

THE NEO-CONFUCIAN SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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The problem of evil has always baffled philosophers. Chinese philosophers have had no more satisfactory solution than their Western counterparts. But the problem has been a real one to them and persistent attempts have been made to solve it.

PRE-SUNG THEORIES OF EVIL

In Chinese philosophy the problem is closely tied up with that of human nature. Early Chinese thinkers, being primarily interested in government and morality, did not tackle the problem of human nature as a metaphysical one and whether human nature is originally good or not. They accepted it as a fact and were chiefly concerned with what to do with it for the benefit of the individual and society. They spoke of "regulating nature"⁽¹⁾ 節性." Confucius (551-479 B.C.), too, directed his attention almost chiefly to practical affairs. As to human nature, he merely remarked that "By nature people are near one another, but through practice they have become apart"⁽²⁾. This saying possibly makes Confucius the first in Chinese history to have formulated a definite proposition about human nature. But since his emphasis was on practice, the philosophical problem of good and evil was not taken into consideration. Of course, the passage in the *Book of Changes*, "What issues from the Way is good and that which realizes it is in the individual nature... The realization of nature... is the gate to truth and righteousness," points to the doctrine of original goodness, but the date of the book is uncertain⁽³⁾. At any rate, it is safe to say that early Chinese thinkers were first and foremost reformers and educators; their teachings were concerned with what to do

(1) *The Book History*, "the Book of Chou," 尚書周書 Bk. 12, sec. 15; English translation by James Legge, *The Shoo King*, The Chinese Classics, Vol. III, London, Henry Frowde, 1865, p. 429.

(2) *Analects*, 17/2.

(3) *The Book of Changes*, *hsi-tz'u* I, 易繫辭 chaps 5 & 7. See English translation by James Legge, *Yi King*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XVI, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1882, pp. 355 & 359.

with man's nature but not with its metaphysical reality.

By the time of Mencius (371-289 B.C.), however, the philosophical problem of good and evil could no longer be ignored. Confucius had taught what the good was and how to achieve it but did not explain why. It was now necessary to provide an explanation. Between the time of Confucius and that of Mencius, there was a vigorous religious development as evidenced by the religious nature of the *Doctrine of the Mean*⁽¹⁾ 中庸. This development makes an investigation of the moral nature of the individual imperative. Besides, at Mencius time, a variety of doctrines on human nature grew up⁽²⁾. There were those who believed that man's nature may be made to practice good and it may be made to practice evil⁽³⁾. There were those who believed that "the nature of some is good while the nature of others is evil⁽⁴⁾." And there was Kao Tzu who claimed that "man's nature is indifferent to good and evil⁽⁵⁾." Mencius had to face the issue and he blankly declared that "man's nature is naturally good just as water flows downward⁽⁶⁾." "When men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well," he said, "they all have the feeling of alarm and distress, not in order to gain friendship with the child's parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, not because they dislike the reputation [of being unvirtuous]." From this he concluded that "A man without the feeling of mercy is not a man; a man without the feeling of deference and complaisance is not a man; a man without the feeling of shame and dislike is not a man; and a man without the feeling of right and wrong is not a man. The feeling of commiseration is the beginning of love; the feeling of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness; the feeling of deference and complaisance is the beginning of propriety; and the feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. Men have these four beginnings just as they have their four limbs." "These four, love, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom," he added, "are not drilled into us from outside. We are originally provided with them⁽⁷⁾."

These utterances are extremely important because they represent the

(1) Traditionally attributed to Confucius' grandson, Tzu-szu 子思 (483-402 B.C.). Some modern scholars have dated it later.

(2) See *The Book of Mencius*, 6A/4-5.

(3) *Ibid.*, 6A/6.

(4) *Ibid.*, 6A/6.

(5) *Ibid.*, 6A/2.

(6) *Ibid.*, 6A/2.

(7) *Ibid.*, 2A/6; 6A/6.

first philosophical approach to the problem of human nature in China. Equally significant is Mencius' conclusion that human nature is originally good. But since man's nature is basically good, he had to answer the question why man practices evil. His answer is typically Confucian and is entirely in line with ancient teachings, namely, that man himself is responsible. "If we follow our essential character," he said, "we will be able to do good....If man does evil, it is not the fault of his original endowment....Therefore it is said: Seek and you will find them [love, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom], neglect and you will lose them. Men differ from one another by twice as much, or five times, or an incalculable amount, because they have not fully developed their original endowment⁽¹⁾." As to why man does not fully develop his original endowment, Mencius again turned to man himself. The failure is due to one's "losing the originally good mind⁽²⁾," "self-destruction and self abandonment⁽³⁾," "lack of nourishment⁽⁴⁾," "failure to develop one's noble and great elements in oneself⁽⁵⁾," "failure to preserve one's mind⁽⁶⁾," "lack of effort⁽⁷⁾," or simply lack of thought⁽⁸⁾. It is clear that man is the cause of his own downfall. Not that Mencius ignored the influence of environment. In explaining why water could be forced uphill, he said that it is not the nature of water but the force applied from outside that made it possible⁽⁹⁾. And to explain the inequality of products, he recognized the difference of the soil and the unequal nourishment afforded by the rains and dews⁽¹⁰⁾. Nevertheless, his emphasis on man's own responsibility is unmistakable.

