

DYNAMIC IDEALISM IN WANG YANG-MING

THE DYNAMIC IDEALISM of Wang Yang-ming (Wang Shou- jen, 1472-1529)¹ dominated China during his lifetime and for 150 years thereafter. Confucius, Mencius, Chu Hsi (1300-1200) and others have exerted stronger influence on Chinese thought, but they had prominent rivals whereas Wang shone alone.

The reason for his strong impact lies in the dynamic quality of his philosophy. It was the result of the unhealthy state of Chu Hsi's philosophy, on the one hand, and the bitterness of Wang's own life and time, on the other.

Since 1313 Chu Hsi's interpretation of Confucianism had been made orthodox and the basis of the civil service examinations. Its spirit of rational inquiry and genuine search for fundamental principles had, by Wang's time, degenerated into trifling with what Wang called "fragmentary and isolated details and broken pieces." What was worse, the examinations were no longer an avenue for serving the people and bringing peace to the world but for personal profit and success. To Wang, the source of the trouble was the erroneous theory of the investigation of

¹ Wang was a native of Yuch in present Chekiang. His private name was Shou- jen and courtesy name Po-an. His father was an earl and a minister of civil personnel. In his youth he was with his father in Nanking and then Peking. In 1492 he obtained the "recommended person" degree and in 1499 the "presented scholar" degree. He then served in the government as an executive assistant in one department after another. In 1506, because he offended a eunuch, he was banished to modern Kueichow where he stayed for more than two years.

In 1510 he was appointed a magistrate in Kiangsi, where he built up a remarkable record of administration in seven months. From late 1510 through 1516, he served in various posts in Peking and Nanking. From 1517 to 1519, he suppressed several rebellions in Kiangsi and Fukien, including the one by Prince Ning. He also established schools, rehabilitated the rebels, and reconstructed the economy. He was awarded the title Earl of Hsin-chien and promised certain hereditary privileges, but his enemies at court accused him of conspiring with the prince and he was therefore ostracized by them. From 1521 to 1527 he was in virtual retirement in his native Yuch.

In 1527, he was called to suppress rebellions in Kwangsi, which he did successfully. On his return he died on the way in the seventh year of the Chia-ching period at the age of fifty-seven. Ordinarily this year is equated with 1528, but his death actually occurred on January 10, 1529.

Now he was accused of spreading false doctrines and opposing Chu Hsi. His hereditary privileges were revoked. It was not until 1567, thirty-eight years after his death, that he was given the title Marquis of Hsin-chien and honored with the posthumous title of Wen-ch'eng (Completion of Culture). In 1584 by imperial decree it was ordered that he be offered sacrifice in the Confucian temple. This was the highest honor for a scholar. Only four scholars were so honored during the whole Ming period.

things propagated by Ch'eng I (Ch'eng I-ch'uan, 1033-1107) and Chu Hsi. In insisting that every blade of grass and every tree possesses principle and therefore should be investigated,² the theory diverted people from the basic principles of things and the fundamentals of life. Moreover, by saying that the mind should go to things to investigate the principles inherent in them, the theory considered things as external and separated the mind and principle. As a result, according to Wang, the mind lost its direction and its motivating power. If principles were outside the mind, he said, then the principle of filial piety and therefore the desire to be filial would cease to be as soon as the parents die.³ To him, principle and the mind are one and the principle of filial piety is nothing but the exercise of the mind. Things (and affairs), too, are not external, for they are likewise inside the mind.

By the mind Wang meant essentially the will. There would be no principle or things unless the mind were determined to realize it. This is the reason why Wang insisted that the sincerity of the will must precede the investigation of things. In this he directly opposed Chu Hsi who shifted the chapters of the *Great Learning* so that that on the investigation of things comes before that on the sincerity of the will. Wang rejected this rearrangement and returned to the old text as it is found in the *Book of Rites* where the chapter on the sincerity of the will comes first.

The fundamental difference between Chu and Wang lies in the fact that while Chu's approach is intellectual, Wang's is moral. Chu Hsi interpreted the term *ko-wu* as the rational and objective investigation of things, but Wang preferred to interpret it to mean to "eliminate what is incorrect in the mind so as to preserve the correctness of its original substance."⁴ That is to say, to investigate things or affairs is to do good and to remove evil.⁵

Actually Wang's theory is entirely subjective and confuses reality with value. It is difficult to accept his version of *ko-wu*, for if the term means to rectify the mind, why should it be *ko-wu* (to *ko* things) instead of *ko-hsin* (to *ko* the mind)? His interpretation is of course based on the theory that the mind and things are one. But this theory of his is founded on very shaky grounds. When he was asked what the mind has to do with blossoming trees on the high mountains, he merely answered that their colors show up when you look at them.⁶ The point, however, is that his whole emphasis is on moral values. He was convinced that if the mind is divided or devoted to external things, it will be concerned only with frag-

² *I-shu* (Surviving Works), 18:9a, ECCS. Also see above, ch. 32, comment on sec. 30.

³ *Ch'uan-hsi-lu* (Instructions for Practical Living), sec. 135.

⁴ *ibid.*, secs. 7, 85, 174.

⁵ *ibid.*, sec. 315.

⁶ *ibid.*, sec. 275.

mentary details and will lack the essentials. Scholars with such a mind will trifle with things and lose their purpose in life. For him this was the reason for the decline of the Confucian teachings, which in turn brought on the intellectual, political, and moral decay of his time.

What was Wang's remedy for this sad situation? The remedy is his greatest contribution to Chinese philosophy, namely, the doctrine of the extension of the innate knowledge of the good (*chih liang-chih*). The idea of the extension of knowledge comes from the *Great Learning* and the idea of innate knowledge of the good from Mencius.⁸ Wang's theory is not merely a combination of the two but it gives them a new meaning which gives a new complexion to Chinese thought.

Wang describes innate knowledge as "the original substance of the mind," "the Principle of Nature," "the pure intelligence and clear consciousness of the mind," the mind that is "always shining" and reflects things as they come without being stirred, the spirit of creation, which "produces heaven, earth, spiritual beings and the Lord," and "man's root which is intelligent. . . . It naturally grows and grows without cease."⁹ In short, it is the Principle of Nature (*T'ien-li*), which is not only the principle of right and wrong but also the principle that naturally extends. The mind in its original substance naturally knows the principle of filial piety, for example, when one sees one's parents, and naturally extends it into action.

This leads to another major contribution he made to Chinese philosophy, namely, the doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action. The Confucianists have always stressed the correspondence and equal importance of knowledge and action,¹⁰ but Wang was the first to identify them as one. According to him, knowledge is the beginning of action and action the completion of knowledge." No one really knows food unless he has tasted it, he argued. He was thinking only of a particular kind of knowledge, but his total emphasis on the will is clear. In his doctrine of the identity of the mind and principle, he was following Lu Hsiang-shan (Lu Chiu-yuan, 1139-1193), but in his doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action, he offered something neither Lu nor anyone else in Chinese history ever thought of. Ordinarily the idealistic movement in Neo-Confucianism is called the Lu-Wang School, in contrast to the rationalistic Ch'eng-Chu School. But it was Wang's doctrines, rather than Lu's, that had the tremendous impact in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). His doctrines demand forthright, direct, and spontaneous action.

⁷ *Great Learning*, ch. 5.

⁸ *Mencius*, 7A: 15.

⁹ *Ch'uan-hsi* 114, secs. 152, 135, 137, 151, 261, and 244, respectively.

¹⁰ See above, ch. 32, comment on sec. 38 and n.72.

¹¹ *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, sec. 5.

As said before, his philosophy is partly a product of the bitterness of his own life and time. China in the fifteenth century was externally harassed by semi-nomadic tribes in the north. Internally, China was ruled by incompetent rulers who allowed eunuchs to usurp power and to suppress scholars. Great domains were established for court favorites and members of the imperial family. Heavy taxes drove many people to become bandits. Even a prince was in revolt. The cultural brilliancy and economic prosperity of the first half of the Ming dynasty had turned into decadence and chaos. Many scholars struggled hard to find a solution but were persecuted for so doing.

Wang had a searching mind from his youth. It is said that on his wedding day, he became so absorbed in talking to a Taoist priest about everlasting life that he did not go home until the next morning. At first he studied military crafts. In 1492 he began to study Chu Hsi's philosophy. Following Chu Hsi's doctrine of the investigation of things, he and a friend sat in front of bamboos to try to investigate their principles, only to become ill after seven days. After trying the writing of flowery compositions, he went back to military crafts and then to Taoist techniques of nourishing everlasting life. Only after having found all these to be futile did he return to Confucianism.

He started his official career at twenty-eight. In the next several years he developed his own philosophy and began to attract disciples. He lectured on the primary importance of making up one's mind to become a sage, and he severely attacked the current habits of recitation and flowery compositions. This did not please the rulers or conservative scholars. In 1506, when he protested the imprisonment of a scholar official by a powerful eunuch, he was beaten forty times before the emperor and then banished to modern Kueichow which was then inhabited by aborigines. There, having to face in isolation political, natural, as well as cultural hardships, he was driven to search within his own mind. One night in 1508, he suddenly understood the doctrine of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. A year later, he realized the unity of knowledge and action. Later, in 1514-1516, when he was an official at Nanking, his fame spread and many scholars became his followers, including one of his superior officials. But his radical doctrines, including his insistence on following the old text of the *Great Learning* instead of the one rearranged by Chu Hsi, attracted more and more criticism. From 1516 to 1519 he was ordered to suppress several rebellions, which he successfully did. But the combination of his blunt personality, his attack on orthodoxy, and his novel ideas worked against him. Instead of being rewarded for his accomplishments, he became *persona non-grata*. From 1521 to 1527 he was in virtual retirement in his native

place. Hundreds of scholars from all over China came to him. It was in 1521, when he was fifty, that he arrived at the doctrine of the extension of innate knowledge which culminated his philosophy, and it was about 1527, a little over a year before his death, that he wrote down the *Inquiry on the Great Learning* which embodies virtually all of his major doctrines. During this last decade of his life, attack and ridicule on him grew in extent and intensity, but they only served to reinforce his search for fundamental values. As he said, his doctrines were "achieved from a hundred deaths and a thousand sufferings."¹² This is why he demanded determination, firm purpose, self-examination and self-mastery, "always be doing something," "polishing and training in the actual affairs of life," and realization of truth through personal experience.

