

**Democracy in the founding cultures of the USA and China:
tales of an ideal often crushed by reality.**

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Two Mosaic figures (Thomas Jefferson and Confucius) will be introduced here as a means of gauging whether Democracy is solely the child of the West and/or whether it can also be traced to a conceptual foundation in Confucianism, the practical political philosophy of ancient China. The teachings of Confucius (c. 551-479 BCE) as a source of political thought appear to be comprehensive enough to provide us with a just model for the administration of the state.

Jefferson, Adams, and democracy

The figures of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams – the former particularly – are continuously drawn into historical accounts of the United States as founding fathers of its republican model

of government and, most importantly, of the nation's independence. Such terms ('republic' and 'independence') are often accepted as icons valid in past representations of the North American nation as well as in discussions over its present political reality.¹ However, both 'republic' and 'independence' are concepts that also gain validity as alternative forms of government and national behaviour to political tyranny or autocracy in its various known forms.

The dilemma has marred politicians and thinkers through the ages as Trevor Lee points out in his review of Aristotle's own assessment of government under democratic rule. He writes:

Despite its perceived faults, Aristotle was not entirely opposed to the concept of democracy. His primary critique of Athenian politics was that it was often too democratic. The demos were routinely tricked by populists and made decisions that served themselves rather than the state. Consequently, Athens lacked a substantial oligarchic or aristocratic counterweight to balance out its politics. Additionally, Aristotle argued that demagogues only arose when the laws were ignored, and the people ruled supreme.

This does not mean that he unequivocally favored oligarchies. In fact, he believed that whenever either the masses or the oligarchs gained power, both sides established governments which served their own interests over those of the state.

Instead, Aristotle favored governments which held a mix between oligarchic and democratic policies. He called this ideal balance *politeia*, usually translated as "polity" or "constitution." This imagined government would be predictably characterized by its moderation. For example, Aristotle argued that the ideal citizen for a mixed government did not come from the rich or poor, but the middle class. That is, he thought that the very rich and the very poor were susceptible to extremism and political dissent, in contrast to the moderate middle class. Consequently, Aristotle's *politeia* was the best because it was stable and free of civil strife.²

A need for a two-chamber approach to government (a universal format modern democracies have since adopted) seems to reverberate within such propositions as Aristotle favours.

The very document that still stands today as the bastion of U.S. sovereignty, declares, and demands of Americans the prerequisite of an ongoing assessment of the political situation and

¹ The following tweet reveals in an eloquent manner how persistent, self-interested politicking (by both red and blue camps) has failed to expunge from the American mind the strong, defining sentiment, the ongoing search for identity, and a true understanding of the democratic ideal. <https://twitter.com/AMERikaNGIRLBOT/status/1017231396778266624?s=03>

² (Lee, 2022) For additional comments on the 'strings of power' and Athenian democracy, see my study: Ezra Pound: Eleusis and the Harmony of Hierarchy: https://www.academia.edu/36821138/ON_SOLID_GROUND_EZRA_POUND_S_METAPHOR_OF_KNOWLEDGE_The_Confucian_Context_Chapter_7_Eleusis_and_the_harmony_of_hierarchy

of the system of government employed in steering their sovereign state. Aside from the well-known phrases that the world has grown to revere, we find next to them those which perhaps offer a greater scope in understanding American politics. Jefferson wrote in 'The Declaration of Independence':

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. ³ That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. ⁴

An assessment of the situation that confronted the British Colonies in America in the second half of the eighteenth century, stood to address both the need to legitimise the actions of independentists and, once successful in achieving emancipation, the equally important obligation of immediately reinstating an order into political life that may have been strong enough to avert very real dangers such as existing allegiances to the British Empire and the conflicting claims from the then thirteen States of America. ⁵

³ Ezra Pound has offered his own commentary on these celebrated words: "Jefferson has a reputation for having made excessive statements, which might happen to any voluble man if a few of his remarks were perpetually considered apart from their context, and apart from the occasions when they were published and the contrary excess they were designed to correct. The 'free and equal' is limited by the passive verb 'born,' it was directed against special privileges of those 'first-born' and to those whose legal fathers were Dukes, Earls, etc. There is not the least shadow of suspicion that T. J. ever supposed that men remained equal or were biologically equal, or had a right to equality save in opportunity and before the law. Like every leader and constructor in human history he tried to bring a certain number of men up to a certain level, by elimination of certain defects." (Pound E. , Jefferson and /or Mussolini: L'idea Statale, Fascism as I Have Seen It, 1935, p. 114)

⁴ (Jefferson, 1961, p. 29)

⁵ The "very real dangers" I refer to here can be best illustrated by the public controversy that has come to be known by the title *Novanglus and Massachusettensis* and which took place starting in the Fall of 1774 and ending in April 1775 within the pages of the *Massachusetts Gazette and Post Boy* and the *Boston Gazette*. At the time, the tensions created by a division of loyalties among Americans resulted in both writers, later identified as Daniel Leonard (Tory from Massachusetts) and John Adams (independentist from New England), having to conceal their names under the Latinised versions of their respective colonies. The views were conflicting in the extreme and they represent even now an excellent example of the thoroughness and conviction underlying both political opinions. As for the growing concerns about unity among the colonies, the personal accounts by Jefferson

The new independent government of the United States needed as much to destroy the previous *status quo* as to replace it with something that could provide stability and economic independence.

Jefferson's rhetoric in the 'Declaration of Independence' is one that aims at balancing a revolutionary thrust with the eventual creation of an institutional model which, because founded on the will of the people to free themselves from oppressive British measures,⁶ was meant to replace it and thus provide access to a more equitable system of government for North Americans.

Principled criticism of the United States government can well be classified under such provisos as Jefferson distinguishes in the 'Declaration ...'. After all, what is intended for the United States through such criticism is that it be true to the founders and that it reassess the structures of governments and the legislative corpus to ensure a greater measure of access and equality among its citizens.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

That such re-evaluation may have implied a study of different economic options to the blatantly capitalistic approach to administration by post-Enlightenment economies, and that such options as have been proposed were not and have not been to the liking of many people in power then and now, does not subtract from the fact that they are meant to examine a potentially fairer system of government where the people can operate not under a structure

and Adams provide large tracts of evidence about such difficulties. Jefferson's autobiography highlights such tensions to show how, despite many obstacles, the labour of Congress came to succeed in establishing a Confederation of States. In the notes Jefferson provides from the proceedings of July 30, 31 and August 1, 1776, he rephrases member Samuel Chase's words as follows: "Mr. Chase observed this article [Art. XVII 'to determine the manner of voting in Congress'] was the most likely to divide us, of any one proposed in the draught then under consideration; that the larger colonies had threatened they would not confederate at all, if their weight in Congress should not be equal to the numbers of people they added to the confederacy; while the smaller ones declared against a union, if they did not retain an equal vote for the protection of their rights. That it was of the utmost consequence to bring the parties together, as, should we sever from each other, either no foreign power will ally with us at all, or the different States will form different alliances, and thus increase the horrors of those scenes of civil war and bloodshed, which in such a state of separation and independence, would render us a miserable people." (Jefferson, *The Life and the Writings of T. J.*, 1998, pp. 32-3)

⁶ The Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767, the events of the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770) and the Boston Tea Party (1773).

bent on the levying of taxes but within a model of sound administration and monetary impartiality on the part of the state.

