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EMOTION, DESIRE, AND NUMISMATIC EXPERIENCE IN RENÉ DESCARTES, ZHU XI, AND WANG YANGMING

Zhu Xi writes, “To extend understanding, one must first cultivate understanding. . . . To cultivate understanding, there is only reduction of desires.”¹ Wang Yangming writes, “When this heartmind is free of the obscurations of selfish desire, it is none other than the natural patterning. Nothing external need be added.”² René Descartes writes, “Because these passions cannot lead us to perform any action except by means of the desire they produce, it is this desire which we should take particular care to control.”³ Three philosophers conclude their theorizing on emotions (and thoughts) with the notion that the first step to practical satisfactory action is to temper the role of desires *qua* emotion. Why in a discussion of emotion is

¹ From *Zhuzi Yulei*, as recorded in Chan, *Jin Si Lu*, p. 296. This and all translations from the Classical Chinese are mine.

² *Chuan Xi Lu*, I:3. A note on translation: I translate *xin* 心 as “heartmind”, *tian* 天 as “nature/natural”, and *li* 理 as “patterning.” Although it is fair to say that the Chinese concept of mind rests in the heart, rendering *xin* as “mind” immediately serves to obscure the holistic view that *xin* affords a Chinese psychology. Whereas in Western folk psychology, we reason with our minds and feel with our hearts, in Chinese folk psychology, the heart is the seat of both thought and emotion. Hence, the English “heartmind” is employed to convey this holistic philosophical anthropology. *Tian*, often translated as “Heaven” is in Chinese thought less than a pure abode of transcendent divinity and more than just the sky. In addition to being above, it grants, endows, and facilitates. It is, in a sense, the trigger of the natural processes, and for this reason, I choose “nature” or “natural” as the translation, since this, I believe, is its most significant philosophical sense. “Principle” is the most common translation of *li*, and is, in my opinion, inadequate. *Li* is a cosmological concept, it is dynamic and pervasive, as real as gravity or a genetic code. It is a constituting force, and as such, I render it “patterning,” choosing the gerund form to emphasize its dynamism.

³ Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, §437.

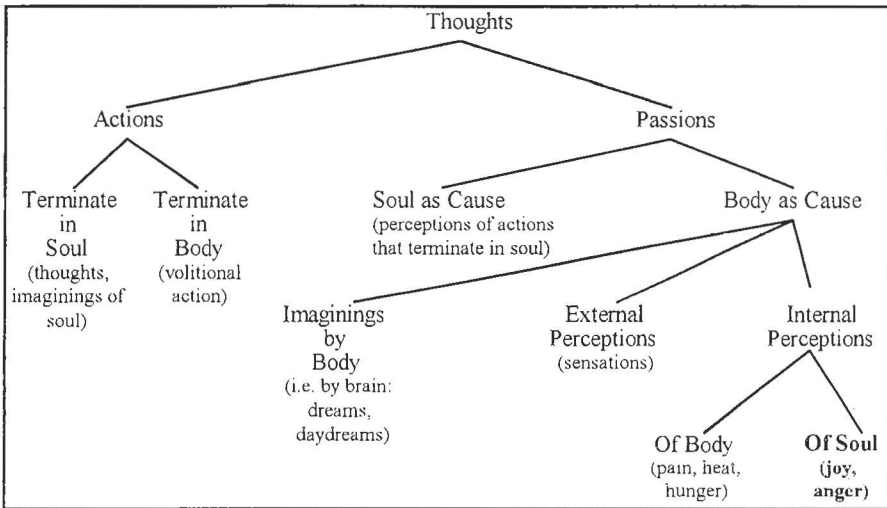
desire fingered as the culprit to be curbed or even eliminated? And are all desires targets for liquidation or just some particular desires? When Dai Zhen⁴ looks back on the developments of Neo-Confucianism up to his time, he suggests that an ongoing weakness had been the consistent focus on the elimination of desires in general (which he considered a natural and even necessary constituent of human life), rather than narrowing the target to the selfishness concomitant with desire. Nevertheless, in this paper, I shall explore the relationship between desire and emotion in Descartes, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming with the aim of demonstrating 1) that Zhu Xi, by keying on the detriments of selfishness, represents an improvement over the more sweeping Cartesian suggestion to control desires in general; and 2) that Wang Yangming, in turn, represents an improvement over Zhu Xi by providing a more sophisticated hermeneutic of the cosmology of desire. As a result, we will see that Dai Zhen was much closer to Zhu and Wang than he had thought.

Descartes

Descartes, Zhu, and Wang all conceive of emotion in relation to a broader physical world, which influences the human body in regard not only to emotions but to thoughts as well. The mental/material split that has come to characterize Descartes' philosophy, does not actually apply in this case, and this is why I include him here. For Descartes, emotions are a species of thought, which is separated into the two broad categories of actions and passions. This is where the split comes. Actions are those thoughts which both originate in the soul and which are therefore volitional. Such actions terminate in either the soul, itself, or in the body, where they trigger volitional movements. The passions, as the word suggests, are those thoughts that effect the soul, that the soul receives passively. They are caused by the body or the soul and are also called by Descartes perceptions, or modes of knowledge. Those caused by the soul are just those volitional thoughts and also imaginings of the soul. Those caused by the body are further divided into three categories: imaginings caused by the brain (such as dreams and bizarre daydreams), external perceptions (from objects of sensation as

⁴ Dai Zhen, *Mengzi Zi Yi Shu Zheng*, p. 182.

perceived through the five senses), and what we might term internal perceptions. The internal perceptions are again distinguished into those of the body (pain, heat, hunger, thirst) and those of the soul (joy, anger, etc.). This last group is the subject Descartes addresses in his seminal work, *Passions of the Soul*.



An aspect of Descartes' theory that is important to note at the outset is his notion that passions and actions are not two distinct things, and in saying this, two points are being made. First, passions and actions are not things in the sense of distinct entities that persist in time and space. Rather, they are series of processes that occur in the soul and body. Second, we differentiate these processes as passions or actions depending on our perspective. I would like to introduce a word for this notion. I propose that we call processes that lend themselves to multiple and seemingly divergent interpretations, *numismatic* processes, to express that, like a coin, they are two sides of the same thing. And, of course, going back to the first point, the "thing" is not, in fact, a

discrete entity, just as a coin persists as a coin only insofar as it possesses its two faces. Other numismatic terms are giving/getting, going/coming, and lending/borrowing. So it must be stressed that there are not two kinds of thoughts for Descartes. In a rather intricate description of human physiology,⁵ Descartes describes how passions of the soul are actually movements of the internal workings of the body. From this perspective, they are actions, and from the perspective that the soul is acted upon by them (i.e. perceives them), they are passions. The same goes for thoughts that originate in the soul - they are (volitional) actions from the perspective of the soul, and passions from the perspective of either the soul or body, depending on where they terminate.

