Cheng Yi's Moral Philosophy

Huang Yong

Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), also known as Cheng Yichuan 伊川, and his brother Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), are often referred to as "the two Chengs" (*er Cheng* 二程). They are both identified with the group known as the Five Masters of the (Northern) Song period (with the other three being Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 [1016–1073], Zhang Zai 張載 [1020–1077], and Shao Yong 邵庸 [1011–1077]). To the extent that Neo-Confucian philosophy can be characterized as the learning of *li* (*li xue* 理學, normally translated as "principle"), as it is most commonly called in contemporary Chinese scholarship, the two brothers can be properly credited as its founders: it is only in their philosophy that *li* obtains its central position for the first time. Thus, in comparison with classical Confucian philosophy, Neo-Confucian philosophy has a more fully developed metaphysics. However, moral life is still the central concern for Neo-Confucians as for classical Confucians. The metaphysics they develop is to provide an ontological articulation of classical Confucian values, and so it is essentially a moral metaphysics. Thus, in this essay on Cheng Yi, I focus on his moral philosophy, paying particular attention to such issues as why be moral, whether one can be moral, how to be moral, the possibility of a virtue politics, and moral metaphysics.

Cheng Yi was born in Huangpi in what is the present Hubei Province. When young, the two brothers moved quite often as their father, Cheng Xiang, was appointed as a local official at various places. In 1046, Cheng Xiang became acquainted with Zhou Dunyi and sent his two sons to study with Zhou briefly. In 1056, Cheng and his brother followed their father to the capital city Luoyang and started to have scholarly exchanges with their uncle Zhang Zai. In the same year, Cheng Yi wrote the famous essay, "What Was the Learning that Yanzi Loved?" (顏子所好何學) as a response to an examination question at the imperial academy, and started to study at the academy. In 1065, he left Luoyang with his father. In the following years, Cheng Yi spent much time drafting official

Y. Huang (✉)
Department of Philosophy, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA 19530, USA
e-mail: yhuang@kutztown.edu

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documents for his father in various places, until 1072 when they returned to Luoyang. Cheng Yi and his brother then started to accept students, teaching Confucian classics. It was also the time when they had a close connection with Shao Yong. Cheng Yi was appointed as a lecturer at the imperial academy in 1086 but was dismissed a year later. In 1092, Cheng finished drafting his *Commentary on the Book of Change*, which he continued to revise until 1099, when he started to write commentaries on the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Book of Rites*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

The main source to study Cheng Yi's philosophy is his conversations with students, many of whom recorded such conversations. In 1168, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) edited some of these recorded sayings in the Chengs' *Surviving Works* (*Yishu*) in 25 volumes, of which 4 volumes are attributed to Cheng Hao and 11 volumes to Cheng Yi, with the first 10 volumes to both, where in most cases it is not clearly indicated which saying belongs to which brother. In 1173, Zhu Xi edited the Chengs' *External Works* (*Waishu*) in 12 volumes, including those recorded sayings that were circulated among scholars but had not been included in *Yishu* (again, in most cases, it is not indicated which saying belongs to which brother). As Zhu Xi himself acknowledged that the authenticity of such sayings in *Waishu* is mixed, they can be used with caution only. Before Zhu Xi edited these two works, Yang Shi 楊時 (1053–1135), a student of both brothers, rewrote some of these sayings in a literary form in *Excellent Sayings of the Two Chengs* (*Cuiyan*), which mostly represents Cheng Yi's views. Cheng Yi's own writings are collected in the eight volumes (volumes 5–12) of the Chengs' *Collected Writings* (*Wenji*), in Cheng Yi's *Commentary on the* Book of Change (*Yizhuan*), and in the Chengs'*Interpretation of the Classics* (*Jingshuo*) (except for part of volume five that is authored by Cheng Hao and volume eight whose authorship is not indicated, all are authored by Cheng Yi). All these are now conveniently collected in the two-volume edition of *The Works of the Two Chengs* (*Er Cheng Ji*).

Why Be Moral?

