

A Criticism of Two Dogmas in Philosophy in China

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ABSTRACT | The authors of this paper criticize two dogmas which have prevailed in philosophy in China over several decades. These dogmas have had devastating consequences for Chinese philosophy. In the first part of this paper the authors criticize the first dogma: Philosophy is the history of philosophy. They describe the first wave of criticism against this dogma in China, and summarize Hegel's main points in his lectures on the history of philosophy. The authors conclude that Hegel does not endorse this dogma, as some have thought. The authors then put forward their own arguments against this dogma. In the second part of the paper, the authors criticize the second dogma: Philosophers ought to design a universal system of philosophical theory from which the solution of any future philosophical issues can be deduced. In their arguments against the second dogma, the authors employ Popper's arguments that it is impossible to predict future human activity. Popper's arguments imply that it is impossible to design the kind of universal system in the second dogma. Finally, the authors emphasize the importance of weighing the values of different options on a case-by-case analysis, taking into account the actual practices of human activities.

KEYWORDS | Dogma; Chinese Philosophy; the History of Philosophy; Deduction; Beneficence

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1 The First Dogma: “Philosophy Is the History of Philosophy”

Perhaps, broadly speaking, philosophers are not aware that there is a dogma which has dominated philosophy in China for more than half a century. The dogma is: Philosophy is the history of philosophy.

The proponents of this dogma have never articulated arguments for the claim in a philosophical journal or academic presentation: Their work simply assumes the truth of the dogma. It is, after all, a dogma. Yet it continues to exert influence. It has been perpetuated by younger scholars. Nobody challenged the dogma until 2012 when Chen Bo, a professor from Department of Philosophy at Peking University published his paper titled as “Facing Philosophical Problems and Participating in Contemporary Philosophy Construction” (Chen 2010).

1.1 The First Wave of the Criticism against the Dogma

In his paper Professor Chen describes the situation of China’s philosophy as follows:

As far as we can see, there are almost all “historical” studies in the philosophy circle in China...Almost the whole Chinese philosophy circle is doing the “history” of philosophy, few are really doing “philosophy”... almost all people focus on the past of philosophy, few people “live” in the present and current time of philosophy, participate in the contemporary construction of philosophy. (Chen 2010, p. 12)

In contemporary China, there are some historians of philosophy, many professors of philosophy, and many philosophical scholars, but there is no “philosopher” in the real sense, and no one dares to call himself a “philosopher.” (Chen 2010, p. 14)

In his critique of this dogma, Chen Bo points out that philosophy is not the history of philosophy, and neither does the study of philosophy amount to the study of the history of philosophy. This is, of course, amounts to a denial of the first dogma. From the viewpoint of the nature of philosophy, the prevalence of this dogma has been harmful. For most students who study in a philosophy department, the purpose of learning the history of philosophy is to accumulate the necessary cognitive resources for independent thinking, not to become a historian of philosophy. By focusing exclusively on the history of philosophy, contemporary Chinese philosophers have not properly foregrounded their own independent lines of inquiry. Instead, contemporary Chinese philosophers should establish their own identity and

win the dignity of philosophers through their own efforts (Chen 2010 p. 14). Chen Bo continued with several proposals: first, that the source of philosophy is always some problem or question; second, that the refinement of philosophical problems leads to the specialization of philosophical research and the emergence of new branches of philosophy; third, that the principles of philosophical study are free inquiry and serious criticism; and finally, that the method of philosophical study is argumentation (Chen 2010, p. 15 ff.).

Immediately following Chen's paper, Jia Yushu, a philosopher working at Institute of Science, Technology and Culture, College of Ordnance Engineering, People's Liberation Army published a paper titled "Departure from the Wrong Area Where Philosophy Is Defined as History of Philosophy" in the same journal (Jia 2010). Jia Yushu first identifies as a dogma the claim that philosophy is the history of philosophy (Jia 2010). He argues that this dogma is "the product of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Hegel's philosophy by Chinese philosophers. Hegel never said that 'philosophy is the history of philosophy'. Therefore, the advocacy of the dogma 'philosophy is the history of philosophy' by the Chinese philosophy circle is nothing but to dissolve the unfamiliar philosophical research into the familiar historical research with the help of the intersection of philosophy and history of philosophy." The author argues that "Chinese philosophy must say goodbye to history, and instead, it must face the real world" (Jia 2010).

