

# Neo-Confucianism



Zhang Huang, *Diagram of the Great Ultimate* 1623

The following selections are from four important Neo-Confucian philosophers. The first is Zhou Dunyi (Chou Tun-I) (1017-1073), the most important of the early Neo-Confucian cosmologists. Included here is his explanation of the *Taiji* (太極) or “Diagram of the Great Ultimate.” The illustration here is from a later version which connects the *Taiji* with the eight trigrams from the *Book of Changes* rather than with the Five Agencies as Zhou explains it. The second selection from Zhou is from his commentary on the *Book of Changes*. What follows after are selections from the two Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao (Ch’eng Hao 1032-1085) and Cheng I (Ch’eng Yi 1033-1108), founders of the Cheng Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism, noteworthy for the development of the concept of principle (*li* 理), an essential feature of Neo-Confucianism. The fourth set of selections are from Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi 1130-1200. In bringing together Zhou Dunyi’s notion of the Great Ultimate with the Cheng brothers concept of principle, Zhu Xi brought Neo-Confucianism to its fullest development. All selections are taken from *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* compiled and translated by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Confucian philosopher Wing-Tsit Chan. The comments included within the selections are from Professor Chan.

## Zhou Dunyi (Chou Tun-I)

### 1. AN EXPLANATION OF THE DIAGRAM OF THE GREAT ULTIMATE

The Ultimate of Non-being and also the Great Ultimate (*Taiji* 太極)! The Great Ultimate through movement generates *yang*. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquillity the Great Ultimate generates *yin*. When tranquillity reaches its limit, activity begins again. So movement and tranquillity alternate and become the root of each other, giving rise to the distinction of *yin* and *yang*, and the two nodes are thus established.

By the transformation of *yang* and its union with *yin*, the Five Agents of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth arise. When these five material forces (*qi* 氣) are distributed in harmonious order, the four seasons run their course.

The Five Agents constitute one system of *yin* and *yang*, and *yin* and *yang* constitute one Great Ultimate. The Great Ultimate is fundamentally the Non-ultimate. The Five Agents arise, each with its specific nature.

When the reality of the Ultimate of Non-being and the essence of *yin*, *yang*, and the Five Agents come into mysterious union, integration ensues. *Ch’ien* (Heaven) constitutes the male element, and *k’un* (Earth) constitutes the female element. The interaction of these two material forces engenders and transforms the myriad things. The myriad things produce and reproduce, resulting in an unending transformation.

It is man alone who receives (the Five Agents) in their highest excellence, and therefore he is most intelligent. His physical form appears, and his spirit develops consciousness. The five moral principles of his nature (humanity or *ren*, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness) are aroused by, and react to, the external world and engage in activity; good and evil are distinguished; and human affairs take place.

The sage settles these affairs by the principles of the Mean, correctness, humanity, and righteousness (for the way of the sage is none other than these four), regarding tranquillity as fundamental. (Having no desire, there will therefore be tranquillity.) Thus he establishes himself as the ultimate standard for man. Hence the character of the sage is “identical with that of Heaven and Earth; his brilliancy is identical with that of the sun and moon; his order is identical with that of the four seasons; and his good and evil fortunes are identical with those of spiritual beings.” The superior man cultivates these moral qualities and enjoys good fortune, whereas the inferior man violates them and suffers evil fortune.

Therefore it is said that “*yin* and *yang* are established as the way of Heaven, the weak and the strong as the way of Earth, and humanity and righteousness as the way of man.” It is also said that “if we investigate the cycle of things, we shall understand the concepts of life and death.” Great is the *Book of Changes*! Herein lies its excellence! (*Chou Tzu ch’üan-shu*, chs. 1-2, pp. 4-32).

## 2. PENETRATING THE BOOK OF CHANGES

### *Ch. 1. Sincerity, Pt. 1*

Sincerity (*cheng* 誠) is the foundation of the sage. “Great is the *ch’ien*, the originator! All things obtain their beginning from it.” It is the source of sincerity. “The way of *ch’ien* is to change and transform so that everything will obtain its correct nature and destiny.” In this way sincerity is established. It is pure and perfectly good. Therefore “the successive movement of *yin* and *yang* constitutes the Way (*dao*). What issues from the Way is good, and that which realizes it is the individual nature.” Origination and flourish characterize the penetration of sincerity, and advantage and firmness are its completion (or recovery). Great is the Change, the source of nature and destiny!

### *Ch. 2. Sincerity, Pt. 2*

Sagehood (*shengren* 聖人) is nothing but sincerity (*cheng* 誠). It is the foundation of the Five Constant Virtues (humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness) and the source of all activities. When tranquil, it is in the state of non-being, and when active, it is in the state of being. It is perfectly correct and clearly penetrating. Without sincerity, the Five Constant Virtues and all activities will be wrong. They will be depraved and obstructed. Therefore with sincerity very little effort is needed [to achieve the Mean]. [In itself] it is perfectly easy but it is difficult to put into practice. But with determination and firmness, there will be no difficulty. Therefore it is said, “If a man can for one day master himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will return to humanity.”

