The Figure of Socrates and its Significance for Liberal Education in Asia[1]

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Abstract:

This essay contributes to the ongoing debate concerning the value of liberal education in East Asia, and how well Western models of liberal education fit with East Asian cultures. It addresses the inadequacy of the two main arguments presented in these debates: 1) utility, whether liberal education provides critical thinking skills to help East Asian countries "catch up" to the West and 2) whether Western liberal education carries with it individualism that is incompatible with East Asian culture. In response to these arguments, this essay considers the figure of Socrates as a transpolitical figure, and a way of considering the place of liberal education in East Asia. Socratic freedom as the ideal of liberal education presents intractable challenges to all political regimes and cultures because it aims higher than their goals and aims. Therefore those interested in liberal education and those responsible for administering institutions where liberal education gets taught need to be attentive to the difference between Socratic freedom and the varying degrees of freedom their respective political societies permit.

Keywords: Socrates, Asia, Liberal education, Politics, Freedom

[1] This essay expands remarks presented at "Liberal Arts Education in an Asian Context: Achievements, Challenges, and Perspectives." Launch Conference of the Alliance of Asian Liberal Arts Universities and Marking the 50th Anniversary of Lingnan University, Hong Kong,

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The question of how the Western ideal of liberal education fits with Asian cultures is longstanding.[1] Our present time is one characterized by an opening up between Western and Asian cultures. It is no longer sufficient for those in the West interested in liberal education to ignore Asian philosophy, science, and literature, whereas Western sources continue being made more available for Asians.

Even so, for Asians, the precise nature and relevance of Western perspectives in liberal education is elusive. The most common argument that Asian culture is harmonious with Western liberal education is utilitarian and seems to be that liberal education provides critical thinking skills that foster political and economic development. By adopting liberal education, Asia, it is said, can "catch up" to the West. Conversely, the most common argument that liberal education is at odds with Asian cultures is that Western ideals of individualism conflict with Asian ideals of social harmony.

This dichotomy is miscast. First, the "catch up" argument reduces liberal education to a mere instrument and illiberally reduces its aim to wealth and power. Many argue that Asians benefit from Western-style liberal education because such education imparts critical thinking skills that make people better equipped to participate in the global economy and to make them better administrators. While this argument contains much truth, it misses the point of liberal education which obliges us to consider at what such education aims. While for most, the ultimate aim of liberal education need not be asked so long as one can find a well-paying job and live comfortably. However, it is important to understand the proper aim of liberal education. Liberal education is not only about helping people live comfortably (if indeed it is about that), but rather it is about how one lives well. With so much debate in east Asia about a moral crisis and worries over social disintegration and corruption despite increasing standards of living, especially in mainland China, the question of human purpose, the central question of liberal education, has become paramount.[2] The most direct way to understand the aim of liberal education is to consider the figure who stands at its origin and core, Socrates. Socrates shows the aim of liberal education, wisdom, is both useful but also poses a challenge for any political order because its aim transcends political life. This transpolitical aim of liberal education makes it a challenge to integrate into any political regime. Yet it is this very challenge that is a source of vitality for regimes open to the Socratic view.

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[1] A good starting-point for the discussion is Pericles Lewis and Katherine Rupp. 2015, "Liberal Education in Asia: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities," *New Global Studies* 9 (3): 245-66; Baoyan Cheng, "A Comparative Study of the Liberal Arts tradition and Confucian Tradition in Education," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 18 (4) 2017: 465-74; and the essays in *Liberal Arts Education and Colleges in East Asia: Possibilities and Challenges in the Global Age,* edited by Insung Jung, Mikiko Nishimura, and Toshiaki Sasao, (Singapore: Springer, 2016).

[2] Ian Johnson discusses the moral crisis plaguing mainland China: "One 2014 study cited 'loss of trust' as the top problem facing China with 88 percent agreeing with the statement that China was beset by 'a social disease of moral decay and lack of trust'" (*The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017), 89-90. See also 16-32, 87-91; He Huaihong, *Social Ethics in a Changing China: Moral Decay or Ethical Awakening?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

1. LIBERAL EDUCATION AND CHINA'S RISE

A proper understanding of the significance of Socrates is gained if we first consider in more detail the weight of the "catch up" argument. We shall consider the "social harmony" argument below.

The manner in which the quest for wealth as well as "China's rise" is tangled up with liberal education requires some clarification. The liberality or freedom at the core of the idea of liberal education is the freedom from the business of securing our necessities. The reason liberal education is conceptually distinct from business or vocational education is because the aim of liberal education is wisdom for its own sake. It is the wisdom for which all other educational endeavors aim. A business student who can also understand a Platonic dialogue or understands Baroque music is undoubtedly a more insightful business student. But the business student's liberal education is impoverished if she has never experienced the delight in simply understanding something for its own sake, and not simply to produce niftier products and higher profit margins. The distinction between wisdom for its own sake and knowledge-for-use is prior to critical thinking and "multidisciplinarity."[3] Before we can think about using different disciplines to think about a topic, we first must understand the meaning of wisdom for its own sake. Bending knowledge always for instrumental use is both illiberal and self-defeating. In its most vivid form, the instrumentalization of all knowledge is technology that treats all reality, including humanity itself, as an object for manipulation. Technology thus understood is destructive of not only of liberal education but also what makes us human.[4]

The distinction between liberal education for its own sake and business of vocational education can be seen in the Greek and Latin etymological roots for their terms. For example, Aristotle notes that business (*ascholia*) is the negation of leisure (*scholia*), which he identifies as the activity of contemplation.[5] Augustine of Hippo too notices how business is the negation of the fuller activity of leisure when he sarcastically states: "The idling [*nugae*] of men is called business [*negotia*]; the idling of boys, though exactly like, is punished by those same men."[6] It is worthwhile bearing this relationship of the thing (leisure) to its negation (business) in mind the next time we use the common English word, "negotiate," which describes an act that serves

[3] Eva T.H. Brann provides an illuminating discussion of the relationship between liberal education and utility, as well as how the different disciplines fit together within the liberal education paradigm (*Paradoxes of Education in a Republic*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). I discuss Brann's thesis in "Reflections on Eva Brann's 'Paradoxes of Education in a Republic," *Imaginative Conservative*, November 18, 2011, http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2011/11/eva-branns-paradoxes-of-education-in-republic.html

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans, William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 2013); Barry Cooper, *Action into Nature: Essay on Meaning of Technology*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Tom Darby, "Spiritual Crisis, Globalization, and Planetary Rule," in *Faith, Reason, and Political Life Today*, eds., Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 35-65.

[5] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans., Joe Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2012), 1333b5-1334b28, 1137b37–38a1.

[6] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., Frank Sheed, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 1.9.

as a means to secure an end. The relationship of business or vocational education to liberal education is one of means to ends.