Descartes does not dwell on this numismatic aspect, and when speaking of the 'passions of the soul', he is generally referring to those thoughts that are passions from the perspective of the soul and that originate in the body, i.e. what we normally call "emotions". There are several points to take note of in Descartes' theory: 1) of the emotions, only one has direct power over the soul or the body, 2) emotions interact with the soul via the interface of a gland⁶, 3) emotions are by and large useful, 4) the soul is able to get a vantage point from which to view emotions only via the pineal gland, and 5) desire is an emotion.

From these points, we see that an essential component of Descartes' theory is the role of the pineal gland. This gland is the interface between the body and the soul. It can be acted upon by both the soul and body, which in both cases can result in signals being sent out to the body, resulting in movement. Some sensations, for instance, bypass the soul altogether, and are relayed automatically by the pineal gland to other parts of the body (including the brain). Some sensations, however, as "ordained by nature",⁷ are relayed to the brain, where they "make the soul feel"⁸ a particular emotion. Any emotion, however, is powerless to have a direct affect on the volition of the soul, which always remain free.

⁵ Descartes' physiology is, of course, outdated, but with imagination it could be made to map on to current notions quite well.

⁶ Identified by the translator as the pineal gland, a convention I will adopt, although Descartes refers to it only as the "little gland in the middle of the brain".

⁷ *Passions of the Soul*, §357.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The importance of the pineal gland can be seen in two ways. The most obvious is in its automaticity, its ability to instigate complex commands after being stimulated in a certain way. For instance, suppose the soul were to think to raise a hand. That thought would go to the pineal gland, which would then, because of preestablished associations stemming from the soul, send out the various signals that entail hand-raising. If it weren't for this automaticity, every motion of the body would have to be directed by volition. The second aspect of the importance of the pineal gland is its function of reflecting, of turning actions into passions. Although Descartes does not draw out this inference, it follows from his theorizing that lacking a pineal gland, the actions of the soul would never be accessible to the soul for review. In this sense, the pineal gland acts as a sort of numismatic mirror, revealing the flip side of the coin of the soul's actions.

When the pineal gland transforms sensations into emotions and passes them on to the soul, they create in the soul another emotion—desire. For this reason, desire is unique among the emotions. It is the only emotion that has an effect on the soul. As Descartes describes it, “The function of all the passions consists solely in this, that they dispose our soul to want the things which nature deems useful for us, and to persist in this volition.”⁹ So although desire is enumerated and described as an emotion, it is also a disposition of the soul and appears to interfere with the pure rational volition of the soul, in fact, overpowering it on occasion.

Since the emotions can effect the soul only via desire, Descartes concludes that if one wishes to maintain complete rational control of oneself, one must control the desires.¹⁰ He does not, however, suggest how this is to be done. This apparently trivial task receives no further elucidation. Still, we must pose a question. Descartes characterizes the passions as good and as useful with respect to the body, so one must wonder how it is that they could be in opposition to the soul. Descartes tells us that because the passions are good, “we have nothing to fear but their misuse or their excess.”¹¹ So although he is very explicit about desires born of emotion being necessarily in

⁹ *Ibid.*, §372.

¹⁰ One other way that he mentions is the cultivation of habit, which would rearrange the preordained connections stemming from the pineal gland.

¹¹ *Ibid.* §487.

opposition to the soul, it is apparently only by dint of their misuse or excess. Excess is characteristic of the emotions, he says, because as certain sensations pass through the body, they get amplified by the heart. This appears to simply be a glitch in human physiology. To counteract such a glitch, one must improve the constitution of the soul so that it can overcome the emotions. And this is probably to be accomplished through the formation of new habits. Yet it is odd that such a glitch in the body exists, since “nothing can possibly happen other than as Providence has determined from all eternity.”¹² Providence, of course, creating only that which is good.

In regard to misuse, Descartes suggests that it is only due to our knowledge of good and evil that we are able to respond appropriately to desires: “When desire proceeds from true knowledge, it cannot be bad.”¹³ The question, then, is how we come to acquire true knowledge. From Descartes’ other writings, we may know what the answer will be, but it is not made explicit in this work, except for a tantalizing passage that goes as follows:

If anyone lives in such a way that his conscience cannot reproach him for ever failing to do something he judges to be the best, he will receive from this a satisfaction which has such power to make him happy that the most violent assaults of the passions will never have sufficient power to disturb the tranquillity of his soul.

We will merely take note of this mention of the conscience and pass on to satisfaction, our final point in regard to Descartes’ theory. At the end of Part II, Descartes unexpectedly introduces the notion of “internal emotions.” Unfortunately, he gives only a cursory description of them, one that fails to place them firmly in the schema he offers at the beginning of his work.¹⁴ He says that they are “produced in the soul only by the soul itself,”¹⁵ which

¹² *Ibid.* §438.

¹³ *Ibid.* §434.

¹⁴ Early on, in section 350, he introduces the word “emotion” and suggests that it is a better word for the passions because it better describes all the changes which occur in the soul, in that they agitate and disturb it like nothing else.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §440.

would mark them as actions, not as passions. This appears to be why he calls them explicitly “emotions”. It is not clear, however, how these emotions arise. Although they violate two of Descartes’ earlier propositions (namely, that all actions of the soul are volitional and that all emotions give rise to desires), the function they serve is to provide a route to ‘pure’ happiness, unencumbered by the possibility of misuse, excess, or desires.

Zhu Xi

Several centuries earlier and a world away, Zhu Xi gathered together the ideas of his Neo-Confucian predecessors in an effort to synthesize their ideas into a coherent philosophy. The resultant *Jin Si Lu*, gives a sophisticated cosmological account of human emotion as inherently and organismically associated with the larger world. There is no soul in the Zhuian conception of the universe, and this will solve certain problems that plague Descartes but create others.

In Descartes, a human without a soul would be stripped of both volition and rationality, reverting to the autonomic state of animals. In addition, because the soul is the perceiver, signals transmitted throughout the body would never have the chance to be converted into passions by the pineal gland for audience with the soul. Of course, the unique emotion of desire could also never arise to influence behaviour. In other words, for Descartes, emotions are a peculiarly human characteristic, dependent on the existence of a soul. Since the Neo-Confucians do not posit the existence of a soul, the emotions must be accounted for in another way.

Although Descartes groups emotion under the category of thought, he maintains a strict separation between rationality and emotion, which influenced later Western theorists, notably psychologists, to draw a clear distinction between thought as rational and emotion as irrational. The Neo-Confucians drew no such distinction. Both thought and emotion are grouped together as belonging to what we might call the *category of activation*, as distinguished from the *category of quiescence*.¹⁶ We may get a clearer idea

¹⁶ The categories of activation and quiescence correspond to the categories of substance and function as promulgated by Wang Bi but with the caveat that Wang Bi’s ultimate subordination of function to substance is repudiated.

of Zhu Xi's position¹⁷ on these points by considering several passages in the *Jin Si Lu*.

