NEO-CONFUCIANISM
Wang Yangming

Introduction, H. Gene Blocker

What Western scholars call neo-Confucianism the Chinese call Tao Xue Jia, the School of the Study of Tao. This name indicates the new metaphysical and spiritual direction of late Taoism and Buddhism that emerged during the Tang dynasty (618–907) and came to maturity during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Although neo-Confucians rejected Buddhism because it was not Chinese in origin or in tradition, they absorbed many elements of both Buddhism and Taoism. Neo-Confucians also interpreted in a new way the Confucianist texts that echoed Tang dynasty Buddhist-Taoist spiritualism. It was during this period that The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and The Mencius were lifted from relative obscurity and added to the Analects to become the central Confucian classics. In this process, the Confucianist Mengzi (Meng Tzu, Mencius) was selected over his fellow Confucianist Xunzi (Hsun Tzu). As they interpreted Mengzi’s works, the neo-Confucians emphasized his idea that everything lies within us, that we share the goodness of human nature with Heaven, and that spontaneous, direct thought is the best insight into reality. Key virtues during this period were not so much the earlier social virtues of propriety and benevolent duties to others, but rather a Buddhist-like, inner quality of mental tranquility and sincerity.

In refining their cosmological theory—that is, their beliefs about what the world is made of—the neo-Confucians added something called trigrams (eight groups of three broken and unbroken lines) to the older Taoist cosmology of qi, which separates into the yin and yang “ethers.” Thus the neo-Confucians derived five elements, which they believed produced “the ten thousand things” (i.e., everything). Philosophically, they added the notion of li in opposition to qi. Qi is the material stuff of the world, and li consists of the formative principles that shape the material stuff into relatively stable and predictable forms. For example, despite constant fluctuations of yin and yang, tomato seeds tend fairly regularly to produce tomato plants, which regularly produce tomatoes that look and taste pretty much the same from year to year.
Li is similar to the Taoist de (in Dao De Jing, or Tao Te Ching). This idea probably comes from Buddhist metaphysics (which may in turn have been influenced by Taoism and is found still earlier in the I Jing, The Book of Changes). The root idea is that the inner nature of everything is the same, namely the Buddha. In neo-Confucianism, the emphasis is somewhat more secular and particularized—each kind of thing is governed by its own principle, or li. The li of chickens, for example, makes chicken eggs hatch into chickens and chicks grow up into chickens, and so on. But an understanding of the various li lies innate in each person’s mind. By quietly reflecting within our own minds, we can come to realize the inner li of everything.

Zhou Tun-yi, Shao Yung, and Chang Cai (Chang Tsai) are all founders of neo-Confucianism in the sense that they led the attempt to revive Confucianism after many centuries of neglect. However, this school of thought really began with the Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi (eleventh century). Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi, late eleventh century) formed the Cheng-Zhu li xue school (also called the Rationalist school), while Cheng Hao, along with Lu Chiu-yuan (twelfth century) and Wang Yangming (fifteenth-sixteenth century) formed the Lu-Wang xin xue school. (The Lu-Wang is also called the Idealistic school, deriving from Yogacara Buddhism, in which xin means mind-heart.)

Li xue held that li exist independently of particular things and of human consciousness. In this sense, it somewhat resembled the Theory of Forms of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Xin xue held that li do not exist independently of human consciousness or of particular things. Thus, according to li xue, we discover li by examining things in the world, whereas according to xin xue, we discover li by examining our own minds. Also, for li xue, human nature is li, whereas for xin xue, human nature is mind (human consciousness). Therefore, for li xue, human consciousness is part of the qi—the material stuff, or body—whereas for xin xue, it is the essential characteristic of human beings. Another difference between Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi is that, for Wang (as for Plato), knowing the good is enough to do it, whereas for Zhu Xi (as for Aristotle), a gap exists between knowing and doing.

In an effort to interpret some very difficult passages in the writings of their predecessors, neo-Taoists had debated whether a sage has no desires, or has desires but doesn’t get entangled in them. This is a Buddhist-Taoist-inspired virtue—what Fung Yulan called a “super-moral value.” Earlier Confucianists were concerned with more human virtues; that is, being the best we can be as human beings, and striving to perfect our human nature.
But Buddhism and Taoism aspire to *transcending* ordinary humanity (being more than a human being). Neo-Confucianists reject this aspect of Buddhism-Taoism because they interpret it as selfish by ignoring the needs of society to seek personal enlightenment. Neo-Confucianists strive for the ideal of the sage living *in* society, rather than apart from society as Buddhist monks and nuns and Taoist hermits prefer.

Late Chinese Buddhism rejects all forms of dualism, whether between reality and appearance, or enlightenment and ignorance. If we really take the Chinese Buddhist rejection of dualism seriously, why should we have to give up our families, our public service jobs, our place in society? Is this alien to Reality, the Buddha Nature, the *tao*? If so, then we have a dualism. If not, what’s the problem? The problem is one of ignorance—falsely thinking that I am a separate ego, and then building on that selfishness. (The Buddhist Chi Tsang addressed this in his double-truth doctrine, which said that we can realize the ultimate emptiness of everything and still order cloth for monks’ robes and garlic for today’s supper.) As the *Xi Ming* (the Western Inscription) of the early neo-Confucianist, Chang Tsai, says, we are all part of the same *qi*, from which it follows that we should serve Heaven and Earth and treat all men as our brothers. In other words, the fact that all is one and each of us is part of a larger whole does not, as the Buddhists claim, mean we should renounce social obligations. Rather, we should see these social relations as also parts of the one great whole. Indeed, knowing we are a part of that one whole should encourage us to act in a more socially cooperative and less selfish, individualistic way. Kongzi (Kung Tzu, Confucius) in Analects said that Yen Hui was happy in the sense that he was perfectly satisfied with little material goods. Cheng Yi was asked what made Yen Hui happy—was it because he enjoyed the *tao*? No, said Cheng Yi, “If Yen Hui enjoyed the *tao*, he was not Yen Hui.” Cheng Yi meant that to strive to be one with the *tao*, to enjoy the *tao*, to talk about the *tao*, etc. indicates that one is not really a part of the *tao*. Someone who is really a part of the *tao* doesn’t ever think about the *tao*—just as a fish never thinks about water. That is true happiness.

In a similar way, Cheng Hao interpreted the traditional Confucian virtue of *ren* (human-heartedness) as the underlying principle of the entire universe—not just the best way for human beings to treat one another. *Ren* thus became more Buddhist-Taoist—all is one; we are a part of the all-embracing one. So, we should respect all things, give all things their proper due, and cooperate with all things.
As you read the excerpt from the work Wang Yangming, consider the many threads of Chinese philosophy that are woven into this late form of Confucianism. What are the Taoist, Buddhist, and other elements that reappear in Wang Yangming’s work? In what sense, if any, was Wang a “closet Buddhist”? In what sense, if any, can we describe Wang as an “idealist”? In the end, what is Confucianism, really?

I made inquiry regarding the saying from the Great Learning, “Knowing where to rest, the object of pursuit is determined.” “The philosopher Chu,” I said, “held that all affairs and all things have definite principles. This appears to be out of harmony with your sayings.”

