

# Wooden Bell and Gadfly: The Story of Confucius and Socrates

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**Abstract:** Works on the comparative study of the two sages Confucius and Socrates at the ideological and cultural level are rarely found. Confucius and Socrates were born in the same epoch in the East and the West, and both rose to fame in the great Axial Period when frequent wars, political turmoil and ideological confusion prompted them to assume the responsibility of spiritual mentors. Confucius was praised as a wooden bell to warn, educate and civilize the people in his time; Socrates was described by himself as the gadfly that stung the state and stirred Athenians into life. On the historical stages of the East and the West, they pondered over and reformed the world in a civilized, moral and rational way. Comparing the ideological convergences of Confucius and Socrates, we can gain an understanding of our own respective cultural roots and facilitate the mutual understanding and blending of the Eastern and Western cultures in this new Axial Period.

**Key words:** Confucius; Socrates; life experiences; ideological comparison

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**标题:** 木铎与牛虻：孔子与苏格拉底的故事

**内容摘要:** 在思想文化层面对中国圣人孔子与西方先哲苏格拉底进行比较研究的论著并不多见。孔子和苏格拉底同一时期诞生于世界的东西两端，并崛起于伟大的轴心时代，战争频繁、政治动荡、思想混乱的时代语境促使他们承担起精神导师的责任。孔子被誉为警醒、教育、教化人们的木铎，苏格拉底自称为叮咬整个慵懒民族、驱动人们向前迈进的牛虻，在东西方的历史舞台上他们共同以文明、道德、理智的方式思考世界、改造世界。对比孔子和苏格拉底的思想共性，可认识东西方文化之源，促进新轴心时代东西方文化的相互了解及相互交融。

**关键词:** 孔子；苏格拉底；人生经历；思想比较

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Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.) and Socrates (469 B.C.-399 B.C.) were brilliant thinkers that emerged during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. They both have exercised great influence over the civilizations of the East and the West so deeply and widely that they have been recognized for their efforts by later generations. Although both philosophers sprang successively from either side of the world, comparing their ideologies concerning nature and morality can draw many similarities. By examining their thoughts, an understanding of our own respective cultural roots might facilitate the mutual understanding and blending of the Eastern and Western civilizations, which is highly attainable in our interdependent world.

### **Great Thoughts Booming in the Axial Period**

The great poet T. S. Eliot in his well-known essay says:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (14)

Eliot points out that tradition is very significant in our life, it associates with the historical sense, which covers the past and presence. When I read this passage, it always makes me think which thought of cultural tradition can formulate our nation's character. Every Chinese, in China and the Chinese communities overseas, every act and every move of his or hers may be influenced by one great book—*The Analects of Confucius*, a canon formed 2400 years ago. To be a Chinese, this book is a must. Coincidentally, the world civilization enjoys its boom around 500 B.C. That is one of the so-called Axial Periods.

“Axial Period” is a concept put forth by Karl Jaspers, a German philosopher. As he pointed out, after the pre-history and the civilization of remote antiquity, in

about 500 B.C., some very remarkable events occurred in the scale of the whole world. In China, Confucius and Laozi were very active, all Chinese philosophical schools including Mo-tse, Chuang-tzu, Lieh-tzu and the other various schools all came into being. So is the case with India, where appeared Upanishad and Buddha; people probed into the whole philosophical probability from skepticism, materialism, sophism to nihilism. As for Greek philosophers, Homer, Parmenides, Herakleitos, Plato, and many tragedians, and Thucydides and Archimedes, all emerged. In these centuries, what were embodied in these names developed almost simultaneously in China, India and the West that were unaware of one another. Jaspers calls this period the “axis” of the world history. Mankind always lives in dependence on what people thought and created in the axial period, and people tend to review this period at every leap forward and they are rekindled by it. After that, as always is the case, the revival of and the return to the potentiality of the axial period, or its renaissance, always provides us with some new spiritual impetus.