Perhaps what draws a line of distinction between the two ex-presidents of the U.S. and some of its critics is that the former were prepared to defend the democratic principle to a greater extent than some of these critics were and are prepared to do even today.⁷ Here is Ezra Pound speaking about democracy in the broadcast of October 2nd, 1941. According to Leonard D. Doob, the transmission was expressly meant for Americans. The first two paragraphs of the transcription made by the American Federal Communications Commission and edited by Doob read as follows:

It's a DITCH all right. Democracy has been LICKED in France. The frogs were chucked into war AGAINST the Will of the people. Democracy has been licked to a frazzle in England where it never did get a look in ANY-HOW. But even pseudo-democracy breaks down when a people is chucked into a war against its will, and the Brits. never VOTED Winston into the premiership. In fact WHEN DID they have an election?

Remember the government in England that decides WHEN to have an election. Think where we would be if Mr. Roosevelt could merely POST-PONE elections till he got ready to have one.

Well, democracy is in her last DITCH, and if she ain't saved in America NO ONE is going to save her in her parliamentary form.⁸

Pound's expression of controlled anger represents as much a warning about the potentially nefarious consequences of representative democracy (where bureaucracy and self-interest take precedence over untainted political representation) as a suggestion – placed at the beginning of a script to be broadcasted – that there is a faster way to achieve genuine representation for the people. However, at a point where the listener might prick-up his/her

⁷ John Adams's own belief in democracy towards the end of his life lacked the uncompromising support he had vested it with in his early years. In the letter of November 13, 1815, Adams writes to Jefferson: "The fund[a]mental Article of my political Creed is, that Despotism, or unlimited Sovereignty, or Absolute Power is the same in a Majority of a popular Assembly, an Aristocratical Counsel, an Oligarchical Junto and a single Emperor. Equally arbitrary cruel bloody and in every respect diabolical. Accordingly arbitrary Power, wherever it has resided, has never failed to destroy all the records Memorials and Histories of former times which it did not like and to corrupt and interpolate such as it was cunning enough to preserve or tolerate. We cannot therefore say with much confidence, what Knowledge or what Virtues may have prevailed in some former Ages in some quarters of the World." (Adams-Jefferson, 1959, p. 456) The above comments by Adams, although falling short of damning representative democracy as the best possible model for government, certainly open the scope for an understanding of political power that may be free from misconceptions and bias arising from particular interests. Perhaps such reasons have worked against Adams's own comparatively less illustrious standing in North American history books.

⁸ (Pound E. , Last Ditch of Democracy, October 2, 1941) 1978, p. 3)

ear to catch again the long-lost echoes of debates over direct democracy, Pound fancies something less intricate. For him, enlightened rule and the cult of the honest leader is still a viable route, and in that, he appears to draw inspiration from history and from the frustration experienced by those before him who had to fight institutional red tape to achieve social results through political means.

Both Jefferson's and Adams's writings show how the slow process of bringing their ideas into action often made them despair of their most cherished projects. Nevertheless, since they always managed to remain within the circle of executive power at the highest levels of government, they never completely capitulated before their opposition. It took Jefferson nearly forty years to see his 'Bill for the more General Diffusion of Knowledge' passed in 1817. Throughout his life, he advocated the institution of a balanced education and prepared detailed administrative proposals for delivering education at primary and higher levels. Despite his efforts however, it was only nine years before his death that the projects he fashioned during the years of the revolution came to fruition.

Adams's plight is perhaps more complex, since most of his writings and particularly his letters to Jefferson reveal how his interest in philosophy, anthropology, religion, and other apparently disparate subjects must have shifted his perspective on practical and financial matters in a way perhaps uncharacteristic of the American mind of the time, which was more concerned with pressing matters of survival.

In fact, if trust is granted to Jefferson's own renditions of the congressional debates during the first years of the revolution, it is possible to discern how Adams's debating manner remains quite different from that of his colleagues. Adams succeeds in providing a great number of vivid examples which are meant to serve as points of view from which others might perceive his opinions in a favourable light.

slavery: counting the peoples

The former president's wide-ranging interests are also worth highlighting since they frequently provide independent and eclectic analyses of whatever issue comes under discussion. An

example in point is the debate over the classification of peoples – slaves in particular – for the contributions to the common treasury in the different states of the confederation.

While most of Adams's colleagues are content to express their opinions, and in so doing trust the ideas and principles underlying such opinions as the sole foundation for argumentation, Adams sees it necessary to illustrate his beliefs – and he does so at every instance with hypothetical examples which appear to have been improvised on the spot and which tend to reduce his arguments to very simple pseudo-mathematical equivalences. The main thrust of Adams's opinion on the topic has been well summarised by Jefferson.

Mr. John Adams observed, that the numbers of people were taken by this article, as an index of the wealth of the State, and not as subjects of taxation; that, as to this matter, it was of no consequence by what name you called your people, whether by that of freemen or of slaves; that in some countries the laboring poor were called freemen, in others they were called slaves; but that the difference as to the state was imaginary only. ⁹

But Jefferson finds it necessary to extend the record of Adams' delivery and provides a full-page account of his open reasoning. Adams has stated that it is all a question of nomenclature. He then goes on to explain why these differences in 'naming' should not affect the procedures of the state when counting its sources of wealth for taxation purposes. His ensuing explanation is important for what it reveals about the processes of government and our ongoing remarks about the nature of naming ¹⁰ and its direct relation to the management of official business.

Suppose, by an extraordinary operation of nature or of law, one-half the laborers of a State could in the course of one night be transformed into slaves; would the State be made poorer or less able to pay taxes? That the condition of the laboring poor in most countries, that of the fishermen particularly of the Northern States, is as abject as that of slaves. It is the number of laborers which produces the surplus for taxation, and numbers, therefore, indiscriminately, are the fair index of wealth; that it is the use of the word 'property' here, and its application to some of the people of the State, which produces the fallacy. How does the Southern farmer procure slaves? Either by importation or by purchase from his neighbor. If he imports the slave, he adds one to the number of laborers in his country, and proportionably to its profits and abilities to pay taxes; if he buys from his neighbor, it is only a transfer of laborer from one farm to another, which does not change the annual produce

⁹ (Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson*, (1821) 2017, pp. 29-30)

¹⁰ See my studies: 'Musical Rehearsals in Confucian Harmony' and 'Philosophies that meet outside philosophy' <https://www.amazon.in/SOLID-GROUND-METAPHOR-KNOWLEDGE-CONFUCIAN-ebook/dp/B0CL4Z4Y6S>

of the State, and therefore, should not change its tax: that if a Northern farmer works ten laborers on his farm, he can, it is true, invest the surplus of the ten men's labor in cattle; but so may the Southern farmer, working ten slaves; that a State of one hundred thousand freemen can maintain no more cattle, than one of one hundred thousand slaves. Therefore they have no more of that kind of property; that a slave may indeed, from the custom of speech, be more properly called the wealth of his master, than the free laborer might be called the wealth of his employer; but as to the State, both were equally its wealth, and should, therefore, equally add to the quota of its tax. ¹¹

Adams' analysis of the fiscal situation in the American Colonies needs to be seen in the light of contemporary opinions about slavery among his peers. However, what strikes the reader most in his delivery is the facility with which generalising concepts about the condition of, and the naming conventions used for some inhabitants of the New Continent seem to suffice for the purpose of administration.