The Teacher said: “To seek the highest virtue in affairs and things is only the objective side of the principles of righteousness. The highest virtues are innate to the mind. They are realized when the manifesting of lofty virtue has reached perfection. Nevertheless, one does not leave the physical realm out of consideration. The original notes say that the individual must exhaust heaven-given principles to the utmost and that no one with any of the prejudices of human passions will attain to the highest virtue.”

I made inquiry saying, “Though the highest virtue he sought within the mind only, that may not enable the individual to investigate thoroughly the laws of the physical realm.”

The Teacher said. “The mind itself is the embodiment of natural law. Is there anything in the universe that exists independent of the mind? Is there any law apart from the mind?”

I replied: “In filial obedience in serving one’s parents, of faithfulness in serving one’s prince, or sincerity in intercourse with friends, or benevolence in governing the people, there are many principles which I fear must be examined.”

The Teacher, sighing, said: “This is an old evasion. Can it be fully explained in one word? Following your order of questions I will make reply. For instance, in the matter of serving one’s father, one cannot seek for the principle of filial obedience in one’s parent, or in serving one’s prince one cannot seek for the principle of faithfulness in the prince, or in making friends or governing the people one cannot seek for the principle of sincerity

and benevolence in the friend or the people. They are all in the mind, for the
mind is itself the embodiment of principles. When the mind is free from the
obscuration of selfish aims, it is the embodiment of the principles of Heaven.
It is not necessary to add one whit from without. When service of parents
emerges from the mind characterized by pure heaven-given principles, we
have filial obedience; when service of prince emerges, faithfulness; when the
making of friends or the governing of the people emerge, sincerity and
benevolence. It is only necessary to expel human passions and devote one’s
energies to the eternal principles.”

I said, “Hearing you speak thus, I realize that I understand you in a mea-
sure, but the old sayings trouble me, for they have not been completely dis-
posed of. In the matter of serving one’s parents, the filial son is to care for
their comfort both in winter and summer, and inquire after their health every
evening and every morning. These things involve many details. I do not
know whether these details are to be investigated in the mind or not.”

The Teacher said: “Why not investigate them? Yet in this investigation
there is a point of departure, namely, to pay attention to the mind in getting
rid of selfish aims and to foster the eternal principles. To understand the pro-
viding of warmth for one’s parents in winter, is merely a matter of exhaust-
ing the filial piety of one’s mind and of fearing lest a trifle of selfishness
remain to intervene. To talk about providing refreshing conditions for one’s
parents during the summer, is again a matter of exhausting the filial piety of
the mind and of fearing lest perhaps selfish aims be intermingled with one’s
efforts. But this implies that one must seek to acquire this attitude of mind
for one’s self. If the mind has no selfish aims, is perfectly under the control
of heaven-given principles (natural law), and is sincerely devoted to filial
piety, it will naturally think of and provide for the comfort of parents in win-
ter and summer. These are all things that emanate from a mind which truly
honors the parents; but it is necessary to have a mind that truly honors the
parents before these things can emanate from it. Compare it to a tree. The
truly filial mind constitutes the roots; the many details are the branches and
leaves. The roots must first be there, and then later there may be branches
and leaves. One does not first seek for the branches and leaves and after-
wards cultivate the roots.

“The Book of Rites says: ‘The filial son who sincerely loves surely has a
peaceful temper. Having a peaceful temper, he surely has a happy appearance.
Having a harpy appearance he surely has a pleasant, mild countenance.’ It is
because he has a profound love as the root that he is naturally like this.”
Because I did not understand the admonition of the Teacher regarding the unitary character of knowledge and practice, Tsung-hsien, Wei-hsien and I discussed it back and forth without coming to any conclusion. Therefore I made inquiry of the Teacher regarding it. He said: “Make a suggestion and see.” I said: “All men know that filial piety is due parents, and that the elder brother should be treated with respect; and yet they are unable to carry this out in practice. This implies that knowledge and practice really are two separate things.”

The Teacher replied: “This separation is due to selfishness and does not represent the original character of knowledge and practice. No one who really has knowledge fails to practice it. Knowledge without practice should be interpreted as lack of knowledge. Sages and virtuous men teach men to know how to act, because they wish them to return to nature. They do not tell them merely to reflect and let this suffice. The Great Learning exhibits true knowledge and practice, that men may understand this. . . .

I said: “The ancients said that knowledge and practice are two different things. Men should also understand this clearly. One section treats of knowledge, another of practice. Thus may one acquire a starting-point for one’s task.”

The Teacher said. “But thereby you have lost the meaning of the ancients. I have said that knowledge is the purpose to act, and that practice implies carrying out knowledge. Knowledge is the beginning of practice; doing is the completion of knowing. If when one knows how to attain the desired end, one speaks only of knowing, the doing is already naturally included; or if he speaks of acting, the knowing is already included. That the ancients after having spoken of knowledge also speak of doing, is due to the fact that there is a class of people on earth who foolishly do as they wish and fail to understand how to deliberate and investigate. They act ignorantly and recklessly. It is necessary to discuss knowledge so that they can act correctly. There is another class of people who vaguely and vainly philosophize but are unwilling to carry it out in practice. This also is merely an instance of estimating shadows and echoes. The ancients of necessity discussed doing, for only then can such people truly understand. The language of the ancients is of necessity directed toward rectifying prejudices and reforming abuses. When one comprehends this idea, a word is sufficient. Men of the present, however, make knowledge and action two different things and go forth to practice, because they hold that one must first have knowledge before one is able to practice. Each one says, ‘I proceed to investigate and discuss knowl-
edge; I wait until knowledge is perfect and then go forth to practice it.’ Those who to the very end of life fail to practice also fail to understand. This is not a small error, nor one that came in a day. By saying that knowledge and practice are a unit, I am herewith offering a remedy for the disease. I am not dealing in abstractions, nor imposing my own ideas, for the nature of knowledge and practice is originally as I describe it. In case you comprehend the purport, no harm is done if you say they are two, for they are in reality a unit. In case you do not comprehend the purport thereof and say they are one, what does it profit? It is only idle talk.” . . .

I made inquiry saying: “Yesterday I heard the Teacher’s instructions about resting in the highest virtue. I realize that I am beginning to get a grasp of this task. Nevertheless, I think that your point of view cannot be reconciled with the philosopher Chu’s instruction with reference to the investigation of things.”

The Teacher said; “Investigation of things is what is meant by resting in the highest excellence. He who has knowledge of the highest excellence also understands the investigation of things.”

I said: “Using the instruction of the Teacher, I yesterday pushed forward in the investigation of things, and it seemed as though I comprehended it in general; and yet the instruction of the philosopher Chu is all substantiated in what is called ‘a state of discrimination and undividedness’ by the Book of History, ‘extensive studying and the keeping of one’s self under restraint’ by the Confucian Analects, and ‘the exhausting of one’s mental constitution in knowing one’s nature’ by Mencius. As a result, I am unable to understand fully.”