Chinese classics have similar records, stating that during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C diverse philosophical schools were booming and competing with each other. According to Ban Gu’s accounts in *Han Shu (The History of the Former Han Dynasty)*, “Among the ten schools of thought, nine deserve appreciation. They came into being when the kingly way was tiny, the feudal princes took the power in the government and the lords held different likes and dislikes. Like the bee swarms, the nine schools sprung simultaneously and advocated their own preferences to persuade and cater for the feudal princes” (594-595). In *Chuang-tzu*, we can find the following statement: “Taoism will inevitably be disintegrated and disrupted”; “These various policies are scattered throughout the world and are propounded in the Middle Kingdom, the scholars of the hundred schools from time to time taking up one or the other in their praises and preachings. But the world is in great disorder, the worthies and sages lack clarity of vision, and the Way and its Virtue are no longer One. So the world too often seizes upon one of its aspects, examines it, and pronounces it good” (222-223).

We may approve of the above-mentioned documents by the following facts that many famous people lived more or less in the same era. Shakya Muni (about 565 B.C.-485 B.C.) was contemporary with Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.), Socrates (469 B.C.-399 B.C.) with Mozi (about 468 B.C.-376 B.C.), Plato (427 B.C.-347 B.C.) probably with Laozi (birth year unknown), Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) with Mencius (about 372 B.C.-289 B.C.) and Chuang-tzu (about 369 B.C.-286 B.C.). In this golden period of cultural development, two figures are strikingly important separately in China and the West. Their thoughts were respectively read

and expounded by their contemporaries and later generations. They are Confucius and Socrates.

### **Birth and Images of Confucius and Socrates**

Confucius and Socrates were born in nearly the same epoch, although they lived far away in distance. They both lived in historical periods marked by tremendous social changes. These changes included frequent wars, political disturbances, ideological confusion and conflict, and demoralization. Confronted with political and social crises, they both sought moral principles as a basis for understanding those crises and for mending the social fabric. Socrates reminded the Athenians of the nature and importance of civic virtue, the health of the city-state and the welfare of the citizens.

The Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China was a time of great social change and political upheaval. It was a time of alliances and wars. States expanded or vanquished. The rites established in the Western Zhou were no longer observed and original social order was broken. Old beliefs collapsed and new ideas proliferated. This turbulent situation stimulated scholars of the day to devise ways to restore peace and stability. The first and most important of these scholars was Confucius.

According to *Zuo's Commentary*, Hua fu, a senior official of the State of Song, met the wife of Kong Fu on the road. He gazed at her with admiration, and as she passed from his view, sighed, "What a captivating beauty!"(21) In spring of the second year, Hua fu and his men attacked Kong Fu. They murdered the unfortunate Kong Fu and Hua fu carried off his wife. This angered his master, Duke Shang of Song, and this prompted Hua fu to murder him, too, for self-preservation (22). When Kong Fu had been killed, his son fled to Lu to escape death and made his home there. Among this man's descendants was a warrior, the lowest rank of the nobility, commonly known as Shuliang He. In fact, his surname was "Kong," "Shuliang" being his courtesy name and "He" his given name. The warrior was married twice and had nine daughters and one crippled son. Custom prevented daughters from becoming heirs, and the lame son could not bring him any honor. So though already over 60, he decided to get married again, this time to a very young woman, Yan Zhengzai. After their marriage, she gave birth in 551 B.C. to a son called Kong Qiu, with Zhongni as his courtesy name. According to legend, Qiu and Ni came from Mount Niqiu, where his parents had prayed to the mountain god for a son.

