

## Editorial Foreword

### How Should “Ultimate Ends” and “Conviction” Respond to “Responsibility”?

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The distinction between an “ethic of ultimate ends/intention” and an “ethic of responsibility” came from Max Weber, who described the two as “fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims.”<sup>①</sup> The former is related to the polysemic German word *Gesinnungsethik*, a term which resulted in a special footnote in the Chinese translation of Weber’s essay “Politics as a Vocation”: “*Gesinnungsethik* is a word that is hard to translate.” According to the translator, the essay has been translated into English so many times with different English words chosen to translate the German term, including “ethic of intention,” “ethic of ultimate ends,” “ethic of conviction” and “ethic of single-minded conviction.” One French translation used “*ethique de conviction*,” while two Japanese translations used the Chinese characters “xin qing 心情” (will, intention) for this term. Chinese translations, such as “yi tu lun li 意圖倫理 (ethic of intention),” “xin yang lun li 信仰倫理 (ethic of conviction)” or “xin qing lun li 心情倫理 (ethic of will)” have been based on different editions of Weber’s essay and thus have reflected different focuses in their choice of characters. The translator who rendered Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation” into Chinese adopted yet a different term - “xin zhi lun li 心志倫理” (the ethic of intention and will).<sup>②</sup>

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<sup>①</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 120.

<sup>②</sup> Max Weber, *Xue shu yu zheng zhi: Wei bo zuo pin ji I* (Writings of Max Weber I: On Academic and Political Vocations), trans. QIAN Yongxiang et al. (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004), 260.

If we consider this further, it may indeed be that Weber's term implies "intention", "conviction" and "will". As Weber says, "This is not to say that an ethic of ultimate ends is identical with a lack of responsibility, or that the ethic of responsibility is identical with lack of conviction."<sup>①</sup> To highlight "responsibility" is not to ignore "intention and conviction." Putting "intention" and "conviction" together, however, might suggest a common signification shared by the varied words chosen by different translators.

In sum, "intention" and "conviction" have been the more popular choices to translate Weber's German term, over "responsibility". If "responsibility" is to judge a human behavior from its foreseeable consequences, "intention" or "conviction" is to determine the "ethical value of an act" through "the intrinsic value of the act per se."<sup>②</sup>

Chinese note a distinction between "behavior (ji 跡)" and "intention (xin 心)," but in the cases of sayings "lun ji jia pin wu xiao zi 論跡家貧無孝子 (If judging by behavior, there will be no filial sons in a poor family)" and "lun xin qian gu wu wan ren 論心千古無完人 (If judging by intention, there would never be a perfect person)," "behavior (ji)" and "intention (xin)" clearly refer to two different types of behavior (i.e. filial piety and adultery). Weber does not weigh in on this distinction, but in the same text he does refer to China, comparing "Chinese mandarins" with "the humanists of our Renaissance", calling them "literati humanistically trained and tested in the language monuments of the remote past." He even quotes Minister Li Hongzhang's diary to show this: "he is most proud of having composed poems and of being a good calligrapher. This stratum, with its conventions developed and modeled after Chinese Antiquity, has determined the whole destiny of China; and perhaps our fate would have been similar if the humanists in their time had had the slightest chance of

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<sup>①</sup> Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis; trans. Gordon C. Wells (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008), 198.

<sup>②</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 139; Max Weber, *On The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. & eds. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), 16.

gaining a similar influence.”<sup>①</sup> However, the “responsibility” that Weber stresses, in contrast to “intention,” probably had nothing to do with the “conventions developed and modeled after ancient China,” but came rather from doubts over the “intrinsic value of the act per se.”

