

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BY CAPACITIES OF VIRTUES: A NEW ANALYSIS OF POWER OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVE

Chung-Ying Cheng*

Abstract: This paper develops the theory of virtues as those capabilities of a human person which integrate both the view of Confucian ethics and Aristotelian ethics. It proposes a theory of leadership (political leadership, in particular) based on the development and implementation of the virtue-capabilities of wisdom, care and courage as defined in Confucian Analects. It argues for those Confucian insights into the depth structure of the human self in terms of feeling, thinking and willing, which then leads to the virtue-capabilities of zhi ren yong (wisdom, care and courage). It explains how these three virtue-capabilities form a unity of trinity which warrants effective political leadership. It also show how this model of political leadership will have to be effective on three levels of society at large; namely, community, business and government.

I. Virtues as Capabilities of Leadership

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP is leadership by power of both competence and performance. There cannot be competence if there is no performance as its articulation and there cannot be performance if there is no competence as its source. People may take leadership to be a skill to be learned, but the skill of leadership must still be rooted in one's competence to master the skill and to apply the skill properly and successfully. In this sense, leadership, particularly political leadership, is a performance of a skill as grounded or rooted in the competence one has developed in reference to people, their circumstances, their needs and their purposes of life. It has to involve understanding and knowledge, judgments of value, and action of insight, incentive and fulfillment.

If we inquire into the substance of competence-performance model of leadership, we can easily identify competence with capabilities of doing and practicing and identify performance with actions issued from such capabilities. Once we get into capabilities, we may wonder what sort of capacities we have to bring out in order to speak of effective political leadership. The answer is actually provided by Confucius in his response to his disciples asking the same question. Confucius's famous answer is simple and brief: "To have effective leadership one has to develop and apply virtues" (Lunyu 2:1).¹ In fact, it is because of virtues,

*CHUNG-YING CHENG, Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA. E-mail: ccheng@hawaii.edu

¹ The Chinese words are, "weizheng yi de."

people and others will surround and support the leader like all stars surrounding and supporting the North Star.

If leadership by Confucian virtues constitutes what Confucian leadership would mean, then we have two main problems for understanding the nature of Confucian leadership or leadership by capabilities as virtues. How are virtues to be regarded as capabilities and how capacities are to be regarded as virtues? In order to be effective, how do we master the unity of virtues as a system so that we can develop and use them systematically?

To answer the first question, we must see that a virtue is a power and capability which we can experience and cultivate so that we shall act right and achieve good by following it. In this sense a virtue is simultaneously a motivation, a consequence and ability, and power of action as well as a desirable performance. It is no doubt a disposition of one's being human and can be said to manifest humanity at its best as it contributes to one's own development, self-realization and flourishing and harmony of a community. In this sense a Confucian virtue is not just a motivated disposition of a human person, but a developed ability to cope with problems of a human situation. This virtuous disposition has to become an ability to make good judgment and right action which brings out concrete good such as meeting an obligation, protecting a right and contributing to a useful and meaningful transformation. In this sense Confucian virtues are like Aristotelian virtues, being a matter of excellent action of a dispositional trait of the human character and a matter of fulfilling the inner telos of a human being, and thus always an essential element constitutive of the well being of the human being or a community of human beings.

We must also note that an Aristotelian virtue (*arête*), being it moral or intellectual, is *de facto* a Confucian one, for each of virtues such as wisdom, justice, temperance and courage or friendship could meet the Confucian ideas of self-development in contributing to social ordering. Hence we can see virtues as well-defined by reflective insights of both Confucius and Aristotle. They can be seen as a matter of natural disposition, innate acquisition, reinforced by deliberative cultivation and practical judgment, and conducive to persistent character or habit formation of the human self. They can also be said to exhibit the ideal principle of the middle way or the mean which Confucius calls "*zhong-yong*", the central and the constant, which should bring the best of action in any ordinary human situation.

