

ON *GE WU*: RECOVERING THE WAY OF THE *GREAT LEARNING*

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The ancients who wanted to bring shining virtue to light in the world would first bring peace to their states; those who wanted to bring peace to their states would first bring order to their families; those who wanted to bring order to their families would first cultivate themselves; those who wanted to cultivate themselves would first set their hearts in the right place; those who wanted to set their hearts in the right place would first be sincere in their intentions; those who wanted to be sincere in their intentions would first elicit understanding; the eliciting of understanding lies in letting things themselves come.

Great Learning

This essay intends to open up a new horizon in the hermeneutics of the early Confucian classics by rethinking the meaning of a central idiom in the *Great Learning* (*Da Xue* 大學). For a long time the translation and interpretation of ancient Chinese texts have been performed largely within or in comparison to Western metaphysical frameworks. It is undeniable that this hermeneutical practice governed by metaphysics has contributed to the introduction of ancient Chinese thought to the West. But it has also obscured the unique character of early Chinese thinking, which takes a fundamentally different path from that of the Western philosophical tradition.

Since its beginning, the guiding question for Western philosophy has been the question of being. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines the first philosophy, which seeks “the principles and the highest causes,” as a science that “investigates being *qua* being and what belongs essentially to it, *epistēmē, he theōrei to on hē on*.”¹ In contrast, early Confucian teachings, as well as mainstream early Chinese thinking in general, have little to do with metaphysics. First of all, the concept of *you* 有 (existence, possession, *Vorhandenheit*), which constitutes at most a plausible equivalent of the Greek concept of being (*to on*), receives no priority at all in ancient Chinese thinking. Moreover, the major concern of early Chinese thinkers comprises neither the search for any supernatural reality or divinity as the first and highest cause nor the determination of any permanent rational principles in nature and human society. Rather, the guiding question of early Chinese thinking is the question of *dao* 道, a *singulare tantum* that can no more be translated than the Greek *logos*.² As the name for the unnamable—the unspeakable mystery that characterizes the origin and the mode of the vital emergence (*sheng* 生) of human lives and natural beings, *dao* eludes any metaphysical categorization. Confucius himself made few comments “on human nature and the way [*dao*] of heaven.”³ The translation and interpretation of early Chinese texts into Western metaphysical languages, therefore, have inevitably missed the simplicity, poesy, and mystery (*das Geheimnis, xuan* 玄) of early Chinese thinking.

If, following the tradition, we identify the priority of “practice” as the distinctive character of early Confucian teaching, then it is precisely the *meaning* of such practice that is still unclear, as its spirit remains unthought. For the priority of practice has nothing to do with the priority of so-called “practical reason” or “practical philosophy.” In the West, both practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy belong to the philosophical science, which Aristotle designates as a science of truth, *epistēmēn tēs alētheias*.⁴ Now, for Aristotle, the investigation of truth lies in the search for principles and the first and highest causes. For “we do not understand a truth without its cause [*tēs aitiās*],”⁵ and we “do not understand a thing until we have acquired the why [*to dia*] of it (and this is to acquire the first cause [*tēn prōtēn aitian*]).”⁶ Accordingly, practical philosophy, which includes ethics, economics, and politics, seeks knowledge (*epistēmēn*) for the sake of action. It is a *science* that investigates the first principles of action—an investigation guided by the question of “why.” In the main, Western thinkers after Aristotle have maintained that the end of ethics is to inquire “what ‘ought’ means, and why we ought to do what we ought to do.”⁷ The question of ethics, as a result, has largely been confined to the search for and justification of a system of moral norms and principles to which our actions ought to conform.

As I see it, “practice” in the eyes of the early Confucians has little to do with a “knowledge” of the first principles of human actions or their application. Nor does it entail a systematic and theoretical exposition of the question of “why” our actions ought to conform to certain metaphysical norms. Rather, practice, or moral practice, always involves the question of “how” we conduct ourselves in particular human situations. “Practice” describes the path by which one lives an ethical life. Engaging in moral practice belongs to the *poetical event* of human dwelling upon the earth. As a way through which the poetical event of human dwelling shines forth, moral practice is not understood in contrast or in relation to a theory or knowledge of the first principles of human conduct. It does not rely on the authority of any metaphysical norms or principles but contains its “justification” in its very enactment.

The early Confucian classics, which offer initial narratives about such practice, belong neither to science nor to philosophy nor to religion. Yet, the seeming fragmentariness of the early Confucian texts and the absence of any “theoretical” foundation do not prove a lack of thinking. On the contrary, the aphoristic expression of early Confucian writings bear witness to a way of thinking that is returning to its highest originality. The early Confucian classics constitute a historical narrative (*shu* 述) of the unspeakable and unfathomable mysterious origin and its humble and reticent function (*yong* 用, performance). As a way of preserving the silent saying of *dao* that finds its primary manifestation in moral practice, these texts belong essentially to “hermeneutics” in the oldest sense of the word: the bearing of the message of destiny from the divine.⁸

This essay is intended as a preliminary step to spell out this unique dimension of early Chinese thinking by disclosing the hidden meaning of a central idiom in the *Great Learning*. I propose to reinterpret this crucial idiom by bringing the text of the *Great Learning* into dialogue with Heidegger’s phenomenology. In *Being and Time* Heidegger identifies the phenomenology of Da-sein, that is, of situated human exist-

tence in the world, as “*hermeneutics* in the original signification of that word” (SZ, p. 37). Representing a movement to overcome the *dominance* of metaphysics in traditional Western philosophies, Heidegger’s phenomenology opens up the possibility of thinking the question of ethics in terms of the poetical essence of human dwelling upon the earth without the endorsement of any metaphysical principles or norms. The original meaning of the Greek word *ēthos*, from which the word “ethics” derives, is “abode, dwelling place.” The tragedies of Sophocles, Heidegger announces, “preserve the *ēthos* in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics.’”⁹ By instigating a dialogue between Heidegger’s phenomenology and early Confucian moral teachings, I hope not only to open up a new horizon for the hermeneutics of early Confucian classics but also to recover an invigorating possibility for the question of ethics as well.

A Review of Traditional Interpretations of Ge Wu

The saying in the *Great Learning* that concerns us here is short and simple:

... 致知在格物。物格而後知至....

James Legge translates this as:

... Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge being complete....¹⁰

The two parts of the saying quoted above that are divided by the period in the translation are the end and beginning of two long sentences, which, in the original Chinese text, can be read in such a way that the characters in these two sentences form mirror images of each other. At the heart of this chiasmic structure sits our idiom *ge wu*, which is the *heart* of the whole paragraph. The saying itself consists of only two phrases: *ge wu* 格物, which Legge translates as “the investigation of things,” and *zhi zhi* 致知, “the extension or completion of knowledge.” In Legge’s translation and interpretation, which is based largely on the commentary and annotation by Zhu Xi 朱熹,¹¹ the meaning of this saying turns out to be plain and simple. For even today, it goes without saying that the only way to extend and complete one’s knowledge is to investigate things.

For Zhu Xi, however, the kind of knowledge “completed” by the “investigation of things” has little to do with so-called “scientific knowledge.” It refers instead to the knowledge of the ultimate principle (*li* 理) of things, which comprises both the metaphysical principles of nature and the moral principles of the human world. Originally a chapter in the *Book of Decorum* (*Li Ji* 禮記), the *Great Learning* is not about science but about politics and ethics. The way of the *great learning*, as the chapter begins, “lies in bringing shining virtue to light, in making forever new lives for the people, and in dwelling in the highest good.” Daniel Gardner identifies Zhu Xi’s greatest contribution to the Neo-Confucian approach to the moral transformation of the individual as the development of a “highly systematic method of self-cultivation.”¹² This program of self-cultivation “evolved principally out of his

reading" of the *Great Learning*.¹³ In Zhu's reading of the text, *ge wu* "became the first step, the foundation of the self-cultivation process. That is to say, only through the apprehension of the principle in things might an individual gradually perfect himself,"¹⁴ thereby "bringing shining virtue to light." Gardner elaborates: "implicit in this method of self-cultivation was the belief that all things in the universe share a common principle. Thus, [an] understanding of the principle in external things would lead ultimately to an understanding of the principle within oneself. And, since principle in man was identical to his nature, [the] understanding of that principle would lead to self-realization."¹⁵ It is not immediately clear, however, how the principle of external things and the principle of one's internal self can be one and the same and how "the investigation of things" in general may bring about a knowledge of the principle for one's self-cultivation. Indeed, Zhu's interpretation of *ge wu* and its relation to moral self-cultivation remains one of the most controversial issues in later Neo-Confucian discourse.