Such tenets reflect what has been identified previously in the examples of the hierarchies in the Eleusinian cult and the Confucian pledge to ancient rulers ¹² as the capacity to utilise naming (*zheng ming* 正名) as a tool for the conceptualisation of phenomena as well as its use as a precise medium for the formulation of laws and the running of government.

The fact that Adams can make all humans (free and slaves alike) count as taxable individuals in their respective states and that, in doing so, he is allegedly investing them with one of the basic obligations befitting free individuals – something the condition of slavery had precluded them from – does not make him feel in any way uncomfortable.

What such a proposition means in terms of the reigning double standards about basic human freedom, rights, and obligations his government would invite were it to implement such fiscal policy, does not seem to bother him. It can hardly be said that whatever slaves got back for

¹¹ (Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson*, (1821) 2017, pp. 30-1) It is interesting to see Adams's concepts in parallel with those of Karl Marx who publishes, nearly a century later, at the very beginning of his treatise 'Capital', the following statement: "The labour, however, that forms the substance of value, is homogeneous human labour, expenditure of one uniform labour-power. The total labour-power of society, which is embodied in the sum total of the values of all commodities produced by that society, counts here as one homogeneous mass of human labour-power, composed though it be of innumerable individual units. Each of these units is the same as any other, so far as it has the character of the average labour-power of society, and takes effect as much; that is, so far as it requires for producing a commodity, no more time than is needed on an average, no more than is socially necessary. The labour-time socially necessary is that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time." (Marx, p. 8)

¹² See my study: *Eleusis and the Harmony of Hierarchy*: <https://www.amazon.in/SOLID-GROUND-METAPHOR-KNOWLEDGE-CONFUCIAN-ebook/dp/B0CL4Z4Y6S>

their contribution as taxable individuals within the state was on par with what free individuals benefitted from as rights within the terms of the Declaration of Independence.¹³

Adams, immersed in the congressional debate, finds no fault in bringing to light the double nature of language; in fact, he seems pleased to uncover such duality and to expose it as a stumbling block for the process of government. His comparing the plight of Northern fishermen with that of Southern slaves must be seen in this light. For the politician in charge of an administration (the treasury), such distinctions have no materiality since the noticeable difference in 'person for person' production from both Northern and Southern states appears negligible.

Similarly, under this conceptual framework, the free labourer becomes the "wealth [property] of his employer" and differs only in appellation from the slave who is indeed the "wealth [property] of his master". It is obvious that the difference between two such people, labourer and slave, is great and that Adams must have been aware of it; however, what matters most here is the service such an understanding of language usage and nomenclature provides in terms of facilitating the drawing up of a particular policy.

It may be said that politics is born in this conscious erasure of such difference in expression or language, and that, with political parlance, comes a necessary obfuscation of what is really meant, together with the ambiguity about the practical meaning of idealistic statements on governance (The Declaration of Independence, constitutions, political manifestos, etc.) and their applied reality as exercised through the mechanisms and 'tools' of government.

Reading through Jefferson's account of Adams's congressional contributions, a very clear picture emerges of the status of the early American nation. More importantly, this clear depiction of the implementation of power through the use of language reveals how the Jeffersonian dictum that 'knowledge is power, ignorance is weakness' has slowly filtrated into the rhetoric employed by minority and oppressed groups in the nineteenth, twentieth and

¹³ It may be said that Socialist ideology, and Communism in particular, use the same rationale and transfer the ownership from the masses to the state somewhat substituting the multitude of private employers with the one state. It is doubtful, based on this, that the results of an identical thinking process might deliver better results in terms of benefits to the people at large than those achieved by Capitalism.

twenty-first centuries. The world-wide union, feminist, LGBT+ rights, and critical race theory movements have challenged and continue to challenge an exclusive access to the use of 'language as power' in modern times, ¹⁴ raising complex problems related not just to the legitimacy of state legislation in regards such minorities but also to the status of these self-same minorities among themselves.

In terms of Adams's own beliefs about the nature of government and how these were translated into specific blueprints for the establishment of American institutions something must also be said. There is perhaps no better example than that provided by his unwavering advocacy of a strong executive organ ¹⁵ that would balance the dealings of the higher (Senate) and lower (Congress) elected assemblies.

In the preface to his three-volume *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America against the attack of M. Turgot, in his letter to Dr. Price, dated the twenty-second of March, 1778*, Adams makes the point that an independent executive is the only real leveller for the activities of the representative assemblies; a theme which is often alluded to in his correspondence with Jefferson. He writes:

If there is one certain truth to be collected from the history of all ages, it is this: that the people's rights and liberties and the democratical mixture in a constitution can never be preserved without a strong executive, or, in other words, without separating the executive from the legislative power. If the executive power or any considerable part of it is left in the hands either of an aristocratical or a democratical assembly, it will corrupt the legislature as necessarily as rust corrupts iron or as arsenic poisons the human body; and when the legislature is corrupted, the people are undone. ¹⁶

¹⁴ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11472/LGBT-a-guide-to-language-in-use/pdf/LGBT_language_april_21.pdf

¹⁵ It is interesting to point out that Jefferson undertook similar efforts in erecting what he called a 'wall of separation between church and state' that would ensure the sturdiness of the executive branch of government, and that, in his commentary on Christianity, he, like Confucius, were averse to speaking about miracles.

¹⁶ (Adams, 1954, p. 115) Adams appears to be referring to the failures of the British Commons/Lords parliamentary system, but also to the newly instituted US system. Pound's constant attack on U.S. past presidents is reminiscent of two important connected concepts underlying his views on government. The issue of "strong" government and that of responsibility in public affairs represent the two sides of Pound's coinage in matters political. Although in the following excerpt he does not mention John Adams directly, the parallelisms are certainly evident. Simultaneously, his mention of "responsibility" strikes as a reminder of Confucian practice. He writes on (Pound E. , Jefferson and /or Mussolini: L'idea Statale, Fascism as I Have Seen It, 1935, pp. 103-04): "Disgust with Wilson [Woodrow], unimpeached, bred a reaction against having 'a strong man in the White House' and we suffered the three deficiencies, and Heavens knows what the present (as H. Mencken defines him) 'weak sister' will offer us. The problem of democracy is whether its alleged system, its de jure system, can still be handled by the men of good will; whether real issues as distinct from red herrings CAN be forced into the legislatures (House and Senate), and whether a sufficiently active segment of the public can still be persuaded to combine and compel its elected delegates to act decently in an even moderately intelligent manner."