II. Unity of Virtues as Unity of Capabilities in a Human Person

In describing the similarity of the Confucian and Aristotelian virtues, however, we should not forget an important difference between the two; namely for Confucius, the virtues though appearing to be discrete, are highly organically related and in fact, are regarded as derived and based from the root virtue of *ren* or benevolence toward others and the world. It is on reflection of *ren* we come to justice and propriety in treating others taking into considerations of time, place and natural relationship

which generate sentiments of right and duty and consideration of appropriateness and trust. In order to have the right way of measuring to the situation and acting properly in relation to others, one has to have wisdom which requires knowledge and consideration of practical application and creative adaptation. In this manner we see that virtues could be one and yet its practice and application are many. Although Socrates may have stressed the idea of unity of virtues in his idea of moral knowledge, Aristotle may not have stressed enough on this matter. On the side of Confucianism, it is clear that virtues have an internal unity which requires a central perspective of reflective intelligence for application in light of understanding and knowledge which are to be conceived as particular understandings, not just conceptual universality. This is then the answer to the second problem of the systematic unity of virtues raised in the above.

To summarize what has been said, virtues are capabilities which are rooted in our nature and which can be developed into abilities to value, normalize and act. In this sense virtues are capabilities to know and deal with human problem and people just like our intellectual capacities which lead to knowledge of the world. They are capable of being refined and cultivated into abilities of adequate performance and hence can be said to be efficient and excellent. Furthermore, virtues have an internal consistence and coherence which gives rise to their organic unity and interdependence. It is in this latter understanding we come to see that virtues are originated from a fundamental source and aimed at a single ideal end.

III. Source of Virtues and Unity of Virtue-Capabilities

With regard to the problem of how to understand the Confucian virtues which are many and which appear to be separate and discrete, we may point out that although Confucian virtues include mainly benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness (*ren yi li zhi xin*) and also many others, depending on different human contexts, the idea of Confucian virtue as capability is always directed toward the one deep source capability for all virtues. In this connection we can point to the Confucian *ren* as that one single source of virtues which gives rise a variety of differentiated virtues. At the same time we may also point to the Confucian wisdom as a virtue which unifies all the virtues in their proper applications in virtue of *ren*. In this sense *ren* is both the source for both difference and identity of all virtues. This I take is the meaning and spirit of oneness in the Confucius's saying: "My way is penetrated with oneness" (The Analects, 4.15).

For the relation between *ren* and *zhi*, perhaps, we may put it in a different way; *ren* unifies the different virtues by genesis whereas *zhi* differentiates virtues by application. But then we need to also stress the importance of practice and application of virtues with regard to concrete action and performance, so that we will be responsible for the action and performance in practice, as well as for producing desirable results which transform a given situation and generate a new scenario. This means we

need to conceive wisdom as a capability which would lead to its being capable of realization in concrete. This implies that we must have the virtue of determined action which we shall identify with the virtue of courage or moral courage (*yong*): to wit, courage is the power of implementing the power of wisdom generated by the power of care and concern toward a human situation. It is the practical power of doing and working in difficult situations and crises. It is the executive power backed by insight and prudence and dedication to an ideal end.

With *yong* understood in this manner, we can now conceive the structure of virtues as organized and represented by the dynamical unity of concern / wisdom / courage as explained above. This unity is in fact the unity of feeling, thinking (reflection) and willing as *ren* is the best function of feeling, wisdom is the best function of wisdom and the willing is the best function of courage. Each of these stands for a capability of human nature, or we may simply identify the three cardinal virtues with capability of heart, mind and will.

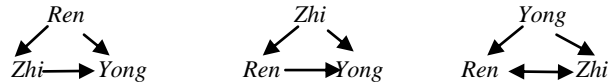
This unity of the capabilities of virtues in my view represents a model of political leadership which is included in any ideal political leadership model, which, however, often remains unarticulated so that virtuous powers of a political leadership also remain ungrounded and uninitiated and even un-sustainable. Here I want to bring this model of the trinity of virtues or powers of humanity to the front for a better understanding and illustration of political leadership.

IV. Trinity of Confucian Virtue-Capabilities: Wisdom /Care / Courage

Confucius has achieved an insight into how an individual person or human being functions in terms of his deep sense of human self: the human self wishes to realize itself in terms of its identity of humanity with difference of virtuous powers (capabilities). He comes to see unity of the self in terms of the unity of feeling heart, thinking mind and acting will and indicates how each function wishes to achieve an end which is essential for the realization of the human self: the human self should have no doubts, should have no misgivings and should have no fears. He expressed on two occasions these reflections of ends of the human self by associating the virtuous capabilities of *zhi* (wisdom), *ren* (care) and *yong* (courage). (The Analects 9:24; 14:28).² For him the question is how one comes to develop these capabilities of nature, so that one becomes resting in harmony and tranquility as he indicates in his remarks on how the wise enjoys water and the caring enjoys mountain,

