

Pre-Qin Confucianism on Civil Society: A Dialogue between Xunzi and Hegel

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Abstract

This paper explores the relation between Confucianism and Hegel's idea of civil society. Hegel conceives civil society, namely modern market societies, as a sphere of ethical life that aims to realize individual freedom. This view contests the prevailing "black box" view of the economy in contemporary political philosophy, which understands the economy as a non-normative autonomous sphere driven by its own logic. This paper first examines this view, and then argues that Xunzi, with a philosophical methodology similar to Hegel, provides an alternative ethical understanding of the economy. For Xunzi, the economic sphere is an essential component of rituals that aims to achieve economic efficiency and the ideal of humanity simultaneously. It concludes that a dialogue between Xunzi and Hegel could form a complementary picture of the ethicality of economic practices.