"China's rise" has deep roots in its rejection of this distinction between liberal and vocational education. The mandarins of classical China were educated in the Confucian manner to excel at, above all, calligraphy and poetry, and not, for example, at war-making. The six "cultural arts," ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics, formed the finishing touch upon the moral education, according to the Confucian tradition.[7] These arts were the aim of Confucian moral education. The claim to Chinese civilizational superiority was based upon the ability of its rulers to engage in leisure. A Platonist or Aristotelian would be able to see something similar to their "best regime" in Chinese classical civilizational form where leisure is the aim of political action.[8]

However, as Henry Kissinger argues, it was this very dedication to leisure that led to its downfall during the Opium War. The Chinese disdain for practical arts prevented them from constructing strong boats and guns that could repel superior British forces and led to its defeat. Qishan, the Viceroy of Zhili (administrative unit surrounding Beijing) judged disdain for practical arts as the primary reason for Chinese defeat. British boats and guns were superior to those held by the Chinese, who were still using guns left over from the Ming Dynasty, and that "[t]hose who are in charge of military affairs are all literary officials… they have no knowledge of armaments."[9] Qishan's assessment gets to the heart of the matter. While the British were building powerful ships and guns, the Chinese were perfecting calligraphy and poetry. A regime that dedicates itself to leisure and disdainfully neglects its necessities, including self-defence, will be ruined. The aim ever since, especially after the modernizing and Westernizing educational reforms promoted by Li Hongzhang in the mid-nineteenth century, who convinced Prince Gong to dedicate resources to learning Western technology, was to catch up to the West.[10]

However, the opposite of Qishan's assessment is also true. As Aristotle notes, a regime that dedicates itself exclusively to necessities such as wealth and war-making at the expense of leisure will also be ruined. The reason for this is that a proper understanding of leisure is also a

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[7] Confucius, *Analects*, translated by Edward Slingerland, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 1.6 and 7.6.

[8] On Aristotle's view that politics aims at leisure, see Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.15 and *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. Aristotle's educational program for the best regime shows some resemblance to the Confucian ideal. He lists letters (or writing), gymnastics, music, and drawing as the primary subjects for civic education (*Politics*, VIII.3.1337b25).

[9] Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York: Penguin, 2012), 49, citing Tsiang Ting-fu, *Chung-kuo chin tai shi [China's Modern History]*, (Hong Kong: Li-ta Publishers, 1955), as translated and excerpted in Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, eds., *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China—The 18th and 19th Centuries*, (New York: Vintage, 1967), 139.

[10] Kissinger, *On China*, 69-77.

proper understanding of peace.[11] The purpose of politics is not war, but peace. A regime that lacks proper understanding of what to do with itself at peace will know nothing more than to prepare for war. Yet the purpose of war is peace. Without a proper understanding of peace, a regime lacks a proper understanding why it fights wars. Thus the truth of the aphorism, "they won the war but lost the peace." Such a regime will then fight wars for ill-considered reasons and out of ignorance. This is a recipe both for imperialism and never-ending wars (which necessitates a response from other powers), and for political exhaustion and self-destruction. Aristotle summarizes his general point:

Events bear witness to the arguments that a lawgiver ought to be more diligent about designing matters pertaining to military skills, and all the rest of his lawmaking for the sake of living in leisure and for peacetime. For most cities of this kind stay safe while they are at war but once imperial rule has been acquired they come to ruin. When they keep the peace, they lose their hard edge, like iron, and the one responsible for this is the lawgiver who has not educated them to have what it takes to live at leisure.[12]

Many ancient and modern commentators have noted the role that grand projects and major rivals and enemies play in invigorating political societies. One need not fully affirm Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction to notice that great powers frequently identify themselves exclusively in opposition to their enemies. In Aristotle's terms, they do this because they lack political self-sufficiency and political friendship with themselves.

Such debilitated regimes also face an existential crisis of who and what they are when their enemy is defeated, which usually leads to their own destruction. Scipio wept when Rome defeated Carthage.[13] While American neoconservatives celebrated the collapse of the Soviet Union, others considered the 1990s as the period where America took a "holiday from history," which preceded its decline in the early twenty-first century. These behaviors reflect Aristotle's point that not only a polity must know what to do with itself during peacetime, but that a robust sense of leisure as the aim of political action enables a regime to identify and possess itself in its own terms, without reference to its enemies. This is what Aristotle means for a properly political regime to be self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency means more than economic self-sufficiency. It means primarily moral self-sufficiency in the sense that the regime is the place where human beings can find their fullest flourishing as human beings. For Aristotle this flourishing means primarily contemplation, which is akin to how the Confucians of classical China understood things. Indeed, for Aristotle contemplation and liberal education are not simply nice things for a society to have. The existence of the regime is justified if it has a place

[11] Aristotle, Politics, VII.15. This paragraph condenses my longer analysis of the question in *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016), 58-65.

[12] Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.14.1334a2-10.

[13] Polybius, *The Histories*, 38.22.

for, and citizens aim at, contemplation as the highest good for human beings.[14] However, not everyone can or wants to be a philosopher. This is why festivity is the form of political friendship where all citizens can partake. Festivity as a civic form of contemplative togetherness of spectacle and public meaning is the civic version of philosophizing.[15]

Only a robust sense of leisure as the aim of political action can enable a regime to be itself, a regime capable of political, and not just economic or imperial, action. Only a robust sense of leisure can enable a regime to be a political regime. This is the question not only of liberal education, but of the aim of "China's rise." Does "China's rise" entail a Hobbesian ceaseless quest for power after power among its citizens and elites, not to mention China's relationships with other nations? This would be the assessment of those who regard China in terms of crony capitalism and regime decay.[16] For them, "China's rise" entails a nihilist quest for power by the ruling class whose moral and spiritual horizons are restricted to materialism and gain for themselves at the expense of others, which undermines the common good. On the other hand, perhaps the efforts of China's lawgiver, Xi Jinping, to teach his people the meaning of the good life, with numerous appeals to Confucius, are sincere and can counteract the corruption he combats.[17] Like all apparent champions of the people, his legitimacy with the people depends on him never quite defeating the corrupt ruling class.[18]

For all the ways regimes navigate, prudentially manage, or even fudge the tension between leisure and necessity, failure to acknowledge those two fundamental and contradictory aims when it comes to "China's rise" not only clouds the issues pertaining to liberal education, but clouds the governance of that regime. One can avoid the full implications of one's aims for only so long. Before turning to a fuller consideration of the aim of liberal education in the figure of Socrates, the question of social harmony must be clarified.

2. SOCIAL HARMONY

Rui Yang summarizes the social harmony argument when he writes: "[T]he role of the individual is crucially important in US liberal arts education. This is totally in conflict with the collectivist cultural value embedded throughout East Asia where every person is part of a family and a community, not the autonomous entity that is highly valued in Western tradition.