We don't agree with Jia Yushu that the dogma has a goal of promoting a post-modernism ideological program; nor do we agree that Chinese philosophy must say goodbye to history. The fact is that this dogma did not promote a postmodernism ideological program in Chinese philosophy. It did, however, lead to a great number of editorial and translational works on the history of philosophy which are deemed to be futile—for example, the translation of Hegel's complete works into Chinese. We believe that the best and productive approach to Hegelian Philosophy is to read Hegel's works in the original German rather than in Chinese translation. We also claim that studying the history of philosophy is useful in order to study the ideas, thoughts and principles of philosophy. We must not say goodbye to the history of philosophy. However, for the majority of the people who are interested in learning philosophy, the history of philosophy is only a small part of their work. We agree with Professor Jia that Chinese philosophy must face the real world, and the Chinese philosophers must focus on philosophical issues that are raised in social practices during the transformation of Chinese society. For example, in the introduction of emerging technologies into China, a number of philosophical issues have been raised. These philosophical issues include ontological, epistemological and ethical issues, such as: what is the entity of a robot (is it an agent or moral agent?) or a synthetic organism (is it a machine or a form of life?); how to know

the entity of these kinds (e.g., do we know life through creating life?); and ethical issues (ought we to prohibit, permit or promote the research, development and application of emerging technologies?).

1.2 Hegel on the Relationship between Philosophy and the History of Philosophy

There is a lot to say about Hegel's idea about the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy; the dogma "philosophy is the history of philosophy" stems partly from a misreading of Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, and partly from a dubious source.

In Chinese philosophy, the proposition that "philosophy is the history of philosophy" has been smuggled in without philosophical argument, accepted as the golden principle of philosophy. Some claim that it was Hegel who said it. We cannot find the source for this claim. Hegel has never said that "philosophy is the history of philosophy" in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Hegel 1892). Interestingly enough, Hegel argued that the concept of the history of philosophy is a self-contradiction in his lectures about the notion of the history of philosophy:

The thought which may first occur to us in the history of Philosophy, is that the subject itself contains an inner contradiction. For Philosophy aims at understanding what is unchangeable, eternal, in and for itself: its end is Truth. But history tells us of that which has at one time existed, at another time has vanished, having been expelled by something else. Truth is eternal; it does not fall within the sphere of the transient, and has no history. But if it has a history, and as this history is only the representation of a succession of past forms of knowledge, the truth is not to be found in it, for the truth cannot be what has passed away. (Hegel 1892-1896)

After this paragraph Hegel tries to explain his argument through a comparison with Christian religion and "the other sciences". Hegel argues that in order to get a better understanding of this contradiction, we must distinguish between the outward history of a religion or a science with the inward history of the subject itself. As for the history of philosophy, we must take into account that because of the special nature of its subject-matter, it is different from other histories. Now it is evident that the contradiction in question could not refer to the outward history, but merely to the inward history—that of the content itself. Hegel further explains the difference between the outward or external history and inward or internal history. He writes that there is a history of the spread of Christianity and

of the lives of those who have avowed it, and its existence has formed itself into that of a Church. This constitutes an external history of Christianity. In contrast with this external history, the Christian doctrine has its inward history, but it necessarily soon reached its full development and attained to its appointed powers. In Hegel's analysis, that the history of this doctrine in its wider sense includes two elements: first the various additions to and deviations from the truth formerly established, and secondly the combating of these errors, the purification of the principles that remain from such additions, and a consequent return to their first simplicity (Hegel 1892-1896).