Both his teachings and technique are new and challenging. But his final goal-forming one body with all things-and his basic value-humanity (*jen*)- are typically Confucian. He has many similarities with Zen Buddhism and has been attacked for centuries because of this, but any superficial similarity is far outweighed by his stress on active involvement in human affairs and a dynamic approach to the mind.

His influence extended to Japan where his school, known as the Yomeigaku, rivaled the Chu Hsi School (Shushigaku) from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century and provided strong leadership for the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In China itself, Wang's followers disagreed on their interpretations of his teachings, especially on the meaning of innate knowledge. This led to division and confusion. Moreover, some of his followers became socially uncomformative and intellectually undisciplined. In many cases they even committed evil in the name of innate knowledge. Many historians have gone too far in blaming the collapse of the Ming dynasty on his degenerated followers, but there is no doubt that the Wang School had allowed the pitfalls of an unorthodox system to spoil itself. However, the dynamic quality and the purposefulness of his philosophy appealed to modern thinkers like Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), T'an Szu-t'ung (1865-1898), and Hsiung Shih-li (1885--).¹³ As in the fifteenth century, the contemporary situation, in the eyes of many, requires a solution that only a dynamic and idealistic system like Wang's can offer.

The following selections include the *Inquiry on the Great Learning* in its entirety and some selections from the *Ch'uan-hsi lu* (Instructions for Practical Living) which consists of conversations with his pupils, letters, and several short essays.¹⁴

¹² Wang Wen-ch'eng *Kung ch'üan-shu* (Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming), preface, SPTK, p. 15b.

¹³ See below, chs. 40 and 43.

¹⁴ Both of these are included in the *Wang Wen-ch'eng Kung ch'üan-shu* and

Chu Hsi: 6, 33, 135, 319

Extension of knowledge and Investigation of things: A, 6, 7, 89, 135, 262, 315, 319, 331

Forming one body with all things: A, 89, 93, 274, 337

Highest good, Good and evil: A, 3, 6, 34, 53, 101, 228, 308, 315

Humanity (*jen*): A, 89, 93, 133

Innate knowledge: A, 135, 155, 262, 274, 315, 331

Knowledge and action: 5, 26, 132, 133

Methods of cultivation: A, 53, 93, 101, 132, 155, 262, 315 331

Mind: A, 3, 5, 6, 32, 33, 34, 78, 94, 108, 135, 228, 275, 277, 315, 337

Principle: A, 3, 6, 32, 33, 34, 94, 133, 135

Principle of Nature: 7, 53, 101, 135, 228

Sincerity of the will: A, 6, 101

A. INQUIRY ON THE GREAT LEARNING

Question: The *Great Learning* was considered by a former scholar [Chu Hsi] as the learning of the great man."¹⁵ I venture to ask why the learning of the great man should consist in "manifesting the clear character"?¹⁶

Muster Wang said: The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is not only true of the great man. Even the mind of the small man is no different. Only he himself makes it small. Therefore when he sees a child about to fall into a well he cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration.¹⁷ This shows that his humanity (*jen*) forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help feeling an "inability to bear" their suffering.¹⁸ This shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and

have been translated by Chan in his *Instructions for Practical Living, and Other Neo-Confucian Works by Wang Yang-ming*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1963. The section numbers of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu* are retained in the following selections.

¹⁵ Chu Hsi, *Ta-hsüeh chang-chü* (Commentary on the *Great Learning*), the text. Actually by "great learning" (*ta-hsüeh*) Chu Hsi meant "education for the adult," but the Chinese phrase can also mean the learning of the great man. Wang preferred this latter interpretation.

¹⁶ The text of the *Great Learning*.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Mencius, 2A:6.

animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help a feeling of pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as he is. Yet even when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed, he cannot help a feeling of regret. This shows that his humanity forms one body with tiles and stones. This means that even the mind of the small man necessarily has the humanity that forms one body with all. Such a mind is rooted in his Heaven-endowed nature, and is naturally intelligent, clear, and not beclouded. For this reason it is called the "clear character." Although the mind of the small man is divided and narrow, yet his humanity that forms one body can remain free from darkness to this degree. This is due to the fact that his mind has not yet been aroused by desires and obscured by selfishness. When it is aroused by desires and obscured by selfishness, compelled by greed for gain and fear of harm, and stirred by anger, he will destroy things, kill members of his own species, and will do everything. In extreme cases he will even slaughter his own brothers, and the humanity that forms one body will disappear completely. Hence, if it is not obscured by selfish desires, even the mind of the small man has the humanity that forms one body with all as does the mind of the great man. As soon as it is obscured by selfish desires, even the mind of the great man will be divided and narrow like that of the small man. Thus the learning of the great man consists entirely in getting rid of the obscuration of selfish desires in order by his own efforts to make manifest his clear character, so as to restore the condition of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, a condition that is originally so, that is all. It is not that outside of the original substance something can be added.

Question: Why, then, does the learning of the great man consist in loving the people?

Answer: To manifest the clear character is to bring about the substance of the state of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, whereas loving the people is to put into universal operation the function of the state of forming one body. Hence manifesting the clear character consists in loving the people, and loving the people is the way to manifest the clear character. Therefore, only when I love my father, the fathers of others, and the fathers of all men can my humanity really form one body with my father, the fathers of others, and the fathers of all men. When it truly forms one body with them, then the clear character of filial piety will be manifested. Only when I love my brother, the brothers of others, and the brothers of all men can my humanity really form one body with my brother, the brothers of others,

and the brothers of all men. When it truly forms one body with them, then the clear character of brotherly respect will be manifested. Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife, and friends to mountains, rivers, spiritual beings, birds, animals, and plants should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms one body with them, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. This is what is meant by "manifesting the clear character throughout the empire."¹⁹ This is what is meant by "regulation of the family," "ordering the state," and "bringing peace to the world."²⁰ This is what is meant by "full development of one's nature."²¹

Question: Then why does the learning of the great man consist in "abiding in the highest good"?²²

Answer: The highest good is the ultimate principle of manifesting character and loving people. The nature endowed in us by Heaven is pure and perfect. The fact that it is intelligent, clear, and not beclouded is evidence of the emanation and revelation of the highest good. It is the original substance of the clear character which is called innate knowledge of the good. As the highest good emanates and reveals itself, we will consider right as right and wrong as wrong. Things of greater or less importance and situations of grave or light character will be responded to as they act upon us. In all our changes and movements, we will stick to no particular point, but possess in ourselves the Mean that is perfectly natural. This is the ultimate of the normal nature of man and the principle of things. There can be no consideration of adding to or subtracting from it. If there is any, it means selfish ideas and shallow cunning, and cannot be said to be the highest good. Naturally, how can anyone who does not watch over himself carefully when alone, and who has no refinement and singleness of mind, attain to such a state of perfection? Later generations fail to realize that the highest good is inherent in their own minds, but exercise their selfish ideas and cunning and grope for it outside their minds, believing that every event and every object has its own peculiar definite principle. For this reason the law of right and wrong is obscured; the mind becomes concerned with fragmentary and isolated details and broken pieces; the selfish desires of man become rampant and the Principle of Nature is at an end. And thus the learning of manifesting character and loving people is everywhere thrown into confusion. In the past there have, of course, been people who wanted to manifest their clear character. But simply because they did not know how to abide in the highest good, but instead

¹⁹ The text of the *Great Learning*.

²¹ *The Mean*, ch. 22.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²² The text of the *Great Learning*.

drove their own minds toward something too lofty, they thereby lost them in illusions, emptiness, and quietness, having nothing to do with the work of the family, the state, and the world. Such are the followers of Buddhism and Taoism. There have, of course, been those who wanted to love their people. Yet simply because they did not know how to abide in the highest good, but instead sank their own minds in base and trifling things, they thereby lost them in scheming strategy and cunning techniques, having neither the sincerity of humanity nor that of commiseration. Such are the followers of the Five Despots²³ and the pursuers of success and profit. All of these defects are due to a failure to know how to abide in the highest good. Therefore abiding in the highest good is to manifesting character and loving people as the carpenter's square and compass are to the square and the circle, or rule and measure to length, or balances and scales to weight. If the square and the circle do not abide by the compass and the carpenter's square, their standard will be wrong; if length does not abide by the rule and measure, its adjustment will be lost; if weight does not abide by the balances, its exactness will be gone; and if manifesting clear character and loving people do not abide by the highest good, their foundation will disappear. Therefore, abiding in the highest good so as to love people and manifest the clear character is what is meant by the learning of the great man.

Question : "Only after knowing what to abide in can one be calm. Only after having been calm can one be tranquil. Only after having achieved tranquillity can one have peaceful repose. Only after having peaceful repose can one begin to deliberate. Only after deliberation can the end be attained."²⁴ How do you explain this?

Answer: People fail to realize that the highest good is in their minds and seek it outside. As they believe that everything or every event has its own definite principle, they search for the highest good in individual things. Consequently, the mind becomes fragmentary, isolated, broken into pieces; mixed and confused, it has no definite direction. Once it is realized that the highest good is-in the mind and does not depend on any search outside, then the mind will have definite direction and there will be no danger of its becoming fragmentary, isolated, broken into pieces, mixed, or confused. When/there is no such danger, the mind will not be erroneously perturbed but will be tranquil. Not being erroneously perturbed but being tranquil, it will be leisurely and at ease in its daily functioning and will attain peaceful repose. Being in peaceful repose, whenever a thought arises or an event acts upon it, the mind with its

23 They were: Duke Huan of Ch'i (r. 685-643 B.C.), Duke Wen of Chin (r. 636-628 B.C.), Duke Mu of Ch'in (r. 659-619 B.C.), King Chuang of Ch'u (r. 613-589 B.C.), and Duke Hsiang of Sung (r. 650-635 B.C.). See *Mencius*, 6B:7.

24The text of the *Great Learning*.

innate knowledge will thoroughly sift and carefully examine whether or not the thought or event is in accord with the highest good, and thus the mind can deliberate. With deliberation, every decision will be excellent and every act will be proper, and in this way the highest good will be attained.

Question : "Things have their roots and their branches."²⁵: A former scholar [Chu Hsi] considered manifesting the clear character as the root (or fundamental) and renovating the people as the branch (or secondary), and that they are two things opposing each other as internal and external.²⁶ "Affairs have their beginnings and their ends."²⁷ The former scholar considered knowing what to abide in as the beginning and the attainment of the highest good as the end, both being one thing in harmonious continuity. According to you, "renovating the people" (*hsin-min*) should be read as "loving the people" (*ch'in-min*). If so, isn't the theory of root and branches in some respect incorrect?