Hsun-Tzu recorded: "Contra Physiognomy, in antiquity, physiognomy did

not exist, and the learned did not discuss it...hence, to physiognomize the external form is not as important as evaluating the mind, and evaluating the mind is not as important as selecting the proper methodology...Confucius' face looked like it was covered with an exorcist's mask"(47; 49). *Records of the Grand History of China* said: "Great Family of Confucius: Confucius was born in Zouyi, Changping, in the State of Lu (now Zoucheng, Shandong Province). His ancestor, Kong Fangshu, was a citizen of the State of Song. Fangshu was the father of Bo Xia who was the father of Shu Lianghe. Confucius was the child of Shu Lianghe and a woman with the surname Yan whose marriage was against the etiquette. Before his birth, his parents prayed to God for a son in Niqu mountain. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Duke Xiang of Lu, Confucius was born. On the top his head, there was a concave in the middle, so he gained his name Qiu. Confucius was styled as Kong Zhongni"; "Confucius lived a poor life...Confucius was over 180 cm tall, so he was called a giant man uniquely" (231).

Details about Socrates can be derived from three contemporary sources: the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon (both devotees of Socrates), and the plays of Aristophanes. According to Plato, Socrates' father was Sophroniscus and his mother Phaenarete, a midwife. He also has been depicted by some scholars, including Eric Havelock and Walter Ong, as a champion of oral modes of communication, standing up at the dawn of writing against its haphazard diffusion. Socrates was a short man with an ugly face. His most noticeable facial feature was a broad nose above a bushy handlebar mustache and a beard. He walked barefooted, always directly connected to the humility of dirt and dust. He wore a simple, unadorned, robe-like garment wrapped about the body.

Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* portrays Socrates as a clown who teaches his students how to bamboozle their way out of debt. Most of Aristophanes' works, however, function as parodies. Thus, it is presumed this characterization was also not literal. See the dialogue in *The Clouds*:

Strepsiades: How is that? Intellectuals draw sap into watercress? But come down, dear Socrates, down to me, and teach the things I came for.

Socrates: What did you come for?

Strepsiades: To learn to speak. I am wracked, ruined and dispossessed by most malignant debts and usury. (Hadas 108)

In Plato's dialogues, Plato himself is never a character, and Socrates is usually the chief figure, in dialogue which is sometimes direct and sometimes narrated,

by others or by Socrates himself. Plato's Socrates varies enormously between dialogues. Sometimes he is a persistent questioner of others' positions; sometimes he puts forward his own views confidently and at length; sometimes he is merely a bystander.

### **Life Experiences of Confucius and Socrates**

At the age of 3 and 17, Confucius' father and mother passed away respectively. He married his wife at 19 and had a baby at 20. During the ages of 34-35, he left the State of Lu. It's said that in the year of 518 B.C., he went to the library of Zhou Dynasty to visit Lao Tzu in Luoyang. In 517 B.C., he went to the State of Qi where he was not employed by Duke Jing. The Duke declined him by negotiating the salary first and confessed that he couldn't give Confucius as much money as Ji got. Finally, the Duke said, as an excuse, that he was too old to accomplish anything. In the State of Qi, the greatest thing Confucius did was appreciate the classical Shao music. He was so absorbed in the music that he couldn't taste the smell of meat during the three months.

It's said in the present Shaoyuan Village in the southeastern Linzi Ancient Town of Zibo City, Shandong Province, an ancient monument carved with "Site of Confucius' Appreciating Shao Music" was unearthed during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty, together with numerous stone chimes. During the ages of 35-50, Confucius returned to Lu and resumed his work of revising the books of poetry and music, teaching and researching. Confucius said, "At forty I had no more doubts" (8), and argued that one who has reached the age of forty and is disliked, will be disliked to the end (182).