Then Hegel returns to Philosophy. He writes that the other sciences, including Philosophy, also have an external history like Religion. Philosophy has a history of its origin, diffusion, maturity, decay, revival; a history of its teachers, promoters, and of its opponents—often, too, of an outward relation to religion and occasionally to the State. However, Hegel argues that the inner content of Religion, Philosophy and Sciences seems to have little historical content. He writes:

In the comparison between the history of Religion and that of Philosophy as to inner content, it is found that there is not in the latter as there is in Religion a fixed and fundamental truth which, as unchangeable, is apart from history. The content of Christianity, which is Truth, has, however, remained unaltered as such, and has therefore little history or as good as none... The other sciences, indeed, have also according to their content a History, a part of which relates to alterations, and the renunciation of tenets which were formerly current. But a great, perhaps the greater, part of the history relates to what has proved permanent, so that what was new, was not an alteration on earlier acquisitions, but an addition to them. (Hegel 1892-1896)

Hegel takes an example of a science like Mathematics. In Mathematics, history more or less has only the pleasant task of recording further additions. Elementary geometry, insofar as it was created by Euclid, may from his time on be regarded as having no further history.

Hegel's ideas on the history of philosophy might be summarized as follows:

First, for Hegel the subject History of Philosophy as an accumulation of opinions would be a most superfluous and tiresome science:

History, at the first glance, includes in its aim the narration of the accidental circumstances of times, of races, and of individuals, treated impartially partly as regards their relation in time, and partly as to

their content. The appearance of contingency in time-succession is to be dealt with later on. It is contingency of content which is the idea with which we have first to deal—the idea of contingent actions. But thoughts and not external actions, or griefs, or joys, form the content of Philosophy. Contingent thoughts, however, are nothing but opinions, and philosophical opinions are opinions relating to the more special content of Philosophy, regarding God, Nature and Spirit. (Hegel 1892-1896)

Hegel argues that the view usually taken of the history of Philosophy ascribes to it the narration of a number of philosophical opinions as they have arisen and manifested themselves in time. This kind of matter is called opinion; those who think themselves more capable of judging rightly, call such a history a display of senseless follies, or at least of errors made by misguided men. Then he concludes that:

If the history of Philosophy merely represented various opinions in array, whether they be of God or of natural and spiritual things existent, it would be a most superfluous and tiresome science, no matter what advantage might be brought forward as derived from such thought-activity and learning. What can be more useless than to learn a string of bald opinions, and what more unimportant? Literary works, being histories of Philosophy in the sense that they produce and treat the ideas of Philosophy as if they were opinions, need be only superficially glanced at to find how dry and destitute of interest everything about them is. (Hegel 1892-1896)

Second, Hegel further argues that philosophical knowledge obtained through the history of philosophy itself is futile. Hegel writes that in view of the many opinions and philosophical systems throughout the history of philosophy, it is a perplexing task to know which one ought to be accepted. It is evident that the greatest minds have erred, because they have been contradicted by others. “Since, this has been so with minds so great, how then can ego homuncio attempt to form a judgment?” When it is admitted that Philosophy ought to be a real science, and one Philosophy must certainly be the true, the question arises as to which Philosophy it is, and when it can be known. Each one asserts its genuineness, each even gives different signs and tokens by which the Truth can be discovered; sober reflective thought must therefore hesitate to give its judgment. Then eventually the whole of the history of Philosophy becomes a battlefield covered with the bones of the dead; it is a kingdom not merely formed of dead and lifeless individuals, but of refuted

and spiritually dead systems, since each has killed and buried the other, as Hegel describes (Hegel 1892-1896).

Third, Hegel argues that in the history of Philosophy we have to deal with Philosophy itself. He writes that

This makes it easy to us to comprehend the aim of Philosophy, which is in thought and in conception to grasp the Truth, and not merely to discover that nothing can be known, or that at least temporal, finite truth, which also is an untruth, can alone be known and not the Truth indeed. Further we find that in the history of Philosophy we have to deal with Philosophy itself. The facts within that history are not adventures and contain no more romance than does the history of the world. They are not a mere collection of chance events, of expeditions of wandering knights, each going about fighting, struggling purposelessly, leaving no results to show for all his efforts. Nor is it so that one thing has been thought out here, another there, at will; in the activity of thinking mind there is real connection, and what there takes place is rational. It is with this belief in the spirit of the world that we must proceed to history, and in particular to the history of Philosophy. (Hegel 1892-1896)

Finally, Hegel defines the study of the history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself.