### *Ch. 3. Sincerity is the Subtle, Incipient, Activating Force (Qi 氣) of Virtue*

Sincerity [in its original substance] engages in no activity, but is the subtle, incipient, activating force giving rise to good and evil. The virtue of loving is called humanity (*ren* 仁), that of doing what is proper is called righteousness (*yi* 義), that of putting things in order is called propriety (*li* 禮), that of penetration is called wisdom (*zhi* 智), and that of abiding by one’s commitments is called faithfulness (*xin* 信). One who is in accord with his nature and acts with ease is a sage (*sheng* 聖). One who returns to his nature and adheres to it is a worthy. And one whose subtle emanation cannot be seen and whose [goodness] is abundant and all-pervasive without limit is a man of the spirit (*shen* 神).

### *Ch. 4. Sagehood*

“The state of absolute quiet and inactivity” is sincerity. The spirit is that which, “when acted on, immediately penetrates all things.” And the state of subtle incipient activation is the undifferentiated state between existence and nonexistence when activity has started but has not manifested itself in physical form. Sincerity is infinitely pure and hence evident. The spirit is responsive and hence works wonders. And incipient activation is subtle and hence abstruse. The sage is the one who is in the state of sincerity, spirit, and subtle incipient activation.

### *Ch. 5. Caution about Activity*

When activity is directed along its correct course, we have the Way (*dao* 道). When its operations are harmonized, we have virtue (*de* 德). The violation of humanity, of righteousness, of propriety, of wisdom, and of faithfulness is depravity. Any activity of depravity is disgraceful. When pushed to a high degree, it is even dangerous. Consequently, the superior man (*junzi* 君子) is cautious about his activity.

### *Ch. 6. The Way*

The way (*dao* 道) of the sage (*sheng* 聖) is nothing but humanity (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), the Mean (*zhong* 中), and correctness (*zheng* 正). Preserve it and it will be ennobling. Practice it and it will be beneficial. Extend it and it will match Heaven and Earth. Is it not easy and simple? Is it hard to know? (If so), it is because we do not preserve, practice, and extend it.

### *Ch. 20. Learning to Be a Sage*

“Can one become a sage through learning?” “Yes.”

“Is there any essential way?” “Yes.”

“Please explain it to me.”

“The essential way is to [concentrate on] one thing. By [concentrating on] one thing is meant having no desire (*wuyu* 無欲). Having no desire, one is vacuous (*hsü*, being absolutely pure and peaceful) while tranquil, and straightforward while in action. Being vacuous while tranquil, one becomes intelligent and hence penetrating. Being straightforward while active, one becomes impartial and hence all-embracing. Being intelligent, penetrating, impartial, and all-embracing, one is almost a sage.”

*Comment.* Confucianists had never advocated having no desire. Mencius merely advocated having few desires.<sup>1</sup> The Taoist influence here is obvious. Hitherto, it was only a Taoist and Buddhist method of moral cultivation, but from now on, it became a Confucian method too. But as Chu Hsi said, Chou went too far, and as the prerequisite for concentrating on one thing, Ch’eng, had to substitute seriousness (*jing* 精) for desirelessness, evidently in order to eliminate this Taoist influence.

#### *Ch. 21. Impartiality and Understanding*

Whoever is impartial toward himself will be impartial toward others. There has never been a person who is partial toward himself and yet impartial toward others. Doubt arises when understanding is not perfect. With understanding there will be no doubt. To say that to be able to doubt is to understand is as far wrong as a thousand miles off the mark.

#### *Ch. 22. Principle, Human Nature, and Destiny*

Only the intelligent can understand the manifestations and concealments (of the operations of *yin* and *yang*). Strength may be good or it may be evil. The same is true of weakness. The ideal is the Mean.

The myriad things are created and transformed out of the two material forces and the Five Agents. These Five Agents are the basis of their differentiation while the two material forces constitute their actuality. The two forces are fundamentally one. Consequently, the many are [ultimately] one and the one is actually differentiated in the many. The one and the many each has its own correct state of being. The great and the small each has its definite function.

*Comment.* This is the most important chapter, because, as the title indicates, it deals with the three basic subjects in Neo-Confucianism: human nature (*renxing* 人性), principle (*li* 理), and destiny (*ming* 命). Strangely enough, none of the words appears in the chapter. According to Chu Hsi, the first sentence deals with principle, the next three deal with nature, and the rest deals with destiny. But as Sun Ch’i-feng pointed out, destiny refers to the endowment by Heaven and nature refers to what is inherent in man and things, and both are principle. Chu Hsi identifies the one with the Great Ultimate. The fundamental Neo-Confucian tenet, that substance is one but its manifestations are many, is here succinctly stated. . . .

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Chan, Wing-tsit. “The Neo-Confucian Metaphysics and Ethics in Chou Tun-I,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. pp. 460-480.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mencius*, 7B:35.

