Dai Zhen on Human Nature and Moral Cultivation

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Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) was a prominent philosopher in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and a highly influential critic of orthodox Neo-Confucian philosophy.[1] The heart of his philosophical project was to restore feelings and sophisticated faculties of judgment to their proper place in moral cultivation and action. He argued for a more robust form of moral deliberation, one which gives greater deference to both cognitive and affective capacities, and which requires us to examine and often reconsider our spontaneous moral intuitions. He also aimed to broaden the scope of desires that could play a legitimate role in a good and virtuous life. Dai used his considerable philological skills to demonstrate (convincingly, for many) that his Neo-Confucian predecessors had read the Confucian classics through Daoist and Buddhist lenses, which he faulted for many of the errors he found in their moral thought.

Dai felt that the views of prominent Neo-Confucians had had a disastrous effect on Chinese society (albeit an inadvertent one). Their fundamental mistake, he argued, was to assume that human beings have an already perfect moral guide in them by nature—a guide that operates best when allowed to act without interference from certain desires and modes of thought. Dai felt that the widespread adoption of this view had brought about a situation in which the political and social elite regarded their unchecked, unexamined opinions as more reliable than judgments drawn from life experience, the Confucian classics, and the sympathetic examination of the feelings and desires of others. Rather than assume that the moral guide already exists by nature, he insisted, Confucians should instead recognize that the resources for good moral judgment and virtue are *present but undeveloped* in our nature, and that the right course of education would bring these capacities to maturity.

[1] Especially those influenced by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), and above all Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200).

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This rough outline of the relationship between human nature and moral cultivation is the centerpiece of Dai's philosophical thought, and it is the principal concern of this essay. I begin with a brief biography and follow with an analysis of two features of Dai's thought: his views on human nature and his account of proper moral deliberation. I connect these two features to his picture of moral cultivation, which is concerned largely with fostering certain natural tendencies so as to make a person a good moral judge and agent. My chief aim will be to illustrate the substantial differences between Dai and his most influential adversary, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), as these differences tend to be downplayed in some (but not all) of the contemporary literature on Dai Zhen.

Life and Impact

The letters and earliest biographies of Dai Zhen suggest that at least two features of his life were deeply embedded in his conception of his life and his work. The first was the humbleness of his origins. Dai came from a family of low status and modest means, his father having been a cloth merchant with too few resources to provide Dai with a conventional education. Another prominent part of his self-conception was his uneasy relationship with the major scholarly movement of his era. Dai lived in the heyday of "evidential studies" (*kaozhengxue* 考證學), whose practitioners prized technical and evidence-based work in areas such as etymology, phonology, and astronomy. By the eighteenth century many evidential scholars eschewed philosophical work, usually characterized as the "study of meanings and principles" (*yili zhi xue* 義理之學— a rough approximation of ethics and metaphysics).[2] This left Dai without a clear intellectual home or audience, for he was fascinated with evidential studies and philosophy alike, and he saw his work as being motivated by the goals inherent in both disciplines. Dai was extremely successful in philology, mathematics, and other fields held in high esteem by his peers in evidential studies, and was revered by many as the greatest evidential scholar of his era. But in spite of his success as an evidential scholar, he saw himself above all as a pursuer of moral and metaphysical truths, which he regarded as giving his work the unity and purpose that any meaningful course of study requires. By the time of his death, Dai believed his philosophical works to be his greatest contribution to Confucian scholarship (Dai 1996b; Hu 1996: 366).

Dai produced a number of essays and three books on issues in Confucian ethics and metaphysics, the latter being *On the Good* (*Yuanshan* 原善), *Remnants of Words* (*Xuyan* 緒言), and his *Evidential Analysis of the Meaning and Terms of*

[2] Evidential scholars in Dai's era tended to see such philosophical speculation as lacking in rigor and overly susceptible to political and personal prejudice. For these and other reasons, many of Dai's acquaintances in evidential studies regarded his fascination with philosophy as unfortunate (Elman 2001: 20–21; Yu 1996: 112–150).

the Mencius (*Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證).[3] Among these Dai regarded the *Evidential Analysis* as his masterpiece, and devoted the last years of his life to writing and revising the work. His philosophical treatises were largely devoted to critiquing and then developing alternatives to the philosophical thought of Neo-Confucianism's greatest luminaries. They focused in particular on the orthodox thought of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi, and Dai framed many of his arguments as competing interpretations of key passages from canonical works of Confucian thought.[4]

Despite the small audience for Dai's philosophical works in his own time, he now figures prominently in philosophical discourse in China today, especially on issues in the history and development of Confucian thought. Most intellectual historians are now persuaded that Neo-Confucian thought bore significant traces of Daoist and Buddhist thought, and Dai's argument for this continues to be influential. Countless scholars also have been attracted to his efforts to divest Neo-Confucian thought of its more ambitious metaphysical claims, especially its commitment to the existence of governing patterns or principles (*li* 理). A minor research industry has been made of tracing the intellectual lineages between earlier Confucians with similar metaphysical views like Luo Qinshun 羅欽順 (1465–1547) and Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1472–1544) to the culminating figure of Dai Zhen (Zheng 2005; Liu 2000). Finally, and due in part to his unsparing criticisms of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, Dai became an inspirational figure for reform-minded Confucian philosophers, especially those seeking authentic Confucian precedents for their views (for Dai was one of the last great Confucian thinkers to write before Western philosophy began to make waves in the Chinese philosophical mainstream) (Liang 1959). As we shall see, however, the same unsparing criticisms have also made him a favorite foil for defenders of the better-known Neo-Confucian philosophers, especially those of Cheng and Zhu.

A Dispute about Human Nature

The declared purpose of Dai's *Evidential Analysis* is to diagnose and help to remedy a moral crisis. As he sees it, influential Neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi popularized an ideal of moral agency that encourages people to act before

[3] For *On the Good* and *Evidential Analysis* see Hu (1996: 201–337). For *Remnants of Words*, see Dai (1991: 64–116). The one complete English translation of *On the Good* is Cheng (1971). Two regularly cited translations of Dai's *Evidential Analysis* are Chin and Freeman (1990), and Ewell (1990). Hereafter specific passages in Dai's *Evidential Analysis* will be cited as "Dai 1996a" and followed by the passage's chapter number, page number in Hu's edition, and page number in Ewell's translation. For example, a passage that appears in Chapter 10, page 253 in Hu, and page 146 in Ewell will be cited as "Dai 1996a: 10.253/146." Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Dai's works that appear in this chapter are my own.

[4] These three texts were largely (but not entirely) consistent with one another, but as Dai's views developed he demonstrated increased levels of sophistication regarding the role of the feelings (*qing* 情) in moral evaluation. For a persuasive argument to this effect see Qian (1972: 334–355, esp. 350).

reflecting on the moral significance of their actions, and to rely on underdeveloped intuitions rather than cultivate their more sophisticated moral faculties. Dai contends that this ideal is in fact a modified form of the spontaneous or unreflective action prized by Daoists and Buddhists. Dai also traces the ideal to the Buddhist contention that all people are endowed at birth with an infallible guide, or Buddha-nature, which operates best when freed from the interference of many desires and processes of thought. The Neo-Confucian permutation of this Buddha-nature is what Zhu variously calls the "original nature" (*benxing* 本性), "nature [bestowed by] heaven and earth" (*tiandi zhi xing* 天地之性), or, most often, "principle" (*li* 理; also translated as "pattern"). Dai regards this picture of human nature to be responsible for a great deal of moral havoc both in his own time and throughout the several centuries in which Zhu's ideas prevailed.

