

Original Paper

Interpretation and Reflection on Goodness in Sakya Legshad and Bacon Essays

Shen Qunying^{1*}

¹ Pre-College Education School, Sichuan Minzu College, Kangding, Sichuan, China

* Shen Qunying, Pre-College Education School, Sichuan Minzu College, Kangding, Sichuan, China

Received: October 14, 2022 Accepted: October 24, 2021 Online Published: November 4, 2022

doi:10.22158/eshs.v3n4p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eshs.v3n4p1>

Abstract

In the 21st century of the in-depth globalization, various problems have emerged such as regional conflicts, epidemics, the environmental deterioration, climate warming, earthquake and other uncertainty. Seeking some common and desirable values is not only the basic needs of harmonious society, but also the inevitable result of human civilization evolution. Sakya legshad, the 1st collection of Chinese aphorisms, and Bacon's Essays, the Britain prose collection, are the world-wide treasures of wisdom, many chapters of which talk about the concept and practice of goodness. It is of immeasurable importance to reread these classics for interpretations of goodness so that their excellent traditional culture can continue to nourish and enlighten today's moral education, promote the construction of the common views on the good and the evil, awaken people a moral consciousness, and enlighten them to hold good will and do good deeds for sustainable social harmony and world peace.

Keywords

Sakya Legshad, Bacon Essays, goodness, human nature

1. Introduction

“The existence of human literature and art has its profound humanistic basis, and it is committed to the overall improvement of human's true, good and beautiful dimensions”. (Jiang, 2014, p. 7) The problem of good and evil has always been the moral cultivation explored by Chinese and foreign scholars in literary works. Sakya Legshad written by a Chinese scholar Saban Gonggajianzan (hereinafter referred to as Saban) is a treasure of wisdom passed down from generation to generation; Bacon Essays written by a British literary giant of Francis Bacon (hereinafter referred to as Bacon) is a classic works. Many chapters in these works talk about the concept and practice of goodness, which represent a kind of universal and normative value and significance within a certain time and space. This value and

significance is always a collection of multiple interpretations in cultural inheritance (Simon, 2012, p. 75). With the in-depth development of globalization, more often diversified intercultural exchanges and the emergence of various problems on the good and the evil, it is necessary to make the reflections and interpretations of the goodness in the two works so that their excellent traditional culture can continue to nourish and enlighten today's moral education, guide people to enhance their moral judgment and pass on the values of goodness, and encourage people to accumulate virtue and achieve lofty personality. All under heaven are one family and it is of more immeasurable importance to form a common view and a universal standard of the good and evil to standardize human behavior to effectively promote social harmony and peaceful world.

2. Goodness' Theoretical Construction

2.1 Goodness' Innateness and Acquisitions

Being good is human natural instinct. People are born with goodness and people are sympathetic, thus they can follow their own internal good nature to make self-requirements and self-discipline in thought and behavior. Bacon (2018, p. 46) calls goodness the habit of the affecting of the weal of men and goodness of nature the inclination to goodness, and he illustrated the inclination imprinted so deeply in the nature of man that it will take onto other living creatures if it doesn't issue towards men. He (2018, p. 37) gave a further insight into the inclination, "there is in man's nature, a secret inclination and motion towards love of others, and if the inclination is not spent upon some one or a few, it does naturally spread itself towards many, and makes men become humane and charitable". But Saban believed that people are good and bad in nature, just as he said: "try as one might to reform bad people, they simply do not become good-natured (2009, p. 94); as long as coarse people remain helpless, they maintain a good disposition (2009, p. 80)". Delightedly Saban (1985, pp. 3-12) attached more importance to people's goodness of nature as follows: Even in danger, the sage will not abandon his good nature; just as the real gold will not change its original color no matter how the real gold is smelted; and scholars will not follow the path of the evil no matter what difficulties they are in, just as swallows will not drink dirty water on the ground no matter how thirsty they are; even if the upright man is poor, he is noble in his moral character; just as the torch's flame is still burning upward although the torch is down.

On the one hand, Saban and Bacon's observation suggest they believe that people are inherently good and evil, but they cling to goodness of nature since people tend to naturally show sympathy for people or things in danger or difficulties, and even make good behavioral responses by instinct, which is completely based on the most natural consciousness of people as living beings. On the other hand, Saban and Bacon believe that goodness of nature is acquired and improved, since people know to think independently, to be strict with themselves, to be cautious in words and deeds, to constantly water their own innate good nature, and to realize human value and dignity.