In *Jin Si Lu* 4:53, "Su Jiming asked whether one could pursue equilibrium (*zhong* 中) before happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment activate."¹⁸

Reply: No. If you think about pursuing it before happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment activate, it is still thought, and with thought, there is activation. (Thought is the same as happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment.)¹⁹ With activation, we can only refer to harmony (*he* 和), not to equilibrium.

We see immediately that thought and emotion belong to the single category of activation. Within this category, there is also harmony, which is posited in contrast to equilibrium. "Equilibrium", according to 1:3, is how we describe happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment before they activate. Equilibrium is postulated as the ideal stance for a person, and although it is not achievable at the level of activation, harmony acts as a functional equivalent by describing the state in which thoughts and emotions are modulated (*zhongjie* 中節).²⁰ Hence, harmony, though not a large part of the theoretical discussion of the *Jin Si Lu*, is Zhu's ultimate goal of self-cultivation. As stated in 4:53, "Cultivation over time will lead to a natural modulation of happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment upon their activation."²¹ How different this is from Descartes' statement, "The chief use

¹⁷ The *Jin Si Lu* is an anthology that in its original edition includes no commentary by Zhu Xi himself, but as it was he who arranged the selections and later explicated them, when I refer to passages in the *Jin Si Lu*, I shall cite them as Zhu Xi's own ideas, recognizing that they did not originate with him.

¹⁸ The term *fa* 發 is often translated in terms of "issuing forth" or "arousal". The choice is often made depending on whether the usage in a particular passage appears to be active, passive, transitive, or intransitive. I choose the word "activate" since in its intransitive (admittedly rare in English) use it means "to become active" and because it can also cover the other three instances.

¹⁹ This parenthetical sentence is a note on the passage in the document in which it originated.

²⁰ 1:3: "發而皆中節謂之和。"

²¹ Descartes, *ibid.*, §487.

of wisdom lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions,” will depend on how cultivation and modulation fit in to Zhu Xi’s framework.

The notion of equilibrium may lead the Western reader to associate it with the Classical European notion of proportion and its concomitant notions of ratio, reason, and *sophrosyne*. Such an association can only be taken so far, for whereas the Greeks took their analogies from geometry and developed the notion of reason as a provider of balance, to the point that Aristotle’s notion of *sophrosyne* meant overt control of appetites and desires, the Chinese analogy arises from the ecological equilibrium of nature. “Equilibrium” for Zhu, means a natural state of balance, prior to any kind of interaction, like a scale that is originally centred before anything is placed on it. “Harmony” would describe the achieved state after something were placed on one side of the scale, and something of the same weight placed on the other side. From this perspective, the states of equilibrium and harmony are effectively equivalent.

The significance of the pervasive ecological analogy in the history of Chinese thought arises in the notion of arousal and response (*gan ying* 感應) particularly the notion of arousal. In fact, more than just an analogy, arousal and response is a cosmological notion that spans all levels of ecological organization. In the commentary to 1:12 of the *Jin Si Lu*, we find:

...asked about arousal and response... Zhuzi²² said: Everything in nature is of the patterning of arousal and response, creative transformation and human affairs included. Take rain and shine for instance. Rain is not just a matter of rain, but arouses shine to come out. Shine is not just a matter of shine, but is the seat of response and arouses rain to come out. With arousal, there is inevitably response, and response in turn constitutes arousal. Winter and summer, day and night are all of this patterning.

Although they may appear at first glance to map on to our ideas of cause and effect, the Neo-Confucian notions of arousal and response are actually quite different. “Arousal” is a numismatic term that means both “to arouse” and “to feel.” Because in Western languages we say that A *causes* B, it took a skeptic the stature of Hume to demonstrate the lack of necessity in causation. For the Neo-Confucians (and Chinese thinkers, in general) this

²² Zhu Xi.

was never a problem, because although there is a certain necessity to arousal and response, it is a very general one: A arouses, B feels, and then B responds. The only necessity is that when A happens, x will happen, but what x is depends on a much wider context, revealing that what appears to be a single interaction is actually just one of numerous interactions within numerous ongoing processes, each affecting the others. Harmony, then, is the ability to manage and maintain the processes that allow for complex interactions, just as all the processes of nature manage to maintain a balance. When extended to the realm of human emotions, this ecological image still pertains, and the heartmind²³ is viewed as the organ responsible for creating and maintaining the harmony of thoughts and emotions. One must not, however, presume a discontinuity between human and nature on the basis of the heartmind. Nature manages to handle the myriad complex processes without volitional, rational intervention, and humans should be able to do the same. The heartmind of humans, rather than being analogous to Descartes' soul, has its analog in the "heartmind of nature"^{24, 25}.

"Patterning"²⁶ in the above quotation is a translation of the Chinese *li* 理. Patterning belongs to the category of quiescence and undergirds all things in nature. It is because patterning extends across macrocosmic and microcosmic, or personal and cosmological, boundaries that arousal and response, as philosophical notions, can also span these levels. Through simple observation, we see that the optimal state of nature is one of motion but with an intrinsic balance, such that events occur at appropriate times and extremes end in reversals. In a comment on 1:3, Zhu Xi says:

²³ "Heartmind" is a translation of *xin* 心, which denotes the organ of the heart but is also viewed as the seat of thought and emotion.

²⁴ When translating the terms 天 *tian* and 天地 *tianti*, I choose to emphasize their organismic relationship to the processes of nature by rendering them in terms of "nature" and "natural" rather than in the conventional terms of "Heaven" or "Heaven and earth", which retain undesirable theistic connotations.

²⁵ *Jin Si Lu*. 2:10.

²⁶ The use of the gerund form in translating *li* 理 may seem unusual since *li* is not often used as a verb. However, the gerund form helps us remember that whereas in English we must arbitrarily give it number by rendering it "pattern" or "patterns" and thereby render it a static notion, it is very much dynamic in the Chinese sense even though it belongs in the category of quiescence. The gerund form conveys this sense of dynamism.

Before happiness, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment activate, there is no leaning; this is called equilibrium. “Equilibrium” refers to one’s nature²⁷ (*xing* 性); “Stillness without motion” speaks to its substructure²⁸ (*ti* 體). The great root –it is everywhere, the patterning of all things– nothing does not come from it. . . . The activating of emotion without perversity is called harmony. Harmony is associated with emotion (*qing* 情). “Communication”²⁹ (*tong* 通) upon arousal” speaks of this. The “connecting path” refers to a natural flowing, from which the patternings come forth, nothing not communicating with it.