Dai finds many things to be amiss in Zhu's appropriation of the Buddha-nature doctrine. For one thing, the Buddhists who most influenced him generally held that one cannot liberate one's better nature without eliminating all (or nearly all) of one's desires. Zhu apparently held a less radical version of this view, whereby large numbers of desires—the "selfish" (*si* 私) or merely "human" (*ren* 人) ones—are obstacles to the spontaneous expression of the principle within us (discussed below). Dai, however, thinks that eliminating many such desires is both unrealistic and counterproductive. People who ignore basic human desires cannot appreciate the extent to which the outcomes of their decisions might harm (*hai* 害) or bring misfortune upon (*huo* 禍) those whose interests one aims to protect (Dai 1996a: 5, 10, 40–43 and *passim*). This is made all the more worrisome because, in Dai's day, mastering Zhu's moral philosophy was highly valued by the ruling elite and more or less prerequisite for entry into the civil service. Thus those who were most influenced by Zhu's thought were the very leaders and decision-makers charged with protecting the interests of ordinary people, generating (on Dai's view) a perverse institutional incentive to reward the Neo-Confucian brand of prudential blindness with positions of political authority (Dai 1996a: 5.245–246/120–122).

Another worrisome implication of Zhu's doctrine of human nature is that it raises puzzles about the purpose of moral cultivation. If, as Zhu holds, one is born already equipped with the knowledge to perform one's obligations well, then why is it necessary to undergo the sorts of growth and educational processes that we normally think necessary for moral development? Zhu's creative solution was to say that we depend on such experiences because our original nature is obscured by impurities of various kinds, which in turn corrupt what would otherwise be good intentions and intuitions. Deploying the metaphysics of Song-dynasty Confucianism, Zhu attributed these impurities to turbid *qi* 氣, the psycho-physical stuff of which concrete things are made. Moral cultivation is thus necessary because it helps to purify the bad *qi* and so enables the principle in one's heart/mind to respond to the world of its own accord. Zhu then used this model to justify a rich array of methods of cultivation, focusing in particular on developing the attitude of reverential attention (*jing* 敬).

He also used the model to justify studying the Confucian classics. A major component of this justification appeals to the idea that all objects of study have principles of their own, which are in some sense parts or manifestations (*fen* 分) of the same thing. When we discover the principles represented in the texts, then, we are in fact *recovering* the principles that are already complete in ourselves, thereby piercing through the obfuscations that otherwise prevent us from living according to the inclinations of our original nature.[5]

Dai finds this way of conceptualizing moral cultivation deeply problematic. For him the point of moral cultivation is not merely to *recover* pre-existing capacities, but also to *develop* new ones. Moral development is as much additive as it is subtractive. When moral cultivation is done rightly, much of what we learn becomes integrated into the feelings, drives, and cognitive skills that help us behave ethically. Dai thus strongly rejects the view that our original nature is (in his words) "complete and self-sufficient," and identifies numerous ways in which education and life experience can add to human nature's inherent deficiencies (Dai 1996a: 14.262/176, 14.265/184, and 27.298/288). Among these he highlights investigative and contemplative skills, the ability to appreciate morally salient similarities between oneself and others, and the ability to sympathize and share in the emotional life of others.

One might think that Dai and Zhu simply deploy two different conceptual schemes to justify roughly the same educational regimen. Whether we call it "developing new characteristics" or "purifying the *qi*" may not seem to matter a great deal, so long as both see it as necessary for their respective goals. But this objection overestimates the flexibility of Zhu's account of human nature. Although the two frameworks can separately justify the claim that a classical education is "necessary" for moral development, Dai's scheme delivers a different sort of necessity than Zhu's. Dai's view says in effect that the fruits of one's education become a *constitutive part* of the faculties and sensibilities that we employ in everyday moral decision-making. Specifically, he holds that the sorts of skills we gain from study—the moral sensibilities and aptitudes required for thoughtful examination of things—play a direct part in moral deliberation. Working within the constraints of his own scheme, however, Zhu says that at best these sensibilities and capacities serve the *instrumental* function of helping us to uncover the principle in ourselves. Since they are only means or instruments to liberating moral faculties, and not constituents of the moral faculties themselves, they cannot be employed to decide between competing courses of action. Zhu leaves that decision to the natural responses of our original nature.

The texts of our two philosophers bear this out. In his *Evidential Analysis,* Dai likens the knowledge gained from one's studies to the nourishment of food and drink: just as nutrients become a part of the mature body, knowledge when properly digested becomes a part of the mature faculty of understanding (Dai

[5] For a more thorough explication of Zhu's "recovery model" of moral cultivation see Ivanhoe (2000: 43–58).

1996a: 9). In contrast, Zhu rejects the view that the ideas and sensibilities we gain from study are a part of the mature moral faculties. If they were, Zhu reasons, then this would imply that principle was imperfect from the start, and this is a point that we cannot concede:

> Book learning is of secondary importance. . .in book learning we must simply apprehend the many manifestations of moral principle. Once we understand them, we'll find that all of them were complete in us from the very beginning, not added to us from the outside. (Zhu 1986: 1.161)[6]

In fairness to Zhu, it is not clear that he held principle to be responsible for every facet of moral assessment in any given decision context. He might have allowed that some *non*-moral facts are apprehended through acquired knowledge, or that learning enhances powers of concentration that do not exist in our original nature itself (Zhu 1986: 1.164; Gardner 1990: 131). There are indications that Zhu thought the more rudimentary activities children master in the course of "lesser learning" (which includes such things as archery and household chores) incorporate aptitudes or forms of knowledge that are not already present in principle (Van Norden 2007: 47–48). It is also arguable that Zhu thought those who are born sages, and thus who fully understand principle, nevertheless need to learn *how to apply* this understanding to specific situations (Zhu 1986: 3.1148; Makeham 2003: 215). Taken together these points might suggest that Zhu regarded the fruits of one's studies as playing a more constitutive role than the above analysis suggests.

In my view we can grant these points and nevertheless insist that important substantive issues (and not just conceptual schemes) ride on the two competing views of human nature. Rather than stray too far into the finer points of Zhu Xi exegesis, it should be enough to note that for Zhu, as for adherents of the Buddha-nature doctrine, our original nature is in command when it responds to external stimuli spontaneously, without engaging in prolonged moral reflection of various kinds. The abilities we develop through the study of classical texts, however, have to do with pondering, weighing the moral significance of alternatives, identifying important similarities between cases, and considering whether subtle differences are relevant—in other words, the very skills necessary to engage in non-spontaneous forms of moral reflection. As Dai sees it, Zhu's mistake lies not just in characterizing key elements of moral cultivation as a process of subtraction and recovery, but in pairing this picture of moral cultivation with the assumption that our original nature works best when left to its own

[6] Translation by Gardner (1990: 128). Dai uses the same language of inner and outer but inverts the point, saying instead that learning "takes what exists within and nurtures it from without" (Dai 1996a: 26.292/274). Hereafter, all references to Zhu Xi's *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu* (*Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類) will refer to the volume and page number of the 1986 *Zhonghua shuju* edition. For example, the above passage from volume one, page 161 would be cited as Zhu 1986: 1.161. If the passage also appears in Gardner's translation (1990), the page number from that work will also be cited in the standard format.