In my view, Zhu Xi's interpretation, while providing a significant and coherent new reading of the *Great Learning*, covers over the authentic and original meanings of the text. It overlooks the unique character of early Confucian thinking, which may only come to light under more careful and penetrating study. In order to set the stage for the search for the original meanings of the text and to examine Zhu's commentary in broader perspective, let us first undertake a brief review of traditional interpretations of this critical term.

The *Great Learning* and the phrase *ge wu* seem to have received no special attention and comments prior to Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 commentary on the *Book of Decorum*. Zheng glossed the characters *ge* and *wu* in this way: "*Ge* 格, is to come; *wu* 物, the same as event." This annotation, as I will show, is accurate and well founded. Zheng's explanation of the idiom *ge wu* as a whole and its relation to the rest of the *Great Learning*, however, turns out to be rather confusing:

Good things will come for those who have profound knowledge of the good, while evil things will come for those who have profound knowledge of evil. [The text] says that the events are coming according to the preference of man.¹⁶

In the text it is said that *zhi zhi* 致知 lies in *ge wu*; that is, knowledge or understanding arrives as a result of the coming of things. *Ge wu*, the coming of events or things, is apparently *prior* to human knowledge or understanding. But in Zheng's interpretation, however, places knowledge prior to the coming of things. Events or things are said to arrive "according to" the preference of man, that is, according to the knowledge of good and evil that one has beforehand. Therefore, this interpretation conflates completely the internal order that the original text follows. Nor does it spell out the connection between *ge wu* and the rest of the text in a satisfactory way. We still do not know, for example, how the "coming of things" and the cultivation of the self are related to each other.

A more profound interest in the *Great Learning* began to develop in the mid-Tang dynasty, when Han Yü 韓愈 made use of the text to illustrate the Confucian way of self-cultivation.¹⁷ Although Han Yu did not touch upon the meanings of *ge*

wu, his disciple and friend Li Ao 李翱 elaborated this central idiom at length. While taking over Zheng Xuan's annotation of *ge* as "to come," Li interpreted the phrase in a completely different way: "When things come before one, the mind should *not* be moved by them."¹⁸ This interpretation, as well as the later interpretation by Sima Guang 司馬光,¹⁹ sets human beings and the external things in an antagonistic opposition. But both these interpretations are based upon an apparent distortion of the original text; they can hardly be *consistent* with the acknowledged meaning of *ge* as "to come."

With the growing attention to the *Great Learning* and the development of Neo-Confucianism or the school of *Li* 理 from the beginning of the Song dynasty, it was Cheng Yi 程頤 who first offered an interpretation of the phrase *ge wu* through which a consistent and coherent reading of the *Great Learning* first began to take form. For Cheng Yi, *Li* 理 is the supreme principle shared by all things in the universe:

All things under heaven can be understood through the principle. "Where there are things there are rules." Each thing necessarily has its manifestation of the principle.²⁰

Ge wu, as the fundamental way toward the understanding of the principle, becomes a pivotal point for the art of moral self-cultivation and thus for Cheng Yi's whole philosophy:

The extension and completion of knowledge (*zhi zhi*) lies in *ge wu*. *Ge* means *zhi*, "to arrive at," "to reach." *Wu* means *shi*, "event." In all events there is the principle; to reach at the principle is *ge wu*.²¹

As a remote disciple of Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao 程顥, Zhu Xi inherited Cheng Yi's interpretation of *ge wu* and developed from it a more coherent and influential commentary on the *Great Learning*. Remarkably, while all commentators before had recognized the meaning of the character *ge* as "to come" (*lai* 來), Cheng Yi glossed the character *ge* as *zhi* 至: "to arrive at, to reach." Zhu took over this subtle shift in the gloss of the character *ge* and extended it. For Zhu, *ge*, when identified with *zhi* 至, carries not only the meaning of "to come, to reach, or to arrive at," but also the meaning of "to the utmost." At the same time, Zhu pushed the word *zhi* 致 toward a less common meaning: "to extend to the extreme" (*tui ji* 推極). The most original and proper sense of *zhi* 致, remarkably is simply to send to, to lead to, or to invite or elicit; that is, to let somebody or something come into presence, to let appear.

The seemingly trivial shifts in the annotation of the characters *ge* 格 and *zhi* 致 have significant consequences. As I have shown, for Zhu Xi, what is "reached" is not "things themselves," that is, the simple event of things' happening as such, but the ultimate principle or reason (*li* 理) of things. The ground of one's self-cultivation, thus, is to reach oneself for the ultimate principle of the universe. One can only grasp this superlative principle through extending one's knowledge to the utmost, through reaching the ultimate reason or principle of the *external* things and events.

Granted, Zhu's gloss of the characters *ge* and *zhi* 致 agrees largely with the basic

meanings of these two characters. By virtue of this annotation, Zhu has not only brought to the interpretation of the *Great Learning* an unprecedented coherence and clarity but also worked out a systematic method for self-cultivation that constitutes the core of his whole Neo-Confucian philosophy. Nevertheless, Zhu's does not spell out the *original* meaning of the text, which has been left unthought and even, in a way, distorted. Remarkably, the concept of *li* 理, principle or reason, does not play a prominent role in early Confucian thinking. In contrast to the concept of *li*, which assumes a central position in Neo-Confucianism, the guideword (*Leitwort*) for early Chinese thinking has been *dao* 道, the way. The shift from *dao* to *li*, which features in Zhu's interpretation of the *Great Learning*, is not a simple and innocent event. It marks a turning point in ancient Chinese thinking. Due to this critical transition, *metaphysical* thinking begins to get the upper hand and hold sway, while the question concerning the meanings of *dao* gradually loses its primacy and urgency.

Zhu's interpretation fails to bring the original meaning of the text to light but leads away from it. Even further away is the later interpretation offered by Wang Yangming, who takes *ge* 格 as a transitive verb that means "to rectify, to put or set something right." This interpretation, which has much weaker editorial and textual evidence in its favor and which provides little for a consistent explanation of the relation between *ge wu* and the cultivation of the self as a humane (*ren* 仁) person, has also covered over the original meanings of the text.

The Etymological Study of Ge

What is at stake in the interpretation of *ge wu* involves three key questions: (1) What are the literal meanings of the character *ge* 格 and the idiom *ge wu*? (2) What are the original meanings of the word *zhi* 知, which I translate as "knowing" or "understanding," and how is such knowing or understanding related to *ge wu*? (3) How does the knowing or understanding that arrives as a result of *ge wu* fit into what the rest of the text is about? That is, how is this knowing or understanding related to the cultivation of the self as a humane person who aspires to bring shining virtue to light in the world?

Obviously, these three questions are closely related and cannot be answered in isolation from one another. Yet, a close study of how the character *ge* is used in early Chinese texts, which is a prerequisite for the clarification of the literal meanings of *ge wu*, must be taken as a starting point of our inquiry.