² In the first occasion Confucius is quoted to put the wisdom before care whereas on the second occasion he is quoted to put the care before wisdom. Each ordering has a significance: the first ordering suggests the differentiating function in practice and the second ordering suggest the unifying or integrating function in reflection. This suffices to indicate how *ren* and *zhi* have unique functions each of which is dispensable and is essentially related to the other in maintaining the leadership of the self as creative autonomy of the self. This point applies to the general explication of political leadership in the Confucian perspective in the paper.

how the wise likes movement and enjoys life and the caring likes rest and enjoys longevity (The Analects 6:23). Let us articulate the structures of trinity of *zhi ren* and *yong* as follows:

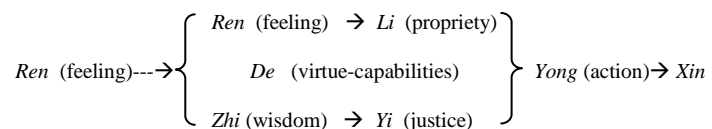


For a deeper understanding of the role of the sense of self-realization in a human person for political leadership, I suggest to identify leadership with the self-directing and self-realizing autonomy of the human self (as indicated in Confucian reflection of self-reflection and self-cultivation). The word for self is composed of two aspects, the aspect of self-origination and the aspect of self-completion, as we see in the term of *zi-ji* 自己, *zi* being the former aspect and *ji* being the latter aspect. As such the human self is the creative integration of its source with its body-reality or experience of reality. The originative action of the self is to seek the other and to extend the whole reality for one's completion, whereas the completive action of the self is to seek integration of one's own self, so that one can originate the power of action again. This may appear to be a metaphysical statement of the dynamics of the human self, but it needs not to be so, for it gives articulation of the capability of *ren* for extending oneself, and the capability of *zhi* for restraining or constraining oneself. Thus, we would be enabled in a better position to appreciate how *ren* and *zhi* become the outstanding capabilities of the humanity whose function is to create a state of no misgiving and no doubts so that one could act out in determination and freedom without fear. This is precisely how political leadership should be conceived and considered. We may conclude by saying that the creative autonomy of the human self represents the self-leadership of the human self whereas the political leadership by retrieval should therefore represent the creative autonomy of a group of people under the political leadership. What is required of the personal in terms of *zhi* and *ren* is consequently required of the political leader because these capabilities are what give identity and difference to the group and their sustaining and growth in the group as well as it is led by the leader.

We have seen how Confucius has envisioned a depth-moral psychological approach to effective leadership which is composed of capabilities of virtues of *zhi ren yong*. We have explained *zhi* and *ren* in detail. But then we can still ask why *yong*? The answer is that we need a virtue-capability which explicitly relates to action and implementation, especially when one has to confront many problems and obstructions. To have *yong* is to be able to meet challenges at certain times and to provide challenges at other times so that we will be able to transcribe one's ideas and ideals into reality. Then we still have the task of identifying the functions of capability for *yi* and capability for *li* and capability for *xin* among all major virtues of Confucian leadership of the human self (or human mind). I shall do these as follows.

First, it is clear that *yi* is a matter of concretely conceiving and configuring the *ren*. It is because *ren* is the totalizing and holistic representation of *yi* whereas *yi* is the distributive and differentiating method of fulfilling the *ren*. In this sense *yi* represents the application of the function of *zhi* for sake of differentiation which is *zhi* itself. This is again true of *li* in so far as *li* deals with individual relations within a framework of values and virtues for the sake of identification of the whole humanity which is *ren* itself. In comparison we see *yi* being more objectively differentiating than *li* where *li* is more subjectively oriented to preserve the *ren* of the human self for what is related to *li* is related to the human self as an individual person.³ But for *yi* it is more a matter of rational distribution which requires sacrifice of the self as an individual and in this sense a more critical realization of the virtue-capability of *ren*.