(spontaneous) devices. Taken together, these two assumptions commit Zhu to a very different understanding of the point and purpose of moral cultivation.

Unlike Zhu, Dai stresses that moral cultivation adds to our natural capacities and dispositions, but he also sees himself as developing a position that is distinct from other additive accounts. On one view, he suggests, we might see the perfected moral capacities—or virtues—as being mature versions of their natural predecessors, but on another view we might simply see them as newly acquired. Dai characterizes his own view as the first and more developmental one, identifying it with the Mengzian idea that moral cultivation "expands and fills in" (*kuo er chong* 擴而充) the incipient moral feelings and capacities of judgment that we have by nature (*Mengzi* 2A.6, quoted in Dai 1996a: 6.248/129, 21.286/247, 26.292/273, and 27.298/289). He associates the view that virtues are largely acquired traits with Xunzi 荀子 (391–308), the Confucian thinker well known for defending the thesis that human nature is bad (Dai 1996a: 25–26).[7] The former might be compared to nurturing naturally pre-existing sprouts or buds so that they grow into mature flora; the latter could be likened to developing and then planting an entirely new variety of new plant.

Dai attempts to walk a fine line between the Neo-Confucian recovery view and the Xunzian assumption that moral cultivation requires a fresh start, but to do so he has to identify which sorts of pre-existing "sprouts" stand in need of nurturance. The most fundamental of these is a natural love of life (*huai sheng* 懷生). We turn this love of life into a moral attitude by putting ourselves in the position of others and replicating the sort of care for their lives that we already have for our own (Dai 1996a: 21.286–287/247–248).[8] This natural predisposition also enables us to take joy in acting rightly, and helps us share the sorrows and joys of others. When combined with human beings' sophisticated faculties of understanding, this then gives us powers of moral judgment that far outstrip those of any other creatures. Indeed, the nascent faculties of understanding are themselves a sprout of another kind, also required for the acquisition of full virtue.[9]

At times Dai writes as though these incipient sprouts of goodness are a necessary presupposition for any plausible account of moral education and development. He suggests that we simply cannot succeed at developing our capacities to understand and care about the good unless there is some budding version of those capacities to start with. Here again Dai invokes the nutrition analogy: if one wants to transform the nutrients of food and drink into the blood-*qi* (*xueqi* 血氣) of the body, one must have a certain amount of blood-*qi* already. So too must we start with a nascent understanding of moral norms and

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[7] Dai's classification of models of moral cultivation closely resembles P.J. Ivanhoe's (see Ivanhoe 2000). I borrow Ivanhoe's language to describe the "developmental" and "acquisitionist" models here.

[8] I offer a fuller account of this process in Chapter 3 of Tiwald (2006).

[9] A more thorough explication of Dai's argument for the goodness of human nature appears in Shun (2002).

basic capacities to care about others if there is to be any hope that cultivation will make us more virtuous (Dai 1996a: 26).

This argument might seem to be only as strong as the analogy that underlies it. Perhaps an acquisitionist would reject the assumption that learning is like bodily nutrition in the relevant sense, insisting that learning is more like generating entirely new blood-*qi* than adding to existing blood-*qi*. However, the argument becomes less mysterious if we take seriously Dai's comparison of mental processing to digestion, which for him is a multi-faceted one. Dai invokes the widespread physiological assumption that digestion is really just the assimilation of one substance to another, whereby the very substance to which one thing is assimilated is also the one that *does* the assimilating. In digestion, the blood-*qi* plays both roles. Dai's analysis suggests that something similar is true of the moral capacities. We add the content of our learning to our moral capacities by processing them with the selfsame capacities. We might say, for example, that we develop an ability to appreciate the virtue of the Duke of Zhou (as reported in classical sources) by drawing upon our appreciation of virtue in more accessible cases. For Dai, the more accessible cases are ones that we already understand and appreciate without having to put our faith in another's authority—ones that we "get for ourselves" (*zide* 自得) (Dai 1996a: 252/144). The goal is to achieve the same robust self-confidence in one's new conviction about the Duke of Zhou. It is hard to imagine how we could achieve this if our more accessible robustly-held beliefs were inconsistent with this new conviction, or if we had no capacity to hold beliefs in this robust way at all.

This section constitutes only a brief sketch of Dai's account of human nature, and the picture of moral cultivation that drives it. To recapitulate, Dai holds that human nature is endowed with certain nascent moral capacities, including the capacity to care about the lives of others and the capacity to make complex moral judgments. He also maintains that these capacities are far from complete, which he sees as a definitive point of departure from his influential Neo-Confucian predecessors. From this sketch we can begin to explain why Dai thinks the relationship between human nature and moral cultivation is necessarily developmental—that is, why the possibility of becoming a truly good moral agent, who can hold the right beliefs with justifiable self-confidence, necessarily presupposes that we have lesser versions of the moral capacities to start with.

Moral Deliberation

The previous section describes Dai's model of moral cultivation only in broad brushstrokes. It says little about which particular kinds of moral capacities need to be developed and what particular methods can be used to develop them. Perhaps the most important of such capacities are those responsible for sound moral deliberation, in particular the sort of deliberation we engage in when

faced with the need to make a decision that affects actual human interests. In this section I will describe two of the major elements of Dai's account of moral deliberation. One is sympathetic concern (*shu* 恕), which plays a crucial part in giving morally appropriate consideration to the interests of others. The second is moral discretion or "weighing" (*quan* 權), which enables us to apply general moral rules and practices to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Sympathetic Concern

Dai plucks his account of sympathetic concern from a number of passages in the Confucian classics, the most famous of which comes from *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) 15.24:

> [Confucius' student] Zigong asked: "Is there one doctrine (*yan* 言) that one can practice throughout one's life?"
>
> Confucius replied: "Is it not *shu* (sympathetic concern)? What you would not desire yourself, do not inflict upon others."

Like other canonical accounts of *shu,* this one is somewhat ambiguous. Strictly speaking it suggests only that we should determine what we would not want for ourselves (if we were in the other's position, presumably) and then see to it that we do not bring about the same state of affairs for others. This brief description of *shu* does not state outright *how* we should determine what we would not want; for example, it does not say that this determination is done by simulating the would-be desires of others in one's own mind, which is often regarded as an essential component of empathy or sympathy (understood as forms of perspective-taking). Many commentators, however, suggest that the simulation of desires is precisely the point of *shu*. Dai shares this assumption, but his account of *shu* is also a distinctive variant of the simulationist one.[10] Let met say more about this variant as I understand it.

