Instructions for Practical Living

WANG YANGMING

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傳習錄

Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited



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Instructions for Practical Living · Wang Yangming

Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/wang-yangming/instructions-for-practical-living

Chinese text: juan 1–3 (語錄, the *Chuanxi lu*) of the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* (王文成公全書), edited by Xie Tingjie (1572), in the *Sibu congkan* photographic reprint (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1919–22) of the Longqing edition, via the Chinese Wikisource page transcription (zh.wikisource.org/wiki/王文成公全書_(四部叢刊本)) (public domain; transcription CC BY-SA 4.0). The compilers—Xu Ai (d. 1517), Nan Daji (d. 1541), Qian Dehong (d. 1574) and Xie Tingjie (16th century)—all died centuries ago. The machine transcription was checked character by character against the *Siku quanshu* text (1780s) and the punctuated Wikisource *Chuanxi lu* (zh.wikisource.org/wiki/傳習錄), with doubtful readings settled from the page images; variant character forms are given in their standard traditional forms. Punctuation follows the punctuated Wikisource text (CC BY-SA 4.0). English: translated from the Chinese with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are the section numbers 1–342 used in Chan Wing-tsit's translation; Pref. and Post. mark the compilers' prefaces and postscripts, and 24a is an entry printed in the 1572 edition that the standard numbering leaves out.

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Set in Source Serif 4, Noto Serif TC.

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INTRODUCTION

Wang Shouren (1472–1529), known as Wang Yangming, was a Ming dynasty official, general and teacher, and the most influential Confucian thinker since Zhu Xi three centuries earlier. As a young man he tried to follow Zhu Xi's method of "investigating things" by staring at the bamboo in a courtyard for seven days, until he fell ill. In 1508, exiled to a remote post at Longchang in Guizhou, he reached the insight that shaped the rest of his life: principle is not to be sought in things outside, because the mind itself is principle.

The *Instructions for Practical Living* (*Chuanxi lu*, "Record of What Has Been Transmitted and Practiced," a phrase from the *Analects*) collects his conversations with students and a selection of his letters. Its central teachings are that knowing and acting are one—no one who truly knows filial devotion fails to practice it—and that every person has "innate knowing" (*liangzhi*), an inborn sense of right and wrong that needs only to be extended to every situation. The tone is direct and personal: students bring their doubts about the classics, about meditation, about ambition and illness, and Wang answers with images, jokes and sharp rebukes.

The book grew in stages. Xue Kan printed the first part in 1518; Nan Daji added letters in 1524; Qian Dehong added the conversations of Wang's last years in 1556. This text follows Wang's *Complete Works* of 1572, in three parts: conversations, letters (with Wang's program for teaching children), and later conversations.

Part One

傳習錄上

Conversations recorded by Xu Ai, Lu Cheng and Xue Kan (c. 1512–18): the unity of knowing and acting, the mind as principle, and the investigation of things as the rectifying of the mind.

XU AI'S PREFACE

Xu Ai tells how the Master's reading of the Great Learning first startled him, then won him over.

1.Pref. On the various explanations of "investigating things" in the *Great Learning*, the Master takes the old text as correct throughout. This is the very text that earlier Confucians called "a corrupted text." When I first heard this I was startled. Then I doubted it. Then, exhausting my energy and thought, comparing and cross-checking, I put my questions to the Master. Only afterward did I know that the Master's teaching is like the coldness of water and the heat of fire: it is surely something that "could wait a hundred generations for a sage without doubt." The Master's clear intelligence was given by Heaven, yet he is genial and easygoing and pays no attention to appearances. People knew that in his youth he was bold and unrestrained, that he once immersed himself in literary composition, and that he moved in and out of the teachings of the two schools, Buddhist and Daoist. Hearing this teaching suddenly, they all took it as a desire to be different and a love of novelty, and carelessly never looked into it. They do not know that in three years living among the peoples of the far southwest, dwelling in hardship and nurturing stillness, his practice of refinement and

singleness had already carried him into the realm of the sage. He had arrived, pure and unmixed, at great centrality and utmost correctness.[1] Morning and evening I have been warmed at his gate, and all I see of the Master's Way is this. Approached, it seems easy, yet looking up at it, it grows ever higher. Seen, it seems coarse, yet probed, it grows ever finer. Drawn near to, it seems close, yet pursued, it grows ever more endless. In more than ten years I have not even managed to glimpse its outer fence. Among the exemplary people of the world, some have met the Master only once, some have never heard so much as his voice, and some come already harboring dismissive or indignant feelings. Yet in a moment's talk, from hearsay, they want to judge by guesswork and speculation. How could they possibly get it? Even those who follow and study with him, hearing the Master's teaching, often get one part and miss two. They see whether the horse is mare or stallion, black or yellow, and miss what makes it a thousand-li horse. So I have recorded in full what I heard day to day and privately shown it to like-minded friends, so that together we may examine and correct it, and perhaps not fail the Master's teaching. Written by his disciple Xu Ai.[2]

RECORDED BY XU AI

Xu Ai asks about loving the people, the highest good, and why principle is not sought outside the mind.

[1] I asked: "For 'lies in loving the people,' Master Zhu says it should read 'renewing the people,' and the phrase 'arouse a renewed people' in a later chapter seems to support him. You think we should follow the old text and read 'loving the people.' Do you also have grounds for this?" The Master said: "The 'renewed' in 'arouse a renewed people' means 'a people renew-

1 The "old text" is the *Great Learning* as it stands in the *Book of Rites*, which Zhu Xi had rearranged and supplemented with a passage of his own on investigating things.

2 Xu Ai (1487–1517), Wang's brother-in-law and earliest disciple, recorded the first part of these conversations.

ing itself.' It is not the same as the 'renewing' in 'lies in renewing the people.' How can that serve as grounds? The word 'arouse' does correspond to 'love,' but it does not carry the meaning of 'love.' Further on, where it speaks of governing the state and bringing peace to the world, nothing sheds light on the word 'renew.' Phrases like 'the exemplary person honors those they honored and loves those they loved; lesser people delight in what they delighted in and benefit from what benefited them,' 'like caring for an infant,' and 'to love what the people love and hate what the people hate—this is called being father and mother to the people' all carry the meaning of 'love.' 'Loving the people' is like Mencius's 'loving one's kin and being humane to the people': 'loving them' is just 'being humane to them.' 'The people did not love one another,' so Shun made Xie minister of instruction to 'reverently spread the five teachings.' That was how he loved them. 'Was able to make his lofty virtue bright' in the *Canon of Yao* is just 'making bright virtue shine.' From 'thereby brought the nine branches of kin to love one another' through 'ordered and distinguished' and 'harmonized' is just 'loving the people,' just 'making bright virtue shine throughout the world.' Again, Confucius speaks of 'cultivating oneself so as to bring peace to the common people.' 'Cultivating oneself' is just 'making bright virtue shine,' and 'bringing peace to the common people' is just 'loving the people.' To say 'loving the people' includes both teaching and nurturing. To say 'renewing the people' feels one-sided."[3]

[2] I asked: "'Knowing where to rest, one becomes settled.' Master Zhu takes this to mean 'every affair and every thing has its settled principle.' That seems to contradict your view." The Master said: "To seek the highest good in each affair and each thing is to treat rightness as external. The highest good is the original substance of the mind. It is simply making bright virtue shine until it reaches utmost refinement and utmost singleness. Yet it

3 Zhu Xi (1130–1200), whose commentaries on the Four Books were the orthodox curriculum in Wang's day, emended 親 "love" to 新 "renew" in the *Great Learning*'s opening line.

has never left affairs and things. What the original commentary says gets it right: 'to exhaust the utmost of heavenly principle without the slightest selfishness of human desire.'"[4]

[3] I asked: "If the highest good is sought only in the mind, I fear one may not be able to exhaust the principles of all the affairs in the world." The Master said: "The mind is principle. Is there anything in the world, any affair or any principle, outside the mind?" I said: "Take the filial devotion of serving one's father, the loyalty of serving one's ruler, the trustworthiness of dealing with friends, the humaneness of governing the people. There are many principles in these, and I fear they too must be examined." The Master sighed: "This blind spot has been around a long time. How could one remark awaken anyone to it? For now let me speak to what you have asked. Take serving your father: surely you don't go to your father to look for the principle of filial devotion? Serving your ruler: surely you don't go to the ruler to look for the principle of loyalty? Dealing with friends and governing the people: surely you don't go to the friends or the people to look for the principles of trustworthiness and humaneness? They are all just in this mind. The mind is principle. When this mind is not obscured by selfish desires, it is heavenly principle, and not one bit need be added from outside. Take this mind that is pure heavenly principle. Put forth in serving one's father, it is filial devotion. Put forth in serving one's ruler, it is loyalty. Put forth in dealing with friends and governing the people, it is trustworthiness and humaneness. Just apply effort to 'removing human desires and preserving heavenly principle' in this mind, and that is all." I said: "Hearing you say this, I already feel something has dawned on me. But the old teaching is still tangled up in my breast, and I am not yet entirely free of it. Take serving one's father. There are many particulars, such as keeping parents warm in winter and cool in summer, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning. Don't these too need to be studied?" The Master said: "Of

4 Wang's 心 (xin) is the heart-mind, the seat of both feeling and thought; it is rendered "the mind" throughout.

course they must be studied. It's just that there is a main point: study them only as part of 'removing human desires and preserving heavenly principle' in this mind. For example, in studying 'keeping them warm in winter,' one only wants to fulfill the filial devotion of this mind, afraid that the slightest human desire might mix in. In studying 'keeping them cool in summer,' one only wants to fulfill the filial devotion of this mind, afraid that the slightest human desire might mix in. It is just studying this mind.[5] If this mind has no human desires and is pure heavenly principle, it is a mind sincere in filial devotion to parents. In winter it will naturally think of the parents' cold and will of itself seek the way to keep them warm. In summer it will naturally think of the parents' heat and will of itself seek the way to keep them cool. These are all particulars that come forth from the sincerely filial mind. But there must first be the sincerely filial mind; only then do these particulars come forth. Compare it to a tree. The sincerely filial mind is the root, and the many particulars are the branches and leaves. There must first be the root, then the branches and leaves. One does not first find the branches and leaves and then go plant the root. The *Book of Rites* says: 'A filial child with deep love is sure to have a gentle air. One with a gentle air is sure to have a pleased look. One with a pleased look is sure to have a mild bearing.' There must be 'deep love' as the root, and then it will naturally be so."

4 Zheng Chaoshuo asked: "Isn't there also some part of the highest good that must be sought in affairs and things?" The Master said: "The highest good is just this mind being pure heavenly principle to the utmost. How would you go seeking it in affairs and things? Try naming a few cases." Chaoshuo said: "Take serving one's parents. How to judge the measure in keeping them warm and cool, and how to provide for them fittingly: one must find what is right and proper, and only that is the highest good. That is why there is the work of studying, inquiring, reflecting and discriminating." The Master said: "If it were

5 "The main point" renders 頭腦 (tounao), literally "head and brain," Wang's word for what governs everything else.

only the measure in warming and cooling and the fitness in providing, one could study them thoroughly in a day or two. What need would there be for studying, inquiring, reflecting and discriminating? It is only that in warming and cooling one wants this mind to be pure heavenly principle to the utmost, and in providing one wants this mind to be pure heavenly principle to the utmost. Here, without the work of studying, inquiring, reflecting and discriminating, one cannot avoid an error of a hair's breadth that ends a thousand li off. That is why even the sage was given the added instruction of 'refinement and singleness.' If getting those ceremonial details right were all it took to be called the highest good, then an actor on today's stage who performed many details of warming, cooling and providing correctly could also be said to have the highest good." That day I had another insight.[6]

KNOWING AND ACTING

Wang argues that knowing and acting are one: knowing without acting is simply not yet knowing.

[5] I had not grasped the Master's teaching of "the unity of knowing and acting." I argued it back and forth with Zongxian and Weixian without reaching a decision, and so I asked the Master. The Master said: "Try giving an example." I said: "Nowadays there are plenty of people who know they should be filial to their fathers and respectful to their elder brothers, yet cannot be filial or respectful. Plainly, knowing and acting are two separate things." The Master said: "That has already been cut off by selfish desires. It is no longer the original substance of knowing and acting. There has never been knowing without acting. Knowing without acting is simply not yet knowing. When the sages and worthies taught people about knowing and acting, it was precisely to restore that original substance, not just to tell you to do thus and leave it there. So the *Great Learning* points out

6 "Refinement and singleness" (jingyi) refers to the *Book of Documents* passage in which Shun instructs Yu: "be refined, be single."

true knowing and acting for people to see, saying 'like loving a lovely color, like hating a foul odor.' Seeing a lovely color belongs to knowing; loving a lovely color belongs to acting.[7] As soon as one sees the lovely color, one already loves it. It is not that after seeing it one sets up a separate mind to love it. Smelling a foul odor belongs to knowing; hating a foul odor belongs to acting. As soon as one smells the foul odor, one already hates it. It is not that after smelling it one sets up another mind to hate it. Take a person with a blocked nose. Even with a foul odor right in front of them, their nose does not smell it, so they do not much hate it. This too is simply not having known the odor. Likewise, when we say someone knows filial devotion or knows respect for elders, that person must already have practiced filial devotion and respect for elders before we can say they know them. Surely we don't say someone knows filial devotion and respect for elders just because they can talk about them? Or again, to know pain one must already have felt pain oneself. To know cold, one must already have felt cold. To know hunger, one must already have felt hunger. How can knowing and acting be separated? This is the original substance of knowing and acting, before selfish intentions cut it off. The sage taught that only this can be called knowing; anything else is simply not knowing. What urgent, solid practice this is! What is the point of insisting so hard on saying knowing and acting are two? What is my point in saying they are one? If one does not know the purpose behind the words and keeps on saying 'one' or 'two,' what use is it?" I said: "When the ancients spoke of knowing and acting as two, it was also to make people see the distinction clearly. Work at knowing on one side and work at acting on the other, and the effort has somewhere to land." The Master said: "That loses the ancients' purpose. I have said: knowing is the governing intent of acting; acting is the effort of knowing. Knowing is the beginning of acting; acting is the completion of knowing. Once you grasp this, speak only of knowing and acting

7 Zongxian is Huang Wan (1480–1554) and Weixian is Gu Yingxiang (1483–1565), both friends of Wang.

is already there; speak only of acting and knowing is already there. Why did the ancients speak of knowing and then also speak of acting? There is one kind of person in the world who does things blindly and confusedly as they please, without any reflection or self-examination. Such people are simply acting in the dark and recklessly, so one must speak of knowing for their acting to be right. There is another kind who drifts along pondering in a vacuum, never willing to put anything into solid practice. Such people are merely groping at shadows and echoes, so one must speak of acting for their knowing to be true. These were the ancients' unavoidable words to correct a bias and remedy a fault. If one sees this meaning, one word is enough. People today, though, split knowing and acting into two things to do. They think one must first know before one can act. 'For now I will study, practice and discuss, doing the work of knowing. Once I truly know, I will go and do the work of acting.' So to the end of their lives they never act, and so to the end of their lives they never know. This is no small ailment, and it did not arise in a day. My present talk of the unity of knowing and acting is precisely the medicine for this ailment. Nor have I made it up out of nothing; the original substance of knowing and acting is just like this. Now, if one grasps the purpose, there is no harm in speaking of two; it is still just one. If one does not grasp the purpose, then even speaking of one does no good. It is just idle talk."

INVESTIGATING THINGS AS RECTIFYING

Wang ties investigating things to sincerity and reads 格 as rectifying what is wrong in the mind.

[6] I asked: "Yesterday I heard your teaching on 'resting in the highest good,' and I already felt my effort had somewhere to apply itself. But when I think about it alongside Master Zhu's explanation of 'investigating things,' I can never make the two fit." The Master said: "'Investigating things' is the effort of 'resting in the highest good.' Once you know the 'highest good,' you

know 'investigating things.'" I said: "Yesterday I extended your teaching to the explanation of 'investigating things,' and I seem to see the general outline. But Master Zhu's explanation finds support in the 'refinement and singleness' of the *Documents*, the 'broad learning and restraint' of the *Analects*, and the 'fully realizing the mind and knowing one's nature' of *Mencius*. So I cannot be at ease." The Master said: "Zixia had firm faith in the sage; Zengzi turned back and sought in himself. Firm faith is right too, of course, but it does not come as close as seeking in oneself. Now that you have not found it in your own mind, how can you cling to what you heard before and not seek what is right? Even Master Zhu, who revered and trusted Master Cheng, never simply went along with him where he did not find it in his own mind.[8] 'Refinement and singleness,' 'broad learning and restraint,' and 'fully realizing the mind' fit my teaching perfectly in themselves; you just haven't thought them through. Master Zhu's explanation of 'investigating things' cannot avoid being forced and strained; it is not their original meaning. Refinement is the effort toward singleness, and broad learning is the effort toward restraint. Since you, Yueren, already understand the teaching of the unity of knowing and acting, this can be made clear in a word. 'Fully realizing the mind, knowing one's nature, knowing Heaven' is the work of those who know from birth and act with ease. 'Preserving the mind, nourishing one's nature, serving Heaven' is the work of those who know through study and act because they see the benefit. 'Not wavering whether life is short or long, cultivating the self and waiting' is the work of those who know through hardship and act with strenuous effort. Master Zhu misexplained 'investigating things' just because he read this the wrong way round. He took 'fully realizing the mind and knowing one's nature' as 'things being investigated and knowledge reaching its utmost,' and wanted beginners to go straight to the work of those who know from birth and act with ease. How could they do it?" I asked: "Why is 'fully realizing the

8 Master Cheng here means the Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107), Northern Song thinkers whose teachings Zhu Xi built on.

mind and knowing one's nature' the work of those who know from birth and act with ease?" The Master said: "Nature is the substance of the mind; Heaven is the source of nature. Fully realizing the mind is fully realizing one's nature. 'Only the most perfectly sincere in the world can fully realize their nature' and 'know the transforming and nourishing of Heaven and Earth.'[9] 'Preserving the mind' means the mind is not yet fully realized. The 'knowing' in 'knowing Heaven' is like the *zhi* 'know' in the official titles *zhizhou* and *zhixian*. It is a matter within one's own charge; the self and Heaven are one. 'Serving Heaven' is like a child serving a father or a minister serving a ruler. One must respectfully receive and carry out what is given before one can be free of fault, and the self and Heaven are still two. This is the difference between the sage and the worthy. As for not letting one's mind waver over a short or long life, this teaches students to devote their whole mind to doing good. They must never let the mind that does good shift because of failure or success, short life or long. They should simply cultivate the self and wait for destiny, seeing that failure and success, long life and short, have their destiny, so that they need not let these stir the mind. In 'serving Heaven,' though the self and Heaven are two, one already sees Heaven before one's face. 'Waiting for destiny' is as if one has not yet met it face to face and is waiting here for it. This is where a beginner first sets the mind, and there is a sense of hardship and effort in it. Now it has been turned upside down, so students have nowhere to begin."[10] I said: "Yesterday, hearing your teaching, I dimly saw that the effort must be like this. Hearing this now, I have no more doubts. At dawn yesterday I was thinking that the 'thing' in 'investigating things' is the same as 'affair,' and that both are spoken of in terms of the mind." The Master said: "Yes. The master of the body is the mind. What the mind puts forth is intention. The original sub-

9 Yueren is Xu Ai's courtesy name. The three pairs of knowing and acting come from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20; the three Mencian phrases come from *Mencius* 7A1.

10 In Ming official titles 知 "to know" meant to be in charge: a *zhizhou* (prefect) "knows," that is, governs, a prefecture, and a *zhixian* (county magistrate) a county.

stance of intention is knowing. Whatever the intention is directed to is a thing. If the intention is directed to serving one's parents, then serving one's parents is a thing. If the intention is directed to serving one's ruler, then serving one's ruler is a thing. If the intention is directed to being humane to the people and caring for creatures, then being humane to the people and caring for creatures is a thing. If the intention is directed to seeing, hearing, speaking and moving, then seeing, hearing, speaking and moving are a thing. That is why I say there is no principle outside the mind and no thing outside the mind. The *Doctrine of the Mean* says, 'Without sincerity there are no things.' The effort of 'making bright virtue shine' in the *Great Learning* is just 'making the intentions sincere,' and the effort of 'making the intentions sincere' is just 'investigating things.'"

7 The Master also said: "The *ge* of 'investigating things' is like the *ge* in Mencius's 'only the great person can rectify (*ge*) the ruler's mind.' It means removing what is not right in the mind so as to make whole the rightness of its original substance. Wherever the intentions and thoughts are directed, simply remove what is not right so as to make whole what is right. Then at every moment and in every place one is preserving heavenly principle, and that is fully exploring principle. 'Heavenly principle' is 'bright virtue'; 'fully exploring principle' is 'making bright virtue shine.'"

8 He also said: "Knowing is the original substance of the mind; the mind naturally knows. Seeing one's father, it naturally knows filial devotion. Seeing one's elder brother, it naturally knows respect. Seeing a child falling into a well, it naturally knows compassion. This is 'innate knowing,' and there is no need to seek it outside. When innate knowing puts itself forth and meets no obstruction from selfish intentions, it is what is meant by 'fill out the heart of compassion, and humaneness will be more than can ever be used.' But ordinary people cannot be free of obstruction from selfish intentions, so they must apply the effort of 'extending knowledge' and 'investigating things.' Overcome the selfish and restore principle, and the mind's

innate knowing meets no more obstruction and can fill everything and flow freely. That is extending one's knowledge. When knowledge is extended, the intentions become sincere."[11]

9 I asked: "You treat 'broad learning in culture' as the effort of 'restraining oneself with ritual.' I have thought about this deeply and still cannot grasp it. Please explain it a little." The Master said: "The word *li*, ritual, is the word *li*, principle. When principle manifests and can be seen, it is called 'culture'; when culture is hidden and subtle and cannot be seen, it is called 'principle.' They are just one thing. 'Restraining with ritual' simply means wanting this mind to be purely heavenly principle. To make this mind purely heavenly principle, one must apply effort where principle manifests. If it manifests in serving one's parents, then learn to preserve this heavenly principle in serving one's parents. If it manifests in serving one's ruler, then learn to preserve this heavenly principle in serving one's ruler. If it manifests in living with wealth and honor or poverty and low station, then learn to preserve this heavenly principle in living with wealth and honor or poverty and low station. If it manifests in living amid trouble and hardship or among the Yi and Di peoples, then learn to preserve this heavenly principle in living amid trouble and hardship or among the Yi and Di peoples. So it is everywhere, down to acting and resting, speaking and keeping silent. Wherever it manifests, right there learn to preserve heavenly principle. This is 'broadly studying culture,' and this is the effort of 'restraining with ritual.' 'Broad learning in culture' is 'be refined'; 'restraining with ritual' is 'be single.'"[12]

10 I asked: "'The mind of the Way is always master of the whole person, and the human mind always obeys its commands.' Judged by your teaching on refinement and singleness, this saying seems flawed." The Master said: "Yes. The mind is one. Before it is mixed with the human, it is called 'the mind of

11 "Innate knowing" renders liangzhi, from *Mencius* 7A15: "what one knows without deliberation."

12 From *Analects* 6.27 and 9.11: the exemplary person "broadly studies culture (wen) and restrains it with ritual."

the Way'; mixed with human artifice, it is called 'the human mind.' The human mind that has its correct state is the mind of the Way; the mind of the Way that has lost its correct state is the human mind. There were never two minds to begin with. Master Cheng said, 'The human mind is human desire; the mind of the Way is heavenly principle.' The wording seems to split them apart, but the meaning actually gets it right. Now to say 'the mind of the Way is master and the human mind obeys' makes two minds. Heavenly principle and human desires cannot stand side by side. How could heavenly principle be master while human desires follow along and obey?"[13]

WHY CONFUCIUS PRUNED THE CLASSICS

Wang praises Wang Tong and argues that Confucius edited the classics to cut away writing, not add it.

[11] I asked about Wenzhongzi and Han Tuizhi. The Master said: "Tuizhi was merely a hero among men of letters; Wenzhongzi was a worthy Confucian. Later people revered Tuizhi only because of his writing, but in fact Tuizhi falls far short of Wenzhongzi." I asked: "Then why was Wenzhongzi at fault for imitating the classics?" The Master said: "Imitating the classics may not be entirely wrong. Tell me, how does the intent of later scholars in writing books compare with imitating the classics?" I said: "When scholars write books, there is some desire for fame, but they hope to make the Way clear. Imitating the classics seems to be purely for fame." The Master said: "Writing books to make the Way clear—whom does that take as its model?" I said: "Confucius edited and transmitted the Six Classics to make the Way clear." The Master said: "Then isn't imitating the classics also modeling oneself on Confucius?" I said: "Writing books brings something to light about the Way. Imitating the classics seems merely to imitate their traces, and probably adds nothing

13 The quoted line is from Zhu Xi's preface to his commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*; the saying of Master Cheng is Cheng Yi's (1033–1107).

to the Way."[14] The Master said: "When you speak of making the Way clear, do you mean getting people to return to simplicity and purity and show it in the reality of their conduct? Or making the words beautiful and merely clamoring before the world? The great disorder of the world comes from empty writing prevailing and real conduct declining. If the Way were clear in the world, there would be no need to transmit the Six Classics; Confucius edited and transmitted them only because he had no choice. From the time Fu Xi drew the trigrams down to King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, the writings on the *Changes*, such as the *Lianshan* and the *Guicang*, were jumbled and scattered, past counting, and the Way of the *Changes* fell into great disorder. Confucius saw the fashion for writing growing day by day in the world and knew that its theories would go on without limit. So he took the teachings of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou and expounded them, holding that only these had grasped the true source. Then the jumbled theories all fell away, and those in the world who spoke of the *Changes* were at last unified.[15] So it was with the *Documents*, the *Odes*, the *Rites*, the *Music*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. After the 'Canons' and 'Counsels' of the *Documents*, and after the 'Two Souths' of the *Odes*, there were writings like the *Nine Hills* and the *Eight Indexes*, and all manner of lewd and dissolute verses—who knows how many thousands of pieces. The names, objects, measures, and numbers of rites and music had by then also become past counting. Confucius pruned them all, then transmitted and corrected what remained, and only then did those theories fall away. In the *Documents*, the *Odes*, the *Rites*, and the *Music*, when did Confucius ever add a single word? The various discussions in today's *Record of Rites* were all pieced together by later scholars and are no longer what Confucius had. As for the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, though it is said that Confucius wrote it, in fact it is all the old

14 Wenzhongzi is Wang Tong (AD 584–617), who wrote works modeled on the classics; Han Tuizhi is Han Yu (AD 768–824), the celebrated prose writer.

15 The *Lianshan* and *Guicang* are traditionally said to be the Xia and Shang versions of the *Changes*, long since lost.

text of the Lu histories. What is called 'writing' was writing down the old; what is called 'cutting' was cutting away the excess. There was subtraction and no addition. Confucius transmitted the Six Classics fearing that excessive writing would throw the world into disorder. He sought only to make them simpler and could not make them simple enough, so that the world would strive to remove the ornament and seek the reality. He did not teach it by means of writing.[16] After the *Spring and Autumn*, writing grew ever more abundant and the world ever more disordered. The First Emperor was condemned for burning the books because he acted from selfish intentions, and he should not have burned the Six Classics. Had his aim at the time been to make the Way clear, then taking all the theories that went against the classics and defied principle and burning them would in fact have matched the intent of editing and transmitting. From the Qin and Han on, writing again grew day by day; to try to remove it all would be utterly impossible. One should simply take Confucius as a model, record what comes close to the truth and make it known, and then the strange and perverse theories should gradually fall away of themselves. I do not know what Wenzhongzi intended back then in imitating the classics, but I deeply approve of what he did, and hold that even a sage arising again could not change it.[17] The world is not well governed simply because writing flourishes and reality declines. People put forward their own views and try to outdo one another in novelty, dazzling the common folk to win praise. This only confuses the world's intelligence and stops up the world's ears and eyes, so that everyone drifts along, competing to polish their writing to make a name in the world, and no longer knows that there is such a thing as conduct that strengthens the root, values reality, and returns to simplicity and purity. All of this was set going by those who write books." I said: "Some writing cannot be done without. Take the *Spring and Autumn Annals*:

16 The 'Two Souths' are the opening sections of the *Odes*; the *Nine Hills* and *Eight Indexes* are legendary ancient books, long lost.

17 The First Emperor of Qin ordered the burning of books in 213 BC.

without the *Zuo Commentary* it would probably be hard to understand." The Master said: "If the *Spring and Autumn* had to wait for the *Commentary* to become clear, it would be a riddle with the answer left off. Why would the sage go to the trouble of writing something so difficult and obscure? The *Zuo Commentary* is mostly the old text of the Lu histories. If the *Spring and Autumn* needed it to become clear, why would Confucius have cut it?" I said: "Yichuan also said, 'The *Commentary* is the case; the *Classic* is the verdict.' When it records 'assassinated such-and-such ruler' or 'attacked such-and-such state,' unless the facts are clear, it would probably be hard to reach a verdict."[18] The Master said: "This saying of Yichuan's is probably also something handed down from conventional scholars, and misses the sage's intent in making the classic. When it records 'assassinated the ruler,' assassinating the ruler is itself the crime; why ask further about the details of the assassination? Military expeditions should come from the Son of Heaven; when it records 'attacked a state,' attacking a state is itself the crime; why ask further about the details of the attack? The sage transmitted the Six Classics only to rectify people's minds, only to preserve heavenly principle and remove human desires. On the matter of preserving heavenly principle and removing human desires, he did speak. Sometimes, when people asked, he spoke according to each one's capacity, yet even then he was unwilling to say much, fearing people would look for it only in words. Hence he said, 'I would rather not speak.' As for all the matters of indulging human desires and destroying heavenly principle, how would he be willing to show them to people in detail? That would be fostering disorder and leading people into wickedness. Hence Mencius said, 'Among the followers of Confucius, no one spoke of the affairs of Huan and Wen, and so nothing about them has been handed down to later ages.'[19] This is the established practice of Confucius's school. Conventional scholars teach only the

18 Yichuan is Cheng Yi, the younger of the Cheng brothers.
19 Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin were the most famous hegemons of the seventh century BC.

learning of the hegemons, so they want to know a great many plots and schemes. It is purely a mind set on profit and achievement, the exact opposite of the sage's intent in making the classics. How could they ever think it through?" Then he sighed and said: "Unless one has reached heavenly virtue, it is not easy to talk with one about this!" He also said: "Confucius said, 'I can still remember when historians left gaps in their texts.' Mencius said, 'To believe the *Documents* entirely would be worse than having no *Documents*. Of the "Completion of the War" chapter I accept only two or three strips.' When Confucius edited the *Documents*, for the four or five hundred years of Tang, Yu, and Xia there are no more than a few chapters. Could nothing else have happened? Yet what he transmitted stopped there. The sage's intent can be known from this. The sage only wanted to cut away excessive writing; later scholars only want to add to it." I said: "The sage made the classics only to remove human desires and preserve heavenly principle.[20] That the sage did not wish to show people in detail the affairs of the Five Hegemons and after is surely true. But why do we see hardly anything of the affairs before Yao and Shun?" The Master said: "In the age of Fu Xi and the Yellow Emperor, affairs were few and loose, and little was handed down. From this, too, one can picture it. That time had an air of utter purity and plainness, with almost no ornament. This was the governance of high antiquity, which later ages cannot match." I said: "Some writings, like the *Three Tombs*, were handed down. Why did Confucius cut them?" The Master said: "Even if some were handed down, they gradually ceased to suit a changing world. As customs opened up and ornament grew day by day, by the end of the Zhou, even if one had wanted to change things back to the ways of the Xia and Shang, it could no longer be done—let alone those of Tang and Yu, and still less those of the age of Fu Xi and the Yellow Emperor. Yet though

20 The hegemons (ba) were rulers of the Spring and Autumn period who led the other states by power rather than virtue; Wang uses their name for any statecraft aimed at results.

their governance differed, their Way was one.[21] Confucius transmitted Yao and Shun as his forebears and took Wen and Wu as his pattern. The laws of Wen and Wu were the Way of Yao and Shun, but because each governed according to its time, their measures and ordinances were already different. Even the work of the Xia and Shang, applied to the Zhou, no longer fit. Hence 'the Duke of Zhou thought to combine the Three Kings; where something did not fit, he looked up and pondered it, night and day.' How much less could the governance of high antiquity be carried out again! This is certainly something the sage could leave out." He also said: "To devote oneself entirely to non-action and, unlike the Three Kings, not govern according to the times, but insist on carrying out the customs of high antiquity—this is the learning of the Buddha and Laozi. To govern according to the times but, unlike the Three Kings, not root everything in the Way, carrying it out instead with a mind set on profit and achievement—this is the work of the hegemons and those below them. Later scholars talk back and forth endlessly, but all they talk about is the hegemons' arts."[22]

12 He also said: "The governance before Tang and Yu cannot be restored by later ages, so it may be left out. The governance after the Three Dynasties cannot be taken as a model by later ages, so it may be cut. Only the governance of the Three Dynasties can be practiced. Yet those in the world who discuss the Three Dynasties do not understand the root and busy themselves only with the branches, and so it too cannot be restored."

13 I said: "Earlier Confucians, discussing the Six Classics, regarded the *Spring and Autumn* as history. History only records events, so I suspect that in the end it differs somewhat in nature from the Five Classics." The Master said: "Spoken of in terms of events, it is called history; spoken of in terms of the Way, it is called a classic. Events are the Way; the Way is events. The

21 The *Three Tombs* is a legendary book said to record the three earliest rulers; it was long lost.

22 The Three Kings are the founders of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou: Yu, Tang, and Kings Wen and Wu.

Spring and Autumn is also a classic; the Five Classics are also history. The *Changes* is the history of Fu Xi; the *Documents* is the history from Yao and Shun on; the *Rites* and the *Music* are the history of the Three Dynasties. Their events are the same, their Way is the same. How could there be any difference?"[23]

[14] He also said: "The Five Classics are just history. History serves to make good and evil clear and to give instruction and warning. Where the good can serve as instruction, it specially preserves the traces to show a model. Where the evil can serve as warning, it preserves the warning but cuts the events, to stop wickedness at the source." I said: "Preserving the traces to show a model—is that also preserving heavenly principle as it originally is? And cutting the events to stop wickedness—is that also checking human desires before they sprout?" The Master said: "The sage's making of the classics certainly had no intent other than this, but one need not cling to the wording." I also asked: "If, where the evil can serve as warning, it preserves the warning but cuts the events to stop wickedness, why is it only in the *Odes* that the songs of Zheng and Wei were not cut? An earlier Confucian said, 'The bad ones can chasten people's wayward impulses.' Is that right?"[24] The Master said: "The *Odes* we have is no longer the original text of Confucius's school. Confucius said, 'Banish the music of Zheng; the music of Zheng is licentious.' He also said, 'I hate the music of Zheng for confusing the classical music,' and 'The music of Zheng and Wei is the music of ruined states.' This is the established practice of Confucius's school. The three hundred pieces that Confucius settled were all what is called classical music. All of them could be performed at the suburban altars and the ancestral temples, and in the villages, and all served to spread harmony and peace, steep people in virtue, and transform customs. How could such pieces be among them? That would be fostering licentiousness and leading people into wickedness. These must have been patched in by

23 The 'Five Classics' here are the other five of the Six Classics besides the *Spring and Autumn*.

24 The earlier Confucian is Zhu Xi, commenting on *Analects* 2.2.

conventional scholars after the Qin burning, to make up the number of three hundred. Licentious verses are what ordinary people most like to pass around, just as in the back lanes today. 'The bad ones can chasten people's wayward impulses'—that is someone looking for an explanation, failing to find one, and making up words to cover it."[25]

XU AI'S POSTSCRIPT

Xu Ai recalls how Wang's paired teachings at first seemed hard to fit together, then delighted him.

1.Post. Because I had been sunk in the old teachings, when I first heard the Master's teaching I was truly startled and unsettled and could find no way in. Later, after hearing it for a long time, I gradually learned to turn back to myself and actually put it into practice, and only then did I come to believe that the Master's learning is the true line of Confucius's school, and that everything else is side paths and byways, dead-end harbors and cut-off rivers. Sayings such as that 'investigating things' is the effort of 'making the intentions sincere,' 'understanding the good' is the effort of 'making oneself sincere,' 'fully exploring principle' is the effort of 'fully realizing one's nature,' 'following inquiry and learning' is the effort of 'honoring the virtuous nature,' 'broad learning in culture' is the effort of 'restraining with ritual,' and 'be refined' is the effort of 'be single'—all of these at first seemed hard to fit together. Later, after thinking about them for a long time, before I knew it my hands were dancing and my feet were stamping. The above was recorded by Yueren.

25 Zheng and Wei were states whose songs were proverbial for licentiousness; the received *Odes* contains songs from both.

RECORDED BY LU CHENG

Lu Cheng's record opens with short sayings on concentration, resolve, quiet sitting and friendship.

15 I asked: "As for the effort of concentrating on one thing—when reading, to have one's whole mind on reading; when receiving guests, to have one's whole mind on receiving guests—can that be called concentrating on one thing?" The Master said: "When loving beauty, to have one's whole mind on beauty; when loving wealth, to have one's whole mind on wealth—can that be called concentrating on one thing? That is what is called chasing after things, not concentrating on one thing. Concentrating on one thing means being wholly focused on the one heavenly principle."[26]

16 Someone asked about setting one's resolve. The Master said: "Simply to want, in every thought, to preserve heavenly principle—this is setting one's resolve. If one can keep from forgetting this, in time it will naturally gather and condense in the mind, like what the Daoists call 'forming the sacred embryo.' If this thought of heavenly principle is always preserved, one gradually arrives at the beautiful, the great, the sage, and the spirit-like—but even that comes only from preserving, nourishing, and expanding this one thought."[27]

17 "If during the day your effort feels scattered and agitated, sit quietly; if you feel too lazy to read, then go ahead and read. This too is prescribing medicine according to the illness."

18 "In dealing with friends, if you strive to put yourselves below one another, you gain; if you put yourselves above one another, you lose."

19 Meng Yuan had the faults of always thinking himself right and loving a good name, and the Master reproved him

26 Lu Cheng (courtesy name Yuanjing) was a disciple of Wang's; the conversations that follow are from his record.

27 'Forming the sacred embryo' is a term from Daoist inner alchemy for the cultivation of an inner, perfected self.

repeatedly. One day, just after a stern rebuke, a friend described his recent effort and asked to be corrected. Meng Yuan said from the side: "Now you've only just found what I already had long ago." The Master said: "Your illness is acting up again." Meng Yuan's face changed, and he was about to argue. The Master said: "Your illness is acting up again." Then he explained by analogy: "This is the great root of illness in your whole life. It is like planting one big tree in a plot ten feet square. The moisture of rain and dew and the strength of the soil only nourish this big root. Even if you want to plant some fine grain around it, it is shaded above by the tree's leaves and entangled below by its roots—how could it grow? You must cut down this tree and leave not even a fine root, and only then can you plant good seed. Otherwise, however much you plow and weed and bank up the soil, you will only be nourishing this root."[28]

[20] Someone asked: "The great number of books written in later ages probably also confuses the correct learning." The Master said: "The human mind and heavenly principle are a seamless whole. When the sages and worthies wrote it down in books, it was like painting a portrait that conveys the spirit: it only shows people the general shape, so that through it they can seek out the real person. The spirit and energy, the speech and laughter, the movement and rest, certainly cannot be conveyed. The writings of later ages go on to copy and recopy what the sages painted, and arbitrarily divide it up and add to it to show off their own skill, so they stray ever further from the real."

[21] Someone asked: "The sage responds to changing circumstances without end. Isn't that also because the sage studied them in advance?" The Master said: "How could anyone study so much in advance? The sage's mind is like a bright mirror. It is simply bright, so it responds to whatever it meets, and there is nothing it does not reflect. Never is the image of what has gone still there, nor the image of what has not yet been reflected there beforehand. Yet what later ages teach is exactly that, and so it is sharply at odds with the learning of the sage. The Duke of Zhou

28 Meng Yuan (courtesy name Bosheng) was one of Wang's early students.

made the rites and composed the music to bring culture to the world—all things a sage can do. Why didn't Yao and Shun do them all, instead of waiting for the Duke of Zhou? Confucius edited and transmitted the Six Classics to instruct ten thousand generations—also something a sage can do. Why didn't the Duke of Zhou do it first, instead of waiting for Confucius? From this we know that only when a sage meets such a time is there such a deed. Worry only that the mirror is not bright, not that things will come and it cannot reflect them. Studying changing circumstances is also a matter of reflecting at the time, but students must first have the effort of making the mirror bright. Students should worry only that this mind is not yet bright, not that they cannot cover every change." The questioner said: "Then what about the saying, 'Empty and still, without a sign, yet the ten thousand forms are already fully present'?" He said: "That saying is fine in itself; but if one doesn't read it well, it too becomes a problem."[29]

22 "Principle and rightness have no fixed place and no end. Having gained a little from what I tell you, you must not conclude that this is all. If I went on speaking for ten, twenty, fifty more years, there would still be no end." Another day he also said: "Among sages there are Yao and Shun, yet above Yao and Shun goodness has no end; among the wicked there are Jie and Zhou, yet below Jie and Zhou evil has no end. Had Jie and Zhou not died, would their evil have stopped there? If goodness had an end, how could King Wen 'gaze toward the Way as if he had not yet seen it'?"[30]

23 Someone asked: "When I am still, my state of mind feels good, but as soon as I meet with affairs it is different. Why is that?" The Master said: "That is because you only know how to nourish yourself in stillness and do not apply the effort of overcoming the self. That way, when affairs come, you are bound to

29 'Empty and still, without a sign...' is a saying of Cheng Yi.
30 Yao and Shun are the model sage-kings of antiquity; Jie and Zhou, the last rulers of the Xia and Shang dynasties, are the stock tyrants. The King Wen line is from *Mencius* 4B20.

topple. One must polish oneself in the midst of affairs. Only then can one stand firm, and only then be settled in stillness and settled in activity."

[24] Someone asked about the effort of "reaching up." The Master said: "When later Confucians teach, as soon as anything touches on the subtle and refined, they say it is 'reaching up' and should not be studied yet, and talk instead about 'learning below.' This splits 'learning below' and 'reaching up' into two. Whatever the eye can see, the ear can hear, the mouth can say, and the mind can think is all 'learning below'; what the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear, the mouth cannot say, and the mind cannot think is 'reaching up.' Take a tree: planting, tending, and watering it is 'learning below'; its growing day and night, its branches spreading out lush and full, is 'reaching up.' How could anyone add their own strength to that? So whatever one can apply effort to, whatever can be put into words, is all 'learning below'; 'reaching up' lies right within 'learning below.' Everything the sage said, however subtle and refined, is 'learning below.' Those who learn need only apply effort within 'learning below,' and they will reach up of themselves. There is no need to look for some separate effort of 'reaching up.'"[31]

[24a] Holding to one's resolve is like having a pain in the heart. With the whole mind on the pain, how would one have time for idle talk or idle business?[32]

[25] Someone asked: "How does one apply effort to 'be refined' and 'be single'?" The Master said: "'Be single' is the aim of 'be refined'; 'be refined' is the effort toward 'be single.' It is not that there is a 'be single' apart from 'be refined.' The character 精, 'refined,' is written with the element for rice, so let us take rice as a comparison. Wanting the rice to be pure and white is what 'be single' means; but without the work of 'be refined'—pounding, winnowing, sifting, sorting—it cannot become pure and

31 "Learning below and reaching up" is from *Analects* 14.35; the tree growing "day and night" echoes *Mencius* 6A8.

32 This entry is not in Chan's numbering; it recurs as Xue Kan's question in section 95.

white. Pounding, winnowing, sifting, and sorting are the effort of 'be refined,' yet all they aim at is getting the rice pure and white. Broad learning, careful inquiry, cautious thought, clear discrimination, and earnest practice are all ways of being refined in order to seek singleness. Likewise, 'broad learning in culture' is the effort of 'restraining with ritual'; 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge' are the effort of 'making the intentions sincere'; 'following inquiry and learning' is the effort of 'honoring the virtuous nature'; 'understanding the good' is the effort of 'making oneself sincere.' There are not two teachings here."

[26] "Knowing is the beginning of acting; acting is the completion of knowing. The learning of the sages is just one effort; knowing and acting cannot be divided into two things."

[27] "Qidiao Kai said, 'I cannot yet be confident in this,' and Confucius was pleased. When Zilu had Zigao made steward of Bi, Confucius said, 'You are harming someone's son.' When Zeng Dian spoke of his aspirations, Confucius approved of him. From this the sage's intent can be seen."[33]

CALM IS NOT EQUILIBRIUM

Wang tells Lu Cheng that quiet calm settles only the qi; removing selfish desires is the real effort.

[28] Someone asked: "When one quietly preserves the mind, can that be taken as 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused'?" The Master said: "When people today preserve the mind, all they settle is their qi. When they are calm and quiet, it is only their qi that is calm and quiet; that cannot be taken as 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused.'" The questioner said: "Even if it is not yet equilibrium, isn't it at least effort toward seeking equilibrium?" He said: "Only removing human desires and preserving heavenly principle counts as effort. In stillness, remove human desires and preserve heavenly principle with

33 Qidiao Kai, Zilu, Zigao, and Zeng Dian were disciples of Confucius; the episodes are *Analects* 5.6, 11.25, and 11.26.

every thought; in activity, remove human desires and preserve heavenly principle with every thought—whether you are calm or not. If you rely on that calm, not only will you gradually fall into the fault of loving stillness and disliking activity, but the many ills inside you will simply lie hidden; you can never get rid of them, and when affairs come they will grow again as before. If following principle is the main thing, when is one ever not calm? If calm is the main thing, one will not necessarily follow principle."[34]

[29] Someone asked: "When Confucius's disciples spoke of their aspirations, Zilu and Ran Qiu took on the affairs of government and Gongxi Chi took on ritual and music—all of real practical use. But when Zeng Xi had his turn, what he said seemed like play, and yet the sage approved of him. What did this mean?" He said: "The three disciples had fixed purposes and insistences; with fixed purposes and insistences, one leans to one side, and being able in this, may not be able in that. Zeng Dian's attitude had no fixed purpose or insistence. That is 'acting according to one's position and not wishing for anything beyond it: placed among the Yi and Di, acting as befits being among the Yi and Di; placed in hardship, acting as befits hardship; there is nowhere one goes where one is not at ease.' The three were what is meant by 'You are a vessel'; Zeng Dian had the sense of 'not being a vessel.' Yet the talents of the three each stood out and were fully formed, unlike the world's empty talkers with nothing real to them, so Confucius approved of them all as well."[35]

[30] Someone asked: "What about when one's knowledge does not grow?" The Master said: "Learning must have a root and source. One must put effort into the root and source, and gradually 'fill each hollow and then move on.' The Daoist immortalists' talk of the infant is also a good comparison. While it is in its mother's womb, an infant is just pure qi—what knowledge does

34 Qi is the vital stuff of which all things, the body and its feelings included, are made.

35 Zeng Xi is Zeng Dian, father of Zengzi; the scene is *Analects* 11.26. Wang quotes the *Doctrine of the Mean* 14 and *Analects* 5.4 and 2.12.

it have? Only after birth can it cry; after that it can laugh; after that it can recognize its father, mother, and brothers; after that it can stand, walk, hold things, and carry them; and at last there is nothing in the world it cannot do. All this is because its vital essence grows fuller day by day, so its sinews and strength grow stronger day by day, and its hearing and sight open wider day by day. It is not something worked out by inquiry and searching on the day it is born. So there must be a root and source.[36] Even the sage's reaching the point of 'giving Heaven and Earth their places and nourishing the myriad things' was nourished simply from 'the equilibrium before joy, anger, sorrow, and delight are aroused.' Later Confucians, not understanding the teaching of investigating things, saw that the sage knew everything and could do everything, and wanted to work it all out the moment they began. How could that be right?" He also said: "Setting one's resolve and applying effort is like planting a tree. When it is still roots and sprouts, there is nothing yet; once it has a trunk, there are still no branches; after branches come leaves, and after leaves, flowers and fruit. When you first plant the root, just tend and water it. Do not think about branches, do not think about leaves, do not think about flowers, do not think about fruit. What good is idle imagining? So long as you do not forget the work of tending, why worry that there will be no branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit?"

