

Reconsidering the Confucian View of the Economy in the Age of the Anthropocene

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Abstract

The common practice of outsourcing manufacturing to countries in which factories' production costs and environmental standards are far lower than in the West indicates an underlying issue: a refusal to take responsibility for the environment, in favor of economic profitability. In confronting this problem, I suggest the need to reflect on the idea of the 'distinction between righteousness and profit' that is emphasized in Confucianism. Through an analysis of primary texts, I explain how the Confucian emphasis on ecological harmony implies a need for economic development as well as individual wealth, as it views humans as part of nature with a need to thrive as moral beings. The Confucian view of the economy informs contemporary attitudes by offering a richer way of thinking about economic development.

Keywords

climate change – economy – ecology – Confucianism – righteousness – Chinese philosophy

1 Introduction

The Confucian idea of the 'distinction between righteousness and profit' (*yìlì zhī biàn* 義利之辨) discussed by Mencius resonates with many other concepts in Confucian philosophy. Confucianism emphasizes the need to preserve 'unselfishness' (*gōng* 公) and act out 'righteousness' (*yì* 義). This is opposed to acting out 'selfishness' (*sī* 私) by forgetting righteousness in seeking 'profit' (*lì* 利), or in other words, exhibiting egoism by monopolizing advantages for oneself.

Although the Confucian tradition has been subjected to different and often conflicting interpretations, the view that Confucian philosophy is holistic and places emphasis on harmony is consistent in the writings of all major philosophers in the Confucian tradition. The Confucian human-nature relationship can be described as 'harmony between Heaven and humans' (*tiān rén héxié* 天人和諧), whereby humans are viewed as playing an active role in achieving harmony in the universe, with a potential to act from their moral trait or 'heart/mind of benevolence' (*rénxīn* 仁心) and manifest the Way of Heaven (*tiāndào* 天道). Thus, humanity is considered to play an active role in determining the future direction of the Earth system.

The emphasis in Confucian philosophy on restraining selfish interests and having consideration for others originates from a view of humanity as being ethically related to the rest of the ecosystem, as 'all things' (*wànwù* 萬物) are part of the creativity of Heaven (*tiān* 天) and Earth (*dì* 地). This stands in stark contrast to the increased prevalence of materialism and its fixation on maximizing profit, which underpin the current ecological crisis. The result is a lack of inclusiveness, whereby humanity does not see itself as ethically related to the rest of the ecosystem. Ultimately, humanity has proved unwilling to sufficiently alter the direction of its behavior to ensure that its overall impact on the rest of the ecosystem is reduced and ecological sustainability is attained.

In this paper, I argue that the distinction between righteousness and profit can as a framework be viewed in light of the current ecological crisis. This notion bears on the root of the crisis: humans exploit the environment with the purpose of gaining selfish advantages. As humanity must re-examine and reformulate its relationship with nature to arrive at one of harmony and coexistence, Confucian philosophy can inform contemporary attitudes by offering a richer way of thinking about economic development, whereby righteousness takes precedence over maximizing the exploitation of the planet.

2 The Climate and Outsourcing Manufacturing

There is general consensus within the scientific community that human activities contribute to transformational changes in global ecosystems. However, despite the call to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has never been as high as it is now (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] 2014). The agreement to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels that was signed at the Paris Climate Change Conference in December 2015 extends a challenge to the IPCC, researchers, and the world at large.

Yet, as many seminal studies indicate, despite decades of awareness about the severity of today's global environmental issues, and although changes can be made with negligible short-term costs and substantial long-term benefits, humanity is neither slowing down nor reducing its collective contribution to the problem (e.g., Stern, 2006; Randers, 2012).

