

Original Paper

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT—A DISCUSSION OF CULTIVATING THREE MORAL HABITS

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Abstract

No matter how small things are, if we repeat them every day, eventually, they will turn into a habit of us. Habits influence the way we live. That is why we should cautiously deal with things that may bear right and false, good and bad. If in everyday life, we pay attention to the boundary of right and wrong, good and bad, and cultivate the habits of removing badness and following goodness, then morals will progress. In this paper, we present three habits that people need to cultivate. We explain why the three good habits are important, so people in today's society can learn from the wisdom of the ancient and are determined to become morally well-developed individuals.

Keywords

Habit, goodness, badness, cultivation, morality

1. General Trends

Rivers are collected by countless streams, and habits are cultivated by trivial things (Beckett & Hager, 2002). In olden days, a criminal from North America makes regretful remarks during his day of death sentence. He says, “The reason why I am punished is because I cannot get up early every day. To get up early seems to be a small thing, but once we do not cultivate this small routine and allow us to do whatever we like, we fail to change bad deeds. That is why I am punished.” Thus, if we repeatedly do things no matter how small they are, and eventually turn them into a habit of us, these things will influence the way we live. That is why we should be cautiously deal with things that may bear seeds of right and false, good and bad (Bennett & Hacker, 2003). If in everyday life, we pay attention to the boundary of right and wrong, good and bad, and cultivate the habits of removing badness and following goodness, then morals will progress (Bloom, 2013). The root of morals never shows itself in world-shaking affairs. Instead, things such as sweeping the floor or greeting guests all bear the seeds of moral cultivation. In this paper, we present three habits that people need to cultivate. We explain why

those good habits are important, so people in today's society can learn from the wisdom of ancient and are determined to become a well-developed individual (Chiu et al., 1997).

2. To Free and to Indulge

Freedom refers to a type of virtue. One is entitled to a series of freedom such as thoughts, health, speech, living condition, occupation, and gathering, etc. If a right to freedom is restrained by external forces, and is difficult to obtain it, then one will strive to fight for it, even it comes to the sacrifice of shedding blood (Csibra & Gergely, 2009). The old saying of "Give me liberty, or give me death" tells us so. However, if freedom turns excessively, it will hurt others, and one will feel guilty. Then freedom will disappear; instead, one indulges his desires. When one indulges his desires, he becomes the enemy of freedom (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

One's thoughts cannot be contained by religious indoctrination, nor influenced by customs. Instead, conscientiousness shall serve as one's standards for words and deeds. This way, one can say he is truly free (Muraven et al., 1998). If occasionally, one yields a mind of badness, and he feels about it, yet he purposefully indulge them and let them grow excessively, eventually, selfishness will surpass conscientiousness and one will indulge his thoughts (Davis, 2003).

One shall eat when he is hungry, drink when he is thirsty, and rest when he is sleepy. These are one's body's freedom. Yet if one is not temperate in terms of eating, drinking and resting, bad habits will develop. At this time, we can say that this individual is indulging his bodily freedom, and his health will be harmful as a result (George, 1934).

One will sing when feeling happy, and cry when feeling sad. These are one's emotion's freedom. Yet when the neighbour is hosting a funeral, one will stop singing on the street. Also, a widow will restrain from crying at night, it is because she cares for others and will not indulge her emotions.

Speech is a type of freedom; yet, some people may disclose others' privacy or lure others to steal. To live in a good environment is a type of freedom; yet someone creates certain danger in his home, or makes a noise at night to disturb his neighbour. Occupation is a type of freedom; however, someone produces products with poor quality or sells drugs. Gathering is a type of freedom; yet someone spreads untruthful thoughts and act wildly against law and public opinion. These behaviour shows people's extreme acts. They do not consider others' freedom and their mistakes are the results of indulging their thoughts and deeds (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

People used to praise French revolution because it is considered as a fight for freedom. Nevertheless, people such as Robespierre or Danton at that time created a fearful and dark era because they used excessive way to treat noblemen and noblewomen. The merciless end is due to people's indulging behavior. What's even closer to our time is the time when British women fight for their right to vote. Their brave act shall not be overlooked by modern people; yet, the way to threaten the government and their deeds to burn postal letters and destroy arts work can be considered as cruel. Freedom, as a type of virtue, can produce cruel and merciless deeds when people fail to restrain themselves and do not

realize the harm they may create. We as modern people shall treat it cautiously.

3. To be Calm and to be Indifferent

The change of the world often occurs in short and sudden time. It is not easily to be predicted. Ordinary people are often frightened. Yet, for people who are strong and patient, they can maintain calmness and make a prompt decision according to the situation, then obviate other's mistrust and worries so that chaos is prevented. What they show is calmness (John, 1971).

