

LU Xiangshan's Ethical Philosophy

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LU Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193), courtesy name Zijing 子靜, literary name Xiangshan 象山, was born in the town of Jinxi 金谿 in Jiangxi province.¹ He was the youngest of six brothers, two of whom, fourth brother Jiushao 九紹 (fl. twelfth century), courtesy name Zimei 子美, literary name Suoshan 梭山, and fifth brother Jiuling 九齡 (1132–1180), courtesy name Zishou 子壽, literary name Fuzhai 復齋, were impressive philosophers in their own right. As we shall discuss below, Jiuling was present at and participated in the extended discussion and exchange Jiuyuan had with ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) at Goose Lake Temple (*E hu si* 鵝湖寺) in 1175; Jiushao initiated an important and extended scholarly debate with Zhu over the interpretation of a number of metaphysical issues central to *daoxue* philosophy at the time.²

LU Jiuyuan passed the highest civil service exam and obtained the presented scholar (*jinshi* 進士) degree in 1172.³ He held a number of posts, the highest of which was magistrate of what is now *Jingmen xian* 荊門縣 in Hubei province. He distinguished himself as magistrate by strengthening local military defenses, cutting

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¹ For more detailed accounts of Lu's life and philosophy, Cady (1939), Huang (1944), and Chang (1958).

² For a study that describes the meeting at Goose Lake Temple, the later debate between Jiushao and ZHU Xi, and the relationship between LU Jiuyuan and Zhu, see the relevant sections of Ching (2000).

³ His examination essay was highly praised by LU Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1185) a friend of the great ZHU Xi and with him co-compiler of the *Jin si lu* 近思錄 "Record for Reflection." For an English translation of this work, see Chan (1963). Zuqian was responsible for suggesting and facilitating the meeting between Jiuyuan and ZHU Xi at Goose Lake Temple.

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through and eliminating bureaucratic red tape, settling legal cases, and implementing more just and benevolent policies.⁴ In all these endeavors, his administrative style was to encourage cooperation, treat others with humanity, and lead by example. Jiuyuan also served for four years as a member of the Imperial Academy (*guoxue* 國學), where he and his ideas attracted a wide and enthusiastic following.

Beginning in 1187, he withdrew from public office and spent approximately five years in his hometown in Jiangxi, devoting the majority of his time and energy to teaching. His students, by then numerous and devoted, built him a lecture hall on nearby Elephant Mountain (*Xiangshan* 象山). As his fame grew, Jiuyuan came to be associated with this place, eventually adopting the name The Elder of Elephant Mountain (*Xiangshan weng* 象山翁).⁵ He died while serving as magistrate of Jingmen *xian*, succumbing to a life-long ailment, probably tuberculosis. According to his *Chronological Biography*, Lu faced his death with great calm and dignity. As he felt his time draw near, he announced to his family, "I am about to die." This led one among them to reply, "Why speak such inauspicious words? How are we to deal with this?" Seeking to comfort them and relieve their anxiety, Lu replied, "It (i.e. my death) is only natural."⁶ His illness waxed and waned over the next few days. When his condition had improved, he met with a number of colleagues and talked with them about the principles of government. He then made sure that proper arrangements were in place for his funeral. After one more day, he passed away in silence.⁷

One of the deepest and most vivid impressions one gains from studying the life and works of LU Jiuyuan concerns his style and effectiveness as a teacher. Both he and his writings attracted a broad and devoted following; we are told that in the course of his residence at Elephant Mountain, several thousand admirers came to study with him. His remarkable success as a teacher reflects the strength of his personal charisma, but it also stems from his idea that self-cultivation must focus on the intuitions and inclinations of each individual as these arise, develop, and take shape in the context of his or her actual life. Such an approach focused Jiuyuan's attention on developing teachings and a pedagogical style that offered students more of a therapy than a theory, and we can imagine that this played a significant role in the attractiveness and success of his message. The form of his written legacy expresses this central feature of his philosophy; unlike ZHU Xi, he

⁴ Like WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), Jiuyuan was keenly interested and skilled in military matters. He was committed to the goal of regaining territory lost to earlier invasions by the Jin Tartars. His biography informs us that when the sixteen year old Jiuyuan read an account of the sacking of Kaifeng and the carrying off the imperial household, which occurred in 1126, he "cut off his fingernails and began to practice archery and horsemanship." See the entry for 1155 in Lu's *Chronological Biography* (*Nianpu* 年譜).

⁵ As a result, he often is referred to by his literary name: LU Xiangshan.

⁶ See the entry for winter of 1193 in Lu's *Nianpu*.

⁷ This account of Lu's passing is a good example of an important genre that emerged in Neo-Confucian biography describing the last moments of life. For a revealing study of this interesting phenomenon, see Peng (2010).

did not write substantial, thematic essays or careful and comprehensive commentaries on the classics. His writings were all in one way or another occasional or thematically-focused and most of what we know about his philosophy comes from recorded conversations between him and his disciples. This marked a break from what had become the norm among Neo-Confucians, but from a historical perspective it can and should be seen as a return to the origin of the Confucian tradition. Most of what we know of Kongzi's (Confucius) thought comes down to us in the sayings of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語).⁸ This text consists of short comments, reports, and at times quite poignant dialogues between the master and various disciples as well as other interlocutors; it contains no sustained, systematic essays of any kind. The one apparent exception to this claim about Kongzi's legacy is the "Ten Wings" ("Shiyi" 十翼): a set of commentaries on the *Book of Change* traditionally ascribed to Kongzi.⁹ However, a consideration of these commentaries shows that the generalization holds firm. For the "Ten Wings" contain no sustained or systematic expositions of any kind. They consist of terse, cryptic, and highly suggestive passages that offer sketches and suggestions, often cast in vivid and complex imagery and metaphor. This text too, which deeply influenced Jiuyuan as well as every other Neo-Confucian, offered a distinctive paradigm for philosophical writing.