## The Cheng-Zhu School

Cheng Hao (Ch'eng Hao)

## THE COMPLETE WORKS OF THE TWO CHENG

1. On Understanding the Nature of *Ren* (Humanity 仁)

The student must first of all understand the nature of *ren*. The man of *ren* forms one body with all things without any differentiation. Righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and faithfulness (*xin* 信) are all [expressions of] *ren*.

[One's duty] is to understand this principle (*li* 理) and preserve *ren* with sincerity (*cheng* 誠) and seriousness (*jing* 精), that is all. There is no need for caution and control. Nor is there any need for exhaustive search. Caution is necessary when one is mentally negligent, but if one is not negligent, what is the necessity for caution? Exhaustive search is necessary when one has not understood principle, but if one preserves *ren* long enough, it will automatically dawn on him. Why should he have to depend on exhaustive search?

Nothing can be equal to this Way (*dao*, that is, *ren*). It is so vast that nothing can adequately explain it. All operations of the universe are our operations. Mencius said that "all things are already complete in oneself" and that one must "examine oneself and be sincere (or absolutely real)" and only then will there be great joy.<sup>2</sup> If one examines himself and finds himself not yet sincere, it means there is still an opposition between the two (the self and the non-self). Even if one tries to identify the self with the non-self, one still does not achieve unity. How can one have joy?

## SELECTED SAYINGS

3. There is no creature in the world that does not possess sufficient principle (*li* 理). I have always thought that rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, brothers, and husbands and wives have somewhat failed to fulfill their functions.

4. Man is not the only perfectly intelligent creature in the universe. The human mind (in essence) is the same as that of plants and trees, birds and animals. It is only that man receives at birth the Mean of Heaven and Earth (balanced material force).

5. "The operations of Heaven (Nature) have neither sound nor smell." Their substance is called Change; their principle (*li* 理), the Way (*dao* 道); and their function, spirit (*shen* 神). What Heaven imparts to man is called the nature (*xing* 性). To follow the law of our nature is called the Way. Cultivation according to the Way is called education. . . . What exists before physical form [and is therefore without it] constitutes the Way. What exists after physical form [and is therefore with it] constitutes concrete things. Nevertheless, though we speak in this way, concrete things are the Way and the Way is concrete things. So long as the Way obtains, it does not matter whether it is present or future, or whether it is the self or others.

6. Sincerity is the way to unify the internal and the external. "Without sincerity there will be nothing."<sup>3</sup>

7. "What is inborn is called nature (*xing* 性)."<sup>4</sup> Nature is the same as material force (*qi* 氣) and material force is the same as nature. They are both inborn. According to principle, there are both good and evil in the material force with which man is endowed at birth. However, man is not born with these two opposing elements in his nature to start with. Due to the material force with which men are endowed some become good from childhood and others become evil. Man's nature is of course good, but it cannot be said that evil is not his nature. For what is inborn is called nature. "By nature man is tranquil at birth."<sup>5</sup> The state preceding this cannot be discussed. As soon as we talk about human nature, we already go beyond it. Actually, in our discussion of nature, we only talk about (the idea expressed in the *Book of*

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<sup>2</sup> Mencius, 7A: 4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 25.

<sup>4</sup> A saying by Kao Tzu ©. 420-c.350 B.C.E.). *Mencius*, 6A:3.

<sup>5</sup> *Book of Rites*, "Record of Music." Cf. Legge, trans., *Li Ki*, vol. 1, p. 96.

*Changes* as) “What issues from the Way is good.”<sup>6</sup> This is the case when Mencius speaks of the original goodness of human nature. The fact that whatever issues from the Way is good may be compared to the fact that water always flows downward. Water as such is the same in all cases. Some water flows onward to the sea without becoming dirty. What human effort is needed here? Some flows only a short distance before growing turbid. Some travels a long distance before growing turbid. Some becomes extremely turbid, some only slightly so. Although water differs in being clean or turbid, we cannot say that the turbid water (evil) ceases to be water (nature). This being the case, man must make an increasing effort at purification. With diligent and vigorous effort, water will become clear quickly. With slow and lazy effort, water will become clear slowly. When it is clear, it is then the original water. Not that clear water has been substituted for turbid water, nor that turbid water has been taken out and left in a corner. The original goodness of human nature is like the original clearness of water. Therefore it is not true that two distinct and opposing elements of good and evil exist in human nature and that each of them issues from it. This principle is the Mandate of Heaven. For anyone to obey and follow it is the Way. For anyone to follow it and cultivate it so that he attains his function [corresponding to his nature] is education. From the Mandate of Heaven to education, one can neither augment nor diminish [this function]. Such is the case of Shun, who [obeying and following the Way], possessed his empire as if it were nothing to him.

8. Good and evil in the world are both the Principle of Nature. What is called evil is not original evil. It becomes evil only because of deviation from the Mean (*zhong* 中). Yang Chu (440—360 B.C.?) and Mo Tzu (fl. 479—438 B.C.) are examples of this.