But to hold man himself responsible for evil is no solution of the problem. To say that man does evil because he loses his originally good mind, for example, is to beg the question, for the act of losing one's originally good mind is itself an evil. To this question Hsün Tzu 荀子 (fl. 289-238 B.C.) offered a unique answer. To him, "Man's nature is originally evil and its goodness is the result of nurture"⁽¹¹⁾. We need not go into his arguments,

(1) *Ibid.*, 6A/6.

(2) *Ibid.*, 6A/8.

(3) *Ibid.*, 4A/10.

(4) *Ibid.*, 6A/8.

(5) *Ibid.*, 6A/5.

(6) *Ibid.*, 4B/8; 6A/8.

(7) *Ibid.*, 6A/7.

(8) *Ibid.*, 6A/6.

(9) *Ibid.*, 4A/2.

(10) *Ibid.*, 4A/7.

(11) *Hsün Tzu*, ch. 23; cf. English translation by Homer H. Dubs, *The Works of Hsüntze*, London, Arthur Probsthain, 1928, pp. 305-308.

which center on the idea that natural desires, if unchecked, will result in excess and disorder. We may say that he was the first one in Chinese history to give a psychological explanation of evil. Unfortunately, he failed to account for it. Why should man's feelings inevitably result in strife and rapacity? His answer is no less begging the question than that of Mencius. Like Mencius, he was primarily interested in a good individual and a good society. He therefore stressed transformation through education, law, and the guidance of propriety and righteousness. As to his explanation of the nature of evil, it is psychological but not metaphysical.

As long as philosophers focussed their attention on practical affairs, they would not go beyond the practical aspects of the problem of evil. For a metaphysical solution of the problem, it is necessary to go beyond the world of human affairs, to the realm of reality itself. This important step was taken by Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 (c. 179–c. 104 B.C.), who may be said to be the first Chinese philosopher to offer a reasonable though inadequate metaphysical explanation of evil. For this reason, Tung is far more important than Mencius or Hsün Tzu in the metaphysical question of human nature, for while they begged the question, Tung evolved a formula that is at least objective and definite. According to this formula, in man's nature there are both good and evil, just as there are the two cosmic forces in the universe, namely, the *yin*, or passive or negative force, and the *yang*, the active or positive force. He equates nature with *yang* and feelings with *yin*, thus making nature the source of goodness and feelings the source of evil⁽¹⁾. He may have merely drawn an analogy. But good and evil are now correlated with the cosmic forces. In other words, good and evil are now traced to the realm of Nature. Man is still responsible for his deeds, but any solution of the problem of evil must be sought beyond practical human affairs. For the first time the problem is considered metaphysically and that is why Tung is exceedingly important in this matter. This fact should be stressed because it is not generally realized. It should be underlined that with him we have the beginning of a metaphysical deliberation on evil. Strangely enough, it was the Yin Yang philosophy that helped make the transition. Without it, the transition from evil as a practical problem to evil as a metaphysical one could not have taken place.

(1) *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* ("Luxuriant Crown Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals"), 春秋繁露 (深察名號篇), ch. 35. *Szu-pu ts'ung-k'an* edition, 1929, 10/5a.

Viewed in this light, it is not incorrect to say that Tung's new approach practically forced later Confucianists to philosophize upon human nature as they did. Generally speaking, in the Western Han period (206 B.C.-9 A.D.) both Confucian and Taoist philosophers ascribed goodness to nature and evil to feelings. This dualistic theory remained the dominant one throughout the Western Han period and extended into the Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.). This can be seen that in the *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* 白虎通 which sums up the prevailing opinions in the first century A.D. and immediately before, where it definitely says that "Nature is the application of *yang* while feelings are the transformations of *yin*," and, quoting a work now non-existent, "the material force of *yang* means love while the material force of *yin* means greed. Hence in feelings there are selfish desires while in nature there is love⁽¹⁾." It is not enough to say that this dualistic theory is the result of an attempt to compromise or synthesize the two cardinal doctrines represented by Mencius and Hsün Tzu, as it is often said. The attempt was sure, but the philosophical force at work was even more significant, for the problem of evil was now discerned on a metaphysical level.

Similarly, the theories of human nature from the Western Han through the Wei (220-265 A.D.) and Chin (265-419 A.D.) times were not merely an effort to remove the conflict between Mencius and Hsün Tzu, but an attempt to find a philosophical solution to the problem of good and evil natures. Generally speaking, the controlling thought in these periods was that the nature of man may be classified into several categories, usually three. Take Wang Ch'ung 王充 (b. 27 A.D.) as the representative. According to Fu Szu-nien 傅斯年 (1896-1950 A.D.), Wang is the father of the three-grade theory⁽²⁾. In his *Lun-heng* 論衡 ("Balanced Inquiries") Wang Ch'ung wrote, "I believe that when Mencius said that human nature was originally good, he was thinking of people above the average; when Hsün Tzu said that human nature was originally evil, he was thinking of people below the average; and when Yang Hsiung 揚雄 (53 B.C.-18 A.D.) said that human nature was mixed with both good and evil, he was thinking of average people⁽³⁾." Clearly Wang Ch'ung

(1) *Po-hu t'ung* 白虎通, ed. by Pan Ku (32-92 A.D.) 班固, *Szu-pu ts'ung-kan* edition, 1929, 8/1a; see English translation by Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T'ung, The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1949, Vol. II, 1952, p. 565.

(2) *Hsing-ming ku-hsün p'ien-cheng* 性命古訓辯證 ("Critical Studies of Classical Interpretations of Nature and Destiny"), Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1940, 3/7b.