Like most influential thinkers of his day, Lu's biography contains stories about his youth that reveal his remarkable abilities and presage his later accomplishments. For example, his biography tells us that when eight years old, "He heard someone reciting the sayings of CHENG Yichuan and asked, 'Why don't the teachings of Yichuan accord with those of Kongzi and Mengzi?'"¹⁰ This precocious remark offers a clear hint of Jiuyuan's future, radical break with the Cheng-Zhu School, and the establishment of what eventually would come to be known as the Lu-Wang School, also called Learning of the Heart/Mind (*xinxue* 心學).¹¹ Moreover, five years later, when thirteen years old, we are told that Jiuyuan had a dramatic insight into the nature of the universe and its relationship to the human heart/mind:

While reading some ancient texts, he came to the word "universe" (*yuzhou* 宇宙)¹² and explained it by saying, "The four cardinal directions, together with up and down, is

⁸ My claim here takes no stand on whether what we find in the *Analects* in fact reflects the views of the historical Kongzi. Clearly substantial parts of it do not. The point, though, is that thinkers like Jiuyuan took this text as an authority and model.

⁹ This attribution, which no contemporary scholar accepts, did not go unchallenged in the Chinese tradition. In the early Song, OUYANG Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) repeatedly argued that Kongzi could not possibly have written them.

¹⁰ See the entry for 1147 in Lu's *Nianpu*. CHENG Yichuan 程伊川 (1033–1107) was the younger of the two famous Cheng brothers.

¹¹ Here and throughout I translate the Chinese word *xin* 心 as "heart/mind" to indicate that it was thought to contain faculties of cognition and emotion as well as intention or volition. In some contexts, one or the other of these various senses may dominate, but often all are present to some degree. The reader is advised to judge by context where the emphasis falls in a given case.

¹² The Chinese word is composed of two characters, meaning space (*yu*) and time (*zhou*).

called space. The past to the present is called time.” He then had a great and sudden insight, saying “The past and future are infinite! Human beings along with heaven, earth, and the myriad things all exist within the infinite!” He then took up his brush and wrote, “The affairs of the universe are my own affairs. My own affairs are the affairs of the universe”. He further wrote, “The universe is my heart/mind. My heart/mind is the universe. Should a sage appear in the region of the Eastern Sea, he will have this same heart/mind; he will have this same principle. Should a sage appear in the region of the Western Sea, he will have this same heart/mind; he will have this same principle. Should a sage appear in the regions of the Southern or Northern Seas, he will have this same heart/mind; he will have this same principle”.¹³

Even if we take these events to be greatly exaggerated or even wholly fabricated, they convey important information about the way people of his time thought about human nature and moral insight, as well as the genre of biography. One thing such stories reveal is a strong belief in the innate abilities of even extremely young children. This is in keeping with widely held Neo-Confucian assumptions concerning a shared endowment of principles constituting or being contained within the heart/mind. This feature of Neo-Confucian biography is philosophically interesting because it shows that metaphysical assumptions about the nature of the heart/mind made it possible and plausible to have ethical prodigies like Jiuyuan.¹⁴ If such wisdom must be acquired and can only be gained through broad, concerted, and prolonged experience and reflection, it will seem wildly improbable that any young person could possess it to such a degree. Rosalind Hursthouse puts it well when she describes this latter kind of perspective, which is well represented by any form of Aristotelianism or early Confucianism: “There are youthful mathematical geniuses but rarely, if ever, youthful moral geniuses, and this shows us something significant about the sort of knowledge that moral knowledge is” (Hursthouse 1997: 224).

Philosophy

I shall focus on some of Lu’s core philosophical doctrines and teachings in order to clear away some mistaken claims commonly made about his philosophy and to offer a sketch of its basic parts, structure, tenor, and aims. Although not a formally systematic thinker, in the sense of presenting a step-by-step, carefully coordinated scheme or method of philosophy, Lu’s various teachings hang together and form a coherent, interrelated, and mutually supporting whole. And even though he does make direct and dramatic appeals to his own and his readers’ intuitions, this aspect of his philosophy is hardly unique and often is significantly over-stated; his writings offer careful and at times quite persuasive textual, historical, and philosophical arguments. At the core of his thought lies a

¹³ See the entry for 1152 in Lu’s *Nianpu*. Essentially the same lines are found in Lu’s “Assorted Sayings.” See section three of the “Assorted Sayings” in Ivanhoe (2009).

¹⁴ As I have argued in other work (Ivanhoe 2002), it also makes the sudden enlightenment experience or the “discovery model” of self-cultivation possible.

constellation of metaphors and images which he musters to invoke a range of related ideas that together compose his distinctive philosophical vision.