Answer: The theory of beginnings and ends is in general right. Even if we read "renovating the people" as "loving the people" and say that manifesting the character is the root and loving the people is the branches, it is not incorrect. The main thing is that root and branches should not be distinguished as two different things. The trunk of the tree is called the root (or essential part), and the twigs are called the branches. It is precisely because the tree is one that its parts can be called roots and branches. If they are said to be two different things, then since they are two distinct objects, how can we speak of them as root and branches of the same thing? Since the idea of renovating the people is different from that of loving the people, obviously the task of manifesting the character and that of loving the people are two different things. If it is realized that manifesting the clear character is to love the people and loving the people is to manifest the clear character, how can they be split in two? What the former scholar said is due to his failure to realize that manifesting the character and loving the people are basically one thing. Instead, he believed them to be two different things and consequently, although he knew that root and branches should be one, yet he could not help splitting them in two.

Question: The passage from the phrase, "The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character throughout the world" to the clause, "first [order their state . . . regulate their families . . .] cultivate their personal lives,"²⁸ can be understood by your theory of manifesting the character and loving the people. May I ask what task, what procedure, and what effort are involved in the passage from "Those who wished to

25 *ibid.*

27 "The text of the *Great Learning*.

26 Chu Hsi. *Ta-hsieh chang-chu*.

28 *ibid.*

cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds . . . make their will sincere . . . extend their knowledge” to the clause, “the extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things”?²⁹

Answer: This passage fully explains the task of manifesting the character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good. The person, the mind, the will, knowledge, and things constitute the order followed in the task. While each of them has its own place, they are really one thing. Investigating, extending, being sincere, rectifying, and cultivating are the task performed in the procedure. Although each has its own name, they are really one affair. What is it that is called the person? It is the physical functioning of the mind. What is it that is called the mind? It is the clear and intelligent master of the person. What is meant by cultivating the personal life? It means to do good and get rid of evil. Can the body by itself do good and get rid of evil? The clear and intelligent master must desire to do good and get rid of evil before the body that functions physically can do so. Therefore he who wishes to cultivate his personal life must first rectify his mind.

Comment. The *Great Learning* clearly says that there is an order from “the investigation of things” to “bringing peace to the world,” but Wang says they are but one affair. To the extent that he, like other Neo-Confucianists, depended on ancient Classics for authority and used ancient Confucian terminology, he was a conservative. But he used the *Great Learning* in his own way.

Now the original substance of the mind is man’s nature. Human nature being universally good, the original substance of the mind is correct. How is it that any effort is required to rectify the mind? The reason is that, while the original substance of the mind is originally correct, incorrectness enters when one’s thoughts and will are in operation. Therefore he who wishes to rectify his mind must rectify it in connection with the operation of his thoughts and will. If, whenever a good thought arises, he really loves it as he loves beautiful colors, and whenever an evil thought arises, he really hates it as he hates bad odors, then his will will always be sincere and his mind can be rectified.

However, what arises from the will may be good or evil, and unless there is a way to make clear the distinction between good and evil, there will be a confusion of truth and untruth. In that case, even if one wants to make his will sincere, he cannot do so. Therefore he who wishes to make his will sincere must extend his knowledge. By extension is meant to reach the limit. The word “extension” is the same as that used in the saying. “Mourning is to be carried to the utmost degree of grief.”³⁰ In

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *Analects*, 19:14.

the *Book of Changes* it is said: “Knowing the utmost, one should reach it.”³¹ “Knowing the utmost” means knowledge and “reaching it” means extension. The extension of knowledge is not what later scholars understand as enriching and widening knowledge.³² It is simply extending one’s innate knowledge of the good to the utmost. This innate knowledge of the good is what Mencius meant when he said, “The sense of right and wrong is common to all men.”³³ The sense of right and wrong requires no deliberation to know, nor does it depend on learning to function.³⁴ This is why it is called innate knowledge. It is my nature endowed by Heaven, the original substance of my mind, naturally intelligent, shining, clear, and understanding.

Whenever a thought or a wish arises, my mind’s faculty of innate knowledge itself is always conscious of it. Whether it is good or evil, my mind’s innate knowing faculty itself also knows it. It has nothing to do with others. Therefore, although an inferior man may have done all manner of evil, when he sees a superior man he will surely try to disguise this fact, concealing what is evil and displaying what is good in himself.³⁵ This shows that innate knowledge of the good does not permit any self-deception. Now the only way to distinguish good and evil in order to make the will sincere is to extend to the utmost the knowledge of the innate faculty. Why is this? When [a good] thought or wish arises, the innate faculty of my mind already knows it to be good. Suppose I do not sincerely love it but instead turn away from it. I would then be regarding good as evil and obscuring my innate faculty which knows the good. When [an evil] thought or wish arises, the innate faculty of my mind already knows it to be evil. If I did not sincerely hate it but instead carried it out, I would be regarding evil as good and obscuring my innate faculty which knows evil. In such cases what is supposed to be knowledge is really ignorance. How then can the will be made sincere? If what the innate faculty knows to be good or evil is sincerely loved or hated, one’s innate knowing faculty is not deceived and the will can be made sincere.

Now, when one sets out to extend his innate knowledge to the utmost, does this mean something illusory, hazy, in a vacuum, and unreal? No, it means something real. Therefore, the extension of knowledge must consist in the investigation of things. A thing is an event. For every emanation of the will there must be an event corresponding to it. The event to which the will is directed is a thing. To investigate is to rectify. It is to rectify that which is incorrect so it can return to its original cor-

³¹ Commentary on hexagrams, no. 1, *ch’ien* (Heaven). Cf. Legge, trans., *Yi King*, p. 410.

³² Chu Hsi, *Ta-hsüeh chang-chü*, commentary on the text.

³³ *Mencius*, 2A:6, 6A:6.

³⁴ Quoting *Mencius*, 7A:15.

³⁵ Paraphrasing the *Great Learning*, ch. 6.

rectness. To rectify that which is not correct is to get rid of evil, and to return to correctness is to do good. This is what is meant by investigation. The *Book of History* says, "He (Emperor Yao) investigated (*ko*) heaven above and earth below";³⁶ "[Emperor Shun] investigated (*ko*) in the temple of illustrious ancestors";³⁷ and "[The ruler] rectifies (*ko*) the evil of his heart."³⁸ The word "investigation" (*ko*) in the phrase "the investigation of things" combines the two meanings.

If one sincerely loves the good known by the innate faculty but does not in reality do the good as we come into contact with the thing to which the will is directed, it means that the thing has not been investigated and that the will to love the good is not yet sincere. If one sincerely hates the evil known by the innate faculty but does not in reality get rid of the evil as he comes into contact with the thing to which the will is directed, it means that the thing has not been investigated and that the will to hate evil is not sincere. If as we come into contact with the thing to which the will is directed, we really do the good and get rid of the evil to the utmost which is known by the innate faculty, then everything will be investigated and what is known by our innate faculty will not be deficient or obscured but will be extended to the utmost. Then the mind will be joyous in itself, happy and without regret, the functioning of the will will carry with it no self-deception, and sincerity may be said to have been attained. Therefore it is said, "When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the mind is rectified; and when the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated."³⁹ While the order of the tasks involves a sequence of first and last, in substance they are one and cannot be so separated. At the same time, while the order and the tasks cannot be separated into first and last, their function must be so refined as not to be wanting in the slightest degree. This is why the doctrine of investigation, extension, being sincere, and rectification is a correct exposition of the true heritage of the Sage-Emperors Yao and Shun and why it coincides with Confucius' own ideas. (*Wang Wen-ch'eng Kung ch'uan-shu*, or Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming, SPTK, 26: 1b-5a)

Comment. This is the most important of Wang's works, for it contains all of his fundamental doctrines—that the man of humanity forms one body with all things and extends his love to all, that the mind is principle, that the highest good is inherent in the mind, that to investigate things is to rectify the mind, and that the extension

³⁶ *History*, "Canon of Yao." Cf. Legge, trans., *Shoo King*, p. 15.

³⁷ *ibid.*, "Canon of Shun"; Legge, p. 41.

³⁸ *ibid.*, "The Charge to Ch'iung"; Legge, p. 585.

³⁹ *Great Learning*, the text.

of innate knowledge is the way to discover the highest good and to perfect the moral life. The theory of the unity of knowledge and action is not mentioned, but since he refuses to separate the internal and the external or substance and function, the theory is clearly implied. In fact, he explicitly says that manifesting the clear character, which may be equated with knowledge, and loving the people, which is action, are identical.

B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICAL LIVING

3. I⁴⁰ said, "If the highest good is to be sought only in the mind, I am afraid not all principles of things in the world will be covered."

The Teacher said, "The mind is principle. Is there any affair in the world outside of the mind? Is there any principle outside of the mind?"

I said, "In filial piety in serving one's parents, in loyalty in serving one's ruler, in faithfulness in intercourse with friends, or in humanity in governing the people, there are many principles which I believe should not be left unexamined."

The Teacher said with a sigh, "This idea has been obscuring the understanding of people for a long time. Can they be awakened by one word? However, I shall comment along the line of your question. For instance, in the matter of serving one's parents, one cannot seek for the principle of filial piety in the parent. In serving one's ruler, one cannot seek for the principle of loyalty in the ruler. In the intercourse with friends and in governing the people, one cannot seek for the principles of faithfulness and humanity in friends and the people. They are all in the mind, that is all, for the mind and principle are identical. When the mind is free from the obscuration of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of the Principle of Nature, which requires not an iota added from the outside. When this mind, which has become completely identical with the Principle of Nature, is applied and arises to serve parents, there is filial piety; when it arises to serve the ruler, there is loyalty; when it rises to deal with friends or to govern the people, there are faithfulness and humanity. The main thing is for the mind to make an effort to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature."

I said, "Having heard what you said, sir, I begin to understand. However, the old theory still lingers in my mind, from which I cannot entirely get away. Take, for example, the matter of serving one's parents. The filial son is to care for their comfort both in winter and summer, and to inquire after their health every morning and evening."⁴¹ These things in-

⁴⁰ Hsü Ai (1487-1518), Wang's favorite pupil, who recorded secs. 1-14 of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*.

⁴¹ Quoting the *Book of Rites*, "Summary of the Rules of Propriety." Cf. translation by Legge, *Li Ki*, ch. 1, p. 67.

volve many actual details. Should we not endeavor to investigate them?"