For Dai, one important feature of *shu* is that it requires the imaginative reconstruction of the point of view of another, even if only as a minimal, fleeting exercise. Before we carry out actions that might have significant consequences for others, Dai recommends that we turn within ourselves (*fan gong* 反躬) and contemplate our own would-be response to such behavior (Dai 1996a: 2.241/106). A second and subtler feature of *shu* is that it requires *concern* for those whose perspectives we adopt or simulate. Indeed, Dai has a particular take on this other-directed concern: caring about them is not enough; we must also care about them in a way that mimics or resembles how we care about ourselves. To

[10] To mention just two pieces of evidence, Dai thinks *shu* makes it possible to have a personal or embodied (*ti* 體) understanding of the feelings of others and to share in their sorrows and joys. These tasks presumably require simulation of sorts (Dai 1996a: 10. 255/151; 15.270/199; 43.336/423).

this extent Dai's preferred form of other-concern draws upon *self*-concern. We better appreciate the importance of another person's well-being for her sake if we have a similar interest in our own well-being for our own sake (Dai 1996a: 10.253/147; Tiwald 2006: Chapter 3).

One way to illustrate the importance of this particular kind of other-directed concern is to think about the nature of human sympathy. Sympathy—or at least what I am calling sympathetic concern—takes on a distinctive moral attitude that is not neatly captured by recreating another's psychological states. Someone who delights in torturing others is not sympathetic simply because he vividly imagines the pain of his victims (to borrow an example from Nussbaum 2001: 329–333). To be truly sympathetic one must have not only a caring attitude toward the person, but must also have accompanying feelings about the badness or wrongness of the torture. Sympathy seems a richer and more considerate process than mere perspective-taking, and in this sense it closely resembles Dai's understanding of *shu*.[11]

Another ambiguity in the canonical account of *shu* concerns how best to distinguish good or appropriate desires from bad or inappropriate ones. A standard criticism of *shu* is that it disposes us to attribute to others desires that they may not in fact share, as when a thrill-seeker imagines her more timid brother wanting to undertake the same escapades. Following Fingarette and Ivanhoe, among others, we might call this "sympathetic paternalism" (Fingarette 1979; Ivanhoe 2005). We can add to this the worry that sometimes desires are simply self-destructive or mistaken, even when both the sympathiz*er* and the receiver of sympathy share them. The wish that a gambling addict be provided access to high-stakes games might be unfortunate in any case, even when the sympathizer is herself a fellow addicted gambler.

These criticisms, which some have leveled against Dai, share the common assumption that *shu* is undiscriminating in its appropriation of desires (Hu 1996: 62–63). They suppose that whatever desires I happen to have are precisely the desires I imagine others having when I put myself in their shoes. Dai's account of *shu* is quite the opposite. He thinks of it not just as a way of recreating the thoughts and feelings of others, but also as a way of *discovering* which desires really count in the first place. In fact, for Dai this discovery role is really the primary function of *shu*. When we take up another person's point of view, Dai believes we are drawn to a core set of genuine, salutary inclinations called the "desires of human nature (性之欲)" (Dai 1996a: 2.242/107). Dai thinks this core set is shared by people of all kinds and classes, is consistent across

[11] Much of the psychological work that Dai attributes to *shu* suggests that the element of care or concern plays a crucial part. For example, Dai holds that *shu* is essential to the operations of the great Confucian virtue of benevolence of humaneness (*ren* 仁), which consists in the ability to attach our own sense of fulfillment or satisfaction to the interests of others (Dai 1996a: 15. 270/199). Presumably simulation or perspective-taking alone is insufficient to achieve so lofty a goal.

generations, and draws upon what he calls the "ordinary" or "constant" (*chang* 常) feelings of humankind (Dai 1994: 61; Dai 1996a: 5.246/123). While our two criticisms raise important questions about some versions of *shu,* then, they do not directly concern Dai's own.

Dai does not say outright why we should attribute such powers of discernment to *shu,* but the above analysis hints at an answer. As we have seen, *shu,* as sympathetic concern, is constituted by a particular kind of care for another human being. Care for another makes the exercise of simulating another's feelings considerably more discerning than it would otherwise be. When we merely simulate or imaginatively reconstruct the suffering of the gambling addict, we will likely need to imagine what it is like to crave two or three sleepless days at the blackjack table. When we *sympathize* with the gambling addict, however, we focus more on the desires that have an intimate connection to her well-being. We do not dwell on her cravings for high-stakes card games but rather on her frustration and disappointment regarding her inability to keep a job or support a family. For Dai, this is likely because the desires that are consistent with living a good life are both *simpler* and *more universal* than the wrong-headed ones. They are simpler in the sense that there are fewer of them, and they tend to be either identical with or natural offshoots of one's love of life (*sheng* 生), understood to include birth, preservation, and procreation. They are more universal because everyone loves the life of which they are intimately aware, beginning with his or her own (Dai 1996a: 21.283/240–241). Dai seems to hold that *shu* draws primarily upon these simpler and more universal desires and emotions, ones which he would characterize as belonging to the "true feelings" or "essential nature" (*qing* 情) of human beings. This is consistent with other remarks Dai makes about the use of desires and feelings in moral deliberation. Early in the *Evidential Analysis,* Dai asserts that we come to understand the standards of good order by measuring the feelings people *happen to have* with a basic set of dispositions (*qing* 情) that we have by nature (Dai 1996a: 2; Shun 2002: 220–221). For Dai, sympathetic concern seems best suited both to engage these basic dispositions and to drown out the other emotional noise.

Weighing

Dai's other major criticism of Zhu Xi is that he promotes spontaneous or insufficiently reflective moral decision-making. What this means for Zhu is a matter of some controversy, for he surely allows that *some* thoughts and judgments can become considerations in our deliberations about possible courses of action (Zhu 1986: 1.237; Gardner 1990: 187). But among those that Zhu appears to consider optional or even pernicious, Dai highlights two as being crucial for virtuous conduct: first, "higher order" moral thinking about whether and why a particular course of action is worth endorsing;

second, deliberation about the relative merits of competing courses of action.[12] Dai sees higher order moral thinking as necessary both because it helps us to recognize when our first intuitions may be wrong and because it is the source of the special delight that human beings take in moral goodness.[13] He sees deliberation about relative merit as crucial because the moral significance of things can change quite radically from one context to the next, and our first intuitions tend to do a poor job of tracking those changes. For Dai, the latter sort of reflection is an exercise in what he calls "weighing" (*quan* 權—sometimes translated as "discretion").[14]

Dai's focus on weighing is premised on the idea that we cannot arrive at good judgments without drawing upon sophisticated cognitive skills and aptitudes, ones which our initial moral intuitions do not properly exercise. A case in point is the discernment of moral importance, which can be applied to facts about one's situation (as when one sees that a person's age should dictate how one interacts with her) and to courses of action (as when one determines that saving a person's life is more pressing than adhering to ritual courtesies) (*Mengzi* 4A.17 and Dai 1996a: 40–41). In Dai's parlance, the moral significance of such things can be "heavy" (= important) or "light" (= trivial). Oftentimes their relative weight will be widely known and immediately obvious, and this lends itself to the assumption that our first moral intuitions are generally reliable. But subtle changes in context can alter the relative "weight" of a thing—we might imagine, for example, that the weight we should give to the principle of giving aid to one's elders before one's juniors varies greatly in different moral scenarios. Dai thinks that the Neo-Confucian mainstream tends to underestimate the extent to which such subtleties elude even the morally cultivated person. Life confronts us with

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[12] Note that the question here is not whether a person should have higher order thoughts or reflect on relative moral value at all, but whether they should "become considerations" in one's decision-making.