Here we see the clear differentiation of the two categories of activation and quiescence. The level of quiescence is a subtle level of inchoate patterning, a substructure, that is expressed in humans as human nature. The level of quiescence is without overt movement and so is naturally in a state of equilibrium. Overt movement occurs on the level of activation, the level of emotion, connection, and harmony. Where Descartes is faced with the question of why emotions are so disruptive in a world created by a perfect God, Zhu Xi is faced with the question of why harmony does not occur as spontaneously in humans as it does in nature.

Since the Neo-Confucians follow Mencius so closely, the culprit would again appear at first glance to be desire, which Mencius repeatedly advised people to reduce. In the *Jin Si Lu*, we find the following instances:

There is one key [to learning how to be a sage] and that is having no desires. (4:1)

²⁷ Which means one’s natural dispositions, as opposed to an Aristotelian, predetermined teleological, notion of human nature.

²⁸ This word is commonly translated “substance”, but in no way is it similar to Aristotelian notions of substance.

²⁹ I employ the word “communication” as a translation of *tong* 通, not in the sense of symbolic transmission, but in the sense of connection. The Chinese also connotes understanding achieved through such communication.

Brian Bruya

In cultivating one's understanding, nothing surpasses the two words, "reduce desires". (4:60)

Mencius said, "In cultivating the heartmind, nothing is better than reducing desires." I say that when it comes to cultivating the heartmind, one shouldn't stop at merely reducing, but should reduce until there are none. (5:2)

Ren is difficult to maintain for long. Everyone loses what they are fond of, for everyone has a heartmind of profit and desire, which are contrary to their learning. Therefore, students must reduce desires. (5:39)

Except for occasional side remarks, such as to say that anger is one of the more recalcitrant emotions, the Neo-Confucians never attempt to catalogue and discretely describe each emotion, as Descartes and other Modern Western philosophers were inclined to do. Since Zhu Xi finds the emotions essential to a fully functioning person but favours the reduction or elimination of desires, one would suspect that desire is not considered an emotion. But in passage 2:3, desire is explicitly listed as one of the "seven emotions." So now the real question arises: is it really all desires that Zhu Xi favours eliminating, or just some particular desires?

When we look harder at the real disruption in the Zhuian picture, although we find passages suggesting that desires can cause confusion, something much bigger is happening. When Descartes adopts the notion that the soul is what distinguishes humans from animals, he confers the advantages of rationality and everlasting life on all humans. What is it in the Neo-Confucian framework that distinguishes humans from animals, if even nature has a heartmind? Rather than an advantage, humans in Zhu's world seem to be burdened with desires, or rather, *selfish* desires. Let's be clear now that most times when the word "desire" is used in the *Jin Si Lu*, it is coupled with the word "selfish (*si* 私)," and it is this word that seems to uniquely characterize the human condition.³⁰

³⁰ The Neo-Confucians would probably object to such a statement, claiming instead that that *virtues* are what distinguishes humans from animals, but as I will demonstrate, it is only because we are selfish that we need to consider the wider world. For now, consider 2:52, which says,

In the West, we have the traditional conundrum that if everything is created by God, and God is perfectly good, then where does evil come from? The answer since the time of Augustine was that it originated in human free will. If Zhu takes nature as his model for human action, and if nature has no free will, per se, then there appears to be no room for evil. It is true that human conniving often plays a part, but this turns out to be secondary to the narrowness that humans are capable of. Animals, in Chinese intellectual history, are considered components of the larger natural processes. Humans, in addition to being components for the larger natural processes, are also individual foci of the natural process involved in the complex sub-realm of human interactions. In other words, every human being has the capacity to be a guiding force in his or her own microcosm. This is the analog to the European notion of free will, but, to my knowledge, it is merely implicit in Chinese cosmological speculations. What is explicit is the notion that humans have the unfortunate capacity to be selfish.

Throughout the *Jin Si Lu*, the reader is warned against having selfish desires (*si yu* 私欲), selfish intentions (*si yi* 私意), and selfishness (*zisi* 自私). The Chinese word *si* 私 means, in its most fundamental sense, “partial”; hence, *zisi* 自私 means “partial to oneself.” The opposite of *si* is *gong* 公, “impartial.” Passage 2:4 of *Jin Si Lu* offers this idea most explicitly: “In regard to a gentleman’s learning, there is nothing like broadness and impartiality (*gong*), like responding smoothly to things as they come.” The goal of the sage is to expand away from the narrowness of the self into the broader processes of nature. Passage 1:27 says:

With impartiality (*gong*), there is unity; with partiality (*si*), there are ten thousand differences. “People’s heartminds are as different from each other as their faces,”³¹ and this is due to heartminds that are partial.

The idea here is not that there should not be multiplicity in general, but that there should not be multiplicity in moral values. These are to be found in the patternings of nature.

If human beings are the moving force in their own microcosms, then the question arises as to how to best emulate the balance of nature, how to bring

³¹ From the *Zuo Zhuan*, 31st year of Duke Xiang.

about harmony in the human realm, since it does not seem to occur as spontaneously as it does in the broader natural processes. “Communication upon arousal” appears to play a significant role.

Arousal in the human being is the activation of emotions and thoughts, and “communication” refers to the heartmind’s ability to grasp the paterings of arousal and response across levels of motion. Passage 2:10 says this well:

“Arousal” refers to the heartmind. The paths of arousal communicate with everything. Selfish attachments hinder arousal . . . the sage is aroused by the heartmind of heaven and earth.

There is a “natural flowing” that occurs when the human heartmind comes into contact with the external world. The pathways of arousal give rise to activation of feelings and thoughts, which when properly modulated, result in harmonious living. Selfish attachments, which result from a narrow perspective, can be eliminated, not through suppression or brute self-control, but through “expanding the heartmind” (2:24), as noted above. Impartiality is arrived at through expanding one’s perspective away from oneself to apprehend the patterning of all things. This is the ideal sense of learning in the *Jin Si Lu*.

Such observation, however, must not be confused with the collection of data. It is true that passage 3:14, and others, mention the desirability of extrapolation from particulars to kinds, but it must be emphasized that this is not intended to be taken in a discrete sense of universal principles or laws. The student of the *Jin Si Lu* is exhorted to observe widely and to think profoundly, but the language used is one of blockage and opening. The term “communication” again comes into play. Whether one is studying a classic text or observing society’s affairs, there are always obstacles to the communication that leads to understanding. When this occurs, there is the need for contemplation (*si* 思). Thought or study in this sense is both undirected (2:74) and ineffable (3:22). The goal is not to formulate a new principle for action, but to gain a general, intuitive understanding, not unlike the Buddhist notion of enlightenment. At many points, the text says that with contemplation, you will apprehend (*zi de* 自得) (e.g. 3:7), and the term “enlightenment” (*wu* 悟) is even used in 3:17.