In 505 B.C., Ji Huanzi took the power in the government. Yang Huo visited Confucius with a piglet as a present and asked him to take a job as an official. Confucius agreed orally but didn't take the job right away. Confucius favored the Changes and once said, "If I could add several years to my life, I would have studied the Changes from the age of fifty and become free of error" (66). He also said, "At fifty I knew the mandate of heaven" (8), maybe for having read the Changes so as to know the mandate of heaven. During the ages of 51-54, Confucius became an official in the State of Lu. In 501 B.C., he became the local governor of Zhongdu. In 500 B.C., he became the minister of public works and later the minister of justice. In 498 B.C., Gongshan Furaio invaded the Duke Ding of Lu and was defeated by Confucius. He then became the deputy prime minister and killed the official Shaozheng Mao. He was frustrated with the Duke Ding of Lu and determined to leave the State of Lu together with Yan Yuan, Zilu, Ran You, Zigong,

etc.

During the ages of 55-68, he traveled through all the kingdoms. In 497 B.C., he left Lu for Wei. In 496 B.C., he traveled westward, got trapped in Kuang and returned to Wei via Pu. He traveled Cao, Song, Zheng, and finally arrived in Chen. He had barely survived on the way and by reloading escaped being killed by Sima of Song. That year, he was 60, and he once said, “At sixty my ear was obedient” (8), for example, various hidden criticisms on his travel way.

In 489 B.C., Confucius left Chen for Cai. He was out of food en route to Cai, and went back to Ye County in the northeastern border of Chu. Confucius lost contact with his disciples when he arrived in Zheng and stood alone at the gate of the outer city. A citizen of Zheng saw him and told Zigong, “At the gate of the outer city stood a man whose forehead was like Yao’s, neck like Gaoyao’s, and shoulders like Zichan’s. Below the waist, he was 9cm shorter than Yu. He looked so tired that he was like an outcast dog. Zigong told all this to Confucius. Confucius smiled and said, ‘The citizen’s description of my appearance was not true, but I was really like an outcast dog’ ” (Sima 233). During the ages of 69-73, Confucius returned to Lu. In 483 B.C., his son Kong Li died. In 482 B.C., he was 70, and once said, “At seventy I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing the norm” (8). In 480 B.C., Zilu died in Wei awfully, which dealt a heavy blow to him. In 479 B.C., Confucius passed away.

When Confucius was in the state of Chu, Jieyu, a recluse in Chu, wandered about his door, saying: “Phoenix, oh! Phoenix, oh! How your virtue has declined! About the future we don’t know; the past we can no longer find. When Tao prevails not in the world, the sage preserves but his own life. To live today in this wild world, he only hopes to be safe in life. Lighter than a feather is good fortune, but no one knows how to enjoy it; heavier than the earth is misfortune, but no one knows how to avoid it” (Chuang-tzu 42). Chuang-tzu, in the disguise of Jieyu, tells how highly people spoke of Confucius and how disorderly the society was.

Though characterized as unattractive in appearance and short in stature, Socrates married Xanthippe, who was much younger than him. She bore for him three sons, Lamprocles, Sophroniscus and Menexenus. His friend Crito of Alopece criticized him for abandoning his sons when he refused to try to escape before his execution. An unreliable later tradition, implausibly ascribed to Aristotle, mentions a second wife Myrto.

It is unclear how Socrates earned a living. Ancient texts seem to indicate that Socrates did not work. In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, Socrates is reported as saying he devotes himself only to what he regards as the most important art or

occupation: discussing philosophy. In *The Clouds* Aristophanes portrays Socrates as accepting payment for teaching and running a sophist school with Chaerephon, while in Plato's *The Apology* and *Symposium* and in Xenophon's accounts, Socrates explicitly denies accepting payment for teaching. More specifically, in *The Apology* Socrates cites his poverty as proof he is not a teacher. According to Timon of Phlius and later sources, Socrates took over the profession of stonemasonry from his father. There was a tradition in antiquity, not credited by modern scholarship, that Socrates crafted the statues of the Three Graces, which stood near the Acropolis until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

At one point he had the money to serve as heavy-armed soldiers, but by the end of his life he was poor. Several of Plato's dialogues refer to Socrates' military service. Socrates says he served in the Athenian army during three campaigns: at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. In the *Symposium* Alcibiades describes Socrates' valour in the battles of Potidaea and Delium, recounting how Socrates saved his life in the former battle. Socrates' exceptional service at Delium is also mentioned in the *Laches* by the General after whom the dialogue is named. In *The Apology*, Socrates compares his military service to his courtroom troubles, and says anyone on the jury who thinks he ought to retreat from philosophy must also think soldiers should retreat when it seems likely that they will be killed in battle.

