary patterns of conduct as they are handed down by tradition. Confucian values of humaneness and appropriateness smoothly integrate their adherents into the mold of customary practices. Furthermore, these values provide strong incentive to substantiate and actively pursue the ideals rooted in these socio-political structures. Recent Western interpretations of Confucian virtue ethics often confuse traditional theories with contemporary Chinese politics, the tendency being to explain the latter by the former and understand the former by the latter. Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophers have been a realistic and practical people. If we investigate their ideas contextually, we arrive at the conclusion that their insistence on socio-political unity and stability

is meant to counterbalance the shortcomings of selfish interests embedded in the exercise of public service. Individuals are well established in the socio-political reality, but not so completely as to be dissolved in it. It is necessary to realize the boundaries of their activities in all circumstances, private and public.

In the global model, the leader seeks to promote prosperous and favorable conditions for all. Profit is essential, sought to the extent of general and individual well-being. It may even be possible to measure and integrate the factors that characterize well-being when creating new policies, products, services, etc. The impact of entrepreneurial and/or industrial activity, properly quantified, on the well-being of the population as a whole and of individual citizens, may prove to be a valid foundation from which to progress -not in a wild and unpredictable manner-but rather holistically and harmoniously. Profit and well-being must be evaluated on a new scale. Profit is not only a means to happiness, but also a very real end in itself. Its impact on human behavior, collectively and individually, must be properly acknowledged. On the other hand, the factor of well-being can be measured when some of its aspects, like positive emotions resulting from precise events, creative activities, imaginative initiatives, etc. are duly taken into account. Other instances, as for example freedom, can provide useful guidelines concerning the method of objectification.

Differences between Confucian and Aristotelian philosophies can be easily attributed to their respective interpretations of happiness. Both advocate the common good as the ultimate standard of personal fulfillment and well-being but with a pronounced divergence in perspective. Confucius claims that if the State prospers, the people are content. Aristotle affirms the individual right to happiness by the inverse argument: If the citizens are happy, the *polis* prospers. In the global model, the leader constantly bridges the gap between these perspectives. Sometimes, the sensitive balance needed is akin to that of a high wire act.

9.5 The Leader's Training

The global model for leadership must be realistic in order to be sustained. Adequate training bridges the gap between ideal and reality. Perhaps the weakness of Aristotelian ethics is to be found in the entirely theoretical nature of the idea of virtue. Aristotle distinguishes between the basic education of children consisting of acquiring varied and extensive knowledge of different skills and the moral knowledge of the supreme good. In basic education, different kinds of knowledge are sought for their results, like medicine is sought for restoring health, whilst the supreme knowledge is an end in itself. The acquisition of this supreme knowledge is not particularly exploited in Aristotelian ethics. Therefore, the issue of the supremely good person, *kalos kagathos*, remains somewhat of a theoretical ideal.

From the fourth century B.C. the Stoics have elaborated a more systematic educative program of moral character (*éthos*). They have stressed the need for introspection, mindfulness and uprightness in order to curb and even extirpate

excessive and harmful impulses, the passions. Stoic cultivation aims at strict self discipline and self restraint. The means to attain the state of absence of passion, *apatheia*, consist of advice from trusted and cool minded friends or teachers, maxims and general truths abundant in ancient Greek lore, and the example of mythical or real persons that provides inspiration by illustrating the benefits of particular virtues. The overall impression is that the Stoics have not taken great pains in detailing the moral education that leads to their ideal of sagehood. The oral teaching has played a considerable role in that matter and perhaps teachers as much as disciples did not think it necessary to write down more than vague exhortations.

Confucians and particularly Neo-Confucians have, on the contrary, outlined with precision and finesse the necessary steps required in order to attain virtue and sagehood (Ivanhoe, 2002). The discourse is not destined for some happy recluses but, as I have pointed out from the beginning, for potential or actual magistrates and, in general, all public minded persons. It is an efficient instrument used to educate the public elite by instilling important values that will serve as guideposts during their careers. Philosophers have expressed various approaches but they all agree on some basic principles. In the broader sense, they provide useful landmarks for a contemporary actualized training oriented towards forging a contextual conscience for professional leaders.