[13] The *Evidential Analysis* is not entirely clear about the role of higher order thinking in our moral delight. Some passages imply that our heart/minds take joy in knowing *why* our morally good conduct is in fact good. Others, however, liken the heart/mind's delight in morality to the pleasure one gets from good food or other objects of the senses, implying that our heart/mind takes joy in good behavior independently of its underlying grounds or justifications (Dai 1996a: 8). Nivison thinks that Dai misses the subtle difference between these two forms of moral delight (Nivison 1996: 277). Ivanhoe offers the compelling and more charitable interpretation that Dai simply sees higher order reasoning as enhancing or enriching the joy we already derive from good conduct itself (Ivanhoe 2000: 94–95).

[14] Zhu is suspicious of weighing for a number of reasons, chief among them that it gives a foothold to rationalization of various (selfish) kinds. When reliable intuitions are tapped, Zhu thinks, little if any thought of one's own interest takes hold. When we weigh competing alternatives, however, we tend to revise our initial views in ways that better serve our own needs and desires. Zhu makes some exceptions for particularly complex or momentous decisions—such as those where life and death hang in the balance. But on the whole he thinks weighing lends itself to rationalization far more often not, and appears to hold that even the less cultivated among us should guard against it (Zhu 1986: 1.237; Gardner 1990: 188).

countless situations in which the apparent moral significance of something must be reconsidered (or "re-weighed"):

> From ancient times to the present day there has been no lack of people who are of stern and upright character, loathe immorality (*e* 惡) as though it were their enemy, and affirm what they regard as right and reject what they regard as wrong—people who hold fast to distinctions between what is important and trivial that are obvious and seen by all, but do not realize that there are times when weighing would show that what they believed to be important has become trivial and what they believed to be trivial has become important. When [such reputable] people err in their affirmations of right or wrong and their judgments of importance or triviality, the world suffers irreparable harm. (Dai 1996a: 40.328/389)

An underlying point of contention here concerns the nature of virtuous behavior. For most Confucians, being virtuous is not just a matter of doing the right thing, but also of doing the right thing with the right (virtuous) motives, and having the right commitment to one's actions. For Zhu and Dai alike, one of the marks of proper motivation and commitment is what we might call "ease"—the feeling of comfort with one's moral responsibilities, such that even self-sacrifice, when obligatory, feels unforced. A virtuous person does not find it difficult, for example, to help a cousin in need, so long as the help is morally justifiable. But there are many possible ways of characterizing the psychological states of which this ease is constituted, and Zhu and Dai bring out significant tensions between two of them. Zhu seems to hold that we lose some of the requisite ease when we find the decision-making process difficult and rife with uncertainties—for example, when we have to pause and carefully consider the relative merits of different courses of action. For Dai, the problem is not in experiencing difficulties in one's *decision-making*, but simply in *executing* one's decision. Our behavior can be morally admirable even if the process by which we arrived at our conclusions is quite labored. On Dai's view as I read it, ease in execution—which is essential for virtue—needs to be uncoupled from ease in deliberation—which is not.[15] Furthermore, Dai thinks labored decision-making is often *necessary* for genuine ease in execution, for without carefully considering the various alternatives one cannot have sufficient confidence in one's convictions, and without acquainting oneself with the feelings and desires of others one will lack the emotional push to carry them out. Sound moral deliberation actually enhances the ease of morally virtuous behavior, largely by increasing our certitude and helping us to appreciate the underlying reasons for our convictions (Dai 1996a: 41).[16]

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[15] To this extent Zhu's model of moral agency lies closer to Daoist ideal of non-action (*wuwei* 無為), which stresses spontaneity in both thought and action.

[16] I have not found a translation of this chapter that does justice to this point about the uncoupling of ease in execution and ease in deliberation. Ewell has perhaps the most accurate rendering of the chapter, but he makes the mistake of translating *zide* 自得 as "apprehend spontaneously" when in context it almost certainly means "understand for oneself" (Ewell 1990: 396).

Moral Cultivation

Like most Neo-Confucian philosophers, Dai took moral cultivation to be primarily concerned with the manifestation of good character, understood as the dispositions and aptitudes that enable one to handle moral challenges in an ethical manner. Also like most Neo-Confucians, Dai particularly valued the virtues most often associated with Mengzi, including benevolence (*ren* 仁), rightness (*yi* 義), ritual propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智). A noticeable difference of emphasis, however, concerns Dai's focus on developing the mental and emotional powers *directly* responsible for moral judgment. Dai's philosophical works pay particular attention to the ability to make fine-grained distinctions, to identify situational variances, and to recognize important social dynamics within traditional relationships (among other things). This might be contrasted with works on moral cultivation that focus more on the development of good motives, self-awareness or attentiveness, and self-control, all of which are central preoccupations of Neo-Confucian philosophers like Zhu Xi. Dai addresses these latter issues as well,[17] but his most pressing concern is the faculties charged with "getting it right" in moral decision-making, which he calls the heart/mind's powers of understanding (*xinzhi* 心知). Another aspect of moral maturity, for Dai, is the possession of a range of healthy, widely shared, and often self-interested desires (*yu* 欲). Dai argues that such desires are necessary for sympathetic concern, and he holds that mainstream Neo-Confucian accounts of moral cultivation neglect sympathetic concern by neglecting the desires that sustain it. In what follows I will address both the development of the faculties of understanding (*xinzhi*) and the cultivation (or at least non-elimination) of certain common desires (*yu*). These two areas correspond to the two general sources of moral failure that Dai highlights (Dai 1996a: 10.254–255/149) and represent two important functions of the heart/mind. I will take each in turn.

Cultivation of the Faculties of Understanding

Dai believes sound moral judgment requires a great deal of knowledge about the world. On his view, goodness (*shan* 善) is ultimately concerned with the continuation of life-processes, processes that originate in the activity of heaven and earth but can be perfected by human beings (Dai 1996a: 32).[18] A featured element of this achievement is one's contribution to the welfare of living things, especially those nearest and dearest to oneself. Dai construes life-fulfillment to include birth, growth, and reproduction, as well as the satisfaction of the

[17] For example, Dai (1996a: 12) takes up the *Doctrine of the Mean*'s (*Zhongyong* 中庸) discussion of reverential attention (*jing* 敬).

[18] See also Dai (1996c: *juan* 1, Chapter 3), Hu (1996: 204–205), and Cheng (1971: 71–73).

inclinations that these demands generate, such as the desire for sex, food, drink, and protection from the cold (Dai 1996a: 43.335/422–423). What qualifies as life-fulfilling varies according to a thing's nature (*xing* 性). Accordingly, a morally competent person should be familiar with the natures of many different kinds, and especially with that of human beings. Such a person should also know a great deal about the operations of human societies, including the role-specific courtesies and obligations that make possible political and social harmony.