Adams's opinions are controversial now, especially in the light of recent events actively affecting the American democracy, and if we consider his status and that of his colleagues in Congress. Yet it is obvious that his assessment of how an administration should perform remains in vogue to this day. The preceding comment on the nature of government and the previously presented positivist views from Adams about the way in which slaves should be accounted for, lead the discussion on to Jefferson's own compromises and to the real position on the issue of race many American politicians held at the time.

thoughts on racial prejudice

It is important to remember that many of the members of Congress were themselves landowners who also owned slaves. Jefferson was among them and although he has always been portrayed as favouring a gradual elimination of slavery through emancipation, we should re-position such notions within the perspective of his most explicit statements on this topic.¹⁷

In the May 1779 session of the Virginian legislature, Jefferson moved a bill "declaring who should be deemed citizens" and "asserting the natural right of expatriation". The bill was passed on the 26th of June 1779 and, according to Jefferson himself "was a mere digest of the existing laws respecting them [slaves], without any intimation of a plan for a future and general emancipation." The ensuing remarks will prove to be of great relevance when trying to assess the interests at play and the real extent of racism in the first years of the North American nation. Jefferson continues:

The principles of the amendment, however, were agreed on, that is to say, the freedom of all born after a certain day, and deportation at proper age. But it was found that the public mind would not yet bear the proposition, nor will it bear it even at this day [1821]. Yet the day is not distant when it must bear and adopt it, or worse will follow. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than these people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the

¹⁷ In this sense, Pound's position remains unclear. Although he seems to consider Jefferson as the ideal emancipationist, his comments do not clearly state whether he was in favour of deportation of slaves as Jefferson was, or whether he only saw Jefferson's concern for the liberation of the oppressed African Americans. Speaking of Jefferson's main contributions Pound writes: "He did not jeopardize his power by untimely fights for his 'higher beliefs' at a time when it would have been impossible to carry them into practical effect. I can think of only two such 'ideals,' one the abolition of slavery, and the other the far more distant ethics of debt." (Pound E. , Jefferson and /or Mussolini: L'idea Statale, Fascism as I Have Seen It, 1935, p. 116)

process of emancipation and deportation, peaceably, and in such slow degree, as that the devil will wear off insensibly, and their place be, *pari passu*, filled up by free white laborers. If, on the contrary, it is left to force itself on, human nature must shudder at the prospect held up. ¹⁸

This personal commentary on the nature of race and slavery, and on the possible solutions to the problems arising from a combination of these two realities, must be seen in the light of what has been an ongoing dualism about the nature and consequences of the fusion of races in the making of policies in most countries. ¹⁹ Even though Jefferson speaks of the inevitable emancipation of slaves, his admission to what appears to be a clear aversion in the "public mind" and to the "indelible" differences between races as well as to what he perceives to be the only solution, namely, deportation, remain facts in disharmony within a current reading of history and are, even in our day, quite removed from the accomplishment of the 'higher democratic ideals' it would seem rightful to uphold. ²⁰

Ezra Pound might have followed a similar progression of ideas leading him to support the Mussolini regime in Italy, yet proof of his prejudice can be found as early as his pamphleteering contributions to the column 'The Revolt of Intelligence' in London's *New Age*. On January 15, 1920, his column was devoted to the criticism of nationalism of the 'wrong' sort. Having expounded on the nature of superstition and blind religious observance, basing his arguments on a swift semantic analysis of long-established phrases and cultural stereotypes, he goes on to say:

Nine-tenths of everything decent in American civic life and institutions probably rest on the Jeffersonian basis; Jefferson may be recorded, therefore, as a fairly decent citizen of his country; he managed to be without failure as a citizen of the world; for an advance in the form of institutions in one part of the globe is a benefit to the whole of it. The term 'citizen

¹⁸ (Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson*, (1821) 2017, p. 51) Striking similarities with such a discourse are to be found in the policies of the major economies (US, UK, and various EU member states) even today, affecting mainly the poor immigrant, and refugee classes.

¹⁹ Jefferson was quite right about the legacy that the occurrence of two and more races 'living in the same government' has brought the U.S.A. in terms of poverty, violence, and percentages of African Americans, Native American Indians, and Latino Americans (as well as other) trapped in the penal system for example. However, the problem is not solely American. Kay J. Anderson concludes her excellent study of Australian Chinatowns in the context of multiculturalism with the following words: "So while policies of multiculturalism may have the appearance of offering a radical equivalence of immigrant voices, I have argued that in absorbing latent notions of innate difference, the policy remains locked within the ethnocentric narrative tradition from which it stems and out of which the very pluralism it seeks to acknowledge was constructed." (Anderson K. J., 1993, p. 88)

²⁰ Technological advances such as DNA testing have also provided us over recent years with clear evidence about a less apparent (not skin-deep) fusion of races that predates many of us despite geographic origins.

of the world' may have fallen into loose usage, but it is a finer ideal than most, and Dante's "Nos autem qui mundus est patria" is the fruit of a more consideration of life than is to be discovered in 'Good American,' 'Good Englishman,' or 'Français loyal.'²¹

Pound therefore, aligns himself with Jefferson and is confident enough to gain in decency through the act by what he considers to be world standards. His remarks on the nature of language usage compare well with those of Adams on the topic of taxation quoted in the previous section. Both appear to relish the discovery of 'clichés' yet, they also enjoy the power that such discovery offers them in terms of the knowledge and practical decision-making being acquired in the process.

To give Pound the benefit of the doubt, and to assume that the one-tenth of the depravity in public affairs he allows Jefferson is that which emanates from the previously quoted paragraph on the issue of slavery, is to err in the analysis.

As the delayed true emancipation from the scourge of slavery that only took place in the U.S. in the mid-1960s through the Civil Rights Movement proves, intellectual positions, ingrained beliefs, and blatant self-interest result in prevailing attitudes of peoples removed by generations becoming ever more deep-seated and stultified, leading societies persistently to decision-making totally out of touch with the evident realities identified with and experienced by those poor and oppressed under the social status quo.

Pound's position is not uncommon, and his opinions and statements represent well such stultified and damaging cultural traits. In 1920, already in London, he carries over his prejudices across the Pond and writes:

America has for some decades been flooded with "inferior races," with the "off-scourings of Europe"; civilization does not "advance" with anything resembling solidarity.²²

Racial bigotry was not something alien to Pound or many of his American contemporaries, and the bedrock of his offensive attitude towards Jews, African Americans, and others was laid during his childhood. His arguments regarding racial conflict are muddled and irrational.

²¹ (Pound E. , *The Revolt of Intelligence VI*, 1920, pp. 176-77) in (Pound E. , *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals*, 1991, pp. 9-10)

²² (Pound E. , *The Revolt of Intelligence VI*, 1920, p. 9)

Once confronted with his bigotry, his explanations cannot stand their ground. Even when more humane considerations arise, and Pound is forced to weigh the consequences that his racist attitude would have on Jewish individuals who are not part of what, if we believe Pound, amounts to a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, his reasoning is, at best, weak:

All that line of talk distracts from the MAIN issue. If the Jews wd. take any sort of part in econ/reform as distinct from communist obscurantism and financial obscurantism there wd. be no need of any antisemitic stuff at all.... It is hard as hell to do justice. A minority race can NOT fight in the open. Not if it has any sense at all. The small jew suffers for the sins of the big gombeen man. The fight ought Not to have been fought on the lines of race prejudice. Only way to avoid that is by spread and acceleration of economic light. ²³

The problem with such an approach to a debate on racial issues is that, under the guise of a benign tolerance, the argument of supremacy of some races over others is being cemented. Pound never doubts his prerogative as a self-appointed judge. ²⁴ Thus, he can, on the one hand, speak of race and prejudice as a generality and make alarming comments on the status of a whole people, while, on the other, he patronisingly removes from every single individual belonging to that race all direct access to freedom of thought, spuriously accusing them of supporting concepts such as "communist obscurantism" or "financial obscurantism". The result of such dialectic, perhaps unsurprisingly, is not far removed from what Adams proposed in dealing with the taxation of free and slave. Language and the way language can allow for the concatenation of ideology proves to be a treacherous tool of government indeed.