[14] Elizabeth C. Shaw, 2005. "Philosophers for the city: Aristotle and the telos of education," *Modern Age* 47 (1): 30.

[15] Heyking, *The Form of Politics*, chapters 3, 5-8.

[16] Minxin Pei, *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

[17] Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Press, 2015); Fenzhi Zhang, *Xi Jinping: How to Read Confucius and Other Classical Chinese Thinkers*, (Jericho, NY: CN Times Books Inc, 2015).

[18] This time-honoured strategy of governing a civil principality is famously explained by Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters IX and XVIII. On the difficulties found in the "Chinese ecumene" of harmonizing spiritual substance with imperial power structure, see Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 272-99.

Such an emphasis on the individual might well be the biggest challenge in translating the Western concept of liberal education to cultures beyond the Western tradition."[19] However, the harmony argument forgets Confucius' own view that harmony differs from agreement. Being surrounded by those too pusillanimous to oppose a ruler when he's wrong, and to do so publicly, he asks, "does this not come close to being a single saying that can cause a state to perish?"[20] Elsewhere in the *Analects*, it is written: "Zilu asked about serving one's lord. The Master replied, 'Do not deceive him. Oppose him openly.'"[21] Robust and quarrelsome debate, indeed dissent, are not foreign to Confucian political order.

By characterizing Western-style liberal democracy as anarchic and full of strife, the harmony argument also overlooks how liberal democracy presupposes harmony or political friendship. The Aristotelian notion of political friendship is not usually associated with the Anglo tradition of liberalism (e.g., John Locke). However, one can see it more readily in the Scottish Enlightenment tradition of common sense in Thomas Reid and even Adam Smith for whom sympathy is the glue that bonds political society. Eric Voegelin draws a direct comparison between Reid's notion of common sense and Aristotelian practical reason and political friendship when he writes: "Common sense… is the habit of judgment and conduct of a man formed by *ratio*; one could say it is the habit of an Aristotelian *spoudaios* without the luminosity of the knowledge concerning the *ratio* as the source of his rational judgment and conduct."[22]

One also must not neglect the key moment in American history when, at his First Inaugural, Abraham Lincoln transcended the Lockean individualist understanding of the American Founding and reframed the American Union in the Aristotelian terms of political friendship: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."[23] As Harry Jaffa notes, the "dominant theme in the remaining paragraphs

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[19] Rui Yang, "The East-West Axis? Liberal Arts Education in East Asian Universities," in *Liberal Arts Education and Colleges in East Asia: Possibilities and Challenges in the Global Age*, edited by Insung Jung, Mikiko Nishimura, and Toshiaki Sasao, (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 33.

[20] Confucius, *Analects*, 13.15. See 13.23.

[21] Confucius, *Analects*, 14.22.

[22] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, trans., M.J. Hanak, ed., David Walsh, vol. 6, *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 411.

[23] Lincoln, "First Inaugural," http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln1.asp. For details on Lincoln's appeal to friendship and even charity as the ground of American liberal political order, see Jürgen Gebhardt, "Abraham Lincoln—Civil Theology and the Political Theory of Republican Governance," in *Politikos—Vom Element des Persönlichen in der Politik*, hsgb., Karl-Heinz Nusser et al., (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2008), 351-76; Joseph Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith*, (Dekalb, IL: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2005); Matthew Holland, *Bonds of Affection: Civic Charity and the Making of America: Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007); Grant Havers, *Lincoln and the Politics of Christian Love*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

[of the First Inaugural], as it was in Jefferson's inaugural, is friendship as the basis of union. A subdominant theme is the right of revolution, not as a threat to the Union, but as the basis of the friendship that formed the Union."[24] Lincoln would go beyond even friendship in his Second Inaugural, near the conclusion of the Civil War, when he invoked charity as the "bond of affection" needed to heal the nation's wounds: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."[25]

If the current state of American politics displays an immoderation that undermines social harmony, it is worthwhile to remember the American presidential system is not the only type of liberal democracy. The Westminster model, like that found in Canada, is more popular worldwide and evidence suggests it works better at promoting human flourishing and protecting individual freedoms than the American model.[26] The Westminster model too offers itself as a type of political friendship, which its most notable practitioners including Winston Churchill noticed and have written about.[27] Moreover, just as the American founders understood the importance of liberal education for the American experiment of self-government, so too did the founders of parliamentary government including Canada. Canadian statesmen and educators at the time of Confederation in 1867 understood the link between liberal education and self-government which they expressed as responsible government. For example, writing a few years later as Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons (1880-1902), John George Bourinot saw a direct link between the habits of deliberation and judgment derived from parliamentary procedure and those same habits as practiced in meetings that take place "lower down" in the spaces of civil society, including businesses, churches, unions, and clubs.[28] Civil society, that web of intermediary and self-governing relationships between state and individual, is the primary way of seeing how political, or better social, friendship operates in liberal democracy.

Even so, the harmony argument has more weight if we consider it in light of the Confucian concern with observing ritual. The Confucian view of ritual sees it both in terms of customs and

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[24] Harry Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 344.

[25] Lincoln, "Second Inaugural," http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln2.asp

[26] On the comparative advantage of parliamentary systems over presidential systems in securing freedoms, see F. L. Buckley, *The Once and Future King: The Rise of Crown Government in America*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), chapters 6-9.

[27] For details, see John von Heyking, *Comprehensive Judgment and Absolute Selflessness: Winston Churchill on Politics as Friendship*, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2018), especially chapters 6 and 7.

[28] On the necessity of liberal education for parliamentary democracy, see my "Liberal Education Embedded in Civic Education for Responsible Government: The Case of John George Bourinot," in *Liberal Education, Civic Education, and the Canadian Regime: Past Principles and Present Challenges*, edited By David Livingstone, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 44-76.

mores that must be observed in order to promote social cohesion, but also as the very basis of political rule and friendship. A comparison may be drawn with the argument found in the *Laws* of Plato, where the *nomoi* are characterized not simply as "laws," or even "customs," but as songs and choruses that mark the liturgical core of the regime.[29] Festivity is form that political friendship takes. Confucius' statement, "A man who is not Good—what has he to do with ritual? A man who is not Good— what has he to do with music?" finds its counterpart in the educational program of the *Laws* that identifies choral education with civic education. The uneducated person is the unmusical person: "*apaideutos achoreutos*."[30] Concern for ritual then is a primary concern for political leaders, according to both Confucius and Plato's Athenian Stranger.