The difference between moral cultivation and basic education is to be found in the disciple's living experience and moral transformation. For both ancient Greek and Chinese moralists, ethics belong to the field of realization, of redressing the character and thinking in a totally new, holistic perspective. It is not about learning a standard knowledge and hence cannot be properly conveyed in a conventional school setting. The teacher acts as more of a guide who has realized virtue in his/her own person, or at least has made significant steps in this direction. The method of teaching is accordingly adapted to the student's temperament and personality.

Neo-Confucian learning begins with the cultivation of a refined perception that enables the student to grasp the context as well as the hidden dynamics of a given situation. It is a pre-rational stage situated at the level of sensory perception. The starting point is ordinary perception. Constant exercise refines and enlarges the sensory scope to include normally imperceptible data of a particular kind. This is a seminal point. According to the Chinese worldview, reality does not only consist of visible things but also their invisible, hidden dynamics. Events, facts and what we call data are the perceived convergence of multiple tendencies in temporary equilibrium. The invisible drives have already configured the future. Whoever, says Chinese wisdom, knows how to read the hidden dynamics of any situation is the master of transformations and possesses the key to unending and everlasting success. The *Book of Changes (Yi Jing)* explains in detail how prognostication, in this case obtained by divination, is the indispensable instrument of the magistrates. Neo-Confucian ethicists have striven to assimilate lessons of the *Changes* into their educational program. Under proper guidance, students explore the potential that conditions and sustains sensory data. They come to understand how the past conditions the present and the present is harbinger of the future. The expanded perception of time is cultivated simultaneously with an all-encompassing

awareness of the interconnectedness of things in space. Gradually, contextualization reports events, the people involved and the perceiver in more comprehensive contexts. Significantly, contextual perception is traditionally paired with the invention of writing, the arts and other important cultural achievements. It is a mental state that favors creativity, invention and discovery.

Students cultivate a clear, focused and unwavering attention. They must concentrate fully on the matter at hand. The average individual's concentration and attention is extremely weak. Attention flickers and jumps constantly from one thing to another. Multitasking, considered an advantage in contemporary society, is also a good way to lose focus. Obviously, without good concentration, contextual perception is unattainable.

Awareness is conditioned by constant and uninterrupted effort. If students suspend their practice even for a short while, their effort will be fruitless. They follow the exemplary actions and lives of the antique sages or, again, of famous virtuous persons. At the beginning, they strive to imitate their model in their everyday conduct. For example, they first learn filial piety (*xiao*), considered the root of civic virtues, as a set of standardized actions, such as providing for the parents, obeying their wishes, continuing their legacy, etc. Progressively, the imitation becomes easier until intentional effort and purposeful conscience are attenuated and even eliminated. At that point, filial piety is second nature and spontaneous. As filial sons or daughters, they pursue and thus transmit to posterity, the spirit that infused their parents' actions, values, ideas, customary practices and aspirations.

Moral cultivation consists of practice and knowledge. Knowledge of right and wrong is obtained through reading, observing and studying. Students study the past in order to understand the meaning of their forbears' exemplary actions. They must realize why the actions were right or wrong, great and memorable or petty and despicable. They seize upon the motivating principle (*li*) and the way such actions promote or disrupt harmony and collective well-being. Additionally, they observe people and events around them. Eagerness to learn and understand the hidden meaning and organizing principles of life abounds. It becomes difficult to manage public or private affairs constructively if they have not grasped the ruling principles of their surroundings and of the way events run their course. They must not only sharpen their psychological intuition but also exercise common sense and dare to approach life honestly. The investigation of things is the foundation upon which to broaden and deepen moral knowledge. It is an everlasting process. In that sense, the leader must become a permanent student of truth and goodness.

Psychology is a key point in the training. Students must reduce, and in the final stage, eliminate all selfish desires. Selfishness obstructs clear perception, unwavering attention and constant practice. Wang Yangming (1472–1529), a famous Neo-Confucian philosopher and pedagogue with a successful civil service career, goes a step further. He states that individuals should never let personal ambitions or desires interfere in the management of professional affairs. Selfishness extends far beyond strict individual boundaries to embrace all partial and unilateral motives and practices, political, economic, commercial, corporeal, etc. that actually or potentially disrupt collective unity. The Neo-Confucian philosopher believes that

ambition, greed, fear and selfish calculation lead to mistakes and failure. The training is meant to produce success because it is instrumental in harmonizing different and, at times, conflicting tendencies. Leaders and their representatives eventually gain credibility and varied long-lasting benefits.