2.1.1 Goodness' Possibility Rather Than Inevitability

In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological needs are the most fundamental one of human beings as natural creatures. Naturally, human beings are busy with the improvement of their living environment and the pursuit of material source guarantee, as Saban (1985, p. 89) pointed out: People driven by survival are always rushing for money and materials. Obviously, it is natural and necessary for human beings to have certain desires such as solving cold, thirst and hunger. As long as people have enough material base for survival, they can be good and do good based on their good nature, just as the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus once said: "All the good originates from the pleasure of the mouth, and even wisdom and culture must be derived from it (Russell, 1963, p. 300)". As for individuals, they should hold the good nature, abide by the laws of life, nature and society development, act to realize their own real survival closer to nature on the premise of not harming or hindering the realization of others' survival.

Goodness of human nature is not inevitable but possible. Although people are in nature faithful and sincere, plain and direct, and not crafty (Bacon, 2018, p. 82), the desire of a better life in excess causes the angels to degenerate. For instance, some people desire to have extravagant clothes and feasts, which is natural but unnecessary; and some people do their best to pursue fame, power and profit excessively, which is unnatural and unnecessary. If various desires of human beings are constantly growing and even flooding, they may also be evil-doers, just as Bacon (2018, p. 15) revealed, "There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong's sake, but thereby to purchase himself profit or pleasure or honour or the like". To some extent, desires ruin one's sense of shame. Saban also attacked greed, "Although it is believed that desires bring happiness, acting on such impulses brings only misery (2009, p. 141). The man, who are greedy for riches, are ruined by their property as their butcher, just as the fish that are greedy for bait are immediately killed by the fisherman (1985, p. 319)". If people let their desires overgrow and overflow, they will inevitably cause interference and harm to their own and others' lives, since "as a rule, people are harmed by others of their own kind (Saban, 2009, p. 112)". Bacon (2018, p. 93) pointed out those who love nobody but themselves are many times unfortunate. Similarly, Saban found that the insatiable greed suffer a lot of pain like spring rain (1985, p. 86); when those who happen to have some wealth fail to use it or give it away, they are either stricken with disease or appearing as pretas (2009, p. 143). Bacon and Saban reveal that the excessive expansion of people's desires result in social chaos, people's pain and misfortune. It can be seen that there is possibility in reality for people to do good and evil though the latter is a curse.

2.1.2 Goodness' Cultivation and Strengthening

How do we make the goodness from the natural possibility to the acquired reality?

Bacon and Saban emphasize that people should be nurtured by learning to keep the good heart and nourish the good nature to serve others. Saban said: "Even if one is to die the next morning, today one must study, and knowledge is safely deposited for future lives (2009, p. 5); wisdom is what achieves

happiness in both this and future lives (2009, p. 10)”. Similarly Bacon (2018, pp. 154-155) believed that men’s discourse and speeches are much according to their learning and infused opinion, but their deeds are after as they have been accustomed; there is no trusting to the force of nature nor to the bravery of words, except it is corroborated by custom which is called education. Although goodness of heart and nature are endowed by heaven, “there is in human nature generally more of the fool than of the wise, and therefore those faculties by which the foolish part of men’s minds are taken are most potent (Bacon, 2018, p. 43)”. People need educating to make goodness flourish into a towering tree and the tendency of human nature to be good come true from a congenital possibility to an acquired reality. What’s more, being educated has a subtle impact on people’s temperament, character, talent and intelligence, just as Saban said: “Carefully cultivated by the wise, the fool will become noble (1985, p. 67); whether people have knowledge depends on whether they can distinguish the right from the wrong; whether their knowledge is profound or not, they are capable persons as long as they can be good at choosing what to do and what not to do (1985, p. 2)”. Bacon (2018, p. 194) confirmed that studies perfect nature, which is like natural plants that need cutting; since a man’s nature runs either to herbs or weeds, let him seasonably water the one, and destroy the other (Bacon, 2018, p. 153). It is clear that human nature is like water, which can either carry a boat or overturn a boat. If properly guided, men can reach the supreme good like water and shoulder great responsibilities.

All above demonstrates the natural and actual effect of acquired education in recovering and perfecting human original goodness. It is obvious that Saban and Bacon have similar views in advocating goodness education. Moral education of goodness can help people listen to good words carefully, learn from good people and their good deeds, and have complete and accurate knowledge of goodness recognized, remembered, and internalized in their hearts with good will. It can promote goodness knowledge deposited and externalized in their deeds together with conscious behavior and intelligent practice of good deeds.