Meanwhile, the number of companies that outsource manufacturing to low-cost countries is rapidly increasing, as factories in these countries adopt far less environmental criteria than those in Western countries. In fact, studies show that international trade has become the fastest-growing contributor of global carbon emissions, with large quantities of emissions caused by exports from emerging economies. This poses a dilemma for climate and trade policy: given that emerging markets have a comparative advantage in manufacturing goods at a cheaper cost, such trade is economically efficient and desirable. However, the carbon-intensive manufacturing of products in emerging countries causes drastically more CO₂ emissions than the production of the same goods elsewhere, which entails that this trade increases global CO₂ emissions. One example is that of emissions produced by exports in China, where pollution is primarily the result of the country's coal-based energy mix and its very high emissions (Liu et al., 2015). In other words, low-cost countries have a high emission-intensity score due to their antiquated manufacturing processes and because they obtain most of their energy from coal. Hence, when consumers buy products that come from such manufacturing processes, they encourage behavior that produces significantly higher CO₂ emissions.

Vandana Shiva aptly writes that "Much of China's 6.2 billion metric tons of CO₂ emissions could just as easily be considered U.S. emissions because U.S. companies have outsourced to China the manufacture of goods that are eventually consumed in the United States" (Shiva 2012: 258).

The outsourcing of manufacturing to low-cost countries reveals a conceptual conundrum: why do multinational companies in the age of the Anthropocene—the current epoch in which human activities significantly impact the Earth's geology and ecosystems—increasingly outsource manufacturing to places where production is driven by coal energy? These companies' behavior manifests a refusal to assume any responsibility toward society, while consumers in developed countries do not want their areas to become polluted. This paper posits that these incommensurable instincts can be addressed through the distinction in Confucian philosophy between righteousness and profit.

3 The Economy and Modern Confucianism

Although many view capitalism as playing a crucial role in the escalating ecological crisis, it has in the past few decades gradually been acknowledged as an effective and adequate model for development. The growing East Asian economy has led many scholars to investigate the roots of its ascent. The East Asian countries that have experienced extraordinary economic achievements are those with traditions in Confucian culture, which has led many to claim that Confucianism may have played a significant role in the development of these economies. This stands in opposition to the view put forward by Max Weber, who considers that Confucianism hinders capitalism (Weber, 1963). Recent thinkers have, in contrast to Weber's view, framed and promoted Confucian values as a positive factor for economic growth, political stability, and social harmony.

However, to attribute the economic development of a country solely to the influence of a philosophy is misguided because the market is shaped by a myriad of factors, such as changes in the climate, population, and technology. This paper does not focus on whether Confucianism itself can create economic development, but rather presents a more complete and correct picture of the normative Confucian view on economic development through a discussion of the two concepts of righteousness and profit. Contrary to many contemporary scholars' opinions, I argue that the normative Confucian view should be viewed as a resource that provides an infrastructure for a more ecologically sustainable economic development.

Throughout history, Confucianism has been considered to be disadvantageous to the economy, and it is easy to see why. Confucius and Mencius teach the value of righteousness: "an exemplary person understands because of righteousness, the petty person understands because of profit" (*Analects* 4.16).¹ Mencius further developed Confucius' view, saying that "To nourish one's lesser part is to be a petty person. To raise one's greater part [heart/mind of benevolence] is to be a great person" (*Mencius* 6A.14). Confucian philosophy differentiates between the 'exemplary person' (*jūnzǐ* 君子) or the 'great person' (*dàrén* 大人) who acts from the 'greater part' (*dàtǐ* 大體, or the 'heart/mind of benevolence') and thus seeks righteousness, and the 'petty person' (*xiǎorén* 小人) who acts from the 'lesser parts' (*xiǎotǐ* 小體) and only seeks profit. As the petty person should be despised, to solely focus on seeking profit was not considered to be good.