For Zhu Xi, a person's nature (*xing* 性) and emotions (*qing* 情) are set in opposition to each other—the nature in the category of quiescence, the emotions in the category of activation. The nature, as the microcosmic expression of natural patterning is the ideal guide for human action, and it is the job of the heartmind to access natural patterning in all forms in order to better direct the emotions (and thoughts) of daily life. However, it is inherent to the human as microcosm that one is partial to oneself. For instance, 5:22 says, “In general, it is because people have bodies that there is the patterning of selfishness (*zisi*).” Zhu Xi's comments on this passage are worth quoting in full:

Someone asked: Why is this natural patterning?
Zhuzi replied: The body has a natural awareness of its own hunger, satiety, toil, and leisure but not that of others. The body has a natural awareness of its own happiness, fear, fondness, and hatred, but not that of others. It is only because of this that there is the statement, “In general, it is because people have bodies that there is the patterning of selfishness (*zisi*).” Because of this, a gentleman must exert his entire heartmind and extrapolate to all things. This will bring one's heartmind closer to impartiality and to apprehending patterning—and also to accordance with the Dao.

Because one's knowledge is limited to oneself, it is essential that one observe broadly to understand the patternings everywhere. When this occurs, one will achieve a level of intuitive understanding that will allow for spontaneous action involving both emotions and thoughts, but not emotions and thoughts that require the purposeful deliberations of a narrow heartmind.

If one stays in one's own solipsistic world, one will fall victim to the vagaries of emotions and be guided only by purposeful cunning meant to fulfil narrow desires. The intuition achieved through expanding outward reveals that it is not emotions, nor thoughts, nor even desires that are at fault, just the narrowness of our perspective. Zhu Xi comments on the notion of reducing desires in 5:2:

Brian Bruya

This “reducing desires” refers to selfish desires. If it were the desire to eat when hungry or to drink when thirsty, how could one go without those?

Because “the human heartmind cannot avoid interacting with and being aroused by the things of the world” (4:48), what is important is to become one with the world through broad communication with the world. According to 2:4:

The constancy of nature is that it spreads its heartmind across all things and so is heartmindless. The constancy of the sage is that his emotions flow smoothly with all affairs and so is emotionless.

The notion of being heartmindless or emotionless, is not to say that one should be entirely without thoughts or emotions but that one’s thoughts and emotions should always arise in appropriate accord with circumstances. For instance, later in the same passage, we find:

A sage’s happiness and anger are not linked to the heartmind, but to things. . . . Compare joy and anger that arise from selfishness and deliberate cunning with the correctness of the joy and anger of the sage.

And in 2:76:

Someone spoke of being heartmindless. Cheng Yi responded, “Not heartmindless. He should have spoken of being without a partial heartmind.”

If we dispense with the notion of a Cartesian soul, do we find a satisfactory model of emotions and desire in Zhu Xi? If we consider nature as a Cartesian mechanist universe, then it would be convenient to posit a soul to account for rationality and free will. In the Neo-Confucian conception of nature, however, we do not find a strictly mechanistic universe. Instead, we find a world of arousal and response that functions to produce a naturally balanced system based on a kind of inchoate patterning. Actually, it is not exactly clear whether the patterning determines the unfolding of natural processes, or whether the processes produce the patterning. Statements such as the following would seem to favour the former: “That which is in things is

patterning. That which is used to deal with things is appropriateness (*yi* 義)” (1:15). And in 2:61, we see: “To smoothly act in accord with *li* is appropriateness.” The reader who is nervous about slipping into a de facto determinism must remember that strict determinism is never posited as a feature of the Chinese cosmology. To confirm this, we need look only as far as the term that we most commonly translate as “nature”, namely, *ziran* 自然, which connotes a very strong sense of spontaneity. We look at the notion of following some kind of patterning and fear the abdication of free will, but consider how we drive down a freeway. Although we are implicitly free to stop suddenly or turn around and go the other direction, we know from the way freeways operate that the most appropriate thing for us to do is follow the “patterning” of the freeway.

Still, we come away from Zhu Xi’s conceptions of emotion and desire with three unresolved issues. First, from an epistemological perspective, is it really possible for a person to comprehend the patternings of nature and thereby execute appropriate behaviour? In other words, is there an exploitable link between the patternings of nature and human behaviour? I will leave speculation on this point up to the reader, for it is beyond the scope of this paper. Second, if “human nature is none other than patterning,”³² then, when we seek to follow the patterning of the wider world in order to overcome selfishness, why can we not simply delve into our own inherent nature? Why not overcome our own partiality by tapping into the patterning that is within us? In fact, this is a remedy that Zhu Xi does advocate, though not as a complete remedy, and it gives rise to the third unresolved issue, which has to do with introspection, as follows.

The *Jin Si Lu* takes pains to distinguish itself from Buddhism and Daoism. The realm of quiescence, for instance, is not to be taken as a reversion to the emptiness or nothingness of Buddhism and Daoism, respectively. The Buddhist and Daoist retreat from the world is viewed as unrealistic in the *Jin Si Lu*, for “the human heartmind cannot avoid interacting with and being aroused by the things of the world” (4:48). What the practitioner must do instead, and what allows for profound thinking, is be

³² 1:38.

mindful³³. In 4:53, we see clearly the distinction from emptiness and the need for mindfulness:

Someone said: Sir, what word would you use for the time before happiness, anger, sorrow and enjoyment activate—"motion" or "quiescence"?

Reply: Calling it quiescence would be fine. But there must be incipient things within quiescence, and this is the hard part. It is best that the student comprehend mindfully (*jing* 敬). If he can be mindful, he will understand this.

There is no true emptiness, for there is always incipience, and mindful contemplation is the way to grasp all things, whether incipient or manifest. Mindfulness is a kind of reverential attention that is described further on in the passage as focusing on one thing at a time. According to Zhu Xi, in notes on this passage, it can even be cultivated through Zen style meditation. Concentration on one thing, however, is not enough. The point of mindfulness is not mindfulness itself, but understanding, and through understanding, appropriate action.

Mindfulness allows the heartmind to focus on the flowing process of harmonizing arousals and activations. As stated above, this is not accomplished through application of extrapolated principles, but through a general understanding obtained through particular understandings which rest on the heartmind's ability to focus on one thing at a time until obstacles to understanding each thing are penetrated (通 *tong*). Patternings are thus illuminated, and appropriate actions are automatically associated with the patternings. The end-goal of self-cultivation, then, is appropriate (harmonious) action, just as nature acts appropriately in all of its patternings of transformation. The word *yi* 義, denotes appropriate action in light of corresponding patternings.

³³ Although "mindfulness" is an unusual rendering of *jing* 敬 and may unintentionally lead the reader to consider it as the Buddhist (*nian* 念), it is used in an unusual sense here. It appears from usage in the *Jin Si Lu* that the two Chinese terms are effectively equivalent, that, in other words, the *Jin Si Lu*, in seeking an appropriate Confucian term for the notion of mindfulness, hit on *jing*, which appears in earlier Confucian texts in a related sense.