Perhaps Pound should have learnt to view other peoples in a more positive light, in the manner one of his elder American craftsmen did. Mark Twain, had written in 1899:

"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

²³ From a letter to James Taylor Dunn of 18 March 1937. See (Redman, 1991, p. 178) Regrettably, we see to this day, in the UK and across the world, persisting remnants of such attitudes and of a conviction that could be summed up in very similar terms as Pound proposes.

²⁴ W. C. Williams has said that "He (Pound) always felt superior to anyone about him" and James Laughlin (Pound's publisher in *New Directions*) spoke of an ego which "Might more equitably have been distributed among three or four of his contemporaries." See (Fuller Torrey, 1984, p. 67)

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, and have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities, of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality? " ²⁵

The same is true of Pound's treatment of African Americans as "coons", and of his treatment of women, though some critics perilously seem to think that Pound means no harm when using such appellatives. ²⁶

For all his concern about justice and his genuine sensitivity towards other cultures, Pound fails to acknowledge, when addressing political or economic phenomena, the fact that different races, religions, and cultures handle these matters in different ways, and that the 'ruler' role-model he would have liked to create should have functioned within processes driven by understanding and not through a forceful equalization of divergent standards. It becomes difficult to explain such an attitude in Pound without falling prey to psychoanalytical arguments about the poet's complexes and deviations.

On the other hand, how Pound manages to endorse such statements may be understood in the light of the tense social conditions evident in America at the time of his birth, ²⁷ but also in terms of legacy's burden. As parents, we are all aware that we instigate in our children certain traits – some positive and others not so constructive – that are inevitably transferred to our

²⁵ (Twain, 1899)

²⁶ Wayne Pounds has provided some context in a footnote to his paper 'A dash of barbarism: Ezra Pound and Gino Saviotti in the *Indice*', 1930-31. He writes: "(26) While cultural pluralism is an issue in the Italy of the early 1930s, race is not. There is no racist writing and no racist language in the *Indice*, either on the part of P or anyone else. This is not surprising, since scholarship is generally agreed that the Italy of the period before the Pact of Steel was the least racist of European countries (Flory 189 and Redman 177, who provide additional references). Still, given later developments, the *Indice*'s pluralism is a fact worth stating." (Pounds)

²⁷ See my study: An American Abroad: <https://www.amazon.in/SOLID-GROUND-METAPHOR-KNOWLEDGE-CONFUCIAN-ebook/dp/B0CL4Z4Y6S>

next generation consciously or indeed unconsciously. 'Founding fathers', it seems, succumb to the same phenomenon, though perhaps do so in a more poignant way: they create and become an integral part of a transmission system endowed with the capacity to influence entire nations and cultures.

Confucianism and democracy

Returning to the discussion on government and Pound's affiliation to the Confucian philosophical model, it is important to recognise what the American poet understood to be the benefits of enlightened rule as against those offered by democracy. Such comparison opens two principal lines of enquiry.

Firstly, we must acknowledge the fact that there exists a real historical choice between a model of government based on the democratic principle which is traceable to ancient Athens and the Platonic defence of democracy, and that separate standard of authority understood within the Confucian lore to be acquired through the concerted nurturing of moral attitudes and practices by the leader/ruler.

Secondly, there is the question of how these two models have been preserved in various forms throughout the centuries.

The differences between these two generic dispositions for government have been explained by Benjamin I. Schwartz in his book *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. His discussions of linguistic, political, and philosophical matters within this volume are thorough and illuminating. He writes:

We have the radical rigorism of Plato and what looks like the more relaxed moral optimism of Confucius. There is no question in Plato of any inherited system of *li* [禮] which, when performed in the spirit proper to it, can lead men to a life of *jen* [ren 仁]. Nothing less than a prolonged arduous study of philosophic dialectic can lead the guardians to the higher vision of the good. In the interim they must be sealed off against all the insidious selfish particularisms of society by being cut off from the economic sphere and familial life through a system of communistic isolation. Confucius' noble men, few as they may be, live in the midst of corrupt society yet, by dint of their unremitting pursuit of *jen*, are still able to achieve an autonomous inner equanimity as well as outer integrity. Their moral attainments, far from being inhibited, are actually enhanced by their particularistic familial commitments, all

of which they are able to treat in a spirit perfectly appropriate to their general integrity. It is precisely in the proper practice of family commitments that they manifest virtue. The traditions of the past which in a distorted and fragmented form are still present in the society do not represent an 'irrelevant' traditionalism but the very source of wisdom. ²⁸

For an individual like Pound who considered himself able to criticise and suggest new ways to ameliorate the society of his time, a 'hands-on' approach such as that exemplified by Schwartz's description of the Confucian model behaviour, may have been very attractive.

Section 7 of Chapter XX in Pound's translation of the *Zhong Yong* 中庸 (Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot*) reads as follows:

Thence the man of breed cannot dodge disciplining himself. Thinking of this self-discipline he cannot fail in good acts toward his relatives; thinking of being good to his blood relatives he cannot skimp his understanding of nature and of mankind; wanting to know mankind he must perforce observe the order of nature and the heavens. ²⁹

We see therefore, that Confucius's thinking represents for Pound a model interaction necessary for the artist to develop a communicative aesthetics through which his contributions may be received widely within society. Moreover, as Schwartz also asserts:

In Athens, it was, perhaps paradoxically, the democrats who had faith in tradition because of their conviction that the average citizen could be a bearer of the genuine wisdom embodied in tradition. Socrates' enemies believe that they are defending the wholesome religious traditions of the Athenian past. To Confucius, a learned vanguard is essential. Yet the learning itself is much more humanly accessible than is Plato's science. ³⁰

The contrast between the Confucian (modernist) "learned vanguard" providing a "humanly accessible" knowledge with Plato's 'less accessible science' might be clarified by two of Pound's own concepts published originally as 'Definitions etc.' ³¹ Definitions 3 and 4 read as follows:

"3. The aim of state education has been (historically) to prevent people from discovering that the classics are worth reading. In this endeavour it has been almost wholly successful.