One might even suggest that *li* gives a background expression to both *ren* and *yi* in providing and requiring a system of rules dealing with relationships and positions and thus obligations and rights. Hence we see a process of particularization of *ren* into *li* via the considerations of *yi* and of *ren* into *yi* via considerations of *li*. In fact, we can treat *ren-yi* and *ren-li* or *li-yi* as a matter of both *benti* and *tiyong*: *ren* is the root of *yi* and *yi* the body of *ren*. Similarly, we can see *yi* as the *yong* of the *ren* whereas *ren* remains the body of the *yi*. This is equally true for the relationship of *ren* and *li* where *ren* is the source of *li* and *li* is the realization of *ren*. One may also see that it is *ren* which gives rise to *li* and it is *zhi* which gives to *yi*. With this insight one can easily how the application and practice of *ren-li* and *zhi-yi* and hence *ren-zhi* and *li-yi* gives rise to *xin* or trust and trustworthiness via the exercise of the virtue-capability of *yong*. We may indeed express the complex structure of derived virtues in the following illustration:



Finally, we can take *xin* to be a result of developing *yong* for it is only on the basis of performance of action by *yong* we gain confidence and establish trust among people whether in market or in government by society at large. With confidence and trust established a political leader can lead much more efficiently than without them. But this does not take away the ability to overcome difficulties and crises when those arise in the process of implementation. Hence *yong* is a constant force for supporting and nourishing *xin*. Thus seen, we can go back to our triad of virtues which could lead to a networking of five and more virtues in the Confucian framework of political leadership.

³ One can see that for music and arts there is the function of relaxing the differentiating functions of both *li* and *yi* in so far it could promote *ren* in the normal proceedings of life-world.

V. Leadership on Three Planes of Society

To recapitulate, in a broad sense, virtues are virtual abilities and disposition to act right and seek good in one's action as leader and driving force in realizing oneself or the potential common identity of a group or community. Virtues are not merely moral virtues but virtues which achieve values which include moral values. Hence we can take virtues as powers of doing right and achieving good as it was understood by Confucius and Confucian scholars. In this regard, even though the Confucian understanding of virtues is different from the Greek understanding of virtues as defined by Aristotle, in speaking of seeking excellence as virtue or virtue as excellence *arête* Aristotelian virtue may be interpreted as acting right to seek happiness and well being of oneself with full control of one's moral and intellectual capabilities. In this one may say that there is virtue implicitly understood as a power and a disposition to act well. Whereas Aristotle speaks of seeking one's own happiness as the goal of virtues, Confucian scholars can see virtues as directed to wellbeing of all other people as one assumes the role of a political leader. In this sense the Aristotle view needs not to differ much from the Confucian view. For the Aristotle virtues can be so publically used and not to be confined to one private human individual. As a matter of fact, the moral virtues of prudence or practical wisdom, justice and temperance all becomes Confucian virtues for attaining the well being and harmony of the community and people which should include the personal self.

The intellectual virtue of reflection and rational thinking is no doubt a matter of knowledge leading to wisdom and hence considered a matter of end and a matter of means for the realization of the good for leadership or fellowship. What is lacking in Aristotle virtues is that of love, namely the Confucian *ren*. Again, as we have suggested, we can make sue of the Aristotle idea of friendship into *ren*, a concern with others. It is needless to say that *ren* is much more a dynamic and creative virtue and power of transformation and action than simply friendship.

Again as indicated above, in the Analects Confucius professed his observation that the wise has no doubts, the caring has no misgivings, and the courageous has no fears (The Analects 9.24;14.28). Does he intend that a good man (*junzi*) will not only lead himself by developing wisdom, care and will, but is capable of leading others by furthering his wisdom and vision, his care and concern , and his will and determination to achieve and act? The answer is absolutely positive, for being *junzi* is to become a person of self-ruling with his power of influence and leadership founded on a cultivated disposition and ability to achieve a better state of self-realization which would be at the same time a realization of intrinsic values of wisdom (knowledge), vision care and determined devotion of implementation. How do we know that these qualities are qualities of leadership? We have to see that in our experience of leadership in a community, a business and governance.

Community is a natural association of human individuals and families based on common desires and feelings of securing life and well being and harmony, without which a community can hardly survive and continue. Although we may count on individuals and family units to maintain their rhythm of life with natural adjustment, there could be many factors which could lead to tensions and conflicts among the members of the community, this is because new needs may arrive and different needs and views need communication and harmonization. It must take a leading force which would channel the harmonizing forces to effective results and curb disharmonizing forces to the minimum. What is most needed perhaps is the power of mediation which is required for communication and coordination. There must be also individuals who would maintain a state of rectitude which would function as umpire and moral observer for balancing opposing forces and integrating the useful and separate directions into synergetic purposes to be shared by all. This means that leaders for community must be able to relate to everybody else in the community so that he can create an atmosphere of cooperation and friendliness in general. Whether there is any major objective to be realized, this atmosphere is needed as the most basic condition for any project to take place or to shape up. Simply, it is a matter of playing the role of cohering and bridging.