[31] Someone asked: "What about when I read books and cannot understand them?" The Master said: "That is just because you are boring into the literal meaning of the words, so you don't understand. In that case you would do better with the old style of learning: those people read a great deal and could explain things. But although their learning explained things very clearly, they gained nothing their whole lives. You must apply effort to the substance of the mind. Whenever you cannot understand something or cannot carry it out, turn back and work it through in your own mind, and you will get through. For the Four Books and the Five Classics speak only of this sub-

36 "Fill each hollow and then move on" is *Mencius* 4B18, said of flowing water.

stance of the mind, and this substance of the mind is what is called the Way. When the substance of the mind is clear, the Way is clear—they are not two. This is the main point in learning."

[32] "Empty, numinous, and unobscured: all principles are contained in it, and all affairs come forth from it. There is no principle outside the mind, no affair outside the mind."[37]

[33] Someone asked: "Master Zhu said, 'What people learn comes down to the mind and principle.' What about this saying?" He said: "The mind is nature, and nature is principle. Putting in the word 'and' risks making them two. Students should look at this carefully."

[34] Someone said: "Everyone has this mind, and the mind is principle. Why then do some do good and some do what is not good?" The Master said: "The mind of a bad person has lost its original substance."

[35] Someone asked: "'Analyze it so as to reach its utmost refinement without confusion, then combine it so as to exhaust its greatness without remainder'—what about this saying?" The Master said: "I'm afraid it doesn't go all the way either. How could this principle allow analysis? And why would it need to be pieced together? When the sage spoke of 'refinement and singleness,' that already said it all."[38]

[36] "Self-examination is preserving and nourishing when there are affairs; preserving and nourishing is self-examination when there are no affairs."

[37] I once asked about Lu Xiangshan's teaching of doing the work amid human feelings and the changes of affairs. The Master said: "Apart from human feelings and the changes of affairs, there are no affairs at all. Are joy, anger, sorrow, and delight not human feelings? From seeing, hearing, speaking, and moving, to wealth and honor, poverty and low station, hardship, life and death—all are changes of affairs. And the changes of affairs lie entirely within human feelings. The key is simply 'achieving

37 "Empty, numinous, and unobscured" is Zhu Xi's description of bright virtue in his commentary on the *Great Learning*.

38 The quoted line is from Zhu Xi's *Questions on the Great Learning*.

equilibrium and harmony,' and achieving equilibrium and harmony lies simply in 'being watchful when alone.'"[39]

[38] I asked: "Do the names humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom arise from what has already been aroused?" He said: "Yes." Another day I said: "Are compassion, shame, deference, and the sense of right and wrong the outward virtues of the nature?" He said: "Humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom are outward virtues too. The nature is one, that is all. As form and body, it is called Heaven; as ruler, it is called the Lord; as flowing and operating, it is called the mandate; as endowed in people, it is called the nature; as master of the body, it is called the mind. As the mind goes forth: meeting one's father, it is called filial devotion; meeting one's ruler, it is called loyalty; and from there on the names become endless—yet it is only the one nature. It is like a person, who is one: facing a father, called a son; facing a son, called a father; and so on without end—yet it is only one person. One need only apply effort to the nature. Once one sees the word 'nature' clearly, all principles shine bright."[40]

LIKE A CAT CATCHING A MOUSE

Wang describes stages of practice, from quiet sitting to relentless self-examination of every selfish thought.

[39] One day we were discussing the effort of learning. The Master said: "In teaching people to learn, one must not cling to one side. At the start of learning, the mind is a monkey and the intentions a horse; they cannot be tied down, and what they think about is mostly on the side of human desires. So for the time being, teach them to sit quietly and stop their thinking. After a while, once the mind and intentions have settled a little, merely keeping still in a void, like dead wood and cold ashes, is of no use either; they must be taught self-examination and over-

39 Lu Xiangshan (Lu Jiuyuan, 1139–1193), Zhu Xi's great rival, taught that the mind is principle.

40 Compassion, shame, deference, and the sense of right and wrong are Mencius's four "sprouts" of humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom (*Mencius* 2A6).

coming. The effort of self-examination and overcoming must never let up. It is like getting rid of robbers: one must be determined to sweep them out completely. When there are no affairs, take the selfish desires—for sex, for wealth, for fame, and the like—and track them down and search them out one by one. Only when you have pulled out the root of the illness so that it never rises again can you be satisfied. Always be like a cat catching a mouse, eyes watching, ears listening. As soon as a single thought stirs, overcome it at once, as decisively as cutting nails or chopping iron. Do not tolerate it or make things easy for it; do not harbor it, do not let it slip away. Only that is truly applying effort; only that can sweep it out completely. When you reach the point where there is no selfishness left to overcome, there will naturally be a time to sit upright with folded hands. Though it is said, 'What is there to think about, what to deliberate?' that is not for the start of learning. Beginners must think. Self-examination and overcoming are 'thinking of sincerity'—thinking only of heavenly principle. When heavenly principle is pure and complete, that is 'What is there to think about, what to deliberate?'"[41]

40 I asked: "What about someone who is afraid of ghosts at night?" The Master said: "It is just that ordinarily they have not been able to 'accumulate rightness,' and the mind has something it is uneasy about; that is why they are afraid. If one's conduct has always accorded with the spirits, what is there to fear?" Zixin said: "Upright ghosts need not be feared. But I'm afraid evil ghosts don't care whether a person is good or bad, so one can't help being afraid." The Master said: "How could an evil ghost ever lead an upright person astray? This very fear is the mind being evil. So if something leads it astray, it is not a ghost that does it; the mind leads itself astray. If a person loves sex, they are led astray by the ghost of sex; if they love wealth, by the ghost of wealth; if they are angry at what they should not be

41 "What is there to think about..." is from the *Book of Changes*; "thinking of sincerity" is from *Mencius* 4A12.

angry at, by the ghost of anger; if they fear what they should not fear, by the ghost of fear."[42]

[41] "Settledness is the original substance of the mind; it is heavenly principle. Activity and stillness are the occasions one meets."

[42] I asked how the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* are alike and how they differ. The Master said: "Zisi summed up the meaning of the whole *Great Learning* in the first chapter of the *Doctrine of the Mean*."[43]

[43] Someone asked: "On Confucius's rectifying of names, an earlier Confucian said he would 'report to the Son of Heaven above and to the regional lords below, depose Zhe, and set up Ying.' What about this?" The Master said: "I'm afraid it could hardly be like that. Could someone show me every respect and courtesy and wait for me to take charge of the government, and I go and depose him first? Is that human feeling or heavenly principle? Since Confucius was willing to serve in Zhe's government, Zhe must already have been able to give him his whole heart and entrust the state to him. The sage's abundant virtue and utmost sincerity would surely already have moved and transformed Zhe of Wei, making him understand that one who has no father cannot be a person, so that he would weep bitterly and hurry off to welcome his father back. The love between father and son is rooted in our Heaven-given nature; if Zhe could repent this earnestly and truly, how could Kuaikui not be moved and come to delight in him? Once Kuaikui had returned, Zhe would hand the state over and ask to be put to death. Kuaikui, already transformed by his son, and with Confucius's utmost sincerity reconciling them, would surely refuse to accept it and would still entrust it to Zhe.[44] The ministers and the people would also insist on having Zhe as ruler. Zhe would then

42 Zixin is Ma Mingheng, a disciple of Wang's. "Accumulate rightness" is from *Mencius* 2A2.

43 Zisi, Confucius's grandson, was traditionally held to be the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

44 Zhe, ruler of Wey, held the throne against his exiled father Kuaikui (*Analects* 13.3); the "earlier Confucian" is Hu Anguo, quoted in Zhu Xi's commentary.

confess his own crimes publicly, petition the Son of Heaven, report to the regional lords and the other lords, and insist on handing the state over to his father. Kuaikui, along with the ministers and the people, would likewise make known the beauty of Zhe's repentance, humaneness, and filial devotion, petition the Son of Heaven, report to the regional lords and the other lords, and insist on having Zhe as their ruler. Then the mandate would converge on Zhe, making him ruler of the state of Wei once more. Zhe, having no choice, would follow the later precedent of the Retired Emperor: he would lead the ministers and the people in honoring Kuaikui as Grand Duke, provide him with everything for his support, and only then step back into his own place. Then the ruler would be ruler, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son; names would be correct and words would follow, and with a single act one could govern the whole world. Perhaps this is what Confucius's rectifying of names was."

[44] I was lodging at the granary of the Court of State Ceremonial when a letter from home suddenly arrived saying my son was gravely ill. I was so anxious and distressed I could hardly bear it. The Master said: "This is just the time to apply effort. If you let this moment slip by, what use is discussing learning in times of leisure? This is exactly when people need to polish themselves. A father's love for his son is of course the deepest of feelings, yet heavenly principle has its own point of equilibrium and harmony; going past it is selfish intention. Here people mostly take it that heavenly principle requires them to worry, and so they go on worrying and suffering, not knowing that this is already 'having worry and anxiety, one does not find the correct balance.' In general, when the seven feelings are stirred, they mostly go too far and rarely fall short. As soon as they go too far, that is not the original substance of the mind; one must adjust them to the proper mean. Take mourning for a parent: what child would not wish to weep themselves to death then and there, to satisfy their heart? Yet it is said, 'Grief must not destroy one's life.' This is not the sage forcing restraint on people; the

original substance of heavenly principle has its own limits, which must not be exceeded. One need only recognize the substance of the mind, and naturally not a hair can be added or taken away."

45 "One cannot say that ordinary people all have 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused.' For substance and function have one source: where there is this substance, there is this function. Where there is 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused,' there is 'the harmony when they are aroused and all hit due measure.' People today do not yet have 'the harmony when they are aroused and all hit due measure,' so you should know that their 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused' is not yet complete either."

46 "The words of the *Changes* are the six characters 'Nine at the beginning: hidden dragon, do not act.' The image of the *Changes* is the first line. The change of the *Changes* is coming upon that line. The divination of the *Changes* is using its words."[45]

47 "'The night qi' is said of ordinary people. If students can apply effort, then during the day, whether there are affairs or not, it is all a place where this qi gathers and grows. For the sage there is no need to speak of 'the night qi' at all."[46]

48 I asked about the chapter "Hold it fast and it is preserved; let it go and it is lost." He said: "'It goes out and comes in at no fixed time, and no one knows its home.' Although this is said of the ordinary person's mind, students too must understand that the original substance of the mind is originally like this; only then will the effort of holding fast and preserving be free of ills. One must not simply take going out as being lost and coming in as being preserved. As for the original substance, it originally has no going out and no coming in. If we speak of going out and coming in, then its thinking and functioning are its going out. But the master is always shining clearly right here—what going

45 The quoted words belong to the first line of Qian, the first hexagram; words, image, change, and divination are the four uses of the *Changes* named in its "Appended Remarks."

46 Mencius (6A8) says the good mind recovers in the calm "qi of the night" after being worn down by the day.

out is there? And since there is no going out, what coming in is there? What Master Cheng called 'the chest' is also just heavenly principle. Even if one responds to people all day long, so long as one does not leave heavenly principle, that is being within the chest. If one leaves heavenly principle, that is called letting it go, that is called losing it." He also said: "Going out and coming in are just activity and stillness. Activity and stillness have no starting point—how could there be a home?"[47]

[49] Wang Jiaxiu asked: "Buddhism draws people onto the Way with escape from birth and death; the immortalists draw people onto the Way with long life and lasting vision. In their minds, too, they do not want people to do wrong. Followed to the very end, they too see the upper part of what the sage saw, but they are not the proper road onto the Way. Among officials today, some come in through the examinations, some through recommendation, some through direct appointment from the palace; all alike rise to high office, but that is not, after all, the proper road into office, and the exemplary person does not take it. At their furthest reach, the immortalists and the Buddhists are roughly the same as the Confucians, but having the upper part, they leave out the lower part, so in the end they are not as complete as the sage. Still, their sameness in the upper part cannot be denied.[48] Later Confucians, for their part, got only the lower part of what the sage taught; splitting it up and losing the truth, they drifted into memorization and recitation, literary composition, profit and achievement, and philological exegesis, and in the end could not avoid becoming heterodox teachings too. These four kinds labor all their lives without the slightest benefit to body and mind. Compared with the followers of the immortalists and the Buddha, who purify their minds, reduce their desires, and stand free above the entanglements of the world, they seem rather to fall short. Students today need not

47 The chapter is *Mencius* 6A8. Master Cheng's saying is "The mind should stay within the chest" (腔子, literally "the body's cavity").

48 Wang Jiaxiu was a disciple of Wang's who had studied Buddhism and Daoism; "long life and lasting vision" is from the *Laozi*, chapter 59.

start by attacking the immortalists and the Buddhists; they should first resolve earnestly on the learning of the sage. When the learning of the sage is made clear, the immortalists and the Buddhists will fade away of themselves. Otherwise, what we learn here may be something they would disdain, and to want them to stoop to it—wouldn't that be hard? That is my humble view. Master, what do you think?" The Master said: "What you say is broadly right. But talk of an upper part and a lower part also comes from people seeing one-sidedly. If we speak of the sage's Way of great centrality and utmost correctness, it runs through top and bottom, all on one thread—what upper part or lower part is there? 'One yin and one yang: that is called the Way.' But 'the humane see it and call it humaneness; the wise see it and call it wisdom,' and 'the common people use it every day without knowing it, and so the Way of the exemplary person is rarely seen.' Can humaneness and wisdom not be called the Way? But once they are seen one-sidedly, faults arise."[49]

50 "The milfoil stalks are indeed the *Changes*; the tortoise shell, too, is the *Changes*."[50]

51 Someone asked: "Confucius said King Wu was not perfectly good. Was he perhaps somewhat dissatisfied with him?" The Master said: "For King Wu, it was only right that it be so." "Had King Wen not died, how would things have turned out?" He said: "While King Wen lived, he already held two of the three parts of the realm. If King Wen had still been alive when King Wu attacked Shang, perhaps it would not have come to raising troops; that last part would surely have come over to him as well. King Wen simply handled the Shang king Zhou well, so that Zhou could not give free rein to his wickedness."[51]

52 Someone asked about Mencius's words: "Holding to the middle without weighing the circumstances is like holding to

49 The quotations are from the "Appended Remarks" of the *Book of Changes*.
50 Milfoil (yarrow) stalks were used to cast hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*. Reading cracks in heated tortoise shell was an older form of divination.
51 In *Analects* 3.25 Confucius says the Wu music, named for King Wu, was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good. King Wen was Wu's father; Zhou was the last Shang king.

one point." The Master said: "The middle is just heavenly principle; it is just change. It changes with the times—how could it be held fast? One must decide what is fitting according to the time; it is hard to fix a rule in advance. Later Confucians want to explain every principle without a single gap and set up a fixed pattern—this is exactly 'holding to one point.'"

53 Tang Xu asked: "Is setting one's resolve a matter of constantly preserving a good thought, wanting to do good and remove evil?" He said: "When a good thought is preserved, that is heavenly principle. This thought is itself good—what other good would you think of? This thought is not evil—what other evil would you remove? This thought is like the root and sprout of a tree. To set one's resolve is just to keep this good thought established for good. 'Following what my mind desired without overstepping the bounds' is just resolve that has come to full ripeness."

54 "In spirit, virtue, speech, and movement, drawing in is generally the main thing; letting out is only for when it cannot be helped. Heaven, Earth, humans, and things are all so."

55 Someone asked: "What kind of person was Wenzhongzi?" The Master said: "Wenzhongzi very nearly 'had the whole body, though in miniature.' A pity he died young." "How, then, do you account for his error of continuing the Classics?" He said: "Continuing the Classics cannot be entirely condemned either." Asked to explain, after a long while he said: "More and more I feel that 'the fine craftsman's heart alone knows its pains.'"[52]

56 "Xu Luzhai's saying that a Confucian should put making a living first also misleads people."[53]

57 Someone asked about the Daoist adepts' primal qi, primal spirit, and primal essence. The Master said: "They are just one thing: flowing, it is qi; condensed, it is essence; in its wondrous functioning, it is spirit."

52 Wenzhongzi is Wang Tong (AD 584–617), a Sui-dynasty scholar who wrote sequels to the Classics. "The whole body in miniature" is from Mencius 2A2; the craftsman line is from Du Fu.

53 Xu Luzhai is Xu Heng (1209–1281), the leading Neo-Confucian of the Yuan dynasty.

[58] "Joy, anger, sorrow, and delight, in their original substance, are of themselves in equilibrium and harmony. The moment one adds some notion of one's own, there is excess or deficiency, and that is selfishness."

[59] Someone asked about "On a day he had wept, he did not sing." The Master said: "The substance of the sage's mind is naturally so."

[60] "Overcoming the self means sweeping clean and clearing out completely, until not a hair remains—only then is it right. If a single hair remains, all the evils will draw one another in."

[61] Someone asked about the *New Book on Pitch Pipes*. The Master said: "Students should attend to what is urgent. Even if one mastered these calculations, I fear they might be of no use; one must first have the root of ritual and music in one's mind, and only then will it do. For instance, the book talks a great deal about using pipes to watch for the qi. But at the very moment of the winter solstice, the ash may fly from some pipes sooner and from others later; within an instant, how would you know which pipe hit the moment of the solstice exactly? You would first have to know the moment of the solstice in your own mind. Here something does not hold together. Students must first apply effort at the root source of ritual and music."[54]

[62] Xu Ai said: "The mind is like a mirror. The sage's mind is like a bright mirror; the ordinary person's mind is like a dull mirror. The recent theory of 'investigating things' is like using the mirror to reflect things: it puts its effort into reflecting, not knowing that the mirror is still dull—how can it reflect? The Master's 'investigating things' is like polishing the mirror to make it bright: it puts its effort into polishing, and once the mirror is bright, reflecting is never given up."

[63] Someone asked about the refined and the coarse in the Way. The Master said: "The Way has no refined or coarse; it is people's views that are refined or coarse. Take this room: when someone

54 The book is by Cai Yuanding (1135–1198), an associate of Zhu Xi. To watch for the qi, pipes packed with fine ash were buried, and the ash was believed to fly out when the seasonal qi arrived.

first comes in, they see only its general layout. After staying a while, they see the pillars, the walls, and so on, each one clearly. After longer still, they make out in fine detail even the patterns on the pillars. Yet it is only one room."

64 The Master said: "Lately, when I see you gentlemen, you have few questions. Why? People who do not apply effort all think they already know how to learn, and need only follow it and act. Little do they know that selfish desires grow daily, like dust on the ground: leave it unswept for a day and there is another layer. Apply effort in earnest and you will see that the Way has no end: the more you probe, the deeper it goes. You must make it refined and pure, with not a hair left unpenetrated, before it will do."

65 Someone asked: "Only when knowing is complete can one speak of making the intentions sincere. As yet I do not fully know heavenly principle and human desires—how can I apply the effort of overcoming the self?" The Master said: "If a person truly and earnestly applies effort to themselves without stopping, then in this mind the subtleties of heavenly principle will show themselves more each day, and the fine details of selfish desire will also show themselves more each day. If you do not apply the effort of overcoming the self, you will spend the whole day just talking; heavenly principle will never show itself, and neither will selfish desire. It is like walking a road: only after walking a stretch do you know that stretch. At a fork, if in doubt you ask, and having asked you walk on; only so do you gradually reach where you want to go. People today will not preserve the heavenly principle they already know, nor remove the human desires they already know, and only fret that they cannot know everything. Just idle talk—what good is that? Wait until you have overcome yourself to the point where there is no selfishness left to overcome; fretting then about not knowing everything will not be too late."

66 Someone asked: "The Way is one, and that is all. Yet when the ancients discussed the Way, they often differed. Is there a key to seeking it?" The Master said: "The Way has no fixed place

or form; it cannot be clung to. To seek the Way by sticking to the literal meaning of texts is to be far off. Take people today who talk only of Heaven—have they ever actually seen Heaven? To say the sun, moon, wind, and thunder are Heaven will not do; to say people, things, grass, and trees are not Heaven will not do either. The Way is Heaven. If you recognize this, what is not the Way? People each take the view from their own corner and fix on it as all the Way is; that is why they differ. If you know how to seek within and see the substance of your own mind, then at no time and in no place is it anything but this Way. Through all antiquity and all the present, without end or beginning—what sameness or difference is there? The mind is the Way; the Way is Heaven. Know the mind and you know the Way and know Heaven." He also said: "If you want actually to see this Way, you must recognize it through experience in your own mind, not by seeking outside; only then will you get it."

67 Someone asked: "Names and things, measures and numbers —must these too be studied first?" The Master said: "If one only brings the substance of one's own mind to completion, the function is contained within it. If one nourishes the substance of the mind until there truly is 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused,' then naturally there is 'the harmony when they are aroused and all hit due measure,' and naturally nothing one does will be amiss. Without this mind, even if one studied in advance all the names and things, measures and numbers in the world, they would have nothing to do with oneself—mere ornament, and when the time came one could not carry them out. This is not to ignore names and things, measures and numbers entirely; only 'know what comes first and what comes after, and one is near the Way.'" He also said: "People should be brought to completion according to their talents; talent is what one is able to do. Kui's music and Ji's farming—their natural endowments were simply so from the start. Bringing them to completion, too, is only a matter of making the substance of their minds pure in heavenly principle. When all their use and application issues from heavenly principle, then it can be called talent. One who

has reached purity in heavenly principle can also be 'not a vessel.' Had Kui and Ji exchanged arts, they could have done them as well." He also said: "'Placed in wealth and honor, act as befits wealth and honor; placed in hardship, act as befits hardship'—all this is 'not being a vessel.' Only those who have nourished the substance of the mind to rightness can do it."[55]

68 "Rather than a pond of many acres with no source, better to be a well a few feet across with a spring: its life never runs out." The Master was sitting by a pond at the time, with a well beside it, so he used it as a metaphor for learning.

69 Someone asked: "The world declines day by day. How can the atmosphere of high antiquity be seen again?" The Master said: "A single day is a whole cosmic cycle. When a person rises at dawn and sits up, before engaging with things, the clear and bright state of the mind is just like roaming in the age of Fu Xi."[56]

70 Someone asked: "The mind tends to chase after things. What should be done?" The Master said: "When the ruler sits upright with folded hands, calm and serene, and the six ministers each manage their own office, the realm is well governed. The mind, governing the five senses, should be the same. Now when the eye wants to see, the mind chases after colors; when the ear wants to hear, the mind chases after sounds. It is as if the ruler, wanting to select officials, went in person to sit in the Ministry of Personnel, or, wanting to deploy troops, went in person to sit in the Ministry of War. That way, not only is the ruler's proper role lost, but the six ministers cannot do their jobs either."

71 "When a good thought arises, know it and expand it; when an evil thought arises, know it and check it. What knows, expands, and checks is resolve—the clear hearing and sight that Heaven gives. The sage has only this; students should preserve this."

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55 Kui was music master and Hou Ji minister of agriculture under the sage-king Shun. "The exemplary person is not a vessel" is *Analects* 2.12.

56 A *yuan*, "cosmic cycle," is the full span of the world's rise and decline in Shao Yong's cosmology. Fu Xi is the legendary earliest ruler.

EQUILIBRIUM BEFORE THE FEELINGS STIR

Wang explains that equilibrium is a mind with every root of selfish desire swept away.

[72] I said: "A mind that loves sex, loves profit, loves fame, and so on is certainly selfish desire. But idle, scattered thoughts—how can they too be called selfish desires?" The Master said: "In the end they arise from the root of loving sex, profit, fame, and so on; seek out their root yourself and you will see. For example, you know for certain that your mind holds no thoughts of committing robbery. Why? Because you never had such a mind to begin with. If your mind toward goods, sex, fame, and profit were all, like the mind of robbery, entirely extinguished, leaving only the bare original substance of the mind, see what idle thoughts there would be! This is 'still and unmoving,' this is 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused,' this is 'broad and greatly impartial.' Naturally 'it responds and penetrates'; naturally 'they are aroused and all hit due measure'; naturally 'things come and one responds as they are.'"

[73] Someone asked about "resolve arrives, qi follows next." The Master said: "It means 'where resolve arrives, qi arrives too'; it does not mean first and second in rank. 'Hold firm to your resolve,' and nourishing the qi is contained in it; 'do no violence to your qi,' and you are also holding firm to your resolve. Mencius was correcting Gaozi's one-sidedness, so he spoke of the two together like this, each holding the other in place."[57]

[74] Someone asked: "A former Confucian said: 'The Way of the sage must come down and make itself low; the words of the worthy draw themselves up to be high.' How about this?" The Master said: "Not so. That would make it false. The sage is like Heaven: there is nowhere that is not Heaven. Above the sun, moon, and stars is Heaven; below the nine depths of the earth is Heaven too. When has Heaven ever come down and made itself

57 The phrase is from Mencius 2A2. Zhu Xi read it as "resolve is supreme, qi comes second"; Wang reads 至 as "arrive" and 次 as "follow close behind."

low? This is what is called 'great and transforming.' The worthy is like a mountain, simply keeping its height. But one a hundred fathoms high cannot stretch itself to a thousand, nor one a thousand fathoms high to ten thousand. So the worthy never draws themselves up to be high; to do so would be false."[58]

75 Someone asked: "Yichuan said, 'One should not seek equilibrium before joy, anger, sorrow, and delight are aroused,' yet Yanping taught students to 'observe the condition before they are aroused.' How about this?" The Master said: "Both are right. Yichuan feared that people would go hunting for some equilibrium before arousal and treat equilibrium as a thing—like what I spoke of earlier, taking the settling of qi for equilibrium—so he had them apply effort only to nurturing and self-examination. Yanping feared that people would not yet have a place to begin, so he had them seek, every moment, the condition before arousal, so that when they looked with eyes straight it was only at this, and when they listened with ears inclined it was only to this—this is the practice of 'being cautious about what one does not see, and fearful about what one does not hear.' Both are words the ancients used, because they had to, to lead people on."[59]

76 I asked: "Ordinary people certainly cannot have the whole of the equilibrium and harmony of joy, anger, sorrow, and delight. But take some small matter that calls for joy or anger: if ordinarily they have no mind of joy or anger, and when the moment comes they still hit due measure, can that too be called equilibrium and harmony?" The Master said: "For a single moment and a single affair it can certainly be called equilibrium and harmony, but it cannot yet be called the great root and the universal Way. Human nature is entirely good; equilibrium and harmony are what everyone originally has—how could one say they are lacking? But since the ordinary person's mind is

58 The former Confucian is Cheng Yi. "Great and transforming" is from Mencius 7B25.

59 Yichuan is Cheng Yi (1033–1107); Yanping is Li Tong (1093–1163), teacher of Zhu Xi.

darkened and obscured, though its original substance does show itself from time to time, in the end it flickers bright and goes dark again, and is not the full substance and great function. Only when there is nothing not in equilibrium is it called 'the great root'; only when there is nothing not in harmony is it called 'the universal Way.' Only the most sincere under Heaven can establish the 'great root' of the world." I said: "I am still not clear on the meaning of the word 'equilibrium.'" He said: "This must be recognized from within your own mind; words cannot convey it. 'Equilibrium' is just heavenly principle." "What is heavenly principle?" "Get rid of human desires and you will know heavenly principle." "Why is heavenly principle called equilibrium?" "It does not lean to any side." "What is it like, not leaning to any side?" "Like a bright mirror: wholly clear and transparent, without the slightest speck of dust clinging to it." I said: "Leaning is being attached to something. When one is attached to things like sex, profit, and fame, the leaning can be seen. But before arousal, beauty, fame, and profit have not yet touched one at all—how can one know there is any leaning?" He said: "Though they have not yet touched you, the mind that ordinarily loves sex, profit, and fame has never been absent. Since it has never been absent, we call it present; since we call it present, one cannot say there is no leaning. Take someone sick with malaria: though at times the fever does not flare, the root of the illness has never been removed, so they cannot be called a person without illness. One must sweep away and wash clean every selfish thought—the everyday love of sex, profit, fame, and the like—with not a hair left lingering, so that the whole of this mind is broad and open, pure heavenly principle; only then can it be called 'equilibrium before joy, anger, sorrow, and delight are aroused,' only then is it 'the great root of the world.'"

[77] Someone asked: "'When Yan Hui died, the sage's learning was lost'—I cannot help doubting this saying." The Master said: "Only Yan Hui saw the whole of the sage's Way. You can tell from his 'heaving a deep sigh.' When he says, 'The Master skillfully leads people on step by step; he broadens me with culture and

restrains me with ritual,' he is speaking after he had seen through. How are broadening with culture and restraining with ritual skillfully leading people on? Students must think about this. The whole substance of the Way is hard even for the sage to tell people; students must cultivate it and awaken to it themselves. Yan Hui's 'though I want to follow it, I find no way' means the same as King Wen's 'gazing at the Way as though not yet seeing it.' Gazing at the Way as though not yet seeing it—this is true seeing. When Yan Hui died, the orthodox line of the sage's learning was no longer handed down whole."[60]

78 Someone asked: "The master of the body is the mind; the luminous clarity of the mind is knowing; the stirring of knowing is intention; what intention attaches to is a thing—is that so?" The Master said: "That is also right."

79 "Just keep this mind always present—that is learning. What good is thinking about past and future affairs? It only lets the mind stray."

80 "Disordered speech is enough to show that the mind is not preserved."

81 Xue Kan asked how Mencius's unmoved mind differed from Gaozi's. The Master said: "Gaozi forcibly grabbed hold of the mind and made it not move. Mencius, though, accumulated rightness until it naturally did not move." He also said: "The original substance of the mind is unmoving to begin with. The original substance of the mind is nature, and nature is principle; nature is originally unmoving, principle is originally unmoving. Accumulating rightness is restoring the mind's original substance."

82 "When the myriad images stand dense and distinct, it is still empty and silent, without a trace; empty and silent without a trace is the myriad images standing dense and distinct. Empty and silent without a trace is the father of 'singleness'; the myriad images standing dense and distinct is the mother of 'refinement.'

60 Wang had made this claim himself, in a farewell preface for Zhan Ruoshui. Yan Hui's sigh is *Analects* 9.11; King Wen's gazing is Mencius 4B20.

Within 'singleness' there is 'refinement'; within 'refinement' there is 'singleness.'"[61]

83 "There are no things outside the mind. For example, when my mind gives rise to a thought of serving my parents with filial devotion, that serving of my parents is the thing."

84 The Master said: "Even now, many of those who pursue the learning I call 'investigating things' slip into a learning of mouth and ear. How much less can those whose learning is of mouth and ear turn back to this! Heavenly principle and human desires: their subtleties are seen, little by little, only through constant effort at self-examination and at overcoming and governing oneself. Now, in the course of a single conversation, though we speak only of heavenly principle, who knows how many selfish desires have arisen in the mind in an instant? Some arise stealthily without our knowing; even when we make an effort to examine, they are not easy to see—how much less can we know them all by mere talk? Now people just talk about heavenly principle and then set it aside without following it, talk about human desires and set them aside without removing them—how is that the learning of 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge'? The learning of later ages, at its very best, achieves only the effort of 'snatching it by an occasional act of rightness.'"[62]

85 Someone asked about "investigating things." The Master said: "格 means to rectify: rectifying what is not right so that it returns to what is right."

86 Someone asked: "'Knowing where to rest'—is it knowing that the highest good lies only in my own mind and was never outside, after which one's resolve is settled?" He said: "Yes."

87 Someone asked: "Is investigating things a matter of applying effort in activity?" The Master said: "Investigating things makes no distinction between activity and stillness; stillness too

61 "Empty and silent without a trace, yet the myriad images stand dense and distinct" is a saying of Cheng Yi.

62 In *Mencius* 2A2 the flood-like qi is born of steadily accumulated rightness, not "snatched by an occasional act of rightness."

is a thing. Mencius said, 'always be doing something'—that means there is something to be done in both activity and stillness."

[88] "The hard part of the effort lies entirely in 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge,' and this is simply the work of 'making the intentions sincere.' Once the intentions are sincere, the mind will for the most part rectify itself, and the self will cultivate itself. Yet the efforts of 'rectifying the mind' and 'cultivating the self' each have their own point of application. 'Cultivating the self' belongs to the side of what is already aroused; 'rectifying the mind' belongs to the side of what is not yet aroused. When the mind is rectified, there is equilibrium; when the self is cultivated, there is harmony."

[89] "From 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge' to 'bringing peace to all under Heaven,' it is all just one thing: 'making bright virtue shine.' Even 'loving the people' is a matter of 'bright virtue.' 'Bright virtue' is the virtue of this mind, and it is humaneness. The humane regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body. If a single thing is out of its place, there my humaneness still falls short."

[90] "To speak only of 'making bright virtue shine' and not of 'loving the people' would be like Laozi and the Buddha."

[91] "The highest good is our nature. Our nature originally has not the slightest trace of evil, so it is called 'the highest good.' To rest in it is simply to return to what one originally is."

[92] Someone asked: "Once one knows that the highest good is one's own nature, that one's nature is contained in one's mind, and that one's mind is the place where the highest good is rested in, one no longer seeks confusedly outside as before, and one's resolve becomes settled. Being settled, one is no longer agitated and becomes calm. Being calm and not acting rashly, one is at peace. Being at peace, one's whole mind and every intention are fixed here alone, and through a thousand thoughts and ten thousand reflections one strives to attain this highest good—this is

being able to deliberate and to attain. Is this way of putting it right?" The Master said: "Broadly speaking, yes."[63]

THE ROOT OF HUMANENESS

Wang explains why Mozi's love without distinctions lacks the root from which humaneness grows.

93 Someone asked: "Master Cheng said, 'The humane regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body.' Why, then, can Mozi's universal love not be called humaneness?" The Master said: "This is very hard to put into words; you must each realize it through your own experience. Humaneness is the principle by which creation produces life upon life without ceasing. Though it pervades everything and is present everywhere, its flowing forth and springing up still proceed gradually, and that is why it produces life without ceasing. At the winter solstice, for instance, one yang arises, and only after that one yang has arisen does it gradually come to six yang. Without the arising of one yang, how could there be six? It is the same with yin. Precisely because it is gradual, there is a point where it begins. Precisely because there is a point where it begins, there is growth. Precisely because there is growth, there is no ceasing.[64] Take a tree. When it first puts out a shoot, that is where the tree's impulse to live begins. After the shoot comes the trunk; after the trunk come branches and leaves; and so it grows without ceasing. Without a shoot, how could there be a trunk, branches, and leaves? If it can put out a shoot, there must be a root below. With a root it lives; without a root it dies. Without a root, where would a shoot come from? The love between father and son and between elder and younger brothers is where the human mind's impulse to live begins, like the tree putting out its shoot. From

63 The question follows the sequence in the opening of the *Great Learning*: knowing where to rest, then being settled, calm, at peace, able to deliberate, and able to attain.

64 Master Cheng here is Cheng Hao (1032–1085). The winter solstice was associated with the hexagram Return, in which a single yang line appears beneath five yin lines.

there, being humane to the people and caring for living things is the growing of trunk, branches, and leaves. Mozi's universal love has no gradations. It regards one's own father and son and one's own brothers just as it regards strangers on the road, and so it does away with the point where things begin. Putting out no shoot, it can be known to have no root, and so it is not life produced without ceasing—how could it be called humaneness? 'Filial devotion and respect for elders are the root of humaneness': that is, the principle of humaneness springs forth from within."

94 Someone asked: "Yanping said, 'Accord with principle and have no selfish mind.' How are 'according with principle' and 'having no selfish mind' to be distinguished?" The Master said: "The mind is principle. 'Having no selfish mind' is 'according with principle'; not yet 'according with principle' is a selfish mind. To speak of the mind and principle as separate is, I fear, not quite right." The questioner went on: "The Buddhists are not tainted by any of the selfishness of worldly feelings and desires, so they seem to have no selfish mind. But since they outwardly cast aside human relationships, they seem not to 'accord with principle.'" He said: "That too is all one affair: it all serves only to fulfill a mind bent on its own self."[65]

RECORDED BY XUE KAN

Xue Kan's record opens: holding to resolve, knowing how to learn, and the ailment of chasing results.

95 I asked: "Holding to one's resolve is like having a pain in the heart. With the whole mind on the pain, how would one have time for idle talk or idle business?" The Master said: "For a beginner, applying effort this way is fine. But one must come to know that 'it goes out and comes in at no fixed time, and no one knows its home.' The spirit and clarity of the mind are originally like this, and only then does the effort have something to hold

65 Yanping is Li Tong (1093–1163), Zhu Xi's teacher.

on to. If one just clings to it rigidly, I fear the effort itself will give rise to a new ailment."[66]

96 I asked: "If one devotes oneself only to nourishing the mind and does not pursue discussion and inquiry, one may mistake desire for principle. What then?" The Master said: "One must know how to learn. Discussion and inquiry are just nourishing; not pursuing discussion and inquiry only means that one's resolve to nourish is not earnest." I asked: "What is knowing how to learn?" The Master said: "Tell me, why do you learn? What is it you are learning?" I said: "I have heard you teach that learning is learning to preserve heavenly principle. The original substance of the mind is heavenly principle, and to realize heavenly principle one need only keep one's own mind free of selfish intentions." The Master said: "In that case, one need only overcome and remove selfish intentions. Why worry that principle and desire are unclear?" I said: "What I fear is precisely that I may not recognize these selfish intentions truly." The Master said: "It all comes down to the resolve not being earnest. When the resolve is earnest, the eyes' seeing and the ears' hearing are all on this—how could one fail to recognize them truly? 'The heart of right and wrong all people have'; there is no need to seek it outside. Discussion and inquiry are just experiencing for oneself what one's own mind sees. Surely you don't think there is some other seeing outside the mind?"

97 The Master asked the friends present: "How has your effort been going lately?" One friend described a sense of emptiness and clarity. The Master said: "That is talk of passing states." Another friend recounted how things differed now from before. The Master said: "That is talk of results." The two friends were at a loss and asked what was right. The Master said: "In applying effort today, all we want is for the mind that does good to be genuine and earnest. When this mind is genuine and earnest, seeing good one moves toward it, and having a fault one corrects it—only that is genuine, earnest effort. In this way human

66 Xue Kan (1486–1545), courtesy name Shangqian, printed the first edition of these records in 1518; the conversations that follow are from his record.

desires dwindle day by day, and heavenly principle grows brighter day by day. If you just keep seeking passing states and talking of results, that is the ailment of forcing growth and running outward, not effort."

98 When the friends read books, many picked out points in Zhu Xi to criticize. The Master said: "To set out deliberately to differ is wrong. Where my teaching sometimes differs from Zhu Xi's, it is because at the point of entry, where one first sets to work, a hair's breadth becomes a thousand miles, and I cannot help disputing it. But my mind and Zhu Xi's mind have never differed. As for the rest, where he explains the meaning of the text clearly and aptly, how could I change a single word?"

SAGES AS FINE GOLD

Wang compares sages to fine gold: alike in purity though different in weight.

99 Xiyuan asked: "Sagehood can be reached through learning. Yet Bo Yi and Yi Yin were in the end unlike Confucius in talent and strength. In what way are they alike in being called sages?" The Master said: "What makes a sage a sage is only that the mind is pure heavenly principle, with no admixture of human desires—just as what makes fine gold fine is only that its purity is full, with no admixture of copper or lead. A person becomes a sage only on reaching pure heavenly principle; gold becomes fine only on reaching full purity. Yet sages differ in the greatness of their talent and strength, as pieces of gold differ in weight. Yao and Shun are like ten thousand *yi*; King Wen and Confucius like nine thousand *yi*; Yu, Tang, and King Wu like seven or eight thousand *yi*; Bo Yi and Yi Yin like four or five thousand *yi*.[67] Their talent and strength differ, but in being pure heavenly principle they are the same, and all may be called sages—just as, though their weights differ, their full purity is the same, and all may be called fine gold. Put five thousand *yi* among ten thousand *yi*, and

67 Xiyuan is the disciple Cai Zongyan. A *yi* was a unit of weight for gold, about twenty or twenty-four ounces.

the purity is the same; place Bo Yi and Yi Yin among Yao and Confucius, and their being pure heavenly principle is the same. For what makes fine gold lies in full purity, not in weight; what makes a sage lies in being pure heavenly principle, not in talent and strength. So even an ordinary person who is willing to learn and make this mind pure heavenly principle can become a sage —just as a single ounce of gold set beside ten thousand *yi* differs vastly in weight, yet in reaching full purity need feel no shame. That is why it is said, 'All people can become Yao and Shun.' Students learning to be sages do nothing more than remove human desires and preserve heavenly principle, like refining gold to bring it to full purity. Where gold falls only a little short in purity, the work of smelting is less and the result is easily achieved; the lower the purity, the harder the smelting. People's endowments of qi differ in clarity and murkiness, purity and mixture: some are above the average, some below. With regard to the Way, some know it from birth and practice it with ease; others learn it and practice it for its benefit; those below them must make a hundred efforts where another makes one, a thousand where another makes ten. But when they succeed, the achievement is one and the same. Later generations, not knowing that the basis of becoming a sage is being pure heavenly principle, sought sagehood only in knowledge and abilities. They thought the sage knew everything and could do everything, and that they had to master all of the sage's knowledge and abilities one by one. So instead of applying effort to heavenly principle, they vainly wore out their spirit and exhausted their strength, boring into books, searching into names and things, imitating outward traces. The wider their knowledge, the more their human desires flourished; the greater their talents, the more heavenly principle was obscured. It is just like someone who sees another with ten thousand *yi* of fine gold and, instead of working at refining for purity so as to be no less pure than the other, foolishly hopes for weight and strives to match the other's ten thousand *yi*, throwing in tin, lead, copper, and iron all together. The more the weight increases, the lower the purity, until in the end

there is no gold left at all." Xu Ai, who was beside him at the time, said: "This analogy of yours is enough to dispel the confusion of fragmented learning among the scholars of our age. It is a great service to later students." The Master also said: "In applying effort, we seek to decrease each day, not to increase each day. Remove one portion of human desire, and you recover one portion of heavenly principle. How light and free! How simple and easy!"

100 Shide asked: "The doctrine of 'investigating things' as you teach it is clear, simple, and easy; anyone can see it. Zhu Xi was the most brilliant mind of his age, yet on this point he did not see clearly. Why?" The Master said: "Zhu Xi had great vigor of spirit. From early on he set out to carry on the past and open the way for the future, so he always applied his effort to research and writing. Had he first cultivated himself in what bore on his own person, he would naturally have had no time for this. Once his virtue had matured, if he truly worried that the Way was not understood, he could have done as Confucius did—withdrawing to edit the Six Classics, cutting away the excess to keep what was essential, and setting it forth for later learners—which for the most part took little research. Zhu Xi wrote many books in his early years and only in old age regretted it. He did things in reverse order." Shide said: "His regret in old age shows when he says, 'My earlier definitive editions were mistaken,' and again, 'Though I have read books, what good have they done for my own concerns?' and again, 'This has nothing whatever to do with clinging to books and sticking to words.' Only then did he regret the mistakes of his earlier effort and turn to cultivating himself in what bore on his own person." The Master said: "Yes. This is where Zhu Xi is beyond others' reach: his strength was great, and once he regretted, he turned around. It is a pity that he died soon after and had no time to correct the many errors of his earlier days."[68]

68 Shide is the disciple Yang Ji.

WEEDING THE FLOWERS

Weeding a garden, Xue Kan learns that good and evil arise from the mind's own likes and dislikes.

[101] I was weeding among the flowers and remarked: "Why is it that between Heaven and Earth the good is so hard to cultivate and evil so hard to remove?" The Master said: "It's only that you haven't cultivated or removed them." After a while he said: "Looking at good and evil this way always starts from thoughts arising from the physical self, and so it goes wrong." I did not understand. The Master said: "The life-impulse of Heaven and Earth is the same in flowers and in weeds—when has there been any distinction of good and evil? When you want to look at flowers, you take the flowers as good and the weeds as evil; if you wanted to use the weeds, you would take the weeds as good instead. Good and evil of this kind all arise from your mind's likes and dislikes; that is how I know it is wrong." I said: "Then is there neither good nor evil?" The Master said: "Being beyond good and evil is the stillness of principle; having good and evil is the stirring of qi. When one is not stirred by qi, one is beyond good and evil, and this is called the highest good." I said: "The Buddhists are also beyond good and evil. How is this different?" The Master said: "The Buddhists fix on being beyond good and evil and so ignore everything; they cannot govern the world. The sage's being beyond good and evil is just 'making no willful likes' and 'making no willful dislikes'—not being stirred by qi. Yet in 'following the Way of the king' and 'converging on the ultimate standard,' one naturally 'follows heavenly principle throughout,' and so there is 'completing and assisting.'" I said: "If weeds are not evil, then weeds should not be removed." The Master said: "That again is the view of the Buddhists and Daoists. If the weeds are in the way, what harm in your removing them?" I said: "But that again is making willful likes and dislikes." The Master said: "Making no willful likes and dislikes does not mean having no likes and dislikes at all—that would be

a person without awareness. To say one does not 'make' them means only that one's likes and dislikes follow principle throughout, without adding the least bit of one's own intent. That way, it is as if one had never liked or disliked at all."[69] I said: "How is removing weeds following principle throughout, without adding intent?" The Master said: "If the weeds are in the way, principle says they should be removed, so you remove them, that's all. If by chance they are not removed right away, that doesn't burden the mind. If you add even a bit of intent, the substance of the mind is burdened, and there will be many places where qi is stirred." I said: "Then good and evil are not in things at all?" The Master said: "They are only in your mind. Following principle is good; stirring qi is evil." I said: "So in the end things have no good or evil." The Master said: "As it is in the mind, so it is in things. It is only because the scholars of our age do not know this that they abandon the mind and chase after things, misreading the learning of 'investigating things.' All day long they run about seeking outside and achieve only 'snatching it by an occasional act of rightness'; all their lives they act without understanding and practice without examining." I said: "What about 'like loving a lovely color, like hating a foul odor'?" The Master said: "That is precisely following principle throughout: heavenly principle ought to be so, and there is no selfish intention making willful likes and dislikes." I said: "'Like loving a lovely color, like hating a foul odor'—how can that not be intention?" The Master said: "It is a sincere intention, not a selfish intention. A sincere intention simply follows heavenly principle. Yet though it follows heavenly principle, not a bit of intent may be added to it. So if there is anger, or fondness and delight, the mind will not be rectified; only when it is broad and wholly impartial is it the original substance of the mind. Know this, and you know 'equilibrium before the feelings are

69 "Making no willful likes," "following the Way of the king," and "converging on the ultimate standard" come from the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Book of Documents*; "completing and assisting," the ruler's ordering of Heaven and Earth, comes from the *Book of Changes*.

aroused.'" Bosheng said: "You said, 'If the weeds are in the way, principle says they should be removed.' Why, then, is it thoughts arising from the physical self?" The Master said: "You must experience this in your own mind. When you want to remove weeds, what kind of mind is that? When Zhou Dunyi did not clear the grass before his window, what kind of mind was that?"[70]

102 The Master said to the students: "In learning you must have the main point; only then does effort have something to hold on to. Even if you cannot yet keep at it without interruption, it is like a boat with a rudder: a single pull and you are awake. Otherwise, though you engage in learning, you achieve only 'snatching it by an occasional act of rightness,' acting without understanding and practicing without examining—not the great root or the universal Way." He also said: "Once you see it, whichever way you put it, crosswise or lengthwise, it is right. If you get through here but not there, you just haven't seen it yet."