(3) *Lun-heng*, Bk. 3, ch. 4; cf. English translation by Alfred Forke, *Lun-heng, Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, Vol. X (1907), p. 165; also *Lun-heng*, London, Luzac, 1907, p. 384.

was here trying to compromise Mencius and Hsün Tzu and to combine their theories with that of Yang Hsiung which is itself a compromise. What is more important, however, is that the theories of grades are all based on the proposition that goodness proceeds from nature and evil from feelings, thus essentially conforming to Tung Chung-shu's formula. The theory of grades reached its climax in the T'ang period (618-907 A. D.), notably in Han Yü 韓愈 (768-824 A. D.). As a matter of fact, he is generally credited with originating the theory. Actually that was not the case. It is true that he was the first to apply the term "three grade" (三品 *san-p'in*) to the theory of human nature. But the term is found in several places in the Classics, and Hsün Yüeh 荀悅 (148-209 A.D.) six hundred years before him had propounded the theory of three grades of human destiny⁽¹⁾. The theory of three grades of human nature had been taught in Buddhism, specifically in the *Treatise on the Completion of Ideation-Only*, or the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* 成唯識論 (*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*), which was translated into Chinese by Hsüan-tsang 玄奘 (596-664 A. D.) some 150 years before. In chapter five of that treatise it is stated that there are the good nature, the neutral nature, and the evil nature. This is not to suggest that Han Yü borrowed his idea from Buddhist Idealism, for there is no evidence that he had studied the Buddhist text. But the Buddhist doctrine was a very common one among the Buddhists whom Han Yü vigorously attacked. As Fu Szu-nien has suggested, the actual source of Han Yü's theory is Wang Ch'ung⁽²⁾.

Whether this is the case or not, the significant thing to note is that as an effort to find a solution to the problem of evil, Han did not go beyond Tung Chung-shu. In his well-known essay *Yuan-hsing* 原性 ("An Inquiry on Human Nature") he said, "Nature comes into existence with birth, whereas feelings are produced when there is contact with things.... There are three grades of nature, namely, the highest, the medium, and the lowest. The highest is good, the medium may be led to be good or evil, and the lowest is evil. Nature consists in five virtues, namely, love, righteousness, propriety, good faith, and wisdom. Men of highest nature abide by the first and act according to the other four virtues. Men of medium nature do not possess much of the first but do not violate it, and are mixed in the other four. Men

(1) *Shen-chien*, 申鑒 ("A Mirror Once More"), *Szu-pu pei-yao* edition, 1934, 5/2b.

(2) *Op. cit.*

of lowest nature violate the first and oppose the other four⁽¹⁾." Here the correlation between good and evil with nature and feelings is obvious. In his friend or pupil, Li Ao 李翱 (798 A.D.), this correlation is even more pronounced. In his treatise on recovering nature 復性篇, he said that "it is man's nature that enables him to become a sage and it is his feelings that leads his nature astray⁽²⁾."

From the above it will be seen that from the Western Han through T'ang, for a period of almost a thousand years, Confucianists adhered to the theory that human nature and human feelings form two separate levels and correspond to good and evil, respectively. In this they advanced further than ancient Confucianists who approached the problem of evil entirely within the framework of man himself. Instead, they correlated man's good and evil natures with the realm of Nature. This, as already pointed out, was forced upon them by Tung Chung-shu's theory of the correspondence of man and Nature. In short, the problem of evil was now raised to the metaphysical level.

It should be added that from the third through the ninth century, the Taoists, and then the Buddhists, seriously and extensively discussed the problem of the good and evil natures of man, and thus directly or indirectly reenforced the Confucian doctrine. In the case of Li Ao, for example, his utterances such as "When there is neither cognition nor thought, then the feelings will not arise" and "To stop feelings by means of feelings is to aggravate feelings" might well have come from the mouth of a Zen Buddhist.

But the solution so far is not a real one. In the first place, to ascribe evil to man's feelings is no more satisfactory than to ascribe it to man's self-neglect as did Mencius. If feelings are evil, then this evil itself needs to be explained. Secondly, to say that feelings are evil is to contradict human experience. Thirdly, the doctrine conflicts with the traditional Confucian doctrine that feelings are basically good, as taught in the *Doctrine of the Mean*⁽³⁾. Most serious of all, the doctrine does not offer any positive solution to the problem of evil. If it is solution at all, it is merely negative.

(1) *Yüan-hsing*, in *Han Ch'ang-li ch'üan chi* 韓昌黎全集 ("Complete Works of Han Yü"), ch. 11; cf. English translation by James Legge, "An Examination of the Nature of Man," *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. II, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1895, pp. 89-91.

(2) *Li Wen-kung chi* 李文公集 ("Collected Works of Li Ao"), *Szu-pu ts'ung-k'an* edition, Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1929, 2/5a.

