

# Chapter 10

## Humankind Must Know Itself

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I originally did not understand Confucianism, but now I understand a little. I understand a little because my father has died—when he was alive he spoke about it often, few people paid attention to his words. Therefore, I would like to repeat a bit of what he said. This is why I am standing before you today.

I will keep to his opinions and explain some of his ideas. The purpose of this volume is to discuss how to reconstruct Confucianism in this day and age. Doctrines necessarily fall into obscurity when society does not feel that they have value. It is difficult to conceive of Confucianism as having no value. Confucianism's fall into obscurity is a result of the strength and flourishing of Western culture, and for this reason Confucianism is seen as having no use. One hundred years later, Western culture is still strong, flourishing, and useful. But it is rather perplexing that the world's deep acceptance of Western culture has brought unease. Everyone knows what I am referring to here.

One day in the late 1970s, my father finished writing his last book, *The Human Heart and Human Life* (人心与人生). On that day, he wrote in his diary: "I can leave (this world) now." The book opens with the following words: "The purpose of my book is to help mankind know itself, and at the same time introduce the thought of the ancient East into the intellectual world of today. The crisis of man-made calamities on the earth is urgent, yet quite unexpectedly we have no way of ameliorating them. Therefore, it may be permissible to say that humankind dominates the material world. But it is not permissible to say that humankind can freely do whatever it wishes. If human beings do not evolve into one family under heaven, then they are doomed to self-destruction." Is this not the international political and ecological situation we are facing today? It is impossible to summarize in one sentence all the factors that have led human history to this point. In the modern era, Westerners

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were so eager to be understand knowledgeable about the myriad of things in the world that they to seek self-knowledge. This has gradually led to a lopsidedness in learning throughout the entire world. Is this not one of the reasons?

Nowadays science has become so fully developed that we are able to unravel the various hidden mysteries of atoms and subatomic particles, and roam through outer space and set foot on the moon. The reason for this is that we have come to understand and then control and use matter—it cannot be said this is not resourceful on our part.

We now face a problem of the greatest importance—mankind cannot busy itself merely with understanding and mastering material things, we also have to understand ourselves. The one-sidedness within the world of scholarship is an expression of the fact that our entire mode of life has problems. This was known long ago, but it has never been as serious as it is today. I deeply believe that everyone attending here today feels the same way, and we all believe that we must rectify this imbalance.

Since age thirty, my father attempted to build a bridge between the two cultures. This last book implied that for him the bridge had been completed. The life of a single person is limited, and one can only busily work to finish what one can. This project requires the continued efforts of many people over many generations. Allow me to speculate further: Can we continue to delve into this question with a consensus? Not necessarily. But I will be satisfied with at least raising the question here.

I would like to be able to enter straight into this question, but unfortunately I cannot. Setting aside everything else, even if we gradually achieve a clear understanding of humanity, we cannot neglect the question of animals. Animals have their own societies, but they have no minds. Their societies are based on a division of labor based on the differentiation of the physical body, and they cannot develop further than this. Humans have bodies and minds. Bodies separate people, and minds link them together. Humankind society is based on human consciousness that is without barriers between people. Only humankind is capable of transcending domination by instinct. Only humankind can achieve culture. Only humankind has intelligence and reason. Only human society continuously develops.

At first, he worked to explain how it was that humankind had developed different cultures. But, as we know, to continuously pursue this question results in other questions. Therefore, coming to know humanity itself became his next topic. As a result of this, we have to return to his starting point: the key is to discuss how he treated humanity's creation of cultures and the reasons why their achievements are different. Humankind has always faced many problems. These challenges can be categorized into three kinds. Humanity has as a result taken three separate paths. Because humanity has "made different efforts," it has as a result developed cultures with three separate tendencies. Note that because different efforts have been made, as a result the methods of solving problems are different. When a certain effort continued with time, it would shape people's attitudes toward life.

The first attitude concentrates effort on obtaining things that are needed. The result of this is to alter the situation. Note that this is directed at needs within the material world, so that in the end there is always a way to address them. The second

attitude does not call for changing the situation. Rather, the method of addressing the problem of needs is to alter one's own desires. Therefore, "the criteria for fulfillment or failure in fulfillment are not fixed." Because of this, the issue involved implicates the subjective state of the "the other." The third attitude seeks to eliminate the problem or challenge altogether. This goes against the nature of life itself.