103 Someone asked about being unable, for the sake of their parents, to avoid the burden of studying for the examinations. The Master said: "If studying for the examinations for your parents' sake is a burden to learning, then is farming the fields to support one's parents also a burden to learning? A former worthy said, 'The only worry is that it may rob you of your resolve.' I only fear that your resolve to learn is not genuine and earnest."

104 Ouyang De asked: "Ordinarily my mind is mostly busy. When there is something to do, of course it is busy; but when there is nothing to do, it is busy too. Why?" The Master said: "The workings of qi in Heaven and Earth have never paused for a single breath, yet there is a ruler, so they are neither early nor late, neither hasty nor slow. Through a thousand changes and ten thousand transformations, the ruler stays settled. It is from this that people live. When the ruler is settled, one is ceaseless like the course of Heaven, and though responding to ten thou-

70 Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) left the grass outside his window uncut, saying its urge to live was the same as his own. Bosheng is the disciple Meng Yuan.

sand changes, one is always unhurried and at ease—as it is said, 'The heavenly lord is calm, and the hundred parts of the body obey.' Without a ruler there is only this qi rushing headlong—how could one not be busy?"[71]

105 The Master said: "The great ailment in learning lies in loving a name." I said: "In years past I told myself this ailment had grown lighter. Lately, examining myself closely, I find it has not gone at all. Need it mean striving for outward show and acting for others' eyes? Simply being pleased at praise and downcast at blame—is that the ailment flaring up?" The Master said: "Exactly. Name stands opposite reality. Make the mind that works at reality one part heavier, and the mind that works at a name becomes one part lighter. If it is wholly the mind that works at reality, there is no mind at all that works at a name. If the mind that works at reality is like the hungry seeking food and the thirsty seeking drink, how would one have time to love a name?" He also said: "'To be distressed at leaving the world without one's name being matched'—here 'matched' is read in the departing tone, and it has the same sense as 'When reputation exceeds reality, the exemplary person is ashamed.' If one's reality does not match one's name, while alive one can still make up for it; once dead, it is too late. 'At forty or fifty and still not heard of' means not having heard the Way, not lacking reputation. Confucius said, 'That is being known, not being accomplished.' How would he expect that of anyone?"[72]

106 I was often full of regret. The Master said: "Regret and awakening are medicine for removing ailments, but what matters is correcting the fault. If regret lingers and stagnates within, then the medicine itself gives rise to an ailment."

107 Dezhang said: "I have heard that you, Master, compare sagehood to fine gold, the measure of a sage to the weight of the gold, and the effort of students to refining it. This is most pro-

71 Ouyang De (1496–1554), courtesy name Chongyi, was one of Wang's leading disciples.

72 Read in the departing tone, the word 稱 (*Analects* 15.20) means "to match" rather than "to be praised," so the worry is that one's name outruns one's reality, not that one lacks fame.

found and apt. Only, you say Yao and Shun were ten thousand *yi* and Confucius nine thousand *yi*. I suspect this is not quite right." The Master said: "This is again thinking that arises from the body, and so you argue over weight on the sages' behalf. If thinking did not arise from the body, then Yao and Shun's ten thousand *yi* would not be more, and Confucius's nine thousand *yi* would not be less. Yao and Shun's ten thousand *yi* are simply Confucius's; Confucius's nine thousand *yi* are simply Yao and Shun's. From the start there is no 'they' and 'I,' and that is why they are called sages. What counts is only 'refinement and singleness,' not more or less. So long as the mind is alike in being pure heavenly principle, they are alike called sages. As for strength and vigor, how could these all be the same? Later Confucians measured only weight, and so they drifted into profit and achievement. If you remove the mind that compares weights, and each person uses their own strength and spirit to the full, applying effort only to making this mind pure heavenly principle, then everyone has it in themselves and each is complete. The great can become great, the small can become small, with no need to envy anything outside, and nothing is lacking. This is the solid, down-to-earth work of 'understanding the good and making the self sincere.' Later Confucians did not understand the learning of the sages. They did not know how to realize and expand the innate knowing and innate ability in their own minds. Instead they sought to know what they could not know and to do what they could not do, aiming only at the lofty and the great. Not knowing that their own minds were the minds of Jie and Zhou, they would at every turn try to accomplish the work of Yao and Shun. How could they? They toil away year after year until old age and death, and in the end they do not know what they have achieved. It is sad indeed."

[108] I asked: "Earlier Confucians took the stillness of the mind as its substance and its activity as its function. What do you think?" The Master said: "The mind cannot be divided into substance and function by activity and stillness. Activity and stillness are times. Speaking of the substance, the function is in the

substance; speaking of the function, the substance is in the function. This is what is meant by 'substance and function have one source.' But there is no harm in saying that in stillness its substance can be seen and in activity its function can be seen."

[109] Someone asked: "Why is it that the very wise and the very foolish cannot be changed?" The Master said: "It is not that they cannot change. They are simply unwilling to change."

[110] Someone asked about the chapter where "Zixia's disciples asked about friendship." The Master said: "Zixia was speaking of friendship among the young; Zizhang was speaking of friendship among grown men. Used well, both are right."[73]

[111] Ziren asked: "'To learn and practice it at the right times—is that not a pleasure?' Earlier Confucians took 'learning' to mean imitating what those who awakened first did. What do you think?" The Master said: "Learning is learning to remove human desires and preserve heavenly principle. If one devotes oneself to removing human desires and preserving heavenly principle, one will naturally seek correction from those who awakened first and examine the ancient teachings. One will naturally put in a great deal of effort at questioning and discussion, reflection, preserving and examining, overcoming and governing oneself. Yet all this is only to remove the human desires of this mind and preserve the heavenly principle of my mind. To say 'imitating what those who awakened first did' names only one thing within learning, and it also seems to seek only outside. As for 'practicing at the right times': 'sit like the impersonator of the dead' does not mean practicing sitting as such; it means practicing this mind while sitting. 'Stand as if fasting' does not mean practicing standing as such; it means practicing this mind while standing. The 'pleasure' is the pleasure in 'principle and rightness please my mind.' The human mind by nature takes pleasure in principle and rightness, just as the eye by nature takes pleasure in color and the ear in sound. Only when it is obscured and

73 In *Analects* 19.3, Zixia teaches choosing one's friends and rejecting the unworthy; Zizhang answers that one should welcome everyone while honoring the worthy.

burdened by human desires does it fail to take pleasure. If human desires are removed day by day, principle and rightness will soak in more fully day by day. How could one not take pleasure?"[74]

112 Guoying asked: "Zengzi's 'examining myself three times a day' is earnest, but wasn't it perhaps his effort from before he heard of the 'one thread'?" The Master said: "Confucius told Zengzi of the 'one thread' because he saw that Zengzi had not yet grasped the key to applying effort. If students truly apply effort to loyalty and reciprocity, is that not the 'one thread'? The 'one' is like the root of a tree, the 'thread' like its branches and leaves. If the root has not been planted, how can there be branches and leaves? Substance and function have one source. If the substance is not established, where would the function come from? It has been said, 'In its functions, Zengzi had already examined each matter carefully and practiced it with vigor, but he did not yet know that its substance is one.' I fear this is not the whole story."[75]

113 Huang Chengfu asked about the chapter "Who is better, you or Hui?" The Master said: "Zigong learned much and remembered it, applying effort to what he heard and saw. Yan Hui applied effort to the ground of the mind. So the sage asked the question to awaken Zigong. But Zigong's answer again stayed on knowledge and views, so the sage sighed in regret for him. It was not approval."[76]

114 "Yan Hui did not shift his anger onto others and did not repeat a mistake. He too could do this only because he had the 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused.'"

115 "One who plants a tree must tend its roots; one who plants virtue must nourish the mind. If you want the tree to grow, you

74 At ancestral sacrifices, a living person sat motionless as the 'impersonator of the dead', representing the ancestor. Both sayings come from the *Book of Rites*.
75 In *Analects* 4.15, Confucius tells Zengzi that his Way has 'one thread running through it'; the view Wang questions is Zhu Xi's commentary on that passage.
76 In *Analects* 5.9 Confucius's closing words can be read 'I grant that you are not his equal' or 'Neither you nor I is his equal'; Wang hears them as a sigh of regret, not praise.

must prune its excess branches when it first sprouts. If you want virtue to flourish, you must get rid of outward attractions when you first begin to learn. If you are drawn outward to poetry and prose, your energy will leak away day by day into poetry and prose. It is the same with every outward attraction." He also said: "The learning I am teaching here is an effort that brings something out of nothing. You must trust it fully. It is simply a matter of setting one's resolve. A student's resolve, a single thought to do good, is like the seed of a tree. Just neither forget nor force it, and keep on tending it. Naturally it will grow day and night, its vitality fuller each day, its branches and leaves more luxuriant each day. When a tree first sprouts and puts out excess branches, these too must be cut away, and only then can its root and trunk grow large. It is the same when one first begins to learn. That is why, in setting one's resolve, what matters is singleness."

116 In a discussion of the Master's followers, someone remarked that one was applying effort to nurturing the mind and another to knowledge and insight. The Master said: "Those who concentrate on nurturing see more each day of what they lack. Those who concentrate on knowledge and insight see more each day of what they have to spare. Those who lack more each day will have more to spare each day. Those who have more to spare each day will lack more each day."

REVERENCE AND EXPLORING PRINCIPLE

Liang Rifu learns that abiding in reverence and fully exploring principle are one effort.

117 Liang Rifu asked: "Abiding in reverence and fully exploring principle are two things, yet you take them as one. Why?" The Master said: "Between Heaven and Earth there is only this one thing. How could there be two? And if we speak of its countless differences, there are 'three hundred rules of ritual and three thousand rules of conduct'—why stop at two? Tell me, what is abiding in reverence? What is fully exploring principle?" Rifu

said: "Abiding in reverence is the effort of preserving and nourishing. Fully exploring principle is fully exploring the principles of affairs and things." The Master said: "Preserving and nourishing what?" Rifu said: "Preserving and nourishing the heavenly principle of this mind." The Master said: "In that case, it too is simply fully exploring principle." He went on: "Now tell me, how does one fully explore the principles of affairs and things?" Rifu said: "For example, in serving one's parents one must fully explore the principle of filial devotion; in serving one's ruler one must fully explore the principle of loyalty." The Master said: "Are the principles of loyalty and filial devotion in the persons of the ruler and the parents? Or are they in one's own mind? If they are in one's own mind, then this too is simply fully exploring the principle of this mind. Now tell me, what is reverence?" Rifu said: "It is simply concentrating on one thing." "What is concentrating on one thing?" Rifu said: "When reading, for example, one's whole mind is on the reading; when dealing with an affair, one's whole mind is on dealing with the affair." The Master said: "Then when drinking wine, one's whole mind is on drinking wine; when pursuing sensual beauty, one's whole mind is on pursuing sensual beauty. That is chasing after things. What kind of effort at abiding in reverence is that?" Rifu asked for instruction. The Master said: "The 'one' is heavenly principle. Concentrating on one thing means keeping one's whole mind on heavenly principle. If one knows only concentrating on one thing and does not know that the one is principle, then when there are affairs one chases after things, and when there are none one clings to emptiness. It is only because, whether there are affairs or not, one's whole mind applies effort to heavenly principle that abiding in reverence is also fully exploring principle. Speaking of fully exploring principle where it is concentrated and single, we call it abiding in reverence. Speaking of abiding in reverence where it is refined and exact, we call it fully exploring principle. It is not that, after abiding in reverence, there is some other mind that explores principle, or that, while exploring principle, there is some other mind that abides

in reverence. The names differ, but the effort is only one thing. So the *Changes* says, 'Reverence to straighten the inner, rightness to square the outer.' Reverence is rightness when there are no affairs; rightness is reverence when there are affairs. The two lines together speak of one thing. When Confucius speaks of 'cultivating oneself with reverence,' there is no need to mention rightness. When Mencius speaks of 'accumulating rightness,' there is no need to mention reverence. Once you grasp this, whether you put it one way or another, the effort is always the same. If you cling to the wording and chase after phrases without recognizing what is fundamental, everything becomes fragmented and torn apart, and the effort has nowhere to land." Rifu asked: "How is fully exploring principle the same as fully realizing one's nature?" The Master said: "The substance of the mind is the nature, and the nature is principle. To fully explore the principle of humaneness is truly to carry humaneness to the utmost of humaneness. To fully explore the principle of rightness is truly to carry rightness to the utmost of rightness. Humaneness and rightness are simply my nature; so fully exploring principle is fully realizing the nature. When Mencius speaks of 'filling out the heart of compassion' until 'humaneness is more than can ever be used,' this is the effort of fully exploring principle." Rifu said: "An earlier Confucian said, 'Every plant and every tree has its principle, and they must be examined.' What do you think?" The Master said: "As for me, I have no time for that. First go and come to grips with your own nature and feelings. Only one who can fully realize the nature of people can fully realize the nature of things." Rifu was startled and had an awakening.[77]

118 Weiqian asked: "How is knowing the original substance of the mind?" The Master said: "Knowing is the numinous awareness of principle. Speaking of it as what governs, we call it the mind; speaking of it as what is endowed, we call it the nature. There is no small child who does not know to love its parents,

77 The 'earlier Confucian' is Cheng Yi (1033–1107), whose call to examine the principle of every plant and tree Zhu Xi adopted.

and none who does not know to respect its elder brother. It is only that this numinous capacity must not be screened off by selfish desires and must be extended to the full; then it is complete. Complete, it is its original substance, and it is one with the virtue of Heaven and Earth. Everyone short of the sage has some obscuration, and so must 'investigate things' to extend their knowing."

[119] Shouheng asked: "The effort of the *Great Learning* is simply making the intentions sincere, and the effort of making the intentions sincere is simply investigating things. Cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world are all fully accomplished by making the intentions sincere. Yet there is also the effort of rectifying the mind: 'If there is anger, fondness, or delight, it will not be correct.' Why?" The Master said: "You must think this through and find it for yourself. If you understand this, you will understand 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused.'" Shouheng asked again and again. The Master said: "The effort of learning has shallow and deep stages. At first, if one does not put real intention into loving good and hating evil, how can one do good and remove evil? This putting in of real intention is making the intentions sincere. But if one does not know that the original substance of the mind has not a single thing in it, and keeps putting intention into loving good and hating evil, then there is this extra bit of intention, and the mind is not broad and impartial. Only what the *Book of Documents* calls 'making no willful likes and no willful dislikes' is the original substance. That is why it says, 'If there is anger, fondness, or delight, it will not be correct.' Rectifying the mind is simply, within the effort of making the intentions sincere, to realize the substance of one's own mind in oneself, keeping it always like an empty mirror and a level scale. This is 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused.'"

[120] Zhengzhi asked: "'Caution and apprehension are the effort for when one does not know; watchfulness in solitude is the effort for what one alone knows.' What about this view?" The Master said: "It is only one effort. When there are no affairs, it is

of course what one alone knows; when there are affairs, it is also what one alone knows. If people do not know to exert themselves here, where one alone knows, and apply effort only where everyone can know, that is pretense. That is 'covering up only after seeing an exemplary person.' This place where one alone knows is the sprout of sincerity. Here, whether a thought is good or evil, there is no falseness at all. One right, a hundred right; one wrong, a hundred wrong. This is exactly the boundary between true kingship and hegemony, rightness and profit, sincerity and falseness, good and evil. To take one's stand here and stand firm is to set the root right and clear the source. It is to establish sincerity.[78] All the ancients' many efforts at making the self sincere—their spirit and lifeblood—lie wholly here. Truly, 'nothing is more visible, nothing more manifest.' At all times and in all places, without end and without beginning, it is only this effort. If you now further split off caution and apprehension as belonging to what one does not know, the effort becomes fragmented and also has interruptions. Caution and apprehension are themselves knowing. If one did not know, who would be cautious and apprehensive? An understanding like that would lead into a Chan meditation of cutting off and extinction." Zhengzhi said: "If, whether a thought is good or evil, there is no falseness at all, then in this place where one alone knows, is there never a time without thoughts?" The Master said: "Caution and apprehension are also thoughts. The thought of caution and apprehension can never rest at any time. If the mind of caution and apprehension is not preserved even for a moment, then if it is not dullness, it has already slipped into evil thoughts. From morning to night, from youth to old age, if you wanted to have no thoughts, that would be not knowing. That happens only in a stupor of sleep, only as withered wood and dead ashes."

121 Zhidao asked: "Xunzi said, 'For nourishing the mind nothing is better than sincerity.' Earlier Confucians rejected this. Why?" The Master said: "This cannot simply be called wrong. The word 'sincerity' is sometimes used of an effort. Sincerity is

78 The view quoted is Zhu Xi's, from his commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

the original substance of the mind, and seeking to return to that original substance is the effort of 'thinking of sincerity.' When Mingdao spoke of 'preserving it with sincerity and reverence,' he meant this too. The *Great Learning* says, 'Those who wished to rectify their minds first made their intentions sincere.' Xunzi's words certainly have many faults, but one must not pick at them all alike. In general, when reading someone's words, if you already hold a fixed view, you will go too far. 'Pursue wealth and you will not be humane': Mencius took these words from Yang Hu. Here one sees the great impartiality of the minds of the sages and worthies."[79]

THE TRUE SELF

Xiao Hui cannot overcome himself; Wang shows him that the true self is the mind that governs the body.

122 Xiao Hui asked: "My selfishness is hard to overcome. What should I do?" The Master said: "Bring your selfishness here, and I will overcome it for you." The Master went on: "One must have a mind that is for oneself before one can overcome oneself; only by overcoming oneself can one complete oneself." Xiao Hui said: "I do have a good deal of a mind that is for myself, but I don't know why I can't overcome myself." The Master said: "Tell me, then, what this mind that is for yourself is like." After a long while Hui said: "I am wholeheartedly set on being a good person, so I thought I had a good deal of a mind that is for myself. Thinking about it now, it seems I have only been for the bodily self and never for the true self." The Master said: "When has the true self ever been apart from the body? I fear you have not even been for that bodily self. Tell me, isn't what you call the bodily self simply the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs?" Hui said: "Exactly. For their sake the eyes want color, the ears want sound, the mouth wants flavor, and the four limbs want ease and pleasure. That is why I can't overcome myself." The Master said:

79 Mingdao is Cheng Hao (1032–1085), the elder of the Cheng brothers. Yang Hu was a retainer who seized power in Confucius's state of Lu.

"'Beautiful colors make the eyes blind, beautiful sounds make the ears deaf, fine flavors spoil the palate, galloping and hunting drive one mad.' All these harm your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs. How can they be for your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs? If you are for your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs, you must think about how the ears should listen, how the eyes should look, how the mouth should speak, and how the four limbs should move. Only by not looking, listening, speaking, or moving contrary to ritual can you make something of your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs; only this is being for your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs. Now you spend all day running outward in pursuit, for fame and for profit. All these are things outside the body. If you are for your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs and want not to look, listen, speak, or move contrary to ritual, is it your ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs that can refrain from looking, listening, speaking, and moving by themselves?[80] It must come from your mind. This looking, listening, speaking, and moving are all your mind. Your mind's looking opens out through the eyes; your mind's listening opens out through the ears; your mind's speaking opens out through the mouth; your mind's moving opens out through the four limbs. Without your mind there would be no ears, eyes, mouth, or nose. What I call your mind is not just that lump of flesh and blood. If it were that lump of flesh and blood, then someone who has died still has that lump of flesh and blood—so why can't they look, listen, speak, or move? What I call your mind is that which can look, listen, speak, and move. This is the nature; this is heavenly principle. Only with this nature can one live. This life-giving principle of the nature is called humaneness. This life-giving principle of the nature: issuing in the eyes, it sees; issuing in the ears, it hears; issuing in the mouth, it speaks; issuing in the four limbs, it moves. All of this is simply heavenly principle coming forth. Because it governs the whole body, it is called the mind. The original substance of this mind is from the start simply heavenly principle,

80 Adapted from *Laozi* 12.

with nothing contrary to ritual in it. This is your true self, and this true self is the master of the body. Without the true self there is no body. Truly, with it one lives; without it one dies. If you are truly for that bodily self, you must make use of this true self. You must always guard the original substance of this true self, cautious over what is unseen, apprehensive over what is unheard, fearing only that it might suffer the slightest harm. The moment the least thing contrary to ritual stirs, it should feel like a knife cutting or a needle pricking, unbearable, so that you must remove the knife and pull out the needle. Only this is having a mind that is for oneself, and only then can one overcome oneself. Right now you are taking a thief for your own son. How can you say you have a mind that is for yourself but cannot overcome yourself?"

123 A student had an eye ailment and was deeply distressed by it. The Master said: "You value your eyes and slight your mind."

124 Xiao Hui was fond of the Daoist arts of immortality and of Buddhism. The Master warned him: "I too, from my youth, was wholeheartedly devoted to those two schools. I believed I had gained something from them, and I thought the Confucians not worth studying. Later, after three years living among the peoples of the far southwest, I came to see how simple and easy, how broad and great the learning of the sage is. Only then did I sigh with regret at having misspent thirty years of effort. On the whole, the subtlety of the two schools differs from the sage's by only a hair's breadth. What you are studying now is their dregs and leavings, yet you trust it and delight in it like this. You are truly the owl clutching its rotten rat." Hui asked about the subtlety of the two schools. The Master said: "I just told you that the learning of the sage is simple and easy, broad and great. Yet you do not ask about what I awoke to; you ask only about what I regret." Hui apologized in shame and asked about the learning of the sage. The Master said: "You are only asking as a formality. Wait until you have a mind that truly wants to become a sage, then come, and I will tell you." Hui asked again and again. The

Master said: "I have already said it all to you in one sentence, and you still do not get it."[81]

125 Liu Guanshi asked: "What is 'equilibrium before the feelings are aroused'?" The Master said: "Just be cautious about what is unseen and apprehensive about what is unheard. Nourish this mind until it is pure heavenly principle, and you will see it naturally." Guanshi asked him to sketch roughly what it is like. The Master said: "When a mute person eats a bitter melon, they cannot tell you what it is like. If you want to know this bitterness, you have to eat it yourself." Xu Ai was beside him at the time and said: "This is what it means that true knowing is acting." At that moment all the friends present had an insight.

126 Xiao Hui asked about the Way of life and death. The Master said: "Know day and night, and you know life and death." He asked about the Way of day and night. The Master said: "Know day, and you know night." Hui said: "Is there anything about day that one might not know?" The Master said: "Can you know day? You get up in a daze and eat in a stupor. You act without understanding and practice without examining. You are muddled all day long, only dreaming through the day. Only when every breath is nourishing and every blink is preserving, when this mind is alert and bright and heavenly principle goes on without a moment's break, can you know day. This is heavenly virtue. This is knowing by penetrating the Way of day and night. What life and death would there be then?"

127 Ma Zixin asked: "On 'cultivating the Way is called teaching,' the old commentary says: 'The sage regulates and grades what our nature inherently has, so as to make it a model for the world, such as ritual, music, punishments and government.' What do you think of this?" The Master said: "The Way is the nature and is the mandate. It is originally whole and complete. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it, and it needs no embellishment. Why would it need the sage to regulate and grade it? That would make it something incomplete. Ritual,

81 The owl comes from the *Zhuangzi*: an owl with a rotten rat screeches at a passing phoenix, fearing the phoenix wants its prize.

music, punishments and government are the means of governing the world, and they can certainly be called teaching. But that is not Zisi's original meaning. If it were as the earlier Confucian says, then why does the passage that follows, on entering the Way through teaching, set aside the sage's teaching of ritual, music, punishments and government and speak of a separate practice of caution and apprehension?[82] That would make the sage's teaching an empty fixture." Zixin asked him to explain. The Master said: "Zisi speaks of the nature, the Way and teaching all from the root source. When Heaven mandates something to a person, that mandate is called the nature. When one acts by following the nature, that nature is called the Way. When one learns by cultivating the Way, that Way is called teaching. Following the nature is the work of the one who is sincere. This is what is meant by 'Clarity that comes from sincerity is called the nature.' Cultivating the Way is the work of the one who strives to be sincere. This is what is meant by 'Sincerity that comes from clarity is called teaching.' The sage acts by following the nature, and that is the Way. Those below the sage cannot yet follow the nature. In relation to the Way they cannot avoid going too far or falling short, and so they must cultivate the Way. When the Way is cultivated, the worthy and the wise cannot go beyond it, and the foolish and unworthy cannot fall short of it. All must follow this Way, and so the Way becomes teaching. This 'teaching' is the same as the 'teaching' in 'the Way of Heaven is the highest teaching' and in 'wind and rain, frost and dew, all of it is teaching.' The 'cultivate' in 'cultivating the Way' is the same as in 'cultivate the Way by humaneness.' When people can cultivate the Way, they can then keep from departing from it and recover the original substance of their nature. Then this too is the sage's Way of following the nature. In what follows, 'caution and apprehension' is the effort of cultivating the Way, and 'equilibrium and harmony' is recovering the original substance of the

82 The line opens the *Doctrine of the Mean*: "What Heaven mandates is called the nature; following the nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called teaching." The 'old commentary' is Zhu Xi's.

nature. As the *Changes* says, 'fully explore principle and fully realize the nature, so as to arrive at the mandate.' 'Equilibrium and harmony,' with Heaven and Earth in their places and all things nourished, is fully realizing the nature and arriving at the mandate."

128 Huang Chengfu asked: "Earlier Confucians held that Confucius's answer to Yan Hui's question about governing a state set out a Way to be practiced for all ages. What do you think?" The Master said: "Yan Hui had all the qualities of a sage. For governing a state, the great root and great source were already complete in him. Confucius had long known this well, so he did not need to speak of any of that here. He spoke only of institutions and cultural forms. Such things must not be neglected either; only with them is it wholly good. Nor should one grow lax about precautions because one's own foundation is sound. One must 'banish the music of Zheng and keep clever talkers at a distance.' For Yan Hui was someone who overcame the self, turned inward and applied his mind to virtue. Confucius feared he might be careless about outward details, so he spoke to fill in where Yan Hui fell short. Anyone else would have had to be told: 'Governing lies in people; one obtains people through one's own person; one cultivates the person by the Way; one cultivates the Way by humaneness.' They would also need the 'universal Way,' the 'nine standards' and 'making the person sincere,' all those efforts, before it could be done. Only that is the Way to be practiced for all ages. Otherwise, would adopting the calendar of Xia, riding the carriage of Yin, wearing the cap of Zhou and performing the *Shao* dance be enough to govern the world? Later people saw only that Yan Hui was the foremost of Confucius's disciples and that he asked about 'governing a state,' so they treated it as a matter of enormous weight."[83]

129 Cai Xiyuan asked: "In Zhu Xi's new edition of the *Great Learning*, the effort of 'investigating things and extending know-

ledge' comes first and 'making the intentions sincere' comes after. This seems to match the order in the first chapter. If we follow the old edition, as you hold, then 'making the intentions sincere' comes before 'investigating things and extending knowledge' instead. I am not yet clear about this." The Master said: "The effort of the *Great Learning* is simply 'making bright virtue shine.' 'Making bright virtue shine' is simply 'making the intentions sincere.' And the effort of 'making the intentions sincere' is simply 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge.' If you take 'making the intentions sincere' as the governing aim and then apply the effort of 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge,' the effort at last has somewhere to land, and doing good and removing evil are all the work of 'making the intentions sincere.' If, as in the new edition, you first go off to fully explore the principles of things and affairs, it is vast and vague, with nowhere to settle. You then have to add the word 'reverence' before you can drag it back to the self and the mind. Still, in the end it has no root source. If the word 'reverence' had to be added, why would Confucius's school have left out the most important word of all and waited more than a thousand years for someone to supply it? The point is precisely that when 'making the intentions sincere' is the governing aim, there is no need to add 'reverence.' That is why 'making the intentions sincere' is singled out: it is the great main point of learning. Fail to see this, and it truly is 'a hair's breadth off at the start, a thousand miles off at the end.' On the whole, the effort of the *Doctrine of the Mean* is simply 'making the person sincere,' and the culmination of 'making the person sincere' is 'perfect sincerity.' The effort of the *Great Learning* is simply 'making the intentions sincere,' and the culmination of 'making the intentions sincere' is 'the highest good.' The effort is always the same. To patch in 'reverence' here and 'sincerity' there is drawing legs on a snake."

83 In *Analects* 15.11 Yan Hui asks about governing a state, and Confucius names the Xia calendar, the Yin carriage, the Zhou cap and the *Shao* music, and tells him to banish the music of Zheng and keep clever talkers away. The other phrases come from *Doctrine of the Mean* 20.

Part Two

傳習錄中

Letters on learning, including the reply to Gu Dongqiao with its essay on "pulling up the root and stopping the source," and the program for teaching children.

QIAN DEHONG'S PREFACE

Qian Dehong explains which of Wang's letters he kept from the 1524 edition and which he added.

2.Pref. Dehong said: "Some years ago Nan Yuanshan printed the *Instructions for Practical Living* in Yue, in two volumes. The second volume excerpted our late teacher's own letters, eight in all. Of these, our teacher himself said of the two letters *In Reply to Xu Chengzhi*: 'The world holds Zhu Xi right and Lu Xiangshan wrong. The verdict has long been settled, and it is hard to overturn it all at once. These two letters offer, for the time being, a mediating view that grants something to both sides, so that people can think it through and find it for themselves.' Perhaps this is also why Yuanshan placed them at the head of the second volume. Now the debate between Zhu and Lu has long been clear to the world. When I printed our late teacher's *Collected Writings*, I placed the two letters in the *Outer Collection* to show that they are not complete, so I do not include them again here.[1] Of the rest, for pointing to 'the original substance of knowing and acting,' none is more detailed than *In Reply to Someone's*

1 Qian Dehong (1496–1574), Wang's disciple and editor, compiled Parts Two and Three. Nan Daji (Yuanshan), then prefect of Shaoxing (Yue), printed the 1524 edition.

Inquiry on Learning and the replies to Zhou Daotong, Lu Qingbo and Ouyang Chongyi, four letters in all. For showing that 'investigating things is where the learner applies effort and can see it day by day,' none is more detailed than the letter *In Reply to Luo Zheng'an*. All his life he braved the world's censure and slander and its attempts to bring him down. Escaping death by a hair again and again, hard-pressed as he was, he never forgot to discuss learning. His only fear was that people would not hear this Way and would drift into profit and achievement, cleverness and scheming, sinking day by day toward birds and beasts and the Yi and Di without knowing it. With his mind that made one body with all things, he kept crying out his whole life long and stopped only at death. This is the anguished care of the sages and worthies since Confucius and Mencius, which even his disciples could not console. None shows this feeling more fully than the first letter *In Reply to Nie Wenwei*.[2] All these keep Yuanshan's original selection. But for showing that 'always be doing something' is precisely the effort of 'extending innate knowing,' so clear, simple and direct that a hearer can take hold of it at once, none is more detailed than the second letter to Wenwei. So I have added it. In Yuanshan's day, amid the uproar, he was able to make this Way clear through his own conduct, until in the end he fell foul of wicked men and was dismissed. Yet he was serene and content, rejoicing only that in this life he had heard this learning, without the slightest trace of resentment or bitterness. When this record was printed, people saw how greatly it served our fellow seekers, but they did not know how hard his circumstances were. What I now leave out or include is decided by what the times call for. It is not that I would presume to add to it or take from it."[3]

2 *In Reply to Someone's Inquiry on Learning* is the letter to Gu Dongqiao that follows. Lu Qingbo is the disciple Lu Cheng.

3 致良知 (zhi liangzhi), extending innate knowing: 致 as in the *Great Learning*'s 致知, "extending knowledge."

REPLY TO GU DONGQIAO

Wang answers Gu Dongqiao's worry that his teaching is too quick and too close to Buddhism.

130 Your letter says: "Students these days work at the outer and neglect the inner. They are broad but lack what is essential. So you have specially advocated the single idea of 'making the intentions sincere,' like a needle and stone applied to an illness lodged in the vitals. This is truly a great kindness." You see the faults of the times this clearly. How, then, will you remedy them? As for my own intention, you have already said all of it in a sentence. What more is there to say? What more is there to say? The teaching of 'making the intentions sincere' is in itself the first principle of effort taught in the sage's school. Only, students of recent times treat it as secondary, so I have tried a little to bring out what is essential. It is not something I can claim to advocate specially.[4]

131 Your letter says: "But I fear the doctrine is pitched too high and the effort made too quick. As younger followers pass it on, its echoes and shadows will breed errors, and it cannot help falling into the Buddhist mechanism of illuminating the mind and seeing the nature, of concentration, wisdom and sudden awakening. No wonder those who hear it have doubts." My modest teaching of investigating, extending, making sincere and rectifying is set within the learner's own mind and the doings of daily life. It means examining things in one's own person, putting them into practice and applying effort on solid ground. How many stages and how much accumulation that involves! It is the very opposite of the doctrine of empty, sudden awakening. Those who hear it have no resolve to become sages in the first place, and they have never looked into its details. That they doubt it is no wonder. But one as discerning as you should grasp

4 This letter answers Gu Lin (Gu Dongqiao, 1476–1545), a scholar-official who had written to question Wang's teaching.

it clearly at a single word. Yet you too say "the doctrine is pitched too high and the effort made too quick." Why is that?

KNOWING AND ACTING ADVANCE TOGETHER

Against Gu Dongqiao's examples of food and roads, Wang argues that knowing and acting cannot be separated in time.

132 Your letter says: "What you teach is that knowing and acting advance together and should not be separated into before and after. This is the effort of the *Doctrine of the Mean*'s 'honoring the virtuous nature and following inquiry and learning.' It is the Way in which each nourishes and develops the other, and inner and outer, root and branch, are threaded on one string. Yet in the order of effort there cannot but be a difference of before and after. One knows it is food and then eats it, knows it is broth and then drinks it, knows it is clothing and then puts it on, knows the road and then travels it. There has never been the deed before the thing is seen. Still, the gap is a hair's breadth and an instant; it does not mean there are stages, knowing today and acting tomorrow." Since you say "each nourishes and develops the other, and inner and outer, root and branch, are threaded on one string," the teaching that knowing and acting advance together is no longer in doubt. You also say: "In the order of effort there cannot but be a difference of before and after." Is that not contradicting yourself? Examples like 'knows it is food and then eats it' are especially clear and easy to see. But you are obscured by what you have recently heard, so you fail to notice. A person must first have the mind that wants to eat, and only then knows food. The mind that wants to eat is intention; it is already the beginning of acting. Whether the food tastes good or bad can be known only after it enters the mouth. How could anyone know whether food tastes good or bad before it enters the mouth? One must first have the mind that wants to go, and only then knows the road. The mind that wants to go is intention; it is already the beginning of acting. Whether a fork in the road is rough or smooth can be known only after one has walked

it oneself. How could anyone know whether a fork in the road is rough or smooth before walking it oneself? 'Knows it is broth and then drinks it' and 'knows it is clothing and then puts it on' work the same way, and none of it is in doubt. Going by your own examples, this is exactly what you call the deed coming before the thing is seen. You further say: "The gap is a hair's breadth and an instant; it does not mean there are sharply separate stages, knowing today and acting tomorrow." This too is not yet observed finely enough. But even taking it as you say, it is beyond all doubt that knowing and acting are one and advance together.

133 Your letter says: "That true knowing is what makes for acting, and that knowing without acting is not worth calling knowing, is fine as an urgent teaching for students, to make them work at practicing in their own persons. But if you truly say that acting is knowing, I fear people will seek only the original mind and so neglect the principles of things, and there will surely be places left dark and unpenetrated. Besides, is this really the established method of the sage's school for knowing and acting advancing together?" Knowing, where it is genuine and earnest, solid and sincere, is acting. Acting, where it is clearly aware and finely discerning, is knowing. The effort of knowing and of acting was never separable. Only because later students split them into two halves in applying effort, and lost the original substance of knowing and acting, is there a teaching that they are one and advance together. 'True knowing is what makes for acting; knowing without acting is not worth calling knowing' can be seen in the very examples in your letter, such as 'knows it is food and then eats it.' I have already spoken of this briefly above. Although this was said urgently to remedy a fault, the substance of knowing and acting is originally just so. It is not that I raise or lower things by my own notions, offering this teaching for the moment to get some quick effect. 'Seeking only the original mind and so neglecting the principles of things' is in fact to have lost the original mind. The principles of things are not outside my mind. Seek the principles of things outside my mind, and

there are no principles of things. Neglect the principles of things in seeking my mind, and what, then, is my mind? The substance of the mind is the nature, and the nature is principle. So if there is the mind of filial devotion to one's parents, there is the principle of filial devotion; if there is no mind of filial devotion to one's parents, there is no principle of filial devotion. If there is the mind of loyalty to one's ruler, there is the principle of loyalty; if there is no mind of loyalty to one's ruler, there is no principle of loyalty. How could principle be outside my mind? Zhu Xi said: "What people learn is simply the mind and principle. Although the mind governs one body, it really manages all the principles under Heaven. Although principle is scattered among the myriad affairs, it is really not outside one person's mind." Between this dividing and this joining, he could not help opening the way for students to make mind and principle two. This is why later generations suffer from 'seeking only the original mind and so neglecting the principles of things': precisely because they do not know that the mind is principle. Seeking the principles of things outside the mind is why there are places left dark and unpenetrated. This is Gaozi's doctrine that rightness is external, which is why Mencius said he did not understand rightness. The mind is one, and that is all. Spoken of as its whole substance of earnest compassion, it is called humaneness. Spoken of as its being fitting, it is called rightness. Spoken of as its ordered pattern, it is called principle. One cannot seek humaneness outside the mind, and one cannot seek rightness outside the mind. Can one alone seek principle outside the mind? Seeking principle outside the mind is why knowing and acting become two. Seeking principle in my own mind is the sage's school's teaching of the unity of knowing and acting. What more do you doubt?[5]

134 Your letter says: "In explaining the old text of the *Great Learning*, you speak of extending the knowing of the original substance. This is indeed Mencius's meaning of 'fully realizing

5 Gaozi, Mencius's opponent, held that rightness is external (*Mencius* 6A4–5). In 2A2 Mencius says Gaozi never understood rightness.

the mind,' and Master Zhu too took empty, spiritual awareness as the full capacity of this mind. But 'fully realizing the mind' comes from 'knowing the nature,' and 'extending knowledge' lies in 'investigating things.'" "Fully realizing the mind comes from knowing the nature; extending knowledge lies in investigating things." This statement is right. But tracing your meaning to its root, I find you are not yet clear about why it is so. Master Zhu took 'fully realizing the mind, knowing the nature, knowing Heaven' as 'things being investigated and knowledge being extended.' He took 'preserving the mind, nourishing the nature, serving Heaven' as 'making the intentions sincere, rectifying the mind, cultivating the self.' He took 'not being of two minds over early death or long life, cultivating oneself and waiting' as 'knowing at its utmost and humaneness complete, the work of the sage.' My own view is exactly the opposite of Master Zhu's. 'Fully realizing the mind, knowing the nature, knowing Heaven' is knowing from birth and acting with ease, the work of the sage. 'Preserving the mind, nourishing the nature, serving Heaven' is knowing through learning and acting for its benefit, the work of the worthy. 'Not being of two minds over early death or long life, cultivating oneself and waiting' is knowing through hardship and acting with effort, the work of the student.[6] How can one take 'fully realizing the mind, knowing the nature' solely as knowing, and 'preserving the mind, nourishing the nature' as acting? Hearing this suddenly, you will surely be greatly startled again. But there is really nothing in it to doubt. Let me explain it for you. The substance of the mind is the nature; the source of the nature is Heaven. To be able to fully realize one's mind is to be able to fully realize one's nature. The *Doctrine of the Mean* says: "Only the most perfectly sincere under Heaven can fully realize their nature." It also says: "To know the transforming and nourishing of Heaven and Earth, to set it

6 *Mencius* 7A1: "Those who fully realize their mind know their nature; knowing their nature, they know Heaven. Preserving the mind and nourishing the nature is how one serves Heaven. Not being of two minds over early death or long life, cultivating oneself to wait for it, is how one establishes one's destiny."

before the ghosts and spirits without a doubt, is knowing Heaven." Only the sage can do this. Therefore I say: "This is knowing from birth and acting with ease, the work of the sage." Those who preserve their mind have not yet been able to fully realize it, so they must add the effort of preserving it. Only when they have preserved it for a long time, so that it is always preserved of itself without their needing to preserve it, can they go on to speak of fully realizing it. The 'knowing' of 'knowing Heaven' is like the 'knowing' in 'knowing a prefecture' or 'knowing a county.' For one who 'knows the prefecture,' all the affairs of the prefecture are one's own affairs; for one who 'knows the county,' all the affairs of the county are one's own affairs. This is being one with Heaven. 'Serving Heaven' is like a son serving his father or a minister serving his ruler; it is still being two with Heaven. What Heaven has mandated to me is the mind, the nature. I simply preserve it and dare not lose it, nourish it and dare not harm it, as in "The parents gave birth to it whole; the child returns it whole." Therefore I say: "This is knowing through learning and acting for its benefit, the work of the worthy." As for 'not being of two minds over early death or long life,' it falls a further step short of those who preserve their mind. Those who preserve their mind, though they cannot yet fully realize it, are already single-minded in doing good; when at times it is not preserved, they simply preserve it. Now to have people 'not be of two minds over early death or long life' implies that early death and long life are still dividing their minds. If early death and long life still divide their minds, their mind for doing good is not yet single. Even preserving it is not yet within their reach. How could one speak of fully realizing it? Now to have them not let early death or long life divide their mind for doing good is as if to say: "Death and life, early death and long life, all have a fixed destiny. I shall simply be single-minded in doing good, cultivate my person and wait for Heaven's mandate." This means that ordinarily they do not yet know there is Heaven's mandate. 'Serving Heaven,' though it is being two with Heaven, already truly knows where Heaven's mandate lies and

only reverently receives and carries it out. But 'waiting for it' means not yet truly knowing where Heaven's mandate lies; there is still something to wait for. Therefore it says "this is how one establishes one's destiny." 'Establish' is the 'establish' of 'founding,' as in 'establishing virtue,' 'establishing words,' 'establishing achievement' and 'establishing a name.' Wherever 'establish' is used, it means something that never existed before and is now set up for the first time. This is what Confucius meant by "One who does not know destiny cannot be an exemplary person." Therefore I say: "This is knowing through hardship and acting with effort, the work of the student." Now if 'fully realizing the mind, knowing the nature, knowing Heaven' is taken as 'investigating things and extending knowledge,' beginners who cannot yet keep their minds undivided are suddenly held to the sage's work of knowing from birth and acting with ease. It is like catching wind and grasping at shadows. At a loss, they do not know where to set their minds. How could this fail to "lead the whole world to run about on the roads"? The faults of extending knowledge and investigating things in our time are plain to see. Is not what you call "working at the outer and neglecting the inner, broad but lacking what is essential" this very error? This is the most crucial point in learning. Go wrong here, and one will go wrong everywhere. This is why I brave the world's censure and ridicule, forget that I may fall into punishment and death, and keep on talking. I cannot stop.

PRINCIPLE IS NOT IN THINGS

Wang argues that the principle of filial devotion lies in the mind, not in one's parents.

135 Your letter says: "I hear that, in speaking to students, you say even the teaching of 'going to things and fully exploring principle' is 'trifling with things and losing one's purpose'; and that you have picked out several of Master Zhu's statements, such as 'tiring of the complex and turning to the essential' and 'nourishing the original source,' to show students, calling them the final

conclusions of his later years. I fear this too is wrong." What Master Zhu calls 'investigating things' consists in 'going to things and fully exploring their principle.' Going to things and fully exploring principle means seeking, in each and every affair and thing, what he calls their fixed principle. This is using my mind to seek principle within each and every affair and thing, and so splitting the mind and principle into two. To seek principle in each and every affair and thing is like seeking the principle of filial devotion in one's parents. If one seeks the principle of filial devotion in one's parents, is that principle really in one's own mind? Or is it really in the person of one's parents?[7] Suppose it really is in the person of one's parents: then after they die, does one's mind no longer have the principle of filial devotion? When one sees a child about to fall into a well, there is sure to be the principle of compassion. Is this principle of compassion really in the child's person? Or is it in the innate knowing of one's own mind? Perhaps one cannot follow the child into the well? Perhaps one can reach out a hand and pull the child out? All of these are what is called principle. Are they really in the child's person? Or do they really come from the innate knowing of one's own mind? Take this as an example, and the principles of all affairs and all things are the same. From this one can see that splitting the mind and principle into two is wrong. Splitting the mind and principle into two is Gaozi's teaching that rightness is external, which Mencius firmly refuted.[8] "Working at the outer and neglecting the inner, broad but lacking what is essential"—this you already know, my friend. What exactly makes it so? To call it 'trifling with things and losing one's purpose'—do you still think that unacceptable? What I mean by 'extending knowledge and investigating things' is extending the innate knowing of my mind to each and every affair and thing. The innate knowing of my mind is what is called 'heavenly prin-

7 Wang had compiled *Master Zhu's Final Conclusions Arrived at Late in Life* (1518), a selection of Zhu Xi's letters arguing that Zhu came round late to views close to Wang's own.

8 The child about to fall into a well is Mencius's example in *Mencius* 2A6.

ciple.' When the heavenly principle of my mind's innate knowing is extended to each and every affair and thing, each and every affair and thing attains its principle. Extending the innate knowing of my mind is extending knowledge; each and every affair and thing attaining its principle is investigating things. This is uniting the mind and principle into one. Once the mind and principle are united into one, all that I said before, and Master Zhu's views in his later years, can be understood without further words.