1 All translations of the ancient texts from Chinese into English are by the author unless otherwise stated.

Furthermore, the 'four segments of society' (*sì mǐn* 四民) in *Guǎnzi* 管子 (*The Book of Master Guan*) became a fundamental division of labor in China, separating the occupations of scholar, farmer, artisan, and merchant. This concept is explained through a discussion between Huángōng 桓公 and Guǎnzhòng 管仲, after whom the text is named. The dialogue reads as follows:

Huángōng asked: 'What should one do to give the people a peaceful life and have them succeed in their undertakings?' Guǎnzhòng said: 'The intellectual, the farmer, the worker and the merchant are four types of important jobs of the people. One should not let them mingle and work together. If they are together, then their thoughts will become messy and they will not succeed in their undertakings. Hence, the sage will let the intellectuals have space so they can do their scholarship. One should let the farmers have land and a place to live. One should have a specialized unit that manages the workers and let the merchants have a location so they can provide trade.'

XIǎOKUĀNG 小匡 [*The Small Historical Document of Qi*] in *Guǎnzi*

While these occupations are viewed as important in the *Guǎnzi*, the professions are listed starting from the scholar, which has throughout Chinese history been considered to be the most desirable occupation. This emphasis has led many today to view Confucianism as detrimental for economic development and a cause for China's weakness in the face of a strong Western culture.

However, the rapid modernization of East Asian countries has altered this view, leading scholars to research, among other things, which aspects of Confucian culture may have contributed to their economic development. Neglecting the emphasis on moral creativity in Confucian philosophy has also resulted in a view of the core of Confucianism as consisting of an emphasis on harmony that results from abiding by external rituals and laws. In other words, Confucianism is viewed beneficial in that it helps foster a situation that is conducive to a stable government and harmonious society, as well as to developing enterprises and a prosperous economy.

In fact, Confucianism can be viewed as one of the intrinsic forces of development in East Asia today. According to Liu Guoqiang 劉國強, assuming that Confucianism and economic development conflict and are contradictory reflects a superficial understanding of Confucian thought. He argues that Confucian thought can enhance positivity, creativity, idealism, and public spirit, consequently solidifying the foundation for economic development (Liu, 2001: 137).

In fact, even if there is no direct relationship between the rise of the Chinese economy and Confucian thought, fundamental Confucian ideas such as ‘managing the world for the purpose of providing for the people’ (*jīngshì jìnmín* 經世濟民) and seeking ‘earnings that are profitable and benefit life [of the people]’ (*lìyòng hòushēng* 利用厚生) do not necessarily contradict economic growth. On the contrary, these ideas can be helpful for the development of the economy. Furthermore, Confucianism has throughout history emphasized the importance of education, the universalization of which helps train talented individuals and advances knowledge.

However, to conclude that Confucian thought necessarily is or is not helpful for the development of the economy may be a product of retroactive thinking founded on historical and environmental factors, while detracting from many Confucian philosophers’ normative views on the economy. Therefore, it is necessary to examine core Confucian texts to acquire a more accurate understanding of how the economy is viewed in Confucian philosophy.

4 Encouraging the Pursuit of Profit in Confucianism

Pre-Qin Confucians proposed their theories in the audience of their rulers, so that many Confucian views on profit are explained through the relationship between the ruler and the people. In Confucianism, the ruler’s most important responsibility is to create wealth for the people. In the *Analects*, Confucius says the following:

In guiding a state of a thousand chariots, approach your duties with reverence and be trustworthy in what you say; keep expenditure under proper regulation and love your fellow men; employ the labor of the common people in the right seasons.

Analects 1.5; LAU 2010: 3

From this quote, it is possible to deduce that if the ruler reduces expenses, there will be sufficient funds to avert the need of taxing the people heavily. Furthermore, by considering the seasons before employing a labor force, farmers will not miss farming seasons and resources will be plenty. As the people are the pillars of the nation’s finances in Confucianism, the foundation of the country’s prosperity and the ruler’s wealth is the prosperity of the people:

When the people have sufficient [means], who is there to share your insufficiency?

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Analects 12.9; LAU 2010: 113

The ruler must, regardless of whether production in a given year is good or bad, dedicate attention to the people's living conditions and provide them with a comfortable life, free of hunger and cold. The absence of a stable living situation may result in the endangerment of social peace being and people's inability to 'live in peace and work happily' (*ānjū lèyè* 安居樂業).