²⁸ (Schwartz B. I., 1985, p. 97)

²⁹ (Pound E. , Confucius, 1951, p. 151)

³⁰ (Schwartz B. I., 1985, p. 98)

³¹ (Pound E. , Definitions etc, 1925, p. 54)

4. The only way a nation can render itself safe is by civilizing its neighbors. The duty of aristocracy is to educate its pleb; failure in this simple precaution means its own bloody destruction. History presents no more imbecile a series of spectacles than the conduct of aristocracies. Without whom civilization is impossible. And after one imbecile lot of these lepidoptera [a large order of insects comprising over 165,000 species of butterflies and moths] is destroyed the whole of woodenhead humanity has to concentrate its efforts on production of another lot, equally piffling and light headed.”³²

Through these excerpts and notwithstanding the irony, Pound declares two principal tenets of his own understanding of society. First, he upholds the pre-eminence of some individuals over others something he terms "aristocracy"; second, he advocates the necessity, if only for the sake of survival, of universal education. These two principles of governmental behaviour are fully attuned to the requirements of both Confucian philosophy and Jefferson's own understanding.

We ask therefore, in what sense can a "learned vanguard" provide a 'more humanly accessible learning' to humanity than that offered by constant meticulous study of reasons and rationality?

Within what Schwartz labels "Plato's science", as he well notices, a wholly individual approach to understanding and perception has been built. The results are commensurate with the effort and, more importantly, with the conceptual intelligence of the candidate.

The Platonic claim would have it that influence must always be measured against the effectiveness of its rhetoric and therefore finds validation only within language. Electioneering in all active democracies exemplifies this point clearly. The emphasis of the large majority of politicians and parties is to effectively build marketing campaigns that sell their propositions on the basis of slogans to be shared, even forced onto the electorate. Ideas, mots, and concepts are banded around without much regard to facts, evidence, or implementation feasibility with the sole purpose of getting a specific individual or party into power. Stepping into a representational or significant language that directly addresses the reality of the world and thus compromises its purely conceptual formulations, conjectures, and refutations, is

³² (Pound E. , Ezra pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, 1991, p. 355)

avoided. Within this model, the reality is surely represented by that 'untouched idea' casting its image inside the Platonic cave. Or, As Mario Cuomo would have it:

'You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.'³³

For the Confucian candidate, on the other hand, effort and conceptual intelligence are also important. They are not however, unique in their claims to wisdom and the attainment of harmonious living. Schwartz's "learned vanguard" upholds tradition as a living instrument, and its first prerogative is to keep 'urging' life into such tradition. Thus, the effort of the Confucian intelligence is directed towards a reality which is not only outside the scope of a purely private concern but nurtures an ongoing relationship with everyday practices both old and new.

In this sense, Confucian practice, although based on sage-hood and clear hierarchical tenets, remains far more immediate to the commoner's life, demanding of the leader/ruler proof of their mastery through effective practice and implementation, yet affording at the same time a body of knowledge that is capable of catering for a conceptual complexity such as that present in the Platonic world of ideas.

In this context, Robert Eno's remarks on Confucianism will prove useful in bringing together once again the Poundian and Confucian views of the world. In the section entitled 'Practical Totalism: The Ruist Doctrine of Sagehood', Eno writes:

Early Ruism³⁴ shares with a number of other systems of thought the belief that an extraordinary level of understanding exists, attainable by man, which can comprehend the phenomenal world as a whole. When this level of understanding is attained, any significant phenomenon will be perceived as possessing a clear meaning because it will be understood in its relation to the whole. In other words, the multiplicity of the world makes sense, and it is possible to understand the holistic sense of it, and so to understand any part in relation to the whole.

³³ <https://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings-interpretations/mario-cuomo-you-campaign-in-poetry-you-govern-in-prose>

³⁴ Eno chooses to speak of Confucian thought as "Ruist" following the denomination Ru Jia 儒家 accorded to the followers of Confucian doctrines. The term although well established in Chinese studies, is a late denomination which, as R. T. Ames has pointed out, emphasised the weakness or sickness of the scholar. The term was first used during the Nan-Bei dynasty (南北朝) towards the end of the fourth century CE.

We will refer to this type of doctrine as "totalistic," a term that signals both the impulse toward holism in the portrait of a universal level of meaning in the world and the force of the associated imperative to grasp the universe in its entirety. ³⁵

Although Eno's definition does much to sanction our comments above, and the suggested affinities between Confucius and Pound, it is vital to note some philosophical and hermeneutical points of distinction to widen our viewpoint.

Eno's representation of the Confucian 'system of thought' is almost totally immersed in a Western understanding of the Chinese classics. Although implications and definitions such as his are useful for the purpose of comparison and illustration, the fact that the writings attributed to Confucius do not stand as a declared or structured 'system of thought', nor do they claim directly but by implication only that 'the phenomenal world can be comprehended as a whole', should alert the reader to the presence of Western appropriative qualities. Therefore, their usefulness needs to be set aside for the time being to further specify the terms of the truly autochthonous Confucian discourse and perhaps draw an even more intimate parallelism to Poundian practice.

As is often the case, it is not the meaning put across but the manner in which it is expressed that leads a reader into certain assumptions. This is exactly what Eno seems to be doing when he tries to explain the very nature of the Western habit of appropriation. He writes about 'totalism' confirming the above remarks:

Nowhere in the *Analects* is there a systematic description of a totalistic consciousness, and the text can be read without introducing the idea. However, to read the text in this way is to encounter a bewildering concatenation of independent moral virtues and imperatives, which leaves the impression that Confucius' philosophical achievement was the laborious piling on of ad hoc rules. It has traditionally been recognized, however, that an important unity is created by the textual dominance of the word "*jen*" [*ren*] in the *Analects*, and this is, in fact, the key to discerning the notion of the Sagely totalism in that text. ³⁶

The *Analects* and all the other Confucian classics must in fact be read without such a 'totalising idea' being introduced. The idea is inherent in the text but does not need to be pre-imposed

³⁵ (Eno, 1990, pp. 64-5)

³⁶ (Eno, 1990, p. 66)

upon the profusion of "concepts" and the disconnectedness among many of its utterances. It is precisely this disconnectedness which induces the reader to thread ³⁷ the propositions advanced not into the idea of 'totalism' but into his/her own mental activity, however disconnected and variegated the propositions themselves may be.

The suggestion that 'an idea' might hold the whole of Confucian classical utterance (or any other for that matter) under its metaphoric umbrella ³⁸ does a disservice to the material comprised within it. Eno's Platonic self – a 'self' Westerners will surely find useful and easy to identify with – allows for a reading of the Chinese classics which, though not deceptive of the general conceptual formation of Confucian philosophy, ³⁹ curtails the impact of the texts themselves by attaching an undue Western formalism to the explanation. Moreover, what Eno calls "independent moral virtues and imperatives" are only so if considered outside the context in which they are formulated.

