

## **ASPECTS REGARDING THE WISE COUNCELLOR FROM CONFUCIUS TO MICHEL FOUCAULT**

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*Abstract: Most rulers along history have had counsellors. Being more or less official counsellors, they have influenced the rulers all over the world to conquer territories and gather as much power as they could or to structure themselves and implement a superior vision of the world to help the subjects live a better life and to have higher expectations from life.*

*Confucius advised the ruler to be a junzi, that is, a superior man, a real model for all who were socially placed below him. From ancient times on, there have been plenty of counsellors, some of them becoming famous for the way they have helped their princes or kings rule for a long time. All such rulers have resisted especially because of the qualities of their advisors.*

*Our article intends to underline the fact that what is more important than resisting in a position (social or political) for a long time is the quality of the character of the ruler, the quality of his message to his subjects. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in the 80's, in France, philosopher Michel Foucault developed such a theory, based on a Greek term-parresia- meaning honesty, sincerity, stating that we can make a clear difference between discourses (mostly political)- which could be private or public, structuring the audience or manipulating it. Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Foucault, to name just some masters, insisted on the type of discourse whose message is benign for the audience, and whose source is a self-developed character, a superior being, the Confucian junzi.*

*Keywords: junzi, wisdom, responsibility, power, governance, discourse, self development, model, character*

Motto:

*He who rules his state on a moral basis would be supported by his people.*

*We can understand a man by observing what he does, how he arrived at his present position and how he feels about it. Then, is there anything about him we do not understand?*

*Gentlemen unite instead of conspiring; petty men conspire instead of uniting.*

*Open your ears to all kinds of advice and opinions, set aside what is obvious and put forward those assured ones discreetly. You will thereby make fewer mistakes. Open your eyes to all kinds of things, set aside the doubtful ones and practise those assured ones carefully. You will thereby have fewer regrets.*

*People will obey you if you promote righteous men and suppress evil men...Be upright in their presence, and they will hold you in respect; be filial and benevolent, and they will be loyal to you; use the righteous and instruct the unqualified, and they will try their best in service...how can one be acceptable without being trustworthy in words?*

*Confucius, Analects*

This short discourse made up of Confucius's ideas is able, I hope, to suggest the profile of the counsellor that Confucius was himself and, at the same time, to underline the moral values on which the ruler ( junzi ) is expected to build his authority. The ruler as a *junzi* is expected to be a model for his subjects in order to install harmony in society, and for this he needs a good advisor, who is himself a wise man. For Confucius, the idea that the ruler should be a *junzi* ( a superior man) is a condition that is to be fulfilled if the subjects are to be changed for the good. This improvement can happen only if they all have an example of sincere goodness, thus, when *the junzi possesses the qualities of virtue, faithfulness, and sincerity...the junzi therefore sets a good example to his people. If the leader's desire is for good, the people will be good.*<sup>1</sup>As we can see, Confucius believed that the ruler *sets an example to his subjects (because) a wise and just*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Politics Book*, London, D.K., 2013, p. 22

*sovereign had a benign effect on the character of his subjects.*<sup>2</sup>The Chinese Master and Counsellor compared the authority of the ruler to the traditional authority of pater familias and he insisted that, as the head of the family had full authority over his family as well as full responsibility for it, the ruler had to set the example and install the virtues that he himself practised. The condition for this was that the ruler (prince or king) had to be himself a model, a junzi, that is, a superior person in virtues and qualities and through his ideas, policies and decisions he, too, had the responsibilities to disperse them with the help of his ministers. As a result, his subjects had a chance to emulate his virtues, including his goodness. Thus, Confucius regarded the sovereign as being superior, as he had the task *to model perfect behaviour, setting a good example to those below him.*<sup>3</sup> All those who were in charge with the implementation of the ruler's decisions had to respect the ruler as well as the people below them because these *ministers and advisors played an important role as 'middle men' between the sovereign and his subjects. They had a duty of loyalty to both parties.*<sup>4</sup>

The intensity of the communication based on respect and honesty makes the Master to be perceived as the messenger of the transcendental Truth. As long as the counsellor structures his disciple (prince, king, ruler of any kind) towards good and virtue, the force of personal example is fundamental. Being a Master/Counsellor is an exercise of Power, because *the knowledge transmitted is a form of power: Who is the master? To whom is the knowledge transmitted? For what purpose? The Master has power at more levels: psychological, social, physical. His authority is institutional or charismatic or both.*<sup>5</sup> Learning by asking brings people towards self discovery and self development, starting the journey towards the inner world, orienting the search to the discovery of ourselves. Disciples *not only learn to ask about the exterior world but also about the interior one. It's a journey towards the self.*<sup>6</sup>