Thus wisdom of understanding people is important, and it will no doubt reduce mistrust and senseless opposition. As to the care and concern they are to do with knowing the community and appreciating its forces of cohesion. Without care and concern which are required for giving rise to pragmatic assistance and support, no sense of interdependence and mutual trust will take place. The sense of will to action is equally important for it means vitality and willingness to seek the new and achieve the desirable. It is with this will to action that the community will not remain just in seclusion but move forward toward what is envisioned and therefore make progression and continuous improvement.

The second level of leadership with higher degree of transformation is the level of doing business as essential constitutive activities of economic development in a free market. A business leader cannot go without knowledge and wisdom of doing the right thing or making the right choice of objectives in the market place. There is always the question of ends and goals. In this requirement we see how knowledge is required as a necessary component of making relevant decisions. But to make correct decisions one needs interested and comprehensive knowledge which is tested and which could yield values for the potential customers and consumers. This means that we must come to know a situation where some needs are present and we also recognize that we see their relevant connection with our means and motivations of production. In this sense we need care and concern for we need to motivate others for acting toward accomplishment of the end and goal. The leading force no doubt comes from one who would commit himself to action under guidance of wisdom and yet relevantly related to the well being of all involved, namely the stakeholders of the producers, the

market and the consumers. Hence the leadership based on capabilities of wisdom/ care / courage will become functional relative to the concrete ideals and goals of the business one has for development.

Finally, we come to the situation or level of political governance, particularly to do with governments of modern days. What is the purpose of political governance? The answer is that it is to maintain order among people relative to pursuits of basic values of life. It is at the same time to seek ways of development and innovative advance for the people at large. It also involves multiple perspectives in order to integrate multiple processes of achieving satisfaction and ordered well being for the people. As the political leadership involves more power than either community or business, it is exposed to many possibilities of competence and performance. This makes the political leadership position extremely dynamic and sensitive because of potential changes and transformations. The ideal is to maintain order without subscribing to any temptation of diversion for personal and selfish desires and this no doubt requires the wisdom of seeking good for the public and maintain an just and fair mind toward matters of profits and benefits to do with people and the public.

To be able to do so obviously requires a political leader to do constant reflection and careful watch over events of the public so that one will not lose sight of the common end of the people which often requires useful and wise guidance regarding problem-solving and resources utilization. For this a political leader needs far and clear vision as to what is to be needed and what is to be achieved and how he would achieve them. He also needs care and benevolence because it is what makes him being capable of relating to people. One's wisdom is matter of making this care and benevolence available so that he can be close to people. It is also a matter of seeking improvement on all aspects of life of people with comprehensive understanding and insight. Finally, it is clearly a matter of motivation and dynamism in actually engaging issues, generating relevant ideas and implementing policies so that they can be effective and useful for people and with the people.

In conclusion, an effective leader is always one who acts on his words and show an example of doing and achieving. Take the example of controlling the economic crisis since 2008; the problem of how to deal with crises of this kind is obviously one of knowing what has happened, and how to redress the situation. One has to show care enough to commit to real solutions, and to act with knowledge and courage, even it costs his own fortune or self-interests or those of his own group or party. This no doubt involves a decision and an ability to act out and to act out correctly and with perseverance.

Appendix

Comments and Discussion of CAUX ROUND TABLE PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNMENT from the point of view of political leadership based on trinity of Wisdom, Care and Courage.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

1. Public power is held in trust for the community

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNMENTS

1. Discourse ethics should guide application of public power

2. The Civic Order shall serve all those who accept the responsibilities of citizenship

3. Public Servants shall refrain from abuse of office, corruption and shall demonstrate high levels of personal integrity

4. Security of persons, individual liberty and ownership of property are the foundation for individual justice

5. Justice shall be provided

6. General welfare contemplates improving the well-being of individual citizens

7. Transparency of government ensures accountability

8. Global cooperation advances national welfare

Reference

1. Confucius, *the Analects*, in *the Four Books and Five Classics*, ed. Yang XiaoMing (Chengdu, China: Bachu Publishing House, 1996), Vol. 1.