Professor Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫 identifies the oldest meaning of the character *ge* 格 as *lai* 來, "to come, to arrive at," which is also indicated by the image of the scripture *ge* 各 on oracle bones.²² One of the original meanings of *ge* 格, as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 points out, is the "advent of the divine during sacrificial ceremonies."²³ In early Chinese texts, *ge* 格 is used repeatedly in the sense of "to come" (*lai* 來) or "to arrive at" (*zhi* 至). The *Er Ya* defines the meaning of *ge* as "to come": "Ge is to come" (格, 來也).²⁴ It is said in the *Book of Poetry* that "the advent of the divine is unpredictable" (神之格思, 不可度思, where the meaning of *ge* is identified as either "to come" or "to arrive at."²⁵ More instances can be found in the *Book of History*:

“Come Thou Shun” (格汝舜).²⁶ And in the *Ceremonial Decorum*: “When the love of parents and the love of brothers do come” (孝友時格).²⁷

With *ge* defined as “to come,” the best translation of the phrase *ge wu* seems to be “to let things themselves come.” It is remarkable that the character *ge* carries another important extended meaning here that has not been well noted by most of the commentators. Professor Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 rightly points out that *ge wu* in this context means 感通于物,²⁸ which I translate as “to open oneself to and be affected by things.” Although ancient commentators and contemporary scholars have largely ignored the sense of *gan* 感 or *gan tong* 感通, textual evidence in support of this interpretation is strong and abundant. It is stated clearly in the *Words and Phrases*, which defines *ge* precisely as *gan tong*: “*Ge*, is to open oneself to and to be affected by” (格, 感通也).²⁹ The character *gan* means literally the movement of the human heart. It points to the stir of one’s emotion or passion brought about by the influence of external things upon one’s heart. The “Book of Music” says that humans “are moved when affected by things” (感於物而動).³⁰ Accordingly, in contemporary Chinese, *gan* is often used in the sense of “feeling, sensation, or emotion,” or “to sense, to perceive, to be aware.” *Ge wu*, in the sense of “opening oneself to and being affected by (*gan tong*),” therefore points to *the movement of the heart*, to the agitation of human emotion and affection in one’s engagement and comportment with things and events in the surrounding world.

The textual evidence for the definition of the character *ge* as *gan tong* is plentiful. Zhu Junsheng 朱駿聲 notes already that “*gan* and *ge* share the same consonant” (感格雙聲) and identifies one meaning of *ge* as *gan*.³¹ There are many instances to be found in early Chinese texts of this use of *ge* in the sense of *gan tong*. The *Analects* says: “Lead the people by virtue and order them by decorum, then they will have the sense of shame” (道之以德, 齊之以禮, 有恥且格).³² According to Confucius, if a head of state teaches the people through virtue and decorum, then they will be *affected by* and *be aware of* shameful actions. *Ge*, hence, is best interpreted here as *gan*, which means “to be aware of, to be affected, to be disturbed at heart.” This interpretation of *ge* also brings to light the meaning of another statement in the *Book of Decorum*: “teach them by virtue and order them by decorum, then the people will have the heart that *is aware*” (教之以德, 齊之以禮, 則民有格心).³³ What the people are aware of at heart, of course, is the shameful actions that are in violation of the teachings of virtue and decorum. Mencius remarks that “Only a great man can *be aware of* what is in the wrong at the heart of the king” (惟大人能格君心之非).³⁴ A great man is he who does not blindly obey the authority of a king. And only he is able to *perceive* or *be aware of* what is wrong in the king’s mind so that he may bring the king back to the path of humaneness and justice. The interpretation of *ge* as *gan*, that is, as “to be aware, to sense, or to perceive,” therefore makes good sense in this context.

This sense of *gan tong*, “to open oneself to and be affected by,” is also found in some older texts such as the *Book of History*. In the “Da Gao” chapter, it is asked “How could it be said that he has the capability to *intuit* and understand the ordinance of heaven?” (矧曰其有能格知天命?).³⁵ The “Shuo Ming” chapter has it like-

wise: “Open oneself to and be affected by the king of heaven” (格于皇天).³⁶ Here, the character *ge* is used in connection with the character *tian* 天, which can be translated as “heaven,” although it does not carry the Christian implications of a determinate personified God. In early *Confucian* texts, *tian* or heaven refers more often to the mysterious origin of the vital emergence of human lives and natural beings in the world.³⁷ The phrase *ge tian* 格天 in the *Book of History* signifies the *intuition and divination* of the ordinance of heaven by opening oneself to and being affected by the continuous emergence of lives and things in the world. It is only through this opening and affection that one can *sense* the message from heaven and become *one* with heaven. Indeed, the oneness of humanity and heaven, which becomes a leading doctrine in later Chinese thinking, has already been indicated in the earlier texts such as the *Book of History*. This phrase *ge tian*, in the sense of “to open oneself so as to divine the ordinance of heaven,” also turns into an idiom in later writings.³⁸

In summary, the character *ge* originally meant the “coming” of the divine or things and events in the world. From the standpoint of what is coming, *ge* acquires the sense of “to arrive at” (*zhi*). From the perspective of the person to whom such coming occurs, *ge* derives the meaning of *gan*, that is, “to be affected,” or *gan tong*, “to open oneself to and be affected by.” Presumably, it is from this sense of “to be affected” that the later meanings of “to sense, to perceive, to be aware” come up. And it is from this meaning of “to perceive, to sense” that there arises the meaning of “measurement or standard” or “the *right* measurement or standard” (*zheng* 正) with which such perception is to be realized.

The literal meaning of *ge wu*, therefore, is “to let things come,” or “to let things be encountered.” In the context of the *Great Learning*, the phrase carries the extended meaning of *gan tong* 感通. It means to open oneself to and be affected by things around, that is, to open oneself to the engagement and comportment with things and events in the surrounding world. Only when one opens oneself to the surrounding things and events around one will true knowledge of the world and the self arrive.

It is a common understanding among ancient Chinese that knowledge arrives from the coming of things, an understanding expressed in many ancient Chinese classics. As Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 sums it up, the ancient Chinese “took one’s body and heart as the host, and things and events as the guests; it is as in military operations, where the guests attack and the host defends . . . so that “‘knowledge arrives’ after the things ‘come.’”³⁹ For example, the *Wen Zi* says that “the rise and movement of knowing lies in responding to the coming of things” (物至而應，智[知]之動也).⁴⁰ In the “Book of Music,” it is said straightforwardly that “one knows/understands when things come” (物至知知).⁴¹ For ancient Chinese, what is moved and affected by the coming of things is the human heart. The movement and affection of the human heart, as the “Book of Music” elaborates, “is made possible by things” (人心之動，物使之然也). The movement of knowing in response to the coming of things, thus, is none other than the movement of the heart. For early Chinese thinkers, the human heart is not only the seat of emotion and affection but also the primary seat of knowing and understanding. The *Guan Zi* identifies the heart as the “house of knowing” (心也者，智之舍也).⁴² Mencius more directly defines the heart

as “the faculty of thinking” (心之官则思).⁴³ The heart only knows, however, when it is first moved and affected by the coming things, when it opens itself to the surrounding world.

Now, it is clear that Zhu Xi’s interpretation of *ge wu* and *zhi zhi* has not only missed the original meaning of *ge* but also reversed the center of the knowing process. For early Chinese, the center of knowing is the human heart. The heart, as the core of human existence, is the seat of both affection and understanding. But for Zhu Xi, the center of knowing becomes the external things. Knowledge arises when humans reach for the external things for the ultimate principles of the universe. The knowledge of one’s own self, thus, is only possible when one extends to the utmost the knowledge of the principle of external things. The ultimate principle reached by the investigation of things constitutes the metaphysical ground of Zhu’s whole Neo-Confucian philosophy. By establishing the priority of the knowledge of principle (*li* 理), Zhu provides a new foundation for self-cultivation and thus brings long-overlooked Confucian teachings to a new land of security. Yet, it is precisely the embracing of this metaphysical principle of *li* that determines the *rootlessness* of Neo-Confucian philosophy. The priority of the knowledge of the principles of *external* things covers over a knowing from the heart that is primarily *internal*. The oblivion of the question of *dao* and the loss of the original Confucian thinking begin with this reversal of the center of knowing in Neo-Confucianism.