A strong argument can be made that Western liberal democracies are arrhythmic and unmusical, and much of the reason can be found in their rejection of the *nomoi*, their rituals in Confucian terms. However, an even stronger argument could be made that the cause of this has less to do with Western liberal democracies being liberal democracies than in experiencing that modern pathology of hollowing out civil society, the middle layer of intermediary institutions that insulates the individual from the state. Tocqueville worried, and historical experience has borne out, that liberal democracy would cannibalize itself in a process whereby the customs and mores that sustain community, neighborhood, and friendship, would be hollowed out.[31] If this is true of Western liberal democracies, it is even more true of mainland China.Today's moral and social crisis of mainland China is the result of the brutal hollowing out of the middle, which has led Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer to claim that "a Middle Kingdom has lost its Middle."[32] If Western liberal democracies are arrhythmic, then mainland China is more so. In this light, the complaint by east Asians that Western liberal democracies lack social harmony seems an instance of self-projection.

3. SOCRATES AND THE PURPOSE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

In order to cut through the two false alternatives—"catch up" and "social harmony"— I appeal to the original figure of Western liberal education, Socrates. Socrates indeed embodies the individual as it has been transmitted throughout the West, but he is not about individual*ism*, which, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the nineteenth-century, is a pathology specific to liberal democracy. Tocqueville defines individualism as: "a reflective and peaceable sentiment

[29] For details, see my *Form of Politics*, chapters 5-7.

[30] Confucius, *Analects*, 3.3; Plato, *Laws* 654b. See also Confucius, *Analects*, 1.12, 2.3, 3.1-26 and *Li Chi: Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia Of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, And Social Institutions*, translated by James Legge, 2 vols., New Hyde Park, N.Y. : University Books, (1967).

[31] A contemporary version of this argument is found in Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[32] Quoted by Johnson, *Souls of China*, 32. Johnson's study of the re-emergence of religion in China, which properly speaking is more the re-emergence of its *nomoi*, is structured around the rituals of the traditional Chinese calendar.

that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself."[33] Individualism is a process by which the moral, spiritual, intellectual, temporal, and spatial horizon of the individual shrinks into nearly a singularity. Tocqueville worries the solitary self makes it easy for despotism to thrive because it replaces the bonds of affection, friendship, and institutions of civil society that fill the gap between state and individual.[34] Conversely, for Socrates the individual who is not an individual*ist*, political life is a form of friendship. However, Socrates also shows us how the critical thinking ideal of liberal education — or to use a better term, philosophizing — cannot be contained within the bounds of society nor in political friendship. Socrates shows us how liberal education is first and foremost care for the soul.

Socrates cannot be easily assimilated with Asian analogies, including Confucianism.[35] Rei Yang argues that "[T]he Confucian educational ideal of '*junzi*' shares much resemblance with the 'gentlemen' in the Western context." However the Socratic philosopher differs from the Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) because the search for wisdom is superior to the virtue of magnanimity, which characterizes the gentleman.[36] The uncanny freedom of Socrates finds no counterpart in the Confucian courtier.[37] Socrates also talked about *daimonia* (*Symposium*, *Apology*), while Confucius disparaged serving "ghosts and spirits" (though even he notes that understanding "Heaven's Mandate" is key to self-knowledge).[38]

The Socratic philosopher is more like a "stray dog," which indeed is how Professor Li Ling of Peking University once described Confucius and produced considerable controversy.[39] The

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[33] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 482. I have explored how this pathology pervades how liberal democrats think about liberty and civil society in "The Challenge and Promise of Religious Associations to Liberal Democratic Order," in *Religion, Liberty, and the Jurisdictional Limits of Law*, edited by Barry Bussey and Iain Benson, (Toronto: LexisNexis Canada, 2017), 89-114.

[34] See my "Friendship: The Horizon of Our Common Life." In *Reflections on Religion and Public Life*, edited by Catherine Caufield, 59-78. Publication of Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life (University of Alberta, Augustana Campus). 2017 (https://www.ualberta.ca/augustana/research/centres/crc/publications)

[35] The literature comparing Socrates and Confucius is too extensive to cover here. See Michael A. Peters, 2015. "Socrates and Confucius: The Cultural Foundations and Ethics of Learning," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47 (5): 423-7. Relevant to the discussion below is Bai, Tongdong. 2010. "What to Do in an Unjust State?: On Confucius's and Socrates's Views on Political Duty." *Dao* 9 (4): 375. For understanding Socrates in the perspective of comparative political philosophy, see Barry Cooper, "Classical Western Political Philosophy," in *Comparative Political Philososophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree*, 2nd edition, edited by Anthony J. Parel and Ronald C. Keith, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 29-44.

[36] Rei Yang, "The East-West Axis?," 30. On magnanimity, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.4.

[37] Confucius, *Analects*, 11.2.

[38] See Confucius, *Analects*, 2.4 and 14.35.

[39] Li Ling, *Stray Dog: My Reading of "The Analects*." See Peter Moody, "How to Treat the Tradition From Confucius to Lu Xun," May 23, 2008, https://www3.nd.edu/~pmoody/Text%20Pages%20-%20Peter%20Moody%20Webpage/Stray%20Dog.pdf

label derives from Sima Qian's historical description of Confucius' wanderings where he faced assassination attempts and impoverishment. Michael Schuman describes one occasion: "When Confucius arrived at one walled city and became separated from his traveling companions, a local citizen saw him outside the gate and remarked: "Lost as a stray dog he looks!" When Confucius heard about the man's comment, all he could do was laugh. 'That is certainly true!' he exclaimed."[40] Indeed, "stray dog" is hardly a suitable translation of "*sang jia zhi quan*," which carries a more foreboding meaning of one who is cursed and whose house or perhaps even his regime is cursed.[41] This of course fits with the Athenian charge that Socrates had committed impiety and indeed that his acquittal may also ruin Athens. Indeed, could a regime ruled by Socrates function?

Both Socrates and Confucius wander and reflect the homelessness inherent in philosophizing. No regime can claim nor contain that activity. This must be kept in mind especially when considering their respective attitudes toward the political implications of philosophizing. Socrates famously describes the rule of philosopher-kings in the *Republic*, which ends up looking not only totalitarian but also a corruption of philosophizing. His rule of philosophers looks more like the rule of ideologues which characterized twentieth-century totalitarians.[42] However, I am persuaded by commentators including Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin that Socrates' plan in the *Republic* was not meant to be taken as a serious political proposal but was meant, among other things, to demonstrate the limits of such a proposal.[43] How can the perfect city be just when Socrates admits philosophers must be forced to give up philosophizing in order to rule? After all, Socrates told the Athenian jury in the *Apology* that he would rather die than give up philosophizing. The perfect city ends up being not only impractical on account of philosophers not wanting to rule and everyone else rejecting philosophers as rulers, but because the idea of philosopher-kings inherently contradicts the principle of one-person, one job at the core of the city's justice. The rot that leads to the perfect city's decomposition resides at its very root. It seems (purposely) flawed in theory; its shortcoming is not simply a practical matter. As an anti-utopia, the *Republic* shows the destruction of wisdom when one tries combining it so closely with political power. Those who give up ceaselessly seeking wisdom in favor of imposing orthodoxy onto others are today rightfully regarded as brutal ideologues.