Some scholars think that the relation between “ultimate ends/conviction” and “responsibility” is one of fundamental opposition because these are motivated by two totally different “ultimate values.” For Weber, “both attitudes are equally legitimate and even laudable.”<sup>②</sup> On the other hand, other scholars believe Weber “did indeed put the ethic of responsibility over the ethic of single-minded conviction” because “the search for certainty and the search for truth are not identical.” The moral principles implied in the “ethic of responsibility” inevitably will expose one’s “most profound convictions” to rational critique and “have them examined for their feasibility.”<sup>③</sup>

The easiest way to obtain a sense of “certainty” is to seek for “profound conviction,” and such a sense of certainty can fulfill the function of “morality” and relieve the guilt of the seeker. However, a “sense of certainty” is not necessarily identical to “certainty” or “truth” in Weber’s sense. To imagine the “sense of certainty” that can bring consolation to one’s soul as the search for “truth” is to pursue a “pre-assurance.”<sup>④</sup> In this sense, these two kinds of ethical maxims or principles cannot be regarded as equally “legitimate.” Weber uses a range of examples, from a man shifting his love from one woman to another, to the nature of a country’s dignity, to try to explain

<sup>①</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 93. Cf Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber’s Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis; trans. Gordon C. Wells, 170.

<sup>②</sup> Julien Freund, “German Sociology in the Time of Max Weber,” in *A History of Sociological Analysis*, eds. Tom Bottomore & Robert Nisbet (London & New York: Basic Books, 1978), 180.

<sup>③</sup> Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” in Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schulchter, *Max Weber’s Vision of History: Ethics and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 110.

<sup>④</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 44.

how “the sense of certainty” may help relieve the guilt of an “unchivalrous conduct;” it being “a profoundly unchivalrous manner” to add “a legitimacy that supposedly puts him in the right.”<sup>①</sup> Therefore, “certainty” as “a principle of action” is not identical to “the search for truth,” and only “uncertainty” can be attuned to “a principle of cognition.”<sup>②</sup> This is the context of the issues Weber addresses.

“Politics as a Vocation” is based on Weber’s speech at the University of Munich in 1919, a time when Germany’s situation was described by Schluchter as hopeless because of “the unholy alliance of intransigent right-wing chauvinism and left-wing politics of single-minded conviction (Gesinnungspolitik).”<sup>③</sup> According to Schluchter, in this “disenchanted world,” if the legitimacy of an action is judged only in light of “ultimate ends/intention” or “conviction,” then it “ultimately leads to the closure of social relationships and to the destruction of structural pluralism and value antagonism.”<sup>④</sup> This view chimed with Weber’s own; while Germany at the time was usually regarded as revolutionary, Weber saw a “tremendous collapse,” and prophesied that “a transformation may be in progress.” The opposition between “intention/conviction” and “responsibility” is in fact nothing but “a pious self-justification” or “a means of ‘being in the right.’”<sup>⑤</sup>

“Responsibility” exposes “legitimacy” to rational critique, however, the question lies in the fact that no one can “act solely according to the dictates of the ethic of responsibility,” but will inevitably “stick to his

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<sup>①</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber’s Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis; trans. Gordon C. Wells, 159. Cf. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 117.

<sup>②</sup> Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 110.

<sup>③</sup> Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 68.

<sup>④</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 91.

<sup>⑤</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber’s Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis; trans. Gordon C. Wells, 190, 195-196. Cf. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 113, 118.

ultimate commitments.”<sup>①</sup> In this case, if “intention/conviction” is destined to mean the “certainty” brought by “a pious self-justification,” how can we solve the problem of these two ethical maxims as “fundamentally differing and irconcilably opposed”?<sup>②</sup> Weber’s answer is “a consistent application of the maxims of” an ethic of responsibility so that one can demonstrate ultimate values “in an ethic of responsibility.”<sup>③</sup> It is a great pity that this argument did not satisfy readers.

Eighty years later, when Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote his essay “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,”<sup>④</sup> he alluded to Max Weber and his arguments. Here too the context was related to the particular situation of Germany,<sup>⑤</sup> but the main protagonist is now Heidegger, a philosopher questioned just as Weber had been.