Almost every modern scholar who has written about Lu describes him as an “idealist” and, as we shall see, there is something correct and important about this claim, but without going on to explain what one means by idealism, such descriptions tend to be unhelpful if not misleading. Idealism can refer to a number of mutually exclusive philosophical views about the nature of the mind, the world, and the relationship between them; some versions of idealism are quite plausible while others involve metaphysical commitments that most contemporary philosophers regard as heroic and many take to be rash. In a number of cases in which modern interpreters have gone on to say at least a little about what they mean by idealism, it is clearly quite wrong. For example, it is not uncommon to find modern scholars claiming that Lu’s idealism denies the existence of a mind-independent world.¹⁵ This would make Lu an advocate of a form of panpsychism in which the world simply is the sum total of the thoughts of minds or some single, universal mind. Bishop Berkeley held something like this view, maintaining that what individual minds take to be the phenomenal or material world in fact exists merely as the object of contemplation in the divine mind of God. One might see a vague resemblance to Berkeley’s view in some of Lu’s claims about the heart/mind. Lu did believe that the *xin* embodies all the principles (*li* 理) that give structure, shape, and meaning to the phenomenal world. But such a claim does not in any way entail a denial of the mind-independent existence of the world, and Lu surely never doubted or questioned the existence of the material world. Lu saw a metaphysically seamless universe in which the principles of the heart/mind and those of the world corresponded to and perfectly cohered with one another. The heart/mind was the unique site where a full understanding of the world could take place; it is where all principles can come to consciousness and be known. This is the main point of his famous teaching that “The universe is my heart/mind. My heart/mind is the universe.”¹⁶ It is lines such as these that have led some to infer Jiuyuan thinks there is no world outside of the heart/mind. Such passages, however, must be read carefully and within the greater context of Lu’s teachings; their meaning then becomes clear. Consider the following, “This principle fills up and extends throughout the universe! Not even heaven, earth, ghosts, or spirits can fail to follow this principle—how much less can human beings afford to do so!”¹⁷ Another example, “The principles of the *dao* simply are right in front of your eyes. Even those who perceive the principles of the *dao* and dwell in the realm of the sages see only the principles of the *dao* that are right in front of your eyes.”¹⁸

¹⁵ For example, “Zhang Zai based his theories entirely on *qi*, whereas Zhu Xi’s contemporary Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1193) asserted that *li* alone exists” (Schirokauer and Brown 2006: 161).

¹⁶ See the entry for 1152 in Lu’s *Nianpu*. Similar lines appear in his “Assorted Explanations.” See Ivanhoe (2009).

¹⁷ See “(Eighth) Letter to Wu Zisi” in Ivanhoe (2009).

¹⁸ See section three of Lu’s “Recorded Sayings” in Ivanhoe (2009).

Such passages cannot be read as implying a reduction of the universe to the principles of the heart/mind and point the way to a proper understanding of Lu's philosophy.

For Lu, coming to understand the world is not a process of taking it in or thinking about it through a set of categories but a process of tallying or matching up the principles inherent in the heart/mind with the various phenomena of the world.¹⁹ Understanding always involves a subjective, introspective dimension: one discovers how things are by coming to see each truth *for oneself*. But "subjective" here does not imply any sense of an idiosyncratic interpretation; it refers only to the nature of the experience of understanding, the individual, subjective consciousness where understanding takes place. The heart/mind is "shared" by all human beings in the sense of being a common inheritance, and the principles it contains are the same throughout the universe and across time. One implication of such a view is that when my heart/mind is rightly ordered, it will track and reveal the very same truths that the greatest sages first discovered. Jiuyuan put this in a typically dramatic fashion, "If one understands the fundamental root or basis, the six classics are all one's footnotes!"²⁰ Because of our shared endowment of principles, Lu believed in a remarkably powerful ability to understand others—even people removed from one's experience by great expanses of space and time. The human heart/mind connects us in a profound and intimate way not only with each other but also with all things in the world:

Tens of thousands of generations ago, sages appeared within this universe and had this same heart/mind and this same principle. Tens of thousands of generations to come, sages shall appear within this universe and will have this same heart/mind and this same principle. Anywhere within the four seas, wherever sages appear, they will have this same heart/mind and this same principle.²¹

We are capable of tremendous degrees of empathy, but only if we work assiduously to remove all the impediments that block this natural sympathetic interaction; the greatest, most tenacious and fundamental obstacle to overcome is an excessive concern with oneself. As noted above, the subjective dimension of understanding ensures that it always is in some sense personal, and this is particularly important when the knowledge being sought is ethical in nature. Thinkers like Lu insist that moral knowledge involves not only cognition but also emotion and volition. Comprehending a moral truth—grasping an ethical principle—consists of seeing, feeling, and being properly disposed to act in a certain fairly specific way.

Like many Neo-Confucians, Lu shared Hegel's drive to find a comprehensive unity underlying the diverse phenomena of the world: a unity that not only

¹⁹ This view about what constitutes understanding is reflected in the modern Chinese word *lihui* 理會, "to comprehend," which literally means a "meeting" or "joining" of "principles."

²⁰ See section five of Lu's "Recorded Sayings" in Ivanhoe (2009).