Confucius was speaking to his itinerant student-followers and to the rulers of his time and, in more than one sense, his words were those of a father/protector of his children, a fact that not only shifts the perspective from pure conceptual speculation to notions of care and coexistence but is also one of the most important tenets *xiao* (孝 or filial piety) of Confucian thought, whether it be political or social. ⁴⁰

³⁷ "For Confucius, therefore, wisdom is not just an accumulation of much knowledge. He made known to his disciples that there is one single thread binding the way together (一以貫之, 4:15). Because this single thread is loyalty to oneself (忠) and extension of this loyalty to others (恕), which is the main method to attain benevolence (仁之方, 6:30), in fact wisdom is nothing but knowing the way of benevolence (仁之道). Therefore it is not surprising that two poles, consisting of the way of benevolence, knowing and practicing the transmitted propriety (知禮, 3:22; 7:31) and knowing and accepting the mandate of Heaven (知天命, 2:4; 16:8; 3:11) comprise the constitutive structure of wisdom in the Analects. In a word, wisdom is for the attainment of benevolence and forms a part of benevolence. This exhibits the practical and moral character of wisdom in the Confucian tradition." (Kim, 1992)

³⁸ This is not to say that Chinese culture is devoid of an encompassing cosmology. In fact, the Chinese conception of universal relationships developed by Song Dynasty (宋 960–1279) scholars and ultimately traceable to the Yi Jing 易經 (Book of Changes) says that there exists a permanent relation among the directions of the compass, numerology, the five elements, the basic colours and tastes, and human qualities among other things. Thus, the Centre 中 (zhong) is associated with xin 信 (trust), qi 氣 (original energy), tu 土 (earth, soil, land), with wu 五 (number 5) and with wu 戊 (the 5th of the ten celestial stems used to calculate time measurements). The South 南 (nan) is associated with li 禮 (ritual), shen 神 (original spirit), huo 火 (fire), qi 七 (number 7) and with bing 丙 (the 3rd of the celestial stems). The North 北 (bei) is associated with zhi 智 (knowledge), jing 精 (original essence), shui 水 (water), yi 一 (number 1), and with ren 壬 (the 9th of the celestial stems). The East 東 (dong) is associated with ren 仁 (humanity), xing 性 (natural disposition), mu 木 (wood), san 三 (number 3), and with jia 甲 (the 1st of the celestial stems). The West 西 (xi) is associated with yi 義 (rightness), qing 情 (emotion), jin 金 (gold-metal), jiu 九 (number 9), and with geng 庚 (the 7th of the celestial stems).

³⁹ Numerous authors have expressed reservations about considering Confucianism a philosophic system.

⁴⁰ The equivalence of the state and the emperor as 'father' figures is found repeatedly in the Confucian classics. The five laws of Confucian behaviour also present service to the sovereign and filial piety (孝 respect of parents, elders, and ancestors) as the two most important social obligations. Finally, the extant remarks about the education of Confucius' own son show that he was

The following excerpt from R. P. Peerenboom's *Law and Morality in Ancient China* accurately illustrates this point:

For Confucius, one becomes a human being, a humane [ren] person, by virtue of participation in society; personhood and humanity are functions of socialization If one does not or is not willing to participate in society, to enter into harmonious relations with others, one not only makes it more difficult for society to realize its potential by depriving the community of one's unique talents but one remains oneself at the level of a beast – of human qua member of a biological species.⁴¹

Therefore, and in so far as Confucian and Poundian concerns show a distinct predilection for social matters and the running of government in a structure which favours popular access through the guidance of an enlightened elite, not only do the ideological connections to some of the previously reviewed modernist tendencies⁴² take on a distinct shape, but Pound's particular ideological affinity with U.S. policy making and the political activities of presidents Jefferson and Adams also gain in clarity.

Pound's interest in politics and the theories of power and government was focused and further intensified through his readings and observations on the concept of money and the facts of economics. It is in this area of debate that he found the closest affinities to figures such as Adams and Jefferson, and it is also within this field of study that he was able to secure explicit statements of ideology from the Confucian classics, particularly from the book of Mencius.

We need not go far into the Mencian text to find very explicit statements about the nature of Confucian government. In Book I, Chapter 1, sections 4-6 (in Legge's translation) Mencius answers King Hui of Liang's invitation to speak on matters of administration and what is profitable for his kingdom with the following words:

4. If your Majesty say, 'What is to be done to profit my kingdom?' the great officers will say, 'What is to be done to profit our families?' and the inferior officers and the common people will say, 'What is to be done to profit our persons?' Superiors and inferiors will try to snatch

considered and treated as any other student and the same requirements were expected of him as were required of Confucius's other followers. See *Analects* 12:11, 16:13, and 17:9.

⁴¹ (Peerenboom, 1993, p. 129) Many of Pound's jests over the inadequacies and deficiencies of public figures might be seen in terms of what Peerenboom considers 'humanity qua a biological species'.

⁴² See my study: Ezra Pound's Modernism and the specific references to T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis's statements on government: <https://www.amazon.in/SOLID-GROUND-METAPHOR-KNOWLEDGE-CONFUCIAN-ebook/dp/B0CL4Z4Y6S>

this profit the one from the other, and the kingdom will be endangered. In the kingdom of ten thousand chariots, the murderer of his sovereign shall be *the chief of a family of a thousand chariots*. In a kingdom of a thousand chariots, the murderer of his prince shall be *the chief of a family of a hundred chariots*. To have a thousand in ten thousand, and a hundred in a thousand, cannot be said to be a large allotment, but if righteousness be put last, and profit be put first, they will not be satisfied without snatching all.

5. There never has been a man trained to benevolence who neglected his parents. There never has been a man trained to righteousness who made his sovereign an after consideration.

6. Let your Majesty also say, 'Benevolence and righteousness, and these shall be the only themes.' Why must you use that word - 'profit'? ⁴³

Legge's "benevolence" is a translation of 仁 ren, and righteousness corresponds to 義 yi, elsewhere translated respectively as 'humanity' and 'justice'. Although Legge is right to translate these two words in terms of their corresponding, inner, or psychological qualities, the reader should not lose sight of the wider social and political implications of the words, especially when the recorded dialogue specifically addresses the topic of government.

From the outset, the Mencian concern is with maintaining the unstated interconnectedness of things economic with certain moral and social priorities, what we called at the beginning of this piece 'a potentially fairer system of government where the people can operate not under a structure bent on the levying of taxes but within a model of sound administration and monetary impartiality on the part of the state'. ⁴⁴

We will quote one of many extremely precise and clear examples of what Confucianism prescribed on the subject of taxation from which, we dare say, much could be learnt today:

Mencius said, 'If a ruler give honour to men of talents and virtue and employ the able, so that offices shall all be filled by individuals of distinction and mark - then all the scholars of the kingdom will be pleased, and wish to stand in his court. If, in the market-place of his capital, he levy a ground-rent

⁴³ (Mencius, 1988, pp. 431-432) Such questions and answers also carry a heightened relevance of their own within the business culture and empire-building tendencies prevalent in societies throughout history and to our very days where profit is invariably considered to constitute the highest representation of attainment and success. 梁惠王上： 孟子見梁惠王。王曰：「叟不遠千里而來，亦將有以利吾國乎？」孟子對曰：「王何必曰利？亦有仁義而已矣。王曰『何以利吾國』？大夫曰『何以利吾家』？士庶人曰『何以利吾身』？上下交征利而國危矣。萬乘之國弑其君者，必千乘之家；千乘之國弑其君者，必百乘之家。萬取千焉，千取百焉，不為不多矣。苟為後義而先利，不奪不饜。未有仁而遺其親者也，未有義而後其君者也。王亦曰仁義而已矣，何必曰利？」 [Pre-Qin and Han - King Hui of Liang - Chinese Text Project \(ctext.org\)](http://Pre-Qin and Han - King Hui of Liang - Chinese Text Project (ctext.org))

⁴⁴ See page 4 of this essay.

