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What we do not desire, do not impose on others.

Introduction

Good afternoon Respected Provost, good morning Ms Deng and Mr Cheung, and hello fellow students! The topic of my presentation today is this verse from the “Common Courtesy” chapter of *Daily Manners*: “What we do not desire, do not impose on others.”¹ My presentation will consist of four main parts: the introduction, an explanation of the passage I chose, comparisons to other texts, and lastly the conclusion.

To begin, we’ve all heard of this saying, in one form or another. “Do as you would be done by” or “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It’s also known as the “Golden Rule” in Western society. It’s a maxim that can be found in many cultures and religions around the world. So many people know this concept, and it’s quite straightforward: Treat people the way you wish to be treated, or in its negative form, what you wouldn’t want people to do to you, do not do to others. The important thing is whether we can truly do as it says and not impose upon others what we ourselves do not want.

In Confucius’ *Analects*, Zigong once asked Confucius, “Is there any single saying that one can act upon all day and every day?”² And Confucius answered, “Perhaps the saying about consideration: ‘Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.’”³ Zigong asked for a *single* saying to act upon *all day and every day*. From this, we can see the importance of this saying, and that it is something we should practice all the time, anytime.

Explanation

The following is Mr Xu and Ms Li’s explanation. Mr Xu writes in his annotations of *Daily Manners* that sometimes we will feel that it is inconvenient or troublesome when someone asks us to do a favour that we find to be difficult. But it can be hard to refuse, and therefore we find ourselves in a predicament. Likewise, we should not ask others to do such difficult tasks and put them in such awkward situations. Tasks which we can complete on our own, we should do ourselves. If and when we need the help of others,

¹ Li Bingnan 李炳南, Changli Juyao 常禮舉要 [Daily Manners] (Taipei: Huazang Jingzong Xuehui, 2012) p. 14

² Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, “Golden Rule”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2017) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Golden-Rule>> [accessed 5 November 2021]

³ Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. by Arthur Waley, 1st edn (Hunan: Hunan People’s Publishing House; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1999) p. 179

of course we should ask for assistance. But when we do, we also need to consider the person's abilities. If we ask someone to help with something that they do not have the ability to do, or has much difficulty doing, we might bring them a lot of pressure or inconvenience. Instead, we should ask someone who has the ability to complete the task and can do so easily. Not only can they do it with ease, we will also get the help we need. Like the example that Ms Li gave: if our computer or laptop has broken, we should bring it to a computer repair service to get it fixed. If we bring it to someone who is clueless when it comes to tech-related things, then not only will we put this person in a very awkward situation, we also will not get our computer fixed. So when we require assistance, we should consider the person's abilities.

Mr Xu wrote of an elderly gentleman, who in his seventies and eighties, was still taking care of all his daily needs and tasks, including cooking, and laundry, and other daily chores. The elderly gentleman did his own laundry and cooked his own food, and took care of all his living needs. Mr Xu says doing so—doing our own tasks and chores—is also a way of cherishing our good fortune. If we always ask others to do these things, it is squandering our good fortune. And not only will we cherish our good fortune, doing daily chores and moving around is also good for our health.

Ms Li raised another example of a situation we may come across when we are taking food at the cafeteria. There may be certain foods that we like, and certain foods that we dislike, or food that most people might not want, such as leftovers. In this situation, we should take the not-so-good ones and leave the better food for others. We shouldn't take the good food and leave the worse for others. And I am reminded of my mother, who would always warm up the leftover food and eat it herself, while everyone else in the family ate the food she had cooked for that meal.

Comparisons

Di Zi Gui, or *Guidelines for Being a Good Person*, says "Before we ask others to do something, we should first ask ourselves if we would do it. If not, then we should not ask others to do it."⁴ If we are not willing to do something, we shouldn't ask others to do it. But sometimes, we may find ourselves asking others to do things that we would not be willing to do. For example, I will sometimes ask my sister to do certain chores for me when I am busy. But when my sister is busy and asks me to do some chores for her,

⁴ *Guidelines for Being a Good Person*, trans. by Pure Land Translation Team (Toowoomba: Pure Land College Press, 2009) p. 25

I am usually not willing. Ms Li teaches that this is because of our selfish thoughts. So in our cultivation, we should be trying to overcome these habits and think more for others.