To achieve an ideal society, Mencius proposes that one should "regulate the livelihood of the people" (*Mencius* 1A.7; Lau 2003: 23). According to Mencius, only an 'exemplary person,' or a moral person manifesting his/her potential to act from the 'heart/mind of benevolence' is willing to pursue moral cultivation and care for the public, even when his/her own circumstances are unstable. If the government does not provide the people with opportunities to make a living, it will be more difficult from them to act from their moral trait.

Mencius' conception of an ideal society formed through proper governance can be discerned in his simple descriptions of ordinary life. According to the philosopher, each household should have a homestead of five *mu* (*mǔ* 畝, a Chinese area unit equivalent to 0.667 hectares) and farming land of 100 *mu*, so that every household is self-sufficient and the people are not hungry. When the fundamental needs of the people are fulfilled, the ruler can teach them about righteousness (*Analects* 13.9). In such a society, elders have sufficient food and clothes, and people are not hungry or cold. When harmony and peace prevail, the people will more easily act from the 'greater part' and implement rituals and righteousness (*Mencius* 7A.22).

Mencius' describes implementing 'benevolent governance' (*rénzhèng* 仁政) in order to 'rule for the people' (*mínběn* 民本). He says, "The people are the most important" (*Mencius* 7B.14), thus the ruler must provide the people with good living conditions. If the government is able to take good care of the people, their fundamental living standards will be met and they will be able to thrive as moral beings.

Thus, Confucianism does not deny individual wealth. For example, Confucius states that he would be willing to pursue achieving wealth even if it comes from low-status work, which expresses his belief that wealth is a positive thing. He says, "If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard holding a whip outside the market place" (*Analects* 7.12; Lau 2010: 59). Though this may be a common view today, some may find it surprising that Confucius was willing to perform a low-level job and give up his life as a scholar-

official for the sake of personal wealth, especially considering how strongly he emphasized the importance of respecting rituals and traditional norms.

The passages discussed make clear that, on both a public and an individual level, Confucianism affirms the importance of the economy and wealth, which stands in stark contrast to the commonly held notion that Confucianism despises wealth. To determine why such a discrepancy exists, it is necessary to first explain the Confucian view on righteousness and profit.

5 The Distinction between Righteousness and Profit

The earliest existing source that speaks to the Confucian view on righteousness and profit is the following saying by Confucius: “an exemplary person understands because of righteousness, the petty and the lowly understand because of profit” (*Analects* 4.13). This saying means that to convince an ‘exemplary person’ one must use arguments based on righteousness. Conversely, one must appeal to petty people’s desire for profit in order to convince them. This view differentiates between two types of people: the ‘exemplary person’ who is driven by righteousness in acting from the ‘heart/mind of benevolence’ and the petty person who is driven solely by profit. As Confucianism sides with the ‘exemplary person’ while criticizing the petty person, it follows that motives for profit and Confucianism are often viewed as incompatible. However, this appears to contradict the previous conclusion that Confucianism values the economy and wealth.

According to the *Analects*, a person who only focuses on seeking profit is a petty person. The ‘exemplary person’ acts from the ‘heart/mind of benevolence’ and understands the importance of righteousness, while those who have not fully manifested their moral potential only know the importance of profit. Later, Mencius echoes Confucius by saying the following:

Only an exemplary person can have a constant heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support. The people [petty person], on the other hand, will not have constant hearts if they are without constant means. Lacking constant hearts, they will go astray and fall into excesses, stopping at nothing.

Mencius 1A.7; LAU 2003: 15

The differentiation between righteousness and profit in Confucian philosophy is founded on its emphasis on the importance of acting from one’s ‘moral consciousness’ (*liángzhī* 良知). This differentiation is the key to whether moral

conduct succeeds or fails, as an ‘exemplary person’ is fully able to bear this in mind in acting from his/her moral trait. While those who fail to act from ‘moral consciousness’ are persuaded by explanations on profit, for an ‘exemplary person’ only explanations that are in accordance with righteousness are convincing.