Given the original meaning of *ge wu* as *gan tong*, it is still unclear what kind of knowing or understanding is supposed to be achieved through the engagement and comportment with things and events in the surrounding world and how a knowing or understanding that is fundamentally *internal* is connected with the rest of the *Great Learning*, say, with the teaching of the cultivation of the self as a humane person who aspires to bring shining virtue to light in the world. Is the location of the human heart as the center of knowing not an illusion that has long been rejected by contemporary epistemological theories? Is the kind of knowledge that originates in the affections of the human heart not arbitrary and unreliable? How can such spurious knowledge comprised of human feelings be the foundation of one’s moral self-cultivation? With these questions unanswered, the true meanings of this ancient text remain obscure. The meanings of the text will only come to light when we open ourselves to the origin from out of which it speaks. The way into that origin (*den Ursprung*) calls for a leap. The difficulty in revealing the meanings of the text boils down to the difficulty in leaping this leap. In order to make this leap possible, I will take Heidegger’s analysis of affection in the context of his phenomenology of *Da-sein* in *Being and Time* as a stepping-stone. Let us expect the hidden meanings of this early Confucian text to shine forth in its dialogue with Heidegger’s thinking on human affection and the existential situation of *Da-sein*.

A Phenomenological Study of Human Affection

Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is set on concretely working out the question of the *meaning* of being, a question of urgency that has been forgotten in the Western

metaphysical tradition. As “being [*Sein*] is always the being of a being [*Seiendes*]” (SZ, p. 9), Heidegger approaches the question of the meaning of being through the interrogation of the being (*Sein*) of one specific kind of being (*Seiendes*): *Da-sein*. Accordingly, the task of working out the question of being boils down to making transparent the being (*Sein*) of *Da-sein* (cf. SZ, p. 7), of situated human existence in the world. The phenomenology of *Da-sein*, that is, the phenomenological description and interpretation of the meaning and structure of its being, which Heidegger insists is “hermeneutics in the original signification of that word” (SZ, p. 37), thus constitutes one of the central tasks of *Being and Time*.

Da-sein is being-in-the-world. The being of *Da-sein* differs from the being of other beings that we encounter in the everyday world, like the being of this chair or that tomato plant, in that in its being *Da-sein* is “concerned about [*es geht ... um*] its very being” (SZ, p. 12). The being of *Da-sein* cannot be properly and sufficiently grasped as a *what*, as the being of something that is objectively present, but must be understood as a *who*, as the existence of the *who* that I myself am (SZ, pp. 44–45): “The ‘essence’ of *Da-sein* lies in its existence” (SZ, p. 42). The essence of *Da-sein* is not the “reality” of its being, say, the reality of its “physical presence,” but its *possibility* to be. But *Da-sein*’s existence or its possibility to be is not something isolated from other kinds of beings. It is always the possibility to be “in” the world, to be with other *Da-seins* and other beings that are merely “inside” the world (*Innerweltlich*).

Being-in-the-world is the fundamental constitution of *Da-sein*. The constitution of *Da-sein* as being-in-the-world has three structural factors: “in-the-world,” that is, the ontological structure of “world”; “the being *who* is always in the way of being-in-the-world”; and “being-in as such” (SZ, p. 53). Being-in as such has again three constitutive elements: existential situation (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding, and discourse, which Heidegger claims to be existentially equiprimordial; that is, they constitute being-in as such at the same time with equal primordially. As the interpretation of the *Great Learning* involves human engagement and comportment with beings in the surrounding world and the affection arising out of such engagement, let us look more closely at Heidegger’s analysis of existential situation or situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*), which indicates something that is “ontically what is most familiar”: attunement, mood, or affect (*die Stimmung*), being attuned, that is, being in a mood or state of affection (*das Gestimmtsein*) (SZ, p. 134).

Moods or affections are not changing and fleeting feelings or sensitivities “accompanying” human *Da-sein* haphazardly, under the influence of which the scientific observation and description of objective facts and realities are inevitably compromised (cf. SZ, p. 138). Rather, they point to a *primordial* disclosure of the existential situatedness of *Da-sein*, to a *fundamental* way *Da-sein* is its “there” as being-in-the-world. *Da-sein*, Heidegger asserts, “is *always already* in a mood” (SZ, p. 134). Being always in a mood makes manifest the *thrownness* of *Da-sein*’s being. It discloses the *facticity* of *Da-sein*’s being delivered over to the there (*da*), although its whence and whither remain unknown (SZ, p. 135). Facticity refers to the *existential fact* that *Da-sein* is always already caught in a totality of relations among different beings. It has no command and mastery over these beings and relations and yet it

cannot get away from them. It cannot isolate itself from other beings in or inside the world but must take the burden of being-in-the-world as a matter of fact. In being in a mood, "Da-sein is always already disclosed in accord with its mood as *that* being [*Seiende*] to which Da-sein was delivered over in its being [*Sein*] as the being [*Sein*] which it, existing, has to be" (SZ, p. 134). To be always in a mood means Da-sein is always *affected* by other beings in or inside the world that has already been disclosed. Ontologically, it refers to the existential situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*) of Da-sein, to the existential situations in which Da-sein always finds itself. But Da-sein can only find itself in this or that situation when it first lets beings other than itself be encountered in a circumspect, heedful way. Only in its encounter with and being affected by other beings is it possible for Da-sein to discover its own being, say, its physical body. Affections of Da-sein announce its constant comportment with the beings and relations in the surrounding world, which makes manifest the fundamental existential situatedness of Da-sein's being there.

Da-sein, moreover, can be affected by other beings only because it is concerned in its being about its being. Only a being who is concerned in its being about its being can let beings inside the world be encountered in a circumspect, heedful way: "Letting things be encountered in a circumspect[,] heedful way," says Heidegger "has . . . the character of being affected or moved" (SZ, p. 137). Only Da-sein can be affected, moved, or touched by other beings. A chair and a wall, no matter how close they are, can neither "touch" nor affect each other (SZ, p. 55). The relation between a chair and a wall is completely "apathetic." This apathetic relation remains because both the chair and the wall are "heartless." The chair and the wall can only be related to each other because they are both relevant to a Da-sein, and when the relevance of both to a Da-sein is foreshown (*vorgezeichnet*) in a totality of relevance (*die Bewandnisganzheit*), say, the totality of relevance that constitutes the things at hand in a studio (cf. SZ, p. 84). A chair and a wall can only be "related" to each other because they both belong to the world of a Da-sein. By themselves the chair and the wall "have" no world. Things like a chair and a wall are worldless. They can only be "inside" the world that is already disclosed by Da-sein.

The being of a chair is its relevance, which is about its "what-for" (*wozu*). The thing at hand that we call a chair is relevant in that it lets human Da-sein sit and rest. A wall, likewise, is relevant in that it supports and demarcates the boundary of a room in which human Da-sein may find its shelter and place of dwelling. *Which* relevance the chair and the wall at hand may have is foreshown in the totality of relevance that constitutes the things at hand in a room to which the chair and the wall belong, say, a studio in which a Da-sein finds its residence. The totality of relevance, as Heidegger points out, "leads back to a *what-for* which no longer has relevance" (SZ, p. 84). It leads back to Da-sein who is "not a being of the kind of being of things at hand inside [*innerhalb*] a world, but a being whose being is defined as being-in-the-world" (SZ, p. 84). "The primary 'what for' is a for-the-sake-of-which" (SZ, p. 84). For only Da-sein, the being who is concerned about its being in that being (*es geht . . . um*), is for the sake of (*um-willen*) itself, that is, for the sake of the *possibility* of its being (SZ, pp. 84, 143). Only the being whose being is for the sake of itself,

who cares for (*sorgen*) its own being, can take care of things in the world to which it belongs and discover a surrounding world in a circumspect, heedful way.

Moreover, only because the “senses” (*die Sinne*) belong ontologically to a being who is concerned in its being about its being, who “finds itself in the existential situation of being-in-the-world” (*befindliches In-der-Welt-sein*), “can they be ‘touched’ and ‘have a sense’ for something so that what touches *them* shows itself in an affect” (SZ, p. 137). Only Da-sein can be affected. Because only for the being that is concerned about its being can what it encounters in the world *matter* to it. “Being affected,” Heidegger remarks, “is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can *matter* to it in this way. This mattering to it is grounded in existential situation, and *as existential situation it has disclosed the world*, for example, as something by which it can be threatened” (SZ, p. 137).