Master Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics said, referring to the authority of Good which is to be perceived by all of us, that *every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that*

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>5</sup> George Steiner, *Maestri si discipoli*, Bucuresti, Editura Compania, 2005, p.13

<sup>6</sup> Augusto Cury, *Parinti straluciti, Profesori fascinanti*, Bucuresti, Editura For You, 2005. p. 128

*at which all things aim...If, then, there is some end of the things we do...clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life?*<sup>7</sup> Developing his idea on good, Aristotle associates it to knowledge and choice and states that political science itself aims at the same goal which is represented by good. He continues by observing that most men identify the good or happiness with pleasure *which is the reason they love the life of enjoyment...But people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honour; for this is, roughly speaking, the end of the political life.*<sup>8</sup>

This fundamental distinction and difference in perception between common people and superior people, present in Aristotle's work and vision as well as in the works of many other thinkers and philosophers should be interpreted as a difference in the degree of awareness of the self. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their book on *The Social Construction of Reality*, also referring to this distinction, add more elements so that the difference becomes not only clearer but also solvable. They consider that common people could think they have freedom of will and consequently are responsible for their acts but they deny this freedom and responsibility to children or insane people, for example. Philosophers, on the other hand, irrespective of methods, will always be preoccupied by the ontological and epistemological status of these notions. They will always ask such questions: *Is human being free? What does responsibility mean? Which are the limits of responsibility? How can somebody find the answers regarding all these questions? And so on.*<sup>9</sup> This distinction is not a horizontal one. It does not refer to the quality of people but to the quality and degree of their awareness and the level of their perception. All people could get to a higher level of perception and awareness if educated properly. Education is the key. Genuine education, that kind of education which is oriented towards self discovery and self development. In a world without discrimination of any kind we could be all 'philosophers', that is, more aware of ourselves and more responsible. Philosopher Constantin Noica wrote that individuality, as a form of manifestation, as a unit of creation, *means being suspended, as it has departed from something, by assuming a personal face. By manifesting itself, the individuality has come out of the condition and the security of being into something. It must, at the price of*

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, apud *Philosophy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 610

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>9</sup> Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *Construirea sociala a realitatii*, Bucuresti, Editura Art, 2008, pp. 10-11

falling into non-being, enter a form of **being into**. This makes the difference between- the individual and the particular...(as) the individual belongs to something bigger and has to become, to develop.<sup>10</sup> Our world belongs to something bigger and better at the same time while the programmes of the universe as well as of our own life contain the Platonic essences: the Truth, the Good, the Beautiful, as manifestations of universal Harmony. Plato himself had a great master- Socrates. Plato too had a great disciple- Aristotle, who in his turn had a famous disciple- Alexander the Great. From great masters we can expect to rise great disciples. When we invest in people we make the best investment possible.

Aristotle with his *theory on good* is not only right but still relevant to the present moment . By focusing on the complexity of this concept and by giving more perspectives of it, he helps us better understand the relevance of this concept for the present. *The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking...Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action...We must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean.*<sup>11</sup> He adds that, from the perspective of good, the function of man is an activity of soul accompanied if possible by the rational principle, and also that the activity of soul should be *in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete (intellectual and moral)* .<sup>12</sup> Aristotle continues by stating that **intellectual excellence** owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while **moral excellence** comes about as a result of habit... *For the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing...so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. This is confirmed by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator...and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind...It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather **all** the difference...Therefore it is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good ...It is clear, then, from what has been said,*

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<sup>10</sup> Constantin Noica, *Sentimentul romanesc al fiintei*, Bucuresti, Humanitas, 1996, pp. 73-74

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Op. Cit.* pp.610-611

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 612

*that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral excellence.*<sup>13</sup>

Going backwards in time to the moment when Confucius was developing his ideas into a theory of the superior human being – the junzi as a ruler, we must add that from this perspective the people, being given *a good example to follow and a clear idea of what was expected of them, would behave correctly.*<sup>14</sup>To conclude for the moment, we have to mention that Confucius considered that all in all *good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father and the son being a son.*<sup>15</sup>Our Romanian tradition too has similar ideas when speaking of *the proper man in the proper position* or that *the human being brings holiness to a place*. This is common sense, which is natural in educated and responsible people. Today, more than before, all these ideas could seem to be old fashioned or even utopian. As we are living in a postmodern world, the question is if we are to abandon all traditions which, along centuries, have structured ourselves and the world around us? Is it really impossible to preserve moral values, virtues as components of our basic education and behaviour? Master K'ung( Confucius) was sure that virtue(education) could be cultivated by anyone and spread all over society. *Having himself risen to be a minister of the Zhou court, he believed that it was a duty of the middle classes, as well as the rulers, to strive to act with virtue (de) and benevolence (ren) to achieve a just and stable society*<sup>16</sup>. The Chinese Master *argues that the virtuous man is not simply one who stands at the top of the social hierarchy, but one who understands his place within that hierarchy and embraces it to the full.*<sup>17</sup> Master Confucius developed a concept which is made up of virtue (de), loyalty (zhong), filial piety (xiao), ritual propriety(li) and reciprocity (shu), moral values cherished by the Chinese tradition, a concept defining *the various means of acting in accordance with virtue(de)*<sup>18</sup>. The concept could be translated as *a man of virtue*, a continuously learning person, honest, respectful and of good manners, a real *junzi*. This *junzi*, according to Confucius, is the person who practises all these values in a sincere way and also tries to install them in all the others. When the ruler can be called a *junzi*, faithfulness and