While appreciating wealth and honor, Confucius did not believe that they should be pursued unconditionally.

Wealth and high station are what men desire, but unless I got them in the right way I would not abide in them. Poverty and low station are what men dislike, but even if I did not get them in the right way I would not try to take myself away from them.

Analects 4.5; LAU 2010: 29

Or as Confucius’ disciple Zi Zhāng 子張 says, “[when the scholar] sees what profit he can gain, he is able to consider whether it [profit] is in accordance with what is righteous” (*Analects* 19.1).

Confucian philosophy focuses on “taking when it is consistent with what is righteous” (*Analects* 14.13). People should obtain benefits only through moral means and eliminate profit-seeking behaviors that are unrighteous. Mencius stresses that “If it was contrary to what was right or to the Way, were he given the Empire he would have ignored it” (*Mencius* 5A.7; Lau 2003: 15). As the sole purpose of human behavior is to pursue righteousness, focusing exclusively on profit is bound to damage the pureness of one’s moral motives and have negative consequences.

To push this argument further, during his visit to King Hui of Wei 梁惠王, Mencius said, “Your Majesty ... what is the point of mentioning the word profit?” (*Mencius* 1A.1; Lau 2003: 3). He believed that a fixation on profit causes people to harm others for the sake of their own interests. Mencius advocates the pursuit of righteousness instead of mere personal profit: only by first taking righteousness as a principle rather than mere self-interest is one able to draw closer to the benefits of righteousness. Thus, the Confucian distinction between righteousness and profit implies that upholding righteousness instead of profit as the motivation for behavior leads to morally earned prosperity.

It is however a mistake to view righteousness and profit as necessarily opposed. Rather, the Confucian emphasis is on “profit being in harmony with righteousness” (*lì zhě yì zhī hé yě* 利者義之和也; *Book of Changes*, *Zhōuyì* 周易). Righteousness is in Confucian philosophy viewed as a morally congruent motivation that results from acting from one’s immanent moral trait, thereby differing from wrongly obtained selfish individual profits. Although Confucian-

ism on the one hand emphasizes a differentiation between righteousness and profit, it is opposed to placing utilitarian values as the penultimate objective of behavior. Thus, losing wealth but not violating one's moral consciousness is a life that is worth living.² This idea can be discerned in the ideals of Confucian merchants (*rúshāng* 儒商), which refers to people who conduct their business based on what is righteous, or in contemporary society those who invest in fair trade products.

Such a differentiation can also be identified in the Confucian approach to desire. In fact, Confucianism does not advocate a complete removal of desires, but rather suggests that one examines the propriety of any given desire.

6 The Distinction between Righteousness and Profit and Its Ecological Meaning

Chinese philosophy places an emphasis on humanity as well as all other things ('all things,' which are viewed as part of the creativity of Heaven and Earth. The Way of Heaven (*tiāndào* 天道) is "incessantly creating and re-creating" (*shēngshēng bùxī* 生生不息. The Commentary of the Appended Statements in the *Book of Changes*, 周易·繫辭傳). In acting from one's 'moral consciousness,' moral creativity is the root and potential for all humans to manifest the Way of Heaven or participate in the creative process of Heaven and Earth. Thus, in describing 'benevolence' (*rén* 仁), Confucius says, "Heaven has given me the clear virtue as a part of me" (*Analects* 7.23.) This emphasis on the moral subject and moral creativity can also be discerned in Mencius' view of humans as having a 'sense of compassion' (*cèyǐn zhī xīn* 惻隱之心; Mencius 7A.6) and a 'heart/mind that cannot bear to see the suffering of others' (*bùrěn rén zhī xīn* 不忍人之心; Mencius 7A.6). Herein lies the fundamental difference between 'humans and other creatures' (*rénqín zhī bié* 人禽之別): humans are embedded in a cosmic relationship with 'all things' and thereby play an active role as moral beings.