The goal of this brief outline of a suitable training for all managers or people occupying posts of responsibility is to unite theory and practice. As it is often observed, ethics have never really been applied to real life because they have never been adequately cultivated. We have seen that Aristotle, the Stoics and the Confucians of all ages have distinguished between basic and moral education. However, in order for moral education to be successful, it must become a concrete and constant way of life under the guidance of a suitable and qualified teacher. Who would be willing to undergo constant check, submit to criticism and forego some cherished weaknesses? Leaders not only need managerial experience and expert knowledge, but also personal commitment.

Theory and practice conjoined in harmonious and unobstructed conduct is the end of all moral training. Neo-Confucians perceive it as an intimate conviction that spontaneously triggers the right reflexes. For example, advances the argument, someone with knowledge of poisonous herbs will abstain from eating them even if he/she is starving to death. His/her knowledge has created an automatic response that neither deliberation nor circumstances can alter. Such practical knowledge is the model for moral conduct. Cultivation is meant to create the right reflexes so theoretical lessons may gradually mature in spontaneous practice. In this respect, we must keep in mind that contextual perception, investigation of things, unwavering attention and extension of knowledge, as mentioned above, are the necessary steps towards self-realization and not just a set of rules. Indeed, Neo-Confucian training avoids maxims and rules that may bring about intellectual and emotional confusion, sloth and mental doubt. Proceeding case by case and meticulous investigation is the best way to awaken an all-embracing consciousness.

9.6 Conclusions

The global model for leadership points to some well known but usually forgotten prerequisites of all managerial practices. It serves to both criticize existing, supposedly self-evident and “natural” truths, like the blind faith in institutions as vehicle and guarantee of progress – or the convenient equation of legal right with moral truth – and to envision an alternative way of doing business or, perhaps more importantly, of leading and directing within any circumstances.

Foremost, the model stresses the need for personal commitment. Constrained by formalities, contractual subtleties and superficial professionalism, the leader may easily lose sight of the real forces that determine the future of his/her enterprise as well his/her personal career. Credibility, loyalty and trust, as well as efficiency are not sufficient in order to transcend challenges. The ancients, both in the East and West, have realized that progress is achieved by a sincere and truthful exercise of

our best qualities. It is not only limited to material acquisitions or technological development, but also includes universal consensus, harmony and peace.

A realistic approach to such sublime aims lies in training the right persons, those who are instrumental in guiding – by their decisions and actions – humanity's destiny. Managers and businessmen belong to this group inasmuch as they influence national and global economies, markets and ultimately, politics.

A direct consequence of the model is the need to revise the Enlightenment centered humanistic paradigm – based on the rational correspondence of duty and rights – by a more contextual and comprehensive approach inspired by the Confucian virtues of appropriateness and humaneness. The social, in addition to legal, consequences of individual actions are a real force to reckon with and, duly observed and measured, may counterbalance arbitrary or authoritarian practices by focusing decisions on their social impact. Reproof and disapproval, as well as general consensus, may therefore serve to bend, even slightly, managerial politics and practices to social advantage.

Additionally, the global model guarantees national, cultural, religious and political diversity. The leader takes into consideration local idiosyncrasies in order to interact constructively with his/her environment, prospective clients and/or partners. Thus, these features play a crucial role in planning and creating services and products and in providing a source of inspiration. Once again, we can see that contextual conduct, as has been emphasized repeatedly in this study, keeps pace with local practices whilst it transcends their isolationist tendencies.

Another aspect that must be taken into account is the reconciliation of corporate and professional practices within society. Currently, society worldwide pleads urgently for humaneness not only in the specific Confucian sense but also in the sense of humanizing market activities and practices. The rule of law, justice and equity are not enough. To their dismay, people and countries often discover the noble Enlightenment values do not coincide with morality in the way that common sense and millennia of human sociability have engraved in the collective consciousness. They watch as international policies become more impersonal. Focusing on people's qualities, conduct and motives is a way to check the faceless mechanisms of power. It is desirable that such accounts are subject to an objective scale of measurement that operates as an international standard of globally evaluating progress, prosperity and well-being, interacting with micro and macro surroundings. Perhaps then, globalization may earn a human face.

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