In 406 B.C. he was a member of the Boule, and his tribe the Antiochis held the Prytany on the day the Generals of the Battle of Arginusae, who abandoned the slain and the survivors of foundered ships to pursue the defeated Spartan navy, were discussed. Socrates was the Epistates and resisted the unconstitutional demand for a collective trial to establish the guilt of all eight Generals, proposed by Callixeinus. Eventually, Socrates refused to be cowed by threats of impeachment and imprisonment and blocked the vote until his Prytany ended the next day, whereupon the six Generals who had returned to Athens were condemned to death.

In 404 B.C., the Thirty Tyrants sought to ensure the loyalty of those opposed to them by making them complicit in their activities. Socrates and four others were ordered to bring a certain Leon of Salamis from his home for unjust execution. Socrates quietly refused, his death averted only by the overthrow of the Tyrants soon afterwards.

Socrates' death is described at the end of Plato's *Phaedo*. Socrates turned down the pleas of Crito to attempt an escape from prison. After drinking the poison, he was instructed to walk around until his legs felt numb. After he lay down, the man who administered the poison pinched his foot. Socrates could no longer feel his legs. The numbness slowly crept up his body until it reached his heart. Shortly

before his death, Socrates told Crito that they owed a rooster to Asclepius and asked Crito not to forget to pay the debt. Asclepius was the Greek god for curing illness, and it is likely Socrates' last words meant that death is the cure—and freedom, of the soul from the body. Additionally, in *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*, Robin Waterfield adds another interpretation of Socrates' last words. He suggests that Socrates was a voluntary scapegoat; his death was the purifying remedy for Athens' misfortunes. In this view, the token of appreciation for Asclepius would represent a cure for the ailments of Athens.

Sometime in 400 B.C. or very early in 399 B.C. an obscure young man named Meletus, son of Meletus of Pitthos, brought and sworn the following indictment against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus: Socrates is a wrongdoer in not recognizing the gods which the city recognizes, and introducing other new divinities. Further, he is a wrongdoer in corrupting the young. The penalty demanded is death. According to Xenophon's story, Socrates purposefully gave a defiant defense to the jury because "he believed he would be better off dead." Xenophon goes on to describe a defense by Socrates that explains the rigors of old age, and how Socrates would be glad to circumvent them by being sentenced to death. It is also understood that Socrates also wished to die because he "actually believed the right time had come for him to die."

Xenophon and Plato agree that Socrates had an opportunity to escape, as his followers were able to bribe the prison guards. He chose to stay for several reasons: He believed such a flight would indicate a fear of death, which he believed no true philosopher has; If he fled Athens his teaching would fare no better in another country as he would continue questioning all he met and undoubtedly incur their displeasure; Having knowingly agreed to live under the city's laws, he implicitly subjected himself to the possibility of being accused of crimes by its citizens and judged guilty by its jury; To do otherwise would have caused him to break his "social contract" with the state, and so harm the state, an act contrary to Socratic principle. The full reasoning behind his refusal to flee is the main subject of the Plato's "Crito." According to *Phaedo*, at his death, Socrates alone retained his calmness: "What is this strange outcry?" He said. 'I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience'" (*The Harvard Classics* 113).