on the shops but do not tax the goods, or enforce the proper regulations without levying a ground-rent - then all the traders of the kingdom will be pleased, and wish to store their goods in his market-place. If, at his frontier-passes, there be an inspection of persons, but no taxes charged on goods or other articles, then all the travellers of the kingdom will be pleased, and wish to make their tours on his roads. If he require that the husbandmen give their mutual aid to cultivate the public field, and exact no other taxes from them - then all the husbandmen of the kingdom will be pleased, and wish to plough in his fields. If from the occupiers of the shops in his market-place he do not exact the fine of the individual idler, or of the hamlet's quota of cloth, then all the people of the kingdom will be pleased, and wish to come and be his people. If a ruler can truly practise these five things, then the people in the neighbouring kingdoms will look up to him as a parent. From the first birth of mankind till now, never has any one led children to attack their parent, and succeeded in his design. Thus, such a ruler will not have an enemy in all the kingdom, and he who has no enemy in the kingdom is the minister of Heaven. Never has there been a ruler in such a case who did not attain to the royal dignity.'⁴⁵

It is such interconnectedness between economics and philosophy, between "profit", "righteousness" and "benevolence" which Pound will use in his approach to economics and his review of the administrative activities of Jefferson and Adams.

Mencius does not avoid answering questions about the practical administration of the state – his works are filled with such advice – what is essential for him is to set the priorities from the point of view of the benefit to humanity or the people at large. The commoner comes up again and again through the Mencian texts as the measuring rod for true and just government.

Moreover, there are instances in Mencius that suggest a form of government that necessitates the approval of the people for the monarch or sovereign to find the just and exact way of action.

In Chapter VII, sections 2-6 (Book I), Mencius comes close to suggesting a plebiscite as the only guide to right government in matters such as the appointment of men to office and the adjudication of the death penalty.

2. The king said, "How shall I know that they [ministers] have not ability, and so avoid employing them at all?"

⁴⁵ <https://ctext.org/mengzi?searchu=tax> 公孫丑上：孟子曰：「尊賢使能，俊傑在位，則天下之士皆悅而願立於其朝矣。市廛而不征，法而不廛，則天下之商皆悅而願藏於其市矣。關譏而不征，則天下之旅皆悅而願出於其路矣。耕者助而不稅，則天下之農皆悅而願耕於其野矣。廛無夫里之布，則天下之民皆悅而願為之氓矣。信能行此五者，則鄰國之民仰之若父母矣。率其子弟，攻其父母，自生民以來，未有能濟者也。如此，則無敵於天下。無敵於天下者，天吏也。然而不王者，未之有也。」

...

4. [Mencius answers] "When all those about you say, - 'This is a man of talents and worth,' you may not for that believe it. When your great officers all say, - 'This is a man of talents and virtue,' neither may you for that believe it. When all the people say, - 'This is a man of talents and virtue,' then examine into the case, and when you find that the man is such, employ him. When all those about you say, - 'This man won't do,' then examine into the case, and when you find that the man won't do, send him away.

5. "When all those about you say, - 'This man deserves death,' don't listen to them. When all your great officers say, - 'This man deserves death,' don't listen to them. When the people all say, - 'This man deserves death,' then inquire into the case, and when you see that the man deserves death, put him to death. In accordance with this we have the saying, 'The people killed him.'

6. "You must act in this way in order to be the parent of the people."⁴⁶

It is in this context that Pound's often repeated remarks about the seriousness entailed in running state affairs and the direct and preeminent importance of policies to the people at large must be examined. Pound was fond of quoting Chapter IV, sections 1 and 3 of Mencius' *entretien* with King Hui of Liang. Here is Legge's translation:

1. King Hwuy of Leang said, "I wish quietly to receive your instructions."

2. Mencius replied, "Is there any difference between killing a man with a stick and with a sword?" *The king* said, "There is no difference."

3. "Is there any difference between doing it with a sword and with *the style of government*?" "There is no difference," was the reply.⁴⁷

These comments by Mencius are by no means the most extreme within his work in terms of 'speaking truth to power'. Chapter VI in Book I is perhaps a better example of how far the

⁴⁶ (Confucius, *The Works of Mencius within The Four Books*, 1988, pp. 491-92) 孟子見齊宣王曰：「所謂故國者，非謂有喬木之謂也，有世臣之謂也。王無親臣矣，昔者所進，今日不知其亡也。」王曰：「吾何以識其不才而舍之？」曰：「國君進賢，如不得已，將使卑踰尊，疏踰戚，可不慎與？左右皆曰賢，未可也；諸大夫皆曰賢，未可也；國人皆曰賢，然後察之；見賢焉，然後用之。左右皆曰不可，勿聽；諸大夫皆曰不可，勿聽；國人皆曰不可，然後察之；見不可焉，然後去之。左右皆曰可殺，勿聽；諸大夫皆曰可殺，勿聽；國人皆曰可殺，然後察之；見可殺焉，然後殺之。故曰，國人殺之也。如此，然後可以為民父母。」 [Mengzi - This man deserves death - Chinese Text Project \(ctext.org\)](#)

⁴⁷ (Confucius, *The Works of Mencius within The Four Books*, 1988, p. 441) 梁惠王曰：「寡人願安承教。」孟子對曰：「殺人以梃與刃，有以異乎？」曰：「無以異也。」「以刃與政，有以異乎？」曰：「無以異也。」曰：「庖有肥肉，廄有肥馬，民有飢色，野有餓莩，此率獸而食人也。獸相食，且人惡之。為民父母，行政不免於率獸而食人。惡在其為民父母也？仲尼曰：『始作俑者，其無後乎！』為其象人而用之也。如之何其使斯民飢而死也？」 [Mengzi - Is there any difference between killing a man - Chinese Text Project \(ctext.org\)](#)

audacity, the independence and courage of the travelling scholar could go in the days of easy summary executions.

“1. Mencius said to the King Seuen of Ts'e, 'Suppose that one of Your Majesty's ministers were to intrust his wife and children to the care of his friend, while he himself went into T'soo to travel, and that, on his return, he should find that the friend had caused his wife and children to suffer from cold and hunger; - how ought he to deal with him?' The king said, 'He should cast him off.' 2. Mencius proceeded, 'Suppose that the chief criminal judge could not regulate the officers under him, how would you deal with him?' The King said, 'Dismiss him.' 3. Mencius again said, 'If within the four borders of your kingdom there is no good government, what is to be done?' The king looked to the right and left and spoke of other matters.”⁴⁸

Focused concern for and attention to the priorities of the commoner rather than the self-interest of those in power is the prerogative of both Confucianism and Democracy. Consequently, it is deplorable that so little is understood and so much is misrepresented about what both these idealistic forms of political management embody. Regrettably, much is being done, at the most distinctive homes of both these philosophies to denigrate, disrupt, and even destroy the rationale of their original intent, and the world at large must necessarily be worse for it.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ (Confucius, *The Works of Mencius within The Four Books*, 1988, pp. 489-90)

⁴⁹ The repeated assaults and legalistic distortions undergoing the democratic process in many advanced economies and the mis-appropriation of some activities within so-called 'Confucian institutions' clearly vouch for such a conclusion.