

Abstract proposed to CUHK

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Do we need a concept of principle in making sense of Confucius' moral thought?

The Analects, a compilation of dialogues between Confucius and his disciples, is widely recognized as a manual of moral experiences. When it comes to moral reasoning, it remains debatable whether there can be found principled-reasoning in Confucius' moral teachings in the Analects. The demand of principled-reasoning seems reasonable if we want to see Confucius' moral thought as generalizable and normatively consistent. In the literature, Confucius' advisor model of imparting moral knowledge encourages various particularist readings. Among all readings I discern two major positions: a moderate particularist suggesting that the concept of principles is not sufficient for understanding Confucius' moral teachings; a radical particularist suggesting that the concept of principles is not necessary in accounting for Confucius' method of moral teachings. I examine the strengths and difficulties of these two positions and then consider the possibility of accommodating principled-reasoning in Confucius' moral teachings, given the basic assumptions in particularism. Based on the above discussion, I defend my tentative position that there is a plausible method of imparting moral knowledge in the Analects, with critical remarks on the weakness of advisor model of knowledge .