In 2:60, mindfulness is stated in terms of an accumulation of *yi*, and throughout the text, *yi* is associated with patterning in the term *yili* 義理, “appropriateness according to patterning.” *Yi* relates to the particular manifestation of general patterning, and so by “accumulating *yi*”, one can come to recognize larger patterning. The learning of the practitioner, then, entails nothing more than executing daily affairs (including study of texts) mindfully (2:77, 2:104).

As stated above, mindfulness means the observation of all things large or small, and includes one’s own thoughts and emotions, the purpose being that the heartmind, acting appropriately to patterning, can direct thoughts, emotions, and actions in a harmonious way. The issue of introspection that arises, as it does in Buddhism, is how the heartmind, as watcher is able to watch itself, and how the heartmind can direct itself to do this and that. The issue is made explicit in passage 4:55:

The human heartmind needs to be settled and should think only when directed to do so. Today, people all proceed directly from their heartmind.

Someone said: Who directs the heartmind?
To use the heartmind to direct the heartmind is fine enough. To let the human heartmind proceed from itself is to throw it away.

Zhu comments:

Someone asked: Is it not a defect to say that one should use the heartmind to direct the heartmind?
Zhuzi replied: No. It means simply that this heartmind has a master.

Like a Westerner hesitant to abdicate free will to determinism, Zhu Xi is fearful of abdicating mastery of the heartmind to wanton thoughts that arise spontaneously from moment to moment due to obscurations arising from selfishness. Although passage 5:27 advocates that a sage’s mind be like a bright mirror, that “when a good thing comes, it reflects it as good, and when a bad thing comes, it reflects it as bad,” the mirror metaphor is qualified in passage 4:48:

Suppose there is a bright mirror here. It will inevitably reflect the things of the world, as a mirror would normally do. It would be a hardship to direct it not to reflect. The human heartmind cannot avoid interacting with and being aroused by the things of the world. It would be a hardship to direct it not to think. If one wishes to avoid this, the only way is for the heartmind to have a master. What kind of master? There is only mindfulness.

But if mindfulness is the master of the heartmind, what is the master of mindfulness?

I suggested early on in this section that Zhu Xi posits the heartmind as something that straddles the categories of quiescence and activation. Ye Cai, a later commentator, in his commentary on passage 4:55, proposes a numismatic solution to this conundrum. He says that in regard to the heartmind directing the heartmind, one heartmind is the substructural heartmind (of the category of quiescence) and the other is the functional heartmind (of the category of activation). In formulating this comment, he must have been referring to Zhu Xi's comment on passage 1:50, in which Zhu says that human nature (*xing*) is substructural and emotion (*qing*) is functional. Zhu quotes Cheng Yi as saying that the heartmind is one and can be referred to as both substructural and functional. Passage 1:50, itself, states that the heartmind unifies human nature and emotion. But which side of this unified heartmind is the master? Since that which is being directed is that which belongs to the realm of activation, it must be emotion (*qing*) that is directed by human nature (*xing*). This is a fascinating solution, because it would allow the heartmind direct access to the patternings of nature (through human nature (*xing*), the microcosmic manifestation of patterning), without introducing a notion of overt voluntarism that would take us back to the *reductio* of who is watching the watcher? However, the solution to issue number three merely redirects us to issue number two: if human nature is none other than patterning, then, when we seek to follow the patterning of the wider world in order to overcome selfishness, why can we not simply delve into our own inherent nature (*xing*)? What need is there for observation and reflection?

Wang Yangming

Three centuries after Zhu Xi, and about a century before Descartes, Wang Yangming asked this same question. In short, his answer was that rather than equate human nature with patterning, we should equate the heartmind with patterning.

Although Wang Yangming appears in many places to implicitly adopt Zhu Xi's complex cosmology, simultaneously Wang also appears to support a certain kind of subjective idealism that obviates the need for the interactions of a cosmological system. In passage 336³⁴ of *Chuan Xi Lu*, Wang's student asks how it is that what appear to be separate objects are not, in fact, separate, and Wang faults him for looking at it from the limited perspective of arousal and response. All things, Wang says, are of the same substructure by dint of the fact that all things, even heaven and earth, are subordinate to human sentience. In this and other passages throughout the *Chuan Xi Lu*, Wang shows that his version of subjective idealism is unique from those of the Indian or British varieties. Here in 336, when he says such things as, "When nature, spirits, ghosts, and the myriad things are separate from my sentience, they do not exist," we may be tempted to follow him down a Berkeleyan path, but it is important to note remaining lines of the passage which state, "if my sentience is separated from nature, spirits, ghosts, and the myriad things, then it also does not exist." Wang explains by saying, "And in this way, it is one *qi* flowing and communicating. How can there be a separation?" Wang is thus actually bringing us back out of subjective idealism to a position of interrelationality and interdependence of all things, but one in which there appears to be an as yet unsatisfactory monism.

Wang's strategy, as revealed here and elsewhere, is of utmost importance to understanding his philosophy. In the beginning of 336, he faults his student for viewing the situation from the cosmological view of arousal and response, and yet at the end of the passage, Wang brings us right back to this view by positing the flowing and communicating of *qi*. The internal contradiction is intentional.³⁵ It turns out that Wang is less of a subjective idealist and more

³⁴ 337 in Chan's English version.

³⁵ In Chan's English version, he misses this. Instead of allowing for the contradiction, he changes the plain meaning of the sentence in which Wang faults the student to say not that he is "just" doing something to say that he *should* just do something.

of what we might call an ontological perspectivist. We discover that what appear to be contradictions are merely different perspectives that offer contrasting views. This method is made explicit in passage 315, in which Wang Ji and Qian Dehong approach Wang to ask which of their contrasting views is correct. He replies that they are both correct but that each is applicable when teaching different kinds of people. Which perspective one takes is a matter of pragmatic choice.

What we must take away from these points is that Wang's cosmology—now embracing the standard Neo-Confucian theories, now repudiating them—is designed to prevent one from becoming attached to the thought of the subject of cosmology itself. If we were to catalog, for instance, all of the times that Wang makes a claim as to what the substructure of the mind is, we would find a dizzying array of items that spans that Zhuian cosmology: human nature (*xing*), sincerity, knowledge, achieved goodness, the mind of the Dao, settling of the mind, etc. How can all of these simultaneously be the substructure of the mind—unless they are all identical, which would bring Wang to a radical monism. He does make such statements as all things are one, but I would caution the reader against interpreting Wang as taking monism to be his underlying metaphysics, even though his theories may by logical analysis inevitably reduce to it. Instead, we must remember the historical milieu in which Wang was positing his theories.