The Teacher said, "Why not endeavor to investigate them? The main thing is to have a basis. The main thing is to endeavor to investigate them by ridding the mind of selfish human desires and preserving the Principle of Nature. For instance, to investigate the provision of warmth for parents in the winter is none other than the extension of the filial piety of this mind to the utmost, for fear that a trifle of human selfish desires might creep in, and to investigate the provision of coolness for parents in the summer is none other than the extension of the filial piety of this mind to the utmost, for fear that a trifle of selfish human desires might creep in. It is merely to investigate this mind. If the mind is free from selfish human desires and has become completely identical with the Principle of Nature, and if it is the mind that is sincere in its filial piety to parents, then in the winter it will naturally think of the cold of parents and seek a way to provide warmth for them, and in the summer it will naturally think of the heat of parents and seek a way to provide coolness for them. These are all offshoots of the mind that is sincere in its filial piety. Nevertheless, there must first be such a mind before there can be these offshoots. Compared to the tree, the mind with sincere filial piety is the root, whereas the offshoots are the leaves and branches. There must first be roots before there can be leaves and branches. One does not seek to find leaves and branches and then cultivate the root. The *Book of Rites* says, 'A filial son who loves his parents deeply is sure to have a peaceful disposition. Having a peaceful disposition, he will surely have a happy expression. And having a happy expression, he will surely have a pleasant countenance.'⁴² There must be deep love as the root and then the rest will naturally follow like this." (1:3a-4b)

5. I did not understand the Teacher's doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action and debated it back and forth with Huang Tsung-hsien⁴³ and Ku Wei-hsien⁴⁴ without coming to any conclusion. Therefore I took the matter to the Teacher. The Teacher said, "Give an example and let me see." I said, "For example, there are people who know that parents should be served with filial piety and elder brothers with respect but cannot put these things into practice. This shows that knowledge and action are clearly two different things."

⁴² *ibid.*, "The Meaning of Sacrifices." Cf. Legge, ch. 21, pp. 215-216.

⁴³ The courtesy name of Huang Wan (1477-1551), Wang's pupil. His daughter was married to Wang Yang-ming's son.

⁴⁴ The courtesy name of Ku Ying-hsiang (1483-1565). He departed from the teaching of Wang Yang-ming in holding that knowledge and action were not identical.

The Teacher said, "The knowledge and action you refer to are already separated by selfish desires and are no longer knowledge and action in their original substance. There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know. When sages and worthies taught people about knowledge and action, it was precisely because they wanted them to restore the original substance, and not simply to do this or that and be satisfied. Therefore the *Great Learning* points to true knowledge and action for people to see, saying, they are 'like loving beautiful colors and hating bad odors.'⁴⁵ Seeing beautiful colors appertains to knowledge, while loying beautiful colors appertains to action. However, as soon as one sees that beautiful color, he has already loved it. It is not that he sees it first and then makes up his mind to love it. Smelling a bad odor appertains to knowledge, while hating a bad odor appertains to action. However, as soon as one smells a bad odor, he has already hated it. It is not that he smells it first and then makes up his mind to hate it. A person with his nose stuffed up does not smell the bad odor even if he sees a malodorous object before him, and so he does not hate it. This amounts to not knowing bad odor. Suppose we say that so-and-so knows filial piety and so-and-so knows brotherly respect. They must have actually practiced filial piety and brotherly respect before they can be said to know them. It will not do to say that they know filial piety and brotherly respect simply because they show them in words. Or take one's knowledge of pain. Only after one has experienced pain can one know pain. The same is true of cold or hunger. How can knowledge and action be separated? This is the original substance of knowledge and action, which have not been separated by selfish desires. In teaching people, the Sage insisted that only this can be called knowledge. Otherwise, this is not yet knowledge. This is serious and practical business. What is the objective of desperately insisting on knowledge and action being two different things? And what is the objective of my insisting that they are one? What is the use of insisting on their being one or two unless one knows the basic purpose of the doctrine?"

I said, "In saying that knowledge and action are two different things, the ancients intended to have people distinguish and understand them so that on the one hand they make an effort to know and, on the other: make an effort to act, and only then can the effort find any solution."

The teacher said, "This is to lose sight of the basic purpose of the ancients. I have said that knowledge is the direction for action and action the effort of knowledge, and that knowledge is the beginning of

⁴⁵ *Great Learning*, ch. 6.

action and action the completion of knowledge. If this is understood, then when only knowledge is mentioned, action is included, and when only action is mentioned, knowledge is included. The reason why the ancients talked about knowledge and action separately is that there are people in the world who are confused and act on impulse without any sense of deliberation or self-examination, and who thus behave only blindly and erroneously. Therefore it is necessary to talk about knowledge to them before their action becomes correct. There are also those who are intellectually vague and undisciplined and think in a vacuum. They are not willing at all to try to practice concretely. They only pursue shadows and echoes, as it were. It is therefore necessary to talk about action to them before their knowledge becomes true. The ancient teachers could not help talking this way in order to restore balance and avoid any defect. If we understand this motive, then a single word [either knowledge or action] will do.

"But people today distinguish between knowledge and action and pursue them separately, believing that one must know before he can act. They will discuss and learn the business of knowledge first, they say, and wait till they truly know before they put their knowledge into practice. Consequently, to the last day of life, they will never act and also will never know. This doctrine of knowledge first and action later is not a minor disease and it did not come about only yesterday. My present advocacy of the unity of knowledge and action is precisely the medicine for that disease. The doctrine is not my baseless imagination, for it is the original substance of knowledge and action that they are one. Now that we know this basic purpose, it will do no harm to talk about them separately, for they are only one. If the basic purpose is not understood, however, even if we say they are one, what is the use? It is just idle talk." (1:5b-8a)

Comment. The relation between knowledge and action has been a perennial subject among Confucianists. Both Confucius⁴⁶ and the *Doctrine of the Mean*⁴⁷ insist that words and action should correspond. The whole doctrine of the rectification of names in ancient Chinese philosophy as well as the whole extensive discussion of the correspondence between names and actuality in ancient China⁴⁸ reinforced this tradition. In the entire Neo-Confucian movement, the equal emphasis on words and action was faithfully maintained.⁴⁹ The stress so far, however, had been on the correspondence and

⁴⁶ *Analects*, 5:9, 13:4, 14:4, 15:5, 18:8.

⁴⁷ *The Mean*, ch. 8.

⁴⁸ See above, ch. 2, comment on 13:3

⁴⁹ See above, ch. 34, secs. 20-24.

equal importance of knowledge and action but not their identity. Ch'eng I came nearest to it when he said that the extension of knowledge and actual demonstration should proceed simultaneously,⁵⁰ but he still thought of them as two. Wang's theory definitely struck a new note.

In spite of this identification, however, the Confucian tradition has always emphasized action. This tradition goes back to the *Book of History* where it is said that "it is not difficult to know but difficult to act."⁵¹ Chu Hsi considered action more important than knowledge.⁵² When Sun Yat-sen turned the ancient doctrine around and said that "it is difficult to know but easy to act,"⁵³ he was really upholding the ancient tradition of emphasizing action.

6. I said, "Yesterday when I heard your teaching about abiding in the highest good, I realized I had some grasp of this task. But I still feel that your teaching does not agree with Chu Hsi's doctrine of the investigation of things."

The Teacher said, "The investigation of things is the work of abiding in the highest good. Once we know what the highest good is, we know how to investigate things."

I said, "Yesterday when I examined Chu Hsi's doctrine of the investigation of things in the light of your teaching, I seemed to understand it in general. But I am still not clear in my mind, because Chu Hsi's doctrine, after all, has the support of what is called 'refinement and singleness of mind' in the *Book of History*, 'extensive study of literature and self-restraint by the rules of propriety' in the *Analects*, and 'exerting one's mind to the utmost and knowing one's nature' in the *Book of Mencius*.⁵⁴

The Teacher said, "Tzu-hsia (507-420 B.C.) had strong faith in the Sage whereas Tseng Tzu (505--c.436 B.C.) turned to seek the highest good in himself.⁵⁵ It is good to have strong faith, of course, but it is not as real and concrete as seeking in oneself. Since you have not understood this idea, why should you cling to Chu Hsi's old tradition and not seek what is right? Even with Chu Hsi, while he respected and believed in Mas-

⁵⁰ *Ts'ui-yen* (Pure Words), 1:162b. in ECCS.

⁵¹ *History*, "Charge to Yüeh," pt. 2. Cf. Legge, trans., *Shoo King*, n. 258

⁵² See above, ch. 34, sec. 20.

⁵³ *Sun Chung-shan ch'üan-chi* (Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen), 1928, vol. 2, p. 53ff.

⁵⁴ *History*, "Counsels of the Great Yü." Cf. Legge, *Shoo King*, p. 6; *Analects*, 6:25; *Mencius*, 7A:1; respectively.

⁵⁵ Quoting Chu Hsi, *Meng Tzu chi-chu* (Collected Commentaries on the *Book of Mencius*) ch. 3, comment on *Mencius*, 2A:2.

ter Ch'eng I, he would not carelessly follow him whenever he came to something he could not understand.⁵⁶ The teachings of refinement and singleness, extensive study and self-restraint, and exerting the mind to the utmost are basically harmonious with my doctrine. Only you have not thought about it.

“Chu Hsi's teaching on the investigation of things is not free from being forced, arbitrary, and far-fetched, and is not what the investigation of things originally meant. Refinement is the work of achieving singleness and extensive study the work of achieving restraint. Since you already understand the principle of the unity of knowledge and action, this can be explained in one word. As to exerting one's mind to the utmost, knowing one's nature, and knowing Heaven, these are the acts of those who are born with such knowledge and practice it naturally and easily. Preserving the mind, nourishing one's nature, and serving Heaven are the acts of those who learn them through study and practice them for their advantage. To maintain one's single-mindedness regardless of longevity or brevity of life, and to cultivate one's personal life while waiting for fate to take its own course, are the acts of those who learn through hard work and practice them with effort and difficulty.⁵⁷ But Chu Hsi wrongly interpreted the doctrine of the investigation of things. Because he reversed the above order, and thought that the higher attainments of exerting one's mind to the utmost and knowing one's nature are equivalent to the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, he required the beginner to perform the acts of those who are born to know and who practice naturally and easily. How can that be done?”

I asked, “Why are exerting the mind to the utmost and knowing one's nature the acts of those who are born to know and who practice naturally and easily?”