In *Xu Xiao Er Yu*, the very first line reads, “One’s heart should be kind and compassionate; one should do things with convenience.”⁵ We should give others convenience and be kind and compassionate, thinking of others.

Xu Xiao Er Yu also says that “To cause disadvantage to others will bring misfortune; to take disadvantages will bring good fortune.”⁶ As we would not like to take disadvantages, we should not let others take disadvantages either.

The Bible also says, in Matthew 7:12, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”⁷ This is the Bible’s teaching on how one should act towards one’s neighbors, to think of ourselves in the others’ situation and act as we wish to be treated.⁸

This moral can also be found in Western folktales and fables, such as the Aesop’s Fable, “The Fox and the Stork,”⁹ which tells the story of the Fox who invites the Stork to dinner. The Fox served soup in a very shallow dish to make fun of the Stork’s long bill, which he found to be quite odd. Naturally, the Stork could not get any of the soup while the Fox made a show of easily lapping it up. However, the displeased Stork knew that a fit of rage wouldn’t do any good. A few days later, the Stork invited the Fox to dinner, serving it in a tall jar with a narrow neck. While the Fox could do nothing but sniff at the delicious smells, the Stork easily enjoyed it with its long bill. This story teaches us that we shouldn’t treat others in a way that we wouldn’t like to be treated. The fox may have been amused at seeing the stork struggle, but he did not think of how upset the stork was. Once he had had a taste of what it was like, he too was quite upset. If he had thought of the stork’s feelings, he would have known that it was unkind to play such a trick.

⁵ Lu Xinwu 呂新吾, *Shengxue Genzhigen: Xu Xiaoyu* 聖學根之根：續小兒語 (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 2015) p. 5

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 7

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, Matthew 7. 12

⁸ *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* <<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/mhc/matt-hew/7.htm>> [accessed 8 November 2021]

⁹ Aesop, “The Fox and the Stork”, *Aesop’s Fables* <<https://fablesfaesop.com/the-fox-and-the-stork.html>> [accessed 5 November 2021]

Another story titled “The Old Man and his Grandson”¹⁰ by the Brothers Grimm tells of an old man who often spilt his food and made a mess while eating. He broke the earthenware bowl out of which he ate so his son bought the old man a wooden bowl to eat out of and told him to eat alone in a corner. One day, the old man’s grandson was playing with some wood and his father asked him what he was doing. The young grandson answered that he was making bowls for his parents to eat out of when they became old. Then the son and his wife realized that they were wrong to have their father eat alone out of a wooden bowl. In this story, the young boy’s actions made his parents realize that if they did not want to be treated in such a way in their old age, they should not treat their elders in such a way. Through this story, we also see that we can practice this verse from *Daily Manners* through filial piety.

In all these classics and scriptures, we see that they all tell us the importance of treating others as we would like to be treated and how widespread and significant it is.

Conclusion

When I was learning this verse, I thought of what my father taught me—tasks that I have the ability to do, I should at least know how to do them. There are many tasks and chores at home and on the farm that my father has taught me how to do. I might not need to do these in the future, but I should know how. So that if and when the times comes, I will know how to do it. My father has taught me using his actions. All the tasks on the farm, he knows how to do, and does them himself. My parents will also do all the hardest work on the farm. In the summer, we will hire labour, but my parents would never let the workers do the hard work and would always do it themselves. This is also a form of cherishing our good fortune.

We see that this concept can be found in many cultures around the world. More than simply knowing it, we should act on it in our daily lives, being mindful and often put ourselves in the other person’s shoes and ask ourselves if we have thought of how they feel.

That concludes my presentation today. And feedback and suggestions would be appreciated. Thank you for listening!

¹⁰ Grimm Brothers, “The Old Man and His Grandson”, *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (1905)

<<https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/175/grimms-fairy-tales/3093/the-old-man-and-his-grandson/>> [accessed 8 November 2021]

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