(3) *The Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF
NEO-CONFUCIANIST CHANG TSAI 張載

There was no positive or logical answer to the question, "Whence comes evil," until the Neo-Confucian philosopher Chang Tsai (Chang Heng-ch'ü 張橫渠, 1020-1077 A. D.). According to him, evil arises with the emergence of physical nature, that is nature associated with Material Force 氣 (*ch'i*). He said, "Nature in man is never evil....With the existence of physical form, there exists the physical nature. If one skillfully recovers the Nature of Heaven and Earth [that is, the original, good nature before the endowment of Material Force], then it will be preserved. Therefore in the physical nature there is that which the superior man denies to be his original nature."⁽¹⁾

For an explanation of the above statement, we must turn to an earlier passage in Chang's work, which reads, "In its original state of Great Vacuity 虛 (*hsu*, Void), Material Force is absolutely tranquil and formless. As it is acted upon, it engenders the two fundamental elements of *yin* and *yang*, and through integration gives rise to forms. As there are forms, there are their opposites. These opposites necessarily stand in opposition to what they do. Opposition leads to conflicts, which will necessarily be reconciled and resolved. Thus the feelings of love and hate are both derived from the Great Vacuity."⁽²⁾ In other words, when the original state of being, the Great Vacuity, assumes form, differentiation necessarily follows. As it is expressed in his famous dictum, "Reality is One but it differentiates into the Many." In the state of differentiatedness, there is bound to be opposition, discrimination, and conflict, which give rise to evil. Furthermore, in the process of differentiation, our endowment often lacks harmony and balance, and this lack leads us to deviate from the Mean. This deviation is evil. Thus physical nature gives rise to two types of evil: first, setting the self against the other, and second, lack of harmony and balance. In the words of the greatest of all Neo-Confucianists, Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130-1200 A. D.), "The Nature of Heaven and Earth is the Principle 理 (*li*). As soon as and where *yin* and *yang* and the Five Agents [of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal and Earth] operate, there is physical nature. Herein lie the differences between intelligence and beclouding, and the heavy and the light."⁽³⁾ "The two forces [of *yin* and *yang*]," he said, "sometimes mutually supplement each other and sometimes contradict each other....

(1) *Cheng-meng* 正蒙 ("Correct Discipline for Beginners"), *Cheng-i-t'ang ch'üan-chi* edition, 3/8a.

(2) *Ibid.*, 2/10a.

(3) Commentary on the *Cheng-meng*, 3/8a.

Sometimes their operation is even and easy but sometimes unbalanced. Hence there is evil and there is good."⁽¹⁾

The process of differentiation itself is not to be regretted, for it is a matter of necessity. As Chang Tsai said, "The Great Vacuity of necessity consists of Material Force. Material Force of necessity integrates to become the myriad things. Things of necessity disintegrate and return to the Great Vacuity."⁽²⁾ As Chu Hsi put it later, "Without physical forms, Principle [that is, the Great Vacuity] would have nothing to adhere to."⁽³⁾ That is to say, Great Vacuity or Principle would be abstract and unreal unless and until it becomes concrete through its being differentiated into the many. This is the reason why the Ch'eng brothers, Ch'eng Hao 程顥 (also called Ch'eng Ming-tao 程明道, 1032-1085 A. D.) and Ch'eng I 程頤 (also called Ch'eng I-ch'uan 程伊川, 1033-1107 A. D.), say that "It will not be complete to talk about the nature of man and things without including the Material force, and it will be unintelligible to talk about the Material Force without including the nature."⁽⁴⁾ It is important to note here that with Buddhism and Taoism the world of differentiation, the world of multiplicity with all its discriminations and conflicts, is to be ignored, forgotten, or transcended. With the Neo-Confucianists, on the contrary, it is not only to be accepted as fact but also as an essential aspect of the Ultimate Being. As to why in the world of differentiation there is lack of balance, lack of harmony, conflict, or inequality, the Neo-Confucianists went right back to Mencius, who declared that "It is the nature of things that they are not equal."⁽⁵⁾ As Ch'eng Hao said, "Nature produces various things—some long, some short, some large, and some small."⁽⁶⁾

We should note that the Neo-Confucianists did not say that differentiation resulting from physical nature as such is evil. That would be following the Buddhist doctrine that the world is an illusion. What they meant is that in differentiation is the occasion for evil. Here we have a logical explanation of the emergence of evil. No wonder Chu Hsi said, "The doctrine of physical nature originated with Chang and Ch'eng. It made a tremendous contribution to the Confucian School and is a great help to us students. No one before

(1) *Chu Tzu ch'üan-shu* 朱子全書 ("Complete Works of Chu Hsi"), Palace edition, 1713, 43/4a.

(2) *Cheng-meng*, 2/3b.

(3) *Op. cit.*

(4) *Ts'ui-yen* 粹言 ("Pure Words"), in the *Erh-ch'eng ch'üan-shu* 二程全書 ("Complete Works of the Two Ch'engs"), *Szu-pu pei-yao* edition, Shanghai, Chunghua Book Co., 1933, 2/21b.

(5) *The Book of Mencius*, 3A/4.

(6) *I-shu* 遺書 ("Literary Remains"), in the *Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu*, 11/6b.

this has enunciated such a doctrine. Hence with the establishment of the doctrine of Chang and Ch'eng, the theories [of human nature] of all previous philosophers collapse."⁽¹⁾

As already suggested, the Neo-Confucian attempt to find an explanation of evil is not only to provide an answer for the question but also to preserve Mencius' doctrine of original goodness. However, while the Neo-Confucianists generally remained true to Mencius, they did not agree with him that evil originated with man. To them, it originated with physical nature. This does not mean that to the Neo-Confucianists evil is a natural phenomenon and not a moral one. Although they confused natural evil and moral evil, there is no doubt that to them moral good and evil arise only in human society. This is the reason why Ch'eng Hao declared that "Nothing can be said about the state before birth."⁽²⁾ The problem of good and evil becomes real only when one's moral life has begun, when in a man-to-man relationship one has to deal with physical nature which is unbalanced and therefore causes him to deviate from the Mean and which puts him in the position of isolation, discrimination, and opposition, thus setting himself against another. The moral problem, then, is what to do with our physical nature. Chang Tsai's answer is, "Transform it."