The Teacher said, “Our nature is the substance of the mind and Heaven is the source of our nature. To exert one's mind to the utmost is the same as fully developing one's nature. Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature and ‘know the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth.’⁵⁸ Those who merely preserve their minds, on the other hand, have not yet exerted them to the utmost. Knowing Heaven is the same as knowing the affairs of a district or a county, which is what the titles prefect and magistrate mean. It is a matter within one's own function, and it means that one in his moral character has already become one with Heaven. Serving Heaven, on the other hand, is like the serving of the parents by the son and the serving

⁵⁶ See, for example, *Chu Tzu yü-lei* (Recorded Conversations of Chu Hsi), 1880 ed., 69:22a.

⁵⁷ Quoting alternately from *Mencius*, 7A:1 and *The Mean*, ch. 20.

⁵⁸ Quoting *The Mean*, ch. 22.

of the ruler by the minister. It must be done seriously and reverently to please them if it is to be perfect. Even then, one is still separated from Heaven. This is the difference between a sage [who exerts the mind to the utmost and knows Heaven] and the worthies [who preserve their minds and serve Heaven].

“As to allowing no double-mindedness regardless of longevity or brevity of life, it is to teach the student to do good with single-mindedness, and not to allow success or failure, longevity or brevity of life, to shake his determination to do good, but instead to cultivate his personal life and wait for fate to take its own course, realizing that success and failure, or longevity and brevity of life, are matters of fate and one need not unnecessarily allow them to disturb his mind. Although those who serve Heaven are separated from Heaven, they nevertheless already see Heaven right in front of them. Waiting for fate to take its own course, however, means that one has not yet seen Heaven but is still waiting for it, so to speak. It is the beginner's first step in making up his mind, involving a certain amount of effort and difficulty. But Chu Hsi reversed the order, so that the student has no place to start.”

I said, “Yesterday when I heard your teaching, I vaguely realized that one's effort must follow this procedure. Now that I have heard what you said, I have no further doubt. Last night I came to the conclusion that the word ‘thing’ (*wu*) in the phrase ‘the investigation of things’ (*ko-wu*) has the same meaning as the word ‘event’ (*shih*), both referring to the mind.”

The Teacher said, “Correct. The master of the body is the mind. What emanates from the mind is the will. The original substance of the will is knowledge, and wherever the will is directed is a thing. For example, when the will is directed toward serving one's parents, then serving one's parents is a ‘thing.’ When the will is directed toward serving one's ruler, then serving one's ruler is a ‘thing.’ When the will is directed toward being humane to all people and feeling love toward things, then being humane to all people and feeling love toward things are ‘things,’ and when the will is directed toward seeing, hearing, speaking, and acting, then each of these is a ‘thing.’ Therefore I say that there are neither principles nor things outside the mind. The teaching in the *Doctrine of the Mean* that ‘without sincerity there would be nothing,’⁵⁹ and the effort to manifest one's clear character described in the *Great Learning* mean nothing more than the effort to make the will sincere. And the work of making the will sincere is none other than the investigation of things.” (1: 8a-10a)

7. The Teacher further said, “The word *ko* in *ko-wu* is the same as

⁵⁹ *The Mean*, ch. 25.

the *ko* in Mencius' saying that 'a great man rectified (X-o) the ruler's mind.'⁶⁰ It means to eliminate what is incorrect in the mind so as to preserve the correctness of its original substance. Wherever the will is, the incorrectness must be eliminated so correctness may be preserved. In other words, in all places and at all times the Principle of Nature must be preserved. This is the investigation of principles to the utmost. The Principle of Nature is clear character. and to investigate the principle of things to the utmost is to manifest the clear character." (1: 10a)

26. [The Teacher said,] "Knowledge is the beginning of action and action is the completion of knowledge. Learning to be a sage involves only one effort. Knowledge and action should not be separated." (1:22b)

32. [The Teacher said,] "The original mind is vacuous (devoid of selfish desires), intelligent, and not beclouded. All principles are contained therein and all events proceed from it.⁶¹ There is no principle outside the mind; there is no event outside the mind." (1:24b)

33. Someone asked, "Master Hui-an (Chu Hsi) said that 'man's object of learning is simply mind and principles.'⁶² What do you think of this saying?"

The Teacher said, "The mind is the nature of man and things, and nature is principle. I am afraid the use of the word 'and' makes inevitable the interpretation of mind and principle as two different things. It is up to the student to use his good judgment." (1:25a)

34. Someone said, "All people have this mind, and this mind is identical with principle. Why do some people do good and others do evil?"

The Teacher said, "The mind of the evil man has lost its original substance." (ibid)

⁶⁰ Mencius, 4A:20.

⁶¹ The two sentences are paraphrases of Chu Hsi's *Ta-hsüeh chang-chü*, commentary on the text. According to Ōta Kinjō (1765-1825) (*Gimon roku*, or Records of Questioning, 1831 ed., p. 15a), the phrase "vacuous, intelligent, and not beclouded" comes from the *Ta-chih tu lu* (*Mahāprajñāpāramita śāstra*, Treatise on Great Wisdom) and was also used by Fa-tsang (643-712), but he gave no specific reference. It is probably derived from the common Buddhist phrase, "intelligent, knowing, and not beclouded," which was uttered by Zen Masters like Ch'eng-kuan (c. 760-838) (see *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, or Records of the Transmission of the Lamp Compiled During the Cheng-te Period, 1004-1007, SPK, 30:8a). The terms "intelligent and knowing" and "not beclouded" were also used by Tsung-mi (780-841) (in his *Ch'an-yüan chu-ch'üan chi tu-hsü* or General Preface to *Collection of Source Material of the Zen School*, TSD, 48:404-405). Chu Hsi considered the Buddhist concept too abstract and therefore added the second sentence. See *Chu Tzu yü-lei*, 1880 ed., 104:17a

⁶² *Ta-hsüeh huo-wen* (Questions and Answers on the *Great Learning*), 1902 ed., 60a-b, in *Ssu-shu ta-ch'üan* (Great Collection of Commentaries on the Four Books). Hui-an was Chu Hsi's literary name.

53. T'ang Hsu⁶³ asked, "Does making up the mind mean retaining good thought at all times and wanting to do good and remove evil?"

The Teacher said, "When a good thought is retained, there is the Principle of Nature. The thought itself is goodness. Is there another goodness to be thought about? Since the thought is not evil, what evil is there to be removed? This thought is comparable to the root of a tree. To make up one's mind means always to build up this good thought, that is all. To be able to follow what one's heart desires without transgressing moral principles" merely means that one's mind has reached full maturity." (1:31b-32a)

78. I⁶⁴ asked, "The mind is the master of the body. Knowledge is the intelligence of the mind. The will is knowledge in operation. And a thing is that to which the will is directed. Is this correct?"

The Teacher said, "Generally correct." (1:39b-40a)

89. [The Teacher said,] "The various steps from the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge to bringing peace to the world⁶⁵ are nothing but manifesting the clear character. Even loving the people is also a matter of manifesting the clear character. The clear character is the character of the mind; it is humanity. The man of humanity regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body.⁶⁷ If a single thing is deprived of its place, it means that my humanity is not yet demonstrated to the fullest extent." (1:41 b)

93. I said, "Master Ch'eng Hao (Ch'eng Ming-tao, 1032-1085) said that 'the man of humanity regards Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body.' How is it that Mo Tzu's [fl. 479-438 B.C.] doctrine of universal love⁶⁸ is not considered one of humanity?"

The Teacher said, "It is very difficult to say. You gentlemen must find it out through personal realization. Humanity is the principle of unceasing production and reproduction. Although it is prevalent and extensive and there is no place where it does not exist, nevertheless there is an order in its operation and growth. That is why it is unceasing in production and reproduction. For example, at the winter solstice the first (active cosmic force) yang grows. There must be the growth of this first yang before all the six stages of yang (the six months between December and June) gradually grow. If there were not the first yang, could there

⁶³ Nothing is known of him.

⁶⁴ *Analects*, 2:4.

⁶⁵ Lu Ch'eng, Wang's pupil, whose courtesy name was Yüan-ching. He recorded secs. 15-94 of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*.

⁶⁶ As taught in the *Great Learning*, the text.

⁶⁷ *I-shu*, 2A:2. See the following section.

⁶⁸ Mo Tzu was strongly attacked by Mencius because Mo Tzu did not acknowledge the special affection due a father. *Mencius*, 3B:9. For Mo Tzu's doctrine, see *Mo Tzu*, ch. 14-16, English translation by Mei, *Works of Motse*, p. 78ff.

be all the six? It is the same with the (passive cosmic force) yin. Because there is order, so there is a starting point, Because there is a starting point, so there is growth. And because there is growth, it is unceasing. Take a tree, for example. When in the beginning it puts forth a shoot, there is the starting point of the tree's spirit of life. After the root appears, the trunk grows. After the trunk grows, branches and leaves come, and then the process of unceasing production and reproduction has begun. If there is no sprout, how can there be the trunk, branches, or leaves? The tree can sprout because there is the root beneath. With the root the plant will grow. Without it, the plant will die, for without the root, how can it sprout?

"The love between father and son and between elder and younger brothers is the starting point of the human mind's spirit of life, just like the sprout of the tree. From here it is extended to humaneness to all people and love to all things. It is just like the growth of the trunk, branches, and leaves. MO TZU's universal love makes no distinction in human relations and regards one's own father, son, elder brother, or younger brother as being the same as a passer-by. That means that MO Tzu's universal love has no starting point. It does not sprout. We therefore know that it has no root and that it is not a process of unceasing production and reproduction. How can it be called humanity? Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humanity.⁶⁹ This means that the principle of humanity grows from within." (1:42a-43a)

Comment. The idea that humanity is life-giving is an important development in Neo-Confucianism. It was developed by Ch'eng Hao and his brother Ch'eng I.⁷⁰ Wang, however, made the idea clearer than ever.

94. I asked, "Yen-p'ing (Li T'ung, 1088-1163) said, 'Be in accord with principle and have no selfish mind.'" What is the difference between being in accord with principle and having no selfish mind?"

The Teacher said, "The mind is principle. To have no selfish mind is to be in accord with principle, and not to be in accord with principle is to have a selfish mind. I am afraid it is not good to speak of the mind and principle as separated."

I asked further, "The Buddhists are [internally] free from all kinds of selfishness of lust in the world and thus appear not to have a selfish mind.

⁶⁹ A saying in *Analects*. 1:2.

⁷⁰ See above, ch. 31, comment on sec. 11, and ch. 32, comment on 42. See also ch. 30, comment on sec. 1; ch. 31, comment on sec. 1; and ch. 34, comment on treatise 1.