The Teacher said: “Tzu-hsia was earnest in his belief in the sages, while Tseng-tzu sought within himself for help. To be earnest in belief surely is correct, but not as much so genuineness in application. Since you cannot grasp this, why should you cling to the sayings of the ancients and thereby fail to apply yourself to what you ought to learn? The philosopher Chu believed the philosopher Ch’en and yet when he reached places in which he did not understand him, did he ever suddenly and thoughtlessly accept his point of view? Discrimination, undividedness, ‘extensive studying,’ ‘keeping one’s self under restraint,’ and ‘exhausting one’s mental constitution’ are ab initio harmoniously blended with my sayings. But you have never thought about this. The philosophic teaching of Chu cannot but be related to and adapted from the views of others. It does not express the original meaning of the sages. Devotion to the essence implies united task; extensive studying implies keeping one’s self in restraint. I say that the virtuous man
already knows that knowledge and practice are a unity. The mere saying of this is enough to show it. ‘To exhaust one’s mental constitution in order to understand one’s nature and know heaven,’ implies that the individual is born with knowledge of the duties and carries them out with ease. Preserving one’s mental constitution and nourishing one’s nature so as to serve heaven, implies that the individual acquires knowledge of them by study and practices them from a desire for advantage. The saying, ‘Neither a premature death nor a long life causes a man any double-mindedness,’ implies that the individual acquires knowledge of them after a painful feeling of his ignorance and practices them by strenuous effort. The philosopher Chu made a mistake in his teaching regarding the investigation of things because he inverted this idea, using ‘the exhausting of one’s mental constitution in knowing one’s nature’ as ‘investigation of things for the purpose of extending knowledge to the utmost.’ He wanted those who were learning for the first time to act as though they had been born with knowledge of duties and carried them out with natural ease. How can that be done?”

I said, “Yesterday when I heard your teaching I clearly realized that the task is as you describe it: having heard your words today, I am still less in doubt. Last night I came to the conclusion that the word ‘thing’ of ‘investigating things’ is to be identified with the word ‘affair.’ Both have reference to the mind.”

The Teacher said: “Yes. The controlling power of the body is the mind. The mind originates the idea, and the nature of the idea is knowledge. Wherever the idea is, we have a thing. For instance, when the idea rests on serving one’s parents, then serving one’s parents is a ‘thing’; when it is on serving one’s prince, then serving one’s prince is a ‘thing’; when it is occupied with being benevolent to the people and kind to creatures, then benevolence to the people and kindness to creatures are ‘things’; when it is occupied with seeing, hearing, speaking, moving then each of these becomes a ‘thing.’ I say there are no principles but those of the mind, and nothing exists apart from the mind. The Doctrine of the Mean says: ‘Without sincerity there would be nothing.’ The Great Learning makes clear that the illustrating of illustrious virtue consists merely in making one’s purpose sincere, and that this latter has reference to investigating things.”

The Teacher spoke again saying: “The ‘examine’ of ‘examining into the nature of things’, just as the ‘rectify’ of ‘the great man can rectify the mind of the prince,’ of Mencius, has reference to the fact that the mind is not right. Its object is to reinstate the original rightness. But the idea conveyed is that
one must cast out the wrong in order to complete the right, and that there should be no time or place in which one does not harbor heaven-given principles. This includes a most thorough investigation of heaven-given principles. Heaven-given principles are illustrious virtue; they include the manifesting of illustrious virtue.”

Again he said: “Knowledge is native to the mind; the mind naturally is able to know. When it perceives the parents it naturally knows what filial piety is; when it perceives the elder brother it naturally knows what respectfulness is: when it sees a child fall into a well it naturally knows what commiseration is. This is intuitive knowledge of good, and is not attained through external investigation. If the thing manifested emanates from the intuitive faculty, it is the more free from the obscuration of selfish purpose. This is what is meant by saying that the mind is filled with commiseration, and that love cannot be exhausted. However, the ordinary man is subject to the obscuration of private aims, so that it is necessary to develop the intuitive faculty to the utmost through investigation of things in order to overcome selfishness and reinstate the rule of natural law. Then the intuitive faculty of the mind will not be subject to obscuration, but having been satiated will function normally. Thus we have a condition in which there is an extension of knowledge. Knowledge having been extended to the utmost, the purpose is sincere.”

I made inquiry of the Teacher saying, “Though I ponder deeply I am unable to understand the use of ‘extensive study of all learning’ in the task of keeping one’s self under the restraint of the rules of propriety. Will you kindly explain it somewhat?”

The Teacher said: “The word ‘propriety’ carries with it the connotation of the word ‘principles.’ When principles become manifest in action, they can be seen and are then called propriety. When propriety is abstruse and cannot be seen, it is called principles. Nevertheless, they are one thing. In order to keep one’s self under the restraint of the rules of propriety it is merely necessary to have a mind completely under the influence of natural law (heaven-given principles). If a person desires to have his mind completely dominated by natural law, he must use effort at the point where principles are manifested. For instance, if they are to be manifested in the matter of serving one’s parents, one should learn to harbor these principles in the serving of one’s parents. If they are to be manifested in the matter of serving one’s prince, one should learn to harbor them in the service of one’s prince.
If they are to be manifested in the changing fortunes of life, whether of wealth and position, or in poverty and lowliness, one should learn to harbor them whether in wealth and position, or in poverty and lowliness. If they are to be manifested when one meets sorrow and difficulty, or is living among barbarous tribes, one should learn to harbor them in sorrow and difficulty, or when one is among barbarous tribes. Whether working or resting, speaking or silent, under no conditions should it be different. No matter where they are manifested, one should forthwith learn to harbor them. This is what is meant by studying them extensively in all learning, and includes the keeping of one’s self under the restraint of the rules of propriety. ‘Extensive study of all learning’ thus implies devotion to the best (discrimination). ‘To keep one’s self under the restraint of the rules of propriety’ implies devoting one’s self to a single purpose (undividedness).”

I made inquiry saying: “An upright (righteous) mind is master of the body, while a selfish mind is always subject to the decrees (of the body). Using your instruction regarding discrimination and undividedness, this saying appears to be mistaken.”

The Teacher said: “The mind is one. In case it has not been corrupted by the passions of men, it is called an upright mind. If corrupted by human aims and passions, it is called a selfish mind. When a selfish mind is rectified it is an upright mind; and when an upright mind loses its rightness it becomes a selfish mind. Originally there were not two minds. The philosopher Ch’eng said, ‘A selfish mind is due to selfish desire; an upright mind is natural law (is true to nature).’ Even though his discourse separates them, his thought comprehends the situation correctly. Now, you say that if the upright mind is master and the selfish mind is subject to decrees, there are two minds, and that heaven-given principles and selfishness can not co-exist. How can natural law be master, while selfishness follows and is subject to decrees?”

I said, “Confucius revised the Six Classics in order to shed light on the doctrine.”

The Teacher said: “Yes. But in interpreting the classics does one not follow Confucius?”

I said: “The writing of comments implies that there is something to be made clear in the doctrine. Interpreting the classics refers only to judging their effect and may not add anything to the doctrine itself.”