As such, the *Republic* teaches us to moderate our expectations of how much philosophy can help heal politics because its primary political teaching is that just political rule begins with self-rule, the rule of our own reason over the passions. Tilo Schabert explains how the "city in

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[40] Michael Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 22, citing the report by Sima Qian, *Records of the Historian*, 11. See also the report in the *Analects* on the starvation he and his disciples faced (15.2).

[41] I thank Mr. Jin Jin for pointing this out to me.

[42] As argued, most famously, by Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 1, (New York: Routledge, 2013 [1945]).

[43] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 50-138; Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle, Order and History III*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 46-134.

speech" is the paradigm of the human soul: "The *kallipolis* already 'existed' before human beings discovered it. It lies in the act of putting thoughtful dialogue on stage; it is not fashioned for the first time in this dialogue. A paradigm's strength lies precisely in its power of actualization. Human beings can follow a paradigm because it is already a form of their actuality."[44] Liberal education then is the means of this self-rule, which is prior to any plan of ameliorating politics. Justice cannot be imposed from above. It must be cultivated in one soul at a time.

Self-rule is also the goal of Confucian education. Like Socrates, Confucius thought good government is impossible without self-rule. Unlike Socrates whose daimon always warned him to avoid politics, Confucius ceaselessly sought to counsel rulers. Schuman explains this was his primary professional goal: "His life was a nearly nonstop quest for senior government office and high-level influence—a perch from which he could proselytize his ideas on good government…. The real Confucius comes across as something of a social climber and self-promoter, constantly networking and schmoozing in his efforts to land a good job."[45]

The examples of Socrates and his daimon, and the paradoxical proposals of philosopher-kings in the *Republic*, contrast with Confucius' aim to counsel rulers. From a Socratic perspective, the Confucian overlooks the paradoxes and problems associated with the political program of combining wisdom with political power. For Socrates, combining these two is inherently problematic if not impossible while Confucius appears to regard them as a natural fit. From a Socratic perspective, the attempt to combine wisdom and power requires that wisdom be compromised, diluted, or lowered. If we cannot expect those who are currently kings to take up philosophy, and if we cannot expect those who are currently philosophizing to become kings, then perhaps the next best thing is to follow Aristotle's recipe for their rapprochement by replacing the philosophic wisdom of the philosopher with the practical wisdom of the statesman, which aims lower.

Confucius seems to share Aristotle's recipe for harmonizing thought and political power. However, Aristotle seems more conscious than Confucius of what his recipe leaves behind, and the trade-offs he needs to make, which can be seen in Aristotle's insistence on finding room in the political regime for contemplation. Moreover, those engaged in contemplation are not likely to be its rulers; there is something about contemplation that transcends the regime which does not appear to be the case for Confucius. For Aristotle, liberal education takes place within political society but cannot be contained by it. One measure of the difference between Socrates (and Aristotle) and Confucius is that it is common to characterize Confucian thought as the basis of China's civil religion. Kissinger refers to Confucianism as "China's Bible and its constitution combined" while Schuman documents the numerous ways that it sets the terms for

[44] Tilo Schabert, *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence*, translated by Javier Ibáñez-Noé, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 71.

[45] Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, 10-11.

Chinese political ethics and amounts to state orthodoxy.[46] Conversely, I can think of no historical examples of a Socratic civil religion.[47]

Liberal education expressed as Socratic philosophizing poses a challenge not only for Asian cultures, but also for the Western ones in which it originated. As the exemplary free person, Socrates simultaneously belongs to no one and belongs to all. Let us also bear in mind that Socrates was tried and executed by the regime dedicated to freedom. The figure of Socrates teaches us important lessons for liberal education and for what we should expect liberal education to do for Asian cultures.

4. SOCRATIC FREEDOM AS BASIS OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

Socrates is the model teacher because dialectic or conversation among friends—question and answer with interlocutors — takes the form of a liberation, a releasing, of one's soul from not only ignorance, but also of the passions and vices that reinforce our ignorance and our vicious presumption that our ignorance is a form of wisdom. Socratic philosophizing is a liberation from ignorance and a turn to the search of wisdom. Perplexity is the essential Socratic condition. I know that I do not know, which spurs me to wonder and to seek and to ask questions with others. Socratic philosophizing is more than a mere academic exercise because it aims at making us just. The most important questions involve asking how I should live my life and how we should live our lives together. Like the gadfly to which Socrates compares himself, philosophizing stings us and thus works to release us from those passions and vices that prevent our wondering and questioning. It stings our pride, love of reputation and honor, fear, sexual immoderation, love of wealth, fear of disrupting social harmony, fear of puncturing ideological lies, fear of suffering injustice, and our fear of violent and ignomious death. It strives to liberate us from the political, social, and individual forces that hinder our ceaseless desire for truth and justice.

Socrates fearlessly told Athenians that he alone, not politicians like Pericles or Themistocles, practiced the true art of politics because he alone was capable of morally improving the Athenians.[48] The so-called great statesmen of Athens were competent only at making Athenians "lazy, cowardly, [and] babbling money-lovers" because they pandered to bodily appetites.[49] No wonder the politicians supported the indictment against him. Recall too that the charge that

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[46] Kissinger, *On China*, 14; Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*.

[47] On the concept of civil religion in the West, see *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, Ronald Weed and John von Heyking, eds., (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010). V. Bradley Lewis's essay on Plato in this volume focuses on Plato's *Laws* where the main character is notably the Athenian Stranger, not Socrates ("Gods for the City and Beyond: Civil Religion in Plato's *Laws*," 19-46).

[48] Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d.

[49] Plato, "Gorgias," in *Plato, Gorgias and Aristotle, Rhetoric*, trans., Joe Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2009), 515e, 518a-b.

Socrates invents new gods and corrupts the youth was meant to include that he undermined the family ties of the Athenian people.[50]

Socrates was afraid of nothing except that in ignorance he might commit injustice. Many of his conversations were attempts by him to convince Athenians that committing injustice is the worst of all evils, even worse than suffering injustice. His relentless quest for truth that eventually led to his execution made him the freest man of all. Nothing, not love of wealth, not love of honour, not sexual appetite, not fear of shame, not fear of dishonor, not fear of ostracism, nor fear of being killed could stop him.