⁷¹ *Li Yen-p'ing chi* (Collected Works of Li T'ung). *Cheng-i-t'ang ch'üan-chu* (Complete Library of the Hall of Rectifying the Way) ed., 2:24a.

But externally they discard human relations and thus do not appear to be in accord with principle."

The Teacher said, "These are the same kind of things, all building up a mind of selfishness." (1:43a-b)

101. I⁷² was pulling weeds out from among the flowers and thereupon said, "How difficult it is in the world to cultivate good and remove evil!"

The Teacher said, "Only because no effort is made to do so." A little later, he said, "Such a view of good and evil is motivated by personal interest and is therefore easily wrong." I did not understand. The Teacher said, "The spirit of life of Heaven and Earth is the same in flowers and weeds. Where have they the distinction of good and evil? When you want to enjoy flowers, you will consider flowers good and weeds evil. But when you want to use weeds, you will then consider them good. Such good and evil are all products of the mind's likes and dislikes. Therefore I know you are wrong."

I asked, "In that case, there is neither good nor evil, is that right?"

The Teacher said, "The state of having neither good nor evil is that of principle in tranquillity. Good and evil appear when the vital force is perturbed. If the vital force is not perturbed, there is neither good nor evil, and this is called the highest good."

I asked, "The Buddhists also deny the distinction between good and evil. Are they different from you?"

The Teacher said, "Being attached to the non-distinction of good and evil, the Buddhists neglect everything and therefore are incapable of governing the world. The sage, on the other hand, in his non-distinction of good and evil, merely makes no special effort whatsoever to like or dislike and is not perturbed in his vital force. As he pursues the kingly path and sees the perfect excellence,⁷³ he of course completely follows the Principle of Nature and it becomes possible for him to assist in and complete the universal process of production and reproduction and apply it for the benefit of the people."⁷⁴

Comment. Because Wang talked about the state of having neither good nor evil, he has been accused of being a Buddhist in Confucian garment. This passage makes the distinction between Confucianism and Buddhism quite clear. What is more important, Wang not only criticized the Buddhists for their escape from social responsibility, but also for their inability to be free from attach-

⁷² Hsüeh K'an (d. 1545), Wang's pupil, who recorded secs. 95-129 of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*.

⁷³ Quoting *History*, "Great Norm." Cf. Legge, *Shoo King*, p. 331.

⁷⁴ Quoting *Changes*, commentary on hexagram no. 11, *t'ai* (successful). Cf. Legge, *Yi King*, p. 281.

ment. In other words, the Buddhists were incapable of handling the mind itself. Although he was not as hostile to Buddhism as many other Neo-Confucianists, he attacked the very foundation of Buddhism.⁷⁵

“If weeds are not evil, they should not be removed.”

“This, however, is the view of the Buddhists and Taoists. If they are harmful, what is the objection to your removing them?”

“What would be a case of making a special effort to like or to dislike.”

“Not making special effort to like or to dislike does not mean not to like or dislike at all. A person behaving so would be devoid of consciousness. To say ‘not to make a special effort’ merely means that one’s like and dislike completely follow the Principle of Nature and that one does not go on to attach to that situation a bit of selfish thought. This amounts to having neither likes nor dislikes.”

“How can weeding be regarded as completely following the Principle of Nature without any attachment to selfish thought?”

“If weeds are harmful, according to principle they should be removed. Then remove them, that is all. If for a moment they are not removed, one should not be troubled by it. If one attaches to that situation a bit of selfish thought, it will be a burden on the substance of his mind, and his vital force will be much perturbed.”

“In that case, good and evil are not present in things at all.”

“They are only in your mind. Following the Principle of Nature is good, while perturbing the vital force is evil.”

“After all, then, things are devoid of good and evil?”

“This is true of the mind. It is also true of things. Famous but mediocre scholars fail to realize this. They neglect the mind and chase after material things, and consequently get a wrong view of the way to investigate things. All day long they restlessly seek principle in external things. They only succeed in getting at it by incidental deeds of righteousness. All their lives they act in this way without understanding it and act habitually without examination.”⁷⁶

“How about loving beautiful color and hating bad odor?”

“This is all in accord with principle. We do so by the very nature of the Principle of Nature. From the beginning there is no selfish desire to make special effort to like or dislike.”

“How can the love of beautiful color and the hatred of bad odor not be regarded as one’s own will?”

“The will in this case is sincere, not selfish. A sincere will is in accord with the Principle of Nature. However, while it is in accord with the

⁷⁵ See comment on sec. 315.

⁷⁶ A quotation from *Mencius*, 7A:5.

Principle of Nature, at the same time it is not attached in the least to selfish thought. Therefore when one is affected to any extent by wrath or fondness, the mind will not be correct.⁷⁷ It must be broad and impartial. Only thus is it in its original substance. Knowing this, you know the state of equilibrium before feelings are aroused.”

Meng Po-sheng⁷⁸ said, “You said that if weeds are harmful, according to principle they should be removed. Why should the desire to remove them be motivated by personal interest?”

“You must find this out yourself through personal realization. What is your state of mind when you want to remove the weeds? And what was the state of mind of Chou Mao-shu (Chou Tun-i, 1017-1073), when he would not cut down the grass outside his window?”⁷⁹ (1:47b-49b)

108. I asked, “A former scholar considered the mind in its tranquil state as substance and the mind in its active state as function.⁸⁰ What about it?”

The Teacher said, “The substance and function of the mind cannot be equated with its tranquil and active states. Tranquillity and activity are matters of time. When we speak of substance as substance, function is already involved in it, and when we speak of function as function, substance is already involved in it. This is what is called ‘Substance and function coming from the same source.’⁸¹ However, there is no harm in saying that the substance of the mind is revealed through its tranquillity and its function through its activity.” (1:52a)

132. Your⁸² letter says, “You teach us that knowledge and action should proceed simultaneously, that no distinction should be made as to which one should precede the other, and that this is the task of ‘honoring the moral nature and following the path of study and inquiry’ as taught in the *Doctrine of the Mean*⁸³ in which the two nourish and develop each other and the internal and external, the fundamental and the secondary form one thread running through all. Nevertheless, in the performance of a task there must be a distinction between what is to be done first and what later. For example, one knows the food before he eats it, knows the soup before he drinks it, knows the clothes before he wears them, and knows the road before he travels on it; It is not true

⁷⁷ According to the *Great Learning*, ch. 7.

⁷⁸ Nothing is known of him except that his private name was Yüan.

⁷⁹ *I-shu*, 3:2a, in ECCS.

⁸⁰ Ch’eng I, *Wen-chi* (Collection of Literary Works), 5:12a, in ECCS. Wang Yang-ming said the same thing in *Wang Wen-ch’eng K’ung ch’üan-shu*, 5:62.

⁸¹ Ch’eng I, preface to his *I chuan* (Commentary on the *Book of Changes*), in ECCS. See above, ch. 32, n.124.

⁸² This refers to Ku Tung ch’iao (Ku Lin, 1476-1545), a high official and a renowned poet.

⁸³ Ch. 27.

that one performs an act without first of all knowing the thing to be acted on. The difference [between knowing first and acting later] is of course a matter of an instant. I do not mean to say that it is comparable to one's knowing today and then acting tomorrow."

Since you have said that the two nourish and develop each other, and the internal and the external, the fundamental and the secondary form one thread running through all, the idea that knowledge and action proceed simultaneously should no longer be doubted. You also say that in the performance of a task there must⁸⁴ be a distinction between what is to be done first and what later. Are you not self-contradictory? This is particularly clear and can easily be seen in your theories that one knows the food before he eats, but your understanding is obscured by recent opinions and you do not realize that it is obscured. A man must have the desire for food before he knows food. This desire to eat is the will; it is already the beginning of action. Whether the taste of the food is good or bad cannot be known until the food enters the mouth. Is there anyone who knows the taste to be good or bad before the food enters his mouth? A man must have the desire to travel before he knows the road. This desire to travel is the will; it is already the beginning of action. Whether the forks of the road are rough or smooth cannot be known until he himself has gone through them. Is there anyone who knows whether the forks of the road are rough or smooth before he has gone through them? The same can be said without a doubt about the theories that one knows the soup before he drinks it and that one knows the clothes before he wears them. The examples you have given are exactly those which show, as you say, that one first of all performs an act without knowing the thing to be acted on. You said also that the difference [between knowing first and acting later] is of course a matter of an instant and that you do not mean to say that it is clearly comparable to one's knowing today and then acting tomorrow. This shows that you have not examined the matter thoroughly, But even as you say, the fact that knowledge and action form a unity and proceed simultaneously is as a matter of course absolutely beyond any doubt. (2:3a-4b)

133. Your letter says, "[You say that] true knowledge is what constitutes action, and unless it is acted on it cannot be called knowledge. This idea is all right as an urgent doctrine for the student, meant to enable him to put his learning into actual practice. But if you really mean that knowledge and action are identical, I am afraid a student will only seek his original mind and consequently neglect the principles of things, and there will be points at which his mind will be closed to the outside world

⁸⁴ In the text there is the word *pu* (not) here. It is obviously a misprint and is therefore omitted from the translation.

and unable to penetrate it. Is this the established method of the Confucian school for the simultaneous advance of knowledge and action?"