The Teacher said: “Sir, do you consider him who understands the doctrine as thereby returning to honesty, reverting to sincerity, and perceiving
the genuine method of conduct? Or do you think that he improves his composition, but merely for the sake of being able to dispute? The great confusion in the Empire is due to the victory of false learning and the decay of genuine conduct. It is not necessary to publish the Six Classics in order to cause the doctrine to be understood. Confucius revised them because that was the only thing feasible. From the time when Fu Hsi drew the eight diagrams to the time of Wan Wang and Chou Kung, portions of the Book of Changes, such as Lienshan and Kueits’ang, were discussed, often in a noisy, disorderly way. I do not know how many scholars discussed them, but the doctrine of the Book of Changes was greatly perverted. Because the custom of admiring literary style daily increased within the Empire, Confucius, realizing that the discussions about the Book of Changes would be endless, chose the interpretation of Wen Wang and Chou Kung and eulogized it as being the only one that grasped the underlying idea. Thereupon the confused interpretations were entirely discarded and a unanimity of opinion was reached among expositors. The same situation prevailed in the case of the Book of History, the Book of Poetry, the Book of Rites and the Annals of Spring and Autumn. In the Book of History from the Tienmo on, and in the Book of Poetry from the Erhnan on—as, for example, in the Chiuch’iu and the Paso—all expressions of lewd wantonness and licentious excess, including I know not how many hundreds or thousands of leaves, were rejected, expunged, or revised by Confucius. Moreover, he did the same with the names of distinguished persons, things, and measures without limit. This was the first time that such sayings were discarded.

“Where did Confucius add a single sentence to the Books of History, Poetry, or Rites? The many present-day interpretations of the Book of Rites have all been agreed upon and adopted by later scholars, and are not the interpretation of Confucius. Though the Annals of Spring and Autumn are attributed to Confucius, in actual fact they are an ancient record of the history of Lu Kuo. The one said to have written it wrote about ancient things; he who corrected it expunged much, abbreviating without making any additions. When Confucius transcribed the Six Classics, he was afraid that multitudinous characters would confuse the Empire. He decided to abridge them in order that the scholars of the Empire might get rid of the mere literary learning of the classics, and, seeking for what was genuine about them, no longer teach merely by using the literary style. After the revision of the Annals of Spring and Autumn, the more the multitude of characters increased, the more confused the Empire became.
“(Ch’in) Shih Huang mistakenly burned the books from private motives, though he had no justification for doing so. If his purpose at that time was to exhibit the doctrine, he should have known enough to collect and burn all the sayings that were opposed to the classics and violated moral principles. That would have been in accord with the idea of revision. From the time of the Ch’in and Han dynasties, literary productions again daily increased in number. Though anyone should desire to dispose of them entirely, it would be utterly impossible. One should adopt the plan of Confucius: record that which is approximately correct and publish it. All superstitious and perverse sayings should, of course, gradually be dropped. I do not know what interpretation of the classics prevailed contemporaneously with Wen Chung-tzu. As I look the matter over privately, I believe that a sage had arisen but was unable to effect a change. The misrule of the Empire was due to the fact that literary productions were abundant, but sincerity had decayed. Men, following their own opinions, sought for new mysteries that they might increase their fame. Ostentatious for the sake of becoming prominent, they confused the wise of the Empire, dulled the ears and eyes of the people, and caused them to dispute extravagantly. They assiduously corrected literary style in order to seek notoriety before the world, but did not understand the practice which is generously original and nobly true, and which returns to honesty and reverts to sincerity. All commentators use their literary productions to promote this.”

I said: “Among commentators there are some that are indispensable. The classic called the Annals of Spring and Autumn would probably be difficult to understand if it were not for the Tso Chuan.”

The Teacher said: “You say that the interpretation of the Annals of Spring and Autumn depends upon the Tso Chuan and can be understood only after the latter has been read. The Annals of Spring and Autumn consists of abridged sayings. Why should the sage devote himself strenuously to profound, abstruse phraseology? The Tso Chuan consists mostly of the ancient history of Lu Kuo. If the Annals of Spring and Autumn can really be understood only after the reading of the Tso Chuan, why did Confucius revise it?

I said: “The philosopher Ch’eng also said that the Tso Chuan is the case (Speaking from a legal standpoint) and the Spring and Autumn Annals are the judgment. For example, a certain book gives an account of the murder of a prince or the devastation of a state by war. But if the individual lacks knowledge of the particular affair it is difficult for him to pass judgment.” . . .
I said: “When the sages wrote the classics their aim was to get rid of the passions of men and harbor natural law. They preferred not to give to others a minute explanation of the events which occurred after the five rulers of the sixth century. That was right. But why is it that the affairs of the period prior to Yao and Shun were still less fully discussed?”

The Teacher said: “In the time of Hsi and Huang, important events occurred rarely and those who transmitted them were few in number. From this one may conclude that at that time all was well ordered, unpretentious, and without special elegance. The methods of government of the most ancient times were of that nature. Later generations have not been able to reproduce them.”

I said: “Inasmuch as the records of the first three rulers had been handed down did Confucius revise them?”

The Teacher said: “Granting that there were those who transmitted them, yet in a changing world they gradually proved inadequate. The attitude of the community was increasingly disclosed and literary taste increased daily until we reach the end of the Chou dynasty. At that time they desired to adopt the manners and customs of the Hsia and Shan dynasties, but it was even then impossible to do so. How much less would they have been able to adopt those of the T'ang and Yü dynasties, or those of the time of Hsi and Huang! However, the path of duty was the same, though their methods of government had changed. Confucius recorded the doctrine of Yao and Shun as if they had been his ancestors, and elegantly exhibited the regulations of Wan and Wu, which were really the principles of Yao and Shun. But the methods of proper government were different, and thus it was not feasible to introduce the professions of the Hsia and Shan dynasties into the Chou dynasty. It was for this reason that the Duke of Chou desired to exhibit the virtues of the three emperors in his own person. When, however, he saw anything in them not suitable to the time, he hesitated and pondered on it from daylight to night. How much less would it be possible to restore the government of the most ancient times! This the sages surely could abridge.”

Speaking again, the Teacher said: “To devote one’s self to an affair without effecting anything and without being able, as were the three emperors, to govern according to the times; and to desire to carry out the manners and customs of the ancients, these must be considered as devices of the Buddhists and Taoists. To desire to govern according to the times, and yet not to find the source thereof in the path of duty as did the three emperors; and to rule with a mind seeking honor and wealth, this is an occupation
lower than that of a tyrant. Though numerous later scholars discussed back and forth, they merely discussed violent, audacious moral conduct.” . . .

I said: “Leaving foot-prints in order to exhibit precepts also implies cherishing and defending the source of moral principles. Does not correcting the corresponding evils in order to prevent wickedness keep the passions of men from shooting forth?”

The Teacher said: “Surely the sage wrote the classics with this in mind. But one need not dote on literary expressions.”

I again made inquiry saying: “The evil may serve as a warning signal. If one heeds the warning and corrects the evils, it may serve to prevent wickedness. Since they are only in the Book of Poetry, why not expunge Chen and Wei (two odes)? Is the assertion of former scholars true, that the evils may serve to regulate the easy-going habits of men?”