²¹ This section continues the passage quoted above from Lu's *Nianpu*. See also section five of Lu's "Assorted Explanations" in Ivanhoe (2009).

explains but justifies a universal scheme subsuming both the social and political order and the individual. Like Hegel, Lu sought for an account that brings all the parts together into a sensible, normative whole that hangs together, eliminates all sense of alienation between the self and the world, and reveals an identity between what we think and what there is. But whereas Hegel believed in a world-historical process, which still was coming into being, as noted earlier, Lu believed each person already has within all the principles of the universe. The way (*dao* 道) is complete and available within every human heart/mind. Perfect understanding is always at hand and involves the unfolding of an inherent endowment. This has a number of important and distinctive consequences. For one thing, it means that *enlightenment* is a live and ever-present possibility, something each individual can pursue. Since a kind of selfishness is the major impediment to the free functioning of one's innate moral endowment, in a number of senses moral failure is "self" *imposed*. We fail to understand, act, and be moral because we fail to understand, act out of, and realize our true nature; we impose a distorted and excessively self-centered understanding of ourselves upon ourselves and the world around us. We suffer from a complex, severe, and virulent form of self-deception. This cluster of beliefs helps us understand why Lu placed such great emphasis on starting and grounding the process of self-cultivation in *one's own* intuitions, responses, and inclinations. The sources of moral failure, as well as the only genuine access to moral knowledge, are to be found in each person's heart/mind; this must be the focus of one's ethical attention, effort, and activity. To look for moral knowledge "outside" of the heart/mind is fundamentally to misunderstand the nature of such knowledge and to perpetuate and deepen one's moral delusion.

This brief account of Lu's philosophy and ways in which it resembles and differs from important Western thinkers is aimed to provide a sketch of some of his most famous and influential claims. Even such a sketch should suffice to show how misleading it can be to apply terms from the Western philosophical tradition to a thinker like Lu uncritically. At the same time, when properly focused, qualified, and supplied with sufficient nuance, such comparisons and contrasts help us to understand several key features of Lu's philosophy and set the stage for a discussion of some of the most dramatic and important differences between his views and those of ZHU Xi.

Lu met ZHU Xi and explored differences between their respective philosophies on two separate occasions (Ching 2000: 132–151). During their first meeting, which occurred at Goose Lake Temple in the summer of 1175, he was joined by his brother Jiuling. Lu and Zhu also exchanged a number of long letters which subsequently were circulated among friends and other scholars. Jiuyuan's brother Jiushao began their most well-focused and sustained exchange of correspondence when he wrote to Zhu challenging his interpretation of the terms Ultimateless (*wuji* 無極) and Supreme Ultimate (*taiji* 太極). Jiuyuan took up and developed his brother's objections and responded to Zhu's attempts to defend his views in separate letters to Zhu. I will sketch the exchange of views that took place during the meeting between LU Jiuyuan, LU Jiuling, and ZHU Xi

at Goose Lake Temple and then relate some of the themes that emerged in this discussion to the disagreements about *wuji* and *taiji* that served as the focus of the letters exchanged between LU Jiuyuan, LU Jiushao, and ZHU Xi in the years 1188–1189.

Jiuyuan and Jiuling spent several pleasant days together with ZHU Xi and LÜ Zuqian at Goose Lake Temple exchanging poems and engaging in discussions focused on the nature of the heart/mind and the implications their contrasting views have for the process of self-cultivation. LU Jiuyuan expressed their core differences clearly and elegantly—though subtly and indirectly—in his poem, “Written at Goose Lake to Rhyme with my Brother’s Verse,” which he wrote for and recited in the opening round of this meeting:

Old graves inspire grief, ancestral temples reverence.
 This is the human heart/mind, never effaced throughout the ages.
 Water flowing from a brook accumulates into a vast sea;²²
 Fist-sized stones form into the towering peaks of Mount Tai and Hua.²³
 Easy and simple spiritual practice, in the end, proves great and long lasting.²⁴
 Fragmented and disconnected endeavors leave one drifting and bobbing aimlessly.²⁵
 You want to know how to rise from the lower to the higher realms;²⁶
 First you must—this very moment—distinguish true from false!²⁷

The Lu brothers’ most fundamental objection concerned Zhu’s teaching that the heart/mind exists in two forms: a pure heart/mind of the way (*daoxin* 道心) and an adulterated human heart/mind (*renxin* 人心). ZHU Xi argued that *daoxin* is an ideal state of mind, one that exists apart from and prior to the actual, existing things and affairs of the world, whereas *renxin* is the way this ideal gets manifested as the hearts and minds of people living in the world. According to ZHU Xi, the heart/mind of the way consists of pure principle (*li* 理) and so is completely good in every respect, whereas the human heart/mind is composed of vital energy (*qi* 氣) as well as *li* and so can never be purely good and often falls considerably short of the ideal.

The interfering influence of *qi* leads us to feel cut off from one another and the rest of the world and obscures the true nature of the principles that should

²² Compare this and the following line to *Doctrine of the Mean* 26.9.

²³ Mount Tai (*Taishan* 泰山) is located in Shandong Province and Mount Hua (*Huashan* 華山) is located in Shaanxi Province. Along with Mount Heng (*Hengshan* 衡山) in Hunan Province, Mount Heng (*Hengshan* 恆山) in Hebei Province, and Mount Song (Songshan 嵩山) in Henan Province these are the Five Sacred Mountains, representing the East, West, South, North, and Center of China respectively.