This phrase, "Transform the physical nature," has been hailed by Neo-Confucianists as an outstanding contribution and has remained a golden teaching in the Confucian School. To Chang Tsai, as already pointed out, nature to man is never evil. "It depends on whether or not man can skillfully recover the Nature of Heaven and Earth."⁽³⁾ If we can skillfully recover it, then physical nature will be transformed. For ways and means of transformation, he urged study. "There is a great benefit in study," he said, because it can transform our physical nature.⁽⁴⁾ He also urged virtue. "When virtue does not overcome the Material Force, our nature is determined and controlled by the Material Force. But when virtue overcomes the Material Force, then our nature is determined and controlled by virtue.... Only life, death, longevity, and premature death are due to the Material Force and cannot be transformed."⁽⁵⁾ But the most important way to transform physical nature is what

(1) Commentary on the *Cheng-meng*, 3/8a.

(2) *I-shu*, 1/76.

(3) *Cheng-meng*, 3/7b.

(4) *Ibid.*

(5) *Ibid.*, 3/9a.

he called "enlarging the mind." "When one enlarges his mind," he said, "one can embrace all things in the universe. As long as there is something not yet embodied by me, then there is still something outside my mind. The mind of a common man is limited to the narrowness of what he has heard and seen. The sage, on the contrary, does not allow his limited knowledge to restrict his mind, but regards all things in the universe as part of himself."⁽¹⁾

This passage should call to mind Chang Tsai's famous essay, "Western Inscription," in which he declares that "Heaven is my father, Earth my mother, and all human beings my brothers." When all discriminations and oppositions and distinctions between the self and the non-self are eliminated, men and Heaven will become one body.

But what makes it possible for the mind to enlarge itself? To go back to Mencius' doctrine of native ability to do good is useless, because such ability itself needs an explanation. In this respect, Chang Tsai offered only an unsatisfactory and what might even be called a negative explanation although philosophically it is very important. This is his concept of the Great Vacuity. Only when reality is a Vacuity can the Material Force operate, and only with the operation of the Material Force can things mutually influence, mutually penetrate, and mutually be identified. Thus the Great Vacuity is the necessary condition for the removal of oppositions and conflicts.

This doctrine of the Great Vacuity is very important because, unlike the Taoist Vacuity, which is pure Void in which individual things are transcended, it is the very thing that makes individual things possible and real, achieve harmony among themselves, and attain full being. Thus Chang Tsai's concept of the Great Vacuity is not a blind borrowing from the Taoist, as sometimes asserted. Rather, it is a conversion of the Taoist concept from something negative to something positive.

But so far as goodness of human nature is concerned, the doctrine of Vacuity is negative because it only provides the necessary condition for the transformation of physical nature but does not explain why human nature is good, what makes it good, and what makes it possible to grow and extend so as to overcome conflicts and restore balance. The answer to these questions lies in the Neo-Confucian concepts of *jen* and *sheng*, which were chiefly developed by the Ch'eng brothers.

(1) *Ibid.*, 3/11b.

THE CH'ENG BROTHERS AND THE CONCEPTS

OF JEN 仁 AND SHENG 生

It is not necessary to recite the whole history of the development of the central Confucian concept of *jen*. Suffice it to note that from its ancient meaning of kindness as a particular virtue, Confucius radically changed it to mean all-inclusive universal virtue. It denotes the general meaning of moral life at its best, or as Mencius put it, that by which "a man is to be a man."⁽¹⁾ In the next twelve hundred years, *jen* was understood as love, that is, love for all men.⁽²⁾ With the Neo-Confucianists of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the concept underwent another important development. We have already referred to Chang Tsai's "Western Inscription." It seems to be an insignificant piece, but it marks an important step in the advancement of Chinese thought. "Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother," it begins, "and such a small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst....All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions."⁽³⁾ Although the inscription is very short, it exercised tremendous influence on the thinking of Chinese philosophers at his time and has ever since. Its primary purpose, as Yang Kuei-shan (楊龜山 1053-1135 A.D.) pointed out, is to urge the student to seek *jen*.⁽⁴⁾ Here we have an important development, that is, that *jen* not only means the love of all people but the love of all things as well. In other words, love is truly universalized.

This doctrine received strong impetus in the Ch'eng brothers. In his famous treatise on *jen*, the *Shih-jen p'ien* 識仁篇 ("On Understanding the Nature of *Jen*"), which has been a *vade mecum* for many a Chinese scholar, Ch'eng Hao begins, "The student must first of all understand the nature of *jen*. The man of *jen* forms one body with all things comprehensively."⁽⁵⁾

(1) *The Book of Mencius*, 7B/16.

(2) For a detailed account, see my article "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept *Jen*," *Philosophy East and West*, 4/4 (January, 1955), pp. 295-305.

