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PHIL 355E

### Unlock Tool For: Confucianism “Ruism”

Prompt: In this story, we see a large change in the behavior of the drill instructor as we progress. Does this change occur with a change in his role? If not, why not? If so, how does his role change? Is he always acting in the best way possible for his role? Why or why not? In this sense, is he always doing the right thing for a Confucian?

The drill instructor in the story has a change in behavior as the story progresses. Initially portrayed as harsh and unforgiving, he seems to embody a strict and authoritarian leadership style, which reflects his role as a soldier tasked with shaping recruits. Showing no sympathy nor empathy for the death of one of his platoon members, the first impression in the introduction to the drill instructors' persona, “You college kids are idiots,” (Liu) was a blunt and unforgiving attitude that set the tone for his early interactions with the recruits. The drill instructor's behavior can be better understood as fulfilling his role's contextual demands rather than merely displaying character traits such as sympathy or compassion. In Ruism, the moral rightness of an action depends on fulfilling one's duties per one's role and the relationships that define it. The drill instructor has no change in his role but particular circumstances in the story influence his behavior.

One of the instances that hints at the alignment of the drill instructor's behavior to a Confucian approach is when he takes care of not only Pea's funeral arrangements but also takes the platoon out for a meal. “After the Drill Instructor takes care of Pea's funeral arrangements, he takes us to a cheap restaurant.” (Liu) This portrays a shift from his blunt and unforgiving attitude, strictly pure authority, to a more compassionate leader, acknowledging his subordinates' emotions. This act also suggests a recognition of his duty to care for his recruits' emotional well-being, reflecting benevolence, in a way that is appropriate to the drill instructor's role and duty. Despite his initial indifference, the drill instructor, after hardships of ineffective missions in their war against Neorats, “The platoon has returned to the town to be resupplied,” (Liu), displays increased concern for the well-being of his soldiers, which further supports a progression towards the Confucian ideal of benevolence. His actions begin to reflect the Confucian principle of caring for others, balancing authority with empathy, and encompassing the role of an effective leader.

There are incidences in the story that cause disturbances the drill instructor does not act in the best way possible for his role. "Pick it up and eat it," (Liu) reflects a moment when the drill instructor forces one of the recruits to eat a grain of rice that he dropped on the floor while eating his meal, an act both demeaning and inhumane. While the act appears cruel, it serves a purpose within the military environment, emphasizing the importance of discipline, attention to detail, and respect for resources (especially food) in a survival context. This action may seem demeaning and harsh, but it effectively points out the tension between upholding strict standards and showing benevolence once again. In Ruist thought, the drill instructor must consider and balance both his duty to instill foundational discipline and his responsibility to ensure his recruits' well-being.

The drill instructor has showcased instances that align with the Confucian ideal. Yet, he has not fully adopted the virtues of benevolence and righteousness, an internal conscious battle driven by particular circumstances. While he occasionally demonstrates empathy, such as when he arranges Pea's funeral, his authoritarian tendencies and moments of cruelty, like forcing a recruit to eat rice from the floor, suggest that he still struggles with balancing compassion and discipline. It is important to note that Ruism acknowledges that moral behavior is not about following rigid rules but about traversing relationships and acting appropriately within a given role. The drill instructor's demeaning, harsh, and authoritarian-like tendencies, are necessary to maintain order and prepare the recruits for the dangers they encounter and will face. Overall, the drill instructor can be viewed as fulfilling his role in the best way possible under the strict demands of a military setting. There is great importance to acknowledge that the drill instructor's primary duty is to prepare his recruits for the harsh realities of war, but he must do so with actions that are contextually justified.

Works Cited

Liu, Cixin. *The Three-Body Problem*. Translated by Ken Liu, Tor Books, 2014