Confucianism has in the past been criticized for being an obstacle to economic development and creating a pan-moralism that ultimately infringes on and controls other areas of life such as politics and economics. However, as I argue in this paper, economic activities are inseparable from problems of value.

2 The Master said, "In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds" (*Analects* 7.16; Lau 2010: 61).

In Confucianism, righteous behavior is the exercise of restraint, which should not be conflated with total prohibition. Only through such behavior can there be a society in which people do not need to worry about their basic livelihoods and in which nature can flourish.

However, it is clear that Confucianism opposes the consumerist view according to which those who have the means to increase their income should necessarily be allowed to do so. Although humans have the ability to exploit the environment and pollute, from a Confucian point of view, they should choose to refrain from doing so. This is because only behavior that maintains a harmonious and sustainable ecology is considered to be righteous. The Confucian emphasis on the interdependence of all things may provide new perspectives on people's relationship with the environment, which are crucial to the ethical discussion on global warming.

Confucianism rejects the currently prevailing mechanistic understanding of nature as simply a resource for humans to use unrestrainedly, because such behavior stems from selfishness. The *Analects* describes Confucius' view as follows: "The Master used a fishing line but not a cable [to which a number of lines are attached]; he used a corded arrow but not to shoot at roosting birds" (*Analects* 7.27; Lau 2010: 63). When Confucius hunted and fished, he did not catch all the prey he found, nor did he attack animals that were sleeping. In other words, he opposed profits that are not in accordance with what is righteous (thereby objecting to ecological disharmony). While the ecosystem was at that time not threatened to the extent it is today, it is clear that Confucius did not propagate hindering the growth and development of the natural world, so that animals and plants could continue to thrive (see Christensen, 2017: 9). Mencius warns the people to temper their behavior in seeking to exploit natural resources:

If you do not allow nets with too fine a mesh to be used in large ponds, then there will be more fish and turtles than they can eat; if hatchets and axes are permitted in the forests on the hills only in the proper seasons, then there will be more timber than they can use.

Mencius 1A.3; LAU 2003: 7

According to Mencius, one should not use fishing nets with mesh that is too dense, so that small fish are not caught. The logging of trees should not occur during the spring growing season, but rather in the winter to prevent the extinction of forests. Confucius also states that the ruler should "employ the labor of the common people in the right seasons" (*Analects* 1.5; Lau 2010, p. 3). While Confucian philosophy, as I argue above, emphasizes the need to exer-

cise restraint, this does not entail a total prohibition of using natural resources. Thus, neither Confucius nor Mencius said one should avoid catching any fish or cutting any trees at the expense of people's livelihoods (Christensen, 2017: 9–10).

Furthermore, Confucian texts stress that morality rather than selfish interests must control the pursuit of economic profits. In fact, the Confucian approach implies a call for consideration for others. As humans have the potential to participate in the creative process of Heaven and Earth by acting from their moral trait, Mencius stresses that “the direction of the exemplary person's behaviour is the same as that of Heaven and Earth” (Mencius 7A.13; my translation). The Song Confucian scholar Cheng Mingdao 程明道 further develops Mencius' view in writing that “A benevolent person has the same body as Heaven, Earth, and all things” (*rénzhě yǐ tiāndì wànwù wéi yītǐ* 仁者以天地萬物為一體; my translation). A ‘benevolent person’ acting from the moral trait is not separated from external things. Thus, humanity has the potential to do its utmost to perfect itself, perfect others, and perfect the rest of the world. Tu Weiming, one of the leading scholars of contemporary Confucian philosophy, aptly describes Confucianism as anthropocosmic instead of adopting its more common description as anthropocentric (Tu, 1985, 1998, 2001, 2002).

Humans must as moral subjects reconsider the choices they make, as these choices determine which kind of difference we make in interacting with the rest of the ecosystem. In other words, the choices we make impact the ecosystem differently. As the direction the Earth system takes is partly decided by humanity, humanity must realize its potential to play an active role in maintaining ecological sustainability.