Knowledge in its genuine and earnest aspect is action, and action in its intelligent and discriminating aspect is knowledge. At bottom the task of knowledge and action cannot be separated. Only because later scholars have broken their task into two sections and have lost sight of the original substance of knowledge and action have I advocated the idea of their unity and simultaneous advance. My idea that true knowledge is what constitutes action and that unless it is acted on it cannot be called knowledge can be seen in such ideas as those expressed in your letter that one knows the food before he eats it, and so forth. I have already stated this briefly. Although my idea arose as an urgent remedial measure, nevertheless the substance of knowledge and action is originally like this. It is not that I have promoted or suppressed either of them according to my own wishes, and purposely propounded such a doctrine carelessly to effect a temporary remedy. He who only seeks his original mind and consequently neglects the principles of things is one who has lost his original mind. For the principles of things are not external to the mind. If one seeks the principles of things outside the mind, there will not be any to be found. And if one neglects the principles of things and only seeks his mind, what sort of a thing would the mind be? The substance of the mind is nature, and nature is identical with principle. Consequently, as there is the mind of filial piety toward parents, there is the principle of filial piety. If there is no mind of filial piety, there will be no principle of filial piety. As there is the mind of loyalty toward the ruler, there is the principle of loyalty. If there is no mind of loyalty, there will be no principle of loyalty. Are principles external to the mind? Hui-an (Chu Hsi) said, "Man's object of learning is simply mind and principles. Although the mind is the master of the body . . . actually it controls all principles in the world. And although principles are distributed throughout the ten thousand things . . . actually they are not outside one's mind."⁸⁵ These are but the two aspects of concentration and diversification but [the way Chu Hsi put it] has inevitably opened the way to the defect among scholars of regarding the mind and principles as two separate things. This is the reason why later generations have the trouble of only seeking their original minds and consequently neglecting the principles of things. This is precisely because they do not realize that the mind is identical with principle. The idea that if one seeks the principles of things outside the mind there will be points at which the mind is closed to the outside world and cannot penetrate it is the same as Kao Tzu's (c.420-c.350 B.C.) doctrine that righteousness

⁸⁵ *Ta-hsueh huo-wen*, 60a-b.

is external.⁸⁶ This is the reason why Mencius said that he did not know the nature of righteousness. The mind is one, that is all. In terms of total commiseration, it is called humanity. In terms of attainment of what is proper, it is called righteousness. And in terms of orderliness, it is called principle. If one should not seek humanity or righteousness outside the mind, should one make an exception and seek principles outside the mind? Knowledge and action have been separated because people seek principles outside the mind. The doctrine of unity of knowledge and action of the Confucian school means seeking principles in the mind. Why do you doubt it? (2:4b-6a)

135. Your letter says, "I have heard that you told students that following [Chu Hsi's] theory of the investigation of the principles of all things that we come into contact with⁸⁷ is to trifle with things and to lose one's purpose, and that you have also selected Chu Hsi's doctrines of rejecting the complex and preferring the simple,⁸⁸ cultivating the fundamental,⁸⁹ and so forth, to show students, labeling them as Chu Hsi's final conclusions arrived at late in life.⁹⁰ I am afraid this is also wrong."

What Chu Hsi meant by the investigation of things is "to investigate the principle in things to the utmost as we come in contact with them."⁹¹ To investigate the principles in things to the utmost as we come in contact with them means to look in each individual thing for its so-called definite principles. This means to apply one's mind to each individual thing and look for the principle in it. This is to divide the mind and principle into two. To seek for the principle in each individual thing is like looking for the principle of filial piety in parents. If the principle of filial piety is to be sought in parents, then is it actually in my own mind or is it in the person of my parents? If it is actually in the person of my parents, is it true that as soon as the parents pass away the mind will lack the principle of filial piety? When I see a child fall into a well [and have a feeling of commiseration], there must be the principle of commiseration. Is this principle of commiseration actually in the person of the child or is it in the innate knowledge of my mind? Perhaps one cannot follow the child into the well to rescue it. Perhaps one can rescue it by seizing it with the hand. All this involves principle. Is it really in the person of the child or does it emanate from the innate knowledge of my mind? What is true here is true of all things and events. From this we know the mistake of dividing the mind and principle into two.

⁸⁶ See *Mencius*, 6A:4.

⁸⁷ *Chung-yung chang-chü* (Commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*), ch. 5.

⁸⁸ *Chu-tzu wen-chi* (Collection of Literary Works of Chu Hsi), CTC, 35:26a.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 47:31a.

⁹⁰ *Wang Wen-ch'eng Kung ch'üan-shi*, 3:63a-80a.

⁹¹ *Ta-hsüeh chang-chü*, ch. 5.

Such division is the doctrine of Kao Tzu who taught that righteousness is external to the mind, a fallacy which Mencius strongly attacked. You know the defects of devoting oneself to external things and neglecting the internal, and becoming broad but lacking essentials. Why are these defects? Is it not permissible to say that to investigate the principle of all things as we come into contact with them, as Chu Hsi has taught, is trifling with things and losing one's purpose in life? What I mean by the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to extend the innate knowledge of my mind to each and every thing. The innate knowledge of my mind is the same as the Principle of Nature. When the Principle of Nature in the innate knowledge of my mind is extended to all things, all things will attain their principle. To extend the innate knowledge of my mind is the matter of the extension of knowledge, and for all things to attain their principle is the matter of the investigation of things. In these the mind and principle are combined into one. As the mind and principle are combined into one, then all my humble opinions which I have just expressed and my theory that Chu Hsi arrived at his final conclusions late in life can be understood without discussion. (2:8b-10a)

155. Your⁹² letter says, "Innate knowledge is the original substance of the mind. It is what is called the goodness of human nature, the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused, the substance that is absolutely quiet and inactive, and the state of being broad and extremely impartial. When were ordinary people incapable of it and had to learn? Since equilibrium, absolute quiet, and impartiality are characteristics of the substance of the mind, then it must be innate knowledge. But as I examine the mind, I find that while knowledge is innate and good, it does not really have the characteristics of equilibrium, quiet, and impartiality. Can innate knowledge transcend substance and function?"

There is no human nature that is not good. Therefore there is no innate knowledge that is not good. Innate knowledge is the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. It is the state of broadness and extreme impartiality. It is the original substance that is absolutely quiet and inactive. And it is possessed by all men. However, people cannot help being darkened and obscured by material desires. Hence they must study in order to get rid of the darkness and obscurity. But they cannot add or subtract even an iota from the original substance of innate knowledge. Innate knowledge is good. The reason why equilibrium, absolute quiet, broadness, and impartiality are not complete in it is that darkness and obscurity have not been entirely eliminated and its state of preservation is not yet complete. The substance and function [you refer to] are

⁹² Referring to Lu Ch'eng. See n.65.

the substance and function of innate knowledge. How can it transcend them? (2:38a-39a)

228. I⁹³ asked, “Sir, you once said that good and evil are one thing.” But good and evil are opposed to each other like ice and burning coals. How can they be said to be only one?”

The Teacher said, “The highest good is the original substance of the mind. When one deviates a little from this original substance, there is evil. It is not that there is a good and there is also an evil to oppose it. Therefore good and evil are one thing.”

Having heard our Teacher’s explanation, I know that we can no longer doubt Master Ch’eng Hao’s sayings, “Man’s nature is of course good, but it cannot be said that evil is not our nature”⁹⁵ and “Good and evil in the world are both the Principle of Nature. What is called evil is not originally evil. It becomes evil only because of deviation from the Mean.”⁹⁶ (3: 12b-13a)

262. A friend who was engaging in sitting in meditation attained some insight. He ran to make an inquiry of the Teacher. The Teacher said, “Formerly, when I stayed in Ch’u-chou,⁹⁷ seeing that students were mostly occupied with intellectual explanations and debate on similarities and differences, which did them no good, I therefore taught them sitting in meditation. For a time they realized the situation a little bit (they saw the true Way) and achieved some immediate results. In time, however, they gradually developed the defect of fondness of tranquillity and disgust with activity and degenerated into lifelessness like dry wood. Others purposely advocated abstruse and subtle theories to startle people. For this reason I have recently expounded only the doctrine of the extension of innate knowledge. If one’s innate knowledge is clear, it will be all right either to try to obtain truth through personal realization in a quiet place or to discover it through training and polishing in the actual affairs of life. The original substance of innate knowledge is neither tranquil nor active. Recognition of this fact is the basis of learning. From the time of Ch’u-thou until now, I have tested what I said several times. The point is that the phrase ‘the extension of innate knowledge’ is free from any defect. Only a physician who has broken his own arm can understand the causes of human disease.”⁹⁸ (3:25a-b)

Comment. Under the influence of Zen Buddhism, most Neo-Confucianists taught sitting in meditation. Wang was no exception. In

⁹³ Huang I-fang, Wang’s pupil, whose private name was Chih. He recorded secs. 222-236 and 317-343 of the *Ch’uan-hsi lu*. Otherwise nothing is known of him.

⁹⁴ *Ch’uan-hsi lu*, sec. 101.

⁹⁵ *I-shu*, 1:7b.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 2A:1b.

⁹⁷ In modern Anhui Province, near Nan-ch’ang.

⁹⁸ Quoting the *Tso chuan* (Tso’s Commentary), Duke Ting, 13th years.

fact, in the first phase of his teaching, he emphasized it. However, it was soon replaced by an active approach, notably “polishing and training in actual affairs.” This doctrine has exerted great influence on both China and Japan.

274. Chu Pen-ssu⁹⁹ asked, “Man has innate knowledge because he possesses pure intelligence. Have such things as plants and trees, tiles and stones innate knowledge also?”

The Teacher said, “The innate knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man. For at bottom Heaven, Earth, the myriad things, and man form one body. The point at which this unity manifests in its most refined and excellent form is the clear intelligence of the human mind. Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun and moon, stars, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, earth and stones are essentially of one body with man. It is for this reason that such things as the grains and animals can nourish man and that such things as medicine and minerals can heal diseases. Since they share the same material force, they enter into one another.” (3:29b-30a)

275. The Teacher was roaming in Nan-chen.¹⁰⁰ A friend pointed to flowering trees on a cliff and said, “[You say] there is nothing under heaven external to the mind.¹⁰¹ These flowering trees on the high mountain blossom and drop their blossoms of themselves. What have they to do with my mind?”

The Teacher said, “Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your mind.” (3:30a)

277. The Teacher said, “The eye has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the colors of all things. The ear has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the sounds of all things. The nose has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the smells of all things. The mouth has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the tastes of all things. The mind has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the right or wrong of the influences and responses of Heaven, Earth, and all things.” (3 : 31a)

308. I¹⁰² asked, “In the discussion on the nature of man and things, the

⁹⁹ He was Chu Te-chih, Wang’s pupil.

¹⁰⁰ The Hui-chi Mountain in present Chekiang.

¹⁰¹ *Ch’uan-hsi lu*, sec. 6.

¹⁰² Referring to Huang Mien-chih, who recorded secs. 248-316 of the *Ch’uan-hsi lu*.

ancients agreed in certain respects but differed in others. Which is the final and accepted conclusion?"