### **Wooden Bell and Gadfly: Confucius and Socrates**

When Confucius was trapped in Kuang, he said, "When King Wen perished, did that mean that culture (文) ceased to exist? If Heaven had really intended that such

culture as his should disappear, a latter-day mortal would never have been able link himself to it as I have done. And if Heaven does not intend to destroy such culture, what have I to fear from the people of Kuang?" (83) Obviously, facing the threat of death, Confucius cared about the culture rather than himself. His attitude originated from his confidence. He strongly insisted that his mission was not completed and he could not die. According to *The Analects of Confucius*, the guardian of the frontier-mound at Yi asked to be presented to the Master, saying, "No gentleman arriving at this frontier has ever yet failed to accord me an interview." The Master's followers presented him. On going out the man said, "Sirs, you must not be disheartened by his failure. It is now a very long while since the Way didn't prevail in the world. I feel sure that Heaven intends to use your Master as a wooden bell" (Confucius 24-25). Confucius was praised as a wooden bell to warn, educate, civilize, moralize the people in his time.

Socrates lived during the time of the transition from the height of the Athenian hegemony to its decline with the defeat by Sparta and its allies in the Peloponnesian War. At a time when Athens sought to stabilize and recover from its humiliating defeat, the Athenian public may have been entertaining doubts about democracy as an efficient form of government. Socrates appears to have been a critic of democracy, and some scholars interpret his trial as an expression of political infighting. Claiming loyalty to his city, Socrates clashed with the current course of Athenian politics and society. He praises Sparta, archrival to Athens, directly and indirectly in various dialogues. But perhaps the most historically accurate of Socrates' offenses to the city was his position as a social and moral critic. Rather than upholding a status quo and accepting the development of what he perceived as immorality within his region, Socrates questioned the collective notion of "might makes right" that he felt was common in Greece during this period. Plato refers to Socrates as the "gadfly" of the state (as the gadfly stings the horse into action, so Socrates stung various Athenians), insofar as he irritated some people with considerations of justice and the pursuit of goodness. His attempts to improve the Athenians' sense of justice may have been the source of his execution:

And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who am his gift to you. For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God; and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am

that gadfly God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel out of temper (like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep), and you think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you sent you another gadfly. (*The Harvard Classics* 19)

According to Plato's *The Apology*, Socrates' life as the "gadfly" of Athens began when his friend Chaerephon asked the oracle at Delphi if anyone was wiser than Socrates; the Oracle responded that none was wiser. Socrates believed that what the Oracle had said was a paradox, because he believed he possessed no wisdom whatsoever. In order to refute the Oracle's pronouncement, he proceeded to test the riddle by approaching men considered wise by the people of Athens, such as statesmen, poets and artisans. Questioning them, however, Socrates concluded that, while each man thought he knew a great deal and was wise, in fact they knew very little and were not wise at all. Socrates realized that the Oracle was correct, in that while so-called wise men thought themselves wise and yet were not, he himself knew he was not wise at all, which, paradoxically, made him the wiser one since he was the only person aware of his own ignorance. Socrates' paradoxical wisdom made the prominent Athenians he publicly questioned look foolish, turning them against him and leading to accusations of wrongdoing. Socrates defended his role as a gadfly until the end: at his trial, when Socrates was asked to propose his own punishment, he suggested a wage paid by the government and free dinners for the rest of his life instead, to finance the time he spends as Athens' benefactor. He was, nevertheless, found guilty of both corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and of "not believing in the gods of the state," and subsequently sentenced to death by drinking a mixture containing poison hemlock.

### **Confucius, Socrates and the Way**

The two great Masters did not write a book by themselves, their ideas remain to us mainly by the records of their students. In *Han Shu*, there is a record as follows: "*The Analects of Confucius* is a book of the answers Confucius gave to his disciples and contemporaries as well as the dialogue between the disciples and the Master. The disciples had their own records. When Confucius passed away, his disciples got together and edited these words, so the book is called *The Analects of Confucius*"

(588). As the book is put into English “Analects,” the word analects come from Greek *analegein*, to collect up, and *legein*, to gather. So is the case with “Lun” and “Yu,” the Chinese pronunciation of analects, “Lun,” means to collect up, to gather; “Yu,” speech, words; Lun Yu, to collect up, to edit the words relative to Confucius. *The Analects of Confucius* is a book about dialogues and actions of Confucius and some of his students. Interesting enough, Socrates had his ways of teaching, he often went to the street, market and square, had dialogue with his contemporaries, his students, sometimes even debated with the people. Like Confucius, his words were recorded and he himself was portrayed as a character in his students’ works. We may find this in Plato’s many books.