²⁴ This line paraphrases section one of the “Great Commentary” to the *Book of Change*.

²⁵ “Fragmented and disconnected endeavors” alludes to the approach of scholars like ZHU Xi who advocated a more gradual method of self-cultivation in which one studies discrete lessons and builds up a comprehensive and synthetic grasp of the *dao*. This criticism became a major theme in WANG Yangming’s teachings.

²⁶ Compare *Analects* 14.35 where Kongzi says, “I study what is below to comprehend what is above.”

²⁷ For this and other examples of Lu’s poetry, see the selections in Ivanhoe (2009).

guide us; it is the original and primary source of an excessive concern with and for oneself. Given that our original, pure natures remain mired in *qi*, no matter how hard or how long we work at self-cultivation, we never can fully escape the limitations of *renxin*. As a result, our ethical status remains in a “precarious” state, and we are “prone to error.” These aspects of ZHU Xi’s philosophy led him to view the human heart/mind with a significant level of distrust and look to the heart/mind of the *dao* as his absolute standard and guide. Those seeking to cultivate themselves are ill advised to follow or even look directly to their own heart/minds for ethical guidance. They are much better served by focusing their attention and efforts outside the self; they should study the classics and rely upon the beneficial effects of ritual practice, working from the outside in to educate, reshape, and refine the self. This describes ZHU Xi’s primary path for self-cultivation or learning: pursuing inquiry and study (*dao wen xue* 道問學).²⁸ In contrast, LU Jiuyuan and his brother advocated honoring the virtuous nature (*zun de xing* 尊德性) as the proper way to cultivate the self. On their view, the first and greatest imperatives in the task of self-cultivation are gaining awareness of and fully engaging the heart/mind, the font of ethical wisdom “never effaced throughout the ages.” Only such “easy and simple spiritual practice in the end proves great and long lasting.” This is because the only genuine source for gaining and sustaining true understanding is the heart/mind. If one directs one’s attention at the source, the results will flow forth and inform all that one does. In stark and utter contrast, “fragmented and disconnected endeavors leave one drifting and bobbing aimlessly.” If one follows ZHU Xi and looks for understanding “outside” the mind—in books, rituals, and the advice of others—one simply will accumulate discrete bits of information that lack any overall coherence or sense. Such knowledge does not have the power to orient and move one toward the way and in the end will only exhaust one’s energy, resources, and spirit. Such an approach will yield neither deeper understanding nor proper action.

In a series of letters between LU Jiuyuan, LU Jiushao, and ZHU Xi, these themes reappear, in a different but recognizable form, in a debate about metaphysics. The starting point is ZHU Xi’s claim that the terms *wuji* and *taiji* refer to two different aspects of the same thing, the highest and most comprehensive principle governing the *dao*. His account of *taiji* is less controversial and shares several features with that of the Lu brothers. All agree that the term, which has its *locus classicus* in the “Great Commentary” to the *Book of Change*, refers to the highest and most comprehensive principle governing the actual things and events of the world. Differences, however, arise in regard to the nature of this principle and its place in ontology. ZHU Xi takes *taiji* to be both the sum and organizing structure of all the principles of the world. At the same time, he thinks that there is something beyond or prior to *taiji* that serves as the

²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of ZHU Xi’s method of self-cultivation see the chapter on ZHU Xi in Ivanhoe (2000). Compare the discussion of Wang’s method of self-cultivation in the later chapter on Wang in the same work.

ultimate source and ground of *taiji*, a kind of esoteric predecessor to the more exoteric *taiji*. Borrowing from the writings of ZHOU Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Zhu called this *most* ultimate principle *wuji*.

Zhu argued for the importance of *wuji* on two interrelated grounds. First, he was concerned that people would mistakenly think of *taiji* as some sort of physical thing. Second, he thought such a conception would lead them to ignore the underlying unity *among* the different things of the world. Such concerns are not wholly unwarranted. Since *taiji* is the sum and organizing structure of all the principles of the world, *taiji* itself seems to exist in the realm of phenomena and risks being reified as a kind of thing in much the same way as “the world” lends itself to being seen as a kind of entity rather than the comprehensive aggregation of all the things in the world in relation to one another. Such a conception of the universe does seem to underemphasize if not efface a sense of its being a complex collection of discrete, interrelated elements, organized and given meaning by an underlying principle: *taiji*. In order to avoid these mistaken and inappropriate implications, Zhu argued that behind *taiji* was *wuji*, an inchoate yet pregnant and productive form of the Supreme Ultimate, in which all principles were present but not yet manifested. While not quite a noumenal *realm*, *wuji* does seem to represent a distinctive and imperceptible *state* of the world. It is helpful to notice that Zhu’s distinction between *wuji* and *taiji* echoes and reflects his views about *daoxin* and *renxin*, discussed above. In both cases, the former stands as a pure, absolute form of and standard for the latter that exists above and prior to the actual phenomena of the world.