Like eros, Socrates is always on the move; he is homeless, a stray dog. In the *Phaedo* he refers to philosophizing as the practice of dying.[51] The freedom of Socrates is the ideal of freedom (*liber*) that is at the heart of liberal education. Liberal education is liberating and it seems to aspire to the dignity of the person in a way that transcends his or her place in society. Liberal education recognizes that as citizens we are a part of greater whole but fundamentally the person is greater than the whole. This is why the ancient Greeks placed friendship above the political common good: our human good transcends the political good. Aristotle identifies friendship with liberal education when describes the core of friendship as constituent of our humanity:

> But one's being is choiceworthy on account of the awareness of oneself as being good, and such an awareness is pleasant in itself. Therefore one also ought to share in a friend's awareness that he *is* [or share his friend's consciousness of his existence – *sunaisthanesthai hoti estin*], and this would come through living together and sharing conversation and thinking; for this would seem to be what living together means in the case of human beings.[52]

For the ancient Greeks, and I think it is true for us, liberal education is essentially "living together and sharing conversation and thinking" about the good with friends. Our deepest friendships, and the relations that are the most meaningful—more meaningful even than those we share with fellow citizens— are those with whom we are transformed in our shared loving quest to understand what is the human good. Aristotle uses a rare term, "*sunaisthesis*," which can be translated as "joint-perception" to describe how souls of friends unite most intimately, most meaningfully, and most strongly, in their co-perception of the good and the beautiful. It is an act of intellectual and emotional triangulation where my perception of the good and the beautiful is inseparable from my perception of it with you who shares that perception while perceiving me. Compared to all other human experiences and relationships, "*sunaisthesis*" is

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[50] Kevin Rabb, "*Asebeia* and *Sunousia*: The Issue behind the Indictment of Socrates," in Gerald A. Press, ed., *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations,* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 77-106.

[51] Plato, *Phaedo*, 67e.

[52] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Joe Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), 1170b10–12.

"most intense and best."[53] This accords with but pushes further Confucius' own view, for whom friendship is one of the key human relationships and indeed he seems to have placed more emphasis on it than on his family relations for reasons similar to what Aristotle lists of the core of friendship.

Liberal education then has its origin in the discovery by the ancient Greek philosophers and mystics that human beings discover their humanity in their loving questioning of themselves in community with one another of the truth of their existence.

5. LIBERAL EDUCATION AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

This discovery of our humanity as restless questioners originated in the earlier discovery in history of a unique realm of human interaction and friendship that enables human beings to mature and to actualize our humanity. This unique realm is called "politics." The Greek discovery of politics is the discovery of a realm of being in which individuals freely come together in a common life, and exercise responsibility for their own actions before one another. This is why liberal education must aim at civic or political engagement, and not just economic or social engagement. The practical experience students gain by interning at businesses is useful but insufficient. The practical experience students gain by interning with service organizations and charities is useful but insufficient. Liberal education must aim too at cultivating the political virtues of deliberation and judging, of acting responsibly on behalf of others and of learning how to negotiate and build coalitions.[54] They must learn the arts of friendship that constitute the basis of political life.

This is not to suggest that liberal education aims at producing "social justice warriors" who protest "the establishment," which seems to be the aim of liberal education for many deans at North American liberal arts colleges. While protest has its place, it is not the entirety of political virtue. Liberal and civic education aims higher by cultivating the deliberative virtues that go along with responsible self-government. Liberal education can assist freedom and self-government, and liberal education also needs political freedom. Tyrannical regimes suck the oxygen out of the life of the mind and the hypocrisy lack of freedom produces insinuates self-censorship into the mind, making thought itself extremely difficult. This is why, for instance, students in tyrannical regimes are so prone to replacing critical thought with sloganeering ideological lies.[55] In these circumstances, liberal education is an anamnestic endeavor to recover the reality that the ideological lies have covered.[56]

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[53] For details, see my *The Form of Politics*, chapter 2. Aristotle refers to "*sunaisthesis*" as "most intense and best" at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b25.

[54] I have outlined one such model of civically engaged liberal education in "Liberal Education Embedded in Civic Education for Responsible Government."

[55] Consider the difficulties Suki Kim had teaching North Korean students how to write essays (*Without You, There is No Us: My Time With the Sons of North Korea's Elite*, (New York: Crown, 2014)).

[56] For details on Eric Voegelin's attempt at such anamnetic recovery, see his *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed., Ellis Sandoz, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011) and *The Eric Voegelin Reader: Politics,*

Jürgen Gebhardt describes the ancient Greek discovery of politics as a realm where humanity enacts its freedom:

> The discovery of a realm of being that coincides with the realm of human interaction and culminates in a common or public dimension of activity was the historical event that exposes the very constituent of man's humanity as it partakes of a more comprehensive structured reality. This event made paramount to men the differentiated realm of being and defined politics in terms of the structure of human existence newly perceived as the tension between order and disorder, fullness and want, mortality and immortality, and time and eternity…. This new experiential mode of the differentiated reality of God, nature, man, and society opened up to man's activities a realm of being (i.e., politics), which enabled Western man to start the enterprise of modern civilization. Naturally, the realm of politics is neither purely secular nor purely sacred. It is the area of "in between" that comprises the two poles of existential experience, time and eternity.[57]

Gebhardt shows how political life (as distinguished from philosophical contemplation) constitutes a unique stratum of human experience. Just as one might distinguish the various strata of human experience into its constituent parts, including inorganic, vegetative, animalic, psyche (passions), psyche (noetic), so too Gebhardt notes that a key constituent of our make up as human beings is politics.[58] This is what Aristotle means when he describes human beings as political animals on account of our capacity for making speeches regarding the just and the advantageous—the stuff of politics.[59] At the core of political life and therefore of our humanity is the activity of living together and persuading one another about how best to achieve the good life. This activity also characterizes our freedom.

Aristotle and other ancient political philosophers arguably provide a more coherent account of our political freedom than even modern liberal philosophers like John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau because their "natural man," the basis for modern natural right, is an abstraction that is blind to the paradoxes of political power. Tilo Schabert points out that "natural man" is "only a para-empirical product; it is also put together in thought without consideration of anthropogonic logic, a logic that is demonstrated in a truly exemplary manner in every human being in the nakedness of his or her bodily existence."[60] As many Asians acknowledge, the presumptive universalism of liberalism, reflected in the notion of "natural man," masks

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History, Consciousness, eds., Charles R. Embry and Glenn Hughes, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2017).

[57] Jürgen Gebhardt, "The Origins of Politics in Ancient Hellas: Old Interpretations and New Perspectives," in *Sophia and Praxis: The Boundaries of Politics*, ed., J.M. Porter, (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1984), 2.

[58] See Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience," in *Published Essays, 1966-1985, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, ed., Ellis Sandoz, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 289.

[59] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a2.

[60] Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 29. See his chapter, "In Freedom," Ibid., 113-22.