The Teacher said: “The Book of Poetry is not the original book of the Confucianists. Confucius said ‘Banish the songs of Cheng. The songs of Cheng are licentious.’ He also said, ‘I hate the way in which the songs of Chen confound the music of Ya.’ That the songs of Chen and Wei are the sounds of a decaying state is according to the domestic discipline of the Confucianists. The three hundred sections which Confucius chose are all called the music of Ya. All may be played in the temple of Heaven or for a village clan. All, therefore, were played pleasantly and harmoniously and greatly promoted virtuous disposition and changed evil usages. Why were the songs of Chen and Wei omitted? Because they fostered the growth of licentiousness and led to adultery. They doubtless were again adopted by ordinary scholars after the burning of the books by Emperor Ch’in, for the sake of making up full three hundred sections. They are expressions of debauchery such as are frequently gladly transmitted by ordinary vulgar people. The alleys of today are full of that sort of conversation. That wicked men may serve as a warning to the easy-going tendency of men, is a manner of approach which seeks verbal form without getting any real advantage, while at the same time it engages in apologizing discussions.”

Because of interest in the loss of the original sayings of the ancients, I at first listened to the instruction of the Teacher, but was really fearful, doubtful, and without any point of contact. After I had heard the Teacher’s instruction for a long time, I gradually realized that I must face about and rectify my steps. After that I first began to have faith that the learning of the Teacher had come direct from Confucius, and that the remaining discussions were all by-paths. Such discussions intercept the stream. He says that the investigat-
ing of things consists in making the purpose sincere; the understanding of virtue, in cultivating one’s self; the investigation of heaven-given principles, in exhausting one’s disposition; the maintaining of constant inquiry and study, in honoring one’s virtuous nature; the extending of learning, in keeping one’s self under the restraint of the rules of propriety; being discriminat- ing, in being undivided; and other like sayings. At first these are hard to harmonize, but after one has thought about them for a long time one spontaneously gesticulates with hands and feet.

The Teacher said: “Seize hold of a good resolution as if the mind were distressed. Will there be any time to engage in idle talk or to care for idle affairs, if the mind is fully occupied with its distress?”

I, Lu Ch’eng, made inquiry saying: “There is the matter of mastering one’s mind. If in studying one is engaged entirely with study, or in receiving guests one is completely engaged in receiving guests, may these be considered as examples of being undivided?”

The Teacher said: “If in being fond of women one gives one’s self completely to salaciousness, or in desiring wealth one devotes one’s self entirely to covetousness, may these be considered as instances of mastering one’s mind? This is what is called urging things and should not be considered as mastering the mind. To master one’s mind implies mastering moral principles.”

I made inquiry regarding the fixing of one’s determination. The Teacher said: “It is simply a question of keeping heaven-given principles in mind; for this in itself is what is meant by fixing one’s determination. If one is able to remember this, it will obviously become gradually fixed in the mind. It may be compared to the Tâoists’ saying, ‘a matrix which brings forth the virtues of the sage.’ One who constantly harbors a regard for natural law little by little becomes a beautiful, great sage and spirit-man. But it is also necessary, in obedience to this thought, to nurture and practice these principles.”

The Teacher said: “If during the day one feels that work is becoming annoying, one should sit and rest. One should study though one feels an aversion to it. This is also giving a remedy for disease. In having intercourse with friends, mutually strive to be humble; for then you will derive benefit from your friendship. In case you strive for superiority you will be injured.”

I made inquiry saying, “There have been many commentators in the past. It is possible that some of them have brought confusion into right learning.”
The Teacher replied: “The mind of man completely embraces natural law. The books written by sages and virtuous men, just as the artist’s work that gives a life-like expression, show men the general outline so that they may earnestly seek the truth in them. The mental energy of the sages, as well as their bearing, their sayings, their joys, their actions, and their behavior, assuredly are things that could not be transmitted. When later generations wrote commentaries they took the things the sages had outlined, and transcribed them according to the pattern. But they did more than this; for they also falsely separated them and interpolated them so that they might thereby show their own skill. In doing so they have strayed far from the truth.”

I made inquiry saying, “Does the unlimited adaptability of the sage not also first have to be acquired?”

The Teacher said: “How can so much be acquired? The mind of the sage is like a bright mirror. There is only brightness there, and thus the response will be true to the influence brought to bear upon it. It will reflect everything truly. Past forms do not linger there; nor does it need to prepare for those which it has not reflected. If according to the expositions of later generations it is necessary that preparation be made, it is quite contrary to the learning of the sages. Chou Kung regulated the rites of propriety and provided music in order to educate the Empire; and this all sages are able to accomplish. But why did not Yao and Shun accomplish it? Why was it delayed until the time of Chou Kung? Confucius revised the Six Classics in order to instruct all later generations. This, too, all sages are able to do. Why did not Chou Kung first accomplish it? Why was it delayed until the time of Confucius? One may know from these situations that when the sage meets with definite conditions, he does a definite work to meet the specific conditions. The only fear one need entertain is lest the mirror be clouded. One need not fear that when the thing comes before it, it will fail to reflect. Investigation of the change of events must also be carried on in accordance with the times. Naturally the student must first complete the task of brightening up the mirror. He should be grieved if his mind cannot become like a bright mirror, and should not grieve because things are continually changing.”

I said, “Surely what you have said is of no immediate concern to me, for I have already made preparation for all sorts of imaginable circumstances. What do you think of such a reply?”

He said, “That way of talking is originally good. But if you do not carefully consider it, it brings distress.”
The Teacher said. “The principles of righteousness have no fixed abode and are inexhaustible. I say unto you, Do not because of having acquired some virtue say, I will cease acquiring.” He said again, “In ten years, twenty years, fifty years, do not cease.” At another time he spoke again, saying, “Sageness is like the evil of Chien and Chou. Truly after their time evil was inexhaustible. If Chien and Chou had not died, would evil have ceased? If virtue may be exhausted, why did King Wen look toward the right path as if he could not see it?”

I made inquiry saying: “When I am tranquil I am conscious of good ideas, but when I meet with events (am subject to stimulation) the situation is different. How do you account for this?”

The Teacher said. “This shows that you know how to cultivate tranquillity but do not understand how to control yourself. For this reason you are prostrate whenever you meet with a difficulty. When one has experience in affairs, he is able to stand firmly. Whether at rest or occupied, his purpose is fixed.” . . .

I made inquiry saying, “May the time in which one is in a tranquil state of mind be said to be a state of equilibrium?”

The Teacher said: “Men of today stay their minds only by controlling their passion nature, and thus when they are in a state of tranquillity the passion nature alone is tranquil. This cannot be considered as the state of equilibrium in which there are no stirrings of feeling.”

I said: “Though they are not in the state of equilibrium, are they not striving for it?”