Jiushao and Jiuyuan rejected ZHU Xi’s view for a number of interlocking reasons.²⁹ First, they argued on purely textual grounds that the term *wuji* lacked any precedent among the classics of Confucianism. Since the classics purportedly contained all the fundamental truths of Confucianism, this fact alone offered a strong *prima facie* reason for doubting the need for or importance of this concept. In addition, the Lu brothers raised further objections about the pedigree and value of this concept. Zhu borrowed the term *wuji* from ZHOU Dunyi’s “Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate” (“Taiji tu shuo” 太極圖說), one of his relatively early works. Jiushao argued that Zhou either was not the author of this work or, if he was the author, it represented an early and unrefined stage of his philosophy. To support the first claim, he noted that a number of reputable scholars argued the “Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate” can be traced to CHEN Xiyi 陳希夷 (906–989), an important thinker of the rival Daoist school who lived in the early part of the Song dynasty. Moreover, no one disputed the fact that the term *wuji* does find an earlier, classical Daoist precedent in chapter twenty-eight of the *Daode jing*. To support the second argument, Jiushao notes the term *wuji* does not appear anywhere in ZHOU Dunyi’s later and more authoritative *Comprehending the Book of Change* (*Tongshu* 通書) and infers from this fact that even if he had used

²⁹ See the letters from Jiuyuan to ZHU Xi in Ivanhoe (2009).

the term in the earlier work, he repudiated it when he wrote his mature and definitive philosophy.

In addition to these textual and historical arguments, Jiuyuan argues that ZHU Xi's explanation of the need for the concept *wuji* is not philosophically compelling. He sees no great threat in the possibility of reifying *taiji* in the way that ZHU Xi feared and points out that none of the early sages expressed the slightest hint of any such concern. Contrary to what Zhu suggested, it is adding *wuji* on top of *taiji*, which Jiuyuan likens to stacking "a bed on top of one's bed,"³⁰ that poses the real risk. Such a theory can easily lead people to look away from the world of real things and actual affairs to search in the insubstantial and imaginary realm of what does not exist (*wu* 無) for the ultimate principle of the *dao*. This is to fall into the error of Daoists and Buddhists: becoming lost in the speculative heavens rather than working to order the more mundane yet pressing affairs of earth. There is simply no need for such abstract and potentially misleading speculation and no evidence that the early sages embraced this esoteric metaphysical doctrine. According to LU Jiuyuan, the Supreme Ultimate is neither in the realm of what does not exist nor is it some reified thing; it is the ideal state of the world and can be found among and only among the things of the world, whenever they attain their harmonious and perfect state. The highest principle governing and ordering the world is not complex, hidden, or esoteric; it is "right in front of your eyes" in everyday things and events, etched upon and revealed through the workings of our heart/minds.

In both their conversations at Goose Lake Temple and later correspondence, one can see many of the distinguishing features of Jiuyuan's philosophy as well as his differences from ZHU Xi. In general terms, Jiuyuan thought ZHU Xi presented an excessively complex, highly speculative, and over-intellectualized account of the way, which threatened to lead people astray. From Lu's point of view, Zhu's teachings urge people to look outside the heart/mind for moral knowledge and to distrust their spontaneous intuitions and inclinations in favor of an established and codified moral standard, found in the classics and traditional norms and practices. In contrast and similar to many Chan Buddhists, Lu advocated more direct and immediate attention to the heart/mind, a way "not residing in words or letters."³¹ Although one must be vigilant and on guard against the intrusion of self-centered thoughts, the greatest imperative was to look toward and trust in the heart/mind as one's true light and guide. The *dao* is found by heeding one's heart/mind as it leads one through the unique and ever-changing situations and events of daily life: there is no way apart from the unencumbered activity of the heart/mind.

³⁰ See the second letter from Jiuyuan to ZHU Xi in Ivanhoe (2009).

³¹ This is one line of the famous four-line description of the Chan, traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma but actually composed some time in the Tang dynasty, "A separate teaching, outside the tradition; Not residing in words or letters. Directly pointing to the heart/mind; See one's nature and become a Buddha." For a discussion, see Dumoulin (1988: 85–86). For a discussion of Chan's influence on Neo-Confucianism, see (Ivanhoe 2009).

The concise message and telegraphic style—often relying upon evocative and enchanting poems, metaphors, and turns of phrase—seen in both his conversations and letters are characteristic of LU Jiuyuan’s philosophical writings. One can imagine that these aspects of his teachings both impressed, challenged, and frustrated colleagues such as ZHU Xi and perhaps some admirers as well—for Lu offers a set of gestures and a series of suggestions rather than clear directions or a full picture. He had a rare gift for opening up unexplored intellectual and spiritual horizons and inspiring others to follow him into new territory, but he never worked at carefully mapping, much less settling, the terrain he discovered. The vision he sketched is both coherent and powerful, but many details were yet to be filled in and many questions called out for answers. This work of filling in, extending, and greatly enriching LU Jiuyuan’s original insights waited for and was taken up by WANG Yangming. In the process, Wang transformed Lu’s initial vision into his own distinctive philosophy.

