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### **Guanzi on how people act**

Guanzi, the political and philosophical text attributed to a homonymous philosopher in the 7th century BCE, is neither a „Legalist“ nor a „Confucian“ text. It can be counted to Legalism in as far as the text envisages strengthening the state and does not stop short from using utilitarian arguments and instruments. There are, however, Confucian elements, for example as Guanzi appeals to the five relationships or urges the ruler to exercise in self-cultivation.

As a certain portion of the text is dedicated to the then-contemporary issue of “salt and iron”, the solution Guanzi offers is based on a reflection on how people act. This philosophy of action blends Legalist and Confucian elements into a complex explanation for human action. Guanzi states that people are generally self-interested, but he also accepts that depending on the context, even the vilest will act according to the (Confucian) virtues – and as context changes, even the noblest will deviate from those virtues. For Guanzi, it is not only the person and its connections to others that matter for actions, but the context in which actions take place. This was a novelty in Chinese Thought.

This paper will advance the argument for Guanzi blending “Confucian” and “Legalist” elements, explaining this combination in Guanzi’s contextual philosophy of action.