The Teacher said, "One's nature has no definite form. The discussion of nature also has no definite form. Some discussed it from the point of view of its original substance, some from the point of view of its emanation and functioning, some from the point of view of its source, and some from the point of view of the defects that may develop in the course of its operation. Collectively, they all talked about this one nature: but their depth of understanding it varied, that is all. If one held rigidly to one aspect as they did it would be a mistake. In its original substance, nature is in fact neither good nor evil. In its function it can indeed be made to be good or evil, and in its defects it is indeed definitely good or evil. It may be compared to the eyes. There are eyes when one is joyous and there are eyes when one is angry. When one looks straight ahead, the eyes see openly. When one looks stealthily, the eyes peep. Collectively speaking, they are all eyes. If one sees a person with angry eyes and forthwith declares that he has no joyous eyes, or if one sees a person with peeping eyes and forthwith declares that he has no openly seeing eyes, one is holding onto a fixed viewpoint and from this we know that one is making a mistake. When Mencius talked about nature, he discussed it directly from the point of view of its source and said only that generally speaking [nature is originally good]. Hsun Tzu's (fl. 298-238 B.C.) doctrine that nature is originally evil¹⁰³ was arrived at from the point of view of its defects and we should not say that he was entirely wrong, only that he did not understand the matter perfectly. As to ordinary people, they have lost the original substance of the mind." (3:42a-43a)

315. In the ninth month of the sixth year of Chia-ching (1527)) our Teacher had been called from retirement and appointed to subdue once more the rebellion in Ssu-en and T'ien-chou¹⁰⁴ [when the earlier expedition under another official had failed]. As he was about to start, Ju-chung (Wang Chi)¹⁰⁵ and I (Ch'ien Te-hung) discussed learning. He repeated the words of the Teacher's instructions as follows:

In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction between good and evil.

When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists.

¹⁰³ *Hsün Tzu*, ch. 17. See above, ch. 6. sec. 3. Hsün Tzu strongly criticized Mencius' doctrine of original goodness (*Mencius*, 2A:6).

¹⁰⁴ Both were counties in Kwangsi.

¹⁰⁵ Wang Chi (Wang Lung-hsi, 1498-1583), one of the two most prominent followers of Wang. He developed the intuitive tendency of Wang and had a large following.

The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil.

The investigation of things is to do good and remove evil.

I¹⁰⁶ asked, "What do you think this means?"

Ju-chung said, "This is perhaps not the final conclusion. If we say that in the original substance of the mind there is no distinction between good and evil, then there must be no such distinction in the will, in knowledge, and in things. If we say that there is a distinction between good and evil in the will, then in the final analysis there must also be such a distinction in the substance of the mind."

I said, "The substance of the mind is the nature endowed in us by Heaven, and is originally neither good nor evil. But because we have a mind dominated by habits, we see in our thoughts a distinction between good and evil. The work of the investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, the sincerity of the will, the rectification of the mind, and the cultivation of the personal life is aimed precisely at recovering that original nature and substance. If there were no good or evil to start with, what would be the necessity of such effort?"

That evening we sat down beside the Teacher at the T'ien-ch'uan Bridge. Each stated his view and asked to be corrected. The Teacher said, "I am going to leave now. I wanted to have you come and talk this matter through. You two gentlemen complement each other very well, and should not hold on to one side. Here I deal with two types of people. The man of sharp intelligence apprehends straight from the source. The original substance of the human mind is in fact crystal-clear without any impediment and is the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. The man of sharp intelligence has accomplished his task as soon as he has apprehended the original substance, penetrating the self, other people, and things internal and things external all at the same time. On the other hand, there are inevitably those whose minds are dominated by habits so that the original substance of the mind is obstructed. I therefore teach them definitely and sincerely to do good and remove evil in their will and thoughts. When they become expert at the task and the impurities of the mind are completely eliminated, the original substance of the mind will become wholly clear. Ju-Chung's view is the one I use in dealing with the man of sharp intelligence. Te-hung's view is for the second type. If you two gentlemen use your views interchangeably, you will be able to lead all people-of the highest, average, and lowest intelligence-to the truth. If each of you holds on to one side, right here you will err in handling properly the different type of

¹⁰⁶ Referring to Ch'ien Te-hung (Ch'ien Hsü-shan, 1496-1574). The other prominent follower of Wang's, he differed from Wang Chi radically and emphasized moral cultivation.

man and each in his own way will fail to understand fully the substance of the Way.”

After a while he said again, “From now on whenever you discuss learning with friends be sure not to lose sight of my basic purpose.

In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil.

When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists.

The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil.

The investigation of things is to do good and to remove evil.

Just keep to these words of mine and instruct people according to their types, and there will not be any defect. This is indeed a task that penetrates both the higher and the lower levels. It is not easy to find people of sharp intelligence in the world. Even Yen Hui (Confucius’ most virtuous pupil) and Ming-tao (Ch’eng Hao) dared not assume that they could fully realize the original substance of the mind as soon as they apprehended the task. How can we lightly expect this from people? People’s minds are dominated by habits. If we do not teach them concretely and sincerely to devote themselves to the task of doing good and removing evil right in their innate knowledge rather than merely imagining an original substance in a vacuum, all that they do will not be genuine and they will do no more than cultivate a mind of vacuity and quietness [like that of the Buddhists and Taoists]. This defect is not a small matter and must be exposed as early as possible.” On that day both Ju-chung and I attained some enlightenment. (3:45b-47b)

Cornment. This conversation concerning the famous “doctrine in four axioms” raises a fundamental issue and led to a bitter controversy both inside and outside the Wang Yang-ming School. The issue is whether the mind in its original substance transcends good and evil, as the Buddhists would say, or is fundamentally good, as the Confucianists insist.

In his teachings Wang Chi interpreted the four axioms to mean the absence of distinction between good and evil and that sagehood comes through a direct intuition of reality in its totality. Ch’ien Te-hung, on the other hand, interpreted them to mean that the distinction exists and that sagehood comes only through moral efforts to do good and overcome evil. Actually Wang Yang-ming taught both, as the conversation clearly shows. It is only because they represented two sharply divergent tendencies within the Wang Yang-ming School, one emphasizing intuitive awakening and the other emphasizing moral endeavor, that they have given the doctrine a one-sided interpretation. Of the two, Ch’ien comes closer

to the teacher, for the teacher definitely stated that the original nature of the mind is characterized by the highest good.¹⁰⁷ To him the mind is a unity and absolutely good and not divided between good and evil. Moral good and evil come in when our will becomes active, that is, when we begin to make a choice. Even accepting the one-sided views of the two pupils, there should have been no quarrel, for Ch’ien’s understanding is on the moral plane whereas Wang’s is on the religious plane, and the teacher’s doctrine covers both.

For a hundred years outsiders, on the basis of Wang Chi’s interpretation, attacked Wang Yangming’s doctrine as a surrender to Buddhist indifference to good and evil. The attack kept the Confucian mind alert about the distinction between good and evil but only at the expense of a great injustice to Wang Yang-ming.

319. The Teacher said, “People merely say that in the investigation of things we must follow Chu Hsi, but when have they carried it out in practice? I have carried it out earnestly and definitely. In my earlier years¹⁰⁸ my friend Ch’ien¹⁰⁹ and I discussed the idea that to become a sage or a worthy one must investigate all things in the world. But how can a person have such tremendous energy? I therefore pointed to the bamboos in front of the pavilion and told him to investigate them and see. Day and night Mr. Ch’ien went ahead to try to investigate to the utmost the principles in the bamboos. He exhausted his mind and thoughts and on the third day he was tired out and took sick. At first I said that it was because his energy and strength were insufficient. Therefore I myself went to try to investigate to the utmost. From morning till night, I was unable to find the principles of the bamboos. On the seventh day I also became sick because I thought too hard. In consequence we sighed to each other and said that it was impossible to be a sage or a worthy, for we do not have the tremendous energy to investigate things as they have. After I had lived among the barbarians for [almost] three years,¹¹⁰ I understood what all this meant and realized that there is really nothing in the things in the world to investigate, that the effort to investigate things is only to be carried out in and with reference to one’s body and mind, and that if one firmly believes that everyone can become a sage, one will naturally be able to take up the task of investigating things. This idea, gentlemen, I must convey to you.” (3 : 50b-51b)

¹⁰⁷ *Ch’uan-hsi lu*, sec. 318.

¹⁰⁸ According to the *Nien-p’u* (Chronological Biography), the following incident took place in 1492.

¹⁰⁹ This friend was not Ch’ien Te-hung, since he did not meet Wang until 1521.

¹¹⁰ When he was banished to become an official in Kuci-chou between 1506 and 1508.

331. I said, “A former scholar said that the flying of the hawk, the leaping of fishes,¹¹¹ and the feeling that one must always be doing something¹¹² are all very lively and dynamic in the same way.”¹¹³

The Teacher said, “Correct. The whole universe is very lively and dynamic because of the same principle. It is the unceasing universal operation of one’s innate knowledge. To extend innate knowledge is the task of always doing something. Not only should this principle not be departed from, in reality it cannot be. The Way is everywhere, and so is our task.” (3 :56a)

337. I said, “The human mind and things form the same body.” In the case of one’s body, blood and the vital force in fact circulate through it and therefore we can say they form the same body. In the case of men, their bodies are different and differ even more from those of animals and plants. How can they be said to form the same body?”

The Teacher said, “Just look at the matter from the point of view of the subtle incipient activating force of their mutual influence and response. Not only animals and plants, but heaven and earth also, form the same body with me. Spiritual beings also form the same body with me.”

I asked the Teacher kindly to explain.

The Teacher said, “Among the things under heaven and on earth, which do you consider to be the mind of Heaven and Earth?”

“I have heard that ‘Man is the mind of Heaven and Earth.’ ”¹¹⁵

“How does man become mind?”

“Clear intelligence and clear intelligence alone.”

“We know, then, in all that fills heaven and earth there is but this clear intelligence. It is only because of their physical forms and bodies that men are separated. My clear intelligence is the master of heaven and earth and spiritual beings. If heaven is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its height? If earth is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its depth? If earth is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its depth? If spiritual beings are deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to distinguish their good and evil fortune or the calamities and blessings that they will bring? Separated from my clear intelligence, there will be no heaven, earth, spiritual beings, or myriad things, and separated from these, there

¹¹¹ Quoting the *Book of Odes*, ode no. 239.

¹¹² Mencius’ saying, in *Mencius*, 2A:2.

¹¹³ Ch’eng Hao, *I-shu*, 3:1a.

¹¹⁴ Undoubtedly a quotation of Wang’s although it cannot be located. The idea is quite obvious in sec. 267.

¹¹⁵ *Book of Rites*, “The Evolution of Rites.” Cf. Legge, *Li Ki*, vol. 1, p. 382.

will not be my clear intelligence. Thus they are all permeated with one material force. How can they be separated?”

I asked further, “Heaven, earth, spiritual beings, and the myriad things have existed from great antiquity. Why should it be that if my clear intelligence is gone, they will all cease to exist?”

“Consider the dead man. His spirit has drifted away and dispersed. Where are his heaven and earth and myriad things?” (3:57a-58b)