*Comment.* This utterance has been most severely condemned by Neo-Confucianists. It seems to destroy one of the foundations of Neo-Confucian metaphysics, namely, that nature, which is identical with principle, is good, and it also seems to tolerate evil. Judged by his whole philosophy, nothing is further from his mind. He merely echoed Mencius’ contention that things are unequal (see sec. 15). He accepted evil as a fact, but insisted on removing it. This is obvious in the preceding section.

22. “All things are already complete in oneself.”<sup>7</sup> This is not only true of man but of things also. Everything proceeds from the self, only things cannot extend [the principle in them] to others whereas man can. However, although man can extend it, when has he augmented it to any extent? And although things cannot extend it, when have they diminished it to any extent? All principles exist in complete sufficiency and are openly laid before us. How can we say that (sage-emperor) Yao, in fulfilling the Way of the ruler, added anything to it, or Shun, in fulfilling the Way of the son, added anything to it? They are always there as ever before.

23. There is only one principle in the world. You may extend it over the four seas and it is everywhere true. It is the unchangeable principle that “can be laid before Heaven and Earth” and is “tested by the experience of the Three Kings.” Therefore to be serious (*jing* 精) is merely to be serious with this principle. To be humane (*ren*) is to be humane with this principle. And to be faithful (*xin* 信) is to be faithful to this principle. (Confucius) said, “In times of difficulty or confusion, [a superior man] acts according to it.”<sup>8</sup> (His pupil) also said, “I do not yet have the confidence to do so.”<sup>9</sup> They could say this much. Principle is extremely difficult to describe.

24. The principles of things are most enjoyable.

25. There is nothing in the world which is purely *yin* (passive cosmic force) or purely *yang* (active cosmic force), as *yin* and *yang* are interfused and irregular. Nevertheless, there cannot be anything without the distinction between rising and falling, and between birth and extinction.

26. By “the state of absolute quiet and inactivity” and “that which when acted upon immediately penetrates all things,” is meant that the Principle of Nature is self-sufficient and from the very beginning lacks nothing. It does not exist because of sage-emperor Yao nor does it cease to exist because of wicked Chieh. The constant principle governing the relations of father and son and of ruler and minister are unchangeable. When has it moved? Because the Principle

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<sup>6</sup> *Book of Changes*, “Appended Remarks,” pt. 1, ch. 5. Cf. translation by Legge, *Yi King* p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> *Mencius*, 7A: 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Analects*, 4:5.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 5:5.

of Nature is unmoved, therefore it is described as absolutely quiet. Although it is unmoved, when acted on it reacts and penetrates, for the influence is not from without.

32. There is nothing outside of the Way, and there is no Way outside of things. Thus within heaven and earth there is nowhere without the Way. Right in the relation of father and son, the way of father and son lies in affection, and right in the relation between ruler and minister, the way of ruler and minister lies in seriousness. From these to being husband and wife, elder and younger, and friends, there is no activity that is not the Way. This is why “The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment.”<sup>10</sup> This being the case, to renounce human relations and to do away with the Four Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind) [as the Buddhists try to do] is to deviate very far from the Way. Therefore “a superior man in dealing with the world is not for anything or against anything. He follows righteousness (*yi* 義) as the standard.”<sup>11</sup> If one is for or against anything, there will be distinction between him and the Way and that would not be Heaven and Earth in their completeness. In the learning of the Buddhists there is seriousness to straighten the internal life but no righteousness to square the external life. Therefore those who are rigid become like dry wood and those who are relaxed end up in recklessness. This is why Buddhism is narrow. Our Way is different. It is to follow our nature, that is all. The Sage has fully explained this in the *Book of Changes*.

33. Principle and the mind are one, and man cannot put them together as one.

34. When none of the myriad things is not adjusted, that is the Mean maintained at all times according to the Principle of Nature.

35. Nature and man are basically not two. There is no need to speak of combining them.

36. It would be incomplete to talk about the nature (*xing* 性) of man and things without including material force (*qi* 氣) and unintelligible to talk about material force without including nature. (It would be wrong to consider them as two.)

37. Due to (the interaction of) the two material forces (*yin* and *yang*) and the Five Agents (of Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth), things vary as weak and strong in thousands of ways. What the sage follows, however, is the one principle. People must return to their original nature, [Which is identical with principle].

40. Humanity (*ren* 仁) implies impartiality, that is, to make (the moral principle) human. Righteousness (*yi* 義) means what is proper, the standard for weighing what is of greater or smaller importance. Propriety (*li* 禮) means to distinguish (to determine ranks and functions). Wisdom (*zhi* 智) is to know. And faithfulness (belief) (*xin* 信) means “We have it.” All things have nature. These Five Constant Virtues are nature. As to commiseration and so forth (the sense of shame, the sense of deference and compliance, and the sense of right and wrong),<sup>12</sup> they are all feelings. Whatever is aroused is called feeling. (One’s nature is naturally self-sufficient. Faithfulness merely means “We have it.” It shows itself only because of disbelief. Therefore faithfulness is not mentioned among the Four Beginnings.)