At the outset of the essay, Gadamer’s thought moves from Heidegger to Plato, who “at the invitation of the tyrant of Syracuse, that city’s absolute ruler, ... had twice gone to initiate the young prince in the basic principles of his thought concerning the just idea of the state and the just ordering of society.” Things did not work out well for Plato, to the point where it was difficult for him to return home.<sup>⑥</sup> The details of this experience were recorded by Plato in his *Letters* vii, in which he draws especial attention to the fact that only by philosophy “one is enabled to discern all forms of

<sup>①</sup> Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 85.

<sup>②</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 120.

<sup>③</sup> Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 126.

<sup>④</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” in *Diogenes*, vol. 46/2, no. 182(1998): 3-11.

<sup>⑤</sup> Schluchter specifically notes that some researchers thought Weber held a “militant National-Liberal position” and an “ideal of the powerful nation state” (W. Mommsen), and “a shadow has casted on Weber’s proposal for organizing politics in a mass democracy, especially on his plea for plebiscitary leadership democracy, because of the fate of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi seizure of power. In Germany, in particular, the critical reception of Weber’s work after the Second World War developed into a political critique.” See Wolfgang Schluchter, “Value-Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 102, n. 105.

<sup>⑥</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” 3.

justice both political and individual. Wherefore the classes of mankind (I said) will have no cessation from evils until either the class of those who are right and true philosophers attains political supremacy, or else the class of those who hold power in the States becomes, by some dispensation of Heaven, really philosophic.”He even holds that friendship should “derive from philosophy”and not “from ordinary companionship.”In the end, however, he admits that as soon as a politician thought that he had become “philosophic”, the situation would turn much worse. <sup>①</sup>

At seventy, Plato, who had once passionately engaged in politics, wrote this long letter reflecting on many ordinary customs and conventions in his age. “Tyrannies, oligarchies, and democracies”are nothing but ceaselessly changing forms of government, he wrote, claiming that it is impossible to have “a just government with equal laws”at all. <sup>②</sup> Gadamer thought that “Plato’s political adventure in Sicily is highly symbolic in its expressive force, and considerably thought-provoking,”<sup>③</sup> which is why the small town of Syracuse in Sicily has become synonymous with political temptation for philosophers. People criticized Heidegger and his philosophy for the same reason. But for Gadamer, it is pointless blaming philosophy for socio-political problems; rather, it is more helpful to speak of the “political incompetence”of philosophy. In light of this, Gadamer directs his question of “responsibility”towards Weber’s “ethic of conviction”and “ethic of responsibility”:

Max Weber in the Germany of the time felt the need to invoke an “ethics of responsibility”... as if responsibility were not the kernel of all ethics! In any case ethics is not a matter of simple conviction but refers to real behavior and taking responsibility for the consequences of that behavior and of any lapses from it. “Conviction ethics,”derived (mistakenly) from Kant, were in reality the expression of political weakness and of the lack of

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<sup>①</sup> Plato, *Letter vii*, 326a-b, 333e, 351d.

<sup>②</sup> Plato, *Letter vii*, 326d.

<sup>③</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” 3.

political solidarity. German nineteenth-century bourgeois society suffered from such a weakness because of its habit of respect for authority. That was no doubt a weakness too of the Protestant church, which accorded authority a kind of religious power that led to the neglect of the duty of critical intelligence. Such an attitude coincided with the depoliticization of the intelligentsia: secularization buttressed the religious pathos of faith and hardened into questions of conviction and conscience. <sup>①</sup>

In Gadamer’s analysis, “ethics” cannot just be related to “simple conviction,” while “legitimate” convictions should naturally also be exposed to “critical rationalism.” But compared with Weber’s “enormous collapse” of Germany after World War I, Heidegger’s position is more complicated. According to Gadamer, “respect for [an] authority” has already become the habit of German bourgeois society, while the tendency to “accord authority a kind of religious power” revealed the “weakness” of the Protestant church. The intelligentsia meanwhile had similarly made a “religious pathos” inflected with “conviction and conscience” into a moral judgement on a secular world. Perhaps because Gadamer feels compelled to address the three symptoms of the comprehensive neglect of “critical rationalism”, he attempts to distinguish “the universal conception of philosophy and the academic conception of philosophy.” The most paradoxical effect here is that “universal conception of philosophy indicates a natural human tendency that at all times made us receptive to the answers offered by religions.” <sup>②</sup>