Systemic activities that harm ecological harmony should from a Confucian viewpoint be rejected, as these activities are motivated by a lack of responsibility toward the environment beyond the point at which such activities are economically profitable. This gets to the heart of the current ecological crisis. The basic dynamics at work in the crisis of global warming are “Population size (the number of humans), times Lifestyle (affluence or consumption, the per capita use of resources), times Technology (the per capita effect of technologies either more or less energy-consuming and polluting)” (Curry, 2011: 20). Thus, unrestrained economic activities contribute strongly to the current crisis. And while new technological advancements may reduce the human impact on the ecology, these advancements may easily be decimated if there is an unrestrained increase in the use of natural resources.

An increasing number of multinational companies outsource their manufacturing to carbon-intensive factories in low-cost countries because doing so

is economically more efficient in the short-term. A large number of these companies do not invest in technologies that help mitigate the pollution from these factories.

Having entered the age of the Anthropocene, it is time to rethink our relationship with the environment; People must be more conscientious of the choices they make. However, when politicians are unwilling to raise taxes on the use of highly pollutant energy sources but voters elect those politicians, when large companies and investors bankroll the production of carbon-intensive energy because it is more profitable in the short-term, rather than invest in renewable energy sources, when wealthy consumers choose carbon-intensive products although they have the choice not to, and so forth, it can be said that these activities originate from a denial of humans' relatedness with other things or the larger whole. From a Confucian perspective, such behavior is deemed selfish. Economic development that is separated from morality may lead to more conveniences for humans, but when this development is not ecologically sustainable people must reconsider their actions and alter their behavior.

7 Concluding Remarks

Confucianism warns that even when people have sufficient means to sustain themselves, they may not become benevolent and may forget about righteousness. Confucius cautions that one should "not behave with arrogance when rich" (*Analects* 14.10; Lau 2010: 135, modified) and Mencius says that "one should not be led into excesses when wealthy and honored" (*Mencius* 3B.2; Lau 2003: 127). Although economic development is important, humanity must not forget righteousness while pursuing profit or neglect behaving fairly and maintaining justice in the realm of the economy.

Confucian philosophy views the development of the economy as important for the sake of meeting the needs of the people, in order for them to thrive as moral beings. In fact, if people's fundamental needs are not met, this may infringe on their potential to act from their moral trait. Confucian philosophy does not oppose people's desire for profit, as emphasizing morality is not equivalent to opposing economic development. Thus, although Confucianism emphasizes righteousness, this does not entail that it promotes asceticism.

From a Confucian viewpoint, 'all things' or the whole world are part of the creative process of Heaven and Earth. Humanity must therefore take 'all things' into consideration while pursuing benefits, which extends beyond a concern for oneself, the family, the country, or human beings as a species. Only this type

of behavior can be said to be a pursuit of profit that is righteous. It is clear that a society that emphasizes both righteousness and profit is more sustainable than one that only pursues profit.

Because the major philosophers in Confucian philosophy do not regard humans as separated from 'Heaven, Earth, and all things' (*tiāndì wànwù* 天地萬物), ecological thought and Confucian philosophy have a strong positive relationship. Hence, while Confucianism focuses on human life, it presupposes that human beings and the rest of the natural world are intimately connected.

Although Confucian philosophy has developed many concepts and ideas regarding humans and society, 'all things' are viewed as part of the creativity of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, the idea of the distinction between righteousness and profit can similarly be expanded to include a strong ecological spirit.

I address in this paper an important problem within today's ecological crisis: an increased prevalence of materialism, resulting in humanity's lack of consideration for those outside of one's immediate environment. In the current age of the Anthropocene, multinational companies increasingly engage in environmentally unsustainable activities, thereby exhibiting a lack of moral responsibility and not caring about anything beyond earning profits for their shareholders (see my discussion in Christensen, 2014). The Confucian concept of the distinction between righteousness and profit provides a new and pertinent resource for addressing this problem by offering a richer way of thinking about economic development: one in which righteousness takes precedence over the exploitation of the planet.

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