During the era of Three Kingdom, Zhugeliang leaves mere ten thousands of soldiers in Pingyang, his garrison town. Simayi, His opponent, will soon arrive. The general and his soldiers of Zhugeliang are all fearful but have no way to solve the problem. At this time, Zhugeliang orders his troops to put flags upside down, stops beating army drums, opens the gates of the town, and asks the soldiers to sweep the roads. Simayi suspects an ambush and orders his troops to retreat. Another example is in Song dynasty. Liuji is the governor of the state of Bao. One day he is hosting a banquet. Suddenly there is a report that someone is stirring up confusion. Liuji does not ask who; instead, he orders some entertainment for his guests. At the same time, Liuji secretly sends his understrappers to run after and successfully capture those who cause troubles. Then, Liuji keeps drinking and enjoying the banquet. There is also another person by the name of Liyun in Song dynasty. One day he is having dinner with guests. At the same time, there is a report that the warehouse is on fire. Liyun does not stop the dinner. Later, the fire is put off and Liyun secretly orders his soldier to bring back weapons with box that used to carry tea. Ten days later, the weapon that is destroyed in the fire is replaced, and no one in the troops knows about it. The empire Zhenzong blames him and Liyun replies: "The procedure of weapon warehouse is quite strict. It is on fire as soon as the dinner begins. There must be a mole. If we leave dinner and go fire-fighting, we are trapped and there will be unfortunate things happening." The three people we just described can be seen as those who have calming minds.

People with calming minds seem to have no acts taken. In fact, they are able to develop their skills to a great extend. If we see with our own eyes the drastic changes of the world and do not respond to them, we call them indifferent ones instead of calm ones (Jurgen, 1992).

At the end of Jin Dynasty, a few nomadic tribes flame into revolt. Wangyan is the prime minister at that time. He does not focus on national affairs; instead, he is singing poems all day and all night. Many young men adore him and copy his behavior and eventually the society creates an atmosphere of arrogance and frivolity. The capital city of Luoyang is about to be captured, many government officials suggest to move the capital city in order to shy away from the disaster. The king of Yan does not want to leave and even sell his carts to pacify the citizens. He seems calm yet does not prepare for the war. Soon the troops are doomed to defeat. When the King of Yan is about to die, he says: "If we stop advocate flashy display and empty pomp and use our whole strength to save the state and our people, we will not reach this end." This story tells us that to be indifferent will not always bring ideal results.

Fubi is the government official in Song dynasty. One day he resigns and returns to home to seek skill to

be live long. Ludalin writes to him and says, “In ancient times, government officials have no specific positions. Those who have noble virtue carry responsibilities. When they are in their position, they discuss affairs, and in their hometown, they teach morals. In ancient times, high officials are courageously bearing his duties. They will certainly teach people morals and cultivate themselves. How can they change as their appointments change and age changes? Now, the truth has not revealed. Ordinary people are inclined to listen to heterodoxy, and do not understand ethics. My lord, this is the time when you grow empathy and carry the duty of fulfilling the great *Dao*. You should strive to change undesirable customs. If you change your mind and pursue the secret of long life, you are performing a selfish deed. Are these the expectations of ordinary people? Fubi then right away apologizes to him. What Ludalin strives to persuade is to let Fubi away from being indifferent.

4. To Have an Enthusiastic Mind and a Wide Ambitious Mind

Mencius uses to tell us, “to arise at the crow of the rooster and is determined to do good deeds for others are those like the Empire Shun. To arise at the crow of the rooster and is determined to do good deeds for themselves are those like the thief Daotuo. The two types of people share the same character. They are all diligent. Yet, the first type of people shows their enthusiasm and do things according to “righteousness” and the second type of people presents ambition and do things according to their own selfish goals. The moment the empire Shun seeing people who drown, he feels himself drowning. The moment Houji thinking people suffering from hunger, he feels himself suffering from hunger. What they show is enthusiasm. Therefore, the Empire Shun is determined to control flood, and Houji teaches people to harvest. These are service for others. When Xiangyu meets Qinshihuang the first time, he says, “I can replace you.”; and when Liubang meets Qinshihuang the first time, he praises, “a great person should spend his life like him.” What they present is ambition. Because of this type of mind, when the cruel Qin dynasty is destroyed, Liubang and Xiangyu fight to the throne and carry out five years of war. Xiangyu used to say, “people are experiencing restless time these years because of two of us.” Harm that ambitious people bring to others just like this.

George Washington strives to win wars in seven years in order to establish the independence of the United States. When the nation is created, he reforms hereditary monarchy and advocates electoral system. When he is elected as the president, he is just and selfless. He resigns after two times of service. When he is about to die, he donates part of his wealth to public education and other philanthropist affairs. He is truly the one who holds an enthusiastic mind.