Dai particularly stressed two arenas in which the requisite forms of knowledge are acquired. The first is in nurturing the Five Relationships (*wulun* 五倫) traditionally associated with Confucian social structures.[19] In our interactions with friends and other members of the family, for example, Dai thinks we can acquaint ourselves with the psychological nuances of human feelings and desires. In more hierarchical relationships between political authorities and their subjects, or between household decision-makers and other family members, we can become aware of ways in which dividing responsibilities according to one's social role can contribute to the life fulfillment of all (Dai 1996a: 28.300–301/298; and 1996c: Book 3, Chapter 9; Hu 1996: 228–229; Cheng 1971: 110–113).

Dai also contends that an education in the Confucian classics is an essential foundation for good moral judgment. Here, however, he insists that mastering the content of the classics is not as important as developing the skills and sensibilities that classical studies requires—especially those that we develop by following the *Doctrine of the Mean's* injunction to "study broadly, inquire thoroughly, ponder carefully, differentiate clearly, and put into practice conscientiously" (*Doctrine of the Mean* 1990: Chapter 20; discussed in Dai 1996a: 27.298/289 and 40.327/388). What Dai seems to have in mind are the ways that scholarly rigor can make one's "weighing" more reliable. The aptitudes we develop in piecing together the meanings of the classics, he implies, are often the very ones that we need in order to grasp the morally important features of new and especially anomalous situations (Dai 1996a: 41).

Putting Dai's account of moral cultivation into the context of Confucian philosophy more broadly, we should note that the source of contention is not the specific set of recommendations he makes but rather the way he frames them—that is, the way he conceptualizes and ultimately justifies them. Dai's favorite foils, including Zhu Xi, also stressed the importance of the Five Relationships and classical studies. Even so, Dai finds their justifications wanting. To review, Zhu held that the point of learning is not to develop new capacities that are directly responsible for moral judgment, but to recover or liberate capacities of judgment that are already complete in one's original nature. As previously discussed, this view ultimately commits Zhu to a model of moral

[19] The Five Relationships are between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, and mutual friends (see *Mengzi* 3A.4 and *Doctrine of the Mean* Chapter 20).

agency in which the knowledge and sensibilities one develops through study play a largely instrumental rather than a constitutive role. For Dai, the point of cultivating the faculty of the understanding is to give it a direct and enduring role in everyday decision-making and action, to "expand and fill in" our fledgling moral sensibilities rather than simply recover sensibilities already in us. Another shortcoming of Zhu's model is that it treats our recovered moral sensibilities as responding to the world best when they respond spontaneously. This then leads even well-intentioned people to rely on unchecked intuitions rather than reflection in to order to appreciate the relative merits of one course of action vis-à-vis others, and rules out the protracted examination of anomalous situational features that first intuitions do not usually grasp. For Dai, we achieve the "ease" of virtuous action precisely by understanding for ourselves the grounds and relative merits of the course of action that we ultimately choose. This provides us with the conviction we need to act in the face of adversity and indeed even makes possible the higher pleasures that the heart/mind takes in knowing that we act correctly.

Here, as elsewhere, the comparison that seems to capture this broad set of framing issues likens the benefits of learning to the nourishment of food and water. The nourishment of study and reflection brings in external materials and uses them to enhance our existing capacities. Moreover it adapts and integrates them by making use of the self-same capacities, much as blood-*qi* is responsible for turning nutrients into more blood-*qi*. As Dai's most succinct analogy for moral cultivation, it may also be his most powerful.

Cultivation and Desire

Probably the best known flash-point in Dai's critique of mainline Neo-Confucian philosophy concerns the relationship between desire and virtuous behavior. Thinkers like Zhu Xi regarded a wide array of desires as pernicious, and aspired in particular to remove such desires from the thoughts and motives that moral agents draw upon. Dai, by contrast, saw desires as the very material from which virtue is built, especially the master-virtue of benevolence or humanity (*ren* 仁). As Dai's claims strike at the heart of Neo-Confucian moral thought and seem at times uncharitable to his opponents, this feature of Dai's thought is among the most widely discussed. Perhaps for the same reasons it is also among the most widely misunderstood. I will attempt a more careful synopsis of his views here.

For Dai Zhen, the debate about desires is above all about the parts they play in moral agency. This is to be contrasted with a different sort of debate—namely, whether one should be without desires at all, even in cases where the desires do not threaten to interfere with moral behavior. The latter claim is fundamental for various forms of asceticism, and Dai surely rejects it, but, as we shall see, it is not clear that he pins it on his Neo-Confucian opponents. Dai's primary dispute with them concerns how desires figure as (a) considerations in

moral deliberation and (b) motives for one's morally significant behavior. When a desire contributes to one or both of (a) and (b), Dai says that the resulting conduct "issues from desire (出於欲)." The key question for him is whether ensuring that desire plays no part in (a) or (b) is sufficient to make one's moral behavior correct. Conversely, another key question is whether any consideration and motivation by desire at all is sufficient to derail morally correct behavior. Dai thinks his opponents essentially answer both affirmatively, holding that considerations and motives come directly from our morally perfected nature—our "principle" (*li* 理)—just in case certain (or perhaps any) desires do not interfere. To employ one of Dai's favorite refrains, Dai's opponents would appear to believe that "if it does not issue from principle then it issues from desire, and if it does not issue from desire then it issues from principle (不出於理則出於欲, 不出於欲則出於理)" (Dai 1996a: 10.253–254/146–147, 40.327/387, and 43.335/421).

In contrast, Dai thinks desires play an indispensable role in moral deliberation and motivation. This is because we engage our desires through sympathetic concern (*shu*) to determine how we would feel if we were in another's shoes, and because we are motivated by this sympathetic engagement to benefit others. A rough sketch of his argument can be reconstructed from the pivotal tenth chapter of his *Evidential Analysis*: Human well-being depends upon the satisfaction of certain basic desires (*sui yu* 遂欲). Virtue consists at minimum in providing for the well-being of one's charges, requiring among other things that one avoid "harming" (*hai*) or "bringing misfortune upon" (*huo*) them. Moreover, virtue also consists in having an intimate acquaintance with or personal understanding (*ti*) of the feelings of others (Dai 1996a: 10, 43, and *passim*). Given these basic moral facts, truly virtuous people cannot but employ their own desires to understand (personally) the desires of others. This is simply what it means to care about and attend to the welfare of others in the minimally required way. By excluding the desires from moral deliberation and motivation, however, one rules out precisely this sort of care and attention.

A second discernable line of argument comes from his analysis of the paramount virtue of humanity (*ren* 仁). For Dai the great achievement of a humane person is to take satisfaction in the satisfaction of others, and to feel sorrow and joy at the sorrow and joy of others (Dai 1996a: 10.253/146–147 and 36.317/351). To reach such a state one must be capable of putting oneself in another's shoes and feeling the kind of concern for her welfare that one has for one's own. This also requires that we have strong desires for the things that enhance our own well-being, for without them we would be cold or indifferent to the predicaments of others, and thus derive no benefit from helping them (Dai 1996a: 10.253/146–147). Dai's own proposal is that the desires be fostered and encouraged but nevertheless pared down to just those that are compatible with living a morally good life. Quoting *Mengzi,* he presents his own position as a more moderate one, whereby we "cultivate the heart/mind" not by suppressing desires altogether but by "making them few" (*Mengzi* 7B.35, quoted in Dai 1996a: 10.253/146).