136 Your letter says: "The substance of the human mind is originally entirely clear, but constrained by qi and obscured by things, few minds are not darkened. Without studying, inquiring, reflecting, and discriminating to clarify the principles of the world, one cannot become aware on one's own of the first stirrings of good and evil or the distinction between true and false; giving free rein to feelings and indulging intentions, the harm is beyond words." This passage on the whole seems right but is wrong; it carries on the faults of the old teaching, and must be examined. Studying, inquiring, reflecting, discriminating, and acting are all ways of learning; there has never been learning without acting. Take learning filial devotion: one must labor and serve, provide for one's parents, and personally practice the way of filial devotion—only then is it called learning. How could merely talking of it in the air, with mouth and ears, be called learning filial devotion? Learning archery, one must draw the bow and fit the arrow, pull it full and hit the target. Learning calligraphy, one must spread the paper and take up the brush, hold the tablet and dip the brush in ink. In all the learning in the world, there is none that can be called learning without acting; so the very beginning of learning is already acting.[9] 篤 (earnest) means solid, steady, and thorough. It means that, having already acted, one acts with steady earnestness and does not let the effort cease. Because learning cannot be without doubts, there is inquiring; inquiring is learning, is acting. Still it

9 The five steps—study broadly, inquire carefully, reflect thoughtfully, discriminate clearly, act earnestly (篤行)—come from the *Doctrine of the Mean* 20.

cannot be without doubts, so there is reflecting; reflecting is learning, is acting. Still it cannot be without doubts, so there is discriminating; discriminating is learning, is acting. When discrimination is clear, reflection careful, inquiry thorough, and study has made one capable, and one goes on without letting the effort cease—this is called acting earnestly. It does not mean that only after studying, inquiring, reflecting, and discriminating does one begin to put it into action. Therefore, speaking of seeking to become capable in a task, we call it studying; speaking of seeking to resolve one's doubts, we call it inquiring; speaking of seeking to understand the teaching, we call it reflecting; speaking of seeking to refine one's discernment, we call it discriminating; speaking of seeking to tread its reality, we call it acting. Divide the effort and speak of it, and there are five; unite the task and speak of it, and there is only one. This is precisely where my teaching—the substance of the unity of mind and principle, the effort of knowing and acting advancing together—differs from the teachings of later ages. Now you single out studying, inquiring, reflecting, and discriminating as the way to fully explore the principles of the world, and do not mention acting earnestly. This treats studying, inquiring, reflecting, and discriminating solely as knowing, and holds that fully exploring principle involves no acting. Is there anywhere in the world learning without acting? Is there anything that can be called fully exploring principle without acting? Mingdao said: "Just fully exploring principle is fully realizing one's nature and arriving at destiny." Therefore one must carry humaneness to its utmost before one can be said to have fully explored the principle of humaneness, and carry rightness to its utmost before one can be said to have fully explored the principle of rightness.[10] To carry humaneness to its utmost is to fully realize the nature of humaneness; to carry rightness to its utmost is to fully realize the nature of rightness. When learning reaches the full exploration of principle, it has reached the utmost—and yet has

10 Cheng Hao's phrase echoes the *Book of Changes*: "fully explore principle and fully realize the nature, so as to arrive at destiny."

not been put into action? Is there any such thing in the world? So if one knows that not acting cannot count as learning, one knows that not acting cannot count as fully exploring principle; and if one knows that not acting cannot count as fully exploring principle, one knows that knowing and acting are one and advance together, and cannot be divided into two stages. The principles of all affairs and all things are not outside my mind; to insist on fully exploring the principles of the world is probably to regard the innate knowing of my mind as insufficient, and to seek outside, in the breadth of the world, to patch it up and add to it. This still splits the mind and principle into two. The effort of studying, inquiring, reflecting, discriminating, and acting earnestly—even when, by struggle and exertion, it reaches 'what others do once, I do a hundred times,' and even when it is expanded to its utmost, to fully realizing one's nature and knowing Heaven—is nothing more than extending the innate knowing of my mind. Beyond innate knowing, can anything be added, even a hair's worth? Now to insist on fully exploring the principles of the world, without knowing to turn back and seek in one's own mind—then as for the first stirrings of good and evil and the distinction between true and false, apart from the innate knowing of one's mind, where would one apply one's examination? What you call being constrained by qi and obscured by things is just this being constrained, this being obscured. Now to wish to remove this obscuring, yet not know to apply effort here, and want to seek outside—this is like someone whose eyes are dim who does not take medicine and look after the eyes to cure them, but merely gropes about seeking clear sight outside them. How could clear sight be gained from outside? The harm of giving free rein to feelings and indulging intentions also comes only from failing to examine heavenly principle carefully in the innate knowing of this mind. This is truly the error where a hair's breadth becomes a thousand miles, and it cannot go unexamined. Do not say, my friend, that my argument is too harsh.

[137] Your letter says: "You teach people extending knowledge and making virtue bright, and warn them against going to things and fully exploring principle. Suppose a dim and benighted scholar lives in seclusion and sits upright, hearing no instruction: can such a person really reach knowledge extended and virtue made bright? Even if, in stillness, such a person gains some awareness and a slight insight into their original nature, it would be only the useless view of 'concentration and wisdom.' Could such a person really know past and present, comprehend the changes of affairs, and apply this to the real business of the family, the state, and the world? You say: 'Knowing is the substance of intention; things are the function of intention; the 格 of "investigating things" is like the 格 of "correcting what is wrong in the ruler's mind."' Though these words are transcendent and insightful, uniquely your own and not treading in old views, I fear they do not fit the Way." My discussion of extending knowledge and investigating things is precisely a way of fully exploring principle; I have never warned people against fully exploring principle, or had them live in seclusion and sit upright doing nothing at all. But if going to things and fully exploring principle is, as said above, 'working at the outer and neglecting the inner,' then it is unacceptable.[11] If a dim and benighted scholar can, in each affair and each thing, carefully examine the heavenly principle of this mind so as to extend their original innate knowing, then "though foolish, they will surely become clear; though weak, they will surely become strong"; the great root will be established and the universal Way will be practiced, and the Nine Standards and the rest can all be threaded on one string with nothing left out. Why worry then about lacking real application? Those devoted to blank emptiness and empty stillness are precisely unable to examine carefully, in each affair and each thing, the heavenly principle of this mind so as to extend their original innate knowing; they aban-

11 "Concentration and wisdom" (ding hui) are Buddhist terms for meditative absorption and insight; "correcting what is wrong in the ruler's mind" is Mencius 4A20.

don human relations and take quiescent extinction and empty nothingness as the norm. That is why, in the end, they cannot govern the family, the state, and the world. Who would say that the sage's learning of fully exploring principle and fully realizing one's nature has this fault too? The mind is the master of the body, and the mind's empty, spiritual, clear awareness is what is called original innate knowing. When the innate knowing that is this empty, spiritual, clear awareness moves in response to what touches it, that is called intention. There is knowing first, then intention; without knowing there is no intention.[12] Is knowing not the substance of intention? Wherever intention is applied, there must be its thing, and a thing is an affair. If intention is applied to serving one's parents, serving one's parents is a thing; if intention is applied to governing the people, governing the people is a thing; if intention is applied to reading books, reading books is a thing; if intention is applied to hearing lawsuits, hearing lawsuits is a thing. Wherever intention is applied, there is never no thing: where there is this intention, there is this thing; where there is not this intention, there is not this thing. Is a thing not the function of intention? As for the meaning of the word 格, some gloss it as 至, "to arrive," as in "he arrived at the temple of the Accomplished Ancestor" and "the Miao came"; these take it as 至. But in "arriving at the temple of the Accomplished Ancestor," one must be wholly filial, sincere, and reverent, so that between the hidden world and the visible nothing fails to attain its principle, before it is called 格. And the stubborn Miao truly came only after civil virtue had been widely spread; so the sense of 正, "to rectify," is also present here, and 至 alone cannot exhaust it.[13] In phrases like "correct their wrong minds" and "a great minister corrects what is wrong in the ruler's mind," 格 always means "to rectify what is not right so

12 The Nine Standards are the nine principles for governing the world listed in the *Doctrine of the Mean* 20, also the source of "though foolish, they will surely become clear."

13 Both phrases are from the *Book of Documents*: Shun's ceremony at the temple of Yao's ancestor, and the submission of the Miao people.

that it returns to rightness," and cannot be glossed as 至. Moreover, how do we know that the 格 of the *Great Learning*'s "investigating things" is not to be glossed as 正, but must take the sense of 至? If one takes the sense of 至, one must say "fully explore and arrive at the principles of affairs and things" before the reading makes sense. Then the key to the effort lies entirely in the one word "fully explore," and the ground for exertion lies entirely in the one word "principle." Drop "fully explore" from the front and "principle" from the end, and say straight out "extending knowledge lies in arriving at things"—does it make sense? "Fully exploring principle and fully realizing the nature" is the sage's established teaching, found in the "Appended Remarks." If the teaching of "investigating things" really meant "fully exploring principle," why would the sage not have said straight out "extending knowledge lies in fully exploring principle," instead of using this roundabout, incomplete wording that opened the way to errors in later ages?[14] The *Great Learning*'s "investigating things" and the "fully exploring principle" of the "Appended Remarks" are broadly the same in purport but differ slightly. "Fully exploring principle" combines investigating, extending, making sincere, and rectifying into one effort. So when one speaks of "fully exploring principle," the efforts of investigating, extending, making sincere, and rectifying are all included; when one speaks of "investigating things," one must also name extending knowledge, making the intentions sincere, and rectifying the mind before the effort is complete and thorough. Now to single out "investigating things" and call it "fully exploring principle"—this is why "fully exploring principle" is assigned solely to knowing, and "investigating things" is said never to involve acting. This not only misses the meaning of "investigating things" but loses the sense of "fully exploring principle" as well. That later learning has split knowing and acting into two stages, one before and one after, growing more frag-

14 The "Appended Remarks" (Xici) are a commentary on the *Book of Changes*; Wang uses the name broadly, as the phrase itself appears in the related "Discussion of the Trigrams."

mented and torn apart day by day, while the sages' learning has become ever more damaged and obscure—its beginning truly lies here. You, my friend, have not escaped carrying on these accumulated habits of view, so it is no surprise that you think my words "do not fit the Way."

KEEPING PARENTS WARM AND COOL

Using filial care, Wang defines intention, extending knowledge and investigating things, then treats Shun's and Wu's hard cases.

138 Your letter says: "You say that in the effort of extending knowledge, knowing how to keep parents warm and cool and how to provide for them is itself 'making the intentions sincere,' and that there is no separate 'investigating things.' I fear this too is wrong." Here you have guessed at my view with your own ideas and so produced this statement; it is not what I told you. If it really were as you say, could it make any sense? My view is this: intending to keep parents warm and cool, intending to provide for them—this is what is called "intention," but it cannot yet be called "making the intentions sincere." Only when one actually carries out the intention to keep them warm and cool and to provide for them, striving to be satisfied with oneself and not to deceive oneself, is it called "making the intentions sincere."[15] Knowing the proper measure for keeping them warm and cool, knowing the fitting way to provide for them—this is what is called "knowing," but it cannot yet be called "extending knowledge." Only when one extends the knowing of the proper measure for keeping them warm and cool and actually keeps them warm and cool by it, and extends the knowing of the fitting way to provide for them and actually provides for them by it, is it called "extending knowledge." The affair of keeping them warm and cool, the affair of providing for them—these are what are called "things," but they cannot yet be called "investigating things." Only when, in the affair of keeping them warm and cool,

15 Keeping parents warm in winter and cool in summer, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning, is the *Book of Rites*' model of filial care.

one acts wholly as one's innate knowing knows the proper measure should be, with not a hair left undone; and, in the affair of providing for them, one acts wholly as one's innate knowing knows the fitting way should be, with not a hair left undone—only then is it called "investigating things." When the thing that is keeping them warm and cool is investigated, only then is the innate knowing that knows how to keep them warm and cool extended; when the thing that is providing for them is investigated, only then is the innate knowing that knows how to provide for them extended. Hence it says: "When things are investigated, knowledge is extended." When the innate knowing that knows how to keep them warm and cool is extended, only then is the intention to keep them warm and cool made sincere; when the innate knowing that knows how to provide for them is extended, only then is the intention to provide for them made sincere. Hence it says: "When knowledge is extended, the intentions become sincere." This, in short, is my teaching on making the intentions sincere, extending knowledge, and investigating things. If you think it over more thoroughly, my friend, you too will find nothing to doubt.

[139] Your letter says: "The main outlines of the Way are easy to understand—what is meant by 'innate knowing and innate ability, which even simple men and women can share in.' But the details of particular cases and changing circumstances, and the errors where a hair's breadth becomes a thousand miles, can be known only through learning. Now, filial devotion as keeping parents warm and cool, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning—who does not know that? But as for Shun marrying without telling his parents, King Wu raising an army before burying his father, nourishing a parent's wishes or only their body, the small stick and the big stick, cutting flesh from one's thigh, living in a hut by the grave—in such matters, in handling the normal and the exceptional, between going too far and falling short, one must discuss right and wrong to establish a basis for handling affairs; only then will the substance of the mind be unobscured and one not err when facing affairs." "The

main outlines of the Way are easy to understand"—this is indeed so. But later students neglect what is easy to understand and do not follow it, and seek what is hard to understand as their learning. This is why "the Way is near, yet they seek it far away; the task is easy, yet they seek it in what is hard."[16] Mencius said: "The Way is like a great road—how is it hard to know? People's trouble is only that they do not follow it." In innate knowing and innate ability, simple men and women are the same as the sage; only the sage can extend innate knowing, while simple men and women cannot. This is where the sage and the simple part ways. The details of particular cases and changing circumstances—how could the sage not know them? But the sage does not make them alone the substance of learning. What the sage calls learning is precisely extending innate knowing so as to examine carefully the heavenly principle of this mind—and in this it differs from the learning of later ages. You, my friend, have had no time yet to extend innate knowing, yet anxiously worry over these things; this is precisely the fault of seeking what is hard to understand as one's learning. Innate knowing is to particular cases and changing circumstances as compass and square are to circles and squares, as rule and measure are to long and short. Particular cases and changing circumstances cannot be fixed in advance, just as circles and squares, long and short, are beyond counting. So once compass and square are truly set up, no one can deceive you about circles and squares, and all the circles and squares in the world can be made without end; once rule and measure are truly laid out, no one can deceive you about long and short, and all the lengths in the world can be measured without end; once innate knowing is truly extended, no one can deceive you about particular cases and changing circumstances, and all the particular cases and changing circumstances in the world can be met without end. As for the errors where a hair's

16 These are stock hard cases: Shun's marriage (Mencius 5A2), King Wu's campaign while his father lay unburied, Zengzi's care for his father's wishes (Mencius 4A19), accepting a light beating from a parent but fleeing a heavy one, and the extreme devotions of feeding a sick parent one's own flesh or living for years beside a grave.

breadth becomes a thousand miles—if one does not examine them in the subtlety of a single thought of one's mind's innate knowing, where else would one apply one's learning? That is trying to fix all the circles and squares in the world without compass and square, trying to measure all the long and short in the world without rule and measure; I see only that it will go awry and astray, laboring day after day without result. You say: "Filial devotion as keeping parents warm and cool, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning—who does not know that?" Yet few are able to extend that knowing. If a rough knowledge of the ceremonial details of keeping parents warm and cool, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning, were enough to be called extending that knowing, then everyone who knows that a ruler should be humane could be said to extend their knowing of humaneness, and everyone who knows that a minister should be loyal could be said to extend their knowing of loyalty—and then who in the world would not be extending knowledge? Seen this way, it is clear that extending knowledge must lie in acting, and that not acting cannot count as extending knowledge. Is the substance of the unity of knowing and acting not all the more evident? When Shun married without telling his parents, was there someone before Shun who had married without telling, to serve as a standard, so that Shun could check it in some text or ask some person, and then do it? Or did he seek it in a single thought of the innate knowing in his own mind, weigh what was fitting between the lighter and the heavier, and do it because there was no other way? When King Wu raised an army before burying his father, was there someone before King Wu who had raised an army before burying, to serve as a standard, so that King Wu could check it in some text or ask some person, and then do it? Or did he seek it in a single thought of the innate knowing in his own mind, weigh what was fitting between the lighter and the heavier, and do it because there was no other way? Had Shun's mind not truly been concerned about leaving no heir, and King Wu's mind not truly been set on saving the people, then marrying without

telling and raising an army before burying would have been the gravest of unfilial and disloyal acts. Yet later people do not work to extend their innate knowing so as to examine rightness and principle carefully amid this mind's responses and dealings, but instead want to discuss these exceptional affairs in the air and hold to them as a basis for handling affairs, hoping not to err when facing them—how far off they are! The remaining points can all be worked out by analogy, and from this the ancients' learning of extending knowledge can be known.[17]

BROAD LEARNING AND ANTIQUARIAN LORE

Wang rereads the classics' calls for broad learning and dismisses the Bright Hall and other antiquarian concerns.

140 Your letter says: "To say that the *Great Learning*'s 'investigating things' means seeking solely in one's original mind can still be made to fit. But consider what the Six Classics and the Four Books record: 'hear much and see much,' 'the words and deeds of the past,' 'love antiquity and earnestly seek it,' 'study broadly and inquire carefully,' 'review the old and know the new,' 'study broadly and explain in detail,' 'love to ask and to examine.' All of these plainly seek in the course of doing things and draw on discussion and explanation. The steps of applying effort certainly cannot be confused." I have already set out the meaning of "investigating things" in full above, and I imagine your doubt about "making it fit" needs no further explanation. As for "hear much and see much," Confucius said it because Zizhang attended to externals and loved what was lofty. Zizhang wanted only to make hearing much and seeing much his learning, and could not seek in his own mind so as to set aside the doubtful and the uncertain. This is why his words and deeds could not escape blame and regret. What Zizhang called seeing and hearing only fed his concern with externals and his love of the lofty. These words were meant to cure Zizhang's fault of hearing much and

17 Mencius 4A26 says that of the unfilial acts, leaving no heir is the worst, and that Shun married without telling his parents for this reason.

seeing much, not to teach him that this is learning.[18] The Master once said: "There may be those who act without knowing; I am not one of them." This is like Mencius's "The heart of right and wrong—all people have it." These words show precisely that the innate knowing of our virtuous nature does not come from hearing and seeing. As for "Hear much, choose what is good and follow it; see much and remember it," this seeks only in the branches of seeing and hearing and has already fallen to the second level. Hence he said, "This is the next best kind of knowing." If knowing through seeing and hearing is the next best, what does the highest knowing refer to? From this one can glimpse where the school of the sage applied its effort in extending knowledge. The Master said to Zigong: "Ci, do you take me for one who studies much and remembers it? No. I have one thread that runs through it all." If it truly lay in "studying much and remembering it," why would the Master have said something false to deceive Zigong?[19] "One thread that runs through it all"—what is this if not extending innate knowing? The *Changes* says: "The exemplary person learns much of the words and deeds of the past in order to store up virtue." If storing up virtue is what one has in mind, then all learning of the words and deeds of the past is a matter of storing up virtue. This is exactly the effort of the unity of knowing and acting. "Loving antiquity and earnestly seeking it" means loving the learning of the ancients and earnestly seeking the principle of this mind. The mind is principle. To learn is to learn this mind; to seek is to seek this mind. Mencius said: "The way of learning and inquiry is nothing other than seeking the lost mind." It is not like later ages, which memorize and recite the words of the ancients far and wide and call that loving antiquity, while eagerly seeking only the means to achievement, fame, profit and advancement outside themselves. On "studying broadly and inquiring carefully" I have already said all there is to say. As for "reviewing the

18 Zizhang (Zhuansun Shi) was a disciple of Confucius; the exchange is *Analects* 2.18.

19 Ci is Zigong's personal name; the exchange is *Analects* 15.3.

old and knowing the new," Master Zhu himself assigned "reviewing the old" to "honoring the virtuous nature." Can the virtuous nature be sought outside? Since "knowing the new" must come through "reviewing the old," and "reviewing the old" is the very means of "knowing the new," this too confirms that knowing and acting are not two stages. "Studying broadly and explaining in detail" is done "in order to return and set forth what is essential." Without the words "return to the essential," what would "studying broadly and explaining in detail" be for? Shun's "loving to ask and to examine" was only in order to employ the mean and attain refinement and singleness in the mind of the Way. The mind of the Way is what we call innate knowing. When has the learning of the exemplary person ever left off doing things or abandoned discussion? But all its engagement in doing and discussing is the effort of the unity of knowing and acting, precisely the means of extending the innate knowing of the original mind. It is not like those in the world who merely busy their mouths and ears with talk and take that for knowing, who divide knowing and acting into two things, so that there really are steps and a before-and-after to speak of.

[141] Your letter says: "Yang Zhu's and Mo Di's practice of humaneness and rightness, the village worthy's professions of loyalty and good faith; the abdications of Yao, Shun and Zizhi, the banishments and punitive wars of Tang, Wu and Xiang of Chu; the regencies of the Duke of Zhou, Wang Mang and Cao Cao —with nothing to confirm and correct our judgment, whom are we to follow? Moreover, if one has never studied the changes in affairs past and present, ritual and music, names and things, then should the state wish to raise a Bright Hall, build a Biyong, fix the calendar and the pitch-pipes, or draft the feng and shan sacrifices, how would one put one's learning to use? So the *Analects*' 'born knowing it' refers only to moral principle. As for ritual and music, names and things, and the changes in affairs past and present, these too must await learning before one can verify the reality of one's conduct. This may be called a settled conclusion." Your distinctions among Yang and Mo, the village

worthy, Yao, Shun and Zizhi, Tang, Wu and Xiang of Chu, the Duke of Zhou, Wang Mang and Cao Cao can broadly be inferred by analogy from my earlier discussion of Shun and King Wu. As for your doubt about the changes in affairs past and present, I have already given the analogy of the compass and square and the measuring rule in speaking of innate knowing, and there should be no need to say more.[20] On the Bright Hall, the Biyong and the rest, it seems I cannot say nothing. But the explanation would be very long, so for now let me set things right by way of your own words, and your perplexity may be somewhat eased. The institutions of the Bright Hall and the Biyong first appear in Mr. Lü's "Monthly Ordinances" and in the glosses and commentaries of Han scholars; the Six Classics and the Four Books never discuss them in detail. Could the knowledge of Mr. Lü and the Han scholars surpass that of the worthies and sages of the Three Dynasties? In the time of King Xuan of Qi a Bright Hall still stood undestroyed, so in the reigns of You and Li the Bright Halls of Zhou were all intact. Yao and Shun had thatched roofs and earthen steps, and the institution of the Bright Hall was not necessarily complete in their day, yet this did not hinder their good government. The Bright Halls of You and Li were still those of Wen, Wu, Cheng and Kang of old, yet they did nothing to save those reigns from disorder. Why?[21] Is it not that if one can "with a heart that cannot bear the suffering of others carry out a government that cannot bear the suffering of others," then even thatched roofs and earthen steps are a Bright Hall; while if one carries out the government of You and Li with the mind of You and Li, then even a Bright Hall is only the place from which tyranny issues? Emperor Wu first discussed building one in the Han, and Empress Wu built one lavishly in the Tang—how did their order and disorder compare? The academy of the Son of

20 Each triad sets sages beside lookalikes: Zizhi received the throne of Yan by abdication (c. 316 BC) and brought on disaster, Xiang Yu of Chu overthrew Qin, and Wang Mang and Cao Cao held power over Han rulers as regents.

21 The Bright Hall (mingtang) was the ancient kings' ritual hall, and the Biyong their academy; the "Monthly Ordinances" is a chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, compiled under Lü Buwei in the 3rd century BC.

Heaven was called the Biyong and that of the feudal lords the Pangong; both names simply depict the lie of the land. Yet the essential purpose of the schools of the Three Dynasties was to make clear the human relationships, not to attach importance to whether a school was fully ringed or half ringed by water. Confucius said: "If a person is not humane, what has such a one to do with ritual? If a person is not humane, what has such a one to do with music?" To establish ritual and compose music, one must have the virtue of equilibrium and harmony, one whose voice sets the pitch and whose body sets the measure; only then can one speak of it. The incidentals of instruments and numbers are the business of musicians and the charge of invocators and scribes. Thus Zengzi said: "The exemplary person values three things in the Way; as for the matter of the sacrificial vessels, there are officials responsible for that."[22] When Yao commanded Xi and He "reverently to follow vast Heaven, and calculate and depict the sun, moon and stars," the weight lay in "respectfully giving the people the seasons." When Shun "examined the jade-studded armillary and the jade sighting-tube," the weight lay in "regulating the Seven Governors." In all this they were eagerly carrying out a government that nourished the people, with a heart humane toward the people; the root of fixing the calendar and making the seasons clear surely lay in this. As for the calendrical learning of Xi and He, Gao Yao and Xie could not necessarily have done it, nor could Yu and Ji; and since "the knowing of Yao and Shun did not extend to every thing," even Yao and Shun could not necessarily have done it. Yet down to today, by following the methods of Xi and He and refining them generation after generation, even people of partial knowledge and petty cleverness, shallow practitioners of the star arts, can calculate and forecast without error. Are these people of partial knowledge and petty cleverness in later ages, then, wiser than

22 Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BC) and Empress Wu Zetian of Tang (r. 690–705) both undertook Bright Halls.

Yu, Ji, Yao and Shun?[23] The talk of the feng and shan sacrifices is all the more unfounded. It was how flatterers and sycophants of later ages sought favor with their superiors, promoting boastful extravagance to unsettle the ruler's mind and squander the state's resources. It is among the greatest and most shameless acts of deceiving Heaven and fooling people, something the exemplary person does not speak of, and the reason Sima Xiangru has been mocked by the world and by later ages. And you hold that this is something a Confucian scholar ought to learn—perhaps you have not thought it through? What makes the sage a sage is being born knowing. Yet a commentator on the *Analects* says: "'Born knowing it' refers only to moral principle. As for ritual and music, names and things, and the changes in affairs past and present, these too must await learning before one can verify the reality of one's conduct." If ritual and music, names and things and the like really bear on the work of becoming a sage, and even the sage must await learning before knowing them, then the sage cannot be called "born knowing" either.[24] If calling the sage "born knowing" refers solely to moral principle and not to ritual and music, names and things and the like, then ritual and music, names and things and the like have no bearing on the work of becoming a sage. If the sage is called "born knowing" solely with respect to moral principle and not to ritual and music, names and things and the like, then those who "learn and come to know" should also learn to know only this moral principle, and those who "come to know through hardship" should also come through hardship to know only this moral principle. Students today who learn to be sages have not managed to "learn and come to know" what the sage is able to know, yet eagerly seek to know what even the sage cannot know and call that learning. Is this not losing the very means of aspiring to sagehood? All this is only a brief analysis of the points that per-

23 Xi and He were Yao's astronomers in the *Book of Documents*; the "Seven Governors" are the sun, moon and five planets.

24 The feng and shan were imperial sacrifices to Heaven and Earth at Mount Tai; Sima Xiangru (c. 179–117 BC) left a piece urging Emperor Wu of Han to perform them.

plex you; I have not yet come to the discussion of pulling up the root and stopping the source.[25]

PULLING UP THE ROOT AND STOPPING THE SOURCE

Wang's essay on how a world once joined as one body was split by the pursuit of profit.

142 If the discussion of pulling up the root and stopping the source is not made clear to the world, then those in the world who learn to be sages will find it more complicated and more difficult by the day; people will sink to the level of birds and beasts and the Yi and Di while still thinking theirs is the learning of the sage. Though my teaching may be clear for a time, in the end it will be like ice thawing in the west while freezing hard in the east, fog lifting in front while clouds gather behind. I would go on clamoring until I died in peril and distress, and in the end not save the world in the slightest. The mind of the sage takes Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as one body. It regards the people of the world without distinction of outer and inner, far and near; all that have blood and breath are as close to the sage as brothers and infants. There are none the sage does not wish to keep safe and whole, to teach and to nourish, so as to fulfill the thought that the myriad things are one body. The minds of people in the world were not at first different from the sage's. It is only that they are cut off by the selfishness of having a self and screened by the obscuration of desires for things: the great becomes small, the open becomes blocked, each person has a separate mind, until some even regard their fathers, sons and brothers as enemies. The sage was grieved by this, and so extended the humaneness that takes Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as one body in order to teach the world, enabling all to overcome their selfishness and remove their obscurations, so as to recover the substance of the mind that is the same in all.

25 The phrase "pulling up the root and stopping the source" comes from the *Zuo zhuan* (Duke Zhao 9); Wang uses it for cutting off at its origin the drive for profit and achievement.

The great outline of this teaching was what Yao, Shun and Yu handed on one to another: "The mind of the Way is subtle; be refined, be single; hold fast to the mean." Its particulars were what Shun commanded Xie: "Between father and son, affection; between ruler and minister, rightness; between husband and wife, distinction; between elder and younger, order; between friends, good faith"—these five and nothing more. In the ages of Tang and Yu and the Three Dynasties, teachers taught only this, and learners learned only this. At that time people held no differing views and families no differing customs. Those at ease in this were called sages, those who strove at it were called worthies, and those who turned their backs on it, even if as quick-witted as Zhu, were called unworthy. Down to the humble folk of the village lanes and the fields—farmers, artisans, merchants and traders—all had this learning and made it their sole concern to perfect their virtue and conduct. Why? There was no clutter of hearsay and observation, no burden of memorizing and reciting, no excess of ornate writing, no chase after profit and achievement. People were simply led to show filial devotion to their parents, respect to their elders and good faith to their friends, so as to recover the substance of the mind that is the same in all. This is inherent in our nature and borrows nothing from outside; so who could not do it?[26] In the schools the only concern was perfecting virtue. As for differences of talent and ability—some excelling at ritual and music, some at government and teaching, some at waterworks, land and planting—they were led, on the basis of the virtue they had perfected, to refine their abilities further in the schools. When people were chosen for their virtue and appointed, they were made to stay in their posts all their lives without change. Those who employed them knew only to be of one mind and one virtue, together bringing peace to the people of the world; they looked at whether a person's talent fit the post, and did not count high or low rank as weighty or light, or toil and ease as good or bad. Those who

26 Zhu is Danzhu, Yao's son, whom the *Book of Documents* calls quick-witted; Yao passed the throne to Shun instead.

served likewise knew only to be of one mind and one virtue, together bringing peace to the people of the world. If a post suited their ability, they would spend their whole lives in demanding work without counting it toil, and be content in humble, minor tasks without counting them lowly. At that time the people of the world were joyful and at ease, all regarding one another as kin in one family. Those of lesser talent and endowment were content with their lot as farmers, artisans, merchants and traders, each diligent in their work, giving life to and sustaining one another, with no wish to aspire to what was lofty or covet what lay outside. Those of exceptional talent and ability, such as Gao Yao, Kui, Ji and Xie, came forward and each gave of their abilities. It was like the affairs of a single household: some saw to food and clothing, some exchanged goods, some provided tools and utensils, pooling their plans and combining their strength to fulfill the wish to serve those above and raise those below, fearing only that whoever was in charge of a task might slacken and add to the burden of all. So Ji worked hard at farming and was not ashamed that he did not know how to teach, regarding Xie's skill at teaching as his own skill at teaching; Kui directed music and was not ashamed that he did not understand ritual, regarding Yi's mastery of ritual as his own mastery of ritual.[27] For their learning of the mind was pure and clear, and they were able to keep whole the humaneness that takes the myriad things as one body. So their spirits flowed through one another, their wills and qi were in full communication, and there was no division between self and others, no gap between things and me. Compare it to one person's body: the eyes see, the ears hear, the hands hold, the feet walk, all serving the needs of the one body. The eyes are not ashamed that they cannot hear, but wherever the ears turn, the eyes attend; the feet are not ashamed that they cannot grasp, but wherever the hands reach, the feet step forward. For the primal qi fills it throughout and the blood vessels flow freely, so that with an itch or an ache,

27 Gao Yao, Kui, Ji (Hou Ji), Xie and Bo Yi were Shun's ministers of justice, music, agriculture, instruction and ritual respectively.

with each breath, whatever touches it, the spirit responds—a marvel understood without words. This is why the learning of the sage is supremely easy and supremely simple, easy to know and easy to follow, easy to learn and master, its talents easy to bring to completion: precisely because its great outline lies only in recovering the substance of the mind that is the same in all, and knowledge and skills do not enter into the discussion.

143 With the decline of the Three Dynasties, the kingly Way was extinguished and the methods of the hegemons ran rampant; after Confucius and Mencius died, the learning of the sages grew dim and false teachings ran wild. Teachers no longer taught this, and learners no longer learned this. The followers of the hegemons stole what resembled the former kings, borrowing it outwardly to serve their selfish desires within; the world was swept along and took them as models, and the Way of the sages was choked with weeds. Imitating and copying one another, they sought daily for theories of wealth and power, schemes of subversion and deceit, plans of attack and conquest—every art of deceiving Heaven and fooling people, of gaining something for the moment, of hunting fame and profit. Those of the sort of Guan Zhong, Shang Yang, Su Qin and Zhang Yi came to be beyond counting. In time, struggle and plunder brought more calamity than could be borne, people sank to the level of birds and beasts and the Yi and Di, and even the methods of the hegemons could no longer work.[28] The Confucian scholars of the age sighed in grief, searched out the statutes and institutions of the former sage kings, and gathered and patched them together from the leftover ashes. In their hearts they truly wished to restore the Way of the former kings. But the learning of the sages was long gone and the tradition of the hegemons' methods had soaked in deep, so that even the worthy and the wise could not escape its taint. What they expounded and embellished, seeking to spread it and restore it to the world, served only to

28 Guan Zhong (7th century BC) was chief minister of Qi, Shang Yang (4th century BC) the reformer of Qin, and Su Qin and Zhang Yi were Warring States strategists of alliance.

enlarge the fences of the hegemons, while the gate and walls of the sages' learning could no longer be seen. So there arose the learning of glosses and commentary, passed on for the sake of reputation; the learning of memorization and recitation, spoken to appear erudite; and the learning of literary composition, embellished to appear beautiful. Such schools, in great profusion, rose up together and stood in rivalry across the world—who knows how many—ten thousand paths and a thousand byways, with no one knowing where to go. The students of the age were like people who have entered a fairground of a hundred shows, where joking and leaping, displays of oddity and contests of cleverness, bids for laughter and rivalry in charm come at them from all four sides. Looking ahead and glancing behind, they cannot take it all in; their eyes and ears are dazzled, their spirits bewildered; day and night they roam and linger there, like people stricken with madness who have lost their wits, none knowing where their family's estate has gone. The rulers of the time were likewise all muddled and turned upside down by these teachings, and spent their lives on useless empty forms, not knowing what they meant. Now and then someone sensed their emptiness and falsity, their fragmentation and entanglement, and rose up resolutely, wishing to see them borne out in real conduct; but at the very utmost this went no further than wealth and power, profit and achievement, the undertakings of the Five Hegemons. The learning of the sages grew more remote and obscure by the day, and the habits of profit and achievement sank lower and lower. Though in between they were for a time blinded and confused by Buddhism and Daoism, the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism could never overcome their minds set on profit and achievement; and though they also sought a balance among the Confucian scholars, the arguments of those scholars could never break down their views of profit and achievement. Down to today, the poison of profit and achievement has soaked into the marrow of people's minds, and habit has become nature for thousands of years. They vie with one another in knowledge,

jostle one another with power, contend with one another for profit, try to outdo one another in skill, and court one another with reputation. When they go out to serve in office, those managing money and grain want to take on military and penal affairs as well; those in charge of ritual and music want a share in appointments; those posted to prefectures and counties dream of high provincial office; those in the censorate look toward the key posts of chief ministers. Now, if one cannot do the work, one cannot hold the combined offices; if one does not understand the theories, one cannot claim the reputation. So their breadth of memorization serves only to swell their arrogance; their abundance of knowledge serves only to carry out their wickedness; their range of hearing and seeing serves only to let loose their argumentativeness; their wealth of literary composition serves only to dress up their falseness. Thus what even Gao Yao, Kui, Ji and Xie could not combine, today's beginners and young students all want to understand in theory and master in technique. In their claims and titles they never fail to say, "I wish to help accomplish the affairs of the world," but where their true intentions lie, they think that unless they do this they have no way to serve their selfishness and satisfy their desires. Alas! With such accumulated taint, with such minds and wills, and with such learning discussed on top of it, no wonder that when they hear the teaching of our sages they regard it as a useless growth, a square peg for a round hole. That they should think innate knowing insufficient and call the learning of the sages useless is likewise the inevitable result of the situation. Alas! For a scholar born in this age, how can one still seek the learning of the sages? How can one still discuss the learning of the sages? For a scholar born in this age who wishes to learn, is it not toilsome and complicated? Is it not cramped and perilous? Alas, it is sad indeed! Fortunately, heavenly principle in the human mind can never in the end be extinguished, and the clarity of innate knowing is the same through ten thousand ages as on a single day. So those who hear my discussion of pulling up the root and stopping the source will surely be moved to sorrow,

stricken with grief, roused to rise up, surging like a river breaking its banks, with something that cannot be held back. If not to people of outstanding caliber who rise up without waiting for anything, to whom else could I look?[29]

REPLY TO ZHOU DAOTONG

Wang answers Zhou Daotong on setting one's resolve, deliberation, and the quarrel over Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan.

144 When the two students Wu and Zeng arrived, they told me in full of your earnest devotion to the Way, which greatly eased my thoughts of you. Someone like you, Daotong, can truly be called "firm in faith and fond of learning." I met them while in mourning and ill, and could not discuss things with them in detail. But the two of them have resolve of their own and are willing to apply effort, and each time I saw them I felt they had progressed. On my side, I truly cannot help having failed them, who came so far; on their side, they have perhaps not failed the purpose of their long journey. As they were leaving, they presented this booklet on your behalf and asked me to write a few words. Worn out and muddled, with nothing worth saying, I have simply taken several points you raised in your letter and written brief responses. This is hasty and far from detailed; the two of them can surely tell you the rest in person.[30] Your letter says: "Daily effort is just 'setting one's resolve.' Lately I have been testing your teachings in my own experience at every moment, and they grow ever clearer. Yet I cannot be apart from friends for any length of time. When I have friends to discuss and practice with, this resolve becomes refined, vigorous, broad and great, and only then does it have life in it. If for three or five days I have no friends to discuss with, I feel it grow faint and weak; when affairs come up I get worn down, and at times I also for-

29 The closing line echoes *Mencius* 7A10, where people of outstanding caliber rise up even without a King Wen to inspire them.

30 Zhou Daotong (Zhou Chong) was a disciple of Wang's; this reply dates from about 1524, when Wang was in mourning for his father.

get. Now, on days with no friends to discuss with, I just sit quietly, or read, or stroll about; whatever meets my eye and wherever I place myself, I take it all to nourish this resolve, and I feel rather at ease and in tune. But in the end it is not as good as gathering with friends to discuss, when the spirit flows and there is more life. For someone who has left the group and lives alone, what other method is there for dealing with this?" This passage is enough to show what you have gained from your daily effort. In broad outline, effort is applied in just this way; the only need is that it be without interruption. Once it has become pure and ripe, the feeling of it will be different again. In general, in our learning the vital main point is just "setting one's resolve." The faults you call "getting worn down and forgetting" are also just a matter of resolve lacking genuineness and urgency. Now a person who loves beauty never suffers from getting worn down or forgetting—it is simply that the love is genuine and urgent. One's own itches and aches one must know oneself, and one must scratch and rub them oneself; and once one knows one's own itches and aches, one cannot help scratching and rubbing them. What the Buddhists call "the gate of expedient means" is something one must adjust and weigh for oneself; others can hardly lend their strength, nor is there any other method to be devised.[31]

145 Your letter says: "Shangcai once asked about 'What need is there in the world to think or deliberate?' Yichuan said: 'There is such a principle; you have only brought it out too early.' For students, effort is of course 'always be doing something, and do not forget it'; but one must also recognize the bearing of 'what need to think or deliberate?' and keep both in view together. If one does not recognize this bearing, one has the faults of 'expecting results' and 'helping it grow.' If one recognizes 'what need to think or deliberate?' but forgets the effort of 'always be doing something,' I fear one will fall into 'nonbeing.' One must neither get stuck in 'being' nor fall into 'nonbeing.' Is this so or not?"

31 "Expedient means" (fangbian) is the Buddhist teaching that methods of practice and instruction are adapted to each person's situation.

What you argue is not far off; only your realization is not yet complete. Shangcai's question and Yichuan's answer express only the ideas of Shangcai and Yichuan, and differ somewhat from the original meaning of Confucius in the "Appended Remarks."[32] When the "Appended Remarks" says "what need to think or deliberate?" it means that what one thinks and deliberates upon is just the one heavenly principle, with no other thinking or deliberating—not that there is no thinking or deliberating at all. So it says: "All return to the same place by different roads; all reach one end through a hundred deliberations. What need is there in the world to think or deliberate?" Since it speaks of "different roads" and of "a hundred deliberations," how could it mean having no thought or deliberation? The original substance of the mind is heavenly principle, and heavenly principle is just one—what more is there to think or deliberate about? Heavenly principle is from the first "still and unmoving," and from the first "when stirred, it penetrates." When students apply effort, even through a thousand thoughts and ten thousand deliberations, they want only to restore its original substance and function—not to arrange and contrive things out of selfish intentions. So Mingdao said: "For the learning of the exemplary person, nothing is better than being broad and utterly impartial, and responding to things in accord as they come."[33] To arrange and contrive out of selfish intentions is "using cleverness out of selfishness." "What need to think or deliberate?" is precisely the effort: for the sage it is natural; for students it takes exertion. Yichuan, however, took it as a result to be attained, and so spoke of "bringing it out too early." When he went on to say "but it is good for applying effort," he had already realized that his earlier words were incomplete. Lianxi's teaching of making stillness the ruler also has this meaning. Now what you say, Daotong, is

32 Shangcai is Xie Liangzuo (1050–1103), a disciple of the Cheng brothers; Yichuan is Cheng Yi. "What need to think or deliberate?" comes from the "Appended Remarks" (Xici) of the *Book of Changes*.

33 The quotation is from Cheng Hao's letter on settling one's nature.

not without insight, yet it still cannot avoid making these two things.[34]

146 Your letter says: "As soon as students understand how to make effort, they should come to recognize the bearing of the sage. For only when one recognizes the bearing of the sage and takes it as the target, and then makes effort on solid ground, will one not go astray; only then is it the effort of becoming a sage. I do not know whether this is right." To recognize the bearing of the sage first—people of the past did say this. But it lacks the main point. The bearing of the sage belongs to the sage; from where would I recognize it? If one does not genuinely and intimately realize it in one's own innate knowing, it is like weighing light and heavy on a steelyard without markings, or reflecting beauty and ugliness in an unpolished mirror—truly what is called measuring the mind of the exemplary person by the belly of the petty person. How could one come to recognize the bearing of the sage? One's own innate knowing is from the first the same as the sage's. If one realizes one's own innate knowing clearly, then the bearing of the sage is not in the sage but in me. Master Cheng once said: "To fix one's eyes on Yao and imitate his conduct—without his great intelligence and wisdom, how could one, as he did, have every movement and turn accord with ritual?" He also said: "Only when the mind penetrates the Way can one distinguish right and wrong." Now tell me: where is this penetrating of the Way? From where do intelligence and wisdom come?

147 Your letter says: "'Polishing oneself in the midst of affairs': within a single day, whether there are affairs or no affairs, I single-mindedly nourish the root source. If an affair comes and stirs me, or I am stirred of myself, then since the mind is aware, how can it be called having no affairs? I just fix my mind on the affair for a while, and once I feel in broad terms that the principle of the affair ought to be thus, I deal with it as if there were no affair, simply exhausting my mind. Yet some things I handle well and some not well—why? Or when many affairs come and

34 Lianxi is Zhou Dunyi, who taught that the sage "makes stillness the ruler."

must be dealt with in order, I am often worn down by them because my talent and strength fall short, and though I strive hard to lift myself up, my spirit already feels weakened. When this happens I cannot help needing to withdraw completely and examine myself; I would rather leave the affair unfinished than fail to nourish myself. What do you think?" The effort you describe is, for one at your stage, applied just like this; yet it still cannot avoid some going astray. All of a person's learning, for a whole life, is for this one thing alone. From youth to old age, from morning to night, whether there are affairs or no affairs, one does only this one thing—what is called "always be doing something." To say "I would rather leave the affair unfinished than fail to nourish myself" still makes them two things. "Always be doing something, and neither forget nor force it": when affairs and things come, simply exhaust the innate knowing of one's mind in responding to them—what is called "loyalty and reciprocity are not far from the Way." Whenever one handles things sometimes well and sometimes not, or suffers from being worn down and losing one's order, it is all because one is pulled by praise and blame, gain and loss, and cannot truly extend one's innate knowing. If one can truly extend one's innate knowing, one will then see that what one ordinarily called good was not necessarily good, and what one called not good may in fact have been just one's being pulled by praise and blame, gain and loss, and so injuring one's own innate knowing.

[148] Your letter says: "On the teaching of extending knowledge, I received your instruction again this spring, and now I rather know how to apply effort; it feels even simpler and easier than before. But in my humble opinion, when speaking to beginners, one still needs to bring in the idea of 'investigating things,' so that they know where to begin. Originally 'extending knowledge' and 'investigating things' are undertaken together, but beginners do not yet know where to begin applying effort, so one still has to tell them about 'investigating things' before they understand 'extending knowledge,'" and so on. "Investigating things" is the effort of "extending knowledge." If one knows

"extending knowledge," one already knows "investigating things." If one does not yet know "investigating things," then one has never known the effort of "extending knowledge" either. Recently I wrote a letter to a friend discussing this in some detail; I now send you a copy. Read it closely and you will see for yourself.[35]

149 Your letter says: "Today the debate over Zhu and Lu has still not ended. I always say to friends: the right learning has long been unclear; for now there is no need to waste effort arguing right and wrong for Zhu or Lu—just transform people with your two words, 'set one's resolve.' If someone can truly make out this resolve and is determined to know this learning, that is already a great clarity. Even without debating Zhu and Lu, they will see it for themselves. I have also noticed that when some of our friends see people criticizing your words, they get worked up. That the two masters Zhu and Lu left later ages so much contention also shows that their effort was not yet pure and ripe; plainly they too had the fault of getting worked up. Mingdao had nothing of this. See how, discussing Jiefu's learning with Wu Sheli, he said: 'Convey all of this to Jiefu for me. If it is of no benefit to him, it will surely be of benefit to me.'[36] How unhurried his bearing was! I have seen that you too quote these words in a letter to someone. I wish all our friends were like this. What do you think?" This passage is argued exactly right, exactly right. I hope you will tell it to all our like-minded friends: let each, for now, discuss their own right and wrong, and not the right and wrong of Zhu and Lu. To slander others with words is a shallow slander. But if one cannot embody and practice it oneself, and it merely goes in at the ear and out at the mouth as one chatters the days away, that is slandering with one's own person—and that slander is deep. All those in the world today who criticize me—if I can take what they say as a means to do good, they are all whetting, cutting and polishing

35 Probably the letter to Gu Dongqiao (secs. 130–143).
36 Jiefu is Wang Anshi (1021–1086), the reforming chief minister, whose policies Cheng Hao opposed.

me; for me, it is all ground for vigilance, cultivation, reflection and advancing in virtue. A man of old said: "The one who attacks my shortcomings is my teacher." And can a teacher be resented?

150 Your letter says: "Someone quoted Master Cheng: 'What precedes "people are born in stillness" cannot be spoken of; as soon as one speaks of nature, it is already not nature.' Why can it not be spoken of? Why is it not nature? Huian answered: 'It cannot be spoken of because there is not yet any nature to speak of; it is not nature because it already cannot be free of the admixture of physical endowment.' I cannot understand either master's words, and every time I read to this point I am puzzled. May I ask about it?" "What is inborn is called nature": the word "inborn" is just the word "qi"—it is like saying "qi is nature." Qi is nature, and "what precedes 'people are born in stillness' cannot be spoken of"; as soon as one says "qi is nature," one has already fallen to one side, and it is not the root source of nature. Mencius's "nature is good" is said from the root source. Yet the beginnings of the goodness of nature can first be seen only in qi; without qi there would be nothing to see. Compassion, shame, deference, and the sense of right and wrong are just qi. Master Cheng said: "To discuss nature without discussing qi is incomplete; to discuss qi without discussing nature is unclear." He too had to speak this way because students each grasp one side. When one sees one's own nature clearly, qi is nature and nature is qi; from the first there is no nature and qi to be divided.[37]

REPLY TO LU YUANJING

Wang answers Lu Cheng's complaint that his mind is never at rest.

151 Your letter says: "In my effort at the outset, I find this mind is never at peace. The deluded mind of course moves, but the illuminating mind moves too. Since the mind is always moving,

37 The first Master Cheng here is Cheng Hao; "people are born in stillness" is from the *Book of Rites,* and "what is inborn is called nature" is Gaozi's saying in *Mencius* 6A3. Huian is Zhu Xi.

there is not a moment's pause." This is because you deliberately seek peace; that is why you are all the less at peace. The deluded mind moves; the illuminating mind does not move. Constantly illuminating, it is constantly moving and constantly still—this is why Heaven and Earth endure and never cease. The illuminating mind of course illuminates, and the deluded mind illuminates too. "As a thing it is undivided, so its producing of things is unceasing." If there were a moment's pause, it would cease, and that would not be the learning of "utmost sincerity without cessation."[38]

152 Your letter says that "innate knowing also has a point where it arises," and so on. Perhaps you did not hear me carefully. Innate knowing is the original substance of the mind—what I earlier called "constant illumination." The original substance of the mind neither arises nor fails to arise. Even when deluded thoughts emerge, innate knowing is never absent; it is only that people do not know to preserve it, so at times it may be lost. Even at the height of darkness and obstruction, innate knowing is never without its brightness; it is only that people do not know to examine, so at times it may be obscured. Though at times it may be lost, its substance is in fact never absent—one need only preserve it. Though at times it may be obscured, its substance is in fact never without its brightness—one need only examine. If one says that innate knowing has a point where it arises, then there would be times when it is absent, and that is not what is meant by its original substance.