2.2 Goodness’s Altruism

Saban and Bacon share goodness’ altruism. Bacon defined goodness as the habit of affecting the weal of men (2018, p. 46). And in his opinion, there is a secret inclination and motion towards love of others in man’s nature, if it is not spent upon some one or a few, it does naturally spread itself towards many, and makes men become humane and charitable (2018, p. 37). Saban also held the view that “To benefit others is to be good”: Noble people, even when living far away, care for their friends by helping from afar (2009, p. 21). Bacon (2018, p. 48) enumerated many parts and signs of goodness: A man is thankful for small benefits; a person is gracious and courteous to strangers; a person is compassionate towards the afflictions of others; a person easily pardons and remits offence. Similarly Saban outlined the good people, who willingly accept contempt from the mean-spirited, who don’t forget even small bestowed favors, who give alms without expecting return (2009, p. 23), who are not displeased by criticism (2009, p. 29), who are able to behave harmoniously with other beings (2009, p. 14), who do

not belittle others (2009, p. 57), who gently care for themselves and others as a fruit-laden tree shelters itself and others (2009, p. 60). Men are social people with affective sympathy and all are in the same universe with the dependent relationship of mutual achievement and common growth, therefore the altruism of goodness stems from not only the originally good intention in mind and fellow cherish, but also the sense of social responsibility.

2.2.1 Rational Goodness

Bacon and Saban encourage people to conduct charitably. In Saban's views, the supreme wealth results from generosity, and the supreme happiness comes from a good mind (2009, p. 133); those who delight in always being charitable have reputations that rise like the wind (2009, p. 22); if the rich want to increase their wealth, its best guarantee is to give it away (2009, p. 135); even foes gather for charity, but without it, even friends stay away (2009, p. 123). Likewise, Bacon (2018, p. 110) advocates that riches are for spending and spending is for honour and good actions, just as he claims, "Of great riches there is no real use, except it is in the distribution; the rest is but conceit. The purpose of accumulating wealth urgently is not to satisfy greed, but to seek a kind of capital to do good. (2018, pp. 136-137)" It is known that philanthropic actions are the most straightforward good deeds in shouldering social responsibility. As the Chinese saying goes, you should first learn to give, then you can come to gain. Goodness is seen in offering and acceptance.

Everyone wants to function the altruism of goodness appropriately, but errors indeed in this virtue of goodness or charity may be committed (Bacon, 2018, p. 47). Bacon (2018, p. 47) warned people never to give others Aesop's cock a gem, who would be better pleased and happier if they had had a barley-corn, which hints people to supply a timely desideratum to the needy, and do good deeds as peculiar benefits with choices. People ought to follow in good deeds Confucius' advice that they should not do onto others what they would not have others do onto them (Jiao, 1987, p. 994). In addition, Bacon (2018, p. 47) warned people not to sell what they have and give it to the poor except they have a vocation wherein they may do as much good with little means as with great, for otherwise in feeding the streams they dry the fountain; therefore Bacon (2018, p. 40) guided people to measure not their donations by quantity, but frame them by measure. Similarly, Saban persuaded people to avoid the following incidents: The ignorant are seen to destroy their allies and then take good care of strangers, just as docking a peacock's head tuft to grace its tail is ludicrous, who but a madman would do such a thing (2009, p. 86); what's more, some people of little shame use others' wealth for favors to show off their good virtue; the unscrupulous people demonstrate their respect to the guests by displaying their friend's clothes as a cushion for visitors to sit on (2009, p. 83).

Although there is a tendency towards goodness in human nature, there is a habit of goodness directed by right reason (Bacon, 2018, p. 48). Bacon told people to seek the good of other men, but be not in bondage to their faces or fancies, for that is but facility or softness, which takes an honest mind prisoner (2018, p. 47), since one can never satisfy evil people even by helping them in a hundred

excellent ways (Saban, 2009, p. 93), and some recipients, who must always be helped by others someday, will certainly land in trouble (Saban, 2009, p. 50). Bacon pointed out some people are so good that they are good for nothing (2018, p. 47), just as Saban reminded people when love is lavished excessively, that in itself generates hostility (2009, p. 118), and when too good in the wrong situation, one is taken advantage of by all (2009, p. 159). Obviously, doing good deeds should be rational to clarify the objects of charity and their specific desires, just as Saban (2009, p. 92) said: “Until someone has been carefully examined, they should not be trusted nor spoken to candidly. From carelessness arises trouble; conversation often creates enemies”.