Many defenders of Neo-Confucian thought find this critique quite unfair. Dai, they say, paints his opponents as self-abnegationists who reject the influence of any and all desires in moral action, and could well be taken to suggest that they aim to free us of the experience of desires altogether. Even if some Neo-Confucians embraced such a view, it is not clear that all of them did, ZHU Xi least of all.[20] As Wing-tsit Chan points out, Zhu sometimes distinguishes two sorts of desire: those that are the direct responses of our original nature or Heavenly Principle (*tianli* 天理) and "selfish" or merely "human" desires (*si yu* 私欲 or *ren yu* 人欲, respectively). The goal of self-cultivation is to sustain the former (acceptable) inclinations and eliminate the latter (unacceptable) ones. A close look at the set of desires that Zhu deems acceptable shows him to be more permissive than one might think. Zhu countenances such things as hunger, thirst, and erotic love, not to mention strong moral aspirations such as the desires for humaneness (*ren* 仁) and rightness (*yi* 義). Indeed, the distinction between a permissible and impermissible desire has more to do with its underlying motives than its object. An otherwise acceptable desire for food becomes selfish or merely human if it is the product of calculation or scheming, for example (Chan 1989: 197–211). The existence of morally good desires—such as the desire for rightness—is itself telling, for it suggests that desires are not just tolerable to Zhu but even a valued component of virtuous conduct. If Zhu grants that desires can be either considerations or motives for humane and morally appropriate acts, then he surely allows that virtuous behavior can "issue from desire," and Dai's critique of Zhu's views on desire would appear to hinge on an oversight.

I worry that the debate up to this point has been unfair to both sides. It would be surprising if Zhu did not countenance at least some desires, and we can see that his more carefully formulated remarks suggest that he did. However, it would be almost as surprising if Dai was not aware of this feature of Zhu's thought, given Dai's educational background and the fact that he used true believers in ZHU Xi as a sounding board for his own theories.[21] To the contrary, Dai's philosophical works show him to be attentive to the fact that Zhu distinguished between acceptable and unacceptable desires. He frequently echoes Zhu's language in reserving the locutions "human desires" and "selfish desires" for those deemed

[20] Part of this confusion has to do with the economy of language prized by Confucian scholars, and part with the unspecified scope of the character "desire" (*yu* 欲) as Neo-Confucians use it. When ZHOU Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) asserts that moral agents achieve the right state of mind by being without desires (*wu yu* 無欲), does he mean that we should be without *all* of them, or merely *certain kinds* of them? Would he distinguish between desires as dispositions and desires as occurrent states? (The Neo-Confucians tended to use *yu* in the latter sense, but there are instances of both.) The terseness of Zhou's writings makes it difficult to answer these questions, but given the sophistication of his moral psychology it is hard to imagine that he did not have a well-considered view. See Zhou (1975: Chapter 20).

[21] As an aspirant to the civil service, Dai must have studied Zhu's commentaries in preparation for his several attempts at passing the imperial examination, and Dai's early mentor, JIANG Yong 江永(1681–1762), was an admirer of Zhu. See Yu (1996: 210–229).

bad by Zhu and his philosophical kindred spirits (Dai 1996a: 10.254/148, 19.279/227, 40.327–328/387–389, 42.331–332/411–412, 43.334–336/420–423). A revealing passage in this regard comes from a letter Dai wrote to a reputable devotee of mainstream Neo-Confucian thought[22]:

> Mengzi said, "An extensive territory and a vast population are things a gentleman desires" [*Mengzi* 7A.21]; and "All people have the same desire to be esteemed" [*Mengzi* 6A.17]; as well as "Fish is what I desire; bear's palm is also what I desire. . .. Life is what I desire; rightness is also what I desire" [*Mengzi* 6A.10]. . .. The Song Confucians, deluded by Daoist and Buddhist talk about "desirelessness," explained the one phrase "rightness is what I desire" as "the heart/mind of the way" and as "Heavenly Principle," disparaging the rest as merely "the human heart/mind" and as "human desire." However, desire rightly understood is the wish of one who possesses life to fulfill that life and protect its excellence. (Dai 1968: 22; trans. by Ewell and Struve [de Bary and Lufrano 2000: 50], slight mod.)

Here Dai not only recognizes Zhu's distinction between the desires of Heavenly Principle and the merely human desires, he also gives it an historical account. He asserts that the Song Confucians were under the spell of Daoist and Buddhist views about desire but nevertheless designated a special subset of inclinations—those that come from Heavenly Principle—to legitimize moral drives like the desire for rightness. Dai also invokes the authority of Mengzi to show that the range of acceptable objects of desire is much wider than his Neo-Confucian opponents assume, for Mengzi appears to endorse even the aspiration to rule a powerful state and eat fine foods like bear's palm.[23] He goes on to suggest that desire in its proper sense refers not just to any impulse but to inclinations of a certain, self-aware kind, where one identifies one's life as valuable and aims to nourish life for that reason (a theme that Dai develops elsewhere).[24]

This evidence suggests that we readers and scholars of Neo-Confucian moral thought have much more work to do before we can identify the true point of contention between Dai and orthodox Neo-Confucians. If Zhu does not reject all desires outright, and if Dai does not take him to do so, then what exactly is at stake in this debate about the role of desires in moral conduct? Without claiming to settle the matter once and for all, I submit that the current discussion has already pointed to a likely answer. To give a brief preview of the answer, I think that when Dai defends conduct that "issues from desire," he has in mind desires that are knowingly or explicitly self-interested. Zhu rejects many such desires, and generally assumes that knowingly self-interested desires are "selfish" ones.

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[22] The devotee is the scholar Peng Shaosheng 彭紹升 (1740–1796). Dai's letter to Peng is reprinted in Dai (1968: 17–25). A partial translation by John W. Ewell and Lynn A. Struve can be found in de Bary and Lufrano (2000: 48–51).

[23] Zhu, by contrast, suggests that the desire for delicacies often oversteps the more acceptable want of basic sustenance: "Hunger and thirst are matters of Heavenly Principle, but the want of fine flavors is a human desire" (Zhu: 1986 1.223).

[24] See Dai (1996a: 21.282–283/240–241).

Dai, however, often goes out of his way to say that knowingly self-interested desires are consistent with virtue under many circumstances (primarily when one has also given due consideration to the interests of others). This then touches upon an issue that is indeed hotly contested in the Confucian tradition—namely, the extent to which concern with one's own well-being as such should play a role in a morally good life.

Zhu allows that people can want things that are in their own interest, but he draws careful boundaries around such wants. We had a glimpse of his approach in Wing-tsit Chan's analysis, which suggests that Zhu distinguished between desires more by their motives than by their objects. Desire for food is usually acceptable, unless one schemes to get the food for one's own advantage. Zhu even accepts the drive to pass the civil service examinations, so long as one sets aside thoughts about the prestige and prosperity that a successful examination would bring (Zhu 1986: 1.246–247; Gardner 1990: 194–195). Zhu reserves the term "selfish" (*si*) for desires like the schemer's want of food or the careerist's aspiration to win an official position.