Contemporary Relevance

If we take LU Xiangshan’s philosophical views as he stated and believed them, they present a distinctive and fascinating set of claims about the nature of the mind and the world, the foundations of ethics and aesthetics, and the proper course of moral self-cultivation. As I shall argue below, a number of Lu’s views remain quite viable and offer important insights in fields such as ethics and aesthetics. On the other hand, his claims about the existence of an innate and fully formed moral mind require what earlier I described as “heroic” metaphysical beliefs. It is not that such beliefs are conceptually impossible, but they do not cohere well with the best science of our day and so many will regard them as eminently doubtable if not implausible. Of course faith can carry one across even a broad expanse of doubt, and if we view Lu’s philosophy from such a perspective, it is not without power or appeal. Even if we set aside or reject his core metaphysical beliefs, coming to understand his view and how the world might look from such a perspective is not without value. Entering another, alien point of view requires the disciplined exercise of imagination and reason; employing and extending the range of these human abilities is good and can lead to genuine insights. In addition, it is possible to arrive at what John Rawls calls an “overlapping consensus” (Rawls 1993: 15) on important ethical issues based upon different and irreconcilable initial assumptions—metaphysical or otherwise.³² For example, Lu’s call for a more holistic view of our place in the universe, while based on underlying beliefs about shared “principle” which many of us do not share, can still inspire and contribute to defensible views about human value and human flourishing. We may not be one *in principle* but

³² For a splendid application of this idea which argues for ways in which Buddhism can support and enhance our understanding of the nature of rights, see Taylor (1999: 124–144).

we most certainly are connected in complex, intricate, and often neglected ways with the other creatures and things of our world, and this insight should be part of any viable ethic. For the purposes of the present essay, however, I will assume that the heroic metaphysical aspects of Lu's philosophy do not offer us live options for constructive philosophy today; with this in mind, I will focus on other aspects of his thought.

Perhaps the first point to note is that it is not too far from LU Xiangshan's views to more plausible forms of idealism. Whatever the world might be in itself, we only come to know what it is through human understanding, and no matter how much theory or how many devices we employ to detect and measure the world, the final word rests in a human perception of what it is like. The second part of this claim grants considerable ground to idealism, while the first insists on the importance of some form of realism. Our understanding of the world relies on the complex interplay between mind and world; whether or to what degree we are capable of understanding the latter depends in no small degree upon the former.³³ It is a massive conceit to think that the human mind just happened to evolve in a way that enables it to understand fully the universe of which it is a part; among other things, a fully naturalized account of the human mind will recognize that, while products of natural selection, things like the power to grasp the fundamental nature of matter played no role at all in our ability to adapt and survive in the course of our evolution. Anyone who believes the human mind does in fact possess the ability to gain an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the world will be expressing a kind of faith and one that embraces something quite close to Jiuyuan's claim that "The universe is my heart/mind. My heart/mind is the universe." We need not accept Lu's view in order to consider it, and considering it can help us understand and appreciate this important point about the mind and our understanding of the world. Things get even more interesting when we turn to aesthetics or ethics, for here the contributions of the human mind are more direct and substantial. When it comes to these aspects of human life, it makes considerable sense to think of the mind in terms of "heart/mind": a combination of cognition, emotion, and volition. It is worth noting that many individual movements within modern Western aesthetics or ethics are based on defending one or more of these three aspects of the heart/mind over the others.

Whatever else one might believe, it seems clear that human beings are not just detectors of the world, just as importantly, they are evaluators, embellishers, and actors. Our understanding of the world almost always involves some kind of evaluative response, one that not only colors our perception of the world but also leads us to color and decorate the world in various ways as well. Of course the role such responses play varies considerably across cases. At least on a very basic level, human beings share general evaluative responses to certain states of

³³ Hilary Putnam argues for something like this view, and his theory can be seen as a distinctive modern expression of idealism. Such a view underlies many of the essays in Putnam (1981, 1983: 1–25). Thanks to Michael R. Slater for suggesting that I note this similarity.

affairs in the world. These span the broad, complex, and subtle spectrum that constitutes more clearly aesthetic as well as ethical judgments. Following Lu and other Confucian thinkers, I will focus more on ethics but not before noting the importance of aesthetics; the two are connected.

It is profoundly misguided to dismiss our general concern with beauty as *mere* aesthetics. A general concern with the beautiful is inseparable from ethics because aesthetic responses are a fundamental part not only of human nature but also its flourishing. If we met someone who showed no interest in getting things right and no ability to develop and present valid or sound arguments, we would be inclined to assume he suffered from some deep deprivation, but we would not on this basis alone conclude that he was anything less than human. However, if we met someone who showed no interest in beauty, no aesthetic response to what he encountered, and no desire to create art and embellish the world around him, we would be more likely to infer that we are dealing with a different kind of creature. At the very least, we would worry much more about his humanity.³⁴

The Confucian tradition and Chinese thought in general have been much more attentive to this deep connection between ethics and aesthetics. Sometimes this has led to dubious claims about an excessively tight fit and inviolable causal links between one of these abilities and the other, but their general view about the intimate relationship between aesthetics and ethics is largely correct. Literati like Lu Jiuyuan placed tremendous emphasis on arts like calligraphy, painting, and composition. They believed all such pursuits not only can help develop a more humane sensibility but also serve as vehicles to express the *dao* and move others to it. All of these claims are eminently defensible and wise. If morality is thought to include more than simply not acting wrongly or not harming others—and perhaps even on such minimalist definitions—it will require us to understand and appreciate what others value. If part of being good entails a desire and perhaps obligation to take reasonable steps to help others understand and act well, then developing skills that facilitate these ends—such as learning to write well or depict the profound value of nature for human life—can be seen not only as morally good but obligatory.

