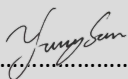


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Module tutor: Venerable Chengde Assignment due date: 08/11/2014		
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The Interaction between Human and Politics

I. Introduction

Since the inception of human civilisation, the group nature of human beings has resulted in the formation of dominant and subordinate groups. This has led to the establishment of a clear hierarchical relationship, necessitating the creation of rules and regulations to be observed and implemented. Consequently, a variety of political systems have emerged. The question of whether politics determines human behaviour or whether human behaviour influences political change has been the subject of extensive investigation by numerous scholars. For the purposes of this report, the term human is primarily used in reference to those in positions of authority, rather than to the general population. Similarly, the term politics is used to refer primarily to the study of state systems and the functioning of the state. The references are primarily drawn from seminal works on the subject, including those of Confucius, Mencius, Socrates and other prominent scholars from both Eastern and Western traditions. This approach aims to provide a concise overview of the complex relationship between human and the political realm.

II. Human Behaviour Affects Politics

In The *ZhongYong*, it is said, ‘ The administration of government lies in getting proper men.’¹In the first instance, Confucius posited that the primary focus of

¹Original text: 為政在人。 The translated by James Legge.

political activity is the human behaviour. He held the view that human beings represent the foundation of all political activities, and that the absence of collective human behaviour precludes the possibility of politics. Similarly, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle famously observed that "man is a natural political animal" (Zoon Politikon), thereby underscoring the notion that "Man is by nature a political animal, more than any bee or any gregarious animal." In his view, there is a significant interdependence between human behaviour and the political sphere. In *The Analects*, Confucius stated, "Let him honour the five excellent, and banish away the four bad, things; then may he conduct government properly."² This reflects Confucius's belief that the foundation of effective governance lies in individuals, particularly in their behavior or conduct, as these aspects have a direct influence on the course and functioning of political affairs. For instance, when Jikangzi 季康子 inquired about state governance, Confucius responded, "To govern means to rectify. If you lead on the people with correctness, who will dare not to be correct?" This underscores that the decisions and virtuous actions of leaders and administrators play a crucial role in fostering positive political development and stability.

There is an example in the opposite direction. As recorded in *the Records of History* 史記, the King of Xin 帝辛 of the Shang Dynasty, despite the fact that he had a 600-year old state and was politically stable, and that he was

² Original text: 子張問於孔子曰：「何如斯可以從政矣？」子曰：「尊五美，屏四惡，斯可以從政矣。」 The translated by James Legge.

surrounded by wise men such as Weizi 微子, Jeizi 箕子, and Bigan 比干, the whole state was politically destroyed because of his very tyrannical behaviour, and the behaviour of such a tyrannical leader can have a direct and great negative impact on politics. Apart from leaders or kings, as long as they are in the upper echelons of management, or even subjects, they are important factors in political activities, and can exert a certain degree of control over politics, which is why the appointment of wise men was highly valued in ancient times. In *The Analects*, “Zhong Gong, being chief minister to the head of the Ji family, asked about government. The Master said, ‘Employ first the services of your various officers, pardon small faults, and raise to office men of virtue and talents.’”³ The Mencius also said: “The best course for him to pursue, is to esteem virtue and honour virtuous scholars, giving the worthiest among them places of dignity, and the able offices of trust.”⁴ Almost all of these show the importance of human behaviour in politics, whether he is good or bad, capable or incapable, wise or unwise, he can influence politics.

III. Politics Affects Human Behaviour

When we have completed the first part of the discussion, we understand that human behaviour has a clear influence on politics, and then we will look at the

³ Original text: 仲弓為季氏宰，問政。子曰：「先有司，赦小過，舉賢才。」 The translated by James Legge.

⁴ Original text: 莫如貴德而尊士，賢者在位，能者在職。國家閒暇，及是時明其政刑。雖大國，必畏之矣。 The translated by James Legge.

influence of politics on human beings. Chinese and Western scholars have similar views on this area of thought, first of all, Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, believed that institutions shape human beings. In *The Republic*, Plato emphasised the decisive influence of political institutions on human behaviour and morality. In *The Republic* he describes a number of political institutions, among which Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny are degenerate political institutions. ⁵Oligarchy: the excessive pursuit of wealth leads to degeneration, Democracy: the excessive pursuit of freedom leads to disorder, and Tyranny: violence and oppression leads to collapse. In his examples of these systems, it is clear that these corrupt systems not only undermine the righteousness of the state, but also directly lead to the moral degradation of the citizens. Therefore, the degradation of the political system is inevitably accompanied by the degradation of the morals of the citizens. He therefore advocated the primacy of institutions. Plato believed that the right politics could lead mankind to justice and make the social system work in an orderly manner, and thus he believed that institutions play a leading role in shaping human behaviour.