In this world, there are people who have neither enthusiasm nor ambition. For example, Changju and jieni use to say, “the world is as chaotic as flood, who can change it?” Mashaoyou discerns: “One’s life can be satisfying when having food to eat, clothes to wear, traveling in vehicle of inferiority, guarding parents’ grave, and being praised by his neighbours as good.” What they say is what they do. Those who retreat to countryside and flight from reality have cognitive defect. They do not understand that they are part of the society. All the things they rely on are given by the society. How could they be

indifferent to the needs of the society, and try their best to do what they are supposed to do? Fanzhongyan teaches us: “plan and worry ahead of the people; enjoy the fruits after the people.” Lifan claims: “People cannot wait to fulfill their career when they have appointed positions; their career can be established when trying their best to do what they can do.”

Those who hold enthusiastic minds do not normally involve social work. Scientists stay at home to do research. They seem have no contact with others, but once their invention become useful to people's life; influences are created (Michael, 1984). Noble literature and elegant arts may not seem to have practical use, but their function to nurture personality is something that other forms of knowledge cannot compare. Thus, diligent intellectuals can also be called people having enthusiastic minds. However, there are few among them think that they are better than others. They put on too many frills in front of wise people, and throw mists before ordinary people. They turn into ambitious ones in academic world. This is something they should guard against (Jaeggiet al., 2008).

TO BE DETERMIED AND TO BE VOLATILE

The empire Huangdi says, “It is time to exposure things to the Sun at noon; when holding a knife, one shall cut.” In the book of *Lu's Commentary of History*, it writes: “Force is useful when it happens in a sudden time; cleverness is useful when it happens in a fast fashion. The reason why a good horse is good is because it can travel thousands of miles in a day; if it takes more than ten days to arrive its destination, what is the difference between it and regular horses? A fast arrow is fast is because it can come along with the air. If it takes the whole day to arrive, why we bother to use it?”(Tang, 2010). These are examples of courage and determination. There is an old saying in Zhou Dynasty, it says, “if one scrunches up, how long his body is left?” When Zhugeliang evaluate Langwang and Liuyao, he says, “there are doubts filled in their belly and difficulties in their hearts.” This description teaches us that harm will come when courage and determination disappear.

Qiuchu in the era of Warring State is more than seventy years old. Mengchangjun tells him: “Sir, you are getting old.” Qiuchu replies, “If you let me to chase wild animals and capture tigers, I am old. If you let me to use words to defeat rebels, make a decision on things you hesitate, I am still young.” Qiuchu is getting old but he is still a courageous and determined person. Fanbang from the East Han Dynasty is given the title of ‘Empire’s censor’. When he claims on his horse, shows the crowd his impassioned appearance, and demonstrates his determination of working for the whole world, he presents himself as someone young yet courageous and determined.

The courage and determination of young people often surpass elderly ones. Yet, if they do not restrain their personality, they will show volatile character (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). When Sushi evaluates Jiayi and Zhaocuo's personality, he comments: “Jiayi is a rare treasure, and often give good strategies. But he shows his naïve when he asks the empire for a higher position and claims that he will capture the leader of his opponent. Military affairs are dangerous. What he claims is the same as Zhaotuo in the Warring State who overlooks the power of small states. If the empire takes his advice, then the world

will not be in rest. If Jiayi experiences some hardship, he will regret of his remarks. Zhaoquo is even worse. When he serves as the prime minister, his colleague is dead after hearing his angry words. He randomly changes the order of the state, so the whole world is in chaos.” Hanyu also gives some remarks on Liuzongyuan’s character. He says, “When Liuzongyuan was young, he did not know being humble. He often thinks that career can be easily obtained. As a result, he is banished because he is involved in reforms. If he can contain himself the same as what he demonstrated when he was older, his life will be different.” These examples tell us that once courage and determination are overdue, one will turn into volatile individuals. Jiayi, Zhaoquo and Liuzongyuan are talented people. Once they show fickleness in their disposition, it is hard to recover. For those who are not as talent as three people just introduced, we shall be extra cautious and try hard to not to be volatile”.

Conclusion

Ritual propriety is a requirement when communicating with others. Yet, it bears the power of creating habits. What one thinks can justify one’s body, and one’s body can also influence what one thinks (Winch, 1998). Thus, when we speak gentle and kind words, wicked thoughts will not arise; loyal and respectful words and deeds will naturally produce without purposely pursue (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We cultivate moral habits because we would like to develop our character and nurture our personality. The reason why we develop our character is because we need to understand the relations between the world and ourselves so our view can be brought forth and our life will be involved in the enhancement of social welfare (Arthur, 1991).

One’s acts of moral cultivation are to cultivate good moral habits and remove bad moral habits. The character development of an individual bears root (Allport, 1954). This root demands the protection of both good and bad moral habits. Otherwise, one will not survive. Therefore, good and bad moral habits are like two wheels of a bicycle, two wings of a bird, they are equally important.

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