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 612-618

<sup>14</sup> *The Politics Book*, p. 24

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>16</sup> *The Philosophy Book*, London, D.K., 2011, p. 37

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*

sincerity allow *virtue* to become visible. Thus *virtue* is made manifest to the world and can then be seen by the others who could be transformed by it. As a consequence, *faithfulness and sincerity have the power of transformation*.<sup>19</sup> Focusing on sincerity, Confucius wrote that *sincerity becomes apparent. From being apparent, it becomes manifest. From being manifest, it becomes brilliant. Brilliant, it affects others. Affecting others, they are changed by it. Changed by it, they are transformed*.<sup>20</sup> But Confucius insists that *only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under Heaven, can transform*.<sup>21</sup>

We can see that the personal model is vital in influencing the others, in modelling them, in cultivating virtues around us. In spite of all we say, what we do is always more important, the responsibility of our behaviour is of paramount importance. Confucius also insisted on the concept of faithfulness (*zhong*) which also means *regard for others* that is respect and responsibility. He believed that *one can learn to become a superior man by first recognizing what one does not know...and then by watching other people: if they show virtue, try to become their equal; if they are inferior, be their guide*.<sup>22</sup> This attitude including *regard for others* is connected in Confucius's view, based on virtue (*de*), to another notion represented by *reciprocity* (*shu*) or self-reflection, which *should govern our actions towards others. The so-called Golden Rule, do as you would be done by, appears in Confucianism as a negative: What you do not desire for yourself, do not do to others. The difference is subtle but crucial: Confucius does not prescribe what to do, only what not to do, emphasizing restraint rather than action. This implies modesty and humility- values traditionally held in high regard in Chinese society, and which for Confucius express our true nature. Fostering these values is a form of loyalty to oneself, and another kind of sincerity*.<sup>23</sup> Confucius's devotion to the idea of establishing a humane society has survived as Confucianism was implemented by the Han Dynasty. *From then on, the impact of Confucius's ideas was profound, inspiring almost every aspect of Chinese society, from (public) administration to politics and philosophy*.<sup>24</sup>

Motto:

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*

*The first problem in this series of texts that I'm analyzing was not the problem of listening: philosophy won't be a discourse, it won't be real if not listened to and comprehended. Second, the philosophical discourse won't be real unless associated, supported, approached and implemented as a practice and through a series of practices.*

Michel Foucault

From Confucius we got to Michel Foucault, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century France and Europe, talking about the theoretical and practical aspects of philosophy. Today, as democracy is being implemented everywhere, practical philosophy has more chances than before to get to the emancipated citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Michel Foucault developed a theory starting from the Greek concept of *parresia* (honesty, sincerity), focusing on the quality of the discourse (private or public, social or political). The French philosopher considered that, *when consulting texts, the researcher-if he is a responsible person- should know that what is more important than the writing of the text itself is to be found somewhere else, at the noblest level-the one regarding the soul- the intention behind the text*<sup>25</sup> And this fact was due to the fact that Foucault was interested in the ancient governance, *in its ethical and political dimension.*<sup>26</sup>

In his courses from 1982-1983, 1983-1984, *Foucault was interested in studying the problem of truth and the process through which a person develops a relationship with the inner self, giving form to personal existence and establishing relations with the world and the others. One conclusion is that one needs help in order to be oriented towards such an approach and such an experience.*<sup>27</sup> The memory of the ancient master of life becomes fresh in our mind. The concept of *parresia*, *meaning free speech, courage to speak the truth and finally to be true to oneself and insist on self-development,*<sup>28</sup> is considered necessary in order to develop the proper relationship which should exist between master and disciples. This is one idea about self governance.