He said: “The individual must expel passion and cherish natural law before he really engages in the task. When in a state of tranquillity, one should constantly meditate how to get rid of passion and how to cherish natural law; and when at work one should also strive for the same end. It makes no difference whether one be in a state of tranquillity or not. If one depends upon the state of tranquillity, the fault of loving tranquillity and despising activity gradually develops, and in connection therewith a great many other faults that are hidden away in the mind and will never be dislodged. As soon as conditions are favorable, they flourish as of old. In case action according to principles is the motivating purpose, how can there fail to be tranquillity? But if tranquillity itself is made the purpose, there will certainly be no compliance with principles.”
I made inquiry saying, “The disciples of Confucius discussed their wishes. Yu (Tzu-lu) and Ch’iu (Jan-yu) wished to be entrusted with a government position; Kung-hsi Chih wished to be responsible for ceremony and music. All these are very useful. But when one reaches the words of Tseng Hsi (Tseng Tien), only play is mentioned. Yet the sage favored him. How is this to be interpreted?”

The Teacher said: “The three disciples had foregone conclusions and arbitrary predeterminations. Having these, they certainly would be turned aside from their purpose. In case they were able to carry out their desires, they would not be able to do the other important thing. Tseng Tien’s wish, on the other hand, was without preconceived ideas and arbitrary predeterminations, and implied doing what is in accord with one’s station and not desiring to go beyond this. Such a viewpoint means that when situated among barbarous tribes one does what is proper among barbarous tribes; that in sorrow and difficulty one adapts one’s self to a position of sorrow and difficulty; and that there is no situation in which one is not self-possessed. According to the language of the three disciples, the individual is merely a tool. Tseng Tien’s wish implied that the individual is not to be a tool. Since each of the three disciples wished to perfect his ability with majesty, they were not like the ordinary man who speaks vainly and lacks genuineness. For these reasons the master also favored their desires.”

I made inquiry saying, “What shall the individual do when he finds that he is making no progress in knowledge?”

The Teacher said: “In devoting one’s self to study, one must have a point of departure. One should work from the starting point forward, and advance by gradually completing each branch of study. The immortals have a good simile when speaking of small children, ‘The child in its mother’s womb consists only of pure vital force.’ What knowledge can it have? After birth it is first able to cry; a little later, to laugh; still later, to recognize its parents and brothers; and after that it is able to stand, walk, grasp, and carry. This is universally true. It implies that mental and physical energy increases, that strength becomes more vigorous, and intelligence more ample as the days pass. These capacities are not acquired through direct endeavor or through a series of investigations after birth. This shows that there is a source. That the sage (Confucius) assumed regal sway over heaven and earth and nourished all things, is merely the result of progressive development from the equilibrium in which there is no stirring of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy. Later scholars do not understand what is meant by ‘the investigation of things.’
They see that the sage was omniscient and omnipotent, and thereupon desire at the very beginning to complete their quest. Is that in harmony with natural law?"

He spoke further saying: “In fixing the determination one must work as though he were cultivating a tree. When the young tree has the first rootlets it does not yet have a trunk, and when the trunk appears it does not yet have branches. After the branches come the leaves, and after the leaves, the flowers and the fruit. When you first cultivate the roots you need only care for them by watering them. You should not think of cultivating branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit. What advantage is there in being anxious? But you should not forget to care for the tree and water it, lest perchance there be no branches, leaves, flowers, or fruit.”

I said: “What shall be done when one studies and is unable to understand?”

The Teacher said: “It shows that the quest is confined to the meaning of the individual characters, and that therefore one does not understand the thought of what is read. This is not equal to the method of those who devoted themselves to education in ancient times, for they read much and were able to explain it. But the unfortunate thing was that though they were able to expound very clearly, they did not really gain any advantage. It is necessary to work on the base of native endowment. Whosoever is unable to understand or unable to practice should return in his work to his original mind. Then he should be able to comprehend. The Four Books and the Five Classics discuss the original nature of the mind. The original nature of the mind is to be identified with the path of duty (truth). He who understands the original nature of his mind thereby understands the path of duty, for the two cannot be distinguished. This is the point of departure in studying.”

Some one inquired about the philosopher Chu, saying: “In case a man devotes himself to study, he need pay attention only to mind and principles. How is this to be interpreted?”

The Teacher said, “Mind is nature, and nature includes law and order. The character yū (and) after ‘mind’ perhaps makes it inevitable that they be considered as two. It will depend upon the way the student uses his good judgment with reference to this.”

Some one said, “All men have natural endowment (mind), and the mind is the embodiment of heaven-given principles (natural law). Why then do some devote themselves to virtue and others to vice?”
The Teacher said, “The mind of the evil man has lost its original nature.”

I made inquiry saying: “Analyze heaven-given principles and you will find them extremely pure and not in the least confused; unite them again and you will have exhausted their greatness and there will be nothing left. How is this to be understood?”

The Teacher replied: “Perhaps they will not be exhausted. Is it really possible that natural laws will admit of being analyzed, and how can they be reassembled? When one attains what the sages call the state of being discriminating and undivided, they have then been exhausted.”

The Teacher said: “Self-investigation should be nurtured when one is busy with the affairs of life, the nurture of self should be investigated when one is not thus occupied.”

I frequently made inquiry about Hsiang-shan’s sayings regarding the way in which one should expend his energy with reference to human feelings and passions, as well as with reference to the vicissitudes of life.

The Teacher said: “There are no crises and problems beyond those of passion and change. Are not pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy passions of men? Seeing, hearing, talking, working, wealth and honor, poverty and lowliness, sorrow and difficulty, death and life, all are vicissitudes of life. All are included in the passions and feelings of men. These need only to be in a state of perfect equilibrium and harmony, which, in turn, depends upon being watchful over one’s self.”

I made inquiry saying, “Is it true that we have the names benevolence, righteousness (duty to one’s neighbor), propriety, and wisdom because we ourselves have manifested them?” The Teacher said, “Yes.”

On another day I said, “Are the feelings of commiseration, shame, dislike, modesty, complaisance, approval, and disapproval to be considered as nature manifesting virtue?”

The Teacher said: “Benevolence, justice, propriety, and wisdom are nature manifesting virtue. There is only one nature and no other. Referring to its substance, it is called heaven; considered as ruler or lord, it is called Shang-ti (God); viewed as functioning, it is called fate; as given to men it is called disposition; as controlling the body, it is called mind. Manifested by the mind, when one meets parents, it is called filial piety; when one meets the prince, it is called loyalty. Proceeding from this on the category is inexhaustible, but it is all one nature, even as there is but one man (generic
sense). As compared with his father, man is called son; as compared with his son, he is called father. Proceeding from this one may go on indefinitely, yet there is but one man and no more. Man should use his energy on his nature. If he is able to understand clearly the connotation of the word nature, he will be able to distinguish ten thousand principles.”

I made inquiry as to whether the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean were alike or different in doctrine. The Teacher said: “Tzu-ssu incorporated the fundamental idea of the Great Learning in the first chapter of the Doctrine of the Mean.”

I made inquiry saying: “Confucius corrected the mutual relationships of the people. Former scholars said: ‘Upward one tells the emperor, downward one tells the financial commissioner, that Chê has been cast aside and Ying established.’ What do you hold of this?”