42. “What exists before physical form [and is therefore without it] is called the Way. What exists after physical form [and is therefore with it] is called a concrete thing.”<sup>13</sup> If anyone regards purity, vacuity, oneness, and greatness as the Way of Nature, he is speaking in terms of concrete things and not the Way.

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Chan, Wing-tsit. “The Idealistic Tendency in Ch’eng Hao,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. pp. 518-543.

<sup>10</sup> *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch.1.

<sup>11</sup> *Analects*, 4:10.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to the Four Beginnings discussed in *Mencius*, 2A:6.

<sup>13</sup> *Book of Changes*, “Appended Remarks,” pt. 1, ch. 12. Cf. Legge, p. 377.

## Cheng I (Ch'eng Yi)

## SELECTED SAYINGS

3. The mind of one man is one with the mind of Heaven and Earth. The principle of one thing is one with the principle of all things. The course of one day is one with the course of a year.

31. To investigate things in order to understand principle to the utmost does not mean that it is necessary to investigate all things in the world. One has only to investigate the principle in one thing or one event to the utmost and the principle in other things or events can then be inferred. For example, when we talk about filial piety, we must find out what constitutes filial piety. If principle cannot be investigated to the utmost in one event, investigate another. One may begin with either the easy or the most difficult, depending on the degree of one's capacity. There are thousands of tracks and paths to go to the capital. Yet one can enter if he has found just one way. Principle can be investigated to the utmost [in this way] because all things share the same principle. Even the most insignificant of things and events has this principle.

33. "The successive movement of *yin* and *yang* constitutes the Way."<sup>14</sup> This principle is very profound and cannot be explained. The Way is that through which *yin* and *yang* operate. The very term "material force" (*qi* 氣) implies a duality and the very expression "opening and closing" implies one thing acting on another. Wherever there is a duality, there is always such an action. The Way is that through which opening and closing operate, and opening and closing are the same as *yin* and *yang*. It is wrong for the Taoists to say that material force comes from the vacuity. There is no time sequence in *yin* and *yang* or in opening and closing. It should not be said that there is *yin* today and *yang* tomorrow. Take, for example, man's body and shadow. As they are simultaneous, it should not be said that a man has his body today and his shadow tomorrow. To have them is to have them at the same time.

34. To know the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming* 天命) means to understand the Principle of Heaven (Nature) (*Tianli* 天理). Surely to receive the mandate (*ming*, destiny) means to get the retribution of Heaven. Destiny is what has been decreed by Heaven. It is like a command. The retribution of Heaven is always like a shadow or an echo. It is normal to have its retribution and it is abnormal not to get the retribution. However, upon careful examination, we know that retribution is inevitable. Only because people seek it with shallow and limited views, they say that it is irregular. Furthermore, the Mandate of Heaven cannot be changed except by a man of virtue.

36. There is no Way independent of *yin* and *yang*. What makes [the material force] *yin* or *yang* is the Way. *Yin* and *yang* are material force (*qi* 氣). Material force is what exists after physical form [and is with it], whereas the Way is what exists before physical form [and is without it]. What exists before physical form is hidden.

37. When a thing disintegrates, its material force is forthwith exhausted. There is no such thing as material force returning to its source. The universe is like a vast furnace. Even living things will be burned to the last and no more. How can material force that is already disintegrated still exist? Furthermore, what is the need of such a disintegrated material force in the creative process of the universe? It goes without saying that the force used in creation is vital and fresh.

39. The material force of the true source is the source from which material force is produced and is not mixed with external force. It is nourished and cultivated only by external force. It is like fish in water. The life and nature of fish are not made by the water, but they must be nourished and cultivated by water in order that they may live. Man's position in the force of the universe is not different from that of fish in water. As to the nourishment of food, it is a way in which man is nourished and cultivated by external force. And as to inhaling and exhaling of breath, it is only the operation of opening and closing. The breath that has just been exhaled is not the material force that is inhaled in the next breath. But the true source can create material force by itself. The material force that is inhaled simply enters the human body when the body closes. This material force is not needed to assist the true source.

41. *Question*: "Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humanity."<sup>15</sup> Does that mean that *ren* can be achieved through filial piety and brotherly respect? *Answer*: No. It means that the practice of humanity begins with filial piety and brotherly respect. Filial piety and brotherly respect are items in the practice of humanity. It is all right to say that they are the root of the practice of humanity but not all right to say that they are the root of humanity itself. For humanity is nature, while filial piety and brotherly respect are its function. There are in our nature only humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Where do filial piety and brotherly respect come in? The controlling factor is love, and there is no greater love than to love parents. Hence it is said, "Filial piety and brotherly love are the root of *ren*."

<sup>14</sup> *Book of Changes*, "Appended Remarks," pt. 1, ch. 5. Cf. Legge, p. 355.

<sup>15</sup> *Analects*, 1:2.