My father believed that Western culture took up the first attitude toward life and that Chinese culture took up the second attitude toward life. All of you seated here today must be waiting to find out what this has to do with the question of humanity coming to know itself. The first attitude relates to material things. The attitude one holds toward obtaining or satisfying this type of desire is such that, even if the desires are difficult to realize, there will be a solution in the long run. The second type of attitude relates to not seeking to control the hearts and minds of others, but rather the method of solving problems has to result in compromise and moderation. In addition, the question of fulfillment is not taken as given. This is to say that the first attitude foregrounds the relation between man and objects, while the second foregrounds the relation between man and man. With regard to objects, things can be taken by force. With regard to the hearts and minds of others, the use of force is extremely perverse. My father directly referred to the former as the culture of objects and the second as the culture of the human interior (the heart/mind).

At this point, we can take a step further and approach another issue. My father believed that the development of human culture involved a successive replacement of one culture by another. That is, the culture of objects (Western culture) had over the past 200 or 300 years transformed the face of the earth. But Chinese culture, which had flourished early on, had suffered a thousand years of decline, to the point that it was on the verge of extinction today. Is there no use for the culture of the human interior? This is certainly not the case. Rather, its appearance did not match the needs of its time, for it matured too early. In my father's view, there is no question of whether a culture was good or bad, but only a question of whether it meets the needs of its time. It is certainly not the case that humanity does not need a culture of the heart, but rather that its time has not yet arrived. To put it more concretely, after the first path is finished, then one should take up the second path. To put this in another way, the world today is facing the transition toward the second path. The quote that I began with was an attempt by my father to put forth a new intellectual approach. After I became familiar with the process of my father's approach toward answering these questions, I came to feel that I had advanced in the measure of understanding humankind. I want to add a word here—the benefit my father received from reading the works of Western scholars was not only an increase in his knowledge but also the realization that Western scholarship had a certain bias and to use a Confucian eye to examine that which Western scholarship often ignores.

In the remarks that follow, I will not proceed in the chronological order of the discovery of these insights, but rather in the order of their importance. I believe that, relatively speaking, instinct is more important. "Appetites for food and sex are part of human nature" (as *The Mengzi* says). Confucians admit this, because these appetites arise from nature itself. The later discussion of "the difference between man and beast" continued for some time without reaching a definitive conclusion. The

scholarship of ancient China was a great distance from natural science on this question. The purpose of discussing the relationship between beasts and man was for the sake of helping people become better men. My father was drawn to the issue of instinct, but later he came to feel that Western scholarship had failed to grasp the real significance of this issue. The true significance is that aside from instinct, there is also an opposing nature. If there was no opposing nature, then in fact there would be no humanity. Human nature is the result of the victory of this opposing nature over instinct. Mankind's future lies in the continuation of this struggle.

I will raise a few examples of the instincts of animals for the sake of comparison and consideration. Instinct is a special capacity that exists from birth. Each aspect of instinct has its own use and meaning. Instinct does not arise from life experience. Intelligent living, however, is necessarily aided by experience. Instinct is knowledge and action; it is the unity of knowledge and action without any distinction between them. This is to say, once an animal encounters certain specific kinds of environments, they immediately and directly enter into and become active within specific stable relationships with those environments.

I will now turn to the question of humankind, with the purpose of pointing out the many differences between man and animals on this point. Those that rely on their instincts to live only require their own bodies as tools, but humanity is literally unable to live without the various tools that humans create outside of their own bodies. Those that rely on their instincts to live are able to survive from the day that they are born, and this continues for their whole lives. Humans are born without any abilities at all, but in the end can do virtually anything. Those that rely on their instincts to live will not escape from the natural state. But humans live through their own intelligence, not just according to nature. Because their lives depend on the nurture and acquisitions after their birth, they must learn before they can adjust to the lives of their fellows. Humans do not become members of society merely as a result of the maturation of their bodies.

These examples and the contrast I have drawn are all common knowledge. After bringing these up, my father said that it follows that the nature of human life is therefore different from that of animals. Humans have reached the point in which they rely on their own intelligence in order to live. Humans not only have bodies, but they also have minds. What follows from humans having minds? Is it necessary to further raise examples of the qualities of humans? It is not necessary. But there is one issue that must be raised. We know that humans also have instincts, and there are many aspects of life in which humans still rely on their instincts to live. If we don't look at this carefully, it would appear that instincts are all alike. But in reality, the existence of the human mind and the society that connects with it makes humans' instincts different from those of animals. This difference lies in the fact that humans' actions do not simply flow from the body as do those of animals. My father's book described animals as being "shackled" by their instincts. And what about us? Are we not shackled by our instincts? Humanity is different from animals in that it opposes its instincts. We should consider humanity from the standpoint of its contrast with animal instincts.