The Teacher said: “It is perhaps as described. Can it be that a man who with the utmost respect exhausts propriety in waiting for me to take up official business would be the first discarded by me? Would this be reasonable and right? Since Confucius was willing to give the government to Chê, Chê certainly had thoroughly repented, restored the state to his father and obeyed the sage. Confucius, a man of staunch virtue and complete sincerity, had certainly brought Chê of the state of Wei to a realization that he who has no father cannot be counted a man, and that he must go and welcome his father speedily with tears. The love of father and son is in accordance with nature. In case Chê truly and thoroughly repented in this manner, could K’uai Wai fail to be influenced and satisfied? When K’uai-Wai had returned, Chê would give him the state and ask to be executed. Since Wai would then have been influenced by his son, and the master, a man of complete sincerity, would have used his influence for peace in this matter, the father in turn would be unwilling to receive the state and would order Chê to rule. The body of ministers and the people would then also desire Chê to act as ruler. Chê, on the other hand, would confess his crime, request the emperor and tell the financial commissioner and all the noblemen that he wished to give the state to his father. Wai, the body of ministers, and the people would then publish the excellence of Chê’s new awakening and unselfish filial piety, and would request the emperor and tell the financial commissioner and noblemen that they truly desired Chê to be the prince. Thereby the requests would center on Chê to cause him again to be the prince of the State of Wei. Chê would have no recourse except to do as in the story of a later emperor’s
father; that is, command the ministers and the people to honor Wai as father of the duke, prepare the things necessary for the comfort of his father, and not till then step back and take up his position. In that way the prince would have carried out the doctrine of the prince, the minister that of the minister, the father that of the father, the son that of the son. The mutual relations would have been corrected, and conversation become filial. Men once Chê had promoted this, he would be able to govern the Empire. The adjustment which Confucius made of the mutual relationships was perhaps of this kind."

While I was the official in charge of the granaries of the Court of Ceremonies, I unexpectedly received a letter from home saying that my son was dangerously ill. My mind was filled with unendurable sorrow.

The Teacher said: "At this time you certainly should apply yourself to the truth (path of duty). if you allow this opportunity to slip by, of what advantage will it be for you to expound learning when you are in prosperity? You should gain experience now. The love of a father for his son is by nature the highest type of affection; but in accordance with natural law there is a state of equilibrium and harmony, which when exceeded leads to selfishness. If at this point men understand that the carrying out of natural law means love, then they will not realize that former sorrows and afflictions are examples of the saying, 'If the mind be under the influence of sorrow and distress, a man will be incorrect in his conduct.' The influence of the seven passions is in most people excessive; in a few only does it fail to reach its proper proportion. When it is excessive, it is not in accordance with the original nature of the mind. It must be adjusted to reach the mean, for then first is it right. For instance, at the death of parents, is it not true that the son desires to mourn unto death because in that way his mind is put at rest? But it is nevertheless said, 'The collapse should not injure the natural disposition.' This does not imply that the same is trying to quell it by force, but that nature has its limits which cannot be exceeded, and that everyone should recognize the nature of the mind. Nothing should he either added to or subtracted from this."

"Do not say that the equilibrium in which the passions are not manifested is kept by all men, that nature and its use have a common source, and that having nature, you also have its use. If one keeps the equilibrium in which the seven passions have been suppressed, one also is in the state of harmony in which they are manifested in proper degree. The present generation has been
unable to acquire this harmony. From this one must know that the equilibrium in which they are suppressed cannot have been completely acquired.

“The restorative influence of the night is spoken of with reference to ordinary men; but the student, if he works diligently, may in the daytime, whether at work or at leisure, be the focus of the gathering and development of this restorative influence. It is not necessary to speak of the influence of night with reference to the sage.” . . .

Wei Ch’ien made inquiry regarding the saying of Mencius, “By holding the medium without leaving room for the exigency of circumstances, it becomes like their holding their one point.”

The Teacher said: “The medium is merely natural law. And yet at any time it may change? How then can it he held? It certainly means that it must be suitably regulated in accordance with the occasion, and for that reason it would be difficult to establish a rule in advance. It would be as though later scholars through their expositions undertook to determine a pattern without leaving a loophole for any change. That would carry with it the idea of holding.”

T’ang Hsü made inquiry saying: “Is it true that in fixing the determination one should constantly cherish good thoughts, do good, and expel evil?”

The Teacher said: “The cherishing of good thoughts is in accordance with natural law. Such thoughts are themselves virtue. What other virtue shall one deliberate upon? They are not evil. What evil shall one expel? Thoughts are like the roots and rootlets of a tree. He who is fixing his determination need only fix his thoughts for a long time. When one is able to follow the desire of the heart without overstepping propriety, one’s determination has become habitual.

“It is of first importance that mental and animal energy, virtue, words, and acts should for the most part be controlled (gathered together). That they will lack unity at times is inevitable. Heaven and earth, man and things, are all alike in this.” . . .

The Teacher said: “Pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are in their natural condition in the state of equilibrium and harmony. As soon as the individual adds a little of his own ideas, he oversteps and fails to maintain the state of equilibrium and harmony. This implies selfishness.

“In subduing one’s self, one must clear out selfish desire completely, so that not a bit is left. If a little is left, all sorts of evil will be induced to make their entrance.” . . .
Yueh-jen said: “The mind may be compared to a mirror. The mind of the sage is like a bright mirror, the mind of the ordinary man like a dull mirror. The saying of more recent natural philosophy may be compared to using it as a mirror to reflect things. If effort is expended in causing the mirror to reflect while the glass is still dull, how can one succeed? The natural philosophy of the Teacher is like a polished and brightened mirror. When after having been polished the mirror is bright, the power of reflecting has not been lost.”

He asked regarding the general plan and the details (fineness and coarseness) of the doctrine. The Teacher said: “The doctrine has neither general plan nor detailed structure. What men consider the general plan and the details may be made clear in examining a house. When one first enters it, one sees only the general plan. After a while one sees the supports and walls. Later still such things as the ornamental duckweed upon the supports become apparent. But all this is only a part of the same house.”

The Teacher said: “Sirs, how is it that recently when you approach me you have sow questions to ask regarding the things about which you are in doubt? When a man fails to put forth effort, he invariably believes that he well knows how to devote himself to study, and that all that is necessary is to follow the order and act (i.e. study). He certainly does not know that selfish desire increases every day like the dust of the earth. If one neglects to sweep for a day, another layer is added. If one really works with determination one realizes that the doctrine is inexhaustible. The more one searches, the profounder it becomes, until its essence and purity are fully comprehended.”

Some one made inquiry saying: “After knowledge has been completed one can say that the thoughts are sincere. At present neither moral law nor the passions of men are thoroughly understood. Under such circumstances how is anyone in a position to begin to subdue himself?”

The Teacher said: “If a person unceasingly applies himself truly and earnestly, he will daily better comprehend the subtle essence of the moral principles of the mind, as well as the subtlety of selfish desires. If he does not use his efforts in controlling himself, he will continually talk and yet never comprehend the meaning of moral principles or of selfish desire. The situation may be likened to a man traveling. When (by walking) he has covered a stage, he understands that stage. When he reaches a fork in the road and is in doubt he makes inquiry, and having made inquiry he again proceeds. In this way he gradually reaches his destination. Men of today are unwilling to abide by the moral principles which they already know, and to expel the passions they have already recognized; but are downcast because
they are unable to understand completely. They merely indulge in idle dis-
cussions. Of what advantage is this? They should wait until in the process of
subduing and controlling themselves there are no more selfish motives to
subdue, for then it would not be too late to sorrow because of their inability
to understand fully.”