Hegel concludes in his lectures that

The study of the history of Philosophy is the study of Philosophy itself, for, indeed, it can be nothing else. Whoever studies the history of sciences such as Physics and Mathematics makes himself acquainted with Physics and Mathematics themselves. But in order to obtain a knowledge of its progress as the development of the Idea in the empirical, external form in which Philosophy appears in History, a corresponding knowledge of the Idea is absolutely essential, just as in judging of human affairs one must have a conception of that which is right and fitting. Else, indeed, as in so many histories of Philosophy, there is presented to the vision devoid of idea, only a disarranged collection of opinions. To make you acquainted with this Idea, and consequently to explain the manifestations, is the business of the history of Philosophy, and to do this is my object in undertaking to lecture on the subject. Since the observer must bring with him the Notion of the subject in order to see it in its phenomenal aspect and

in order to expose the object faithfully to view, we need not wonder at there being so many dull histories of Philosophy in which the succession of its systems are represented simply as a number of opinions, errors and freaks of thought. (Hegel 1892-1896)

From all this, it is clear that the Chinese philosophers who favor the dogma misread Hegel's thought on the history of philosophy in his lectures on the history of philosophy, where he focused on what the subject of the history of philosophy should be rather than on what Philosophy should be. Furthermore, they have misinterpreted Hegel's ideas. Hegel said that the study of the history of philosophy is philosophy, but he never said that philosophy is restricted to the history of philosophy. Hegel has never argued for such a claim and at least there is no evidence to prove he has said it.

One more astonishing thing is that in the Chinese version of *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (黑格尔 1959) the translators (Professor He Ling and his colleagues) inserted the following sentence (which is one of Hegel's addition in his other writing) into the Chinese translation of *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

The Chinese version is:

哲学史的本身就是科学的，因而本质上它就是哲学这门科学

The German original text is:

die Geschichte der Philosophie selbst wissenschaftlich ist und sogar zur Wissenschaft der Philosophie, der Hauptsache nach, wird

The English text is:

The history of Philosophy is itself scientific, and thus essentially becomes the science of Philosophy.

It is quite extraordinary that an authentic Chinese expert in German Philosophy (He Ling) illegitimately inserted such a sentence which was absent from the original of *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

Many Chinese proponents of the dogma "Philosophy is the history of philosophy" seem to cite this sentence as the basis of their acceptance of the dogma. However, the passage in which the inserted sentence appears is really an argument for what the history of philosophy should be if it becomes a legitimate subject, not for what philosophy as such should be (Han 2015; Yao 2020; "Positivism" 2021).

1.3 Arguments against the First Dogma: “Philosophy is more than the History of Philosophy.”

We would like to argue that philosophy is more than the history of philosophy. If philosophy is limited to the history of philosophy, it would not be productive and creative; it would produce only glossaries of previous philosophical works. Let's suppose that there is a first philosopher A, who has written a lot of philosophical papers, then a successor B studies A, and writes a lot of papers on the philosophy of A, and after B there is a C who studies A and B, and produces a lot of papers, and so on. Some people comment that philosophy in China is nothing but an annotation to the six Confucian classics—or, likewise, that all Western philosophy is nothing but footnotes to Plato. Despite being different from science in some aspects, philosophy should share with science the possibility of breakthroughs. If philosophy is nothing but annotations to previous philosophical works, it would tend to be confined in an updated world view. And indeed, Chinese traditional philosophy and science has retained the conceptual framework which consists of *qi*, *yin yang* and *wuxing*, so neither Chinese science nor philosophy have entered a modern time. In fact, current philosophy, both in China and in the West, is much more advanced and sophisticated than the six Classics and Platonic philosophy, precisely because philosophers on both sides have not been confined to the outdated world view formulated in the works of previous philosophers.