This indicates a fairly consistent way of distinguishing between acceptably self-interested desires and unacceptably self-interested (i.e., selfish) ones. What appears to make the latter sorts of desires "selfish" is that they aim for one's own good *as such*, or *under that description*. This is to be contrasted with desires whose satisfaction just so happens to contribute to one's own good. For Zhu the crucial term is "benefit" (*li* 利), understood in this context as benefit-to-oneself. Many desires that happen to be beneficial are acceptable, but this is because they come directly from Heavenly Principle and therefore prior to any consideration of one's own good. As soon as we begin to consider our own good, however, the desire that emerges is sullied by the "enticements" (*you* 誘) of "external things" (*wu* 物). Zhu particularly stressed this view with respect to explicitly virtuous desires—such as the desire to act in morally appropriate ways—which he regards as extremely sensitive because thoughts of being good are so closely connected to thoughts about the benefits of being good. In his comments on a passage in the *Analects*, Zhu asserts (by way of quoting Yang Shi 楊時 [1053–1135]) that the difference between the gentleman's and the petty person's desire to act rightly is that the latter knows rightness's benefits *as* benefits (知利之為利), while the gentleman does not.[25] For Zhu, then, whether one's desires are selfish or not depends in part on whether one is self-consciously self-interested, or seeking benefit under that description.

By contrast, Dai embraces desires for one's own good as such. In his less loaded parlance, seeking one's own good is simply a matter of seeking to fulfill one's own life (*sui sheng* 遂生), and there is considerable evidence to suggest that Dai conceives of this as a knowingly self-interested pursuit. Seeking to fulfill one's own life presupposes some awareness of oneself as a living creature, and it takes one's self as a direct object of concern. In one remarkable passage Dai

[25] See Zhu's remarks on *Analects* 4.16 in his *Collected Commentary on the Four Books*.

asserts that self-interest ("*si,*" used here in a *non*-pejorative sense) is a type of humane love (*ren* 仁) but directed at one's self (Dai 1996a: 21.283/240–241). Dai argues that the definitive mark of selfishness is the failure to give due consideration to the desires of others. This criterion appears to take no side on the issue of the self-conscious pursuit of one's own interests, for one can want to fulfill one's own life while still considering others' desires to fulfill their own, and one can be entirely without knowingly self-interested desires and yet still fail to consider the desires of others. This has the interesting implication that accomplished Buddhists and Daoists (as Dai understands them) are selfish in their desirelessness, as they cannot give adequate attention to the needs and concerns of others. Dai embraces this implication with enthusiasm (Dai 1996a: 327/388). In short, perhaps not all desires to fulfill one's life are knowingly self-interested, but for Dai clearly a significant share of them are.

It is hard to show with any brevity why Dai thinks self-consciously self-interested desires are so important, but it is worth noting that the *Evidential Analysis* suggests some intriguing and varied answers, two of which I will discuss here. First, the fulfillment of such desires constitutes the larger share of human well-being, at least if we understand the desires as rich in cognitive content. There is satisfaction in passing the civil service examinations, to be sure, but there is significantly more satisfaction to be gained in the knowledge that this will help fulfill one's life in other ways—by providing one with the means to raise children, for example, or in guaranteeing a reliable source of income with which to sustain oneself. Dai thinks that being without the means to fulfill one's life is the greatest evil one can suffer (Dai 1996a: 10.253/146). If we understand life-fulfillment in the way suggested here then his claim seems plausible indeed.[26] Second, having legitimate desires for one's own good as such is necessary to be a good judge of the interests of others. Dai assumes that one cannot truly appreciate the importance of life-fulfilling goods without desiring similar life-fulfilling goods for oneself. The structure of sympathetic concern simply requires it.[27] Moreover, those in positions of authority need to recognize such desires as legitimate in order to give full credit to the pleas of the oppressed

[26] This point assumes that being self-consciously self-interested promotes one's own life-fulfillment or *prudential* good. A stronger claim would be that this sort of self-interest is itself a *moral* good. What could justify such a claim? Some virtue theorists assume that virtues must contribute to the moral agent's own flourishing; many see human flourishing as involving some combination of the agent's own well-being and the exercise of sophisticated cognitive and emotional capacities. A desire for one's own life-fulfillment (as envisioned by Dai) performs both functions: it contributes to the agent's well-being and it exercises some of our most sophisticated capacities, for it asks us to see how things could fit into an overall good life and then strive for them. Such a desire would thus be a plausible candidate for a virtue. If this is Dai's view, then he would appear to follow closely an argument Eirik Harris makes for a virtue of self-love, which, as Harris shows, likely has roots in the thought of Kongzi and Mengzi (Harris 2010).

[27] "There is no [arrangement of] feelings (*qing* 情) such that one could need to fulfill the lives of others without also [wanting to] fulfill one's own life" (Dai 1996a: 10.253/147).

and downtrodden. One of Dai's great worries about Neo-Confucian ideas of moral agency, as we have seen, is that they make it hard for the concerns of the powerless to gain traction in the deliberations of their superiors. Here we see a version of that worry that inspired Dai to some of his more moving protests against Neo-Confucian orthodoxy: the oppressed generally cannot make their case without invoking a conscious desire that their own lives be fulfilled (to "make your case" *is* to draw attention to yourself as a person with interests that should be met). If they protest that they need more food or better shelter, they appear to their superiors as people who want their own good as such. For true believers in Zhu Xi's doctrine, this makes them less sympathetic figures, and would thus give them grounds for dismissing demands for even basic necessities as being motivated by "selfish desires."[28]

In short, when Dai says that the Neo-Confucians condemn human conduct that "issues from desire," he means that they condemn conduct that issues from one's wish to fulfill one's own life. For cognitively sophisticated creatures like human beings, at least, a rich sense of one's own good is a crucial motivation for many such desires. We saw in the letter quoted above that Dai sees this as the meaning of "desire" (*yu*) in its proper sense. Dai's gloss on the phrase "issues from desire" is also consistent with this interpretation: "In every case, all that issues from desire is for the sake of life and nurturance" (Dai 1996a: 10.254/149). In endorsing the cultivation of desires of this kind, he opens the door to ways of life wherein an awareness of oneself as a creature with distinct interests figures prominently, and explicitly self-interested motives are essential. In the context of Song and post-Song Confucianism this is a radical position indeed.

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Bibliography

Although there is a great deal of contemporary literature on Dai Zhen, to date only a sliver of it focuses primarily on his *philosophical* arguments and views, and even less addresses in detail his views on moral deliberation and moral cultivation. Readers interested in further study of Dai's moral thought are encouraged to examine some of the books and articles highlighted below.

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[28] A case in point is Cheng Yi's notorious remark that widows should not be permitted to remarry even if they lack the resources to eat. Cheng suggests that they should regard starvation as extremely small and insignificant (*ji xiao* 極小) when compared with the preservation of their integrity or chastity. See Zhu and Lü (1992: Book 6, Chapter 13); for an English translation see Chan (1967: 177). Thanks to P.J. Ivanhoe for this apt example.

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