153 "?" The jing in "refinement and singleness" (jingyi) refers to principle; the jing in "essence and spirit" (jingshen) refers to qi. Principle is the ordering of qi; qi is the operation of principle. Without ordering there could be no operation; without operation there would be nothing by which to see what is called ordering. Refined, it is essence; refined, it is clear; refined, it is single; refined, it is spirit; refined, it is sincere. Single, it is refined; single, it is clear; single, it is spirit; single, it is sincere.

38 "Deluded mind" and "illuminating mind" are terms of Buddhist origin: the mind clouded by false thoughts and the mind that clearly reflects.

From the first these are not two things. But the teachings of later Confucians and the teachings on nourishing life have each got stuck on one side, and so they do not serve each other. My earlier discussion of "refinement and singleness" was prompted by your concern, Yuanjing, to cherish and nourish your essence and spirit; yet the effort of becoming a sage in fact lies in nothing beyond this.[39]

154 Your letter says: "The original spirit, original qi and original essence must each have a place where they are lodged and stored and from which they arise; and there are also the essence of true yin and the qi of true yang," and so on. Innate knowing is one. Spoken of in terms of its wondrous functioning, it is called spirit; in terms of its flowing movement, it is called qi; in terms of its condensing and gathering, it is called essence. How can it be sought in shapes and images, places and locations? The essence of true yin is the mother of the qi of true yang; the qi of true yang is the father of the essence of true yin. Yin is rooted in yang and yang is rooted in yin; they too are not two. If my teaching of innate knowing is made clear, then all things of this sort can be understood without words. Otherwise, things like the "three passes," "seven returns" and "nine reversions" your letter mentions will remain endlessly open to doubt.[40]

A SECOND REPLY TO LU YUANJING

A long reply on equilibrium, stillness, longevity practices and meditation, all brought back to innate knowing.

155 Your letter says: "Innate knowing is the original substance of the mind—what is called the goodness of nature, the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused, the substance that is 'still and unmoving,' the state of being 'broad and utterly impartial.' Why can ordinary people not attain it, but must rely on learn-

39 The source gives only a question mark here; the question this answers is not recorded.

40 These are terms from Daoist internal alchemy, a set of practices for refining the body's essence, qi and spirit to nourish life.

ing? Equilibrium, stillness, impartiality—since these belong to the substance of the mind, they are innate knowing. Now when I test it in my own mind, knowing is never other than good; yet equilibrium, stillness and broad impartiality I do not really have. Could it be that innate knowing stands beyond substance and function?" Nature is never other than good, so knowing is never other than good. Innate knowing is the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused; it is the original substance that is broad and utterly impartial, still and unmoving, which all people possess alike. But it cannot help being darkened and obscured by desires for things, so one must learn in order to remove the darkening and obscuring; yet to the original substance of innate knowing nothing can be added or taken away, not by a hair. That knowing is never other than good, while equilibrium, stillness and broad impartiality are not yet complete, is because the darkening and obscuring have not been fully removed and the preserving is not yet pure. Its substance is the substance of innate knowing; its function is the function of innate knowing. How could there be anything that "stands beyond substance and function"?

156 Your letter says: "Master Zhou said 'make stillness the ruler'; Master Cheng said 'in activity one is settled, in stillness one is settled'; you said, 'Settledness is the original substance of the mind.' This stillness and settledness surely does not mean not seeing, not hearing, not thinking, not acting; it must mean constantly knowing, constantly preserving, constantly being ruled by principle. But constantly knowing, constantly preserving, constantly being ruled by principle is plainly activity, the aroused state—why call it stillness? Why call it the original substance? Could it be that this stillness and settledness is something that runs through both the activity and the stillness of the mind?" Principle does not move. Constantly knowing, constantly preserving, constantly being ruled by principle is just what is meant by not seeing, not hearing, not thinking, not acting. Not seeing, not hearing, not thinking, not acting does not mean being like dry wood and dead ashes. When seeing, hear-

ing, thinking and acting are all one with principle, and yet there has never been any seeing, hearing, thinking or acting—that is moving yet never having moved. This is what is meant by "in activity one is settled, in stillness one is settled" and "substance and function have one source."[41]

157 Your letter says: "Does the substance of this mind before it is aroused come before its being aroused? Or is it within the aroused, acting as its master? Or is it without before and after, inner and outer, one undivided whole? When we now speak of the mind's activity and stillness, do we mean having affairs and having no affairs? Do we mean silent stillness and responsive penetration? Do we mean following principle and following desire? If following principle is stillness and following desire is activity, then the saying 'In activity there is stillness, in stillness there is activity; activity at its extreme becomes stillness, stillness at its extreme becomes activity' makes no sense. If responsive penetration when there are affairs is activity, and silent stillness when there are none is stillness, then the saying 'Active yet without activity, still yet without stillness' makes no sense. If we say the unaroused comes before the aroused, and stillness gives rise to activity, then perfect sincerity would have pauses and the sage would need to 'return'—and that will not do either.[42] If we say the unaroused is within the aroused, then I do not know: should the unaroused and the aroused both be governed by stillness? Or is the unaroused stillness and the aroused activity? Or are both without activity and without stillness? Or do both have activity and stillness? I hope you will instruct me." Equilibrium before the feelings are aroused is innate knowing. It is without before and after, inner and outer, one undivided whole. Having affairs and having no affairs can be spoken of as activity and stillness, but innate knowing is not divided into having affairs

41 "In activity one is settled..." is from Cheng Hao's letter on settling one's nature; "substance and function have one source" is from Cheng Yi's preface to his commentary on the *Book of Changes*.

42 The quoted lines draw on Zhou Dunyi's *Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate* and his *Penetrating the Book of Changes*. 'Perfect sincerity is ceaseless' is from the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

and having none. Silent stillness and responsive penetration can be spoken of as activity and stillness, but innate knowing is not divided into silent stillness and responsive penetration. Activity and stillness are the occasions one meets; the original substance of the mind is not divided into activity and stillness. Principle never moves; to move is desire. If one follows principle, then even amid ten thousand changing responses one has never moved. If one follows desire, then even with the mind withered down to a single thought one has never been still. "In activity there is stillness, in stillness there is activity"—what doubt is there in that? Responsive penetration when there are affairs can certainly be called activity, yet nothing is ever added to silent stillness. Silent stillness when there are no affairs can certainly be called stillness, yet nothing is ever taken from responsive penetration. "Active yet without activity, still yet without stillness"—what doubt is there in that? If it is without before and after, inner and outer, one undivided whole, then the doubt about perfect sincerity having pauses needs no answer. The unaroused is within the aroused, yet within the aroused there is no separate unaroused thing. The aroused is within the unaroused, yet within the unaroused there is no separate aroused thing. So it is never without activity and stillness, yet it cannot be divided into activity and stillness. Whenever we read the words of the ancients, the point is to meet the author's intent with our own understanding and grasp the main import. If we must cling to the literal sense, then "Not a single one was left" would mean that Zhou truly had no surviving people. Master Zhou's saying "stillness at its extreme becomes activity," if not read well, is also not free of fault. Its meaning comes from "The Supreme Ultimate moves and gives rise to yang; it is still and gives rise to yin." The principle of the Supreme Ultimate's ceaseless generating is marvelous in function and never pauses, while its constant substance never changes. The generating of the Supreme Ultimate is the generating of yin and yang. Within this generating, pointing to its marvelous function that never pauses, we call it activity and call it the birth of yang. This does

not mean there is activity first and yang is born afterward. Within this generating, pointing to its constant substance that never changes, we call it stillness and call it the birth of yin. This does not mean there is stillness first and yin is born afterward. If yin really came after stillness and yang after activity, then yin and yang, activity and stillness, would be cut cleanly apart, each a separate thing.[43] Yin and yang are one qi: one qi contracting and expanding becomes yin and yang. Activity and stillness are one principle: one principle, hidden and manifest, becomes activity and stillness. Spring and summer may be taken as yang and as activity, yet they are never without yin and stillness. Autumn and winter may be taken as yin and as stillness, yet they are never without yang and activity. The ceaselessness of spring and summer and the ceaselessness of autumn and winter can both be called yang and called activity. The constant substance of spring and summer and the constant substance of autumn and winter can both be called yin and called stillness. It is so all the way through: from cosmic era, epoch, revolution and generation, through year, month, day and hour, down to quarter-hour, minute, instant and moment. "Activity and stillness have no starting point; yin and yang have no beginning." Those who know the Way grasp this in silence; words cannot exhaust it. If you merely drag at the text and get stuck on phrases, comparing and imitating, then you are what is called "a mind turned by the *Lotus*, not one that turns the *Lotus*."[44]

158 Your letter says: "I have tested this in my own mind. When joy, anger, worry and fear are stirred, even when the qi is moved to the extreme, the moment the innate knowing of my mind becomes aware, they dissolve and subside. Sometimes they are checked at the start, sometimes controlled midway, sometimes regretted afterward. So innate knowing seems always to dwell in

43 "Not a single one was left" is from the *Book of Odes*. Mencius (5A4) cites it to show that a poem must not be read literally, and urges "meeting the author's intent with one's own understanding."

44 Era, epoch, revolution and generation are the cosmic cycles of Shao Yong (1011–1077). The *Lotus* line is from the *Platform Sutra,* where Huineng tells a monk that a deluded mind is turned by the sutra and an awakened mind turns it.

a place of ease and leisure, free of affairs, and to be master there, as if it took no part in joy, anger, worry and fear. Why is that?" If you know this, then you know equilibrium before the feelings are aroused, the substance that is silent and unmoving. With it you have the harmony when the feelings are aroused and all hit due measure, and the marvel of responding and so penetrating. But to say "innate knowing seems always to dwell in a place of ease and leisure, free of affairs" still has a fault in it. Innate knowing does not get stuck in joy, anger, worry and fear, yet joy, anger, worry and fear are not outside innate knowing either.

159 Your letter says: "Yesterday you, sir, called innate knowing the illuminating mind. I would venture that innate knowing is the original substance of the mind, while the illuminating mind is where a person applies effort. It is the mind of caution and apprehension, something like thinking. Why then take caution and apprehension to be innate knowing?" What is able to be cautious and apprehensive is innate knowing.[45]

160 Your letter says: "You also said: 'The illuminating mind does not move.' Is that because it follows principle and so is called still? And: 'The deluded mind also illuminates.' Is that because innate knowing is never absent from it and never fails to be clear within it, so that whatever in seeing, hearing, speaking and moving does not exceed the rule is all heavenly principle? Moreover, since you call it the deluded mind, then it may be called illuminating with respect to the deluded mind, but with respect to the illuminating mind it would be called deluded. How is delusion different from pausing? To borrow the illumination within delusion to carry on the ceaselessness of perfect sincerity is something I do not understand. I hope you will enlighten me again." "The illuminating mind does not move" because it arises from the natural clear awareness of the original substance and has never moved at all. Once there is any movement, it is delusion. "The deluded mind also illuminates" because the natural clear awareness of the original substance is

45 "Caution and apprehension" is from the opening of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

never absent from it; there is only movement in it. Once there is no movement, it is illumination. Being without delusion and without illumination does not mean taking delusion for illumination or illumination for delusion. If the illuminating mind is illumination and the deluded mind is delusion, then there is still delusion and still illumination. With delusion and illumination, it is still twofold; being twofold, it pauses. Without delusion and without illumination, it is not twofold; not twofold, it does not pause.

161 Your letter says: "In nourishing life, the essential thing is to clear the mind and lessen desires. Clearing the mind and lessening desires completes the effort of becoming a sage. Yet when desires are few, the mind clears of itself. Clearing the mind does not mean abandoning human affairs and living alone in search of stillness. It means wanting this mind to be wholly heavenly principle, without a hair of selfishness from human desires. Now if I work at this by overcoming human desires as they arise, the root of the illness always remains, and I cannot avoid stamping it out in the east only to have it spring up in the west. If I try to scrape away and wash clean the many desires before they sprout, there is nothing to apply my strength to, and I only make this mind unclear. Moreover, searching out desires that have not yet sprouted in order to remove them is like leading a dog into the hall and then chasing it out. That is even worse." To insist that this mind be wholly heavenly principle, without a hair of selfishness from human desires, is the effort of becoming a sage.[46] To insist that this mind be wholly heavenly principle, without a hair of selfishness from human desires, cannot be done except by guarding against desires before they sprout and overcoming them the moment they sprout. Guarding against them before they sprout and overcoming them the moment they sprout is exactly the effort of "caution and apprehension" in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and of "extending knowledge and investigat-

46 "Nourishing life" (yangsheng) refers to practices for health and longevity, associated especially with Daoist traditions. Lu Cheng, often ill, was interested in them (see sec. 154).

ing things" in the *Great Learning*. Apart from this there is no other effort. What you call stamping it out in the east only to have it spring up in the west, and leading a dog into the hall and then chasing it out, comes from the burden of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. It is not trouble caused by overcoming, governing and washing clean. Now you say, "In nourishing life, the essential thing is to clear the mind and lessen desires." Those two words, "nourishing life," are themselves the root of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. With this root of illness lying hidden within, no wonder you have the trouble of "stamping it out in the east only to have it spring up in the west" and "leading a dog into the hall and then chasing it out."[47]

162 Your letter says: "The Buddhists' 'at the moment you think neither of good nor of evil, recognize your original face' differs from our Confucian effort of 'investigating each thing as it comes.' If, at the moment I think neither of good nor of evil, I apply the effort of extending knowledge, I have already strayed into thinking of good. For good and evil to go unthought while the innate knowing of the mind is clear, quiet and at ease happens only at the moment of just waking from sleep. This is exactly Mencius's idea of the 'night qi.' But this state cannot last. In an instant, thoughts and deliberations have already arisen. I do not know whether those who have applied effort for a long time are always as at the moment of just waking, before thought arises. Now I seek tranquility and am all the less tranquil; I want thoughts not to arise, and thoughts arise all the more.[48] How can I make this mind's preceding thought easily extinguished and its following thought not arise, so that innate knowing alone appears and I roam with the Creator?" "At the moment you think

47 "Sending off and welcoming" (將迎), from Cheng Hao's letter on settling one's nature, describes a mind that clings to what has passed and runs ahead to what has not yet come. "Willfulness and insistence" (意必) echoes *Analects* 9.4, where Confucius is free of both.

48 "Think neither of good nor of evil" is from the *Platform Sutra*, Huineng's words to the monk Huiming.

neither of good nor of evil, recognize your original face" is an expedient the Buddhists devised for those who have not yet recognized their original face. The original face is what our sagely school calls innate knowing. Now that you have recognized innate knowing clearly, there is no longer any need to speak this way. "Investigating each thing as it comes" is the effort of extending knowledge. It is just like the Buddhists' "always alert," which is also simply always preserving one's original face. In general shape and effort the two are broadly alike. But the Buddhists have a mind of selfishness and self-interest, and that is where the difference lies. Now you want good and evil to go unthought while the innate knowing of the mind is clear, quiet and at ease. Here already is a mind of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. That is why you have the trouble that "if, at the moment I think neither of good nor of evil, I apply the effort of extending knowledge, I have already strayed into thinking of good." When Mencius spoke of the "night qi," he too was only pointing out, for people who had lost their good mind, the place where the good mind sprouts and stirs, so that they could nurture it from there. Now that you already know innate knowing clearly and constantly apply the effort of extending knowledge, there is no need to speak of the "night qi." That would be like catching the hare and then, not knowing to keep hold of it, going back to watch the stump: the hare will be lost again. Wanting tranquility and wanting thoughts not to arise are exactly the illness of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. That is why thoughts arise all the more and you are all the less tranquil. Innate knowing is just the one innate knowing, and good and evil are distinguished of themselves. What further good or evil is there to think of! The substance of innate knowing is tranquil in itself, yet you add on a seeking of tranquility. It is generative in itself, yet you add on a wish for nothing to arise. Not only does the effort of extending knowledge in the sagely school not work like this; even Buddhist learning does not send off and welcome, will

and insist, like this. Just one thought of innate knowing, through from head to tail, without beginning or end: that is the preceding thought not being extinguished and the following thought not arising. Now you want the preceding thought easily extinguished and the following thought not to arise. That is what the Buddhists call cutting off and extinguishing the seed of one's nature, sinking into withered wood and dead ash.

163 Your letter says: "The Buddhists also teach constantly holding up one's thought. Is it like Mencius's 'always be doing something' and your teaching of 'extending innate knowing'? Is it the same as 'always alert, always remembering, always knowing, always preserving'? While this thought is held up, when affairs arrive and things come, one will surely respond to them in the right way. But I fear this thought is seldom held up and often let go, so the effort is broken off. Moreover, losing the thought usually begins with the stirring of selfish desires and passing qi. Only when one is suddenly startled awake does one hold it up again, and in the interval between losing it and holding it up, the mind's darkness and confusion mostly go unnoticed. Now, if I want to become more refined and more clear each day, holding it up constantly without letting go, by what way can I do it? Is this constant holding up without letting go itself the whole of the effort?[49] Or, while constantly holding it up without letting go, should one add the effort of self-examination and overcoming? Even if one constantly holds it up without letting go, without the effort of caution, apprehension, overcoming and governing, I fear selfish desires will not go. But if one adds the effort of caution, apprehension, overcoming and governing, that again becomes a matter of 'thinking of good,' and still falls a little short of the 'original face.' What would be right?" Caution, apprehension, overcoming and governing are precisely the effort of constantly holding it up without letting go. They are precisely "always be doing something." How could there be two things? In this passage of questions, the first part already

49 "Passing qi" (客氣, literally "guest qi") means agitated impulses not rooted in one's true nature.

explains itself clearly. Only at the end do you create confusion for yourself and talk in a fragmented way. The doubt that it "still falls a little short of the original face" all comes from the illness of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. Remove this illness, and the doubt will vanish of itself.

164 Your letter says: "'For one of fine endowment, once clarity is complete, the dregs melt away.' What is meant by 'clarity is complete'? And how can the dregs further melt away?" Innate knowing is clear of itself. Those whose qi-endowment is not fine have many dregs and thick obstructions, and are not easily opened to clarity. Those of fine endowment have few dregs to begin with and little obstruction. With a little effort at extending knowledge, this innate knowing becomes lucid and transparent of itself. A few dregs are like snow floating in hot water. How could they obstruct it? This is not really hard to understand. That you, Yuanjing, are puzzled by it must be because the one word "clarity" is not clear to you, and also because you are a little impatient for quick results. We once discussed face to face the meaning of "making good clear": when there is clarity, there is sincerity. It is not the shallow sense that later Confucians give to "making good clear."[50]

165 Your letter says: "Are intelligence, perceptiveness, insight and wisdom really endowment? Are humaneness, rightness, ritual and wisdom really nature? Are joy, anger, sorrow, and delight really feelings? Are selfish desires and passing qi really one thing, or two? Talented men of old such as Zhang Liang, Dong Zhongshu, Huang Xian, Zhuge Liang, Wang Tong, Han Qi and Fan Zhongyan were distinguished in virtue and achievement, and all of it issued from innate knowing. Yet they cannot be said to have heard the Way. Why is that? If one says this was merely the fineness of their native endowment, then would not those who know from birth and act at ease be superior to those who know through learning or strive through hardship? My

50 The quoted saying is Cheng Hao's. "Making good clear" (明善) is from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which ties it to sincerity.

humble view is that one may say these men saw the Way partially. To say they had heard nothing of it is, I fear, the error of later Confucians who prize memorization, recitation and glosses. Is that so or not?" Nature is simply one. Humaneness, rightness, ritual and wisdom are the nature of nature. Intelligence, perceptiveness, insight and wisdom are the endowment of nature. Joy, anger, sorrow, and delight are the feelings of nature. Selfish desires and passing qi are the obscurations of nature.[51] Endowment may be clear or turbid, so feelings may go too far or fall short, and obscurations may be shallow or deep. Selfish desires and passing qi are one illness with two pains, not two things. Zhang Liang, Huang Xian, Zhuge Liang, Han Qi and Fan Zhongyan were all of fine natural endowment, and of themselves they often tacitly accorded with the subtleties of the Way. They cannot be fully said to have understood learning or fully said to have heard the Way. Still, from the learning they had, they did not stray far from the Way. Had they heard of learning and known the Way, they would have been Yi Yin, Fu Yue, the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao. As for Master Wenzhong, he cannot be said to have not understood learning. His book mostly came from his disciples and has many points that are not right, yet its general outline can still be plainly seen. But we are now so far removed from him, and have no firm evidence, that we cannot judge from afar how far he reached.[52] Innate knowing is the Way. Innate knowing is present in the human mind in this way not only for sages and worthies but for ordinary people as well. If nothing pulled at it or obscured it with desires for things, and one simply followed innate knowing as it functions and flows forth, then everything would be the Way. But ordinary people are mostly pulled and obscured by desires for things and cannot follow innate knowing. Men like these few were of naturally clear endowment and had few desires for things to pull at

51 Zhang Liang (d. 189 BC), Dong Zhongshu (c. 179–104 BC), Huang Xian (Eastern Han), Zhuge Liang (AD 181–234), Wang Tong ("Master Wenzhong," AD 584–617), and the Song statesmen Han Qi and Fan Zhongyan.

52 Yi Yin, Fu Yue, the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao were the model ministers of the Shang and early Zhou dynasties.

and obscure them. So the places where their innate knowing functioned and flowed forth were naturally many, and they naturally did not stray far from the Way. Those who learn learn only to follow this innate knowing. To be said to understand learning is simply to understand that learning lies wholly in following innate knowing. These men did not yet know that effort lies wholly in innate knowing. Some spread themselves over many forking paths, and some were misled by shadows and echoes. So at times they departed from it and at times accorded with it, and were not pure. Had they understood this, they would have been sages. Later Confucians held that these men were all still ruled by their qi-endowment and could not avoid "acting without understanding, practicing without examining." This is not an overstatement either. But what later Confucians mean by understanding and examining is itself confined by narrow hearing and seeing and obscured by mistaken habits handed down. It imitates and models itself on shadows, echoes and traces, and is still not what the sagely school means by understanding and examining. How, then, can one who is in the dark demand that others be bright? As for "knowing from birth and acting at ease," the words "knowing" and "acting" there are also said with reference to applying effort. The original substance of knowing and acting is innate knowing and innate ability. Even in those who strive through hardship, it can all be called knowing from birth and acting at ease. The two words "knowing" and "acting" deserve still closer examination.[53]

THE JOY OF THE SAGES

Lu Cheng asks about true joy and the sage's feelings; Wang answers with the image of a clear mirror.

166 Your letter says: "Long ago Zhou Dunyi would always have Cheng Hao look for where the joy of Confucius and Yan Hui lay. May I ask whether this joy is the same as the joy among the

53 "Acting without understanding, practicing without examining" is from Mencius 7A5. The line about being in the dark echoes Mencius 7B20.

seven feelings, or not? If it is the same, then ordinary people could all be joyful the moment they get what they want. Why need anyone be a sage or a worthy? If there is a separate, true joy, then when sages and worthies meet great grief, great anger, great alarm, or great fear, is this joy still present? Moreover, the mind of the exemplary person is always watchful and apprehensive. This is a lifelong anxiety, so how can there be joy? All my life I have been troubled in spirit and have never known the taste of true joy. Now I earnestly wish to find it." Joy is the original substance of the mind. Though it is not the same as the joy among the seven feelings, it is not apart from the joy of the seven feelings either. Though sages and worthies have a separate, true joy, ordinary people share it too. Ordinary people simply have it without knowing it, and instead go looking for a great deal of grief and suffering, adding to their own confusion and self-abandonment. Yet even in the midst of grief and suffering, confusion and self-abandonment, this joy has never ceased to be present. Let a single thought open into clarity, let one turn back on oneself and be sincere, and it is right here. Whenever I talk with Yuanjing it is never about anything but this, and still Yuanjing asks, "By what way can it be attained?" This is still the blindness of riding a donkey while looking for the donkey.[54]

167 Your letter says: "The *Great Learning* holds that when the mind has fondness and delight, anger and resentment, worry and distress, fear and dread, it 'fails to be correct.' Master Cheng also says, 'The sage's feelings accord with all affairs, yet the sage has no feelings.' As for what 'has' means, the *Instructions for Practical Living* compares it to having malaria, which is extremely precise and apt. But Master Cheng's words imply that the sage's feelings arise not from the mind but from things. What does that mean? Further, when an affair stirs us and a feeling responds, one can affirm the right and reject the wrong, and so rectify things on the spot. But when no affair has yet stirred us, to call the feelings present is wrong, since they have not taken shape.

54 Cheng Hao (here called Bochun) studied with Zhou Dunyi as a youth. "Riding a donkey while looking for the donkey" is a Chan Buddhist saying.

To call them absent is wrong too, since the root of the illness is there, somewhere between present and absent. How then am I to extend my knowing? If learning aims at having no feelings, the burden may be lighter, but that is leaving Confucianism and entering Buddhism. Is that acceptable?" The sage's practice of extending knowledge is utmost sincerity without cease. The substance of the sage's innate knowing is as bright as a clear mirror, without the slightest speck of dimness. When the beautiful and the ugly come before it, each shows its form according to the thing, yet nothing ever lingers on the mirror or stains it. This is what is meant by "feelings accord with all affairs, yet there are no feelings."[55] "Abiding nowhere, let the mind arise." The Buddhists have said this, and it is not wrong. When a clear mirror responds to things, the beautiful are beautiful and the ugly are ugly. Each is reflected once and all is true: that is where the mind arises. The beautiful are beautiful and the ugly are ugly. Each passes once and nothing is kept: that is where it abides nowhere. Since you have already seen how precise and apt the malaria comparison is, the question in this passage should clear up of itself. In someone with malaria, even when the fever has not broken out, the root of the illness is still there. How then could one forget the work of taking medicine and nursing one's health just because the fever has not broken out? To wait until the fever breaks out before taking medicine and nursing it would already be too late. The practice of extending knowledge makes no distinction between having affairs and having no affairs, so how could it depend on whether the illness has broken out or not?[56] In general, Yuanjing, your doubts may seem varied from first to last. Yet they all arise from the mischief of selfishness and self-interest, of sending off and welcoming, of willfulness and insistence. Once this root is removed, all your doubts from first to last will melt like ice and lift like fog, with no need for further questioning and debate. When the

55 The quotation is from Cheng Hao's letter on settling one's nature (Dingxing shu).

56 The line "abiding nowhere, let the mind arise" is from the *Diamond Sutra*.

reply to Yuanjing's letter came out, readers were all delighted that Lu Cheng had asked so well and our teacher had answered so well, and that all had heard what they had never heard before. Our teacher said: "Yuanjing's questions only circle around in intellectual understanding, so I had no choice but to analyze them point by point. If one truly trusts innate knowing and applies effort only to innate knowing, then even a thousand classics and ten thousand canons will all agree with it, and heterodox teachings and distorted learning will be exposed at a single examination. Why analyze it piece by piece like this? The Buddhists have the comparison of pouncing on the person and chasing the clod. If, on seeing the clod, one pounces on the person, one gets the person. If, on seeing the clod, one chases the clod, what is to be gained from the clod?" The friends present who heard this all felt a sudden release and came wide awake. This learning values seeking within oneself; it cannot be entered through intellectual understanding.[57]

REPLY TO OUYANG CHONGYI

Wang tells Ouyang De that hearing and seeing are functions of innate knowing, never its source.

168 Your letter, Chongyi, says: "You, Master, have said: 'The innate knowing of the virtuous nature does not come from hearing and seeing. To speak of "hearing much, choosing what is good and following it; seeing much and remembering it" is to seek only in the branch-tips of hearing and seeing, and that has already fallen to the second level.' My humble view is this. Although innate knowing does not come into being through hearing and seeing, the knowing of students is always called forth through hearing and seeing. To be stuck in hearing and seeing is certainly wrong, but hearing and seeing are also functions of innate knowing. Now you say 'fallen to the second level.'

57 From "When the reply..." on is a note by the compiler Qian Dehong. The Buddhist image contrasts a lion, which leaps at the person who throws a clod, with a dog, which chases the clod.

I suspect this is said of those who take hearing and seeing alone as learning. If one extends one's innate knowing and seeks it in hearing and seeing, that too would seem to be the practice of the unity of knowing and acting. What do you think?" Innate knowing does not come into being through hearing and seeing, yet all hearing and seeing are functions of innate knowing. Therefore innate knowing is not stuck in hearing and seeing, nor is it mixed up in hearing and seeing.[58] Confucius said, "Do I have knowledge? I do not." Apart from innate knowing there is no other knowing. Therefore extending innate knowing is the main point of all learning and the first principle in the sages' teaching of others. To say that one seeks only in the branch-tips of hearing and seeing is to lose the main point, and that has already fallen to the second level. Lately there is hardly anyone among our like-minded friends who does not know the teaching of setting one's resolve on innate knowing. Yet many are still muddled in their practice, and that is precisely because they lack this one question. In general, the practice of learning needs only that its guiding idea, its main point, be right. If the guiding idea and main point are wholly devoted to extending innate knowing, then all hearing much and seeing much is nothing but the practice of extending innate knowing. In daily life, hearing and seeing and dealing with others run in a thousand strands and ten thousand threads, yet all of it is nothing but the functioning and flowing forth of innate knowing. Apart from hearing and seeing and dealing with others, there would be no innate knowing to extend. So it is just one thing. But to say "extend one's innate knowing and seek it in hearing and seeing" cannot help making them two in the very wording. This differs somewhat from seeking only in the branch-tips of hearing and seeing. Yet both fail to grasp the meaning of refinement and singleness, and in that they are one and the same. "Hearing much, choosing what is good and following it; seeing much and remembering it." Since it speaks of choosing and of remembering, innate knowing is still at work in it. But if one's intent is only on choosing and

58 Chongyi is Ouyang De. The quoted lines are from *Analects* 7.28.

remembering through hearing much and seeing much, then the main point is already lost. You, Chongyi, must already see such matters clearly. Today's question serves precisely to bring out this learning, and it is of great benefit to our like-minded friends. But when the wording is not clear, a hair's breadth becomes a thousand miles, and one cannot fail to examine it closely.

169 Your letter says: "You, Master, have said: 'When the *Appended Remarks* says "What need to think or deliberate?" it means that what one thinks and deliberates on is only heavenly principle, with no other thought or deliberation. It does not mean there is no thinking or deliberating at all. The original substance of the mind is heavenly principle itself, so what is there to think or deliberate about? When students apply effort, they may think a thousand thoughts and deliberate ten thousand times, but they only seek to recover that original substance. They do not arrange and contrive something out of selfish intentions. To arrange and contrive is to be selfish and use cleverness.' The failing of students is mostly either sinking into emptiness and clinging to quiet, or else arranging and contriving. In 1521 and 1522 I was afflicted with the first of these; lately I have been afflicted with the second. But thinking is also a functioning of innate knowing. How is it to be told apart from arranging by selfish intention? I fear I may be taking a thief for my son, deluded without knowing it." "Thinking means being penetrating; being penetrating makes a sage."[59] "The function of the mind is to think; by thinking it gets it." Can thinking be done without? Sinking into emptiness and clinging to quiet, and arranging and contriving, are exactly what it is to be selfish and use cleverness. As ways of losing innate knowing they are one. Innate knowing is the clear, luminous, numinous awareness of heavenly principle. Therefore innate knowing is heavenly principle, and thinking is the functioning of innate knowing. If it is thinking that comes from the functioning of innate knowing, then whatever it thinks is nothing but heavenly principle.

59 The final line is from the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Book of Documents*.

Thinking that comes from the functioning of innate knowing is naturally clear, simple, and easy, and innate knowing itself can know it. Thinking arranged by selfish intention is naturally tangled and troubled, and innate knowing itself can tell the difference. Whether a thought is right or wrong, straight or crooked, innate knowing always knows of itself. People take a thief for their son precisely because the learning of extending knowledge is not understood, and they do not know to seek its realization in innate knowing.

170 Your letter also says: "You, Master, have said: 'Learning is just one thing for the whole of life. Whether there are affairs or no affairs, it is just this one thing. To say "Better to leave the task unfinished than to fail to nourish oneself" is to split it into two things.' My humble view is this. To feel that one's energy is failing and not enough to finish the task is innate knowing. To leave the task unfinished for now and rest and recuperate is extending knowledge. How does that make two things? Suppose some turn of affairs arrives and circumstances will not allow the task to be left unfinished. Though one's energy is failing, one can keep going by rousing oneself a little. Then holding firm to one's resolve to command one's qi will do. But suppose one's words and movements lack strength to the end, and once the task is done one is utterly exhausted. Is that not close to doing violence to one's qi? Innate knowing certainly knows which is weightier and which lighter, which is urgent and which can wait. Yet when one is pressed by circumstances, how can one attend to one's energy? And when one is worn down in energy, how can one attend to circumstances? What should one do?" The idea of "better to leave the task unfinished than to fail to nourish oneself" is not without benefit when said this way to beginners for the time being. But once it is seen as two things, the trouble is there. When Mencius speaks of "always be doing something," the exemplary person's learning throughout life is just the one thing of "accumulating rightness." Rightness means fittingness; when the mind attains what is fitting, that is called rightness. If one can extend innate knowing, the mind attains what is fitting.

Therefore accumulating rightness too is just extending innate knowing. The exemplary person deals with ten thousand changes, going on when one should go on, stopping when one should stop, living when one should live, dying when one should die. All this weighing and adjusting is nothing but extending innate knowing so as to seek contentment in oneself. Thus "the exemplary person acts according to the position they are in," and "their thoughts do not go beyond their position." Planning for what one's strength cannot reach, or forcing what one's knowing is not capable of, can never count as extending innate knowing. But whatever "wears out one's sinews and bones, starves one's body, leaves one destitute, and thwarts what one does, so as to stir one's mind, toughen one's nature, and add to what one is incapable of" is all a means of extending one's innate knowing. To say "better to leave the task unfinished than to fail to nourish oneself" is also to begin with a mind bent on profit and achievement. It calculates success and failure, advantage and setback, and loves and hates, chooses and rejects among them. That is why finishing the task is made into one thing and nourishing oneself into another. This at once carries the idea of affirming the inner and rejecting the outer. It is selfishness and the use of cleverness. It treats "rightness as external." It has the fault of "what one does not get in the mind, do not seek in the qi." And it is not the practice of extending innate knowing so as to seek contentment in oneself. You speak of "rousing oneself to keep going, and being utterly exhausted once the task is done," and again of "being pressed by circumstances and worn down in energy." All of this comes from treating it as two things. In the practice of learning, if it is one, it is sincere; if it is two, it is false. All of this happens because the intention to extend innate knowing lacks sincerity and singleness, genuineness and urgency. The *Great Learning* says: "Making the intentions sincere is like hating a foul odor and loving a lovely color; this is called contentment in oneself." Have you ever seen anyone who hates a foul odor or loves a lovely color and has to rouse themselves to keep going? Have you ever seen

anyone utterly exhausted once that is done? Has anyone ever been pressed by circumstances or worn down in energy over it? From this you can know where the illness comes from.

171 Your letter further says: "People's feelings put forth a hundred schemes and deceptions. If one meets them without suspicion, one is often deceived. If one is on guard, one falls into anticipating and presuming. But to anticipate deceit is itself deceit, and to presume bad faith is itself not good faith. Yet to be deceived by others is not being aware either. Not anticipating, not presuming, and yet always being aware first: is that possible only when innate knowing is crystal clear? Still, the difference lies within a hair's breadth, and many turn their backs on awareness and fall in with deceit." Not anticipating, not presuming, and yet being aware first: Confucius said this because of two kinds of people in his time. Some set their minds wholly on anticipating deceit and presuming bad faith, and so fell into deceit and bad faith themselves. Others did not anticipate or presume, but did not know the practice of extending innate knowing, and so were often deceived by others. He did not mean to teach people to keep this in mind and aim only at detecting others' deceit and bad faith first.[60] To keep this in mind is what the suspicious and jealous, the treacherous and mean-spirited of later ages do. With just this one thought one can no longer enter the Way of Yao and Shun. Those who do not anticipate or presume and are deceived by others still do not fall short of being good. But they are not as worthy as those who can extend their innate knowing and so are naturally aware first. When you, Chongyi, say "possible only when innate knowing is crystal clear," you have already grasped the point. Yet this is as far as quick insight reaches; I fear it is not yet actual attainment. Innate knowing in the human mind spans all ages and fills the universe, and is everywhere the same. It knows without deliberating; it is always easy and so knows danger. It is able without learning; it is always simple and so knows obstruction. It acts ahead of Heaven, and Heaven does not oppose it. If even Heaven does not

60 The saying is *Analects* 14.31.

oppose it, how much less will human beings? How much less will ghosts and spirits? As for those who turn their backs on awareness and fall in with deceit: though they do not anticipate others, they may not yet be free of deceiving themselves; though they do not presume about others, they may not yet truly trust themselves. They may often have a mind that seeks to be aware first, yet not be constantly aware themselves. To often have a mind that seeks to be aware first is already to drift into anticipating and presuming, and that is enough to obscure one's own innate knowing. This is why they cannot avoid turning their backs on awareness and falling in with deceit. The exemplary person learns for the sake of the self. They never worry that others will deceive them; they simply never deceive their own innate knowing. They never worry that others will not trust them; they simply always trust their own innate knowing. They never seek to detect others' deceit and bad faith first; they simply always work to be aware of their own innate knowing. Therefore, when one does not deceive, innate knowing has nothing false in it and is sincere, and sincerity brings clarity. When one trusts oneself, innate knowing has nothing to confuse it and is clear, and clarity brings sincerity. Clarity and sincerity give rise to each other, and so innate knowing is always aware and always illuminating. Being always aware and always illuminating, it is like a clear mirror hung up, and things that come before it cannot hide their beauty or ugliness. Why? When one does not deceive and so is sincere, there is no room for deceit, and if any deceit appears it is noticed. When one trusts oneself and so is clear, there is no room for bad faith, and if any bad faith appears it is noticed. This is what is meant by being easy and so knowing danger, being simple and so knowing obstruction. It is what Zisi called "utmost sincerity is like a spirit; it can know beforehand." But when Zisi says "like a spirit" and "can know beforehand," he still speaks of it as two. He was extending the account to the results achieved by those who seek sincerity, and so was still speaking for those who cannot yet be aware first. If one speaks from the standpoint of utmost sincerity itself, then

the wondrous functioning of utmost sincerity is itself called "spirit," and there is no need to say "like a spirit." Utmost sincerity "has no knowing, yet there is nothing it does not know," and there is no need to say "can know beforehand."

REPLY TO VICE MINISTER LUO ZHENG'AN

Wang defends his restored text of the Great Learning and his anthology of Zhu Xi's late letters.

172 With a bow to the ground, I write. Yesterday I received your instruction concerning the *Great Learning*, but my boat was setting off in haste and I could not reply. This morning, traveling on the river, I have a little leisure and have taken up your letter and read it again. I fear that once I reach Ganzhou the press of affairs will crowd in again, so I am setting out the gist of my thoughts first for your consideration. Your letter says: "To see the Way is certainly hard, but to embody the Way is harder still. The Way is truly not easy to understand, and learning truly must be discussed. I fear you cannot rest content with what you have seen and take it as the final standard." How very fortunate! How did I come to hear such words? Would I dare regard what I have as the final standard and rest in it? I was just thinking of going to those in the world who have the Way, to discuss it and make it clear. But in recent years some have heard my views and mocked them, some have reviled them, and some have set them aside as not worth weighing or debating. Would any of them have been willing to instruct me? Would any have been willing to instruct me, explaining again and again, with deep concern lest they fail to rescue and correct me in time?[61] Among all in the world who care for me, then, surely none has a heart as deep and thorough as yours. How grateful I must be! "Virtue not cultivated, learning not discussed": Confucius counted these among his worries. Yet as soon as the students of our age can

61 Luo Qinshun (courtesy name Zheng'an, 1465–1547) was a senior official and a leading follower of Zhu Xi. He had written criticizing Wang's views on the *Great Learning*, and this reply dates from 1520.

pass on and practice a few glosses and commentaries, they all consider themselves to understand learning and no longer pursue what is called discussing learning. How sad! The Way must be embodied before it is seen; it is not that one first sees the Way and then adds the work of embodying it. The Way must be learned before it is understood; it is not that, apart from discussing learning, there is some further business called understanding the Way. But there are two kinds of people in the world who discuss learning: those who discuss it with body and mind, and those who discuss it with mouth and ear. Those who discuss it with mouth and ear grope and guess, seeking it in shadows and echoes. Those who discuss it with body and mind act with understanding and practice with examination, truly having it in themselves. Know this, and you know the learning of Confucius's school.

173 Your letter says that I "restored the old text of the *Great Learning* because I hold that in learning one should seek only within, while the Cheng–Zhu account of 'investigating things' cannot avoid seeking outside; and so I discarded Master Zhu's division into chapters and cut out the commentary he supplied." I would not dare to do any such thing. How could learning have an inside and an outside? The old text of the *Great Learning* is simply the version handed down in the school of Confucius. Master Zhu suspected that parts of it were missing or corrupted, so he corrected and supplemented it. I hold that nothing was ever missing or corrupted, and I have simply followed the old text throughout. If I have erred, it is in trusting Confucius too much. It is not that I deliberately discarded Master Zhu's chapters and cut out his commentary. In learning, what matters is to get it in one's own mind.[62] If I seek it in my mind and find it wrong, then even if the words come from Confucius, I dare not take them as right. How much less words from those who fall short of Confucius? If I seek it in my mind and find it right, then

62 Zhu Xi divided the *Great Learning* into a classic text and ten commentary chapters and wrote a supplementary chapter on investigating things. Wang used the older arrangement preserved in the *Book of Rites*.

even if the words come from an ordinary person, I dare not take them as wrong. How much less words from Confucius? Moreover, the old text has been handed down for thousands of years. Read its wording today, and it is clear and makes sense. Consider its practice, and it is easy and simple and can be entered. On what evidence, then, can one decide that this passage must belong there and that passage here, that this part was lost in such a way and that part must be supplied in such a way, and then go on to correct and supplement it? Is this not treating departure from Master Zhu as grave and rebellion against Confucius as light?

174 Your letter says: "If you insist that learning does not depend on seeking outside, and that one need only make looking back and examining oneself within one's task, then what would the phrase 'rectifying the mind and making the intentions sincere' fail to cover? Why must students be burdened, at the very threshold, with the effort of 'investigating things'?" Quite so, quite so! If we speak only of essentials, then the phrase "cultivating the self" would suffice. Why also speak of "rectifying the mind"? "Rectifying the mind" would suffice. Why also speak of "making the intentions sincere"? "Making the intentions sincere" would suffice. Why also speak of "extending knowledge," and of "investigating things"? It is just that the effort is detailed and thorough, and yet in essence it is only one task. That is what makes it the learning of "refinement and singleness," and this is exactly what must be thought through. Principle has no inside or outside, and nature has no inside or outside. Therefore learning has no inside or outside. Study and discussion have never been merely inner, and looking back and examining oneself have never left out the outer. To say that learning must depend on seeking outside is to treat one's own nature as having an outside. That is "rightness is external," and it is using cleverness. To say that looking back and examining oneself is seeking within is to treat one's own nature as having an inside. That is clinging to a self, and it is being selfish. Neither knows that nature has no inside or outside. Hence it is

said: "Refining rightness until it enters the spirit is for the sake of putting it to use; making use beneficial and settling the self is for the sake of exalting virtue." And: "It is the virtue of the nature, the way that unites inner and outer." From this one can understand the learning of "investigating things." "Investigating things" is where the *Great Learning* actually sets its hand to the work. From beginning to end, from first learning all the way to sagehood, there is only this one effort.[63] This step does not belong only to the threshold. "Rectifying the mind," "making the intentions sincere," "extending knowledge," and "investigating things" are all means of "cultivating the self," and "investigating things" is where one applies effort, the place where it can be seen day by day. Thus "investigating things" is investigating the things of the mind, the things of the intentions, the things of knowing. "Rectifying the mind" is rectifying the mind of things. "Making the intentions sincere" is making sincere the intentions of things. "Extending knowledge" is extending the knowing of things. How could there be any division here of inner and outer, this and that? There is only one principle. Speaking of principle as it gathers together, we call it "nature." Speaking of what governs that gathering, we call it "the mind." Speaking of the stirring of what governs, we call it "intention." Speaking of the clear awareness in that stirring, we call it "knowing." Speaking of how that clear awareness responds to what it meets, we call it "things." So with respect to things we speak of "investigating"; with respect to knowing, of "extending"; with respect to intentions, of "making sincere"; with respect to the mind, of "rectifying." To rectify is to rectify this. To make sincere is to make this sincere. To extend is to extend this. To investigate is to investigate this. All of these are what is meant by "fully exploring principle so as to fulfill one's nature." In the world there is no principle outside nature and no thing outside nature. Learning is not understood because the scholars of the age take principle as outer and things as outer. They do not know that Mencius long ago refuted the doctrine that "rightness is external," and they

63 The two quotations come from the *Book of Changes* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

have followed it and sunk into it without noticing. Is this not another case of something that seems right and is hard to see through? It must be examined!