Confucius said, “In the morning, hear the way; in the evening, die content!” (30)

Ji Lu, one of Confucius’ disciples, talked about serving ghosts and spirits. Confucius said, “How can one serve ghosts and spirits before one knows how to serve men?” “May I ask about death?” the answer was: “How can one understand death before one understands life?” (108-109) Fan Chi, a disciple, asked about wisdom. Confucius said, “To work for the common people’s reasonable needs and keep one’s distance from but show reverence to ghosts and spirits may be what wisdom means” (56). The Master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits.

According to *The Analects of Confucius*, the Grand Minister asked Zigong saying, “Is your Master a Divine Sage? If so, how comes it that he has many practical accomplishments?” Zigong said, “Heaven certainly intended him to become a Sage; it is also true that he has many accomplishments.” When the Master heard of it, he said, “The Grand Minister is quite right about me. When I was young I was in humble circumstances; that is why I have many practical accomplishments in regard to simple, everyday matters. Does it befit a gentleman to have many accomplishments? No, he is in no need at all” (83).

Confucius said, “Neither the knight who has truly the heart of a knight nor the man of good stock who has the qualities that belong to good stock will ever seek life at the expense of Goodness; and it may be that he has to give his life in order to achieve Goodness” (156).

Cicero once said that Socrates was the first one who dragged philosophy from heaven back to the city, even to families, so as to make it ponder about such issues as living, morality, good and evil.

Socrates ever lived in the public eye; at early morning he was to be seen betaking himself to one of the promenades, or wrestling-grounds; he would appear

with the gathering crowds in the market-place; and as day declined, wherever the largest throng might be encountered, there was he to be found, talking for the most part. On seeing others, he always asked whether they feel their knowledge of things human so complete that they betook themselves to these lofty speculations? Or did they maintain that they were playing their proper parts in thus neglecting the affairs of man to speculate on the concerns of God?

Socrates denied having any knowledge, but what he did disavow was having any wisdom, and consequently he denied that he educated people, clearly understanding education as handing on a body of wisdom or learning. Given his assertions in *The Apology* that only god is truly wise and human wisdom is nothing in comparison to that true wisdom, the denial of wisdom might be understood as simply the acceptance of human limitations.

For I have this in common with the midwives: I am sterile in point of wisdom, and the reproach which has often been brought against me, that I question others but make no reply myself about anything, because I have no wisdom in me, is a true reproach; and the reason of it is this: the god compels me to act as midwife, but has never allowed me to bring forth. I am, then, not at all a wise person myself, nor have I any wise invention, the offspring born of my own soul; but those who associate with me, although at first some of them seem very ignorant, yet, as our acquaintance advances, all of them to whom the god is gracious wonderful progress, not only in their own opinion, but in that of others as well. And it is clear that they do this, not because they have ever learned anything from me, but because they have found in themselves many fair things and brought them forth. But the delivery is due to the god and me. (Plato 35-37)

Although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is,—I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him. Then I went to another who had still higher pretensions to wisdom, and my conclusion was exactly the same. Whereupon, I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him. (*The Harvard Classics* 9)

And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear!—for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better. (*The Harvard Classics* 10)

Confucius and Socrates are the teachers of teachers. There is a saying in China: Without Confucius, all ages of China would have been like a long night. Alfred North Whitehead characterized all Western philosophy as a series of footnotes to Plato. Benjamin Franklin said: "Imitate Jesus and Socrates."

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