Therefore, letting beings be encountered, which has the character of being moved or affected, points to the fundamental existential situatedness that discloses the being there of Da-sein as being-*in*-the-world. Being always already in an affection, Da-sein is a site of disclosure. As a site of disclosure, Da-sein is “*in*” the world. The being-in of Da-sein is different from “being inside” of beings like a chair or a wall. Being-in is the “formal existential expression of the being of Da-sein” (SZ, p. 54). The word “*in*” here does not refer to the objective presence of one being *among* other beings. Nor does it mean being “inside” a space that is objectively delimited. It is *not* the case that there is a “world” of beings that are already objectively present, “*in*” which Da-sein happens to find itself. On the contrary, there is no world before Da-sein’s being *there*.

But is it not true that before any human Da-sein comes into being there have long been all kinds of physical and animated beings on the earth? Granted. But stars and clouds, rivers and mountains, and trees and grasses do not constitute a *world* unless there is a Da-sein *there* in the first place. Without Da-sein’s being there, there can be no “relation” between natural beings except physical actions and resistances. Before natural beings can be *relevant* for Da-sein’s existence, they are completely *apathetic* to each other and cannot have any significance. Natural beings can have significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*; see SZ, pp. 72–88) only because they belong to the world of Da-sein, which alone can be meaningful (*sinnvoll*) or meaningless in its being (SZ, p. 151). The world is significant only because Da-sein has meaning, because Da-sein, as a being whose being is characterized by its finitude, that is, whose being is *mortal temporality*, is concerned in its being about its being. Da-sein is *in* the world because it is the very site at which a world opens up. Being-in does not refer to being among some other beings or inside a space that is the receptacle for these beings. Rather, the being-in of Da-sein means *disclosing* a world and *dwelling* in it together with other beings in and inside the world. It means to find one’s place of dwelling in the world. The word “*in*,” as Heidegger points out, stems from “*innan-*, to live, *habitare*, to dwell” (SZ, pp. 54–55). Being *in* the world, Da-sein is *in* the truth. “In that Da-sein essentially is its disclosedness, and, as disclosed, discloses and discovers, it is essentially true. Da-sein is ‘in the truth’” (SZ, p. 221).

In the claim “Da-sein is in the truth,” the word “truth” does not carry the usual meaning of correctness, that is, correspondence between a statement and a thing. Heidegger insists that truth, *alētheia*, in its most original Greek sense, means unconcealment. For Heidegger, making a statement “is a being toward the existing thing itself.” Thus, to say that “a statement is true means that it discovers the beings in themselves. . . . The being true (truth) of the statement must be understood as discovering” (SZ, p. 218). The everyday concept of truth as the accord between a statement and a thing itself is grounded on truth in the most primordial sense as unconcealment. The propositional truth is only possible on the basis of truth as disclosedness and discovering. On the other hand, truth or being-true as discovering “is . . . ontologically possible only on the basis of being-in-the-world” (SZ, p. 218). The disclosure of Da-sein as being-in-the-world is the foundation of the primordial phenomenon of truth as the unconcealment of things in the world. In that Da-sein essentially is its disclosedness, it is the site of disclosure; as the site of disclosure, it is the site of *being* (*Sein*). There is (*Es gibt*) being “only insofar as truth [*alētheia*—disclosure] is. Truth *is* only because and as long as Da-sein is” (SZ, p. 230).

In his phenomenology of Da-sein, by questioning the traditional understanding of being (*Sein*) in terms of beings (*Seiendes*), Heidegger overturns the meaning of truth from the everyday understanding of correctness into the primordial meaning of unconcealment. Accordingly, Da-sein as being-in-the-world is not only the foundation of the primordial truth as unconcealment, but also the site of disclosure at which the meaning of being can be understood. It becomes manifest that affections arising from the engagement and comportment with surrounding beings are not *mere* feelings or sensations that one happens to be associated with, but point to the existential situatedness of Da-sein, which discloses the being of Da-sein as being-in-the-world. Mood or affection refers to a fundamental mode in which the disclosure of Da-sein takes place. It is a *primordial* way in which Da-sein is *in* the truth.

Discovering the Way of the Great Learning

Despite the anthropocentric and metaphysical overtones of *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s phenomenology of Da-sein, of situated human existence in the world, spells out the significance of mood and affection and their relation to human engagement and comportment with beings in the surrounding world. It lends us a new perspective on the original meanings of *ge wu* and of the *Great Learning* as a whole. I have identified the literal meaning of *ge wu* as “to let things come.” It carries also the extended connotation of “opening oneself to and being affected by things in the surrounding world.” The site of this opening is the human heart. As the seat of affection and emotion, the human heart is also the site of disclosure at which a world opens up.

Remarkably, with the clarification of the original meanings of *ge wu* and its relation to the human heart, the long-embraced interpretation that attempts to make a distinction between the teaching of the *Great Learning* and that of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, a line of interpretation that still holds sway today, turns out to be unten-

able. For the cruxes of both texts lie in the human heart. In accord with the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the heart, which contains all human affections, such as happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy, “is the great origin of the world” (中也者，天下之大本也).⁴⁴ The harmony (*he* 和) of the heart, that is, the harmony of the affections and emotions in the heart, is “the supreme way of the world.” It is upon the attainment of this harmony that “heaven and earth will be at the right place and all things in the world will be growing and flourishing.”⁴⁵

Now, for the ancient Chinese, harmony in human affections and emotions is attained first and foremost in music. The “Book of Music” is a hidden groundwork of early Confucian thinking that has never been adequately studied by contemporary scholars. In this foundational chapter of the *Book of Decorum*, it is said that music, which “originates in the human heart” (樂由中出), is “the harmony of heaven and earth” (樂者，天地之和也). Confucius elucidates the elements of self-cultivation as follows: to “rouse oneself in poetry, establish oneself in decorum, and accomplish oneself in music” (興於詩，立於禮，成於樂).⁴⁶ Music accomplishes one’s moral cultivation as it articulates the great harmony of the world. In music lies the root of the moral order of the world because music makes manifest an *aesthetic* common ground to which all human hearts return.⁴⁷ But this commonality of human affections and emotions found in music has nothing to do with the *metaphysical* ground of a *universal* reason or principle (*li* 理). Rather, reason or principle can only have its proper function on the basis of the harmony of the heart brought forth in music.

Remarkably, the character *li* 理, the foundational concept of Neo-Confucianism, refers originally not to the universal principle of nature or human society but to the *different* features and lineaments of *external* things. The *Han Fei Zi* defines *li* as the different properties of things, such as their being “long and short, big and small, square and circular, hard and crispy, light and heavy, white and black.”⁴⁸ It can be said that for the early Chinese, *li* describes the way or the reason for how and why an individual thing is what it is.⁴⁹ Every individual thing in the world thus “has its own particular reason” (萬物各異理).⁵⁰ Accordingly, used as a verb, *li* in its primary sense means “to distinguish and divide different things in accord with their particular features and lineaments.” It means also “to bring different things to the right order in accord with their individual reasons or properties.” The division and ordering of different things is only possible when this is performed according to certain rules and principles. Hence, *li* also carries the meaning of “rule, principle, law,”⁵¹ or “to be in the proper order in accord with certain rules and principles.”⁵² When used to indicate the proper order of human society, the meaning of *li* overlaps with the concept *li* 禮, the rule of decorum. The *Book of Decorum* states that “decorum is the same as principle” (禮也者，理也).⁵³ The rule of decorum, as the “Book of Music” clarifies, is for the recognition of and distinction between different individuals in a society (禮辨異). The rule of decorum is for the sake of dividing individuals according to their particular characteristics so as to place them in the right positions in society. Only when kings and subjects, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and partners and friends all live up to their right positions in society according to the rules of decorum will all things in the world grow and flourish. The

rule of decorum, therefore, manifests “the order of heaven and earth” (禮者，天地之序也).