By Wang's time, Zhu Xi's promulgation of the method of investigating external things had come to be the standard view of proper moral self-cultivation, and regardless of what Zhu may or may not have intended by this, the popular view during Wang's time was that things were necessarily outside the mind and that investigating them necessarily entailed paying attention to external things. Wang saw this as a misplaced emphasis and hope to restore balance by taking the extreme position of radical internalism—everything is inside the heartmind. As usual, however, we must be careful not to follow Wang too blithely down this path, for we may end up pursuing inevitable inferences that his perspectivism does not warrant. For instance, the leap to subjective idealism is premature. When Wang explains what he means by every *thing* being in the mind, it turns out that he means much more than simple psychological idealism.

When Alfred North Whitehead and John Dewey began unraveling the dualisms of received Western philosophy, they proposed what I will now call

a numismatic view of experience which pertains to the question at hand. Dewey, in commenting on Whitehead's views says the following:

There are revolutionary consequences for the theory of experience and of knowledge involved in [Whitehead's] view of the subject-object relation.

I select, as illustration of these consequences, the relation of his philosophy to the idealism-realism problem. Simplifying the matter, idealism results when the subject-object relation is confined to knowledge and the subject is given primacy. Realism results when the object is given primacy. But if every actual occasion is 'bipolar' (to use Whitehead's own expression) the case stands otherwise. The terms 'real' and 'ideal' can be used only in abstraction from the actual totalities that exist. When we talk about the physical and the psychical as if there were objects which are exclusively one or the other, we are, if we only know what we are about, following, and in an overspecialised way, the historic routes by which a succession of actual occasions become enduring objects of specified kinds.³⁶

This bipolarity of experience is just what Wang hints at when he consistently cautions his interlocutors to refrain from entertaining single perspectives. I would suggest that instead of the "perspectivism" of Wang mentioned above or the "bipolarity" of Whitehead, that we describe this deceptive aspect of experience in terms of its being numismatic. When we speak of perspective, as in looking at a single building from different perspectives, it is still clear that there is only one building and that the change in perspective makes it appear different. In regard to bipolarity, poles, while lying at two ends of the same continuum, show themselves vividly as continuous with each other; for example in a long magnet. The coin image called up by the term "numismatic," however, emphasizes the illusion of there being two discrete objects that are revealed to be one only when our experiencing of the object shifts in some significant way. For this reason, I

³⁶ John Dewey, "Whitehead's Philosophy" (1937), in Hickman 1998, pp. 417-18.

propose that the term “numismatic” best describes Whitehead’s and Dewey’s notion of experience.³⁷

In 1:6 of the *Chuan Xi Lu*, we find the following:

Ai said: . . . Yesterday when I was thinking, I realized the “things” of “investigating things” is none other than “affairs”, that all things can be viewed from the perspective of the heartmind.

[Wang] replied: Yes. The master of the body is the heartmind. What the heartmind activates is intention (*yi* 意). The underlying substructure of intention is understanding (*zhi* 知). That in which intention is placed is a thing. For instance, when intention is placed in the affair of loving one’s family, then the affair of loving one’s family is an individual thing. When the experience is placed in the affair of serving one’s sovereign, then the affair of serving one’s sovereign is an individual thing. When intention is placed in *ren* and fondness, then *ren* and fondness are individual things. When intention is placed in vision, hearing, speech, and activity, then vision, hearing, speech, and activity are all individual things. That’s why it is said that there are no patternings outside the heartmind, no things outside the heartmind.

Experience for Wang is numismatic. Although he explicitly eschews Zhu Xi’s notion of investigating external things, he also repeatedly says things like, “One’s efforts will be beneficial only if one is trained and polished in the actual affairs of life” (3:204). In practice, then, should one direct one’s efforts to the external (as with Zhu Xi) or to the internal? Wang concludes neither:

In Hongdu, I [a follower of Wang] discussed the internal and the external with Zhong and Guozhang. Both of them said that things naturally have their internal and external aspects but that one should turn one’s attention to them both simultaneously, and not divide one’s efforts.

³⁷ And if there are situations where there appear to be more than two discrete objects, we need not be limited by the two-dimensionality of the coin metaphor.

I asked Wang Yangming about this, and he said: One's efforts should never leave the underlying substructure, and the underlying substructure has neither internal nor external. It's just that later speculators have divided it and therefore lost it. If we want to speak clearly about efforts, do not harbour thoughts of internal and external, and that is the effort of the underlying substructure.³⁸

Again, we should not be tempted from this passage to ascribe an all-encompassing monism to Wang. The underlying substructure is still that "thing" that now can be called patterning, now can be called heartmind, and now can be called conscience. In regard to practice, Wang focuses on this latter term, "conscience"³⁹.

Wang addresses Zhu's *reductio* problem of the witness mind in this very important passage of 3:204. First, the Zhuian perspective:

When I turn my efforts to meditation, I somewhat have the feeling of the heartmind becoming more collected. And then when I encounter an actual affair, it is broken. I then make up my mind to examine that affair. When the affair passes, I return to my previous efforts. And yet I feel that I am unable to bring the internal and external into a single piece.

Wang Yangming responds:

This description of the method of investigation of things is incomplete. Since when has the heartmind had internal and external aspects? For instance, in your discussion right now, do you have a separate heartmind managing things on the inside?

³⁸ *Chuan Xi Lu*, 204.

³⁹ The Chinese term is *liang zhi* 良知, which, stemming from Mencius, means "an understanding based on the inherent goodness of human nature." In this sense, it seems sufficiently close to the English word "conscience", if we keep in mind that his is not a Christian conscience loaded down with guilt and the fear of eternal damnation.

As with our solution for Zhu Xi above, Wang turns toward a kind of non-deliberate thought and action, and, as suggested, his notion of conscience is paramount.

Ideally, for Wang, thought, emotion, and action should all be matters of exercising one's conscience, which is the substructure of the heartmind, which is none other than the patterning of nature. Wang chooses the term "conscience" to emphasize that there is a certain inherent goodness to anything that issues from the heartmind-as-natural-patterning. As he says, conscience is "none other than pre-activation equilibrium, a substructure that is still and without movement, broad and extremely impartial" (2:155). Wang inherits Zhu Xi's idea that in order to act appropriately, one must expand out of partiality into impartiality. For Wang, however, this does not necessarily entail expanding one's attention outward, for that would merely introduce deliberate intentionality and its concomitant problems of constantly trying to distinguish numismatic features of existence, not to mention the *reductio* of the witness heartmind. What should happen instead is that one should naturally follow the conscience, which will entail the seemingly self-contradictorily notions of acting without acting and thinking without thinking.