My father talked about religion in every book he wrote. The first book deals with the formation and development of religion and culture. Beginning with his second book, there was a shift in the purpose of talking about religion—he shifted toward discussing how the flourishing or non-flourishing of religions had affected the degree of openness and development of people’s minds. What did he think of this? I will sum up for him in a single sentence: Humanity has made it this far by relying on religion, but in the future it will be even better if we do not rely on religion. By “even better,” the point is that in the past humanity, especially in ancient times, needed more reassurance and inspiration than the people of today. Here is how he defined religion: “Religion necessarily takes as its business giving emotional comfort to and inspiring the ideals of people; religion must recognize that it controverts the basis of human knowledge.” He also said: “The proof of religion is in its transcending the world...The mundane world is limited, but religion puts faith in the limitless. The mundane world is relative, but religion puts faith in the absolute. The mundane world is the cycle of birth and death, but puts faith in the eternal.” “Accompanying the arrival of the notion of spirits and ghosts came the religious concepts of sin and blessedness, along with prayer, religious sacrifice, and all other religious behavior.”

Everyone here should be able to understand his realistic view of religion. He also realistically viewed Confucius. He wrote, “Confucius did not have the essential qualities of religion. Confucius had a spirit that religion cannot have.” That is, that Confucius had complete faith in humanity, in its knowledge of right and wrong. “Thus Confucius did not give people an arbitrary set of rules.” Zaiwo asked if it was necessary to fulfill the rituals of mourning his parents’ passing for 3 years. Zigong asked whether or not one could avoid sacrificing a lamb during the ritual at the inauguration of each month. Confucius was extremely mindful of ritual but he did not at all regard Zigong’s question as impudent—he responded that you should consider this for yourself. This is something that is not possible in religion.

Everyone has his own understanding of Confucius. What filled my father with endless admiration was that Confucius’s teachings always led people to examine themselves, to make efforts to improve themselves, and called on people to reflect (appealing to their reason) and make demands on themselves (appealing to their will). This is precisely the opposite of religion, which calls on people to set aside faith in themselves and their own efforts and instead put faith in and rely on others. Everyone knows that the type of rituals and fragmentary religion that later flourished in China was completely opposed to the spirit of Confucius and became a tool for binding people’s minds—Chinese society was almost equivalent to a religious society. But even though this was the case, my father still believed that when the Chinese people rid themselves of this obstruction in their spirit, they would not on the contrary ask for a religion to replace it. The Chinese people have open minds. Think for a moment on why it is that foreign cultures encountered very few obstacles when entering China. The Chinese people have open minds.

My father often spoke of religion. He had really thought this through quite well. But how can one make judgments on this and related questions about humanity? His most important opinion was that religion teaches people to give up faith in them-

selves and to believe in others and to substitute a sense of sin and holiness for a sense of right and wrong. To put it another way, this is the aspect of Confucius's spirit most worth of recognizing and adopting. If there is something else that needs discussing, it is that religion exacerbates humanity's limitations and tendency toward exclusivity. At the most fundamental level, it is difficult for people to be free of alienation from others because of the nature of their bodies, and religion teaches people to exclude others.

Confucius's teachings helped elevate the bearing of the Chinese people. Confucius put great emphasis on ritual but he did not by any means mythologize it. As the *Book of Rites* says, "It does not come down from heaven, it does not come forth from the earth; it is simply the expression of the human feelings." The standard is not on the outside, but on the inside, and not static, but flexible. Please note that the standard being "not on the outside but on the inside" relates to Confucianism's fundamental attitude, through which it evolved into a culture that works on the interior of humans, while the culture of the West developed toward exerting effort toward the external world. Just as the point of discussing instinct was to discuss the capacity to oppose instinct, and likewise the meaning of talking about the divisions between individual bodies is the purpose discussing how to overcome such divisions, the point of discussing religion is to discuss the Chinese people who have extricated themselves from religion. All of this is done in preparation for discussing people's hearts and minds.

Above I said that I have no way of directly entering into the topic at hand. In what follows I will attempt to bring us a step closer. My father began from his observation that Western culture is a culture of objects and proceeded to say that it was a culture of the body, an outward-oriented culture. What was its origin, its history, and its products and results? Compared with the more ambiguous Chinese culture, what are its positive and negative aspects? The great accomplishments of Western culture are obvious. That a single culture could exercise such overwhelming superiority and dominate the world is unprecedented in history. The greatest strength within the values of this culture—freedom of thought—has caused many Western scholars to faithfully look back and evaluate their own history. I say what I feel here. I have said this from the beginning. For in China even today we lack this spirit.