One can defend Lu's beliefs about the ethical value of various arts on at least two levels. On a high level of generality, simply exercising and disciplining one's natural capacities by learning any art, craft, or skill can contribute to the development of abilities that may readily serve ethical ends. On a more practical and specific level, and one that Lu and other Confucians would insist upon, the *content* of the arts one appreciates and practices plays a critical role as well.

³⁴ A good illustration of this point is parents of children with severe cognitive disabilities who take great hope, pride, and joy in their children when they respond to or create art, music, dance etc. This parental response is not just an expression of gratefulness that their children can participate in these activities; it is a celebration of their children's fundamental humanity. I owe this example to Erin M. Cline.

Some arts are “higher” or as they would say correct or in accord with the way; others are “lower,” or in their parlance deviant and depart from the way.³⁵

Most Confucians thought that the relationship between ethical good and aesthetic beauty was even stronger than this. None thought that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty”—truth *per se* was not their interest—instead, they believed, at least *more* plausibly, that being a good person contributed to and in fact was necessary for becoming a great calligrapher, writer, or painter or fully appreciating these forms of art.³⁶ As a consequence, they thought *implausibly* that a bad person could never be a great artist or fully appreciate fine art and that a truly discerning person could detect the bad character in only apparently good art. Such ideas are not unknown in the West; perhaps they represent nothing more than wishful thinking, but the appeal of such a perspective is so strong that Oscar Wilde felt compelled to argue against it. His view is summed up in the oft-quoted line, “The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose.”³⁷ The strongest reading of Wilde’s claim, however, may overstate the disjunction between art and ethics. Surely an understanding of the human good can help one to become a better artist. It may also turn out that such knowledge is necessary to produce certain kinds of art, for example, art whose central themes involve fundamental human goods. If Lu and other thinkers such as Aristotle and WANG Yangming are right that genuine moral knowledge requires proper attitudes and dispositions, then even the greatest technician will fall short of the highest moral ideal. If an artist must genuinely and sincerely understand her subject in order to capture it, then there may be some truth to these aspects of the traditional Confucian view. Another common feature of aesthetic experience might offer further grounds for defending a version of the traditional Confucian view: knowing that a work of art was produced by an absolutely despicable person detracts from most people’s appreciation of it. So under a certain conception of the ideal epistemic conditions for appreciating art, a version of the Confucian claim makes sense.³⁸ While some Confucians tend to make an error that many contemporary thinkers continue to make when they conflate skill with virtue, their ideas about how art relates to ethics still have much to teach us.

Turning to what are more decisively ethical issues, we begin by noting that no human being or culture regards being incapacitated, suffering, or death as

³⁵ Lu and later followers of the Lu-Wang School were much more open to non-classical expressions of art, literature, and philosophy than were their Cheng-Zhu School colleagues. In fact, these and other schools of later Confucian philosophy expressed a broad range of views on this general topic. For a study that focuses on such theories in regard to literature, see Ivanhoe (2007: 29–48).

³⁶ For the quotation, see John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1819).

³⁷ This line can be found in his essay “Pen, Pencil, and Poison—a Study in Green,” (1889).

³⁸ To insist that aesthetics *must* be divorced from ethics expresses one reasonable but quite distinctive norm for a conception of aesthetic judgments. Such a view stipulates where to draw the line, but it in no way justifies that it be drawn here rather than where the Confucians want to draw it.

desirable states much less the proper ends of human life. Isolation from other human beings and living things as well as the constriction of space and constraints on one's ability to move about freely all are regarded as serious deprivations. None wishes such things upon another in the absence of very strong justifying reasons, which is why these are universally regarded as punishments and always risk shading into cruelty. If one thinks of these and other fundamental responses and attitudes as "principles" that all people share as the basic components of an ethical point of view, something very much like Lu's general approach gains considerable plausibility. Along with such plausibility is the possibility of shedding considerable light on how we might work to improve ourselves. Recall that Lu saw moral improvement as originating in a critical attentiveness to one's responses and reactions to the affairs of one's own life while working to eliminate an excessive concern with oneself. Rather than being focused on theoretical understanding, self-cultivation is primarily driven by a kind of reflective practice aimed at coming to see and appreciate the fundamental ethical goods that all human beings desire.³⁹ Part of what constitutes such understanding is the recognition that these things are not just objects of my desires but are by their nature *desirable* and part of most if not every good human life. In order to attain such a stance or perspective, one must cultivate an enhanced state of attentiveness to oneself and the world and ensure that one's appreciation of these goods is always felt as a shared—as opposed to *self*-centered—human concern. Such attentiveness and awareness are the keys and core of an ethical life. Lu has a great deal to say about how to cultivate such a view of oneself and one's relationship with rest of the world, and these aspects of his philosophy offer rich resources for contemporary thinkers.

While the above remarks are only a sketch of an adequate moral psychology and theory of self-cultivation, together with the earlier discussion of idealism and my comments about aesthetics, ethics, and their mutual relationship, this brief account shows that there are significant resources within LU Xiangshan's philosophy for modern constructive philosophy. He and his views are most worthy of and command our respect, interest, and admiration.

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³⁹ A modern account should rely upon a counterfactual account of what people would desire under reasonable conditions of information, experience, and reflection. These aspects of Lu's view were developed in a distinctive and powerful way by the Qing Confucian DAI Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777). For a splendid introduction to this aspect of Dai's philosophy, see Tiwald (2010).

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