He made inquiry saying: “Is it necessary first to investigate the mutual human relationships, the things of nature, measures, and numbers?”

The Teacher said: “It is necessary to develop the original nature of the
mind; then its use will include the state of equilibrium. In case one nourishes
the original nature of the mind and attains to the equilibrium in which there is
no stirring of feelings, there surely is present the state of harmony which
results when the feelings are stirred and act in due degree. Of course it must
be exhibited. If mind is lacking, the mutual human relationships, the things
of nature, as well as measures and numbers, would have no relation to the
self, though one explain them first; but would simply imply pretension and
superficiality. When at times the feelings are displayed, the individual natu-
rally does not maintain the equilibrium. I do not wish to say that the mutual
relationships, the things of nature, measures, and numbers should be entirely
left out of consideration. If the individual knows what is first and what is
last, he will be near the truth.”

He spoke again saying: “Man must develop in accordance with his
capacity. Capacity constitutes his ability to accomplish things. For instance,
the music of K’uei and the agriculture of Chi were noteworthy because they
were in harmony with their natural endowment. He who would complete
himself need only preserve the nature of his mind guileless in natural law.
When the occasions on which he acts all take their original from nature
itself, he may be said to have ability. When a person reaches the state in
which he is completely in accord with natural law, he is no longer a mere
utensil. Had K’uei and Chi been ordered to exchange professions and engage
in them successfully, they would have been able to do so.”

Again he said: “In a position of wealth and honor to do what is proper to
a position of wealth and honor, in a position of sorrow and difficulty to do
what is proper to a position of sorrow and difficulty, implies that one is not a
mere machine. This can be accomplished only by the man who cultivates an
upright mind.”

The Teacher said: “To dig a pond several hundred mu in size, but with-
out a spring, is not equal to digging a well a few feet deep with a spring in it
that runs without ceasing.” The Teacher said this as he sat at the side of a
pool near which there was a well. Subsequently he used this figure in elucidating learning.

He made inquiry saying. “In what way may the mind devote itself to things?”

The Teacher said: “When the people’s prince is upright, reverent, and majestic, and the six boards distinguish their respective official duties, the Empire is well governed. In the same way the mind should govern the five senses. In our day when the eye wishes to see, the mind applies itself to color, and when the ear wishes to hear, the mind devotes itself to sound. It is as though the people’s prince were himself to take a seat on the Board of Civil Offices, when he wishes to choose an official, or on the Board of War, when he wishes to move the troops. In this way the original character of the prince would be sacrificed and in addition the six boards also would be unable to perform their official duties.”

I made inquiry saying: “Former scholars said: ‘The truths expressed by the sage show him forth as lowly and humble. The words of a virtuous man exhibit and exalt his personality.’ Do you consider that true?”

The Teacher said: “No. A statement such as that is false. The sage may be compared to heaven. There is no place where heaven is not present. Above the sun, moon and stars heaven is found, and below the nine divisions it is also found. How can heaven descend and make itself lowly? The implications here are greatness and the exercise of a transforming influence. The good man may be compared to a lofty mountain peak, maintaining his lofty height. Nevertheless. one a thousand feet high cannot stretch and become ten thousand feet high, and one ten thousand feet high cannot stretch and become a hundred thousand feet high. The good man does not exhibit and exalt himself. It is false to say, ‘exhibits and exalts himself.’”

The Teacher said: “Nature is the highest good. Nature is in its original condition devoid of all evil, and for this reason is called the highest good. To rest in the highest good implies returning to one’s natural condition.”

He (Shang-ch’ien) made inquiry saying, “Knowledge of the highest good is characteristic of my nature, and my nature is to be identified with my mind. My mind, however, is the place in which the highest good rests. In that case I should not, as of old, seek for the highest good confusedly in external things, but should fix my determination. When the determination has been fixed, it will not give trouble. Confusion will give place to quietude; quietude and absence of disorderly activity will usher in peace. When there is
peace, mind and will are interested in this alone. If in all planning and think-
ing I earnestly seek, I will surely get this highest good; but it can be acquired
only after one is able to take serious thought for it. Is this manner of
expounding the situation correct or not?”

The Teacher replied, “In general it is.”

Shang-ch’ien made inquiry saying: “The philosopher Ch’eng said, ‘The
benevolent person considers heaven, earth, and all nature as an all-pervading
unity.’ How, then, does it come that the philosopher Mo, who loved all
things, said nothing about benevolence?”

The Teacher said: ‘It is very hard to give an adequate reason for this.
You yourselves, Sirs, will need by means of introspection to investigate this
thoroughly up to the point where you understand it, for then first will you get
satisfaction. Benevolence is the fundamental principle of continuous creat-
ing and growth. Though these are boundless in extent and everywhere pre-
sent, their progress and manifestation proceed gradually. For instance, at the
winter solstice one Yang is brought forth, and from this one Yang later six
other Yangs are gradually developed. Were it not for the development of this
one Yang, how could the six Yangs be generated? And the same holds true of
the Yin. Because it is gradual in its operation, there is a beginning; and
because there is a beginning, there is a bringing forth. Because it continues
to bring forth, there is no ceasing. The tree begins by developing a bud. This
is the point at which the tree’s purpose to grow starts. After the bud has
developed the trunk appears, and then the branches and leaves; and from that
time it grows continually. If it has no bud, how can it have trunk, branches,
and leaves? Its ability to develop a bud surely depends upon the root under-
neath; for if there is a root there can be growth, and without the root it must
die. From what shall the buds develop if there is no root? The love of father
and son, elder brother and younger brother, is the point at which the purpose
of man’s mind to develop begins. Just as in the tree the buds shoot forth, thus
from this love toward the people and love of things trunk, branches, and
leaves develop. The man named Mo loved all things without difference of
degree. He looked upon his own father, his own son, his own elder brother,
and his own younger brother even as he did upon the stranger; and for that
reason he lacked a point from which he might start to develop. Where there
is no ability to grow a bud, there are no roots, and consequently no continu-
ous development. How can such a condition be called benevolence? Filial
piety and respectfulness toward the elder brother are the beginning of benev-
olence; benevolence, however, must be manifested from within.”
Shang-ch’ien made inquiry saying: “Yen P’ing said, ‘He who acts in accordance with moral principles does not have a selfish mind.’ In what way should I distinguish between moral principles and unselfishness?”

The Teacher said: “The mind is to be identified with moral principles. When one’s mind is freed from selfishness, acting in accordance with moral principles is a necessary accompaniment. If one does not act in accordance with moral principles, his mind is selfish. Perhaps it would be better not to distinguish between mind and moral principles in expounding this.”

He made further inquiry saying: “The Buddhists are not infected by any of the selfishness of lust, and thus appear to have a mind free from selfishness. On the other hand, they outwardly disregard human relationships, and thus do not appear to be acting in accordance with moral principles.”

The Teacher said: “This belongs to the same class of things. They all carry out the mind of a selfish personality.”