If we say that Chinese religion did not discuss the human interior enough, then we may say that the European Middle Ages, in which religion was overdeveloped, discussed the point at which people's hearts could not be constrained and why after this there was a huge advance in material culture. "Religion dominates people's mind," he remarked and gave a few examples, the most important of which I quote here: "Religion was the central focus of the era. It was the acme of the civilization." "A history of the Middle Ages that omitted the Church would amount to no history at all." "The Church of the Middle Ages was an utterly different entity from the Church of more recent times." "Whoever was a member of the Church...if they did not obey or believe the teachings of the Church, they were subject to the death penalty." "The Church owned a great amount of land and received the benefit

of tithing.” “The Church was in reality no different from a state. It had its own laws and its own courts, and the power to imprison people for life.” “The pope could make laws and regulate the territory of each country. In Western Europe, Latin was used by the Church as the unifying language.” “At the lowest level of the Church was the [parish] priest....the parish church was the center of village life, and the priest was the leader of the village.” “All private contracts, from will to marriages, were mediated by the church.”<sup>1</sup>

We said above that Confucius did not give people a set of arbitrary rules. What of Europe? “...In 1539, the British Parliament passed “The Statute of Six Articles,” which decreed that the blood and flesh of Christ were present in bread and wine used in the ceremony of Communion, and that all who dared doubt this would be burnt at the stake.”<sup>2</sup> “Why did they so often resort to death by burning? Because they did not want to shed the person’s blood, as spilling blood was against the dictates of the Church.” “It was this barbaric two hundred years ago—who could imagine that two hundred years later it could become so civilized?...In modern times Western people have given up the medieval attitude that abstinence, purity, and prayer would lead to a heavenly heart, and again adopted the ancient Greek attitude of seeking satisfaction in this life and constantly moving forward. The fact that it quickly became the most civilized nation in the world is precisely due to this.”<sup>3</sup>

Recall what we said above about man’s attitude toward life and our emphasis on three points: this attitude is one of recognizing again, which is very different from unconsciously continuing along the same path. This is the result of consciously deciding what to keep and what to leave aside. It started from the recognition of “I” and affirming the self. This is the fundamental essence of “the awakening of mankind.” Taking “I” as the point of departure, all things become objects to be demanded, things to be used, and objects to be conquered. Relations between man and nature and between man and man become divided and turn into oppositions. When this attitude is expressed to its limit, the highest civilization and the most barbaric savagery appear at the same time. The awakening of “I” caused Europeans to begin to seek happiness in this life. This was in accordance to the original order of the development of culture—the satisfaction of material needs. If there had not been this turning point, and if the closed-mindedness, parochialism, and prejudice of religion continued, and individuals continued in bigotry and cruelty, then many aspects of the present world would be inconceivable.

Below I will bring the discussion to another area: the intimate relationship between the structure of society and society’s understanding of humanity. For example, the structure of Chinese society presents a family-centered ethical society.

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations above are from He Bingsong, *A History of Pre-Modern Europe*.

<sup>2</sup>Editors note: The statute reads only that “the offender or offenders therein shall suffer the pains of death, and lose and forfeit all his and their goods, lands, and tenements as in cases of felony” and does not mention death by fire. Adams and Stephens (1901).

<sup>3</sup>Quotations from He Bingsong, *A History of Pre-Modern Europe*

Western society on the other hand displays an urban civilization. The first is peaceful and quiescent, while in the second everyone is moving forward and changes come quickly. The effect of the social structure on people's bodies and minds is obvious. What follows is my own thinking. In recent years I have noticed that Western scientists have shown great interest in understanding humanity, but they have not been able to make observations beyond the level of materiality (or the functions of the body). This is the particular strong point of Western civilization, but in this day it has become a limitation. Relying on instruments to make observations not only limits one to the level of visible objects but further limits observation to the scale of the individual, rendering society completely invisible. This omission is vast indeed!

What we have discussed above are the fundamental conditions for molding humankind today. But there is still one other aspect: After the transformation into humankind, the faculty of thinking places humans higher than all other living things. The faculty of thinking is none other than reason and rationality, and it can be separated into the two aspects of knowing and feeling. According to my father's idea, reason caused mankind to undergo a qualitative change. This so-called qualitative change is what makes humankind fundamentally different from animals, for it transcends merely living for the sake of living.