We can see that the history of philosophy is filled with creative and wonderful ideas, thoughts and principles which were invented by great philosophers over successive generations. These philosophers include philosophers in the West such as Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Epicurus, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Bacon, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx. The great contributions that they made are far beyond annotations or glossaries to ancient Greek philosophers who are the first generation of philosophers, such as Thales and Heraclitus. As cited above, Hegel claims that philosophy is not just the sum of opinions. In our opinion philosophy should be a systemic knowledge on what entity exists or is real in the world (ontology), how to know it (epistemology) and what we ought to do to it (ethics), all with rational philosophical argumentation. A good philosophical theory should have greater explanatory, predictive, and performative (changing the world) power than others (Qiu 1996). If a philosophy consists only of glossaries of previous works done by previous philosophers it would not have adequate explanatory, predictive and normative power to deal with newly found entities or facts. Consider: we know that a person who is in an irreversible coma but on the respirator can have normal cardiopulmonary function. How to explain the fact? What is the entity: a living person or a brain dead? Will he/she

exist in this state forever? How should we treat her/him? We cannot find the solution of all these issues if we limit us to the history of philosophy or the glossaries of the works of previous philosophers, such as the six Confucian classics and Platonic philosophy. There would be a great blank space in philosophy except the part of the history of philosophy. To properly solve these issues we have to learn new facts, and invent new theories (such as new concept of death) out of the philosophical ivory tower.

This dogma is institutionalized in China, upheld by senior and younger philosophers for lifetimes. It controls not only the philosophy departments of universities and the philosophy institutes of the academy of social sciences, but also the publishing houses and even the funding and professional title review institutions. If you don't comply with this dogma, your work is not considered philosophical. Your chance of getting published is poor, your opportunity of professional promotion is slim, and your graduate students cannot obtain their degrees. The proper work of both university philosophy departments and of the philosophy institutes of the academy of social sciences is to compile or translate the history of philosophy, or write about historical philosophers. Instead of philosophies developed by Chinese own philosophers, philosophy in China has become a philosophy of talking about the philosophies developed by the ancient philosophers.

This dogma has become a defense to support philosophers who feel at ease in their ivory tower and are not concerned with philosophical issues raised in social practices and actual reality, especially those issues raised by emerging technologies and social reform. A visit of Chinese philosophers to Europe is indicative in a couple of ways. When Chinese philosophers visited Britain in 1980s, they found a paper titled "The doctor, the pill, and the fifteen-years-old girl: a case study in medical ethics and law" written by Ian Kennedy (Kennedy 1985). This paper was of great interest because there is never such an article in China which is so practical and also very creative. Kennedy provides a convincing answer that the doctor ought to prescribe the conceptive pill to the fifteen-years-old girl with rigorous arguments of doctor's obligation to her/his patient and possible outcomes if he/she refuses to prescribe. Kennedy's paper, together with other papers written by British philosophers and lawyers, led to revise the legal regulation which limited the age of girls who could get access to contraceptive pills to 16 years-old. This event reveals the fact that philosophy can change the world if philosophers can persuade relevant policy-makers or law/rule-makers to change their decision. Then Chinese philosophers visited Karl Marx's grave and on the grave there is an epitaph which says "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various way, the point, however, is to change it" (Marx 1976). Kennedy's article is exemplary of philosophy which changes or improves the world, a clear contrast with Chinese philoso-

phers who have been immersed in the history of philosophy without concern for real-world affairs. Because of their complexities, uncertainty and transformational power, emerging technologies (technologies such as gene editing, synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, and robotics) have raised sophisticated philosophical issues—issues which need to be solved for application and further research. For example, in the case of synthetic biology there have been a series of philosophical questions regarding ontological, epistemological and ethical issues such as “Is synthetic genome a machine or a form of life?”, “Do we know the life via creating life?”, “Is synthetic biology Playing God, so it should be banned?”, “Does synthetic biology create an unnatural life so compromise the value of life?”, “Does synthetic biology undermine the relationship between the nature and human beings?” and many others. When the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949 an urgent task was to liberate women from gender injustice which is deeply rooted in traditional ideology and institutions, and mobilize them to participate in the construction of new republic, almost no philosophers who immersed into the history of philosophy stood out to criticize the gender prejudice in traditional culture including Confucianism which has notorious gender prejudice in its core theory.