175 Your doubts about my account of "investigating things" must arise because you think several things of it. You must think it affirms the inner and rejects the outer. You must think it devotes itself only to looking back and examining oneself and abandons the work of study and discussion. You must think it fixes single-mindedly on the brevity of general principles and root sources and neglects the detail of branches and particulars. You must think it sinks into a one-sided, withered emptiness and stillness and does not fully engage the changes in the principles of things and in human affairs. If it truly were so, it would not only offend against the school of the sages and against Master Zhu. It would be a heresy deceiving the people, a betrayal of the Way and a confusion of what is correct, and anyone would be justified in striking it down. How much more would you, with your uprightness, do so? If it truly were so, anyone with a little understanding of glosses who had heard the discourses of earlier worthies would know it was wrong. How much more would you, with your lofty discernment? What I call "investigating things" takes in and comprehends all of Master Zhu's nine points. It is only that its practice has an essential focus and works differently. This is precisely the "difference of a hair's breadth." But the hair's-breadth difference that becomes an error of a thousand miles truly starts here, and it must be distinguished.[64]

176 Mencius attacked Yang Zhu and Mozi so far as to say they "deny their fathers and deny their rulers." Yet the two men were worthies of their own time. Had they lived in the same age as Mencius, he might well have considered them worthies. Mozi's "universal love" was practicing humaneness to excess. Yang Zhu's "being for oneself" was practicing rightness to excess. Were their teachings really so destructive of principle and so

64 Zhu Xi's "nine points" are nine statements by Cheng Yi on investigating things, which Zhu Xi collected in his *Questions on the Great Learning*.

disruptive of the constant norms that they could dazzle the world? Yet for the harm that flowed from them, Mencius went so far as to compare them to birds and beasts and the Yi and Di. This is what is called killing the world and later ages with a doctrine. As for the harm in the learning of our own age, should we call it studying humaneness to excess? Studying rightness to excess? Or studying what is neither humane nor right, to excess? I do not know how it compares with the flood and the wild beasts. Mencius said: "Do I love to argue? I have no choice."[65] The ways of Yang Zhu and Mozi filled the world. In Mencius's time, the world's reverence for and trust in them was surely no less than today's esteem for Master Zhu's teaching, and Mencius alone, a single man, kept crying out against them. Ah, how sad! Han Yu said: "The harm of Buddhism and Laozi is worse than that of Yang and Mo." Han Yu's worth did not match Mencius's. Mencius could not save the Way before it fell into ruin, yet Han Yu wished to restore it after it had fallen. He too failed to measure his strength, and one sees him in peril with no one to save him from death. Alas! One like me measures his strength even less, and truly I shall see myself in peril with no one to save me from death. When everyone is merry, I alone weep and sigh. When the whole world goes along at ease, I alone, with aching head and furrowed brow, am filled with worry. If I am not mad and out of my mind, there must truly be some great anguish hidden within me. Who but the most humane in the world could perceive it? I compiled *Master Zhu's Final Conclusions Arrived at Late in Life* because I likewise could not help it. As for the early or late dates of the pieces in it, I truly did not examine them all. Though not all of them come from his late years, many certainly do. But my main purpose was to mediate and reconcile, with making this learning clear as the priority. All my life I have regarded Master Zhu's teachings as I would the spirits, or the yarrow stalks and the tortoise shell. To turn suddenly against

65 Yang Zhu and Mozi (5th–4th century BC) were thinkers whom Mencius opposed. In Mencius 3B9 he likens his refutation of them to Yu's taming of the flood and the Duke of Zhou's driving off of wild beasts.

him was something I truly could not bring myself to do, so I did this because I could not help it. "Those who know me say my heart is grieved; those who do not know me ask what I am after." Not bearing to contradict Master Zhu is my true mind. That I cannot help contradicting him is because the Way is truly so. "If one is not direct, the Way will not be seen."[66] You say that I "definitely differ from Master Zhu." How could I dare deceive my own mind? The Way is the Way shared by all under Heaven, and learning is the learning shared by all under Heaven. Neither Master Zhu nor Confucius can have it for his own. What is shared by all is simply to be spoken of openly. So if what is said is right, it benefits oneself even though it differs from one's own view. If what is said is wrong, it harms oneself even though it agrees with one's own view. What benefits oneself one is sure to welcome, and what harms oneself one is sure to dislike. That being so, my present arguments may differ from Master Zhu, but they are not necessarily something he would not welcome. "The faults of the exemplary person are like eclipses of the sun and moon: when they are corrected, everyone looks up to them." Whereas "the petty person always glosses over faults." Unworthy as I am, I would never dare serve Master Zhu with the mind of a petty person.

177 Your instruction runs to several hundred words and goes over things again and again, and all of it comes from not fully understanding my account of "investigating things." Once my account is made clear, all these words will be cleared up without further argument, and nothing will stand in the way. So I will not now go through them point by point and trouble you with trivial details. Yet unless my account is presented in person and explained by word of mouth, it can certainly never be made fully clear on paper.

178 Ah! The way you have opened my mind and guided me can only be called earnest and thorough. Could anyone love me as you do? Foolish and lowly as I am, how could I fail to feel deeply

66 Luo Qinshun had challenged the dating of some of the letters in this compilation (1518).

grateful and to cherish it? And yet I dare not hastily abandon what I am truly convinced of within and merely pretend to accept your teaching. That is precisely because I dare not fail your deep love, and wish to repay it. When autumn ends and I return east, I will surely seek a meeting to finish what I have to ask. I earnestly beg you to complete your instruction.

REPLY TO NIE WENWEI

Wang tells Nie Bao why he cannot stop teaching: the world's suffering is a pain in his own body.

179 In spring you took the trouble to come a long way, out of your road, to visit me, and you questioned and tested my views with such earnestness. How can I be worthy of such kindness! I had hoped that we might find a quiet place with two or three like-minded friends and keep you for ten days or so. Then I could offer a little of my humble understanding and gain the benefit of polishing each other. But your official duties and worldly ties made that impossible. After we parted I was deeply disappointed, as if I had lost something. Then suddenly your letter arrived, over a thousand words long and going over things again and again, and I cannot say how much it comforted me. In it you praise me far too highly, which comes from your generous wish to encourage me. Your admonitions are genuine and earnest, for you wish to bring me into the realm of the worthies and sages. You also asked Chongyi to convey your earnest concern. Who but a close friend with deep affection would go so far? I feel grateful and ashamed, and I fear I am not equal to it.[67] Even so, how could I dare not spur myself on, and offer only gratitude, shame, and modest refusals? You say: "Zisi, Mencius, Zhou Dunyi, and the Cheng brothers met in spirit across a thousand years without intending to. Rather than be fully believed by the whole world, it is better to be truly believed by one person. The Way is there of itself, and learning is there of itself. To be

67 This letter (1526) is addressed to Nie Bao (Wenwei, 1487–1563), who later declared himself Wang's disciple. Chongyi is Ouyang De.

believed by the whole world is not much, and to be believed by one person is not little." This is indeed the mind of the exemplary person who "is untroubled when not approved." How could the shallow and petty people of the world understand it? But for my part, there is something here I truly cannot help, and it is not that I am reckoning whether others believe me or not. The human being is the mind of Heaven and Earth. Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things are fundamentally one body with me. The hardship and torment of the people: which of these is not a pain and ache felt keenly in my own body? Not to know the pain and ache of one's own body is to lack the heart that knows right and wrong. The heart that knows right and wrong knows without deliberation and is able without learning. It is what is called "innate knowing." Innate knowing is in the human mind without distinction between sage and fool. It is the same everywhere under Heaven, past and present. If the exemplary people of the world would simply devote themselves to extending their innate knowing, they would naturally share a public sense of right and wrong and common likes and dislikes. They would regard others as themselves and the state as their family, and take Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body. Then even if one wanted the world to be in disorder, it could not happen. The ancients could see goodness in others as if it came from themselves, and see evil in others as if they themselves had fallen into it. They regarded the people's hunger and drowning as their own hunger and drowning, and if a single person failed to find a place, they felt as if they themselves had pushed that person into a ditch. They did not do this deliberately to seek the world's trust. They simply devoted themselves to extending their innate knowing, seeking to be satisfied within themselves. When the sages Yao, Shun, and the Three Kings spoke, the people all believed them, because they spoke by extending their innate knowing. When they acted, the people were all pleased, because they acted by extending their innate knowing. That is why their people were content and at ease. When put to death they bore no resentment, and when benefited they gave no

credit. This reached even the peoples of the frontier, so that all with blood and breath honored and loved them, because their innate knowing was the same. Ah! How simple and easy was the sages' governing of the world!

180 In later ages the learning of innate knowing was not understood. People used their selfish cleverness to compete with and crush one another, and so each came to have a separate mind. Biased, petty, warped, and narrow views and cunning, false, hidden, and crooked tricks became too many to tell. Outwardly people borrowed the name of humaneness and rightness, while inwardly they pursued selfishness and self-interest in fact. They used devious words to flatter the vulgar and contrived conduct to court a reputation. They covered up others' goodness and stole it as their own merit, and exposed others' private faults to take credit for being upright. They used anger to defeat one another and still called it devotion to rightness. They used treachery to topple one another and still called it hatred of evil. They envied the worthy and resented the able and still thought they shared a public sense of right and wrong. They indulged their feelings and gave free rein to their desires and still thought they shared common likes and dislikes. They trampled and harmed one another. Even among the flesh and blood of a single family, they could not be free of thoughts of you and me, winning and losing, or of fences between this one and that one. How much less could they regard as one body the vastness of the world and its multitude of people and things? No wonder there is such turmoil, and calamity and disorder follow one another without end.

181 Truly relying on the grace of Heaven, I have happened to gain some insight into the learning of innate knowing, and I believe that only by following it can the world be well governed. So whenever I think of how the people have sunk and drowned, I am grieved and pained at heart. Forgetting my own unworthiness, I think to save them by this means, without knowing my own limits. People who see me like this join in mocking and denouncing me, taking me for someone mad and out of their

mind. Ah! Is that worth worrying about? When I feel a pain that cuts into my very body, do I have time to reckon with others' mockery? Suppose someone sees a father, son, or brother fall into a deep abyss. They cry out and crawl, half-naked and barefoot, stumbling and falling, clinging to the cliff face as they climb down to rescue them. Scholars who see this are bowing and yielding to one another, chatting and laughing nearby. They think that to throw off decorum and proper dress and cry out and stumble like this is to be mad and out of one's mind. So to bow and yield, chat and laugh beside a drowning person without knowing to save them is something only a passerby could do, someone without the feelings of kin, flesh and blood. Even then, we would already say such a person lacks the heart of compassion and is not human. But one bound by the love of father and son or brothers would surely feel a pained heart and an aching head. They would run wildly with all their strength and crawl to the rescue. They would disregard even the danger of drowning themselves. How much less would they mind ridicule for being mad and out of their mind? And how much less would they care whether others believe them or not? Ah! People today may call me mad and out of my mind, and that is quite all right. The minds of all people in the world are my mind. While there are still people in the world who are mad, how could I not be mad? While there are still those who are out of their minds, how could I not be out of my mind?

[182] In his own time Confucius had many critics. Some accused him of flattery and some mocked him as glib. Some disparaged him as no worthy, denounced him as ignorant of ritual, and insulted him as "Qiu, the neighbor to the east." Some were jealous and obstructed him, and some hated him and wished to kill him. Even the gatekeeper and the basket-carrier, worthy men of the time, said: "Is this the one who knows it cannot be done and does it anyway?" and "How vulgar, that dogged clinking! If no one knows you, just stop, and that is that." Even Zilu, who was among those who had "ascended to the hall," could not help doubting what the Master saw and was displeased at where he

wished to go, and he even thought him impractical. So among his contemporaries, those who did not believe in the Master must have been far more than two or three in ten.[68] Yet the Master was anxious and restless, like someone searching the roads for a lost child, never staying long enough to warm his mat. Was it merely to win others' recognition and trust? It was because his humaneness, which formed one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, felt the pain so urgently that even had he wished to stop, something in him would not let him stop. Hence his words: "If I do not keep company with the people of this world, with whom shall I keep company?" "Wishing to keep oneself pure, one throws the great human relations into disorder." "How resolute! Yet there is nothing hard in that." Ah! Who but one who truly takes Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body could understand the Master's mind? As for those who withdraw from the world without dejection, who delight in Heaven and know their destiny, they are of course content wherever they find themselves. Their way and his can go side by side without conflict.

183 Unworthy as I am, how would I dare take the Way of the Master as my own charge? Yet my mind, too, has come to know a little of the pain in its own body, and so I look about me in distress, seeking those who can help me, so that together we may discuss how to remove this sickness. If I could truly find heroic people of shared resolve to support and aid me, so that together we might make the learning of innate knowing clear throughout the world, so that everyone in the world knew to extend their own innate knowing, to bring one another peace and to nourish one another, to remove the blindness of selfishness and self-interest, and to wash away once and for all the habits of slander, envy, rivalry, and resentment, and so arrive at the Great Unity, then my madness would surely be cured all at once, and I would at last escape the affliction of having lost my mind. Would that not be a joy?

68 Qiu was Confucius's personal name; the jibe treats him as an ordinary neighbor. The gatekeeper and the basket-carrier appear in *Analects* 14.38–39.

184 Ah! If one truly seeks heroic people of shared resolve throughout the world, whom could I hope for if not someone like you, my Wenwei? With talent and resolve such as yours, you are truly able to rescue a drowning world. And now that you also know that the means lie within yourself and need not be sought outside, if you follow this and fill it out, it will be like a breached river pouring into the sea. Who could hold it back? You said, "If one person believes it, that is not too few." To whom else, then, could you modestly hand this task?

185 Kuaiji has long been known as a land of mountains and waters. Deep forests and long valleys lie wherever one strolls; cold or heat, dark or bright, there is no season that does not suit. I live in peace and eat my fill, untroubled by the dust and noise of the world; good friends gather from all around, and the Way and rightness are renewed day by day. At ease, at leisure: between Heaven and Earth, could there be any joy greater than this? Confucius said, "I do not resent Heaven, I do not blame others; I learn what is below and reach what is above." A few friends of shared resolve and I are just now resolving to devote ourselves to these words. How would I have time to long for anything outside? Only this pain that cuts into my own skin is something I cannot shrug off, and so I have said all this once again.

186 With a cough and the poison of summer heat, I have been utterly lazy about letters. Your messenger came from far away and has waited here a month. Now, at the point of parting, I take up the brush and without noticing have filled page after page. Because our understanding of each other runs so deep, though I have gone on at such length, I still feel there is much I have not managed to say.

A SECOND REPLY TO NIE WENWEI

Wang explains "always be doing something" as extending innate knowing in serving parents, elders and ruler.

187 On receiving your letter and seeing how swiftly your learning has advanced of late, my joy and comfort are beyond words. I

read it closely several times. Though there are one or two places not yet perfectly clear, that is only because your effort at extending innate knowing is not yet fully ripe; once it ripens, these will vanish of themselves. It is like driving a carriage: you are already on the broad highway, and if at times you veer sideways or wander, that is because the horses' temper is not yet trained and the bit and reins are not yet even. But you are already on the broad highway and will never be lured onto side paths and crooked trails. Of late, among those of shared resolve across the land, I have seen few who have reached this point. My joy and comfort are beyond words; this is good fortune for the Way! This poor body of mine has long suffered from a cough and a dread of heat, and since I came into the torrid south it has flared up badly again. His Majesty, sage and clear-sighted, entrusted me with a heavy charge, and I did not dare decline at once. The military affairs of the region have been many and pressing, and I have handled them all while ill, carried in a litter. Now, fortunately, all is pacified, and I have already submitted a memorial asking to return home to recuperate. If I can rest a little in the cool of the woods, I may recover. Your messenger is returning, and I write hastily from my pillow, unable to express all my longing for you. Separately there is a note for Chen Jiuchuan; please be so kind as to pass it on. As for what your letter asked, I reply hastily on one or two points. In recent years many of those discussing learning in the mountains have often said that the effort of "neither forget nor force it" is very hard. When I asked them why, they said: "As soon as you put your mind to it, that is forcing; as soon as you don't, that is forgetting. That's why it is so hard." So I asked: "Forgetting—forgetting what? Forcing—forcing what?" The person fell silent and had no answer, and only then asked me. So I told him that in my teaching here I speak only of "always be doing something," not of "neither forget nor force it."[69] "Always be doing something" simply means "accumulating rightness" at every moment. If one applies the effort of "always be doing something" at every moment but at times it lapses, that

69 The Chinese has Weijun, the courtesy name of Chen Jiuchuan.

is forgetting, and so one must "not forget." If one applies the effort of "always be doing something" at every moment but at times wants quick results, that is forcing, and so one must "not force it." The effort lies entirely in "always be doing something"; "neither forget nor force it" only rouses and alerts one along the way. If the effort never lapses in the first place, there is no need to speak further of "not forgetting"; if one never wanted quick results in the first place, there is no need to speak further of "not forcing." How clear and simple this effort is! How free and at ease![70] Yet now, instead of applying effort to "always be doing something," people hold on in a vacuum to a "neither forget nor force it." This is just like cooking rice in a pot: without first putting water and rice into the pot, one devotes oneself to adding firewood and stoking the fire. What on earth does one expect to cook? I fear that before the heat is even regulated, the pot will already have cracked. Those today who apply effort solely to "neither forget nor force it" suffer from precisely this ailment. All day long they work in a vacuum at "not forgetting," and in a vacuum at "not forcing"; vast and vague, they have nowhere solid to set their hands. In the end their effort amounts only to sinking into emptiness and guarding stillness, and they learn to become dull and witless. The moment some small affair comes along, they are entangled and thrown into confusion, no longer able to order and manage things. These are all people of resolve, yet they are made to toil and be bound, wasting a whole life, all because a mistaken teaching has misled them. It is deeply pitiable! Now, "always be doing something" is simply "accumulating rightness," and "accumulating rightness" is simply "extending innate knowing." When one speaks of "accumulating rightness," the main point is not immediately apparent; when one speaks of "extending innate knowing," there is right away solid ground on which to apply effort. That is why I speak only of "extending innate knowing." Extending one's innate knowing in affairs as they arise is "investigating things"; truly extending innate know-

70 "Accumulating rightness" (jiyi), like "always be doing something," comes from *Mencius* 2A2, on nourishing the flood-like qi.

ing is "making the intentions sincere"; truly extending one's innate knowing without the slightest trace of "willfulness, insistence, obstinacy, or self" is "rectifying the mind." If one truly extends innate knowing, one will naturally be free of the ailment of "forgetting"; with not the slightest trace of willfulness, insistence, obstinacy, or self, one will naturally be free of the ailment of "forcing." So when one speaks of investigating, extending, making sincere, and rectifying, there is no need to speak further of "forgetting" and "forcing." When Mencius spoke of "forgetting" and "forcing," he too was writing a prescription for the place where Gaozi had fallen ill.[71] Gaozi forcibly controlled his mind; that is the ailment of "forcing," which is why Mencius spoke especially of the harm of helping the sprouts grow. Gaozi's forcing also came from his taking rightness to be external: he did not know to "accumulate rightness" in his own mind and apply effort to "always be doing something," and so he ended up like this. If at every moment one "accumulates rightness" in one's own mind, then the substance of innate knowing is clear and bright, and naturally right is seen as right and wrong as wrong, with not a hair escaping. How then could one fall into the fault of "What you do not get in words, do not seek in the mind; what you do not get in the mind, do not seek in qi"? Mencius's teaching of "accumulating rightness" and "nourishing qi" has certainly done great service to later students, but it too was a prescription for an ailment and was stated in broad strokes. It is not as supremely refined and single, simple and easy, as the *Great Learning*'s effort of investigating, extending, making sincere, and rectifying, which runs through from top to bottom and will be free of faults for ten thousand generations.

188 When sages and worthies discussed learning, they mostly spoke to the moment and the affair at hand. Though their words differ as people do, at the core their effort and its main point match like the two halves of a tally. For between Heaven and Earth there is originally only this nature, only this principle,

71 "Willfulness, insistence, obstinacy, or self" are the four things Confucius was free of (*Analects* 9.4).

only this innate knowing, only this one task. So whenever one speaks of effort on the basis of the ancients' discussions of learning, there is no need to mix and patch them together; naturally they all fit and run through one another. The moment one needs to mix and patch them together, that shows one's own effort is not yet clear and thorough. Some lately say that the effort of "accumulating rightness" is complete only when "extending innate knowing" is patched onto it; that means their effort of "accumulating rightness" is not yet thorough. And an effort of "accumulating rightness" that is not yet thorough serves only to burden "extending innate knowing." Those who say that the effort of "extending innate knowing" becomes clear only when "neither forget nor force it" is patched onto it show that their effort of "extending innate knowing" is not yet thorough; and an effort of "extending innate knowing" that is not yet thorough serves only to burden "neither forget nor force it." People like this all interpret and attach things at the level of the text's meaning, trying to blend them and fit them together, without ever testing them in their own real effort. So the more finely they argue, the farther they stray. As for your views, Wenwei: on the great root and the all-pervading Way you are already wholly free of doubt; but on "extending knowledge," "fully exploring principle," "forgetting and forcing," and the like, there are at times places of mixing and patching. These are what I called veering and wandering at times on the broad highway; once your effort ripens, they will dissolve of themselves. You say that when you seek the teaching of "extending knowledge" in serving your parents and following your elder brother, you feel you have something to hold to and follow. This passage shows best the genuine, earnest, and solid effort of your recent practice. To do this yourself does no harm, and it has its strength; but to make it a fixed doctrine for teaching others risks falling sick from the medicine, so we must discuss it.

189 For innate knowing is simply the place where heavenly principle naturally becomes bright, aware, and manifest; it is simply true sincerity and compassionate concern, and that is its

original substance. So extending the true sincerity and compassionate concern of this innate knowing in serving one's parents is filial devotion; extending the true sincerity and compassionate concern of this innate knowing in following one's elder brother is respect for elders; extending the true sincerity and compassionate concern of this innate knowing in serving one's ruler is loyalty. There is only one innate knowing, one true sincerity and compassionate concern. If the innate knowing in following one's elder brother cannot extend its true sincerity and compassionate concern, that just means the innate knowing in serving one's parents cannot extend its true sincerity and compassionate concern; if the innate knowing in serving one's ruler cannot extend its true sincerity and compassionate concern, that just means the innate knowing in following one's elder brother cannot extend its true sincerity and compassionate concern. So to extend the innate knowing in serving one's ruler is to extend the innate knowing in following one's elder brother; to extend the innate knowing in following one's elder brother is to extend the innate knowing in serving one's parents. It is not that when the innate knowing in serving one's ruler cannot be extended, one must then expand it outward from the innate knowing in serving one's parents. That would again be leaving the original source and seeking among the branches and joints. Innate knowing is only one. Wherever it manifests and flows, it is complete right there, with no coming or going, and needs nothing borrowed. Yet where it manifests and flows, there are naturally distinctions of heavier and lighter, more generous and more sparing, that cannot be increased or reduced by a hair—what is called "the mean that is naturally so." Although its distinctions of heavier and lighter, more generous and more sparing, cannot be increased or reduced by a hair, it is originally only one; although it is only one, its distinctions of heavier and lighter, more generous and more sparing, cannot be increased or reduced by a hair. If they could be increased or reduced, if anything had to be borrowed, it would no longer be the original substance of true sincerity and compassionate concern. This is

why the wondrous functioning of innate knowing has no fixed place or form and no limit: "Speak of its greatness, and the world cannot contain it; speak of its smallness, and the world cannot split it."

190 Mencius's saying "The Way of Yao and Shun is nothing but filial devotion and respect for elders" alerts people at the point where their innate knowing manifests most genuinely, earnestly, and deeply, where it cannot be obscured. It lets people, in serving their ruler, dealing with friends, being humane to the people, and loving creatures, and in all their activity and stillness, speech and silence, simply extend that one thought of true sincerity and compassionate concern, the innate knowing that serves their parents and follows their elder brother; then naturally everything is the Way. For though the affairs of the world change in a thousand and ten thousand ways, beyond all fathoming, if one only responds to them by extending this one thought of true sincerity and compassionate concern, the innate knowing that serves one's parents and follows one's elder brother, nothing will be left out or slip through, precisely because there is only this one innate knowing. Beyond the one thought of innate knowing in serving one's parents and following one's elder brother, there is no other innate knowing to be extended. Hence it is said, "The Way of Yao and Shun is nothing but filial devotion and respect for elders." This is why it is the learning of "be refined, be single": set it anywhere within the four seas and it holds true; apply it to later ages and there is no morning or evening when it fails. You say, Wenwei: "I wish to seek the learning of so-called innate knowing in serving my parents and following my elder brother." To say this on the basis of where your own effort has found its strength is perfectly acceptable; and to say that one extends the true sincerity and compassionate concern of one's innate knowing in order to fulfill the Way of serving one's parents and following one's elder brother is also perfectly acceptable. Mingdao said: "Practicing humaneness begins with filial devotion and respect for elders. Filial devotion and respect for elders are one aspect of humaneness;

one may call them the root of practicing humaneness, but not the root of humaneness." That is right. On the saying about "anticipating, presuming, and perceiving first," you say: "With sincerity, moving out in every direction and guarding in roundabout ways are all functions of innate knowing." Excellent, excellent! As for the places where there is some patching, I have already spoken of them above. Chen Jiuchuan's words are not wrong either. You need to take something from his words to be complete, and he in turn needs to take something from yours to be clear; otherwise each of you will not escape the ailment of leaning to one side. Shun examined plain words and consulted grass-cutters and woodgatherers—not because plain words ought to be examined and woodgatherers ought to be consulted, and so he did it, but because his innate knowing manifested and flowed, bright and perfectly clear, without any obstruction or screen. That is why it is called great knowing. The moment there is clinging, willfulness, or insistence, one's knowing becomes small. In discussing learning there will naturally be choosing and distinguishing, but when it comes to truly applying effort on the ground of the mind, this is how it must be. On the three passages about "fully realizing the mind," I have earlier offered the account of "knowing at birth, knowing through learning, and knowing through hardship"; it is quite clear and leaves nothing to doubt.[72] For one who fully realizes the mind, knows the nature, and knows Heaven, there is no need to speak of preserving the mind, nourishing the nature, and serving Heaven, nor of not being of two minds over early death or long life and cultivating the self while waiting; the effort of "preserving the mind and nourishing the nature" and of "cultivating the self while waiting" is already within it. One who preserves the mind, nourishes the nature, and serves Heaven, though not yet at the stage of fully realizing the mind and knowing Heaven, is already

72 The three passages are in *Mencius* 7A1: fully realizing the mind, knowing one's nature, and knowing Heaven; preserving the mind, nourishing the nature, and serving Heaven; and not being of two minds over early death or long life but cultivating the self while waiting for one's fate.

there doing the effort of seeking to reach it; there is no need to speak further of not being of two minds over early death or long life and cultivating the self while waiting, for the effort of "not being of two minds over early death or long life and cultivating the self while waiting" is already within it. Take walking as an analogy. One who fully realizes the mind and knows Heaven is like a person in the prime of strength, already able to run back and forth over hundreds and thousands of miles; one who preserves the mind and serves Heaven is like a young child being taught to walk and run in the courtyard; one who is not of two minds over early death or long life and cultivates the self while waiting is like an infant in swaddling clothes, just being helped along the walls to learn little by little to stand up and take steps. One who can already run back and forth over thousands of miles need not be made to learn walking and running in the courtyard again, and naturally can walk and run in the courtyard; one who can already walk and run in the courtyard need not be made to learn standing and stepping by holding on to the walls again, and naturally can stand and take steps. Yet learning to stand and take steps is the beginning of learning to walk and run in the courtyard, and learning to walk and run in the courtyard is the foundation of learning to run back and forth over thousands of miles. These are certainly not two different things; only the difficulty of the effort differs enormously. The mind, the nature, Heaven: they are one. So when it comes to knowing it and to achieving it, they are one; yet the three differ in a person's caliber and strength, which have their own grades, and one cannot skip stages. Looking closely at your argument, Wenwei, you seem to fear that one who fully realizes the mind and knows Heaven might abandon the effort of preserving the mind and cultivating the self, and that this would turn into a fault in fully realizing the mind and knowing Heaven. This is worrying on the sage's behalf that the effort might lapse, without knowing to worry on one's own behalf that one's effort is not yet genuine and earnest. In our own effort, we must devote our whole mind and resolve to not being of two minds over early death or long

life and cultivating the self while waiting; this alone is the beginning of the effort of fully realizing the mind and knowing Heaven—just as learning to stand and take steps is the beginning of learning to run a thousand miles. I am still worried that I cannot stand up and take steps; how could I rush to worry that I cannot run a thousand miles, much less worry on behalf of someone who runs a thousand miles that they might forget the practice of standing and stepping! Your insight is by nature lofty and far-reaching, yet you argue this way because you have not yet shaken off the old habit of explaining the meaning of texts. You split up these three passages and match them against one another, seeking to blend and unify them, and so you add on many tangled opinions of your own, which in turn keep your effort from being concentrated and single. Those today who work in a vacuum at "neither forget nor force it" have precisely this ailment in their opinions. It misleads people terribly and must be cleansed away. As for what you say on the passage "honoring the virtuous nature and following inquiry and learning," it is entirely right and comes back to one; there is nothing to doubt. Only because you have truly applied effort could you say this. This is not, in principle, something perilous, obscure, or hard to see. If people's opinions differ, it is because their innate knowing still has some faint film lurking in it; remove this faint film, and naturally all will be clear. After writing my letter I moved my bed under the eaves, and happening to have nothing to do, I went on to answer this as well. Since your learning has already grasped what is great, such points will in time dissolve of themselves, and there was really no need to analyze them so minutely. But having received such deep affection from you—sending someone a thousand miles and asking so earnestly—I could not leave your purpose unmet, and so could not stop myself from speaking. Still, I have been blunt and long-winded in the extreme; trusting in your faith and affection, I hope you will not hold it against me. Please make a copy each for Chen Jiuchuan, Zou Shouyi, and Ouyang De and send it to them; that

would further honor our bond as one body. The above was recorded by Nan Daji.[73]

THE BASIC IDEAS OF TEACHING CHILDREN, FOR THE TEACHERS LIU BOSONG AND OTHERS

Wang tells village teachers to lead children with songs, ritual and reading rather than the whip.

191 In ancient times, teaching meant teaching the human relationships. In later ages the habit of memorization, recitation and literary composition arose, and the teaching of the former kings was lost. In teaching children today, the sole concern should be filial devotion, respect for elders, loyalty, trustworthiness, ritual, rightness, integrity and a sense of shame. As for the way to cultivate and nourish them, one should draw them on with singing poems to stir their resolve, lead them in practicing ritual to give dignity to their bearing, and encourage them in reading books to open their understanding. People today often regard singing poems and practicing ritual as irrelevant to present needs. This is the shallow, vulgar view of a declining age. How could it grasp the ancients' purpose in establishing teaching?[74]

192 On the whole, children by nature delight in play and dread restraint. They are like plants just beginning to sprout: give them room and they grow freely; crush and bend them and they droop. In teaching children today, one must make them eager and inspired, glad at heart, and then their progress will carry itself forward. It is like timely rain and spring wind moistening plants and trees: none fail to bud and burst forth, growing day by day and changing month by month of their own accord. But if ice and frost strip them, their life dwindles, and day by day they dry up and wither.

193 So leading them in singing poems is not only to stir their resolve. It is also a way to let out their jumping and shouting in

73 Nan Daji (1487–1541), a disciple and prefect of Shaoxing, compiled and printed the letters of this part in 1524; the line marks the end of his collection.

song, and to release their pent-up frustrations in rhythm and tone. Leading them in practicing ritual is not only to give dignity to their bearing. It is also a way to stir their blood by turning, bowing and yielding, and to strengthen their sinews and bones by kneeling and rising, bending and stretching. Encouraging them in reading is not only to open their understanding. It is also a way to preserve their minds by immersing themselves and going over the text again and again, and to express their resolve by reciting with rising and falling voice. All of this serves to guide their resolve along its natural course and to bring their nature and feelings into balance. It quietly dissolves their meanness and silently transforms their coarseness and stubbornness, so that day by day they are steeped in ritual and rightness without finding it hard, and enter equilibrium and harmony without knowing why. This, it seems, was the subtle purpose of the former kings in establishing teaching.

194 Those who teach young children nowadays do nothing all day but drill them in punctuating texts and copying models. They demand restraint but do not know to guide them with ritual; they seek cleverness but do not know to nourish them with goodness. They whip and bind them as if handling prisoners. So the children look on the schoolhouse as a jail and refuse to enter, and look on their teachers as enemies and do not want to see them. They spy, dodge and cover up to get their play, and invent lies and tricks to indulge their stubbornness and meanness. Frivolous, shallow, mediocre and inferior, they sink lower day by day. This is driving them into evil and asking them to be good. How could that succeed?

195 This is truly the purpose behind all my teaching. I fear that common opinion will not see it and will think it impractical. Besides, I am soon to leave. So I give you this earnest charge. You teachers, make every effort to grasp my intent and keep it always as your rule. Do not let popular talk lead you to alter or abandon these guidelines. Then you may come close to achiev-

74 This and the following sections are Wang's guidance to the teachers of the elementary schools he set up in southern Jiangxi in 1518, followed by his school rules.

ing the work of "nourishing what is right in the young." Keep this in mind, keep this in mind![75]

SCHOOL RULES

The daily routine of the schools: morning questions on conduct, then singing, ritual practice and recitation.

196 Every day at dawn, after the pupils have bowed in greeting, the teacher asks each of them in turn: At home, has your heart that loves your parents and respects your elders grown slack or careless and fallen short of being genuine? In the rites of keeping them warm and cool, settling them at night and greeting them in the morning, have you been lacking and failed to carry them out? Coming and going in the streets, in your walking and manners, have you been unruly and failed to be careful and orderly? In all your words, deeds and inner thoughts, has there been deceit, falsehood or anything crooked, so that you failed in loyalty, trustworthiness, earnestness and reverence? Each child must answer truthfully. If there is a fault, correct it; if there is none, strive all the more. The teacher then gives patient, detailed instruction and encouragement as the occasion and the matter suggest. After that all return to their seats to study.[76]

197 In singing poems, pupils must compose their faces and steady their qi. They must keep their voices clear and bright and attend carefully to the evenness of rhythm and melody. They must not be hasty and rushed, loose and noisy, or weak and timid. In time their spirits will flow freely, and their minds and qi will become calm and balanced. Each school divides its pupils into four groups according to their number. Each day one group takes its turn singing. The rest stay in their seats and listen with composed faces and respectful attention. Every five days, all four groups sing in turn within their own school. On

75 The quoted phrase comes from the commentary on the *Meng* ("Youthful Ignorance") hexagram of the *Book of Changes*.

76 These are the classic duties of a filial child from the *Book of Rites*: keeping parents warm in winter and cool in summer, settling their beds at night, and asking after them in the morning.

the first and fifteenth of each month, the schools gather and sing together at the academy.

198 In practicing ritual, pupils must clear their minds and settle their thoughts. They must attend carefully to the forms and procedures and gauge their bearing and movements. They must not be careless and lazy, hesitant and embarrassed, or hasty and uncouth. They should be at ease without becoming slow and sluggish, and careful and attentive without becoming stiff and cramped. In time body and manner become practiced and familiar, and their moral nature becomes firm. The groups of pupils are the same as for singing. Every other day, one group takes its turn practicing ritual. The rest stay in their seats and watch with composed faces and respectful attention. On ritual days, pupils are excused from copying models. Every ten days, all four groups practice in turn within their own school. On the first and fifteenth of each month, the schools gather and practice together at the academy.

199 In assigning texts, quantity is not the point; what matters is thorough mastery. Gauge each pupil's ability. One who can manage two hundred characters should be given only a hundred, so that energy and strength are always left over. Then there will be no trouble with boredom and strain, but rather the delight of finding it for oneself. During recitation, make sure they are wholly focused and single-minded, reciting with the mouth and reflecting with the mind. They should unravel every word and every phrase again and again, let their voices rise and fall with the rhythm, and keep their minds relaxed and open. In time rightness and ritual will permeate them, and their intelligence will open day by day.

200 The daily routine: first, examination of conduct; next, reciting from memory and reading aloud; next, practicing ritual or copying models; next, more reading aloud and explanation of texts; and next, singing poems. Practicing ritual, singing poems and the like all serve to keep the children's minds always present, so that they enjoy their studies without tiring and have no time for anything wayward or depraved. Teachers who

understand this will know how to proceed. Even so, this is only the general outline. Grasping it with spirit and insight depends on the person.

Part Three

傳習錄下

Conversations of the later years (1520s), centered on extending innate knowing, including the four-sentence teaching given at the Tianquan Bridge in 1527.

RECORDED BY CHEN JIUCHUAN

Chen Jiuchuan tells how he came to accept that body, mind, intention, knowing and things are one.

201 In 1515 I first met the Master at Longjiang. The Master was discussing the teaching of "investigating things" with Zhan Ruoshui. Zhan held to the old interpretation. The Master said: "This is seeking it outside." Zhan said: "If you treat investigating the principles of things as external, you are making your own mind small." I was delighted that the old interpretation was right. The Master then discussed the chapter on "fully realizing the mind," and as soon as I heard it, all my doubts were gone. Later, living at home, I again sent a letter questioning "investigating things." The Master replied: "Just apply effort in a practical way, and in time it will resolve itself." In the mountains I copied out the old text of the *Great Learning* and read it. I came to feel that Master Zhu's interpretation of "investigating things" was wrong. Yet I also had doubts about the Master's saying that "whatever the intention is directed to is a thing," because the word "thing" was not clear. In 1519, returning from the capital, I met the Master again at Hongdu.[1] The Master was pressed with

1 Chen Jiuchuan (1494–1562), a disciple from Jiangxi, recorded this group of conversations.

military affairs, but he taught in spare moments. First he asked: "How has your effort gone these past years?" I said: "In recent years I have come to realize through experience that the practice of 'making bright virtue shine' is simply 'making the intentions sincere.' Starting from 'making bright virtue shine throughout the world,' I traced it step by step back to its root, and at 'making the intentions sincere' I could go no further. So why is there, before that, the further practice of 'investigating things and extending knowledge'? Later, on further reflection, I felt that one must first know whether an intention is sincere or false before anything else can follow. I took as proof Yan Hui's 'whenever he had something not good, he never failed to know it, and once he knew it, he never did it again,' and suddenly I seemed to have no doubt. But then the practice of 'investigating things' seemed superfluous. Then again I thought: with the spiritual clarity of my mind, how could it fail to know whether an intention is good or evil? It is only obscured by desires for things. One must investigate and remove the desires for things; only then can one be like Yan Hui and never fail to know. Then I began to suspect that my practice was upside down and did not form one piece with 'making the intentions sincere.' Later I asked Xiyan. Xiyan said: 'The Master's saying that investigating things and extending knowledge are the practice of making the intentions sincere is excellent.' I said: 'How are they the practice of making the intentions sincere?' Xiyan told me to think it over again and test it in experience, but I still did not understand. So I ask you." The Master said: "What a pity! This can be understood in a single word. The example of Yan Hui that you cited, Jiuchuan, is just it. You need only know that body, mind, intention, knowing and things are one thing." I was doubtful and said: "Things are outside. How can they be one thing with body, mind, intention and knowing?" The Master said: "The ears, eyes, mouth, nose and four limbs are the body. Without the mind, how could they see, hear, speak or move? And if the mind wants to see, hear, speak or move, it cannot do so without the ears,

eyes, mouth, nose and four limbs either.[2] So without the mind there is no body, and without the body there is no mind. Speaking of it as what fills out, we call it the body. Speaking of it as what governs, we call it the mind. Pointing to where the mind stirs into motion, we call it intention. Pointing to the spiritual clarity of intention, we call it knowing. Pointing to what intention touches and attaches to, we call it things. It is all just one thing. Intention never hangs in a void; it always attaches to some affair or thing. So to make the intention sincere, investigate whatever affair the intention is directed to, removing human desires and returning to heavenly principle. Then the innate knowing present in that affair is unobscured and can be extended. This is the practice of making the intentions sincere." At that, my doubts of several years were dispelled. I also asked: "Zhan Ruoshui has lately also come to trust the old text of the *Great Learning*. He says 'investigating things' is like saying 'arriving at the Way.' He also says that the word 'explore' in 'fully exploring principle' means exploring as one explores a lair to its depths, reaching it in person. So investigating things, too, is simply 'realizing heavenly principle wherever one is.' This seems to be gradually converging with your teaching." The Master said: "Zhan has applied effort, so he has been able to come around. Back then I told him that 'loving the people' need not be emended, and he did not believe me either. Now his account of 'investigating things' is close too. Only he need not swap the word 'thing' for 'principle.' Just give him back the word 'thing' and it is right." Later someone asked me: "Why do you no longer doubt the word 'thing'?" I said: "The *Doctrine of the Mean* says, 'Without sincerity there are no things.' Master Cheng says, 'When things come, respond to them as they are.' And there are phrases like 'let each thing be what it is' and 'nothing in one's breast.' All of these are words the ancients commonly used." Another day, the Master said the same.[3]

2 Xiyan is Cai Zongyan, an early disciple of Wang.

3 "Realizing heavenly principle wherever one is" was Zhan Ruoshui's signature teaching.

[202] I asked: "In recent years I have grown tired of scattered, unfocused learning, and I have often tried sitting quietly to shut off thoughts and deliberation. Not only can I not do it, but I feel more agitated than ever. What should I do?" The Master said: "How can thoughts be stopped? They need only be made right." I said: "Should there not be times when there are naturally no thoughts?" The Master said: "There really is no time without thoughts." I said: "Then how can one speak of stillness?" He said: "Stillness is never without activity; activity is never without stillness. Caution and apprehension are themselves thoughts. How can one divide activity and stillness?" I said: "Then why does Master Zhou say, 'Settle it by the mean, correctness, humaneness and rightness, and make stillness the ruler'?" He said: "Without desire, hence still. This is the 'settled' of 'settled in stillness, settled in activity'; it means making the original substance the ruler. The thought of caution and apprehension is lively and vital. This is where the workings of Heaven never cease. As it is said, 'The mandate of Heaven: how profound and unceasing!' To cease even for a moment is death. A thought that is not of the original substance is a selfish thought."[4]

[203] I also asked: "When I apply effort to collect the mind, sounds and sights are before me, and I hear and see them as usual. I fear this is not concentration." He said: "How could you want not to hear or see? Only if you were dry wood and dead ashes, deaf and blind, would that be possible. The point is simply to hear and see without being carried off by them." I said: "Once someone was sitting quietly while their son was reading in the next room, and did not know whether the son was diligent or idle. Master Cheng praised this person as very reverent. What about that?" He said: "Yichuan was probably mocking them."[5]

[204] I also asked: "When I apply effort in quiet sitting, I feel my mind fairly well collected, but when I meet with affairs it breaks off. Then I raise a thought to examine myself in the affair. When

4 The quoted line is from the *Book of Odes* ("The Mandate of Heaven," Ode 267).
5 Yichuan is Cheng Yi, the younger of the Cheng brothers.

the affair is over I look for my former practice again, and I still feel there is an inside and an outside that cannot be made into one piece." The Master said: "Your understanding of 'investigating things' is not yet thorough. When has the mind ever had an inside and an outside? Take you, Jiuchuan, discussing things here right now. Is there a separate mind inside keeping watch? This attentive reverence while listening to the discussion is just the mind of quiet sitting. The practice is one thread. Why raise another thought? One must polish oneself in the midst of affairs; only then is the practice of benefit. If you only like stillness, you will be thrown into confusion when affairs come, and you will never make progress. And that practice in stillness is also off: it seems collected, but in fact it is letting the mind drift and sink." Later at Hongdu, I again discussed inside and outside with Yuzhong and Guoshang. They both said that things do have an inside and an outside, but one must apply effort to both together, without any gap. I put this to the Master, who said: "Practice is never apart from original substance, and original substance has no inside or outside. It is only because those who practiced later divided inside from outside that they lost the original substance. What we need now is to make clear that practice must not have an inside and an outside. That is the practice of original substance." That day we all gained an insight.[6]

205 I also asked: "What about Master Lu's learning?" The Master said: "After Lianxi and Mingdao, it is still Xiangshan, only he is a bit coarse." I said: "Reading his discussions of learning, every piece lays bare the marrow, and every sentence seems to put the needle right on the deepest ailment. I don't see any coarseness." The Master said: "Yes. He applied effort in his own mind, and that is naturally different from guessing, imitating and seeking in the meaning of texts. But look closely and there are coarse spots. Apply effort long enough and you will see them."[7]

6 Yuzhong is Xia Liangsheng and Guoshang is Shu Fen, both scholar-officials from Jiangxi.

7 Lianxi is Zhou Dunyi; Mingdao is Cheng Hao, the elder of the Cheng brothers.

THE KNACK OF INNATE KNOWING

Wang calls innate knowing each person's own standard and the secret of extending knowledge.

206 In 1520 I went to Qianzhou and saw the Master again. I asked: "In my recent practice, though I seem to have some grasp of the main point, it is hard to find a place of steadiness and joy." The Master said: "You go looking in the mind for heavenly principle. This is exactly what is called 'the obstruction of principle.' There is a knack to it." I said: "May I ask what it is?" He said: "Just extending knowledge." I said: "How does one extend it?" He said: "That bit of innate knowing of yours is your own standard. Wherever your intentions are directed, if something is right it knows it is right, and if it is wrong it knows it is wrong. You cannot hide the slightest thing from it. Just don't deceive it; follow it honestly and solidly in what you do. Keep the good and remove the evil. How steady and joyful it is there! This is the true secret of 'investigating things' and the real practice of 'extending knowledge.' Without relying on these true workings, how would one investigate things? I myself have only in recent years come to grasp it this clearly. At first I still suspected that merely following it might not be enough. But looking closely, nothing at all is lacking."[8]

207 In Qianzhou, Yuzhong, Zou Shouyi and I were attending the Master together. The Master said: "Everyone has a sage within, but lacking confidence in themselves, they bury it." Then he looked at Yuzhong and said: "Within you, at root, is a sage." Yuzhong rose and said he did not dare accept this. The Master said: "This is something you yourself have. Why would you decline it?" Yuzhong again said: "I don't dare." The Master said: "Everyone has it, let alone you, Yuzhong. Why are you being modest? Modesty won't do here either." Yuzhong then smiled and accepted. The Master went on: "Innate knowing in people

8 "Obstruction of principle" is a Buddhist term for being hindered by attachment to concepts or doctrine.

cannot be extinguished, no matter what you do. Even a thief knows that stealing is wrong. Call them a thief and they still squirm." Yuzhong said: "It is just covered by desires for things. The good mind is within and naturally is not lost. It is like clouds hiding the sun. When has the sun ever been lost?" The Master said: "Yuzhong is so perceptive. Others do not see this far."[9]

208 The Master said: "Once you see through this thoroughly, then no matter how many thousands of words there are, right and wrong, sincere and false become plain the moment they come before you. What fits is right; what does not fit is wrong. It is like what the Buddhists call the 'mind-seal.' It is truly a touchstone, a compass."[10]

209 The Master said: "Once you know the knack of innate knowing, then however many wayward and crooked thoughts you have, they all melt away the moment you become aware of them here. It is truly a single grain of elixir that touches iron and turns it to gold."

210 Ouyang De said: "Your teaching of 'extending knowledge' brings out its essence completely. It seems one can go no further." The Master said: "How easily you say that! Apply effort for another half year and see how it is. Apply effort for another year and see how it is. The longer the practice, the more different it feels. This is hard to put into words."

211 The Master asked me: "How has your experience of the teaching of 'extending knowledge' been?" I said: "I feel it is different. In the past, when I held on to my practice, I never found just the right point. This is just the right point." The Master said: "So you see, realizing it yourself is different from listening to lectures. When I first explained it to you, I knew you were only taking it lightly and had not yet tasted it. Realize this essential subtlety more deeply, and day by day you will see it differently.

9 Zou Shouyi (courtesy name Qianzhi, 1491–1562) was one of Wang's leading disciples.

10 In Chan (Zen) Buddhism, the "mind-seal" is the direct, mind-to-mind confirmation of awakening passed from teacher to student.

It is inexhaustible." He also said: "These two words, 'extending knowledge,' are truly the secret transmitted by the sages through the ages. Seeing this far, one can 'wait a hundred generations for a sage and have no doubt.'"[11]

212 I asked: "When Yichuan spoke of substance and function having one source and of no gap between the manifest and the subtle, his students already said he was leaking Heaven's secrets. Isn't your teaching of 'extending knowledge' leaking Heaven's secrets far too much?" The Master said: "The sages already pointed it out to show people. It is only that later people hid it away, and I am bringing it to light. Why call it leaking? This is something everyone has, and once realized, it seems hardly anything at all. But if you tell it to people who do not apply real effort, they take it very lightly. That is a pity and of no benefit to either side. If you point it out to those who apply real effort but have not found the key, it gives them abundant strength."[12]

213 He also said: "When knowing comes, at root it is without knowing; when awareness comes, at root it is without awareness. Yet without knowing, one simply sinks and is buried."

214 The Master said: "In general, with friends there should be little admonishing and pointing out of faults and much guiding, supporting, praising and encouraging. Only that is right." Later he also warned me: "When discussing learning with friends, you must be accommodating and humble, and 'dwell in it with generosity.'"

215 I lay sick in Qianzhou. The Master said: "Illness too is a hard thing to investigate. How do you find it?" I replied: "The effort is very hard." The Master said: "Being cheerful all the time —that is the effort."