Obviously, different individuals in a society can only be brought together in accordance with certain rules and principles when all these individuals share a common ground. In contemporary Western society, this common ground lies largely in the social contract established by societal authorities, which will enforce punishment for any violation of laws and social norms. In the Middle Ages, we find such common ground in the general faith in the supreme power of God—the creator of all beings in the world and the divine authority who enjoins His commandments on human beings. By contrast, for early Confucian thinkers the rule of decorum, which is *gentler, more flexible*, and thus *more enlightening* than the rule of law, is not based on the supreme command of any social or divine authority. For, the common ground that makes the rule of decorum possible is “the *sensus communis* of the human heart” (心之所同然者)⁵⁴ that is expressed in music. As Mencius elaborates, the sense (*xin* 心) of commiseration, the sense of shame, the sense of respect, and the sense of right and wrong, which constitute the germs of humaneness, justice, decorum, and wisdom, respectively, are shared by *all* people. Since humaneness, justice, decorum, and wisdom all originate in the human heart, they are “not imposed upon me from outside, but belong to my own self.”⁵⁵ Music, in bringing forth harmony from the human heart, also manifests “the harmony of heaven and earth.” It is on the basis of this harmony and the *sensus communis* of all different individuals that a knowing of *dao* arrives and a world with proper order in accord with the rule of decorum opens up and prospers. The key and the first step toward this harmony of the hearts and the world, as the *Great Learning* shows, lies in *ge wu*: opening oneself to and being affected by things and events in the surrounding world.

Therefore, when Zhu Xi interprets *ge wu* as “to reach for the ultimate principle of the universe by the investigation of things” and when he regards the knowledge of this universal principle as the *foundation* of moral self-cultivation, he has not only shifted the center of knowing from the *internal* self to *external* things but also falls wide of comprehending the true root of human ethical life that is expressed in the original text. According to the teachings of Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, the universal principle of heaven is manifested in every individual being in the world. Following this line of thinking, Zhu Xi sees *dao* as “the principle in external things” (道是在物之理)⁵⁶ and identifies this principle as “the *dao* that is beyond substantial forms and thus the foundation of the emergence of all beings” (理也者，形而上之道也，生物之本也).⁵⁷ *Li* 理, which in early Chinese thinking refers to the *different* reasons and properties of *individual* things, becomes a *universal metaphysical* principle for the explanation of the ultimate reason and cause of *all* beings in the world. But this metaphysical turn of Neo-Confucianism does not move closer to *dao*, the way of truth from out of which the early Confucian texts speak; it leads away from it. In this turning away from *the way*, it also loses sight of the originality, poesy, and mysterious vitality of early Confucian thinking.

As I see it, the knowing that arrives from *ge wu* is not the universal principle acquired through the investigation of *external* things, but an understanding of one’s

most internal self—an understanding that can only originate in one’s own heart. Such knowing compares well with what Heidegger describes as the understanding of the *truth (aletheia)* of situated human existence (*Eksistenz*) in the world. This knowing arising out of one’s affection and emotion, moreover, is neither “subjective” nor “idealistic.” As a more *primordial* or *original* understanding of the truth of human existence, it is *prior* to the metaphysical distinction between subject and object or between idealism and materialism. For the knowing originating in my heart refers neither to the scientific knowledge of external things nor to the knowing of *what I myself*, as the *subject* of affection, am. Rather, it involves mainly the knowing of *dao* and the question of *who I am*.⁵⁸ As Mencius points out, “He who brings his heart out to the full knows his nature; he who knows his nature knows heaven.”⁵⁹ The knowing of heaven or the way (*dao*) of heaven arrives after the knowing of my nature, that is, the knowing of *who I am*—a knowing that comes ultimately from my own heart. The opening statement of the *Doctrine of the Mean* echoes Mencius’ assertion about the way and human nature: the mandate of heaven is called human nature; the development of human nature is called *dao*; the cultivation of *dao* is called education.

Here, I have deliberately left the word *dao* untranslated, because the meaning of this unique guideword of early Chinese thinking is still in the dark and cannot become manifest all at once. *Dao* names the unnamable, the unspeakable mysterious origin that always turns away from us while offering the way toward the vital emergence of human and natural beings (反者道之動). Heidegger designates the word “way” as a primordial word (*Urwort*) of language, which grants itself (*sich zuspricht*) to meditating (*sinnenden*) humans. It articulates the “proper” meaning of the guideword (*Leitwort*) in Lao Zi’s poetical thinking:

Tao [道] could be the way that gives all ways. . . . Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful saying conceals itself in the word ‘way.’ *Tao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, . . . Perhaps the enigmatic power of today’s reign of method . . . [is] after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.⁶⁰

In contrast to the Daoists, who are involved in the mystery and elusiveness of the way or the way of heaven, early Confucian thinkers are more concerned with the way of the human, that is, with the appropriation and manifestation of “the way” in concrete human lives and moral practices. It is humans, as Confucius insists, who “are capable of bringing *the way to light*” (人能弘道).⁶¹ For Confucius and his disciples and followers, *dao* is the supreme open way that provides all ways and grants the poetical human dwelling upon the earth. The cultivation of the way lies in education, in the teaching and learning of the rules of decorum (*li* 禮) that articulate the order of human society. It is well known that Confucius, the first and greatest teacher of ancient China, who spread royal learning to the common people, believed that education is possible for all people (有教無類).⁶² With education playing a central and critical role in the Confucian moral and political teachings, the *possibility* of education relies again upon the *sensus communis* of the human heart. I have made

clear that music functions as the common ground of human affections. By bringing human affections and emotions into harmony, music manifests the harmony between heaven and earth. It brings forth the *sensus communis* of the human heart on the basis of which true empathy and compassion arise. Such affections as empathy and compassion, understood in phenomenological terms, disclose the being-in-the-world of humanity as a being with others. The manifestation of such affections as empathy and compassion attests to the common ground of human existence and opens up the clearing (*die Lichtung*) onto a world of harmony. The key and first step toward this harmony, as the *Great Learning* states, lies in *ge wu*: opening oneself to and being affected by things and events in the surrounding world.

The dialogue that I have instigated here between Heidegger's phenomenology and the *Great Learning* anticipates a new horizon for the hermeneutics of early Confucian thinking. It has also opened a new track for thinking about the question of ethics. This new track will become visible as long as we are resolute in making the leap toward the origin from out of which the early Confucian classics speak. This leap will only be possible when we, with open hearts, listen to the silent saying of *dao* and in this listening let ourselves into the region that is disclosed in the way of such saying.

In origin, the question of ethics is a question of human dwelling. In the *Great Learning*, there is a line quoted from the *Book of Poetry*: "The state with so vast a territory is where the people dwell" (邦畿千里，惟民所止). The ancients who wanted to bring shining virtue to light in the world, as the *Great Learning* elaborates, "would first bring peace to their states." The end of self-cultivation is never the accomplishment of virtue for oneself alone. For early Confucian thinkers, moral practice is never a "personal" matter about one's self only. For one can only *accomplish* oneself as a virtuous person when the state in which one dwells and for which one serves is in peace and order. A moral state, which is intermediate between the dignity of the individual and peace in the world, is only possible when all people in a state are educated to lead humane and just lives, when they all live up to their duties in accord with the rules of decorum. The founding of a moral state and the accomplishment of a virtuous self, therefore, are interdependent.

From today's perspective, this *interdependence* of the ethical state and moral self-cultivation might appear to involve a *circular* movement. It would indeed, if we were to read the *Great Learning* as a "theory" of politics and ethics. Nothing, however, is farther from the truth of this early Confucian text. For what the *Great Learning* is concerned with is not a *philosophical* exposition of a political or ethical *theory* of how to build an ethical state or how to realize a virtuous self. Nor do the eight steps from *ge wu* to the harmony and happiness of the world form a "logical order" for "world peace." The circle manifested in the interdependence of an ethical state and a virtuous self does not involve a logical fallacy. It is not a vicious circle to be avoided. Rather, the epigrams gathered together in the *Great Learning* are *poetical* articulations of the way of education; what they elaborate is not a *logical* order but an order of *practice*. The sayings of the text call us to leap *into* the circle. This leaping takes place when all the people in the state, from the king, who is "the son of

heaven, to the commoners, all take self-cultivation as the foundation.” For it is only through engagement in moral self-cultivation that we will find a way toward our *ēthos*, toward our most auspicious place of dwelling in the highest good (*zhi shan* 至善).