70. Spoken of as one, Heaven is the Way (*Dao*) This is the meaning when it is said that “Heaven will not be in opposition.”<sup>16</sup> Spoken of in its different aspects, it is called heaven with respect to its physical body, the Lord (*Ti*) with respect to its being master, negative and positive spiritual forces with respect to its operation, spirit (*shen* 神) with respect to its wonderful functioning, and *ch'ien* with respect to its nature and feelings. *Ch'ien* is the beginning of all things. Therefore it is Heaven, *yang*, father, and ruler. Origination, flourish, advantage, and firmness are called the Four Moral Qualities. Origination is the beginning of all things, flourish the growth of all things, advantage the success of all things, and firmness the completion of all things.

71. Origination in the Four Moral Qualities is comparable to humanity in the Five Constant Virtues (humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness). Separately speaking, it is one of the several, but collectively speaking, it embraces all the four.

72. Destiny is what is endowed by Heaven and the nature is what things have received from Heaven.

73. In identifying himself with Heaven and Earth, sun and moon, the four seasons, and positive and negative spiritual forces, the great man identifies himself with the Way. Heaven and Earth are the Way. Positive and negative spiritual forces are traces of creation.

74. Humanity (*ren* 仁) is universal impartiality; it is the foundation of goodness (*shan* 善).

75. Principle (*li* 理) in the world is one. Although there are many roads in the world, the destination is the same, and although there are a hundred deliberations, the result is one.<sup>17</sup> Although things involve many manifestations and events go through infinite variations, when they are united by the one, there cannot be any contradiction.

76. According to the principle of the world, nothing can last forever without activity. With activity, a thing will begin again when it ends, and can therefore last forever without limit. Among things in the universe, even as solid and dense as huge mountains, nothing can remain unchanged. Thus being long lasting does not mean being in a fixed and definite state. Being fixed and definite, a thing cannot last long. The way to be constant is to change according to circumstances. This is a common principle. . . . Unless one knows the Way, how can he understand the constant and lasting way of the universe and the constant and lasting principle of the world?

77. That which is inherent in things is principle (*li* 理) . That by which things are managed is moral principles.

78. The beginning and ending of all things are nothing but integration and disintegration. Positive and negative spiritual forces are the function of creation. If viewed from the causes of what is hidden and what is manifest, from the principle of life and death, and from the features of positive and negative spiritual forces, the Way of Heaven and Earth can be understood. . . . Activity and tranquillity have no beginning and yin and yang have no starting point. Unless one knows the Way, how can he understand this? Activity and tranquillity cause each other and thus changes and transformation are produced. What follows this Way is good. . . . Heaven and Earth do not share the anxiety of the sage. For Heaven and Earth do not act as master whereas the sage has a mind of his own. Heaven and Earth create and transform without having any mind of their own. The sage has a mind of his own but does not take an [unnatural] action. How perfect is the eminent virtue and great achievement of Heaven and Earth and the sage!<sup>18</sup>

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Chan, Wing-tsit. “The Rationalistic Tendency in Ch’eng I,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. pp. 544-571.

<sup>16</sup> *Book of Changes*, commentary on hexagram no. 1, *ch'ien* (Heaven). Cf. Legge, p. 417.

<sup>17</sup> Quoting *Changes*, “Appended Remarks,” pt. 2, ch. 5. Cf. Legge, p. 389.

<sup>18</sup> Quoting *Changes*, “Appended Remarks,” pt. 1, ch. 5. Cf. Legge p.356.





Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi) (1130–1200)

## Zhu Xi

Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi) brought the development of Neo-Confucianism to a culminating synthesis. He brought together Zhou Dunyi's conception of the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極) together with the concept of principle (*li* 理) emphasized by the Cheng brothers. A great scholar, he edited and compiled the Four Books (the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*), establishing the basis for the state examination system that last until 1905. He is credited with restoring Confucianism to its original focus on moral cultivation. The selections here are from *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* compiled and translated by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Confucian philosopher Wing-Tsit Chan. The comments included within the selections are from Professor Chan.

Selections from *The Complete Works of Chu Hsi*

### 7. The Mind

75. The principle of the mind (*xinli* 心理) is the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極). The activity and tranquillity of the mind are the *yin* and *yang*. (44: 1b)

76. Mind alone has no opposite. (44:1b)

77. *Question*: Is consciousness what it is because of the intelligence of the mind or is it because of the activity of material force (*qi* 氣)?

*Answer*: Not material force alone. [Before material force existed], there was already the principle of consciousness. But principle at this stage does not give rise to consciousness. Only when it comes into union with material force is consciousness possible. Take, for example, the flame of this candle. It is because it has received this rich fat that there is so much light.

*Question*: Is that which emanates from the mind material force?

*Answer*: No, that is simply consciousness (44:2a)

78. *Question*: Mind is consciousness and the nature is principle. How do the mind and principle pervade each other and become one?

*Answer*: They need not move to pervade each other. From the very start they pervade each other.

*Question*: How do they pervade each other from the very start?

*Answer*: Without the mind, principle would have nothing in which to inhere. (44:2a)

79. *Question*: Mind as an entity embraces all principles. The good that emanates of course proceeds from the mind. But the evil that emanates is all due to selfish material desires endowed by material force. Does it also proceed from the mind?

