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Refuse to be Selfishness and Put Ourselves in Others' Shoes

Word count:1,521

Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Xue Chunyuan. The topic of my oral presentation today is 'Refuse to be Selfishness and Put Ourselves in Others' Shoes'.

This is my outline.

1. Introduction
2. Bad influences of selfishness
3. The way to avoid selfishness
4. Being considerate by using wisdom
5. Summary

Introduction

Contemporarily, technology has shortened the distance between people. At the same time, it also increases the chance of communication and contact between people. However, some people can live in harmony with others, and some will produce conflict and opposition to people. The difference between the two is whether we are put ourselves in others' shoes or just think only of ourselves. Therefore, contradictions and conflicts arise from selfishness.

Bad influences of selfishness

Selfishness means that everything we do is for our own benefit without considering others. However, some people believe that there is nothing wrong with considering their own interests, they do not know that the harm it brings. On the one hand, When we only look at the short-term benefits, we will ignore the feelings of others and lead them loss their property. On the other hand, the effect of selfishness is so great that it may lead to the demise of a country. The first sentence of *Mencius* 孟子 explains this point very well.

> Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. Who said, 'Venerable sir, since you have made light of the distance of a thousand *li,* you may have some way to profit my state, mayn't you?'

> Mencius answered, 'Why should Your Majesty have mentioned the word "profit" ? What counts is benevolence and righteousness. If Your Majesty says, "How can I profit my state?" the high officials will say, "How can we profit our fiefs?" and the intellectuals and the commoners will say, "How can we profit ourselves?" If those above and those below strive to snatch profit one from the other, the state will be endangered.'(孟子見梁惠王。王曰："叟不遠千里而來，亦將有以利吾國乎？"...上下交征利而國危亦。)[1]

From this sentence we can see, although King Hui of Liang thought for the sake of his country, he hoped that Mencius' arrival would bring profit to his country, but Mencius still pointed out the problems in his idea without mercy. He pointed out that benevolence and righteousness are more important than profit. As we can see, although King Hui of Liang was the king of his country and his selfishness was only for the benefit of his country, it is also wrong. Afterward, Mencius explain that if everyone in the state pursued his own interests as King Hui did, the state would perish. Thus it can be seen that selfishness can do great harm to both individuals and countries. Therefore, selfishness is the root of all contradictions.

Nevertheless, in today's society, there are also many people who are selfish and do not care about the interests of others. In fact, they seem to get the immediate benefits, but the final results still have to bear the consequences. For example, many site owners in modern society do not pay their workers after they have finished their work. Then they will use all kinds of means to avoid responsibility. This may seem to save them a lot of money, but many workers lose a year's salary of work. However, these bosses often fail to escape the law, leading to the seizure of their assets by the courts. These bosses seem to save a lot of money, but in the end they lose even more. At the same time, they also caused discontent among workers and normal people, and some workers even went up in the street to resist and even injured innocent passers-by. The source of all is the selfishness of unscrupulous bosses. They not only bring disaster to themselves but also disturb the harmony of the society. In conclusion, all of this is caused by selfishness. It can be seen that the influence brought by selfishness is

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[1] Translated into English by Zhao zhentao 趙甄陶 Zhang Wenting 張文庭 Zhou Dingzhi 周定之, LIBRARY OF CHINESE CLASSICS: Mencius (Hunan People's Publishing House & Foreign Languages Press, 1999.) p.3. Translated into Modern Chinese by Yang Bojun 楊伯俊.

not good for oneself or others.

The way to avoid selfishness

Since the harm of selfishness is so great, we should learn to be considerate and the best way to be considerate is to put ourselves in others' shoes. Selfishness is because we only think about our own interests. Empathy allows us to put ourselves down and put ourselves in the other person's shoes. When we can feel the feelings of others, we will know whether it is the right thing to do. Chapter 15 of *The Analects of Confucius* 論語 records such a story,

> A disciple of Confucius enquired: 'Is There one word which may guide one in practice throughout the whole life ?' Confucius answered, 'The word "charity" is perhaps the word. What you do not wish others to do unto you, do not do unto them.'(子貢問曰："有一言而可以終身行之者乎？"子曰："其恕乎！己所不欲勿施於人。")[2]

From this we can see that charity can guide a person's whole life and the specific way to do this is to look for empathy.

Here I use one of my own experiences as an example. I used to like to play jokes on others. Although I mean no harm and just hope to bring some joy to everyone, sometimes I hurt others without knowing it. Until one time I was made fun of by others. I felt really bad inside at that time, and it was not until then that I realized that the person who had been joked was really sad inside. I was just trying to liven things up in this case, but I did not think I would hurt anyone. At that time, I understood why we should put ourselves in others' shoes all the time. As a result of the feeling is really bad, if it is not their own experience may have been unaware of their mistakes. And I felt really ashamed that I had been taking pleasure in the pain of others. It was only then that I realized the importance of empathy.

Being considerate by using wisdom

Ok, now let us get back to the point. We mentioned above that empathy is a good way to

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[2] Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘, trans., *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius,* in Gu Hongming Wenji 辜鴻銘文集 (Hainan: Hainan chubanshe,2000), p.466.

avoid selfishness. However, sometimes our good intentions can have bad results. I do not know if you have heard the story of Zilu received the cattle and Zigong does not accept golds. The story goes something like this. Zilu and Zigong were disciples of Confucius. There was a law in the State of Lu that if someone could redeem a Lu who had been enslaved in another country, lu would reward him with gold. Zigong, knowing this, went to redeem the slaves, but did not ask for a state reward. However, Confucius was very angry and criticized Zigong, saying, 'If you accept the bonus, it will not harm your virtue, but if you do not accept, there will be no one to save your suffering compatriots.' One day Zilu saved a drowning man and received the ox in return. Confucius was pleased to say that he had done the right thing.

We all know that if you do something good, you do not expect anything in return is a good virture. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Zigong did. Why did Confucius criticize him? And Zilu received the reward. Why did Confucius praise him? Actually, the answer is vision of overall situation. Confucius criticized Zigong because he lacked perspective. Zigong thought only that it was a virtue not to accept the reward, but did not think that it would stop people from redeeming their compatriot. Not everyone is so rich, many people still need to receive a government bonus after the redeemed, but Zigong's practice is easy to get recognition, causing others to be shy about accepting the bonus. In this way, Zigong seems to have done a good thing but the effect is really negative. However, Zilu's act of receiving gifts seems less noble than Zigong's, but encourage more people are brave enough to save others, which has a positive effect. And this is why Confucius praised Zilu and criticized Zigong. An ancient Chinese book, *A Commentary on Liaofan's Four Lesson*, also mentions that

> From this, we can see that those who practice good deeds must not only consider the current outcome but that of the future as well. Neither should we only consider our own gain and loss but think about the impact made on others.(不論現行而論流弊，不論一事而論久遠，不論一身而論天下。)[3]

In general, being considerate need using wisdom and everything requires foresight, not just in

[3] Master Chin Kung, Changing Destiny: A Commentary on Liaofan's Four Lessons 了凡四訓講記, trans. Silent Voices, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Education Foundation Ltd, 2013), p279.

the short term but in the long term. Therefore, consider everything and take the long view. Even for the good of others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, selfishness will bring disaster to ourselves and others. The solution is to put ourselves in others' shoes and think for others. However, When thinking for others, we should also be able to take a long-term view and see whether the final result is good or bad. That is all I have for today. Thank you for listening!

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