Why would a “universal concept of philosophy” or “widely held convictions” <sup>③</sup> make us willing to receive “the answers offered by religions”? A simple answer relates to the “incompetence of philosophy in politics,” which encompasses Gadamer’s sympathetic understanding of Heidegger. For this reason he insists that philosophers are not “supposed to have a particular competence,” nor should they be “invested with a particular responsibility” although their thoughts might exert great influence

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<sup>①</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” 10-11.

<sup>②</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>③</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

upon their age and time. But “in thoughts as in life,” philosophers as well as other ordinary people are “individually responsible for our actions.”<sup>①</sup> This, seen from another perspective, is different from Weber’s logic that the “application of the maxims of an ethic of responsibility” is to demonstrate one’s “profound conviction” in responsibility.

The critical point for Gadamer lies in the query: “How could one put the question of the true good differently?”<sup>②</sup> His brief explanation, which touches upon an important topic of contemporary academia, namely how can “the subject of morality” might be possible.<sup>③</sup> In his words, “the essential prerequisite” of the question of the true good is to “address the question to oneself, and not to think only of oneself.” In other words, “One cannot ... put oneself in someone else’s place, and one cannot make people accept the recommendations, suggestions, advice or even instructions that they do not see or acknowledge themselves.” Therefore, the so-called “conciliatory ethic” fundamentally does not exist.<sup>④</sup>

The formula to “address the question to oneself, and not to think only of oneself” is very similar to the question raised by Gayatri Spivak in her discussion of “the subaltern” as well as by Derrida in the claim of “speaking on behalf of them ... without speaking for them.”<sup>⑤</sup> This logic and expression lead Gadamer’s apologetic essay to a poetic conclusion:

I have once again reread Kafka’s *The Trial*. The marvelous and agonizing description found there shows how so-called

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<sup>①</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” 5&7.

<sup>②</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>③</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9.

<sup>④</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy”, 10.

<sup>⑤</sup> G. C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois, 1988), 271-314; Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 95. Detailed discussion of Spivak and Derrida’s thought on this please see YANG Huilin, “What Does It Mean By ‘the Poor’?” in *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*, vol.16 (2006): 7-8.

innocence makes a person guilty. In such circumstances in life philosophers can perhaps help us formulate better the questions that concern us all, but they can only be of assistance if they are able to show other people how much we are faced with tasks whose resolution cannot be treated as the sole responsibility of others. It is never solely the other person who is guilty.<sup>①</sup>

To relate “true goodness” to the generation of a “subject of morality”, and to turn the “subject of morality” from a single identity into a relational identity between subjects, is the very “responsibility” that any “intention” or “conviction” cannot fail to deal with, especially in today’s world. Otherwise we are unable to bear our own responsibilities, and have no means to escape the moral traps of “self-justification”.

On several occasions Weber used the phrase “in religious terms, meaning where “The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord.”<sup>②</sup> But in contemporary theology, this would be extremely hard to sustain, having been replaced with a political theology beyond “geo-politics” and “identity politics”. Only with this in mind can we better understand Pope Francis’ extraordinary remarkaphorism: “Dialogue does not necessarily mean compromise” or “fully giving up oneself,”<sup>③</sup> and that spreading the Good News, “is not to convert people from other religions...”<sup>④</sup> What today’s world needs most is for us to walk together in our differences.

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<sup>①</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy,” 11.

<sup>②</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. & eds. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, 120.

<sup>③</sup> Francesco Sisci, “ ‘The World Should not Fear China’s Rise’ : An Interview with Pope Francis,” in this current issue, 86, 88.

<sup>④</sup> TAN Lizhu, “Beyond Geopolitics: The Catholic Church among Refugees as Reflected in Pope Francis’ Words and Deeds in 2016,” in this current issue, 54.

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