(3) *Hsi-ming* 西銘 ("Western Inscription"); cf. German translation by Werner Eichhorn. "Die Westinschrift des Chang Tsai, ein Bertrag zur Geistesgeschichte der Nördlichen Sung," *Abhandlungen für die Kunde Des Morgenlandes*, Vol. XXII (1937), pp. 33-73; French translation by Ch. de Harlez, "Le Si-ming, Traité philosophique de Tschang-tze, avec un double Commentaire," *Actes du Congrès International des Orientalistes* (1889), pp. 35-52; English translation by P. C. Hsü, *Ethical Realism in Neo-Confucian Thought*, Peiping, privately published, 1933, Appendix, pp. xi-xii.

(4) *Kuei-shan yü-lu* 龜山語錄 ("Recorded Conversations of Yang Kuei-shan"), *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* edition, 1934, 2/18b, 3/28a.

(5) *I-shu* 遺書, (in the *Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu*) 2A/3a.

Elsewhere he says, "The man of *jen* regards the universe and all things as one body."⁽¹⁾ His brother Ch'eng I also said, "The man of *jen* regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body."⁽²⁾ Their utterances have become so familiar that they have come to be regarded as the originators of the doctrine rather than Chang Tsai.

From the time of Chang Tsai, every Neo-Confucianist has elaborated or at least repeated the idea. Among them, Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 (also called Wang Shou-jen 王守仁, 1472-1529 A.D.), has been generally recognized as the strongest champion of the doctrine. He said, "The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but it is natural with the loving nature of his mind that he forms a unity with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things."⁽³⁾

But what makes it possible for man to extend this love to cover the entire universe? As has been said before, Chang Tsai's theory of Vacuity only provides a negative condition. For a positive explanation, we have to go to a new concept of *jen*, namely, *jen* as a dynamic process of creativity. This new concept was chiefly developed by the Ch'eng brothers. This is what the elder brother has to say:

"Books on medicine describe paralysis of the four limbs as absence of *jen*. This is an excellent description.... If things are not parts of the self, naturally they have nothing to do with it. As in the case of paralysis of the four limbs, the vital force no longer penetrates them, and therefore they are no longer parts of myself. Therefore, to be charitable and to assist all things is the function of the sage."⁽⁴⁾

This analogy of paralysis may sound naive, but it contains an exceedingly significant idea, namely, that *jen* is a life force. If *jen* is merely something

(1) *Ibid.*, 2A/2a.

(2) *Ts'ui-yen*, 1/7b.

(3) *Yang-ming ch'uan-shu* 陽明全書 ("Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming"), *Szu-pu pei-yao* edition, Shanghai, Chunghua Book Co., 1934, 26/1b; cf. English translation by Frederick Goodrich Henke, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*, Chicago, Open Court, 1916, p. 107.

(4) *I-shu*, 2A/2a.

comparable to the feeling of pain in the case of illness, it would be nothing more than a state of mind. But what is in operation is not merely feeling, but the life force, the dynamic element behind all production and reproduction.

The idea of life force (*sheng*) goes back to the *Book of Changes* where it is declared, "The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is to give life."⁽¹⁾ But to make *jen* and life-giving synonymous was definitely an innovation of the Ch'eng brothers. Ch'eng Hao said, "The will to grow in all things is most impressive.... This is *jen*."⁽²⁾ And according to Ch'eng I, "The mind is like seeds. Their characteristic of growth is *jen*."⁽³⁾ And their pupil, Hsieh Liang-tso 謝良佐 (1050-1103 A.D.), said, "The seeds of peaches and apricots that can grow are called *jen*. It means that there is the will to grow. If we infer from this, we will understand what *jen* is."⁽⁴⁾ To call the seeds of fruits *jen* and the dynamic creative moral force also *jen* is not just a pun. It means that whereas hitherto *jen* meant love or universal love, to the Ch'eng brothers the fundamental character of *jen* is to grow, to create, to produce and reproduce, to give life. All virtues spring from it. Because by nature *jen* is creative and therefore expansive and increasingly inclusive, it will not stop until it covers the entire universe. Let Chu Hsi elaborate on this idea of creativity:

"[The Ch'eng brothers said], 'The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things.'⁽⁵⁾ [They also said], 'In the production of man and things, they receive the Mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind.'⁽⁶⁾ These sayings describe the moral qualities of the mind in a most comprehensive and penetrative manner and leave nothing to be desired. Nevertheless, one word will cover all, namely, *jen*. Let us explain. The Mind of Heaven and Earth has four characteristics, namely, Origination, Development, Adaptation, and Correction. But Origination covers them all. In its operation it becomes the sequence of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, but the vital force of spring penetrates them all. Similarly, the mind of man has four characteristics, namely, love, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, but love embraces them

(1) *The Book of Changes*, *hsi-tz'u*, II, ch. 1; cf. Legge, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

(2) *I-shu*, 11/3a-b.

(3) *T's'ui-yen*, 1/4b.

(4) *Shang-ts'ai yü-lu* 上蔡語錄 ("Recorded Sayings of Hsieh Liang-tso"), *Cheng-i-f'ang ch'üan-chi* edition, 1/2b.

(5) *Wai-shu* 外書 ("Additional Works"), in the *Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu*, 3/12.

(6) This saying is not found in their extant works.

all....For the way of *jen* is that the Mind of Heaven and Earth is to give life....it is the source of goodness and the basis of all conduct."⁽¹⁾

Elsewhere Chu Hsi said, "*Jen* as the principle of love is comparable to the root of a tree and the spring of water."⁽²⁾ "Wherever *jen* is in operation the idea of righteousness becomes the reality....It is like the will to grow, like the seeds of peaches and apricots."⁽³⁾ In other words, since the Mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce and reproduce, and man receives this Mind to be his mind, therefore his original nature is good because it is the original character of his mind to give life. *Jen* as the life-giving force is therefore natural to him. It is this dynamic, creative life-giving quality that makes the growth and extension of the good inevitable.