*Answer*: It is certainly not the original substance of the mind, but it also emanates from the mind.

*Further question*: Is this what is called the human mind?"

*Answer*: Yes.

Thereupon Ch'ien Tzu-sheng asked: Does the human mind include both good and evil?

*Answer*: Both are included. (44:2b-3a)

80. Master Chang Tsai said that "in the unity of the nature and consciousness, there is the mind." I am afraid this idea is not free from error, as though there was a consciousness outside our nature. (44:5a)

81. *Question*: The mind is essentially an active thing. It is not clear to me whether before (feelings) are aroused the mind is completely quiet and tranquil or whether its tranquillity contains within it a tendency toward activity.

*Answer*: It is not that tranquillity contains within it a tendency toward activity. Master Chou Tun-i said that "when tranquil, it is in the state of non-being. When active, it is in the state of being."<sup>19</sup> Tranquillity is not non-being as such. Because it has not assumed physical form, we call it non-being. It is not because of activity that there is being. Because (activity makes) it visible, we call it being. Heng-ch'ü's (Chang Tsai's) theory that "the mind commands man's nature and feelings" is excellent. The nature is tranquil while feelings are active, and the mind involves both tranquillity and

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<sup>19</sup> *T'ung-shu*, ch.2.

activity. Whether these refer to its substance or its function depends on one's point of view. While it is in the state of tranquillity, the principle of activity is already present. Ch'eng I said that in the state of equilibrium (before the feelings are aroused), "Although the ear hears nothing and the eye sees nothing, nevertheless the principles of hearing and seeing must be already there before hearing and seeing are possible." When activity takes place, it is the same tranquillity that becomes active. (44:6b-7a)

82. In the passage, "By enlarging one's mind, one can enter into all things in the world,"<sup>20</sup> the expression "enter into" is like saying that humanity enters into all events and is all-pervasive. It means that the operation of the principle of the mind penetrates all as blood circulates and reaches the entire body. If there is a single thing not yet entered, the reaching is not yet complete and there are still things not yet embraced. This shows that the mind still excludes something. For selfishness separates and obstructs, and consequently one and others stand in opposition. This being the case, even those dearest to us may be excluded. "Therefore the mind that leaves something outside is not capable of uniting itself with the mind of Heaven." (44: 12b)

#### 10. Principle (*li* 理) and Material Force (*qi* 氣)

100. In the universe there has never been any material force without principle or principle without material force. (49: 1a)

101. *Question*: Which exists first, principle or material force?

*Answer*: Principle has never been separated from material force. However, principle "exists before physical form [and is therefore without it]" whereas material force "exists after physical form [and is therefore with it]."<sup>21</sup> Hence when spoken of as being before or after physical form, is there not the difference of priority and posteriority? Principle has no physical form, but material force is coarse and contains impurities. (49: 1a-b)

102. Fundamentally principle and material force cannot be spoken of as prior or posterior. But if we must trace their origin, we are obliged to say that principle is prior. However, principle is not a separate entity. It exists right in material force. Without material force, principle would have nothing to adhere to. As material force, there are the Agents (or Elements) of Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire. As principle, there are humanity (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智). (49: 1b)

103. *Question* about the relation between principle and material force.

*Answer*: I-ch'uan (Ch'eng I) expressed it very well when he said that principle is one but its manifestations are many. When heaven, earth, and the myriad things are spoken of together, there is only one principle. As applied to man, however, there is in each individual a particular principle. (49: 1b)

104. *Question*: What are the evidences that principle is in material force?

*Answer*: For example, there is order in the complicated interfusion of the *yin* and the *yang* and of the Five Agents. Principle is there. If material force does not consolidate and integrate, principle would have nothing to attach itself to. (49:2b)

105. *Question*: May we say that before heaven and earth existed there was first of all principle?

*Answer*: Before heaven and earth existed, there was after all only principle. As there is this principle, therefore there are heaven and earth. If there were no principle, there would also be no heaven and earth, no man, no things, and in fact, no containing or sustaining (of things by heaven and earth) to speak of. As there is principle, there is therefore material force to operate everywhere and nourish and develop all things.

*Question*: Is it principle that nourishes and develops all things?

*Answer*: As there is this principle, therefore there is this material force operating, nourishing, and developing. Principle itself has neither physical form nor body. (49:3a-b)

106. K'o-chi asked: When the creative process disposes of things, is it the end once a thing is gone, or is there a principle by which a thing that is gone may return?

*Answer*: It is the end once a thing is gone. How can there be material force that has disintegrated and yet integrates once more? (49:3b-4a)

<sup>20</sup> Chang Tsai, *Cheng-meng*, ch. 7, *Chang Tzu chüan-shu*, 2:21a.

<sup>21</sup> *Book of Changes*, "Appended Remarks," pt. 1, ch. 12. Cf. Legge, *Yi King*, p. 377. About this translation, see Appendix, comment on "Hsing-erh-shang."