2 The Second Dogma: “All Issues in the World Can Be Solved by a Well-designed Universal System of Philosophical Theory.”

Now let us to move to the second dogma, that is, that all issues in the world can be solved from a well-designed universal system of philosophical theory with deduction. Many younger philosophers and Ph.D. students in philosophy departments have been haunted by this dogma, spending their whole lives to build a well-designed universal system of philosophical theory. The hope is that all issues in the world can be solved by deduction from such a theory. So far, however, no such system has been developed. In what follows we will argue that on the contrary, real philosophical issues that arise in practice—in particular, ethical issues—cannot be solved by mere deduction from a universal theoretical system which is designed and constructed only in a certain period of time in human history.

2.1 Arguments against the Second Dogma: “Impossibility of predicting the future events”

The second dogma relies upon several assumptions, such as the following:

Assumption 1. The past is similar with the present and future, there is nothing new under the sun in the human history;

Assumption 2. We can know everything which has happened in the human history;

Assumption 3. We can predict what will happen in the future of human activities.

It follows from these assumptions that we can solve present and future issues by merely deducing from a universal theoretical system which is designed and constructed only in a certain period of time.

We think that a strong argument against the second dogma is this: when designing a well-designed universal system of philosophical theory to solve all present and future issues, the designer cannot know everything that has happened in the human history; nor can he/she predict what will happen in future human activity. There is no way to know which issues would be raised after the system is designed because the present will be quite different from the past, and the future will be more different from the present, and the new events always happen without precedent and beyond the expectation of all people. In such situation the designer cannot predict what issues will be raised, so he/she cannot contain the solution of these new issues into her/his system. The impossibility to predict the future issue is based on the impossibility of predicting the future of the humankind. As Karl Popper argues in his *The Poverty of Historicism* (Popper 1957), there are four reasons why it is impossible for us to predict the future of the humankind:

First, a description of the whole of history of the whole of society is impossible because the list of characteristics making up such a description would be infinite. If we cannot know the whole of the present state of the mankind it follows that we cannot know the future of the humankind. Popper writes:

If we wish to study a thing, we are bound to select certain aspects of it. It is not possible for us to observe or to describe a whole piece of the world, or a whole piece of nature; in fact, not even the smallest whole piece may be so described, since all description is necessarily selective. (Popper 1957, p. 77)

Second, human history is a single unique event. Therefore, knowledge of the past does not necessarily help one to know the future (Popper 1957, p. 108).

Third, individual human action or reaction can never be predicted with certainty, therefore neither can the future: "the human factor is the ultimately uncertain and wayward element in social life and in all social institutions. Indeed this is

the element which ultimately cannot be completely controlled by institutions (as Spinoza first saw)" (Popper 1957, p. 158).

Fourth, it is impossible to know the future course of history when that course depends in part on the future growth of scientific knowledge, because we cannot predict the growth of scientific knowledge. So we cannot predict the future course of human history. In last century, nobody expected the emergence of relativity theory and quantum mechanics. In this century, nobody expected the invention of gene editing and synthetic genome; nor did they software of artificial intelligence such as DeepBlue which beat the chess Master Kasparov or AlphaGo which won the Go Master Lee Sedol. Suppose that the designer of this universal system lived before gene editing technology was invented. The designer cannot predict any ethical issues raised by this technology. For example: Should we permit ex vivo fetal research in gene editing? Should we permit to conduct clinical trials on somatic gene editing and treat it an ordinary therapy? Should we conduct clinical trials on inheritable gene editing? Do we have obligations for the wellbeing of future generations the health and life of which will be impacted on by inheritable gene editing? Should we enhance our bodily and mental functions beyond those that our species have? And: should we conduct gene editing on non-human organism, including eliminating harmful species such as *Aedes aegypti* which spreads malaria and Dengue fever, reviving eliminated species such as mammoth, or produce legend species such as unicorn? And so on. If the designer has no idea of these ethical issues, he or she cannot include the solution of these ethical issues into her or his system.