To sum up, evil is a natural fact, because in man's natural endowment there is the lack of balance which gives rise to a state of discrimination and also a state of opposition between the self and the non-self. But man has the ability to change this state of affairs. He can transform his physical nature, and he can do so because in his nature there is this *jen* which is a creative life-force and makes his goodness grow until it covers the entire universe.

SOURCES OF THE IDEA OF LIFE-FORCE (*Sheng*)

Where did this idea of *sheng* come from? The external evidence is that it came from the *Book of Changes*, as the above quotations already show. But why did this idea suddenly occur with the Ch'eng brothers after having been dormant for a thousand years? Of course it can be said that with Neo-Confucianists, the *Book of Changes* assumed special importance.⁽⁴⁾ Ch'eng I himself wrote a commentary on the classic. It is understandable that the *Book of Changes* should receive special attention from the Neo-Confucianists, because faced with Buddhist epistemology and metaphysics, they found the Confucian prose and poetry of the T'ang period inadequate to meet the Buddhist challenge and had to resort to a book of philosophical nature to reconstruct the Confucian philosophy. The *Book of Changes* met this need.

(1) *Chu Tzu ch'üan-shu*, 47/22a-b.

(2) *Ibid.*, 47/37a.

(3) *Ibid.*, 47/3a.

(4) Chou Lien-ch'i 周濂溪 (1017-1073 A. D.) based his entire philosophy on the *Book of Changes*. Hu Yüan 胡瑗 (993-1059 A. D.), Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072 A. D.), Szu-ma Kuang 司馬光 (1019-1086 A. D.), Wang An-shih 王安石 (1021-1086 A. D.), etc. all wrote commentaries on the classic.

But the emergence of the idea of *sheng* requires further explanation. Several factors can be offered. One is the influence of the personality of Chou Lien-ch'i 周濂溪 (also called Chou Tun-i, 周敦頤 1017-1073 A.D.) on the Ch'eng brothers. We are not here concerned whether the two Ch'engs were actually pupils of Chou Lien-ch'i. Ch'eng Hao did say that he studied under philosopher Chou.⁽¹⁾ But he also called him by name⁽²⁾ and even called him "poor Buddhist fellow,"⁽³⁾ an unlikely remark for a pupil to make. But there can be no doubt that through informal contacts, at least, Chou exercised marked influence on them. Ch'eng Hao himself recalled that when he was sixteen or seventeen, he had loved to hunt but after he saw Chou he no longer loved the sport.⁽⁴⁾ Philosopher Chou was well known for his love of life, even to the point of refusing to cut the grass in front of his window. When Ch'eng Hao was asked about it, he said, "I feel the same way."⁽⁵⁾ When he became an official and saw his people carrying sticks to strike birds in flight, he took the sticks and broke them.⁽⁶⁾ Here we can see the personal influence of Chou at work.

It is inevitable that the love of life in Ch'eng Hao's personality also characterizes his outlook on life in general. It is only natural that he saw the universe in general, and *jen* in particular, as a life-giving process. His brother, too, had a similar conviction. He said, "It is the Way that spontaneously produces and reproduces without end."⁽⁷⁾ Again, "In the transformation of the universe, production and reproduction naturally go on without end."⁽⁸⁾

Another factor that deserves attention is the Buddhist idea of "seeds". The concept that consciousness consists of "seeds", that is, generative forces, is a cardinal one in Buddhist Idealism. According to the school, the mind is divided into eight consciousnesses, the eighth of which is the "store-consciousness." It stores the "seeds" or effects of good and evil deeds which exist from time immemorial and become the energy to produce manifestations. This store-consciousness is forever in a state of instantaneous change and is influenced, or "perfumed", by external manifestations. At the same time it

(1) *I-shu*, 2B/ab.

(2) *Ibid.*, 3/1b; 2B/ab.

(3) *Ibid.*, 6/4a.

(4) *Ibid.*, 7/1a.

(5) *Ibid.*, 3/2a.

(6) *Wen-chi*文集, ("Collection of Literary Works"), in the *Erh-Ch'eng ch'uan-shu*, 7/2b.

(7) *I-shu*, 15/5b.

(8) *Ibid.*, 15/4b.

endows the perceptions and cognitions coming from the external manifestations with the energy of the "seeds" which in turn produce manifestations. This mutual process keeps on without cease, with "seeds", "perfuming", and the manifestations acting at once as cause and effect. Since all manifestations are results of "perfuming," which contains impure elements, the "seeds", which are absolutely pure, can be cultivated to overcome the impure aspects of the "store-consciousness". When that stage is reached, all manifestations will be seen as mere ideations and therefore illusory and the true nature of reality as Void will be revealed.

This Buddhist school was very active in the city of Loyang where the Ch'eng brothers lived. Furthermore, they both studied Buddhism. As Ch'eng I said, his brother "went in and out of Buddhist schools for almost a decade before he finally returned to Confucianism."⁽¹⁾ Both brothers had Buddhist friends. Their pupil, Hsieh Liang-tso, came very close to Buddhism and actually used the phrase "seeds of peaches and apricots that can grow," already quoted above. Ch'eng himself said that "the mind is like seeds," as cited before. The resemblance of these ideas to those of Buddhism is striking.