Remarkably, the Chinese character *shan* 善, which is usually translated as “good,” does not refer *originally* to the qualities of humans or things that meet certain standards or value judgments. Nor does it mean to describe persons or things with such appreciable or acceptable qualities. The oldest sense of the character *shan*, as the *Shuo Wen* explains, is “auspicious” (善[善]·吉也). It thus has “the same meaning as ‘just’ and ‘beautiful’” (與義美同意).⁶³ The characters for good (*shan* 善), just (*yi* 義), and beautiful (*mei* 美) all share the same component 羊 (*yang*), which means “goat” or “sheep.” In ancient China, goats and sheep were among the best animals for sacrifice in ritual ceremonies. The proper use of the sacrificial animal invites the blessing from the divine. It elicits and reveals the unpredictable divine message from heaven. Only when humans intuit and discover the mysterious and reticent mandates of heaven will they find a way of dwelling that is at the same time auspicious, good, just, and beautiful.

To dwell in the highest good is to open one’s heart and attune oneself to the reticent summons from the divine and the silent saying of *dao*. The divine message from heaven blesses humans with an *auspicious* dwelling place. It calls humans to develop their internal “good” nature and to bring their virtues to light. The engagement in such moral practice belongs to the *poetical event* of the vital emergence of human lives in the world. In the enactment of this poetical way of living, the *beauty* of human existence also shines forth. Self-cultivation for the ethical way of life is not a personal matter that involves an individual alone. For dwelling upon the earth is always a dwelling together with other human beings. Drawing on the terminology of phenomenology, we can say that human being-in-the-world is always already *being with* others. The presence of others and the necessity of “sharing” the “world” with others initially constitute a limitation on one’s existence in the world. For to be with others is to share, to struggle for, or to give up the natural resources, valuables, and the dwelling places that one desires.

It is in the encounter with others that one first has to recognize and face up to the limits of one’s own being. But for early Confucian thinkers, it is precisely in being with others that one’s being-in-the-world can be expanded and elevated. The expansion and elevation of one’s being take place when one is capable of living in *harmony* with others. This harmony arrives when human affection and emotions are “articulated right to the point” (發而皆中節).⁶⁴ Here, to articulate one’s affections right to the point (中節) means to have one’s emotions attuned and expressed in accord with the rules of decorum. The rules of decorum, by restricting excessive human desires and emotions, decree that humans live up to their duties and positions in society. They spell out the *right* and *just* way of human dwelling in the world. When all people in a society maintain themselves according to the way of decorum and justice, the world will be in order and harmony, which are fully brought out in music. And to be attuned to the playing of music is “to be happy”

(樂者，樂也).⁶⁵ Accordingly, to dwell in the highest good, to dwell in a world of order and harmony, to dwell in a way of ethical life that is at the same time auspicious, beautiful, and just is to be dwelling in supreme happiness, in the lyrical *ēthos* of human existence. The way toward this poetical way of dwelling will only open up to us when we listen and attune ourselves to the call of our hearts and conscience. For in the call of the human heart the reticent message of the divine and the silent saying of *dao* come across. Presumably, the knowing of this heavenly message lies in *ge wu*—opening our hearts to the primordial truth of our poetical way of dwelling upon the earth that is disclosed in our affections and emotions:

When things themselves come, understanding will arrive. When understanding arrives, we will be sincere in our intentions. When we are sincere in our intentions, our hearts will be in the right place. When our hearts are in the right place, our selves will be cultivated. When our selves are cultivated, our families will be in order. When our families are in order, our states will be in peace. When our states are in peace, the world will be in harmony and happiness.

For Susan M. Schoenbohm: In Honor of Friendship

Notes

- 1 – Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1979), 3.2.1003a21. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Loeb Classical Library, 1933).
- 2 – Cf. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 36.
- 3 – *Analects* 5.13, in *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine, 1998): “Zi Gong says, ‘... The Master’s words on human nature and the way of heaven cannot be heard’” (translation modified; cf. 9.1).
- 4 – Aristotle *Metaphysics* 2.1.993b20.
- 5 – *Ibid.*, 2.1.993b23.
- 6 – Aristotle, *Aristotle's The Physics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1980), 2.3.194b.20. Cf. Aristotle, *The Physics* (Loeb Classical Library, 1957).
- 7 – Sir David Ross, *Aristotle* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), p. 189.
- 8 – I am borrowing Heidegger’s description of hermeneutics, which seems especially appropriate in this context. See Heidegger, “A Dialogue of Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 29. Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), and Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2001), pp. 37–38. Hereafter, Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is cited as *SZ*, followed by the German page reference.

- 9 – Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 269.
- 10 – Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 358.
- 11 – See Legge’s notes for this saying in *ibid.*, pp. 358–359.
- 12 – Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (Cambridge [MA] and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 47.
- 13 – *Ibid.*
- 14 – *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 15 – *Ibid.*
- 16 – Zheng Xuan’s commentary on the “Great Learning,” in *Li Ji Zheng Ju* 禮記鄭注 (Book of decorum with Zheng commentary), vol. 15 of *Si Bu Bei Yao* 四部備要 (1965). All translations of ancient Chinese texts are mine, unless otherwise noted.
- 17 – See Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh*, pp. 17–19.
- 18 – *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 19 – See *ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
- 20 – Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, *He-nan Cheng Shi Yi-Shu*, 214, in *Er-Cheng Quan-Shu, Si Bu Bei Yao* edition (quoted in Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh*, p. 25) (translation modified).
- 21 – Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, *He-nan Cheng Shi Wai-Shu*, 2.4a, in *Er-Cheng Quan-Shu, Si Bu Bei Yao* edition (quoted in Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh*, p. 25) (translation modified).
- 22 – Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫, *Xiao-Dai Ji Da Xue de Dao Jiangjie* 小戴記大學之道章解 (Interpretation of the way of the Great Learning in the Book of Xiao-Dai), in *Gushi Xue Lunwen Ji* 古史學論文集 (A collection of essays on the study of ancient history) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1996), p. 170.
- 23 – Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xin Ti yu Xing Ti* 心體與性體 (Xin Ti and Xing Ti) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1999), 2 : 326.
- 24 – *Er Ya* 爾雅, “Shi Yan” 釋言 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian* 中文大辭典 [Encyclopedic dictionary of the Chinese language], 7th ed., ed. Lin Yin 林尹 and Gao Ming 高明 [Taipei: Zhongguo Wenhua Daxue Chubanshe 中國文化大學出版部, 1985], vol. 5, p. 194).
- 25 – “Yi” 抑, in *Shi Jing* 詩經 (Book of poetry), “Da Ya” 大雅 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5 : 194).
- 26 – *Shang Shu* 尚書 (Book of history [alternate name]), “Yao Dian” 堯典 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5 : 194).