"The ability to think is a special characteristic of humanity—the advent of humanity lies precisely in this. Ancient China and the modern West have each developed this characteristic to remarkable levels." This essay began with my father's praise of humankind's vast abilities and exasperation over humanity's inability to manage itself today. This is what is being said here. According to his view, in ancient China, people developed reason under conditions of material insufficiency, while in the modern West, people gave their intelligence free reign and created every sort of invention but had failings in their attitude toward life, for they single-mindedly pursued the happiness of the individual while overlooking social harmony.

Then what is intellect? What is reason?<sup>4</sup> Please look to his explanation: Reason has a tendency to oppose instinct. They are potentially opposed, but not incompatible. "Only humankind's life depends in various ways on thinking; because of that, it can lead in many ways to error. To make a mistake but not be content in one's mistake, nothing is more precious than this. This is the meaning of reason. Because of this, reason is more precious than all else." Intellect and reason are two aspects of the function of the mind. The knowing aspect is called intellect, and the affective aspect is called reason. Intellect must soberly and objectively come to its conclusions. It is only after intellect arrives at the calm state of nonaction that it can function fully. The

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<sup>4</sup>The author is using this term "reason" (lixing) in the sense that his father used it, which may confuse some readers. "Reason" refers not to the modern English or Chinese senses of the word, but rather to the "moral sense." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the famous British poet and philosopher, used the word "reason" in this sense, setting it apart from "rationality," by which he meant the usual meaning of "reason." In the English-speaking world, the writer Cardinal Henry Newman used the term "illative sense" for the same meaning of "moral sense."



uses of the intellect are inexhaustible, but it does not offer judgments on particular questions of right and wrong. What allows for value judgment is reason.

Consider to the following statement: The creations of Western culture are outside of the body. It changes matter. It is not like the temperament of Confucianism, which is to change one's own self. Recall what we said above: Western culture exerts force toward the human exterior, while Chinese culture exerts force toward the human interior. My father's explanation of reason probably was aimed at emphasizing that it was part of self-consciousness and that one should not take a lackadaisical attitude toward one's own mistakes. But he also said that because he knew that it was easy for people to make mistakes, one should not frequently criticize others. This type of sympathetic understanding represents a great development of reason. I believe that this kind of harmony is not the kind of harmony that many people speak of today, for the latter presupposes the mediation of different interests. We should all recognize that what we are speaking of is a different kind of culture—one that directs force toward the human interior. "Exerting force toward the interior"—we may think that this sounds too abstract and that one would not know where to begin if one wanted to practice or develop it. This is a result of our being estranged from it for long period of times, so that it seems difficult to recover it. In my father's view, this is because the problems to be solved had not forced humanity to feel the need for it. Human understanding often lags behind the state of things, but humanity must eventually have an awakening and eventually take action. When the problems to be solved change, "then naturally a different kind of knowledge will emerge." "That the two cultures merge and be put right is to be expected." "We should know that of what is called orientation inward, the implication is that it is a shift from an outward orientation to an inward orientation; it does not involve any other change in direction. If it involves a direction, then it is outward again. As expected, limiting it causes one to enter life over and over. By studying what is lowly, one can gradually elevate oneself. The nature of life itself is to climb upward."

If we ask what sort of thinking did my father use to know humankind, perhaps it can be summarized like this: People have bodies and minds; humans have instincts, but because they have minds, they can resist their instincts. In the end, humankind has intellect and reason. The many expressions of humanity all follow from this. Animals only have bodies. Humans should therefore make efforts to elevate themselves.

Now I will return to the main topic: The reconstruction of Confucianism. Why was Mayan civilization lost? Where did the inhabitants of Easter Island go? We will find answers to these questions in the future. Humankind's blind application of force toward the outside world has created serious problems. There are endless calls for people to decrease carbon emissions. Today the environment is already clearly unable to sustain mankind's desire for material goods, and this is at a time when half of mankind lives in poverty. It is obvious that this mode of life cannot long continue. It is reasonable to say that it is time for mankind to change its attitude toward the environment. Great problems require a great awakening before they can be solved. An awakening must necessarily start with a small group of people. Or perhaps what is needed is not necessarily the reconstruction of Confucianism. Perhaps in a broad

sense, a group such as Greenpeace follows the same path. We might even say that objectively speaking, suffering brings us to the same path. It uses actual facts to push us toward that second attitude toward living, to have us rebuild a type of culture whose major thought is close to that of Confucianism.

*This chapter was translated from the Chinese by the editor.*

## **Reference**

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