Western parochialism, which is something even Rousseau recognized when he said Hobbesian "natural man" is simply an Englishman. What is right by nature according to Plato and Aristotle is arguably more complex and more rigourous than modern natural right.[61] The abstract nature of liberal rights that Asians often hear Western liberals offer is due to the tendency of Westerners to justify liberty in terms of theory instead of a practice and tradition centered upon the luminous core and dignity of the person.[62]

Aristotle captures well how free citizenship is inherent to our humanity when he defines citizenship in an unqualified sense as "taking part in judging and ruling" in a regime of political friendship where citizens take turns ruling and being ruled.[63] Contrast Aristotle's endeavour to distribute political wisdom among citizens with Confucius' reasons for restricting it: "When the Way prevails in the world, commoners do not debate matters of government."[64] Slingerland notes this saying is the traditional ideal of Chinese government that remains alive today: "political debate among common people is a sign of disorder, because in a properly run state, the people will be busy and content, and will have no cause to form or express opinions about how the state is being run."[65] Conversely, for Aristotle and for Plato, there is always something to debate because political time is always in motion; it is in the realm of in-between, of coming-into-being and degeneration. There is no utopian stoppage to political time.[66]

Plato's dialogues show Socrates not only discovering politics in a differentiated realm of being that is the place for our actualization of humanity, they also show him effecting that realm, of constituting politics. That is the deepest meaning of his startling claim that only he, not Pericles or Themistocles, is the genuine practitioner of the art of politics. His endeavors to convince fellow Athenians that justice is better than injustice, that committing injustice is the worst of all evils, and that suffering injustice is thereby a lesser evil, are his demiurgic attempt to wrest order out of chaos, to make justice at least in the soul a possibility.[67]

In this sense, Confucius was on the same "political" mission as Socrates of effecting the rule of reason over passions, of justice over injustice. The *Analects* reports on his disciple Zilu complaining to him of their suffering during their wanderings in the state of Chen: "Upset, Zilu

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[61] Eric Voegelin, "What is Right By Nature?" in *Anamnesis*, 140-56; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

[62] For such person-based approach to liberty (but not ideological liberal*ism*), see David Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994) and *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016). See also "Afterword" in *The Souls of China*, 396-400.

[63] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275a24, III.4-5, VI.2.1317b3.

[64] Confucius, *Analects*, 16.1).

[65] Slingerland comment in Confucius, *Analects*, 16.2 (p. 193).

[66] See "In Time," in Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 96-104.

[67] For details of this attempt to constitute the possibility of politics as political friendship, see my *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*, chapters 5 to 7.

appeared before the Master and said, 'Does even the gentleman encounter hardship?'"[68] Confucius responds that yes, but he does not complain. The point of this exchange is to raise the question of why the just suffer equally if not more than the unjust. If even the gentleman suffers injustice, then what does that say about the possibility of establishing a just regime? Schuman explains: "Confucius's message was clear and simple: a good man must maintain his commitment to virtue under all circumstances, and not expect any recompense in return."[69] The establishment of justice seems to oblige the just human being to suffer the greatest of injustices—the reputation of being unjust.[70] The obverse of this point is that moral power is the greatest political power.[71]

Socratic politics as liberal education consists of creating and sustaining a republic of learners, bound together in friendship, loving truth expressed as questioning, and being grateful toward others for correcting one and for being released from ignorance. Socratic learners are grateful, not resentful, when they are proven wrong because that is the means of obtaining wisdom. This attitude is also marked by freedom and friendship. Socrates remarks in the *Republic* and Plato says in his own name in his *Seventh Letter* that when the corruption of one's society has rendered the authority of its rulers, its laws, and its customs illegitimate, then the only way that politics can be regenerated is by friends joining together in loving questioning and conversation concerning the good and the beautiful.

Socrates converses with the youth who find not only their city's laws but their elders have lost moral authority. He converses with them in the *Republic* at night in the house of Cephalus, who is not even an Athenian citizen. Cephalus is more like the hundreds of thousands of expats and permanent residents of many east Asian cosmopolises. Plato writes in his own name: "For I saw it was impossible to do anything without friends and loyal followers; and to find such men ready to hand would be a piece of sheer good luck, once our city was no longer guided by the customs and practices of our fathers, while to train up new ones was anything but easy."[72] The wanderings of Confucius and his disciples shows the same phenomenon. Schuman notes the significance that for all the emphasis Confucius places upon the family, "it is revealing that Confucius traveled not with his family, but with his disciples."[73] Politics begins with and among friends, and it also seems to aim at friendship: "What may be the greatest legacy of Confucius the man is the group of loyal disciples he left behind—learned men every bit as committed to Confucius's ideals and goals as the sage himself. It would be these followers, and the many more to come, who would transform Confucius from a failed statesman into the most

[68] Confucius, *Analects*, 15.2.

[69] Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, 23.

[70] See Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2007) 361a.

[71] Confucius, *Analects*, 13.1, 12.17, 2.1; Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, 27.

[72] Plato, "Epistle VII," 325d, in *Plato's Epistles*, trans., Glenn R. Morrow, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962).

[73] Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, 17.

influential individual in East Asian history."[74] Socrates signals this same genesis of a new politics when he concludes his defence speech before the Athenians:

> This much, however, I beg of them: when my sons grow up, punish them, men, and pain them in the very same way I pained you, if they seem to you to care for money or anything else before virtue. And if they are reputed to be something when they are nothing, reproach them just as I did you: tell them that they do not care for the things they should, and that they suppose they are something when they are worth nothing. And if you do these things, we will have been treated justly by you, both I myself and my sons.[75]

By exhorting the Athenian men who had just condemned him, Socrates inaugurates them into the new just city that he has founded along with his friends whom he calls his sons.

6. LIBERAL EDUCATION, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE GENESIS OF POLITICS

Numerous dissidents of tyrannical regimes take up and read the writings of the great philosophers, including those of Plato, because the corruption of their society compels them to rethink politics as the realm of our humanity from the ground up. Mark Lilla reflects on the intellectual focus of east European dissident writers:

> My conversations in China reminded me of political discussions I used to have in Communist Poland in the mid- '80s, after the coup and while Solidarity's power was at its nadir. To my surprise, the people I met then—academics, journalists, artists, writers—were more anxious to talk about Plato and Hegel than about contemporary affairs, and not as a means of escape. For them, the classics were just what dark times demanded. I was particularly impressed with the publisher of a small samizdat magazine printed on terrible, waxy paper, who referred everything back to the Platonic dialogues. When post-Communist Poland failed to meet his high expectations, he became a minister in the right-wing Kaczyński government, somehow confusing Kraków with Athens, and Warsaw with Syracuse.[76]

One finds similar phenomena elsewhere, including mainland China.

Socratic philosophizing means we can never place our full faith in the laws and customs of our particular regimes, including also liberal democratic ones. Each new generation must rethink their humanity from the ground up, quite often in the homes of friends as Socrates speaks with his friends at night in the home of Cephalus, and in the twentieth-century when Jan Patočka

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[74] Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*, 32.

