

CollabOrate
Justice #7
Confucius

LADY JUSTICE, JUSTITIA, GOES TO HER SIXTH PSYCHIATRIC APPOINTMENT. *When Justitia enters, a ramrod straight-backed Chinese man, impeccably dressed in fine silks, waits. His long salt-and-pepper hair has been pulled severely to the back of his head, and dangles in a braided queue. The gentleman rises and bows silently. His hand subtly points to the divan for Justitia.*

CONFUCIUS: I am K'ung Ch'iu of a venerable Chinese family. Your people call me Confucius. *Justitia lays her blindfold, sword, and scales on the floor next to her divan. She reclines, sighing.*

JUSTITIA: You wrote *The Analects*? The work is still widely read. You're famous.

CONFUCIUS: I am humbled. I must note, gracious lady, that my students wrote most of that book. My fame is perhaps now limited to fortune cookies. As during my life, most who read me, forget me.... I have perused your session notes, though there were none from that peasant, Jesus. Tell me how this process is going for you so far.

JUSTITIA: Jesus urged me to hope that Yahweh of Israel, his god, will intervene dramatically to set straight the jumbled pieces of this fractured world. I guess I have to say, I am just not that religious.... It seems to me that righting the global social world is a messy job that belongs to the human community. Their greatest challenge, actually. Mankind is presently wandering dazed in a bramble of ill-deliberated change and rampant overpopulation. Malthus vindicated.

CONFUCIUS: I agree. Why do you focus on human conduct, Justitia?

JUSTITIA: Because humans control conduct, at least to some extent. Humans do not command earthquakes, the sun's diurnal transit, the generational cycle of butterflies, or even the price of tea in China. Forces beyond us govern those. But, at least occasionally, humans control their actions. I focus on doing the do-able. On good days, humans can choose useful new conduct, and by diligent practice embed new habits.

CONFUCIUS: I see. Tell me more. *Confucius strokes his sparse chin hairs.*

JUSTITIA: All modern societies have grown ponderous and impersonal. Institutions crush meaningful community life in favor of supposed efficiency. We compel people to waste away performing robotic economic activity. Families have shrunk--from vibrant bushes brimming with third cousins and laughing uncles, to hard-pruned nuclear husband-wife-children bonsais, to scraggly single-parent-family poles, and now to lone people living in twiggish isolation. Humans must redirect themselves.... How do you see these matters, Confucius?

CONFUCIUS: In my time, I urged all to seek heaven's path. A man strives to grow benevolent, to tame himself for insight and utility, and to stop being small. One honors one's parents. One performs rites punctiliously. I taught....

The black box of conscience, on the coffee table next to Confucius, creaks open. Another dignified Chinese man stands, barely topping six inches. "I am Mo, a student of Confucius a century after his death. With all due deference, I do not see matters as does my esteemed Master. One owes filial devotion not just to one's parents and one's own elders, but to all mankind. What matters is not so much what is just and right, but love. Heaven requires that our love should lack boundaries. Honor and esteem must extend to all. I apologize for my hubris in contradicting you, Master." Mo bows and sits. The ebony lid closes over him.

CONFUCIUS: Mo may be right. I worry, however, that love of all may become esteem for none. Still, I never really questioned the class structure of my time. To honor men of lower classes....

JUSTITIA: And women?

CONFUCIUS: Now you push me too far. Women are...

JUSTITIA: Never mind. Mo interrupted you. Please continue. How would you have me make the world just?

CONFUCIUS: In my time I would have advised: Your rulers have lost the Mandate of Heaven. Small men repress gentlemen of benevolence and insight, seizing control of matters for which the small are ill-equipped. So, the people suffer. One must rely on the best people. The gentleman helps others find and do the good; small men seek profit. Deeds count more than words. Care for and esteem your elders. Perform those tasks the culture deems worthy. Seek *jen*, which is human-heartedness, benevolence, virtue, love, magnanimity. Cling to what is good in the past. Embrace the helpful new thing. Spit out evil. Be wise enough to recognize each when you encounter it.

JUSTITIA: You are sage. The Chinese kings must have valued you greatly.

CONFUCIUS: Regrettably, my kings rejected me. I hoped they might seek my counsel. But, alas, I was reduced to eking my living from students' fees.... Back to you. The session notes indicate you are seeking companionship.

JUSTITIA: I once thought so. But this psychoanalysis is teaching me. The absence I feel lies within me. A consort will not help. I must fill my gaps myself. So, I am searching.

CONFUCIUS: As are we all. I see our time is up.

Justitia gathers her sword, scales, and blindfold. She hikes her jeans up stony hips, and departs.

(Brad Lancaster mediates and collaborates family, elder, and probate issues. He works with his spouse/paralegal, Kim, and little dog, Sofie, in Shoreline as Lancaster Law Office. Email: brad@lancasterlawoffice.com).