2.2.2 Perfect Goodness

Since there are attribute of egoism and altruism in human nature, perfect goodness is the mutual benefit of individual and collective ideals. On the one hand, one wants to meet the basic physiological and spiritual needs of his own natural person; On the other hand, he has to play the role of a social person to influence and change the life of others and the society, just as Bacon (2018, p. 39) said, “Merit and good works is the end of man’s motion, and conscience of the same is the accomplishment of man’s rest”, so Saban (2009, p. 21) was firmly under the belief that one’s reputation brings pleasure while one is alive, and merit brings happiness in future lives.

If taking Bacon’s advice to divide with reason between self-love and society (Bacon, 2018, p. 92), people have three choices and representations between selfishness and unselfishness in dealing with the same issue. One is always to think much about themselves, never of others and the public. This will inevitably lead to the evil of excessive selfish desires, avarice nature, and benefiting oneself at the expense of others; and it is likely to result in such vices of extreme self-lovers as corruption, bribery, malpractices for selfish ends. Saban criticized the self-centered that always ignoring the interests of others is to behave in the same way as cattle, and if they aspire only to a full stomach, they are nothing but hairless pigs (Saban, 2009, p. 37), and even those absorbed in talk of food and riches are referred to as two-legged cow(2009, p. 45). Another is always to think much about others and the public, seldom or never of themselves such as serving the public and profiting others at the price of their own personal interests, and even their lives to respect and safeguard the interests of others and the public. The third is to give consideration to the interests of themselves, others and the public. It is a perfect goodness either to benefit others without harming oneself or to benefit oneself without harming others and the public. Saban (2009, p. 124) illustrated this ideal: The rich give generously, and the profound learned are gentle and elegant, and the great love their subordinates, all of which are beneficial to others and themselves. Bacon (2018, p. 92) warned people to be so true to themselves as be not false to others, specially to their king and country, just as Saban (2009, pp. 225-226) said, “If one strongly wants to achieve private aims, one must first work for the interests of others; by working solely for personal concerns, it will be impossible to achieve them; those who work mainly for the welfare of others are like clever people furthering their own interests; but those who work only for their own interests are

like honest people working to help others get ahead". Bacon and Saban show benefiting others and benefiting oneself are connected inextricably, and they hope one gives consideration to both public and private interests and achieve win-win results in the relation balance between a person's life activities and the human community.

3. Conclusion

Sakya Legshad and Bacon Essays tell the meanings and practices of goodness as well as the relative value standards of human goodness in different times, nations and countries. Saban and Bacon constantly enrich and improve goodness' theoretical construction goodness as follows: Goodness is innate and acquired in human nature, so being good is possible more than inevitable and goodness can result from the enrichment and strengthening of moral education in societies well ordained and disciplined (Bacon, 2018, p. 156); although goodness has the characteristic of altruism, practice of goodness needs rationality and appropriateness rather than errors committed in the virtue of goodness. Saban and Bacon finally attribute goodness to meeting the social public will including self-desires, that is to say, a person's shaping of his own life conforms to the ideal of individual perfection while promoting the happiness of others (Paulsen, 1988, p. 212). The meanings and practices of goodness in these two works will continue to nourish people's spiritual world to hold goodness concept, enlighten today's moral education, let people examine and reflect themselves to do good deeds, and promote the perfect goodness of the mutual benefit, mutual achievement, and harmonious coexistence between oneself and others. In the new era of improving people's well-being and building a community with a shared future for mankind, it has profound significance for many scholars to do multiple interpretations of classics in cultural inheritance to help the shaping of a social mentality with mutual respect, rationality, peace, kindness and fraternity.

References

- Bacon, F. (2018). *Bacon's Essays, Notes and Guide* (Shen Yiwen, inter.). Beijing: China Aerospace Press.
- Jiang Wenzhen. (2014). *What Is Literature For: A Comparative Study of Chinese And Western Traditional Literary Values*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Jiao Xun. (1987). *Mencius' Rectified Interpretation*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Paulsen, F. (1988). *Ethics System*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.
- Russell, B. (1963). *A History of Western Philosophy* (I) (Z. W. He, & J. Needham, trans.). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Saban, G. (1985). *Sakya Aphorism* (Zidandoji, trans.). Lhasa: People's Press.
- Saban, G. (2009). *Sakya Legshad* (Trilingual Version, English Translated by J. T. Davenport, Chinese Translated by Renzengcairang & Caigongtai). Lhasa: China Press.

Simon, G. (2012). *History And Cultural Theory* (J. Han, trans.). Beijing: Peking University Press.