[75] Plato, "Apology of Socrates," in *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans., Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 41e.

[76] Lilla, "Reading Strauss in Beijing: China's Strange Taste in Western Philosophers," *New Republic*, December 30, 2010, 15.

delivered his *Plato and Europe* lectures in the last years of his life under communism in Czechoslovkia, and Eric Voegelin who helped young Germans rebuild their post-war society.[77] Voegelin in particular was a "father" to several students in post-war Germany.[78] Teachers of liberal education must necessarily be inventors of new gods and corruptors of the youth, and accept the risks that go along with that vocation.

So far I have been speaking about Socratic soulcraft in the general sense. Permit me to summarize and then to make a few comments on what this might mean for Asian cultures and political regimes. Note that I have dispensed with the trendy buzzwords of "critical thinking" popular in discussion of liberal education. I do so because they obscure what is essential to the paradoxical figure of Socrates, which shows our humanity is somehow rooted in a realm of being beyond any particular regime which means that the human person transcends the collective good of whatever regime in which he or she lives. As citizens we are parts of the greater whole of our political regime; as persons we are wholes greater than our regime. Politics as a differentiated realm whereby we actualize our humanity can only be constituted when our humanity is actualized by a transcendent source of being beyond politics.

East Asians do not need me to remind them of the precarious state of freedom in many parts of East Asia. I am speaking more of the Socratic form of freedom than the liberal democratic form of freedom Westerners like me like to promote, though I like that kind of freedom too. The Periclean and Themistoclean focus, for instance, on "China's rise" and on East Asian economic development, illiberally reduces liberal education to a servant of technology and instrumental reason, and reduces politics to a field of power relations with little concern for whether that field is conducive to human flourishing and political friendship. Politics thus reduced just feeds cynicism, opportunism, corruption, and xenophobic nationalism.

But those committed to liberal education must, like Socrates and even Confucius, be like a voice in the wilderness, or stray dog, who insists that living in truth means understanding that committing injustice is the worst of all evils, and liberating minds and hearts of the impediments of the opposite of that view, which is the view of tyrant. It entails viewing the art of politics as the art of caring for souls, instead of the art of pandering to bodily desires, including those associated with national chauvinism and crass opportunism. The liberty of liberal education is found in liberating one's soul from those errors, in community and friendship with those struggling to be liberated. Liberal education aims at care of the soul who struggles with other souls to enact its humanity in freedom.

Liberal education has a cost. Socrates was executed. Jan Patočka, nicknamed the "Socrates of Prague," was marginalized for twenty years while working as a clerk, and later died at the

[77] Petr Lom, "Foreword," in Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans., Petr Lom, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv; John von Heyking, "The Art of the *Periagoge*: Eric Voegelin as Teacher," in *Teaching in an Age of Ideology*, eds., Lee Trepanier and John von Heyking, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 87-113.

[78] Barry Cooper and Jodi Bruhn, eds., *Voegelin Recollected: Conversations on a Life*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 112-16.

hands of communist authorities for his leadership of the Charter 77 group. God knows how many Socrateses have learned to die in prison camps and struggle sessions throughout the world.

Vowing to prevent future Socrateses from being executed, Plato wrote dialogues to promote the public value of philosophy and to establish an orthodoxy that committing injustice is the worst of all evils. He also claims he never wrote down his most serious thoughts.[79] This is what Plato meant by irony, which is at least rooted in the philosopher's awareness that non-philosophers are probably right to be wary of their uncanny skills at dialectic.[80] In this vein Adeimantus complains to Socrates: "They believe that from inexperience in questioning and answering they're led a little off course by the argument at each question, and when the little deflections have added up at the end of the discussion, a big blunder blazes up that's opposite to the things they said in the first place, and like unskilled checker players who end up getting backed into a corner by people who are skilled at it."[81]

Philosophers are used to establishing "second societies".[82] Perhaps it is for reasons of irony that when Chinese students read Leo Strauss's commentaries on Socrates, they find his discussion of the gentleman most relevant to their own experience.[83] Perhaps liberal education universities can tap into the Confucian vein of east Asian culture and educate a future ruling class whose love of truth and justice makes them resistant to sycophancy and ideological lies. Such efforts would have to pay close attention to the career trajectory of those like Wang Huning, the scholar of political thought who is now mainland China's "hidden leader," whose presence at elite levels demonstrates how liberal education can face the "formidable constitutive questions and challenges facing the nation."[84] Whether he is truly Socratic, however, is another question. Finally, Strauss notes, "a slight bias in favor of laughing and against weeping seems to be essential to philosophy."[85] Online *egao* as "politics by other means" might be yet another example, this time the ironic use of irony, of Socratic politics.[86]

7. CONCLUSION

[79] Epistle VII, 344c.

[80] The other root is Plato's recognition of the apophatic manner by which we encounter truth of the highest things. For discussion, see James M. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 113-81.

[81] Plato, *Republic*, 487b.

[82] Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution*, chapter 22.

[83] Lilla, "Reading Strauss in Beijing," 16. On the importance of Leo Strauss in China, see Kai Marchal and Carl K.Y. Shaw, eds., *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss in the Chinese-Speaking World*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

[84] Haig Patapan and Yi Wang, "The Hidden Ruler: Wang Huning and the Making of Contemporary China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, published online, August 2017, DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2017.1363018

[85] Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed., Thomas Pangle, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 206.

[86] Shih-Diing Liu, "The Cyberpolitics of the Governed," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 14(2) 2013: 252-71.

Socratic irony then is the attempt by the Socratic philosopher to find a home for him and friends of truth in a world that is largely hostile to the quest for justice, and the care of souls. Schools dedicated to liberal education must find their own ways to negotiate a home for themselves with careful attention to the moral and spiritual possibilities their particular political regimes hold. They need to cultivate an intellectually honest and ethically grounded practical wisdom that enables them to make necessary trade-offs that enable them to stay the course of their mission and to avoid straying from it. Concentrating too much on the means of delivering liberal education can obscure focus on its aim and purpose. One can avoid the full implications of one's aims for only so long, which makes it imperative always to keep the figure of Socrates always in focus.

Staying on course is extremely difficult because the mission of liberal education to wonder and to wander. The course —the pathway out of the cave— is anything but straight. In the words of Laozi, "A Way that can be followed is not a constant Way."[87] Stray dogs are homeless and restless, living on the street, much the way Socrates describes philosophic eros when he says: "he's always poor and, far from being tender and beautiful, as the many suppose, is instead tough and dried out, shoeless and homeless, always stretched out on the ground and without blankets, lying down in doorways and on roads in the open air."[88]

[87] Laozi, *The Daodejing of Laozi*, translated by Philip J. Ivanhoe, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003) 1.

[88] Plato, *Symposium*, translated by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017), 203c-d.