At a different level, the governance of the others should be based, too, on the principles of self governance. Therefore, there should exist a continuation between private, personal and public. *Here we are talking about the ontological engagement of the speaker, parresia being brought to*

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Governarea de sine si guvernarea celoralti*, Cluj, Idea Design & Print, 2003, pp. 253-254

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 371

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 372

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*



*public speech.*<sup>29</sup> The courage to speak the truth can be that of the public speaker or of the private counsellor-philosopher of the prince or king. The concept of *parresia* will be connected to an ethical dimension in order to structure the audience. *In his courses from 1983-1984, Michel Foucault goes over the private discourse, getting to the public one-by following the Socratic model. Once at the political level, the concept of parresia can take two forms:*

-the one of the speech addressed to the audience by a person motivated to convince them that he is interested in the public good(welfare)-(the democratic *parresia*).

-and the one of the private speech that the philosopher addresses to the soul of the prince in order to convince and orient him towards self-governance and also to make this one understand what the flatterers hide from him (autocratic *parresia*).<sup>30</sup>

*Thus parresia is thought to be used in a free competition between the speakers, allowing the best to win but also to make clear the idea of philosophy as experience (practical philosophy) , based on a personal relationship between the speaker and the discourse.*<sup>31</sup> *By developing the relation between philosophy and power, philosophy is seen as a continuous practice of the soul, a process of self development towards spirituality. But legitimacy is not given by knowledge but by a certain way of existence (a superior lifestyle), a special kind of relationship.*<sup>32</sup> *Foucault continues the idea and states that the philosopher (master) shouldn't get recognition due to his speculative competences, or to his ideas but due to his philosophy as life, to his philosophical life, to his ethos.*<sup>33</sup> So the key of his political attitude is given by the life such a master is living.

*Following the Socratic parresia, the ethical test will be focused on the life of the two partners of dialogue- talking about truth and revealing the reality of their life. From this perspective, Foucault suggests an opposition between rhetoric and philosophy, through something called the ontology of the discourse.*<sup>34</sup> *Telling the truth, the whole truth, reveals an inner initiation, a genuine ontological initiation and a metaphysical connection to the Being. The distinction*

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 374

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 375

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 376

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 379

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*

*between Socratic (structuring) parresia as an exercise and a test for the soul and the rhetorical art fueled by political ambitions seems to be clear.* <sup>35</sup>

At this moment we can say that Foucault 's contribution to political thought and to the development of the way we should perceive political life and the relations created by it is prominent, as well as nourishing. This distinctive contribution lies in his elaboration of this particular attitude or philosophical ethos of permanent criticism (self-awareness), focused on *the forms of truths, the manner in which we exercise power over others and over ourselves, and the ways in which we are constituted as subjects.*<sup>36</sup> **Truth** in relation to **power** are to be permanently connected to **experience** which means a particular combination of certain kinds of relation to the self, certain normative rules governing conduct and certain forms of thought practised within philosophy and the human sciences, but also the forms of rationality embedded in everyday practice of administrators, doctors, priests, and private individuals. In this sense, experience (rather knowledge or even wisdom) implies no reference to an implicit subject but rather refers to the three axes of any system of human activity, namely the relation to things (knowledge), the relation to others (power), and the relation to self (ethics).<sup>37</sup>

His focus on power, knowledge and their role in the constitution of subjectivity has contributed to a broader understanding of what counts as political with direct implication on the meaning of **democracy, justice** and deep diversity within and between **contemporary cultures**.<sup>38</sup> As many have suggested, Foucault's contribution to political philosophy lies in his reformulation of the concept of **freedom** and his contribution to a new form of critical-theoretical activity, applicable to the entire range of present practices of **governance**.<sup>39</sup>

As we have seen up to this moment, Foucault was interested above all in the potential for **transformation of the present**. Developing his *diagnosis of the character of modern government* and stating that *many of the political struggles of our present were directed against the individualizing power*, Foucault suggested that *maybe the target nowadays is not to discover*

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>36</sup> *Political Thinkers, From Socrates to the Present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 529

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 519

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 532

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*

*what we are but to refuse what we are,*<sup>40</sup> and develop in a different way, by improving what **we are**, and the way *we constitute ourselves as ethical, social, or political subjects.*<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, we could say, using some ideas of Petre Tutea, that the human being living in contemporary Europe has to choose between knights and dignity or servants, even slavery, between honour or cowardice, between decency or vulgarity, between wise, real people or the conservation instinct and petty people, between manipulation or awareness, between knowledge or ignorance, between responsibility or corruption, between spiritual or material:

the human who lost his shadow,

the knight devoured by the gold loving merchant, who replaced honour with the credit,

the phantom shadow or the shadow that lost its human,

the human without shadow, or

**the pure human...**<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 531

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 290

<sup>42</sup> Aurel dragos Munteanu, *Petre Tutea*, Romania Press, Bucuresti, 2006, p. 125

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