11. *The Great Ultimate (taiji 太極)*

114. The Great Ultimate is nothing other than principle. (49:8b)

115. *Question:* The Great Ultimate is not a thing existing in a chaotic state before the formation of heaven and earth, but a general name for the principles of heaven and earth and the myriad things. Is that correct?

*Answer:* The Great Ultimate is merely the principle of heaven and earth and the myriad things. With respect to heaven and earth, there is the Great Ultimate in them. With respect to the myriad things, there is the Great Ultimate in each and every one of them. Before heaven and earth existed, there was assuredly this principle. It is the principle that “through movement generates the *yang*.” It is also this principle that “through tranquillity generates the *yin*.”<sup>22</sup> (49: 8b-9a)

116. *Question:* [You said,] “Principle is a single, concrete entity, and the myriad things partake it as their substance. Hence each of the myriad things possesses in it a Great Ultimate.” According to this theory, does the Great Ultimate not split up into parts?

*Answer:* Fundamentally there is only one Great Ultimate, yet each of the myriad things has been endowed with it and each in itself possesses the Great Ultimate in its entirety. This is similar to the fact that there is only one moon in the sky but when its light is scattered upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere. It cannot be said that the moon has been split. (49:10b-11a)

117. The Great Ultimate has neither spatial restriction nor physical form or body. There is no spot where it may be placed. When it is considered in the state before activity begins, this state is nothing but tranquillity. Now activity, tranquillity, *yin*, and *yang* all exist only after physical form [and are with it]. However, activity is after all the activity of the Great Ultimate and tranquillity is also its tranquillity, although activity and tranquillity themselves are not the Great Ultimate. This is why Master Chou Tun-i only spoke of that state as Non-ultimate. While the state before activity begins cannot be spoken of as the Great Ultimate, nevertheless the principles of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are already inherent in it. Pleasure and joy belong to *yang* and anger and sorrow belong to *yin*. In the initial stage the four are not manifested, but their principles are already there. As contrasted with the state after activity begins, it may be called the Great Ultimate. But still it is difficult to say. All this is but a vague description. The truth must be personally realized by each individual himself. (49:11a-b)

118. Someone asked about the Great Ultimate. Reply: The Great Ultimate is simply the principle of the highest good. Each and every person has in him the Great Ultimate and each and every thing has in it the Great Ultimate. What Master Chou calls the Great Ultimate is a name to express all the virtues and the highest good in Heaven and Earth, man, and things. (49: lib)

119. The Great Ultimate is similar to the top of a house or the zenith of the sky, beyond which point there is no more. It is the ultimate of principle. *Yang* is active and *yin* is tranquil. In these it is not the Great Ultimate that acts or remains tranquil. It is simply that there are the principles of activity and tranquillity. Principle is not visible; it becomes visible through *yin* and *yang*. Principle attaches itself to *yin* and *yang* as a man sits astride a horse. As soon as *yin* and *yang* produce the Five Agents, they are confined and fixed by physical nature and are thus differentiated into individual things each with its nature. But the Great Ultimate is in all of them. (49: 14a)

120. The Great Ultimate contains all principles of the Five Agents and *yin* and *yang*. It is not an empty thing. If it were a void, it would approach the Buddhist theory of dharma-nature (which maintains that the nature of dharmas, that is, elements of existence, are void). (49: 14a)

121. *Question:* Is the Great Ultimate the highest principle of the human mind?

*Answer:* There is an ultimate in every thing or event. That is the ultimate of principle.

122. There is no other event in the universe except *yin* and *yang* succeeding each other in an unceasing cycle. This is called Change. However, for these activity and tranquillity, there must be the principles which make them possible. This is the Great Ultimate. (49: 1 6a)

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Chan, Wing-tsit. “The Great Synthesis in Chu Hsi,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. pp. 588-653.

<sup>22</sup> Chou Tun-i, *An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*.

KEY TERMS

太極

*Taiji*  
*T'ai chi**The Great Ultimate*

氣

*Qi*  
*Ch'i**material force**vapor or breath**the vital energy found in both the atmosphere and the human body*

理

*Li**pattern, principle*

聖

*Sheng**the Sage*QUESTIONS

1. How did Chinese Buddhism and Daoism influence the development of Neo-Confucianism?
2. How did Zhou Dunyi's concept of the Great Ultimate (*Taiji*) provide a basis for Neo-Confucianism? In your answer, explain how this concept incorporated features of Daoist, *yin-yang*, and the theory of the five agencies thinking, and how it furthered the Confucian interest in morality.
3. What is the Cheng brothers' concept of principle (*li*) and how does it differ from Zhou Dunyi's concept of the Great Ultimate? Why did the Cheng brothers feel the need to replace the concept of the Great Ultimate with that of principle?
4. How did Zhu Xi bring together the concept of the Great Ultimate and the concept of principle? What is the relationship between principle (*li*) and material force (*qi*) according to Zhu Xi and how does he use this to explain the problem of evil in human nature?