- 27 – *Yi Li Zheng Ju* 儀禮鄭注 (Ceremonial decorum with Zheng commentary), vol. 12 of *Si Bu Bei Yao* (1965), “Shi Guan Li” 士冠禮.
- 28 – Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo Renxing Lun Shi: Xianqin Pian* 中國人性論史：先秦篇 (History of the theory of human nature in China: Pre-Qin period) (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian 上海三联書店, 2001), p. 254.
- 29 – *Zi Hui* 字彙 (Words and phrases) (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5:194).
- 30 – *Book of Decorum*, “Yue Ji” 樂記 (Book of music).
- 31 – Zhu Junshen 朱駿聲, *Shuowen Tongxun Ding Sheng: Buyi* 說文通訓定聲：補遺 (Pronunciation and definition of characters in the *Shuo Wen*: Addendum) (quoted in Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo Renxing Lun Shi: Xianqin Pian*, p. 254).
- 32 – *Analects* 2.3, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius* (translation modified).
- 33 – *Book of Decorum*, “Zi Yi” 緇衣.
- 34 – *Mencius* 4.1.20, in Mencius, *The Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1970) (translation modified).
- 35 – *Book of History*, “Da Gao” 大誥 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5:196).
- 36 – *Book of History*, “Shuo Ming” 說命下 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5:194).
- 37 – The meaning of the word *tian* 天 in early Chinese texts involves some very complicated questions. In certain periods the word indeed refers to a God that corresponds to the Christian Creator. But this is not the understanding of heaven by early Confucian thinkers. For a careful investigation of the concept of *tian* in early Chinese thinking, see Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Xianqin Zhengzhi Sixiang Shi* 先秦政治思想史 (History of political thought in pre-Qin China) (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe 東方出版社, 1996), pp. 21–49, and Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Xianqin Tian Dao Guan Zhi Jinzhan* 先秦天道觀之進展 (The development of the concept of the way of Heaven in pre-Qin China), in Qingtong Shidai 青銅時代 (The Bronze Age), vol. 1 of *Zhongguo Gudai Shehuixue Yanjiu* 中國古代社會研究 (Investigations of ancient Chinese society) (Shi Jia Zhuang 石家庄: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 2000), pp. 303–360.
- 38 – For example, 後漢書，朱雋傳：“舍格天之業，蹈匹夫之小諒，” and 隋書，高祖紀：“表格天之勳，章不伐之業，” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5:194). Also, one more example of the use of *ge* in connection with *tian* can be found in the “Jun Shi” chapter: 書，君奭：“我聞，在昔成湯既受命，時則有若伊尹，格于皇天，” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 5:194). The word *gan* is also used together with *ge* to express the sense of being affected. For example: 中庸：詩曰奏假無言。章句：“言進而感格於神明之際，” and 琵琶記，感格墳成：“孝心感格動陰兵” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 4:177).
- 39 – Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, *Guan Zhui Bian* 管錐編 (Collections of fragmentary insights), 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1986), vol. 3, p. 909.

- 40 – *Wen Zi* 文子, “*Dao Yuan*” 道原 (quoted in *Qian Zhongshu, Guan Zhui Bian* 3:909).
- 41 – *Book of Decorum*, “*Book of Music*.” A more literal translation would be “the knowing faculty (*zhi* 知—noun) knows (*zhi* 知—verb) when things come.”
- 42 – *Guan Zi* 管子, “*Xin Shu Shang*” 心術上 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 3:1698).
- 43 – *Mencius* 6.1.15 (from Legge; translation modified).
- 44 – I believe the character *zhong* 中 here should be translated as “heart.” The contemporary translation and interpretation of this character as “equilibrium,” which is based on Zhu Xi’s annotation, misses the original meaning of this key word in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. We can establish the true meaning through the following three steps:
- (1) In the traditional commentary of Zheng Xuan, the character *zhong* is indeed interpreted as “heart.” As Zheng Xuan interprets it, *zhong* (heart) is the “great origin” because “it contains affections such as happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy and is thus the site from which decorum arises” (中為大本者，以其含喜怒哀樂，禮之所由生).
- (2) The character *zhong*, as well as *nei* 內—which means literally what is internal or inside (cf. *Shuo Wen* 說文: “*Zhong* is the inner, what is internal” [中，內也] [quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 1:403])—is often used to refer to the human heart in ancient Chinese literature. See the following, for example: (a) *Book of Decorum*, “*Wen Wang Shi Zi*” 文王世子: “Decorum and music communicate in the heart (*zhong*)” (禮樂交錯於中). Note 註: “*Zhong* means in the heart” (中，心中也). (b) *Book of Poetry*: “*Guanju Xu*” 關雎序: “Emotions stir in the heart (*zhong*)” (情動於中). *Commentary* 疏: “*Zhong* refers to the heart that is the center” (中，謂中心). (c) *Book of History (Shi Ji 史記)*, “*Book of Music*” 樂書: “Emotions stir in the heart (*zhong*)” (情動於中). *Annotation* 正義: “*Zhong* is the same as the heart” (中，猶心也). (All of the preceding are quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 1:403.)
- (3) The understanding of the heart as the origin of the world is also echoed in the *Book of Changes (Yijing, Fu 易，復)*: “Isn’t it true that in the hexagram *Fu* (return), the heart of the world becomes visible?” (復，其見天地之心乎). Note 注: “*Fu* means to return to the origin. *The origin of the world is the heart*” (復者反本之謂也。天地之本為心者也) (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 3:1698). Cf. *Book of Decorum*, “*Li Yun*” 禮運: “Humans are the heart of heaven and earth” (人者，天地之心也). Regarding my translation of the character *ben* 本 as “origin,” see the *Book of History, “Book of Music*”: “The origin (*ben*) lies in the human heart that is affected by things” (其本在人心感於物也). *Annotation* 正義: “*Ben* is the same as the origin” (本，猶初也). And see *Guang Ya 廣雅*, “*Shi Gu Yi*” 釋詁一: “*Ben* means the beginning” (本，始也). (Both are quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 4:1596.)
- 45 – *Book of Decorum*, “*Doctrine of the Mean*.”

- 46 – *Analects* 8.8, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius* (translation modified).
- 47 – *Book of Decorum*, “Book of Music”: “樂也者，情之不變者也...樂統同。”
- 48 – *Han Fei Zi* 韓非子, “Jie Lao” 解老 (quoted in *Zhexue Da Cidian* 哲學大辭典 [Encyclopedic dictionary of philosophy], ed. Feng Qi 馮契 et al. [Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe 上海辭書出版社, 1992], p. 1408).
- 49 – *Han Fei Zi*, “Jie Lao”: “理者，成物之文也” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 6:455).
- 50 – *Han Fei Zi*, “Jie Lao” (quoted in *Zhexue Da Cidian*, p. 1408).
- 51 – For example, *Han Shu* 漢書 (History of the Han), “Wu Di Ji” 武帝紀 (Biography of Emperor Wu): “將軍已下廷尉，使理正之。” 注， “師古曰：理，法也。言以法律處正其罪，” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 6:455).
- 52 – For example, *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* 呂氏春秋, “Quan Xue” 勸學：“聖人之所在，則天下理焉” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 6:455); *Book of Decorum*, “Book of Music”: “四時和焉，星辰理焉，萬物育焉。”
- 53 – *Book of Decorum*, “Zhongni Yan Ju” 仲尼燕居. Cf. *Book of Decorum*, “Book of Music”: “禮也者，理之不可易者也” (Decorum is the principle that is unchangeable).
- 54 – *Mencius* 6.1.7 (from Legge; translation modified).
- 55 – *Mencius* 6.1.6 (from Legge; translation modified; cf. 2.1.6).
- 56 – Zhu Xi, *Zhu Zi Yulei* 朱子語類 (Collections of words), vol. 1 (quoted in *Zhexue Da Cidian*, p. 1408).
- 57 – Zhu Xi, *Da Huang Daofu* 答黃道夫 (An answer to Huang Daofu) (quoted in *Zhexue Da Cidian*, p. 1408).
- 58 – Notably, the word *zhi* has often been coupled with the word *dao* in the early Chinese classics. Some examples in the early Chinese texts in which the word *zhi* is used together with the word *dao*: (a) *Zhuang Zi* 莊子, “Qiu Shui” 秋水：“知道者必達於理”；(b) *Book of Decorum*, “Book of Learning”: “人不悞，不知道” (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 6:1194); (c) *Mencius* 6.1.6: “孔子曰：‘為此詩者，其知道乎。’”
- 59 – *Mencius* 7.1.1 (from Legge; translation modified).
- 60 – Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, p. 92.
- 61 – *Analects* 15.29, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius* (translation modified).
- 62 – *Analects* 15.39, in *ibid.* (translation modified).
- 63 – Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuo Wen* 說文 (quoted in *Zhongwen Da Cidian*, 2:833).
- 64 – *Book of Decorum*, “Doctrine of the Mean.”
- 65 – *Book of Decorum*, “Book of Music.”

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