216 I asked: "When I examine my thoughts and concerns, some stray into the wrong and the false, and some plan ahead how to manage the affairs of the world. When I think them through to

11 The quoted phrase is from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, chapter 29.
12 The phrases come from Cheng Yi's preface to his commentary on the *Book of Changes*.

the end, they seem neatly ordered and full of savor, and they cling so that I can hardly push them away. If I notice early, it is easy; if I notice late, it is hard. When I exert myself to overcome them, I feel all the more at odds with them. Only when I shift my thoughts a little to some other matter are both forgotten. Clearing things out this way also seems harmless." The Master said: "Why do that? Just apply your effort to innate knowing." I said: "That is just what I mean: at that moment I don't know." The Master said: "I have my own effort here—how could those thoughts get in? It is only because your effort broke off that your knowing became obscured. Once it has broken off, simply take up the former effort again. Why do anything like that?" I said: "It is truly a hard fight. Even though I know, I cannot get rid of them." The Master said: "You need courage. Apply effort long enough and courage comes of itself. So it is said, 'It is produced by accumulated rightness.' One who wins easily is a great worthy."

217 I asked: "I have experienced this effort clearly in the mind, but I cannot make sense of the books." The Master said: "Just make sense of the mind. When the mind is clear, the books will naturally fall into place. If it is not clear in the mind and you only make the wording of the books clear, you will instead give rise to opinions of your own."

218 There was a subordinate official who had long heard the Master lecture on his learning. He said: "This learning is very good, but documents and lawsuits are so many and so troublesome that I cannot pursue learning." Hearing this, the Master said: "When have I ever taught you to leave documents and lawsuits behind and go off to discuss learning in the void? Since you have official business, learn right in the midst of official business—only that is true investigating things. Say you are hearing a lawsuit. You must not let someone's rude answers stir anger in you; you must not let their smooth talk give rise to pleasure; you must not, disliking their attempts to pull strings, punish them all the harder; you must not, because of their pleading, bend your judgment to go along with them; you must

not, because your own work is heavy, decide the case carelessly as you please; you must not, because bystanders slander and frame them, deal with them as others would like. All these intentions are selfish, and only you yourself know them. You must examine yourself minutely and overcome them, fearing only that this mind might lean the slightest bit to one side and stifle the right and wrong of the case. That is investigating things and extending knowledge. Among documents and lawsuits, everything is real learning. To learn apart from affairs and things is to cling to emptiness."

219 When I was about to leave Qianzhou for home, I wrote a poem in farewell to the Master: "What has innate knowing to do with hearing much? The wondrous union planted its root back then. To follow it in liking and disliking is the learning of the sages; where nothing is escorted out or welcomed in, there is Qian, the great origin." The Master said: "If you had not come to discuss this learning, you would not know what 'follow it in liking and disliking' means to follow." Fuying, who was present, said: "Truly. I once read your *Preface to the Old Text of the Great Learning* and did not know what it was talking about. Only after coming and listening to the lectures for some time did I begin to grasp the general idea."[13]

220 Yuzhong, Guoshang and others were attending the Master at a meal. The Master said: "All eating and drinking is just to nourish my body; what is eaten must be digested. If it merely piles up in the belly, it becomes a blockage—how could it build flesh? Later students with their broad learning and wide knowledge let it all stagnate in their chests. All of this is the illness of indigestion."

221 The Master said: "The sage too 'knows through learning,' and ordinary people too 'know by birth.'" Someone asked: "How so?" He said: "This innate knowing everyone has. The sage simply keeps it whole, without the slightest obstruction, wary

13 "Neither escorting out nor welcoming in" describes a mind that does not chase after things (Zhuangzi, taken up by Cheng Hao); Qian, the great origin, is the creative power of Heaven in the *Book of Changes*.

and diligent, tireless and attentive, naturally unceasing—and that too is learning. It is only that the share of what is inborn is larger, so it is called 'knowing by birth and acting with ease.' Ordinary people, from the time they are small children, all possess this knowing completely; it is just that the obstructions are many. Yet the knowing of the original substance is hard to extinguish; even in inquiry, study and overcoming, they simply rely on it. It is only that the share of learning is larger, so it is called 'knowing through learning and acting for its benefit.'"

222 Huang Yifang asked: "In your teaching on investigation and extension, one investigates things as occasions arise in order to extend one's knowing. Then that knowing is knowing of one part, not knowing of the whole. How could one reach the state of being 'vast and broad as Heaven, deep and springing as the abyss'?" The Master said: "The human mind is Heaven, is the abyss. The original substance of the mind contains everything; originally it is one Heaven, but because selfish desires obstruct it, the original substance of Heaven is lost. The principle of the mind is inexhaustible; originally it is one abyss, but because selfish desires block it up, the original substance of the abyss is lost. Now if, thought after thought, you extend innate knowing and clear away all these obstructions and blockages at once, the original substance is restored, and that is Heaven and the abyss." Then he pointed at the sky to show him: "Take the sky you see in front of you: it is bright sky. The sky you see on every side is also just bright sky. Only because so many buildings and walls block it, you do not see the whole of the sky. Take the buildings and walls away, and it is all one sky. You cannot say the sky before your eyes is bright sky while the sky outside is not bright sky. From this you can see that knowing of one part is knowing of the whole, and knowing of the whole is knowing of one part; it is all one original substance."[14]

14 The same word, 天, means both "Heaven" and "sky"; Wang's illustration turns on this. Huang Yifang is Huang Zhi, who recorded later groups of these conversations.

RECORDED BY HUANG ZHI

Huang Zhi records sayings on good and evil as one thing and on Buddhist detachment.

223 The Master said: "Sages and worthies are not without achievements and moral integrity. But because they follow heavenly principle, that is simply the Way; they cannot be named by their achievements and integrity."

224 "'So eager as to forget to eat'—such is the sage's resolve, truly never ceasing. 'So joyful as to forget all worry'—such is the sage's Way, truly never distressed. There is perhaps no need to speak of attaining or not attaining."[15]

225 The Master said: "When we extend knowing, each of us simply goes as far as our measure allows. Today innate knowing appears like this: just expand it to the full according to what you know today. Tomorrow innate knowing opens to some further insight: then expand it to the full according to what you know tomorrow. Only this is the practice of refinement and singleness. In discussing learning with others, too, you must go as far as their measure allows. It is like a tree with a little sprout: you water it with just that much water. When the sprout grows more, you add more water. From a sapling you can grasp in two hands to a trunk you can embrace with both arms, the watering always goes as far as its measure allows. If there is a tiny sprout and you have a whole bucket of water and pour it all on, you will soak it to ruin."

226 Someone asked about the unity of knowing and acting. The Master said: "For this you must understand the aim behind what I say. In people's learning today, because knowing and acting are split into two things, when a thought stirs that is not good, since it has not yet been acted on, they do not go about stopping it. I now speak of the unity of knowing and acting precisely so that

15 The lines are Confucius's self-description in *Analects* 7.19. Zhu Xi read the first as the state before understanding is attained and the second as the state after; Wang rejects that division.

people will understand that where a thought stirs, that is already acting. If there is something not good where it stirs, then overcome that bad thought. You must go to the root and the very bottom and not let that one bad thought lie hidden in your chest. That is the aim behind what I say."

227 "The sage knows everything—just knows heavenly principle; can do everything—just can do heavenly principle. The sage's original substance is clear, so in every affair the sage knows where heavenly principle lies and goes on to fulfill it. It is not that once the original substance is clear, one then knows all the affairs and things in the world and can do them all. The affairs and things of the world—names and objects, measures and numbers, plants and trees, birds and beasts and the like—are endlessly numerous. Even with the original substance clear, how could the sage know them all? But what need not be known, the sage naturally does not seek to know; what ought to be known, the sage can ask others about—as when 'Confucius entered the Grand Temple and asked about everything.' An earlier scholar said, 'Though knowing, he still asked: the utmost of reverent care.' That explanation will not do. The sage need not know all the names and objects of ritual and music. But knowing heavenly principle, the sage naturally brings forth the many forms, measures and numbers. Not knowing and being able to ask—that too is where the forms of heavenly principle lie."

228 Someone asked: "You once said that good and evil are just one thing. Yet good and evil are two extremes, opposed like ice and burning charcoal. How can you call them just one thing?" The Master said: "The highest good is the original substance of the mind. As soon as one goes a little too far in the original substance, that is evil. It is not that there is a good and then also an evil set against it. So good and evil are just one thing." Having heard the Master's explanation, I understood what Master Cheng meant: "Good is certainly nature, but evil too cannot but be called nature." And again: "Good and evil are both heavenly principle. What is called evil is not evil at root; it lies only in

going too far or not far enough with respect to the original nature." These sayings no longer leave any room for doubt.[16]

229 The Master once said: "If only a person could love the good as one loves a lovely color and hate evil as one hates a foul odor, that would be a sage." When I first heard this it seemed very easy; later, when I came to experience it, I found this effort truly hard. For instance, though a thought may know to love the good and hate evil, without one's knowing or noticing it gets mixed with something else; once there is any admixture, it is no longer the mind that loves the good as one loves a lovely color and hates evil as one hates a foul odor. If one can truly love the good, then there is no thought that is not good; if one can truly hate evil, then there is no thought that touches on evil. How is that not a sage? So the learning of the sage is nothing but sincerity.

230 Someone asked: "The *Discourse on Cultivating the Way* says that 'following the nature is called the Way' concerns the sage, and 'cultivating the Way is called teaching' concerns the worthy." The Master said: "Ordinary people too follow their nature, but following the nature is the larger share in the sage, so 'following the nature is called the Way' concerns the sage. The sage too cultivates the Way, but cultivating the Way is the larger share in the worthy, so 'cultivating the Way is called teaching' concerns the worthy." He also said: "The *Doctrine of the Mean* as a whole mostly speaks of cultivating the Way. So later on, wherever it speaks of the exemplary person, of Yan Yuan, of Zilu, these are all people able to cultivate the Way; where it speaks of the petty person, of the worthy and the wise, the foolish and the unworthy, of the common people, these are all unable to cultivate the Way. As for the rest—speaking of Shun, King Wen, the Duke of Zhou and Confucius, of perfect sincerity and perfect sageliness and the like—those are sages who are naturally able to cultivate the Way."

231 Someone asked: "When a Confucian, at the third watch of the night, sweeps all thoughts from the chest and is empty and

16 The recorder here is Huang Zhi; the sayings quoted are those of Cheng Hao (1032–1085).

still, it is just like the stillness of the Buddhists. Neither is engaged with anything at that point. How do they differ then?" The Master said: "Activity and stillness are just one. That empty stillness at the third watch is simply preserving heavenly principle; it is the very mind that now responds to affairs and meets things. The mind that now responds to affairs and meets things also follows this heavenly principle, and so it is the very mind that is empty and still at the third watch. So activity and stillness are just one and cannot be told apart. Know that activity and stillness are one, and the hair's breadth by which the Buddhists diverge will be impossible to hide."

232 Among the disciples present was one whose bearing was very stiff and guarded. The Master said: "If a person is too stiff and guarded, it will in the end cause trouble." Someone said: "Being too stiff and guarded—how does that cause trouble?" He said: "A person has only so much energy. If one puts all one's effort into outward bearing, much within the mind will be left untended." There was another who was too casual and blunt. The Master said: "To discuss this learning now and yet put no restraint at all on outward conduct—that again splits the mind and affairs into two."

233 A disciple wrote a piece to see off a friend who was leaving, and asked the Master: "In writing I cannot help spending thought, and after it is written it stays on my mind for a day or two." He said: "Thinking over your writing does no harm. But if after it is written it stays on your mind, you are burdened by the writing; there is a thing lodged in your mind, and that will not do." Later the disciple wrote a poem to see someone off. When the Master had read it, he said: "Whenever you write, go only as far as your own measure reaches. If you say too much, that too is not 'cultivating one's words to establish sincerity.'"

234 "Master Zhu's account of investigating things simply lacks the main point. Take his line 'examine it in the subtlety of thoughts and concerns': it should not be lumped together with 'seek it in written texts, verify it in the evident workings of affairs, search for it in the course of discussion,' as if they were

all of a kind. That is to have no sense of what weighs more and what less."

235 Someone asked about the passage on "being affected by anger." The Master said: "Anger and the like—how could the human mind be without them? It just must not be 'affected' by them. Whenever people are angry, if they add even a bit of intention, the anger goes too far, and it is no longer the substance that is broad and impartial. So when one is affected by anger, the mind does not gain its correctness. Now, with anger and all the rest, simply respond to things as they come, without adding a bit of intention; then the substance of the mind is broad and impartial and gains the correctness of its original substance. Say you go out and see people fighting: at the one in the wrong, my mind too grows angry. Yet though angry, this mind is broad and open and has not stirred its qi in the least. Now when you are angry at someone, it should be like this too; only then is it correct."

236 "You once said: 'The Buddhists do not cling to forms, yet in fact they cling to forms; we Confucians cling to forms, yet in fact we do not cling to forms.' May I ask about this?" He said: "The Buddhists fear being burdened by father and son, so they flee father and son; they fear being burdened by ruler and minister, so they flee ruler and minister; they fear being burdened by husband and wife, so they flee husband and wife. All this is because they cling to the forms of ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, and so must flee them. With us Confucians, there are father and son, and we answer them with humaneness; there are ruler and minister, and we answer them with rightness; there are husband and wife, and we answer them with proper distinction. When have we ever clung to the forms of father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife?"[17]

17 "Forms" (相, Sanskrit lakṣaṇa) is a Buddhist term for the outward marks of phenomena; not clinging to them is a central Buddhist teaching.

RECORDED BY HUANG XIUYI

Huang Xiuyi records sayings on good thoughts, examination study and the root of innate knowing.

237 Huang Mianshu asked: "When the mind has no bad thoughts, it is empty and vacant. Must one also hold on to some good thought?" The Master said: "Once the bad thoughts are gone, that is the good thought; that is the original substance of the mind restored. It is like sunlight blocked by clouds: when the clouds go, the light is already restored. If, once the bad thoughts are gone, you still want to hold on to a good thought, that is lighting a lamp in the sunshine."[18]

238 Someone asked: "In my recent efforts I find that deluded thoughts hardly arise, but inside my chest it is pitch dark. How can I make it bright?" The Master said: "When you have only just set your hand to the effort, how could your chest be bright right away? It is like rushing, muddy water just poured into a vat: at first, though it has settled, it is still cloudy and murky. You must wait until it has stood settled a long time; then naturally the sediment all goes and it becomes clear again. Just apply effort to innate knowing. When innate knowing has been preserved a long time, the darkness will become bright of itself. To demand results now is forcing growth, and that is no real effort."

239 The Master said: "My teaching people to apply effort to 'extending innate knowing' in 'investigating things' is learning with a root. It advances day by day, and the longer it goes, the more refined and clear it feels. The scholars of the age teach people to search in every affair and every thing; that is learning without a root. In their prime they can manage outward polish for a while, and no faults show; when they grow old and their energy fails, in the end they collapse. It is like a tree without roots transplanted to the water's edge: though fresh and fine for a time, in the long run it is bound to wither."

240 Someone asked about the chapter "Set your resolve on the Way." The Master said: "The one line 'set your resolve on the Way' already contains the effort of the lines that follow; one cannot stop there. Take building this house: 'set your resolve on the Way' is thinking constantly of choosing the site and gathering materials, planning and building a dwelling. 'Hold fast to virtue' is when the plan is complete and there is something to hold to. 'Rely on humaneness' is living in the dwelling all the time and never leaving it. 'Roam in the arts' is adding some painting and color to beautify the dwelling. The arts are rightness, what accords with principle—reciting poetry, reading books, playing the zither, practicing archery and the like. All of them serve to train this mind and make it at home in the Way. If one does not 'set one's resolve on the Way' and yet 'roams in the arts,' that is like some feckless youngster who, without first building a house, keeps buying paintings to hang up for show—where will they hang them?"[19]

241 Someone asked: "Reading books is a way to regulate and compose this mind; it cannot be dispensed with. But while I read, thoughts of the examinations come pulling at me. How can I avoid this?" The Master said: "As long as your innate knowing is genuine and earnest, even preparing for the examinations will not burden the mind; and even if there is some burden, it is easy to notice and simply overcome. For instance, when you are reading and innate knowing knows that a mind bent on forced memorization is wrong, overcome it at once; if there is a mind that wants quick results, which is wrong, overcome it at once; if there is a mind that boasts of breadth and vies in ornament, which is wrong, overcome it at once. In this way you are simply matching yourself against the sages and worthies all day long, and it is a mind that is pure heavenly principle.[20] Let it read

18 Huang Mianshu is Huang Xiuyi, who recorded the conversations that follow.

19 The chapter is *Analects* 7.6. 藝 "arts" and 義 "rightness" are both pronounced yi; Wang glosses one by the other.

20 The civil service examinations, the main route to office in Ming China, tested set interpretations of the classics and formal essay writing.

whatever it reads; it is still only regulating and composing this mind. What burden is there?" The student said: "Though I have received your instruction, my endowment is mediocre, and I really find the burden hard to avoid. I have heard that success and failure are a matter of fate; people of the highest wisdom, I suspect, would disdain this. Unworthy as I am, entangled by fame and profit, I go along with it willingly and only make myself suffer. I want to give it up, but I am constrained by my parents and cannot let it go. What can I do?" The Master said: "Many people blame this on their parents; in fact it is only that they lack resolve. Once resolve is set, for innate knowing a thousand affairs and ten thousand undertakings are just one affair. How could reading and writing essays burden anyone? People burden themselves with gain and loss!" Then he sighed: "Because this learning is not understood, who knows how many heroes have been held up right here!"

242 Someone asked: "'What is inborn is called nature'—Gaozi was right to say so too. Why did Mencius reject it?" The Master said: "It is certainly nature, but Gaozi grasped only one side and did not understand the main point. If one understands the main point, saying it this way is also right. Mencius too said, 'Form and complexion are the nature given by Heaven.' This also speaks of qi." He also said: "Ordinary people say whatever comes into their mouths and do as they please, and all claim that it comes from their own mind and nature; this is what is called 'what is inborn is called nature.' But it is bound to go wrong. If one understands the main point and speaks and acts from one's innate knowing, it will naturally be right. Yet innate knowing too is just this mouth speaking and this body acting; how could it be outside qi, with something else to do the acting and speaking? Hence it is said: 'To discuss nature without qi is incomplete; to discuss qi without nature is unclear.' Qi is nature, and nature is qi; but one must grasp the main point properly."[21]

243 He also said: "In your practice, the one thing you must never do is 'force it.' People of the highest wisdom are extremely

rare; there is no way for students to leap straight into sagehood. Rising and falling, advancing and retreating—these are naturally the stages of practice. You must not, because your effort worked yesterday and today it doesn't, strain to put on a show of having no flaw. That is 'forcing it,' and it ruins even the little effort you made before. This is no small fault. It is like someone walking along who trips and falls: get up and walk on; don't deceive people by acting as if you never fell. You need only always keep a mind that can 'withdraw from the world without regret, go unrecognized without regret,' rely on this innate knowing, and press on patiently. Don't mind people's mockery, don't mind their slander, don't mind whether they honor or disgrace you. Let your practice advance or retreat; just keep extending innate knowing in charge, without ceasing. After a long time there will naturally be a point where it takes hold, and nothing outside will move you." He also said: "If a person truly applies effort, then whatever slander or contempt others show, everywhere is gain, everywhere is material for advancing in virtue. If one does not apply effort, these are just demons, and in the end one will be dragged down by them."

244 One day the Master went on an outing to Yu's Cave. Looking at the grain in the fields, he said: "In so short a time it has grown this much again!" Fan Zhaoqi, beside him, said: "That is only because it has roots. If learning can plant its own roots, there is no worry that it won't grow." The Master said: "Who has no roots? Innate knowing is the living root planted by Heaven; of itself it grows and grows without ceasing. It is only that, when one is caught up in selfish burdens, this root is injured and blocked and cannot grow."[22]

245 A friend was quick to anger and often blamed others. The Master warned him: "Learning must turn back on oneself. If you only blame others, you see only what is wrong with them and

21 Gaozi debated human nature with Mencius (*Mencius* 6A3). The closing saying comes from the Cheng brothers.

22 Yu's Cave, near Shaoxing, was traditionally held to be the burial place of the legendary flood-tamer Yu. Fan Zhaoqi was a disciple.

not your own faults. If you can turn back on yourself, you will see how much in you is still lacking—where is the leisure to blame others? Shun was able to transform Xiang's arrogance, and the key was simply that he did not see Xiang's wrongs. Had Shun only wanted to correct Xiang's wickedness, he would have seen Xiang's wrongs; and Xiang, an arrogant man, would never have yielded. How could Shun have moved and transformed him?" The friend was moved and repentant. The Master said: "From now on, just don't go judging the rights and wrongs of others. Whenever you are about to reproach and argue with someone, treat it as a great selfishness of your own and overcome it. Then you will be all right."[23]

246 The Master said: "Whenever friends raise questions and objections, even if they are shallow and crude, or show off their talents and exalt themselves, it is all the illness breaking out. One should give medicine suited to the illness; one must not harbor contempt for them, for that is not the exemplary person's mind of helping others do good."

247 Someone asked: "On the *Changes*, Master Zhu takes divination as the core, while Master Cheng's *Commentary* takes principle as the core. What do you think?" The Master said: "Divination is principle, and principle is divination. Of all the principles under Heaven, which is greater than divination? It is only because later ages looked at divination solely as casting hexagrams that it came to seem a minor art. They do not know that today's questions and answers between teachers and friends—learning broadly, inquiring carefully, thinking cautiously, discerning clearly, acting earnestly—are all divination. Divination is nothing but seeking to resolve doubts and make our minds spiritually clear. The *Changes* is asking Heaven. When people have doubts and cannot trust themselves, they use the *Changes*

23 Shun, a legendary sage-king, was renowned for his patience toward his half-brother Xiang, who plotted against his life.

to ask Heaven. The idea is that the human mind is still entangled in things, while Heaven alone admits no falsehood."[24]

248 Huang Mianzhi asked: "'Nothing they insist on, nothing they refuse; they side with rightness'—must it be like this in every affair?" The Master said: "Certainly it must be so in every affair, but one must recognize the main point. 'Rightness' is innate knowing; only when one understands that innate knowing is the main point is one free of fixation. Take receiving gifts: some you ought to accept today and ought not to accept another day; some you ought not to accept today and ought to accept another day. If you fix on 'today I ought to accept' and accept everything, or fix on 'today I ought not to accept' and refuse everything, that is 'insisting' and 'refusing.' It is not the original substance of innate knowing—how could it be called 'rightness'?"[25]

RECORDED BY HUANG SHENGZENG

Huang Shengzeng records sayings on the Odes, the mind of the Way and the sage's generous bearing.

249 Someone asked: "How can the single phrase 'No swerving in thought' cover the meaning of all three hundred poems?" The Master said: "Why only the three hundred poems? The Six Classics are all encompassed by this one phrase. Indeed, all the words of the sages and worthies, ancient and modern, the world over, are encompassed by the phrase 'No swerving in thought.' What else is there to say? This is the practice that settles one thing and settles a hundred."

250 Someone asked about "the mind of the Way" and "the human mind." The Master said: "'Following one's nature is called the Way'—that is the mind of the Way. Add the slightest human intention, and it is the human mind. The mind of the

24 Master Cheng's *Commentary* is Cheng Yi's *Commentary on the Changes*, which reads the book mainly as moral philosophy.

25 Huang Mianzhi is Huang Shengzeng, who recorded the next group of conversations. The saying is *Analects* 4.10; Wang reads 適 and 莫 as fixed acceptance and fixed refusal.

Way is originally without sound or smell, so it is called 'subtle.' Acting by the human mind, there are many unsteady places, so it is called 'precarious.'"[26]

251 Someone asked: "'With those below the middle, one cannot speak of higher things.' Even when you speak of higher things to the foolish, they make no progress; how much less if you don't speak to them at all—can that be right?" The Master said: "It is not that the sage never speaks to them. The sage's mind is anxious only that not everyone can become a sage. It is just that people's endowments differ, and teaching must not skip steps. With people below the middle, if you speak to them of 'nature' and 'destiny,' they won't understand; you must slowly polish them up."

252 A friend asked: "What if I can't remember what I read?" The Master said: "You need only understand it; why must you remember it? And wanting to understand is already falling to the second level; you need only make clear your own original substance. If you only want to remember, you won't understand; if you only want to understand, you won't make clear your own original substance."

253 Someone asked: "'It passes on like this'—is this speaking of how alive our own mind and nature are?" The Master said: "Yes. One must at all times apply the effort of extending innate knowing; only then is it alive, only then is it like the river water. If it breaks off for even a moment, it is no longer like Heaven and Earth. This is the utmost point of learning; even the sage is only this."[27]

254 Someone asked about the chapter on "the resolute scholar and the humane person." The Master said: "It is only because people in the world all value their own lives far too highly that, without asking whether they ought to die or not, they insist on twisting and bending to preserve them, and in doing so throw

26 The pair comes from the *Book of Documents*: "The human mind is precarious; the mind of the Way is subtle."

27 *Analects* 9.17: standing by a river, Confucius said, "It passes on like this, never ceasing day or night."

heavenly principle away. Once one can harden one's heart and harm principle, what will one not do? If one violates heavenly principle, one is no different from birds and beasts; even if one clung to life in the world for a hundred or a thousand years, it would be no more than a thousand or a hundred years as a bird or beast. Students must see this kind of point clearly. Bigan and Longfeng were able to fulfill themselves as human beings only because they saw it clearly."[28]

255 Someone asked: "Shusun Wushu disparaged Confucius. How could so great a sage still not escape slander?" The Master said: "Slander comes from outside; even a sage cannot escape it. What matters is cultivating oneself. If you are truly and solidly a sage or worthy, then even if everyone slanders you, their words cannot touch you—it is like floating clouds covering the sun; how could they harm the sun's brightness? If you are respectful in appearance and grave in countenance but neither firm nor steadfast, then even if not a single person speaks against you, your hidden wickedness will one day come to light. That is why Mencius said, 'There is censure that comes from seeking perfection, and praise that comes unexpectedly.' Censure and praise are external; how can they be avoided? What matters is only how one cultivates oneself."[29]

256 Liu Junliang wanted to sit quietly in the mountains. The Master said: "If you seek stillness with a mind that loathes outside things, you will instead cultivate an arrogant and indolent temper. If you do not loathe outside things and then nourish yourself in a quiet place, that would be good."

257 Wang Ruzhong and I were sitting in attendance. The Master held up his fan and said, "Use your fans." I rose and replied, "I wouldn't dare." The Master said: "The learning of the sage is not this kind of tied-up misery; it is not putting on the airs of a moralist." Ruzhong said: "One can glimpse this in the chapter where

28 *Analects* 15.9 says such people will give up life to complete humaneness. Bigan and Guan Longfeng were ministers put to death for remonstrating with the last rulers of the Shang and Xia.

29 Shusun Wushu was a minister of the state of Lu (*Analects* 19.24).

Confucius and Zeng Dian speak of their aims." The Master said: "Yes. Looking at that chapter, what a broad, generous, all-embracing bearing the sage had! Moreover, as teacher he asked his disciples about their aims, and the three answered in proper form. As for Zeng Dian, carefree, not even glancing at the other three, he went on strumming his zither—how unrestrained! And when he came to state his aim, he didn't answer the teacher's question either; it was all unrestrained talk. Had it been Yichuan, he might have scolded him. Yet the sage actually praised him—what a bearing! The sage, in teaching people, does not bind them all into one mold: the unrestrained he brings to fulfillment through their unrestraint, the scrupulous through their scrupulousness. How could people's talents and temperaments be the same?"[30]

258 The Master said to Lu Yuanjing: "Yuanjing, when you were young you too wanted to explicate the Five Classics, and your aim was set on breadth. But in teaching people, the sage feared only that they would not be simple and easy; what he taught were all rules of simplicity and ease. Seen with the modern taste for breadth, it would look as if the sage taught people wrongly."

259 The Master said: "Confucius never acted without knowing; when Yan Hui had something not good, he never failed to know it. This is the true lifeline of the learning of the sages."

260 He Tingren, Huang Zhengzhi, Li Houbi, Ruzhong, and Dehong were sitting in attendance. The Master looked at them and said: "The reason your learning makes no progress is simply that you have not set your resolve." Houbi rose and replied: "I, Gong, wish to set my resolve too." The Master said: "I can't say you haven't set it; it is just not yet the resolve to become a sage without fail." He replied: "I wish to set the resolve to become a sage without fail." The Master said: "If you truly have the resolve to become a sage, there will be nothing in your innate knowing left unfulfilled. If in your innate knowing you keep some other thought hanging on, that is not the resolve to become a sage

30 Wang Ruzhong is Wang Ji (1498–1583), one of Wang's leading disciples. The chapter is *Analects* 11.26; Yichuan is Cheng Yi, known for his strictness.

without fail." When I first heard this, I was not quite convinced; but as it went on to this point, I broke into a cold sweat without realizing it.[31]

261 The Master said: "Innate knowing is the vital spirit of creation. This vital spirit gives birth to Heaven and gives birth to Earth, brings forth ghosts and gods—all come from it. Truly it has no counterpart among things. If one can restore it whole and complete, without the least deficiency, one's hands will dance and feet stamp without one knowing it. What other joy in all of Heaven and Earth could take its place?"

262 A friend had an insight while sitting quietly and hurried to ask the Master. He replied: "When I lived in Chuzhou, I saw that many students were busy with intellectual understanding and secondhand debates about points of agreement and difference, which did nothing for their attainment, so for the time being I taught them quiet sitting. For a while they glimpsed certain visions and got quick results. In time, gradually, the problem appeared of loving stillness and loathing activity, slipping into dry withering; or they strove for mysterious interpretations and marvelous awakenings to impress listeners. So lately I speak only of 'extending innate knowing.' Once innate knowing is clear, it is fine if you go to a quiet place to realize it in experience, and fine if you go polish yourself in the midst of affairs; the original substance of innate knowing is beyond activity and stillness. This is the main point of learning. This teaching phrase of mine has been tested several times since Chuzhou, and only the three words 'extend innate knowing' have no flaw. Only someone who has broken an arm can diagnose the ailments of others."[32]

263 A friend asked: "In my practice I want this knowing to be continuous at all times, but in all my responses to things I find I can't keep watch over it. If I attend to affairs, I find I have lost it. What should I do?" The Master said: "This is only because you

31 Li Houbi's personal name was Gong, which he uses of himself here; the recorder is Qian Dehong.

32 Chuzhou, in present-day Anhui, where Wang held office in 1513–1514.

have not recognized innate knowing truly; there is still a gap between inner and outer. The practice I teach does not go by an anxious mind. Recognize innate knowing properly as the main point, apply effort plainly and solidly, and it will become thoroughly clear of itself. At that point inner and outer are both forgotten; how then could the mind and affairs not be one?"

264 He also said: "If your practice does not break through to these true workings, how can you make it full and radiant? Yet breaking through is not something you can reach by cleverness and intellectual understanding; the dregs in your breast must be wholly dissolved, with not a hair's breadth clinging, before you can."

265 The Master said: "'What Heaven decrees is called nature': the decree is nature. 'Following nature is called the Way': nature is the Way. 'Cultivating the Way is called teaching': the Way is teaching." Someone asked: "How is it that 'the Way is teaching'?" He said: "The Way is innate knowing. Innate knowing is originally whole and complete: what is right it gives back as right, what is wrong it gives back as wrong. Just follow it in right and wrong, and there will be nothing that is not right. This innate knowing is, after all, your wise teacher."

266 Someone asked: "Is 'unseen and unheard' speaking of original substance, and 'cautious and apprehensive' speaking of effort?" The Master said: "Here you must trust that the original substance is originally 'unseen and unheard,' and also originally 'cautious and apprehensive.' 'Cautious and apprehensive' has never added the slightest bit to 'unseen and unheard.' When you see it truly, you could even say, 'Cautious and apprehensive is original substance; unseen and unheard is effort.'"

267 Someone asked about "knowing by penetrating the Way of day and night." The Master said: "Innate knowing originally knows day and knows night." He asked again: "When a person is sound asleep, innate knowing doesn't know anything either." The Master replied: "If it doesn't know, why does one answer as soon as one is called?" The student said: "If innate knowing always knows, how can there be sound sleep?" The Master

replied: "'As evening comes, one goes in to rest'—this too is a constant principle of creation. At night Heaven and Earth are chaotic and undivided, forms and colors all vanish; people too see and hear nothing with their ears and eyes, and all their openings close. This is when innate knowing gathers in and becomes concentrated and one. When Heaven and Earth open, the myriad things appear and grow; people's ears and eyes too see and hear, and all their openings open. This is when the marvelous functioning of innate knowing comes forth. From this you can see that the human mind is one body with Heaven and Earth, and so 'above and below, it flows together with Heaven and Earth.' People today don't know how to rest; at night they either sleep in a stupor or have wild thoughts and nightmares." The student asked: "How is effort applied during sleep?" The Master said: "Knowing day is knowing night. In the daytime innate knowing responds smoothly without obstruction; at night innate knowing gathers in and becomes concentrated and one. Dreams, when they come, are omens."[33]

268 He also said: "Innate knowing as it emerges in the night qi is its original substance, because it is not mixed with desires for things. Those who learn should make it so that even when affairs crowd and churn about them, it is always like the night qi. That is 'knowing by penetrating the Way of day and night.'"

269 The Master said: "The seekers of immortality speak of emptiness. How could the sage add a hair of substance to that emptiness? The Buddhists speak of nothingness. How could the sage add a hair of being to that nothingness? But the immortality seekers' talk of emptiness comes from nurturing life, and the Buddhists' talk of nothingness comes from escaping the bitter sea of birth and death. They add these bits of intention to the original substance, so it is no longer the true character of emptiness and nothingness, and it becomes an obstruction to the original substance. The sage simply leaves innate knowing in its

33 The question quotes the "Appended Remarks" of the *Changes*; "as evening comes, one goes in to rest" is also from the *Changes*, and "flows together with Heaven and Earth" from *Mencius* 7A13.

true character and adds not the slightest intention to it. The emptiness of innate knowing is Heaven's great void. The nothingness of innate knowing is the formlessness of the great void. Sun, moon, wind, thunder, mountains, rivers, people, things—everything with appearance, image, shape and color—all function and move within the formless great void, and never become an obstruction to Heaven. The sage simply follows the functioning of innate knowing. Heaven, Earth and the myriad things all lie within the functioning and flow of my innate knowing. How could there ever be a single thing beyond innate knowing that could become an obstruction?"

270 Someone asked: "The Buddhists also work at nourishing the mind, yet in the end it cannot be used to govern the world. Why?" The Master said: "When we Confucians nourish the mind, we never leave things and affairs. We simply follow their heavenly norm as it naturally is, and that is the effort. The Buddhists want to cut off things and affairs entirely and regard the mind as an illusory appearance. They gradually withdraw into emptiness and stillness, as though they had nothing at all to do with the world. That is why it cannot govern the world."

271 Someone asked about "heterodoxy." The Master said: "What is the same as in simple men and women is called shared virtue. What differs from simple men and women is called heterodoxy."

272 The Master said: "Mencius's unmoved mind and Gaozi's unmoved mind differ only by a hair's breadth. Gaozi put his effort only on keeping the mind unmoved. Mencius went straight to understanding the place where this mind is originally unmoved. The original substance of the mind is originally unmoved. Only because what one does fails to accord with rightness does it move. Mencius did not discuss whether the mind moves or not; he simply 'accumulated rightness.' When everything one does is right, this mind naturally has nothing to be moved by. Gaozi, by contrast, wanted only to keep this mind from moving, and that is clamping down on it, which actually obstructs the root of its unceasing life. This is 'not only of no

benefit, but does it harm.' Mencius's effort of 'accumulating rightness' naturally nourishes the mind until it is full, with no starving or lack. It naturally ranges freely in every direction, lively and vigorous. This is the flood-like qi."

273 He also said: "The source of the fault Mencius addressed can be seen in the claim that nature is neither good nor not good. Saying that nature is neither good nor not good is not, in itself, far wrong. But Gaozi held this view rigidly, so that for him there was a nature, neither good nor not good, inside. And he located good and evil in being stirred by things, so that there were things outside. He looked at it as two sides, and so he went wrong. Neither good nor not good—that is what nature originally is. When one's insight reaches this, this one sentence says it all, and there is no gap between inside and outside. Gaozi saw a nature inside and saw things outside. This shows that his grasp of nature was not thoroughly penetrating."[34]

ONE BODY WITH ALL THINGS

Wang argues that grass, stones and the flowers on a cliff all share in human innate knowing.

274 Zhu Bensi asked: "Only because human beings have an empty and spiritually aware mind do they have innate knowing. Do grass, trees, tiles, stones and the like also have innate knowing?" The Master said: "Human innate knowing is the innate knowing of grass, trees, tiles and stones. If grass, trees, tiles and stones lacked human innate knowing, they could not be grass, trees, tiles and stones. And not only grass, trees, tiles and stones: without human innate knowing, Heaven and Earth could not be Heaven and Earth either. For Heaven, Earth, the myriad things and human beings are originally one body, and the place where this opens out most finely is the single point of clear spiritual awareness in the human mind. Wind, rain, dew and thunder; sun, moon, stars and constellations; birds, beasts, grass and

34 Most editions read 告子 "Gaozi" for 孟子 "Mencius" at the start of this entry, which makes the fault Gaozi's own.

trees; mountains, rivers, earth and stones—all are originally one body with human beings. That is why the five grains, birds and beasts and the like can all nourish people, and medicinal herbs and minerals can all heal illness. It is only because they share this one qi that they can pass into one another."[35]

275 The Master was touring Nanzhen. A friend pointed to a flowering tree on the cliff and asked: "There is nothing in the world outside the mind. But this flowering tree in the deep mountains blossoms and drops its flowers of itself—what does it have to do with my mind?" The Master said: "Before you looked at these flowers, they and your mind alike returned to stillness. When you came and looked at these flowers, their colors at once became clear. So you know these flowers are not outside your mind."[36]

276 Someone asked: "The great person forms one body with things. Why then does the *Great Learning* speak of greater and lesser weight?" The Master said: "It is just that principle itself has greater and lesser weight. Take the body: it is one whole, yet we use the hands and feet to shield the head and eyes. Is that deliberately slighting the hands and feet? Principle is simply such. Birds and beasts and grass and trees are alike loved, yet we can bear to feed grass and trees to birds and beasts. People and birds and beasts are alike loved, yet the mind can bear to slaughter birds and beasts to feed our parents, provide for sacrifices and entertain guests. One's closest kin and a stranger on the road are alike loved. But if there is only a basket of rice and a bowl of soup—with it one lives, without it one dies—and both cannot be saved, one would rather save one's closest kin than the stranger, and the mind can bear that too. This is how principle ought to be. When it comes to oneself and one's closest kin, there can be no distinguishing between this one and that, greater and lesser. For humaneness toward the people and love for things all come from here. If one could bear it here, there would be nothing one could not bear. The greater and lesser

35 Zhu Bensi is Zhu Dezhi, one of Wang's disciples.
36 Nanzhen is Mount Kuaiji, near Wang's home in Shaoxing.

weight the *Great Learning* speaks of is the natural order within innate knowing, which cannot be overstepped. This is called rightness. Following this order is called ritual. Knowing this order is called wisdom. Holding to this order from beginning to end is called trustworthiness."

277 He also said: "The eye has no substance of its own; it takes the colors of the myriad things as its substance. The ear has no substance of its own; it takes the sounds of the myriad things as its substance. The nose has no substance of its own; it takes the smells of the myriad things as its substance. The mouth has no substance of its own; it takes the tastes of the myriad things as its substance. The mind has no substance of its own; it takes the right and wrong in its responses to Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as its substance."

278 Someone asked about "not being of two minds over early death or long life." The Master said: "In the effort of learning, one may manage to shed nearly every attachment to fame and profit, likes and cravings. Yet if a hair's breadth of thought about life and death still clings, then somewhere the whole substance has not yet melted free. Thoughts of life and death come with the very root of life we are born with, so they are not easily removed. Only if one can see through this point and get past it does the whole substance of the mind flow without obstruction. Only then is it the learning of fully realizing one's nature and arriving at one's destiny."

279 A friend asked: "I want, during quiet sitting, to search out one by one the roots of the love of fame, the love of sensual pleasure, the love of wealth and so on, and sweep them away and clear them out. I am afraid this might be cutting into healthy flesh to make a wound?" The Master said sternly: "This is my prescription for curing people. It truly removes the root of their illness. Even people of far greater ability will still find it useful after ten years or more. If you don't want to use it, then put it away—but don't spoil my prescription!" The friend apologized in shame. After a while the Master said: "This was surely not your own idea. It must be someone in my school who under-

stands a little of what I mean who said this and misled you." Everyone present was startled.

280 A friend asked about effort that does not hit home. The Master said: "I have already said everything about the effort of learning in a single phrase. Why is it that today the more we talk the further away we get, never touching the root?" He replied: "I have indeed heard your teaching on extending innate knowing, but it still needs to be explained clearly." The Master said: "If you already know about extending innate knowing, what is there to explain? Innate knowing is clear in itself. Just apply the effort in earnest. If you are unwilling to apply effort and stay at the level of words, the more you talk the more muddled you get." He said: "That is exactly why I ask you to explain the effort of extending it." The Master said: "This too you must seek for yourself; I have no other method to tell you. There was once a Chan master who, whenever someone came to ask about the Dharma, simply raised his fly-whisk. One day his disciples hid the fly-whisk to see what he would do. The Chan master looked for the fly-whisk and could not find it, so he simply raised his empty hand. This innate knowing of mine is the fly-whisk I teach with. Apart from it, what is there to raise?" After a while another friend asked about the essentials of effort. The Master glanced around and said: "Where is my fly-whisk?" At once everyone present came alive with delight.[37]

281 Someone asked about "complete sincerity knows beforehand." The Master said: "Sincerity is real principle; it is just innate knowing. The wondrous functioning and flow of real principle is spirit. The place where it first stirs is incipience. 'Sincerity, spirit and incipience: such is the sage.' The sage does not value knowing beforehand. When misfortune or good fortune comes, even the sage cannot always escape it. The sage simply knows incipience, and meeting change, finds a way through. Innate knowing has no before and after. Just know the incipience present now, and once that is settled, everything is

37 The fly-whisk was carried by Chan teachers as an emblem of their office and often raised in wordless teaching.

settled. A mind that seeks to know beforehand is a selfish mind, with an intention to pursue gain and avoid harm. Master Shao insisted on knowing beforehand; in the end, that was where his mind of gain and harm had not been fully cleared."[38]

282 The Master said: "Without knowing, and yet nothing it does not know—this is how the original substance is. It is like the sun: it never intends to shine on things, yet of itself there is nothing it does not shine on. Without shining, and yet nothing it does not shine on—this is the original substance of the sun. Innate knowing is originally without knowing, yet now people want it to have knowing. It originally knows everything, yet now people suspect there is something it does not know. It is only that their trust in it falls short."

283 The Master said: "'Only the most perfect sage under Heaven can be keen of hearing, clear of sight, perceptive and wise'—how profound and mysterious that used to seem to me! Now I see that everyone has it of themselves. The ear is originally keen, the eye originally clear, the mind's thinking originally perceptive and wise. The sage is simply able to make it so, and that ability is precisely innate knowing. Ordinary people cannot, only because they do not extend their knowing. How clear and simple this is!"

284 Someone asked: "How do Confucius's 'far-reaching consideration' and the Duke of Zhou's carrying night on into day differ from sending off and welcoming?" The Master said: "Far-reaching consideration is not vague, boundless pondering. It is simply wanting to preserve this heavenly principle. Heavenly principle is in the human mind, through all of past and present, without end or beginning. Heavenly principle is innate knowing. A thousand thoughts and ten thousand considerations are only for extending innate knowing. The more innate knowing thinks, the more refined and clear it becomes. If one does not think carefully but responds carelessly to whatever comes, innate knowing grows coarse. If one simply fixes on affairs and

38 Master Shao is Shao Yong (1011–1077), a Song thinker known for his numerological system based on the *Changes*.

ponders them vaguely and boundlessly, calling that far-reaching consideration, then praise and blame, gain and loss, and human desires cannot help mixing in—and that is sending off and welcoming. The Duke of Zhou thinking all night long was just the effort of being 'cautious over what is not seen, fearful over what is not heard.' When one sees this, its whole bearing is naturally different from sending off and welcoming."

285 Someone asked: "'If for one day one overcomes the self and returns to ritual, all under Heaven will return to humaneness'—Master Zhu explains this as a result. What do you think?" The Master said: "The sages and worthies practiced only learning for oneself; they valued the effort, not the results. The humane person takes the myriad things as one body. Failing to be one body is just that one's selfishness has not yet been forgotten. When one fully attains the substance of humaneness, all under Heaven returns to my humaneness—this is the sense of 'the eight far regions are all within my gate.' That all under Heaven approve of it is also contained in this. Likewise 'no resentment in the state, no resentment in the family' simply means that one does not resent, in the sense of 'not resenting Heaven, not blaming others'; yet that family and state have no resentment toward me is also contained in it. Only, the emphasis is not there."

286 Someone asked: "On Mencius's teaching of 'skill and strength, sageliness and wisdom,' Master Zhu says: 'The three masters had strength to spare but lacked skill.' What do you think?" The Master said: "The three certainly had strength, and skill as well. Skill and strength are really not two things; skill lies precisely in how strength is applied. Strength without skill is mere strength. Take the three as archers: one was good at shooting on foot, one at shooting from horseback, one at shooting long distances. That their arrows all reach the target can be called strength; that they all hit the mark can be called skill. But the one on foot could not shoot from horseback, and the one on horseback could not shoot long distances. Each had a particular strong point, and this is where their talents and powers had different limits. Confucius was strong in all three. But Confucius's

harmony went no further than Liuxia Hui's, his purity no further than Bo Yi's, his sense of responsibility no further than Yi Yin's. How did he add the least bit to them? If one says 'the three had strength to spare but lacked skill,' then their strength would actually surpass Confucius's. 'Skill and strength' only serve to bring out the meaning of 'sageliness and wisdom.' If one recognizes what the original substance of sageliness and wisdom is, it all becomes clear of itself."[39]

287 The Master said: "'When one goes ahead of Heaven, Heaven does not go against one'—Heaven is innate knowing. 'When one follows after Heaven, one keeps to Heaven's seasons'—innate knowing is Heaven."

288 "Innate knowing is just the heart of right and wrong. Right and wrong are just liking and disliking. Liking and disliking alone exhaust right and wrong. Right and wrong alone exhaust all affairs and all their changes." He also said: "The two words 'right' and 'wrong' are a great compass and square. The skill in using them rests with the person."

289 "The knowing of the sage is like the sun in a clear blue sky. That of the worthy is like the sun in a sky of drifting clouds. That of the foolish is like the sun in a dark, overcast sky. Though they differ in dimness and brightness, their ability to tell black from white is the same. Even in the darkness of night one can faintly make out black and white; that is where the sun's lingering light has not wholly gone. The effort of learning through hardship simply sets out from this bit of brightness and examines it carefully."

290 Someone asked: "Knowing is likened to the sun and desires to clouds. Although clouds can cover the sun, they are also something the qi of Heaven properly has. Are desires likewise part of the human mind, something it properly has?" The Master said: "Joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, aversion and desire are called the seven feelings. All seven are proper to the human mind, but one must recognize innate knowing clearly. Take sun-

39 The three are Bo Yi, Yi Yin and Liuxia Hui, whom Mencius (5B1) calls the sages of purity, responsibility and harmony, and Confucius the sage of timeliness.

light: one cannot point to a particular place where it is. Wherever a crack lets light through, there is sunlight. Even when clouds and mist close in on every side, colors and shapes in the great void can still be made out; that too is where the sunlight has not been extinguished. One cannot, because clouds can cover the sun, tell the sky not to produce clouds. When the seven feelings flow as they naturally do, they are all the functioning of innate knowing and cannot be sorted into good and evil. But there must be no attachment. When the seven feelings become attached, they are all called desires, and all become obscurations of innate knowing. Yet the moment there is attachment, innate knowing itself becomes aware of it. Once it is aware, the obscuration goes and its substance is restored. Only if one can see through this point is the effort simple and thoroughgoing."