⁵ Original text:

Oligarchy (寡頭制): “In oligarchy, the rulers... fix their attention on the acquisition of wealth, and anything that makes for this they praise and admire, but anything that makes for virtue and wisdom they discredit.” (The Republic, Book VIII, 545d)

Democracy (民主制): “The democratic state, with liberty and freedom, would say that this is the fairest of all states... but really it leads to a sort of anarchical freedom.” (The Republic, Book VIII, 562b)

Tyranny (僭主制): “Tyranny develops from no other form of government than democracy... when the insatiable desire for freedom and liberty grows, a tyrant can rise to power.” (The Republic, Book IX, 565d)

On the other hand, the ancient Chinese sage Mencius also suggested that the fairness and reasonableness of the politics would affect the implementation of the politics of benevolence 仁政. In the original text of *Mencius*, he said: “Now, the first thing towards a benevolent government must be to lay down the boundaries.”⁶ Which means that the stability of the state can only be ensured by a rational system of field planning, which is also mentioned in *the Book of Rites* 禮記: “Examines all statutory arrangements, and distinguishes benevolence from righteousness; it is by them, in short, that government is rightly ordered, and his own tranquillity secured.”⁷ These two points illustrate an important point, that is, the reasonableness and correctness of a system has a direct impact on a country and those in power. Good politics can stabilise a state and at the same time serve as a prerequisite for the implementation of a better benevolent government.

At this point in the discussion, we can also make it clear that politics can indeed influence human behaviour, but the question now is, given the mutual influence of politics and human beings, who, in terms of details, has more possibilities of influence? Or which aspect is more influential? Let us move on to the next stage of our discussion:

IV. The Interaction between Human and Politics

⁶ Original text: 使畢戰問井地。孟子曰：「子之君將行仁政，選擇而使子，子必勉之！夫仁政，必自經界始。經界不正，井地不鈎，穀祿不平。是故暴君汙吏必慢其經界。經界既正，分田制祿可坐而定也。」 The translated by James Legge.

⁷ Original text: 「是故，禮者君之大柄也，所以別嫌明微，儆鬼神，考制度，別仁義，所以治政安君也。故政不正，則君位危；君位危，則大臣倍，小臣竊。」 From *the Book of Rites*. The translated by James Legge.

As mentioned in the previous part of the discussion, many kinds of people can influence politics, regardless of the goodness or badness of those in power. According to Mencius, “These evils growing in the mind, do injury to government, and, displayed in the government, are hurtful to the conduct of affairs.”⁸ This means that the heart is what makes the politics. Mencius also believes that “The ancient kings had this commiserating mind, and they, as a matter of course, had likewise a commiserating government.”⁹ Mencius would also have thought that a person who was not good at heart would jeopardise politics, and that a virtuous and benevolent person could lead politics to perfection. The ancient Greek scholar Aristotle also believed that personal virtues affect political stability. He said, “The virtue of a citizen must be suited to his constitution, and it is the special quality of a citizen to know and be able to rule and be ruled by turn.” and “The salvation of the community is the common business of all the citizens.”(*Politics, Book 3*)¹⁰ In his view, the stability of a political system depended to a large extent on the behaviour of its citizens. He advocated that the behaviour and sense of responsibility of citizens were the basis for maintaining political justice. If citizens generally possessed the virtues of justice, wisdom and courage, the whole society would remain stable and prosperous; if citizens lacked the virtues, the politics would fall into

⁸ Original text: 生於其心，害於其政；發於其政，害於其事。The translated by James Legge.

⁹ Original text: 人皆有不忍人之心。先王有不忍人之心，斯有不忍人之政矣。The translated by James Legge.

¹⁰ Note: In Ancient Greece, since the citizens here had the substantive right to vote and were able to directly influence politics, they were not entirely counted as people with no real power, so they are included as reference to those in power in the text.

corruption and injustice.

In addition, another ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, as an example, was finally killed by a democratic vote because he was framed by the elders of the Council of the Ancient Greeks for polluting the youths with harmful knowledge and compelling them to disbelieve in the gods of Ancient Greece. In *The Apology of Socrates*, Socrates also confessed that most of the voters who voted him to death were not deeply philosophical, and did not pursue beauty, wisdom and morality correctly and purely enough, which made them easy to be incited and no longer rational. At this point we can already conclude that “A man can influence politics whether he is pure or not.”

Furthermore, we can understand from the second major paragraph before that the concept of political priority is mainly based on the source of the belief that the occurrence of evil acts such as corruption and decadence should be curbed and prevented, which are mainly rooted in the badness as well as behaviours of human beings. In Book V of *The Republic*, Socrates proposed an ideal politics, saying: “Unless either philosophers become kings in their countries or those who are now called kings and rulers come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom; unless, that is to say, political power and philosophy meet together... there can be no rest from troubles... for states, nor yet, as I believe, for all mankind.”

Contrasting the two, Socrates hoped that those philosophers who seriously and adequately engaged in philosophical thinking and who had high adherence to

morality would be able to truly lead politics as kings, whereas it is often the case that those who do not have a proper and adequate pursuit of beauty, wisdom and morality will often be influenced by politics, which is what we would consider as corruption and degradation. On the other hand, positive people will not be influenced by politics. For example, Confucius said: “He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.”¹¹ In the view of Confucius, a moral and intelligent person, when in position, not only will not be influenced, but can even automatically influence the whole political operation, to this point we can again conclude “Politics can only influence the impure, not the pure.”

V. Conclusion

Summing up the discussion of the whole article, we come to the following two conclusions: Firstly, a man can influence politics whether he is pure or not. Secondly, Politics can only influence the impure, not the pure.

That is all for my presentation today. Any feedback and suggestions will be appreciated. Thank you for your listening.

¹¹ Original text: 為政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而眾星共之。The translated by James Legge.