2.2 The Possible Counter-Arguments

One argument may claim that there are many cases in ordinary life in which the issue raised in practice can be readily solved by some existing theory or principle or rule. This is true, but the issue must be a routine issue. Consider the following inference:

- (1) All patients who suffer from pneumonia without any hypersensitive or immune reactions and other complications should be prescribed with penicillin;
- (2) Patient A suffer from pneumonia without any hypersensitive or immune reactions and other complications; and
- (3) Patient A should be prescribed with penicillin.

In this routine case there is no ethical difficulty: we can easily see what the physician ought to be done by deducing from existing rules.

However, consider another case. In a far more significant example, the deduction does not work anymore:

Patient B suffers from pneumonia without any negative reactions or other complications, but he refuses to be treated. An ethical issue is raised: What ought the physician to do? Should the physician prescribe penicillin and force the patient to receive the treatment, or should he withhold treatment and respect the patient's preference? The physician cannot solve this ethical issue merely by deduction from any systematic theory, either from a novel well-designed philosophical theory or from a historical theory. An ethical issue is an issue about what ought to be done. And the designer of any particular philosophical system, contemporary or historical, cannot predict it when he or she design the system as human action is uncertain and wayward both in patient's side and physician's side.

As Popper argues above, individual human action or reaction can never be predicted with certainty. Therefore, the future cannot be predicted. In the case in question, the physician should not look for an answer from any available theory. Instead, he or she ought to ask B why he or she decides to refuse the treatment. The reasons of which the patient B refuses to take penicillin may be various:

The patient B may tell the physician that he or she has been at the late stage of bone cancer with intractable pain—that pneumonia is “the friend of elderly” as it causes death with less suffering in the elderly even if it results in B being dead earlier.

The patient B may tell the physician that one of her or his friend was killed by injecting penicillin, so he or she is hesitant as he or she has no confidence in the quality of penicillin available. On these grounds, B may refuse to take penicillin at least temporarily.

The patient B may tell the physician that he or she has heard that the mycobacterium tuberculosis generates a new variant via gene mutation which has resistant power to penicillin.

The patient B may tell the physician that he or she has a phobia of being injected.

And B may have other reasons to refuse to take penicillin. Also it may be the case that the patient B may be in an oscillating situation and he or she may switch from one option to the other option from time to time.

As an individual human the doctor D who treats B may have various belief-value system and he or she may come from different culture:

D may be a medical paternalist and insist that the clinical decision should be made by the physician rather than the patient or anybody else.

D may be a Confucian from China and think that in clinical context a physician must put the priority on the principle of beneficence and assume the responsibility

for patient's good, that is: treat her or disease, restore health, and prolong her or his life as far possible despite the patient's refusal.

D may be a believer of Kantian philosophy and think that a doctor must put the priority on the principle of respect for patient's autonomy, following the patient's decision even if it is irrational or uninformed.

These scenarios show that the designer of a universal philosophical system cannot predict all of the various human uncertain and wayward ideas and actions, so the system cannot provide the solutions to future ethical issues.

When confronted with such variables from the patient's and physician's preferences, the physician is faced with a moral dilemma: Allow patient B to die from pneumonia without the treatment of penicillin, complying with the ethical principle of respecting the patient's autonomy; or allow the patient to linger with intractable pain, complying with the ethical principle of beneficence (treating disease, restoring health, avoiding premature death). The physician is faced with conflicting obligations. One of his or her obligations is "provide benefit to the patient" (beneficence); the other is "respect the patient as a person" (autonomy). When these two obligations cannot be carried out at same time, the physician is trapped in a moral dilemma.