It can be argued, of course, that there is a fundamental difference between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism in this respect. In Buddhism, the "seeds" mutually "perfume" one another and hence the process is circular, whereas in Neo-Confucianism *jen* is a continuous growth and hence the process is evolutionary. The result is that the Buddhist "seeds" are essentially agents for annihilation and quietude, for the external manifestations are reduced by them to the Void. In contrast, the Confucian *jen* has the character of development and fulfillment. Furthermore, both Ch'eng brothers and Hsieh were critical of Buddhism.⁽²⁾ Most important of all, there is no evidence that they had derived the idea of "seeds" from any Buddhist text or Buddhist thinker. From all this it can be argued that the Neo-Confucian idea of *jen* as life-force has nothing to do with Buddhism.

However, it is a well-known fact that Neo-Confucianism was vastly influenced by Buddhism. In meeting the Buddhist challenge, Neo-Confucianists developed new thinking but returned to ancient Confucian Classics for orthodox expressions. For example, they were stimulated to speculate on the reality of the universe, and in opposition to the Buddhist negative Void, they evolved

(1) *Wen-chi*, 7/6a.

(2) *I-shu*, 15/5b, 15/7b, 18/10b, 18/11a; *Shang-ts'ai yü-lu*, 1/12-b, 1/12-b, 2/4b, 3/1a.

the doctrine of a positive, concrete, all-inclusive Absolute and found in the Classics the term *li* 理 for it. Is it not unlikely that they were similarly stimulated by the Buddhist idea of "seeds" but because the Buddhist doctrine was negative they evolved a positive theory and went to the *Book of Changes* for the term *sheng*, that is, production and reproduction, and made it synonymous with *jen*? At least, this is a plausible hypothesis.

A third factor is Han Yü. In his epoch-making essay "An Inquiry on the Way" 原道 (*Yüan-tao*), a central idea is *sheng*.⁽¹⁾ By vigorously attacking Buddhism, the essay helped to turn the rising tide of Buddhism and restore Confucianism as the Chinese way of life.

What is this Way? Because the essay begins with statements on love, righteousness, truth, and virtue, repeats them, and puts them in direct opposition to those of Taoism, it has been traditionally understood as a treatise on these virtues. But love, righteousness, truth, and virtue are merely qualities by which the Way can be demonstrated; they are not the Way itself.

What did Han understand to be the Confucian Way? It is none other than the Way of *sheng*.

In his strong attack on Buddhism, he sharply contrasted the Confucian Way, which, as he put it, was "the Way of giving life and supporting one another," while that of Buddhism was the "way of doing away with the process of giving life and supporting one another but one of reducing life to silence and annihilation."⁽²⁾ This contrast runs through the celebrated essay. Other well known passages about "ordering the state and regulating the family" and about truth, virtue, love, and righteousness are but elaborations of this central theme of life-giving.

Did the Ch'eng brothers derive their idea of *sheng* directly from Han Yü? From the narrow point of view, we cannot say so. After all, Ch'eng Hao was silent on Han. As to Ch'eng I, in his several references to Han, he did not mention Han's idea of *sheng*.⁽³⁾ Even in his comment on the essay itself he ignored the idea.⁽⁴⁾ From the broader point of view, however, Han formed an important link in the development from ancient Confucianism to

(1) "Yuan-tao" 原道 ("An Inquiry on the Way"). See Herbert A. Giles, trans., *Gems of Chinese Literature: Prose* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1923), p. 115, and French translation by Geroge Margouliès in his *Kou-Wen chinois* (Paris: Geuthner, 1926), p. 177.

(2) *Ibid.*

(3) *I-shu*, 1/3b, 18/36b, 18/37a, 19/4b, 19/11b-12a, 23/3b.

(4) *Ibid.*, 1/3a, 19/12a.

Neo-Confucianism. It is generally accepted that Han and his contemporary Li Ao were forerunners of the Neo-Confucian movement. In attacking the Buddhist way of annihilation and in propounding the Confucian way of life-giving, Han perpetuated and enhanced the Confucian emphasis on production and reproduction. Besides, Han's essay virtually turned the intellectual tide of the T'ang period. It is not unreasonable, then, to believe that his dominant thought of life-giving should constitute a logical step toward the Neo-Confucian idea that reality as such is characterized by life-giving.

From the above, it is clear that the long dormant idea of production and reproduction in the *Book of Changes* was given a new life and meaning in the Neo-Confucian outlook on reality in general and in the solution of the problem of evil in particular. This new life and new meaning were brought about by Chou Lien-ch'i's influence on the Ch'eng brothers, by the Buddhist influence on Neo-Confucianism, and by the long tradition of the Confucian Way of "life-giving and supporting one another" raised to new heights by Han Yü.

In sum, it may be said that the evolution of the Chinese philosophy of evil has gone through four stages. In the pre-Han era, it was tackled primarily as a practical problem. From Han through T'ang, it was correlated with Nature, chiefly due to Tung Chung-shu, thus entering upon the metaphysical level. In the third stage, Chang Tsai provided a philosophical explanation of evil, but his doctrine of "transforming the physical nature" was still philosophically negative in that it did not explain why this could be done. Finally, the Ch'eng brothers evolved the doctrine *jen* as *sheng*, thus providing the creative force which makes the transformation of evil possible and inevitable.