In a virtuosic letter to Lu Yuanjing, which he wrote at the culmination of his speculative endeavours, Wang lays out his notion of conscience in relation to partiality, deliberate action, natural patterning, and, our final notion for discussion, vigilance. For Zhu Xi, pre-activation equilibrium is unachievable, and this is why he proposes harmony on the level of activation as a functional equivalent. For Wang, however, conscience, as heartmind, as the natural patterning, operates directly from the level of quiescence, of pre-activation equilibrium. From this perspective, there is no movement. As in Zhu Xi, movement would entail desire, which is an expression of partiality, which leads one to untoward actions. From another perspective, in life, "we must study" (2:156), and there is inevitably "seeing, hearing, thinking, and acting" (2:156). What we must realize is the numismatic nature of the conscience. Once partiality is cleared away, there is seeing, but not deliberately, and movement, but not deliberate movement. Wang's task now becomes one of demonstrating how to eliminate partiality, which takes us right back to Descartes' problem of desires as well as Zhu Xi's trouble with the mirror heartmind.

As in Zhu Xi, the problem of desires for Wang is not a matter of overt control, and solving it begins with distinguishing that the real target is *selfish* desires. The conscience is inherently good, and understanding this allows us to confidently follow it. But choosing to do so involves a deliberate effort which “traps [us] in the concept of ‘good and bad’”(2:156). The solution is to invoke an abiding stance, the terminology for which Wang borrows from the Zhuian classic *Da Xue*, namely, “caution and apprehension *shen ju* 慎懼”. Because this terminology is borrowed and applied in a quite different context, and because Wang applies it in the same breath of speaking about the Buddhist ideal of always being alert, I will refer to this notion as “vigilance”. Vigilance involves no intentionality, no subject/object distinction, no separating of numismatic experience. If one can merely remain vigilant, then the conscience will naturally shine forth, and all partiality will be wiped away. The difference between vigilance and mindfulness is that mindfulness involves mindfulness of something, thereby creating the dualist bifurcation. The result of vigilance is a more satisfactory return to Zhu Xi’s positing of the mirror metaphor.

The conscience, when not obscured by selfish attachments always functions like a mirror, reflecting things accurately and thinking and acting appropriately. The effort at exercising the conscience (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知) consists in being vigilant (3:329), but vigilance is not an intentional stance. In a previous letter, Lu Yuanjing had asked Wang about how to prevent the generation of thoughts in his own mind, since the generation of thoughts necessitates thinking *about something*, which would inevitably involve a certain deliberateness and so a move away from the spontaneity of the pure conscience.

Wang responds (in 2:162) that any desire to prevent thoughts of good and bad, to purify the conscience and put it at rest, is itself tainted with selfishness. Even the desire for tranquillity and for not generating any thoughts at all are tainted with the same kind of partiality to oneself. And the more deliberate thoughts such as these that one has, the further away from tranquillity one will be. The substructure of the conscience, Wang says, is originally tranquil and quiescent, so there is no need to further seek tranquillity and quiescence. And despite the conscience being originally tranquil and quiescent, it is also marked originally by a natural and spontaneous creative generation (生生 *sheng sheng*). The term *sheng sheng*

comes directly from the *Yi Jing*,⁴⁰ where it appears in the context of how one should flow with the myriad transformations of nature. In other words, Wang not only identifies the conscience of the heartmind with natural patterning, he highlights the natural and spontaneous creative generation that characterizes the human heartmind as a microcosmic replica of the larger natural processes. What need is there for extra effort? Why add the desire for no generation when creative generation is itself what characterizes the conscience? Vigilance is merely allowing for that creative generation to occur spontaneously, a conscious dropping away of extra thoughts or desires, an unleashing of the powers of the conscience as it is tapped into, or is a microcosm of, the natural processes.

We mentioned earlier that the movement from partiality to impartiality is the manifestation of the self as a microcosm of the larger natural processes. We are able to clarify now that the instantiation of the patterning in the heartmind that gives rise to the self necessarily gives rise to a partiality toward the self. In modern evolutionary, or sociobiological, terms, we would call this minimally the “instinct for self-preservation”. Animals, who would have heartminds, would interact as parts of the natural processes, interrelating with other things through arousal and response, but always with an eye to themselves. Still, in that they flow with the natural processes, as opposed to fighting them with overweening cleverness, they also manifest a certain impartiality. In this way, animals, which we might characterize as having, at most, limited consciences, would manifest a constantly shifting polarity from partiality to impartiality, such as the *yin yang* polarity that is the main feature of the larger natural processes.

In human beings, the common person is no different from the animal in that they perpetuate the same cycle of polarities from selfishness to impartiality and back again. Human beings are capable of much more (and much less) than animals, however, and this by virtue of the fact that they can move to much greater extremes in the cycle. Overactive cleverness in the form of deliberate thought and action directed toward oneself, takes one to the extreme of selfishness, while letting go of one’s impartiality and exercising conscience (致良知 *zhi liangzhi*), takes one to the extreme of impartiality. In the standard Chinese cosmology, going to extremes always meets with

⁴⁰ Section 5 of the first part of the Appended Statements (繫辭).

reversal, of course, but in the case of humans, this polarity can be bucked through exercising deliberateness toward selfishness on the one hand and vigilance allowing for the impartiality of the conscience on the other. The first is the path of the person with a stunted morality. The second is the path of the person who has fully developed into his or her own microcosm in which the pole of impartiality transforms to re-instantiate the generic polarities of the natural processes, thereby, in effect, becoming more than human. This is the realm of the sage, and now we see why the sage is also the ideal public figure, one who has completely transcended his own partiality and become as impartial and as nurturing as the larger natural processes. From conscience, one can move through partiality to impartiality, which is characterized by creative spontaneity, which is another term for the natural processes.

私 ↔ 公

selfishness ↔ impartiality

common person

良知 → 公 → 自然

conscience → impartiality → spontaneous creativity

sage

Vigilance plays the central role as catalyst, which lets the conscience return to the natural state of impartiality.

Contrary to Dai Zhen's understanding of the thought of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, we see that it is not desire, itself, that leads one astray, but an overactive partiality toward oneself. We have been helped along in this understanding by the terminology of numismatic experience and by understanding first the roles of desire and emotion in Descartes and his conception of the them vis-à-vis the soul, and then by understanding the roles of desire and emotion in Zhu Xi and his conception of them vis-à-vis the arousal and response of the natural processes.

Let us recall, briefly, a statement of Descartes quoted above in regard to internal emotions:

Brian Bruya

If anyone lives in such a way that his conscience cannot reproach him for ever failing to do something he judges to be the best, he will receive from this a satisfaction which has such power to make him happy that the most violent assaults of the passions will never have sufficient power to disturb the tranquillity of his soul.

Since, for Wang Yangming, the conscience automatically judges good and bad,⁴¹ it must be, according to Descartes, that a person fully vigilant will attain a level of happiness that transcends everyday, run-of-the-mill happiness. Indeed, Wang may not be so different from Descartes, after all, for in 2:166, we find a similar statement, except with Wang's own numismatic twist:

Enjoyment is the original substructure of the heartmind. Although it differs from the enjoyment of the seven emotions, it is also not external to the seven emotions.

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