How does the physician escape from this dilemma? When we deal with this kind of moral dilemma, we find two things. First, we find that these cases present different values which we have to weigh. In the case above, one value is patient B's preference or autonomy, and the other value is the patient B's life being prolonged in a certain time.

We could formulate the moral dilemma above as follows (P=the physician, M and N=options of clinical decision):

- (1) P ought to do M;
- (2) P ought to do N;
- (3) P cannot do M and N both at same time;
- (4) If M overrides N, P should make decision of doing M;
- (5) If N overrides M, P should make decision of doing N;
- (6) If M does not override N, and N does not override M because of uncertainty and ignorance; now what P ought to do?

In the formula above it is commonly accepted by both the medical community and the public that the physician has the obligation to do benefit patients (M) while at

the same time respecting the patient's autonomy (N). In (3) M and N are in conflict; P is cast in a moral dilemma in which he has to weigh which obligation between M and N should be prioritized. In (4), P judges that M overrides N and makes the decision of doing M. In (5) after weighing P judges that N overrides, P makes the decision of doing N. However, in (6) M does not override N, nor N does override M. In such a case it is difficult for P to make a decision following any rule. Instead, the decision must be made on a case-by-case basis. Suppose that P lives in a plural cultural context in which whether M overrides N can only be decided on a case-by-case analysis, and P's own value system will have great impact in clinical decision making. Indeed, this is just the case in China, where both Confucianism (beneficence should override respect for patient's autonomy) and Kantianism (respect for patient's autonomy should override beneficence) are influential in both the medical community and the public. In this context, a doctor such as P ought to weigh the outcomes of different options: Which will bring about lesser harms and more benefits or interests to B, but not the deduction from a philosophical system which is designed by some philosophers who fail to predict all possible variables on the side of the patient (such as B) and on the side of the physician (such as P). Our argument above indicates the futility of pre-designed universal systems of philosophical theory. P's appropriate decision cannot be deduced from the system. Instead, P has to weigh the value in his or her own settings.

There may be a counter argument which says that if we design a Kantian system, the above case can be solved by prioritizing the patient's (B's) autonomy. However, in the Chinese cultural context human life is assigned more weight than human autonomy. Furthermore, the decision made by the patient (or the family) may be made out of irrationality or ignorance. In these cases the administrative authority can order the treatment. After such a successful mandatory treatment, the patient or family always expresses great gratitude to physician for saving their life. In the efforts to fight against COVID-19, China is one of the countries in the world with the most effective control over the epidemic. One reason is that nobody refuses to wear face mask, and nobody adopts the slogan, "Mask no, freedom yes." People observe social distancing receive vaccination. Chinese people believe that freedom only exists for a human when that human is alive. So a Kantian system will not work in China. Yet a Confucian system also does not work, because in the Chinese pluralistic context there are many groups who do not favor Confucianism, instead they prefer individual autonomy or self-determination. Only decisions made with the patient's best interest in mind may be accepted by both the patient and the physician. However, even in such a case, what is the best interest for the patient can be determined only on a case by case basis; both sides need to weigh the specifics and communicate with each other to reach agreement.

The pre-designed system is futile in this endeavor.

We wish to make two final points. First: in the clinic or during an epidemic the situation changes quickly. Under such conditions, philosophers cannot predict all possible issues raised by these changes and develop in advance the rules to solve these issues by a pre-designed system of philosophical theory. Second: when we make a moral judgment, we must know the facts, especially facts which cause a new ethical issue or moral dilemma. Take the example of COVID-19 pandemic. When many people became infected with coronavirus and some of them died, we needed to know what the coronavirus is, what medical conditions it caused, how to treat these conditions, and how to prevent or control the epidemic. The pandemic raised philosophical issues in scientific, technological, medical practices. To solve these issues, we cannot appeal to any philosophical theory, contemporary or historical, designed before the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, we have to study what actually happens in the real world.

3 Conclusion

The conclusion is: Pre-designed systems of philosophical theory which are intended to solve all present and future issues are in vain.

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