291 Someone asked: "The sage knows from birth and acts with ease; that is natural. What effort could there be?" The Master said: "The two words 'knowing' and 'acting' are themselves the effort; there are only differences of depth and difficulty. Innate knowing is originally refined and clear. Take wanting to serve one's parents with filial devotion. Those who know from birth and act with ease simply follow this innate knowing and fully carry out filial devotion in practice. Those who know through learning and act for its benefit simply stay alert at every moment and make sure to follow this innate knowing in carrying out filial devotion. As for those who know through hardship and act with strenuous effort, their obscuration is deep-rooted. Although they want to follow this innate knowing and be filial, they are blocked by selfish desires and so cannot. They must put in a hundred times the effort where others need one, a thousand where others need ten, before they can follow this innate knowing and fully carry out filial devotion. Although the sage knows from birth and acts with ease, the sage's mind does not dare to consider itself right, and is willing to make the effort of those who know through hardship and act with strenuous effort. Yet those who know through hardship and act with strenuous effort

want to do what those who know from birth and act with ease do. How could they succeed?"

[292] Someone asked: "Joy is the original substance of the mind. When one meets a great bereavement and is weeping in grief, is this joy still present?" The Master said: "One must weep thoroughly before there is joy; without weeping there is no joy. Though one weeps, the place where this mind is at peace is joy. The original substance has never moved."

[293] Someone asked: "Innate knowing is one and only one. Yet King Wen composed the *Judgments*, the Duke of Zhou attached the *Line Statements*, and Confucius wrote commentaries on the *Changes*. Why did each see principle differently?" The Master said: "How could the sages be bound to a rigid pattern? As long as, in the main, it comes from the same innate knowing, what harm is there in each giving their own account? Take a garden of bamboo: as long as they all share these branches and joints, that is the great sameness. If one insisted that every branch and every joint be the same height and size, it would not be the marvelous hand of creation. You need only cultivate innate knowing. As long as innate knowing is the same, there is no harm in differences. If you are unwilling to apply effort, you have not even sent up a shoot—where would you begin to discuss branches and joints?"

A FATHER AND SON AT LAW

Wang reconciles a quarreling father and son, then discusses music, plays and the pitch pipes.

[294] A father and son from the district had brought a lawsuit against each other, and they asked to plead their case before the Master. The attendants wanted to stop them, but the Master heard them out. Before he had finished speaking, father and son embraced, wept bitterly, and left. Chai Mingzhi came in and asked: "What did you say, Master, to move them to remorse so quickly?" The Master said: "I said that Shun was the most unfilial son in the world, and Gusou the most loving father in

the world." Mingzhi was startled and asked what he meant. The Master said: "Shun always thought himself greatly unfilial, and that is why he could be filial; Gusou always thought himself greatly loving, and that is why he could not be loving. Gusou only remembered that he had raised Shun from a babe in arms—so why did Shun not please him now? He did not realize that his own mind had been turned by his second wife, and still believed himself loving, and so he grew ever less able to love. Shun only thought of how his father had loved him when he carried him as a child; if his father did not love him today, it was simply because he himself could not fully carry out his filial devotion. Every day he reflected on where he fell short in filial devotion, and so he grew ever more filial. When at last Gusou was pleased, it was nothing more than his regaining the original substance of his mind, which had always been loving. That is why later ages call Shun the most filial son of past and present, and Gusou too was made into a loving father."[40]

[295] The Master said: "When a plain, simple man came to ask Confucius something, Confucius did not first have some knowledge ready to answer him; his mind was simply empty. He only knocked at both ends of the right and wrong that the man himself knew, and helped him settle it, and the man's mind became clear. The right and wrong that the man knew for himself was his own heavenly standard from the start; even with a sage's intelligence, how could one add or take away a hair's breadth? It was only that he could not trust himself; once Confucius helped him settle it, it was exhausted completely, with nothing left over. If, when speaking with the man, Confucius had held back even a little knowledge of his own, he could not have exhausted the man's innate knowing, and the substance of the Way would have been split in two."[41]

[296] The Master said: "'Steadily, steadily he kept good order, and they did not go as far as wickedness'—the standard commentary

40 Shun, the ancient sage-king, had a father, Gusou, who with Shun's stepmother and his half-brother Xiang repeatedly tried to kill him.

says that Xiang had already advanced toward rightness and did not go as far as great wickedness. Yet after Shun was summoned to office, Xiang still made killing Shun his daily business—what wickedness could be greater! Shun simply advanced himself in good order, and steeped Xiang in that good order; he did not set out to correct Xiang's wickedness. Glossing over faults and covering up wrongs is the usual way of wicked people; if you point out their rights and wrongs, you only provoke their wickedness. At first Shun brought it about that Xiang wanted to kill him; that too was because his heart was too impatient for Xiang to be good—this was Shun's fault. Having gone through it, he understood that the effort lies only in oneself, not in blaming others, and so he brought about 'harmony.' This is where Shun 'stirred his mind, toughened his nature, and added to what he was unable to do.' The words of the ancients all came from what they had lived through themselves, and so they speak intimately. Handed down to later ages, they fit human feelings exactly; if one had not been through it oneself, how could one come by so much hard-won care?"[42]

297 The Master said: "Ancient music has not been performed for a long time; today's plays still come close to the spirit of ancient music." Someone did not understand and asked about this. The Master said: "The nine movements of the *Shao* were a play about Shun; the nine changes of the *Wu* were a play about King Wu. All the real deeds of a sage's life were spread through the music, so those with virtue, on hearing it, knew where it was perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and where it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good. The music composed in later ages is only some lyrics and tunes, with no bearing at all on the people's customs and moral transformation—how could it transform the people and improve their customs? Now if we want the people's customs to return to simplicity and purity, we

41 This reworks *Analects* 9.8: "A simple man asked me something, and I was empty; I knocked at both ends and exhausted it."

42 The opening line is from the "Canon of Yao" in the *Book of Documents*; the "standard commentary" is Cai Chen's (Song dynasty), followed in the Ming examinations.

should take today's plays, remove all the seductive and lewd lyrics and tunes, and keep only stories of loyal ministers and filial children, so that ordinary common folk can all easily understand them, and their innate knowing is roused without their noticing—that would benefit moral transformation.[43] Then ancient music could gradually be restored." I said: "I have sought the original tone without finding it; I fear ancient music will be hard to restore as well." The Master said: "Where do you say the original tone is to be sought?" I replied: "The ancients made pitch pipes to observe the qi; perhaps that is the method of seeking the original tone." The Master said: "If you seek the original tone in reed ash and millet grains, it is like fishing for the moon at the bottom of the water—how can you get it? The original tone is to be sought only in your mind." I said: "How is it sought in the mind?" The Master said: "When the ancients governed, they first nourished people's minds into harmony and peace, and only then made music. For example, when we sing poems here, if your mind and qi are harmonious and peaceful, the listeners will naturally be delighted and uplifted—just this is the beginning of the original tone.[44] The *Documents* says, 'Poetry expresses the will'—the will is the root of music. 'Song prolongs the words'—song is the root of making music. 'The tones follow the prolonging, and the pitch pipes harmonize the tones'—the pipes need only harmonize the tones, and harmonizing the tones is the root of making the pipes. When was it ever sought outside?" I said: "Then what did the ancients intend with their method of observing the qi?" The Master said: "The ancients possessed the substance of equilibrium and harmony and so made music. My equilibrium and harmony originally correspond with the qi of Heaven and Earth; observing the qi of Heaven and Earth and matching the notes of the phoenix were nothing more than checking whether my qi was truly harmoni-

43 In *Analects* 3.25 Confucius calls the *Shao* perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and the *Wu* perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good.

44 Ancient lore held that pitch pipes filled with reed ash and buried in the ground expelled the ash as the qi of each month arrived, beginning at the winter solstice; millet grains were used to fix the pipes' measurements.

ous. That comes after the pipes are made; it is not that one must wait for it in order to make them. Now if you want to observe the ash in the pipes, you must first fix the day of the solstice; but even the midnight hour of the solstice may not be exact—where then would you find exactness?"

298 The Master said: "Learning too needs a guiding touch from others, but it is not as good as working it out for oneself: then once it is settled, everything falls into place. Otherwise, even a guiding touch cannot accomplish much."

299 "Confucius's breadth of spirit was immense; there was nothing in the work of emperors and kings that he did not attend to, one by one, yet it all came from that mind. It is like a great tree with so many branches and leaves: it is only because the effort of cultivation is applied at the root that it naturally becomes so; it is not that one works on the branches and leaves to produce the root. Students who learn from Confucius without applying effort in the mind, and eagerly try to learn that breadth of spirit, have it backwards."

300 "When people have faults, they mostly apply effort to the faults themselves; that is patching a cracked pot, and it is bound to end in glossing over the faults."

301 "People today, even at mealtimes with nothing in front of them to do, are always restless and unsettled in mind. It is only because the mind is so used to being busy that it cannot gather itself in."

302 "The qin and the se, books and scrolls—students should not be without them, for when one has an occupation to dwell in, the mind does not run off."

303 The Master sighed and said: "People in the world who know about learning have just this ailment they cannot break through, and so they are not 'good together with others.'" Chongyi said: "This ailment is just a matter of loving what is lofty and being unable to forget oneself."[45]

304 Someone asked: "Innate knowing is originally in equilibrium and harmony; how then can there be going too far and fall-

ing short?" The Master said: "Knowing where one goes too far or falls short—that itself is equilibrium and harmony."

305 "'What you dislike in those above you' is innate knowing; 'do not use in dealing with those below you' is extending knowledge."[46]

306 The Master said: "The wisdom of Su Qin and Zhang Yi was also the endowment of a sage. In later ages, many heroes and famous masters of statecraft and letters only learned the old tactics of Zhang Yi and Su Qin. Their art lay in reading people's feelings skillfully; not one thing failed to hit the crux of a person's concerns, and so their persuasions could never be exhausted. Zhang Yi and Su Qin too had glimpsed the wondrous workings of innate knowing; they simply used it for what was not good."[47]

307 Someone asked about "before arousal" and "after arousal." The Master said: "It is only because later Confucians spoke of before arousal and after arousal as separate that I have had to declare flatly that there is no before arousal and after arousal, so that people might think it through and get it for themselves. If I said there is a before arousal and an after arousal, listeners would fall right back into the later Confucians' view. If one truly sees that there is no before arousal and after arousal, then it does no harm to speak of there being a before arousal and after arousal; there is indeed a before arousal and after arousal." Someone asked: "Before arousal there is never a lack of harmony; after arousal there is never a lack of equilibrium. It is like the sound of a bell: before it is struck one cannot say there is none, and after it is struck one cannot say there is some; yet in the end there is struck and not struck. How about that?" The Master said: "Before it is struck, it already startles Heaven and shakes the earth; once it is struck, it is still only Heaven in silence and earth in stillness."

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45 From Mencius 2A8, said of Shun, who was "good together with others," giving up his own way to follow theirs.

46 Both phrases come from one sentence in the *Great Learning*: "What you dislike in those above you, do not use in dealing with those below you."

47 Su Qin and Zhang Yi were famous political persuaders of the Warring States period (4th century BC), who argued for rival alliances among the states.

[308] Someone asked: "The ancients' discussions of nature agree in some ways and differ in others; which is the settled view?" The Master said: "Nature has no fixed substance, and discussion of it has no fixed substance either. Some speak from its original substance, some from its expression in function, some from its source, some from where it flows downstream into faults. Taken all together, it is just this one nature; only what people see is shallow or deep. Holding rigidly to one side is wrong. The original substance of nature is beyond good and evil. In its expression in function, it can become good and it can become not good. Downstream in its faults, it is fixedly good or fixedly evil. Take the eye: there is the eye when one is happy and the eye when one is angry; looking straight, it is a seeing eye; looking narrowly, it is a peering eye. Taken all together, it is just this one eye. If, on seeing the angry eye, one says there was never a happy eye, or on seeing the seeing eye one says there was never a peering eye—that is all holding rigidly to one side, and you can tell it is wrong. Mencius's account of nature speaks directly from the source, and also gives only the general outline. Xunzi's doctrine that nature is evil speaks from the downstream faults; one cannot say he was entirely wrong, only that his view was not refined. Ordinary people, though, have lost the original substance of the mind." Someone asked: "Mencius spoke of nature from the source, wanting people to apply effort at the source and see through it clearly; Xunzi spoke of nature from the downstream faults, so the effort lies only in rescuing and correcting at the lower reaches, which takes great labor." The Master said: "Yes."[48]

[309] The Master said: "The more refined one's effort becomes, the less words can touch it, and the harder it is to speak of principle. If one fixes one's attention on the refined and subtle, the effort as a whole is instead obscured and bogged down."

48 Xunzi (3rd century BC) argued that human nature is bad and must be reshaped by ritual and learning, against Mencius's view that it is good.

310 "Yang Cihu was not without insight, but he too got stuck in seeing it as 'without sound or smell.'"[49]

311 "In a single day a person passes through the whole world of past and present, only people do not see it. When the night qi is clear and bright, with no seeing and no hearing, no thinking and no doing, calm and even-minded—that is the world of Fu Xi. At dawn, with the spirit clear and the qi bright, harmonious and serene—that is the world of Yao and Shun. Before midday, with ritual and courtesy exchanged and an orderly air—that is the world of the Three Dynasties. After midday, as spirit and qi gradually grow dim, with comings and goings and confusion—that is the world of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States. As it slowly grows dark toward night and all things go to rest, with a desolate scene—that is the world where people vanish and things come to an end. Students who trust innate knowing through and through, and are not thrown into disorder by qi, will always be people from before Fu Xi."

WHY CRITICISM GROWS

Wang explains why slander against him increases and warns disciples not to preach like sages.

312 Xue Shangqian, Zou Qianzhi, Ma Zixin, and Wang Ruzhi were sitting in attendance, and they lamented that since the Master's campaign against the Prince of Ning, slander and criticism of him throughout the realm had only increased; each was invited to give the reason. One said that as the Master's achievements, power, and position rose day by day, those in the realm who envied him grew more numerous day by day. One said that as the Master's teaching became clearer day by day, those who contended for the Song Confucians grew more numerous day by day. One said that since the Master's time in the southern capital, Nanjing, the like-minded who believed and followed him

49 Yang Jian (Cihu, 1141–1226) was a leading disciple of Lu Xiangshan; "without sound or smell" is from the *Book of Odes*, quoted at the close of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

had grown more numerous day by day, while those in every quarter who opposed and obstructed him had grown more forceful day by day. The Master said: "What you gentlemen say is all true, but there is one thing I know about myself that none of you has mentioned." The friends asked about it. The Master said: "Before Nanjing I still had a bit of the village worthy's attitude in me. Now I trust that this innate knowing truly knows right as right and wrong as wrong; I act just as it leads, without hiding or covering anything. Only now have I attained the bearing of the wild; let everyone in the realm say that my actions do not live up to my words—so be it." Shangqian went out and said: "To trust this through and through—that is the true lifeblood of the sage."[50]

313 In tempering people, the Master could move them most deeply with a single word. One day Wang Ruzhi came back from an outing. The Master asked: "What did you see on your outing?" He replied: "I saw that the whole street was full of sages." The Master said: "You see the people filling the street as sages; the people filling the street in turn see you as a sage." Another day Dong Luoshi came back from an outing. He went to see the Master and said: "Today I saw a strange thing." The Master said: "What was strange?" He replied: "I saw that the whole street was full of sages." The Master said: "That is just an ordinary thing; what is strange about it?" For Ruzhi's sharp edges were not yet worn smooth, while Luoshi had just glimpsed an awakening; so though the questions were the same, the answers differed, each turning their words around to move them forward.[51] I returned from the metropolitan examination of the bingxu year together with Huang Zhengzhi, Zhang Shuqian, and Ruzhong, and we told the Master that when we lectured on learning along the way, some believed and some did not. The Master said: "You

50 Mencius 7B37 contrasts the "village worthy," who pleases everyone and so steals virtue, with "the wild," whose aims are lofty though their deeds do not match their words.

51 Wang Ruzhi is Wang Gen (1483–1541), later founder of the Taizhou school; Dong Luoshi is Dong Yun (1457–1533), a poet who became Wang's disciple in his late sixties.

went about lecturing to people carrying a sage with you; when people see a sage coming, they all run off in fright—how could your lectures get anywhere? You must become ordinary men and women; only then can you lecture on learning with people." I also said that nowadays it is very easy to see the high and low quality of people's character. The Master said: "How do you see it?" I replied: "The Master is like Mount Tai before us; anyone who does not know to look up must be without eyes." The Master said: "Mount Tai is not as great as level ground. What is there to see on level ground?" With one word the Master cut through and laid open the ailment of long years spent outwardly loving loftiness, and none of those present was not struck with awe.[52]

314 In the spring of the guiwei year, Zou Qianzhi came to Yue to ask about learning. After he had stayed several days, the Master saw him off at Fufeng. That evening, with Xiyuan and other friends, he moved the boat to spend the night at Yanshou Temple. Sitting up at night by candlelight, the Master was full of melancholy. He said: "River waves, misty willows—and my old friend is suddenly a hundred li away!" One friend asked: "Why does the Master think of Qianzhi so deeply?" The Master said: "What Zengzi described—'able, yet asking of those not able; having much, yet asking of those with little; having, as though not having; full, as though empty; wronged, yet not contending'—someone like Qianzhi truly comes close to it."[53]

THE FOUR-SENTENCE TEACHING AT TIANQUAN BRIDGE

Before leaving on campaign, Wang reconciles Wang Ji and Qian Dehong over his four-sentence teaching.

315 In the ninth month of the dinghai year, the Master was recalled to service to lead a campaign in Si'en and Tianzhou. As he was about to set out on his commission, Dehong and

52 The bingxu year is 1526. Huang Zhengzhi is Huang Honggang; Zhang Shuqian is Zhang Yuanchong.

53 The guiwei year is 1523. Zengzi's words are from *Analects* 8.5, describing a friend traditionally taken to be Yan Hui.

Ruzhong were discussing learning. Ruzhong cited the Master's teaching: "In itself the mind is beyond good and evil; good and evil appear when intentions stir; knowing good and evil is innate knowing; doing good and removing evil is investigating things." Dehong said: "What do you make of this?" Ruzhong said: "I fear this is not the final word. If we say the mind in itself is beyond good and evil, then intention too is intention beyond good and evil, knowing too is knowing beyond good and evil, and things are things beyond good and evil. If we say intention has good and evil, then in the end the mind in itself still has good and evil."[54] Dehong said: "The mind in itself is 'the nature conferred by Heaven,' and originally beyond good and evil; but people have habituated minds, and in their intentions and thoughts good and evil appear. Investigating, extending, making sincere, rectifying, cultivating—these are precisely the effort to restore the substance of that nature. If there were originally no good and evil, there would be no need to speak of effort at all." That evening, sitting in attendance at Tianquan Bridge, each set forth his view and asked to be corrected. The Master said: "I am about to leave, and this is just when I want you to talk this through. The views of you two should complement each other and be used together; you must not each hold to one side. In receiving people here, I have always had these two kinds. People of sharp faculties awaken directly from the source: the original substance of the human mind is originally bright, clear, and unobstructed, originally the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. For people of sharp faculties, once they awaken to the original substance, that itself is the effort; self and others, inner and outer, are all penetrated at once.[55] Those of the next rank cannot avoid having habituated minds, and their original substance is obscured, so for now I teach them to do good and remove evil in their intentions and thoughts, really and con-

54 The dinghai year is 1527; Si'en and Tianzhou were prefectures in Guangxi, where Wang was sent to deal with an uprising.

55 Tianquan ("Heavenly Spring") Bridge was at Wang's home in Shaoxing; this exchange is known as the Tianquan Bridge Inquiry.

cretely. When the effort has ripened and the dregs are entirely removed, the original substance too will be entirely bright. Ruzhong's view is how I receive people of sharp faculties; Dehong's view is the method I set up for those of the next rank. If you two take from each other and use both, people of middling ability, above or below, can all be guided into the Way; if you each hold to one side, you will lose people right before your eyes, and each of you will fall short with respect to the substance of the Way." Then he said: "From now on, when you lecture on learning with friends, you must never lose my core teaching. In itself the mind is beyond good and evil; good and evil appear when intentions stir; knowing good and evil is innate knowing; doing good and removing evil is investigating things. Just follow these words of mine and point people to it according to who they are, and naturally there will be no ailment; this is from the start an effort that reaches from top to bottom. People of sharp faculties are hard to meet with in the world; to awaken to original substance and effort and penetrate it all at once—even Yan Hui and Mingdao did not dare to claim this; how could one lightly expect it of others? People have habituated minds; if you do not teach them to really apply the effort of doing good and removing evil in their innate knowing, but only have them imagine some original substance in a vacuum, nothing they do will be grounded, and all it will produce is an empty stillness. This ailment is no small thing, and it must be exposed early." That day, Dehong and Ruzhong both had an awakening.

316 When the Master first returned to Yue, friends were still few and scattered. Afterward, those who came from every quarter to study with him grew in number day by day. From the guiwei year on, the people living around the Master filled house after house. In temples such as Tianfei and Guangxiang, every room was taken, and often dozens ate together. At night there was nowhere to lie down, so they took turns sharing mats, and the sound of singing went on from dusk to dawn. In the temples of the hills near and far, at Nanzhen, Yu's Cave and Yangming

Grotto, wherever one set foot there were fellow aspirants staying. Whenever the Master took the lecture seat, those sitting all around him to listen were often no fewer than several hundred. Seeing people off and welcoming new arrivals, not a day in the month was empty. Some had attended him for more than a year and he still could not remember all their names. At each parting the Master would often sigh and say: "Though you are leaving, you do not go beyond Heaven and Earth. If we share this resolve, I too can forget about being together in body." Whenever the students came out of the gate after a lecture, they never failed to leap about and cry out with delight. I once heard senior fellow students say: "Before Nanjing, many friends followed him, but never in such abundance as in Yue. Partly this is because he had been teaching for a long time and trust in him had gradually spread. Still, it is also that the Master's learning advanced daily, and the ways in which he moved and drew people unfolded and changed without fixed form. That in itself made a difference."[56]

RECORDED BY HUANG YIFANG

Huang Zhi explains how investigating things means rectifying the self through mind, intention and knowing.

317 I asked: "'Learn broadly in culture' is taken to mean learning, in each affair, to preserve heavenly principle. But then the saying 'If they have strength to spare after acting, let them use it to study culture' does not seem to fit." The Master said: "The *Odes*, the *Documents* and the six arts are all manifestations of heavenly principle, and written texts are all included in them. Examining the *Odes*, the *Documents* and the six arts is entirely a way of learning to preserve this heavenly principle. It is not only what is manifested in conduct that counts as culture. 'Studying culture with strength to spare' is simply part of 'learning broadly in culture.'" Someone asked about the two lines on "learning without thinking." He said: "This too was said for a particular

56 Yue is the Shaoxing region, Wang's home. This entry is a record by Qian Dehong.

purpose. In fact thinking is learning. When learning raises doubts, one must think about them. As for 'thinking without learning,' there are indeed such people. They just think in a vacuum, trying to come up with some principle, but they do not actually apply effort in their own body and mind to learn to preserve heavenly principle. They treat thinking and learning as two things, and so they fall into the faults of being 'bewildered' and being 'in peril.'[57] In fact thinking is simply thinking about what one learns. The two were never two things." The Master said: "Earlier Confucians explained 'investigating things' as investigating all the things in the world. How could all the things in the world be investigated? They also say that even a single blade of grass or a single tree has its principle. How would one go about investigating them now? And even if one managed to investigate grass and trees, how would one turn back and make one's own intentions sincere by it? I take 格 in the sense of 'to rectify,' and 物 in the sense of 'affairs.' What the *Great Learning* calls 'the self' is the ears, eyes, mouth, nose and four limbs. Wanting to cultivate the self means: the eyes, look at nothing contrary to ritual; the ears, listen to nothing contrary to ritual; the mouth, say nothing contrary to ritual; the four limbs, make no movement contrary to ritual. But if you want to cultivate this self, how can effort be applied to the body itself? The mind is the master of the body. Though it is the eyes that look, what makes them look is the mind.[58] Though it is the ears that listen, what makes them listen is the mind. Though it is the mouth and the four limbs that speak and move, what makes them speak and move is the mind. So cultivating the self lies in realizing for oneself the substance of one's own mind, keeping it always broad and impartial, without the slightest thing in it that is not right. Once the master is rectified, then when it opens out through the eyes, there will naturally be no looking contrary to ritual; when it opens out through the ears, naturally no listening

57 The lines are *Analects* 2.15: "Learning without thinking, one is bewildered; thinking without learning, one is in peril."

58 身 means both "self" and "body," and Wang moves between the two senses here.

contrary to ritual; when it opens out through the mouth and the four limbs, naturally no speaking or moving contrary to ritual. This is what is meant by 'cultivating the self lies in rectifying the mind.' Yet the highest good is the original substance of the mind. How could the original substance of the mind have anything not good in it? Now, if one wants to rectify the mind, where on the original substance could effort be applied? One can exert oneself only where the mind stirs into activity. The mind's stirring cannot be free of what is not good, so one must exert oneself right here, and this is 'making the intentions sincere.' For example, when a thought arises in loving the good, then really and truly love the good. When a thought arises in hating evil, then really and truly hate evil. Once whatever the intention issues in is sincere, how could its original substance be anything but rectified? So 'rectifying the mind lies in making the intentions sincere.' Only when effort reaches making the intentions sincere does it have somewhere to land. Yet the root of making the intentions sincere lies in extending knowledge. What is called 'what others do not know but one alone knows' is precisely the innate knowing of my mind. Yet suppose one knows the good but does not follow this innate knowing and do it, or knows what is not good but does not follow this innate knowing and refrain from it. Then this innate knowing is obscured, and one cannot extend knowledge. If the innate knowing of my mind cannot be expanded to the full, then though one knows the good should be loved, one cannot truly love it; though one knows evil should be hated, one cannot truly hate it. How then can the intentions become sincere? So extending knowledge is the root of making the intentions sincere. But neither is it extending knowledge in a vacuum. Extending knowledge lies in investigating actual affairs. For instance, if the intention is to do good, then do it in that very affair. If the intention is to remove evil, then refrain from it in that very affair. Removing evil is of course rectifying what is not right so as to return it to rightness. Doing good means that what was not good has been rectified, and this too is rectifying what is not right so as to return it to rightness. In this

way the innate knowing of my mind is no longer obscured by selfish desires and can be extended to the utmost, and whatever the intention issues in, loving good and removing evil, will be wholly sincere. The real place to set one's hand to the effort of making the intentions sincere is investigating things. If things are investigated in this way, anyone can do it. 'All people can become Yao and Shun'—this is exactly where it lies."

THE BAMBOO IN THE COURTYARD

Wang recalls staring at bamboo for seven days to find its principle, and falling ill.

318 The Master said: "Everyone says that for 'investigating things' one should follow Master Zhu, but when have they ever actually put his teaching to use? I truly did. In my early years my friend Qian and I discussed becoming sages and worthies. We said one must investigate all the things in the world, but where would one now find such great strength? So I pointed to the bamboo in front of the pavilion and had him investigate it. Qian went at it from morning to night, fully exploring the principle of the bamboo and exhausting his mind and thoughts. By the third day he had worn out his spirit and fallen ill. At the time I said his energy was not enough, so I went myself to fully explore it, from morning to night, without grasping its principle. By the seventh day I too fell ill from the strain of thinking. So we sighed together that sagehood and worthiness were beyond us, since we lacked their great strength to investigate things. Then, during my three years living among the peoples of the far southwest, I came to see something of what this meant, and realized that the things of the world have, in truth, nothing to be investigated. The effort of investigating things is carried out only in one's own body and mind. Once one firmly holds that everyone can reach sagehood, one naturally takes up the task oneself. This is what I want you all to know."[59]

59 The friend Qian has not been securely identified; he is not the disciple Qian Dehong.

319 One of the students mentioned Shao Duanfeng's view that children cannot investigate things and should be taught only sprinkling and sweeping, answering and responding. The Master said: "Sprinkling and sweeping, answering and responding are themselves a thing. A child's innate knowing reaches only this far, so teaching the child to sprinkle and sweep, answer and respond, is extending that bit of innate knowing. Again, children know to stand in awe of teachers and elders; this too is their innate knowing. So even in the middle of play, when they see a teacher or an elder, they bow and show respect. This is their being able to investigate things so as to extend the innate knowing that reveres teachers and elders. Children have children's own investigating things and extending knowledge." He also said: "The investigating things I speak of here is the same effort from the child all the way to the sage. It is only that the sage's investigating things is a little more practiced and costs no effort. Investigating things in this way, even someone who sells firewood can do it, and ministers and high officials, all the way up to the Son of Heaven, all do it in just this way."[60]

320 Someone doubted that knowing and acting are one, and raised the two lines beginning "It is not knowing that is hard." The Master said: "Innate knowing knows of itself; it was always easy. It is only failing to extend that innate knowing that makes it 'not knowing that is hard, but acting that is hard.'"[61]

321 A student asked: "How can knowing and acting be one? For instance, the *Doctrine of the Mean* speaks of 'learn broadly' and also of 'act earnestly.' Clearly knowing and acting are two things." The Master said: "Learning broadly is just learning, in every affair, to preserve this heavenly principle. Acting earnestly just means learning without ceasing." He also asked: "The *Changes* says 'learn so as to gather it,' and also 'with humaneness put it into practice.' What about this?" The Master said: "It is the

60 Shao Duanfeng is Shao Rui, a contemporary scholar-official of the Zhu Xi school. Sprinkling and sweeping, answering and responding were the classic first tasks of children's education.

61 The lines are from the *Book of Documents*: "It is not knowing that is hard; it is acting that is hard."

same. If one goes about learning, in every affair, to preserve this heavenly principle, this mind is never let go and lost; hence 'learn so as to gather it.' And if one constantly learns to preserve this heavenly principle, with no interruption by selfish desires, this is the mind's unceasingness; hence 'with humaneness put it into practice.'" He also asked: "Confucius said, 'Knowing reaches it, but humaneness cannot keep it.' So knowing and acting are two after all." The Master said: "To speak of 'reaches it' is already acting. It is only that one cannot act constantly and is interrupted by selfish desires; that is 'humaneness cannot keep it.'" He also asked: "About the teaching that the mind is principle: Master Cheng says, 'In things it is principle.' How can you say the mind is principle?" The Master said: "In 'in things it is principle,' the word 'mind' should be added before 'in': this mind, in things, is principle. For example, this mind in serving one's father is filial devotion, in serving one's ruler is loyalty, and so on." The Master then said to them: "You must grasp the basic aim behind what I say. Why do I now speak of 'the mind is principle'? Only because people of the world divide mind and principle into two, and so there are many faults. For instance, when the Five Hegemons drove back the Yi and Di and honored the Zhou royal house, it was all from a selfish mind, so it did not accord with principle.[62] Yet people say they acted in accord with principle, only their minds were not quite pure. So people often admire what they did and want to make things look good on the outside, which has nothing whatever to do with the mind. Dividing mind and principle into two, the trend runs on into the falseness of the hegemons' way without people realizing it. So I speak of 'the mind is principle' to make people know that mind and principle are one, so that they work on the mind and do not snatch at rightness in deeds of rightness. That is the genuineness of the kingly way. This is the basic aim behind what I say." He also asked: "The sages and worthies said so many things. Why insist on making them into one?" He said: "It is not that I want to make them into one. It is said: 'The Way is one, and that is all.' And:

62 Master Cheng here is Cheng Yi.

'Being without doubleness, it produces things beyond measure.' Heaven and Earth and the sage are all one. How could they be two?"

322 "The mind is not a lump of flesh and blood. Wherever there is awareness, that is the mind. For example, the ears and eyes knowing how to see and hear, the hands and feet knowing pain and itching—this awareness is the mind."

323 I asked: "In your account of 'investigating things,' teachings such as 'being watchful when alone' in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, 'accumulating rightness,' and 'broad learning and restraint' are all matters of 'investigating things.'" The Master said: "No. Investigating things is being watchful when alone; it is being cautious and apprehensive. As for 'accumulating rightness' and 'broad learning and restraint,' the effort is just the same. It is not that those several things are all made into matters of 'investigating things.'"

324 I asked about the passage on "honoring the virtuous nature." The Master said: "'Following inquiry and learning' is the very means of 'honoring the virtuous nature.' Master Zhu remarked that Zijing taught people by 'honoring the virtuous nature,' and asked whether there was not rather more of 'following inquiry and learning' in his own teaching. That divides 'honoring the virtuous nature' and 'following inquiry and learning' into two things. Now, all the effort we put into lecturing, practicing and discussing is nothing other than preserving this mind and not losing its virtuous nature. How could there be an 'honoring the virtuous nature' that just honors emptily, without inquiry and learning? Or an inquiry and learning that just inquires and learns emptily, with no bearing on the virtuous nature? If that were so, I do not know what our present lecturing, practicing and discussing would be learning." I asked about the two lines on "attaining breadth and greatness." He said: "'Exhausting the refined and subtle' is the very means of 'attaining breadth and greatness'; 'following the Mean' is the very means of 'reaching the height of brilliance.' For the original substance of the mind is in itself broad and great. If one cannot

exhaust the refined and subtle, it is obscured by selfish desires and becomes unbearably small. So if one can be thorough in every fine detail and every twist and turn, selfish intentions cannot obscure it, and naturally there are none of those many obstructions and barriers. How then could breadth and greatness not be attained?" I asked further: "Is the refined and subtle that of thoughts and deliberations, or that of the principles of affairs?" He said: "The refinement and subtlety of thoughts is the refinement and subtlety of the principles of affairs."[63]

325 The Master said: "Those who discuss human nature today, with all their disagreements and agreements, are all talking about nature, not seeing nature. For one who sees nature, there are no disagreements or agreements to speak of."

326 Someone asked: "Music and beauty, goods and gain—I fear even innate knowing cannot be without them." The Master said: "Certainly. But beginners applying effort must sweep them out and wash them away, not letting them collect. Then when they happen to come along, they are no longer a burden, and one naturally responds to them in accord. Innate knowing applies its effort right in music and beauty, goods and gain. If one can extend innate knowing so that it is refined and bright, without a hair's breadth obscured, then all one's dealings with music and beauty, goods and gain will be nothing but the flowing of Heaven's norms."

327 The Master said: "When I discuss 'extending knowledge' and 'investigating things' with you, it is this every day, and if I discuss it for ten or twenty years it will all be just this. If you listen to what I say and actually apply effort, then each time you see me lecture you will find you have progressed another step. Otherwise it is just a round of talk. Even if you listen, what use is it?"

328 The Master said: "The original substance of a person is always 'still and unmoving,' and always 'stirred, it penetrates.' Before responding is not earlier; after responding is not later."

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63 Zijing is Lu Xiangshan (Lu Jiuyuan). The quoted lines are from *Doctrine of the Mean* 27.

329 A friend raised this: "A Buddhist held up a finger and asked, 'Do you all see it?' They said, 'We see it.' Then he put the finger into his sleeve and asked, 'Do you still see it?' They said, 'We do not.' The Buddhist said, 'You have not yet seen your nature.' I do not understand what this means." The Master said: "The finger is sometimes seen and sometimes not, but your seeing nature is always there. People's minds and spirits just gallop after what is seen and heard, and do not apply real effort to what is not seen and not heard. For what is not seen and not heard is the original substance of innate knowing, and being cautious and apprehensive is the effort of extending innate knowing. Only when students, at every moment, constantly see what is not seen and constantly hear what is not heard does their effort have somewhere real to rest. After it has long ripened, no exertion is needed and no guarding or checking, and the true nature will of itself be unceasing. How could what is heard and seen outside be a burden?"[64]

330 Someone asked: "An earlier Confucian said that 'the hawk flies' and 'the fish leap' are vibrantly alive in the same way as 'always be doing something.'" The Master said: "That is right too. What is vibrantly alive throughout Heaven and Earth is nothing but this principle, and this is the ceaseless flowing of my innate knowing. 'Extending innate knowing' is the effort of 'always be doing something.' Not only must this principle not be departed from; in truth it cannot be departed from. There is nowhere that is not the Way, nowhere that is not effort."[65]

331 The Master said: "You who are here must set your resolve that you will surely become sages. At every moment it must be 'every blow of the stick a welt, every slap a palmful of blood'; only then can you listen to what I say and gain strength from every sentence. If you pass your days in a vague drift, like a lump of dead flesh that feels no pain or itch even when struck, I

64 "Not seen and not heard" echoes the opening chapter of the *Doctrine of the Mean*: the exemplary person is cautious about what is not seen and apprehensive about what is not heard.

65 The remark is Cheng Hao's, on *Doctrine of the Mean* 12, which quotes the *Odes*: "The hawk flies up to heaven; the fish leap in the deep."

fear it will come to nothing in the end, and when you go home you will find only your old tricks. Wouldn't that be a pity?"

332 Someone asked: "Lately I find my stray thoughts are fewer, and I also find I have not been deliberately thinking about exactly how I must apply effort. I wonder whether this is effort." The Master said: "Just go and apply effort for real. Even if you have these extra deliberations, it does no harm; in time it will settle by itself. If you have put in only a little effort and already talk about results, what is there to rely on?"

333 A friend sighed: "When selfish intentions sprout, my own mind clearly knows it. I just cannot make them go away at once." The Master said: "That knowing at the moment of sprouting is your life root. To wear them away right then and there is the effort of establishing your destiny."

334 "When Confucius said, 'By nature people are close to one another,' it is the same as Mencius saying 'human nature is good.' It must not be taken solely in terms of physical endowment. If one speaks of physical endowment—firm against yielding, for example—how could they be close? Only in the goodness of nature are they the same. At birth people are good, and in this they are originally the same. But the firm, habituated to good, become firm and good, and habituated to evil, firm and evil; the yielding, habituated to good, become yielding and good, and habituated to evil, yielding and evil. And so they grow farther apart day by day."[66]

335 The Master once said to his students: "Not a single thought can be allowed to linger in the substance of the mind, just as not the least speck of dust or sand can be allowed in the eye. How much is a speck? Yet the whole eye goes dark, as if heaven were black and the earth dim." He also said: "This 'thought' means not only selfish thoughts. Even good thoughts cannot be allowed the least bit. It is like putting a few flakes of gold or jade in the eye: the eye cannot open either."

66 The saying is *Analects* 17.2: "By nature people are close to one another; by practice they grow far apart."

THE MIND OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Wang argues that the clear intelligence of the human mind is the mind of Heaven and Earth.

336 Someone asked: "The human mind forms one body with things. My own body has blood and qi flowing through it, so we call it one body. But with other people the body is already different, and birds, beasts, grass and trees are further removed still. Why call it one body?" The Master said: "Just look at it at the subtle point of stimulus and response. Not only birds, beasts, grass and trees—even Heaven and Earth form one body with me, and ghosts and spirits form one body with me." The questioner asked him to explain. The Master said: "Look at all that lies between Heaven and Earth: what is the mind of Heaven and Earth?" He replied: "I have heard that human beings are the mind of Heaven and Earth." "And what in a human being is called the mind?" He replied: "Just a clear intelligence." "So you can see that filling Heaven and stopping up Earth there is only this clear intelligence. People are cut off from it only by their own physical forms. My clear intelligence is the master of Heaven and Earth, ghosts and spirits. If Heaven lacked my clear intelligence, who would look up at its height? If Earth lacked my clear intelligence, who would look down into its depth? If ghosts and spirits lacked my clear intelligence, who would discern their good and bad fortune, their calamities and blessings? Apart from my clear intelligence, there would be no Heaven and Earth, ghosts and spirits, or myriad things; and apart from Heaven and Earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things, there would be no clear intelligence of mine either. So it is all one qi flowing through—how could it be cut off from them?" He asked again: "Heaven and Earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things have been here from the remotest past. Why would they all be gone without my clear intelligence?" He said: "Look now at those who have died: their spirit has scattered and

dispersed. Where are their Heaven and Earth and myriad things now?"

337 When the Master set out on the campaign to Si'en and Tianzhou, Dehong and Ruzhong followed to see him off as far as Yan Rapids. Ruzhong raised the Buddhist teaching of "real form" and "illusory form." The Master said: "Where there is mind, all is real; where there is no mind, all is illusion. Where there is no mind, all is real; where there is mind, all is illusion." Ruzhong said: "'Where there is mind, all is real; where there is no mind, all is illusion' speaks of effort from the standpoint of original substance. 'Where there is no mind, all is real; where there is mind, all is illusion' speaks of original substance from the standpoint of effort." The Master agreed with him. At the time I had not yet understood. Only after years of applying effort did I come to believe that original substance and effort are one. But the Master was then only speaking in passing, in response to a question. Where we Confucians guide people, there is no need to borrow this to frame our teaching.[67]

338 I once saw the Master see two or three venerable elders out the gate. When he came back and sat down in the middle hall, he looked troubled. I hurried forward to ask why. The Master said: "Just now I was discussing this learning with those old gentlemen—truly a square tenon in a round mortise. This Way is as level as a road, yet the scholars of our age often choke it with weeds themselves and spend their whole lives stuck in a field of thorns without regret. I don't know what to make of it!" I withdrew and said to my friends: "The Master teaches people without passing over even the aged and worn. This is the heart of a humane person who pities all beings."

339 The Master said: "The great malady of human life is just the one word 'arrogance.' A son who is arrogant will surely lack filial devotion; a minister who is arrogant will surely lack loyalty; a father who is arrogant will surely lack kindness; a friend who is arrogant will surely lack good faith. So Xiang and Danzhu were

67 Si'en and Tianzhou, in Guangxi, where Wang was sent in 1527 to put down a rebellion; he died on the return journey in early 1529.

both unworthy, and it was just the one word 'arrogance' that finished off their lives. All of you should always take this to heart. In origin the human mind is principle as it naturally is, refined and bright, without the least speck of taint—it is simply having no self, nothing more. There must never be a self in your breast; to have one is arrogance. The many excellences of the ancient sages were also simply having no self. Having no self, one is naturally humble. Humility is the foundation of all goods; arrogance is the chief of all evils."[68]

340 He also said: "This Way is utterly simple and easy, and also utterly refined and subtle. Confucius said: 'It would be like showing it in the palm of the hand.' What day do people not see their palms? Yet ask them how many lines are in the palm, and they don't know. So with my two words 'innate knowing': explain them once and they are clear—who doesn't know them? But if one wants truly to see innate knowing, who can see it?" Someone asked: "I suspect this knowing has no location or form and is very hard to grasp." The Master said: "Innate knowing is just the *Changes*: 'As a Way it often shifts, changing and moving without rest, flowing through the six empty places, rising and falling without constancy, firm and yielding changing places; it cannot be made a fixed rule; it goes only where change leads.' How could this knowing be grasped? When one sees through it, one is a sage."[69]

341 Someone asked: "Confucius said: 'Hui is no help to me.' Did the sage really look to his disciples for help?" The Master said: "It is also the plain truth. This Way is inexhaustible; the more questions and challenges, the more its refinements and subtleties appear. The sage's words are complete in themselves, but when a questioner is blocked inside, the sage, challenged, brings the point out all the more vividly. Yan Hui heard one thing and knew ten; everything was clear inside him—how

68 Xiang was the half-brother of the sage-king Shun, and Danzhu the son of the sage-king Yao; both are traditional examples of unworthy kin.
69 The first quotation is *Analects* 3.11; the second is from the "Appended Remarks" of the *Book of Changes*.

would he raise questions? So the sage too remained still and unmoved, with nothing to bring out. Hence he said 'no help.'"[70]

342 Zou Qianzhi once said to me: "Shu Guoshang once brought a sheet of paper and asked the Master to write out the chapter on 'a tung or catalpa tree a span or two around.' The Master held his brush aloft and wrote. When he reached 'as for their own person, they do not know how to nourish it,' he looked round and laughed: 'Guoshang has read his books and come first in the palace examination—does he really not know how his own person should be nourished? Does he still need to recite this as a warning?' All the friends attending him at the time were struck with alarm."[71]

QIAN DEHONG'S POSTSCRIPT

Qian Dehong tells how the later conversations were collected, pruned and printed in 1556.

3.Post. In the winter of the wuzi year of the Jiajing reign (1528), Ruzhong and I hastened to Guangxin for our teacher's funeral. We sent word of his death to our fellow students and agreed to collect his surviving words within three years. Afterward the fellow students each sent me what they had recorded. I selected the entries most relevant to the questions put to him for correction, combined them with what I had recorded privately, and obtained a number of entries. While I was living in Wu, I was about to print them together with the *Literary Records*, but I had to leave to mourn a parent, and it was not done. At that time the gatherings for discussing learning in every quarter grew by the day, and our teacher's central doctrine was already clear, so there seemed no need for a superfluous printing, and I gave it no more thought. Last year a fellow student, Zeng Caihan, obtained my handwritten copy, added further gleanings of his own, titled it *Surviving Words,* and had it printed and circulated in Jing.

70 *Analects* 11.4.
71 Shu Fen (Guoshang) placed first in the palace examination of 1517; the chapter is *Mencius* 6A13.

Reading it, I felt the original selection had not been careful, so I cut the repetitions and pruned the overgrowth, keeping a third. I titled it *Continued Record of Instructions for Practical Living* and had it printed again at the Shuixi Retreat in Ningguo. This summer I traveled to Qi, and Mr. Shen Siwei said: "Our teacher's teaching has long spread in every quarter, but it alone has not yet reached Qi. When the scholars of Qi read the *Surviving Words*, it was as if they received the Master's instruction in person; being shown innate knowing was like seeing again the light of sun and moon. They only fear that the teaching and its practice are not spread widely enough, and do not find repetition excessive. May I ask you to gather what was left out and print it as an addition? How would that be?" I said: "Yes. Our teacher's doctrine of extending knowledge and investigating things opened the way for later learners. Those who learn cultivate it in their own persons and awaken to it in silence, not daring to receive it through intellectual understanding, but gaining it only through real embodiment. That is why our teacher spoke of this all day without wearying of the trouble, and those who learned listened to it all day without tiring of the repetition.[72] For when the guidance is single-minded, understanding through experience grows more refined by the day: the subtle point is met before the words, and the spirit is roused beyond the words—such is the sincerity of response in a true encounter. Now, less than thirty-six years after our teacher's death, his precise words and subtle meanings are already sinking into obscurity. Is this not because we of his school have not practiced them vigorously ourselves, and much talk has harmed them? The paths students take are not one, and our teacher's teaching is not made plain." So I took the left-out drafts again, selected the sayings that do not run counter to his teaching, and obtained one juan. The rest —vague echoes and not genuine, or already contained in the *Literary Records*—I cut. I also recast the middle juan in the form of questions and answers, and gave it to Mr. Zhang, magistrate of Huangmei, to print as an addition. It is to be hoped that readers

72 Qi is Qizhou, in present-day Hubei.

will not receive it through intellectual understanding but gain it only through real embodiment; then they will have no doubts about this record. Written respectfully by his disciple Qian Dehong at the Chongzheng Academy in Qi, in the fourth month, summer, of the bingchen year of the Jiajing reign (1556).[73]

73 A juan is one of the parts (originally scrolls) of a Chinese book; the middle juan is part 2, Wang's letters.