The question of why one should be moral has long troubled moral philosophers. The question is puzzling because it does not ask "why should *we* be moral?" which is relatively easy to answer. For example, we can use Thomas Hobbes's argument: if we are not moral to each other, we will be living in the state of nature, in which everyone is at war against everyone else. The question rather asks "why should *I* be moral, particularly if my being immoral to others will not cause others to be equally or even more immoral to me?" Obviously, this is a question raised by an egoist who is first of all concerned with his or her self-interest. As absurd as it might appear,[1] this question has been repeatedly posed, rather seriously, in the

[1] The question has often been regarded as something absurd and therefore to be safely ignored. Stephen Toulmin, for example, argues that, just like the question "why are all scarlet

history of Western philosophy. In the form of "why should I be just," it was put most sharply by Glaucon and his brother Adimantus, as devil's advocates, in Plato's *Republic* (Plato 1963b: 361a–365b). This same question was later raised again by Thomas Hobbes's "irresponsible fool" (Hobbes 1998: 15.4–5; 27.16) and David Hume's "sensible knave" (Hume 1957: 91–121). Of course, Plato (Plato 1963b: 589a-e), Hobbes (Hobbes 1998: 15.4), and Hume (Hume 1957: 102–103), as well as many other philosophers, notably Aristotle and Kant, have each tried to provide an answer to this question. However, none of them seems to be satisfactory, and for this reason it has sometimes been claimed that this question, while intelligible, is unanswerable (Meldon 1948: 455; Copp 1997: 86–87; Nielsen 1989: 299).[2] In this section, I shall discuss CHENG Yi's moral philosophy as the most plausible answer to this question.

Confucian learning is concerned with moral self-cultivation. However, the highest goal of such self-cultivation is joy (*le* 樂). The Neo-Confucian philosophy initiated by CHENG Yi and his brother CHENG Hao is sometimes also called the learning of *dao* (*daoxue* 道學), which, according to FENG Youlan 馮友蘭, "is not merely a kind of knowledge; it is also an enjoyment" (Feng 1995: 5.131). For example, a superior person (*junzi* 君子) is an exemplary person in the Confucian tradition. However, for CHENG Yi, "without joy, one is not qualified to be a superior person" (Cheng and Cheng 2004: *Yishu* 17.181; citations from this source will be indicated with book titles, volume (*juan*) number, and page numbers only hereafter). Similarly, the goal of Confucian self-cultivation is to become a sage, and Cheng claims that, "when one's learning reaches the level of cultivating what one has attained so that one finds joy in it, it becomes clear, bright, lofty, and far-reaching" (*Cuiyan* 1.1189). To understand this joy, Cheng thinks that it is particularly important to understand such sayings as "he does not allow his joy to be affected [by hardship]" (*bu gai qi le* 不改其樂) and "joy lies in them" (*le zai qi zhong* 樂在其中) in the *Analects*.

For Cheng, these two expressions vividly describe the so-called joy of Confucius and Yanzi (*kong yan zhi le* 孔顏之樂), the joy they still felt even when they were living under unfavorable conditions. According to Cheng, "Yanzi's joy was not caused by his eating a scoop of grain, drinking a ladleful of water, or living in a shabby lane. Confucius regarded him as virtuous because he did not allow his poverty to burden his heart/mind and affect his joy" (*Jingshuo* 6.1141). Similarly, Cheng states that Confucius himself was still joyful "even though he had only coarse grain to eat and unboiled water to drink. . .. This does not mean

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things red," it is a tautological question (Toulmin 1964: 162). F.H. Bradley, on the other hand, thinks that it is a self-contradictory question because it asks for self-interested reason to be moral, i.e., to be not self-interested (Bradley 1935: 61–62). However, Kai Nielsen claims that the question makes sense because it really asks "whether it is rational for me to be moral" (Nielsen 1989: 286–287). David Copp also thinks that the question is intelligible as it asks: "does morality override self-interest?" (Copp 1997: 86).

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the topic of why one should be moral, as featured in the history of Western philosophy, see Huang (2008c: 321–330).

that he had joy because he ate coarse grain and drank unboiled water" (*Jingshuo* 6.1145). It was being in accord with moral principles that was the source of Confucius' and Yanzi's joy. As long as one is in accord with moral principles, one can find joy in anything one encounters. In his reply to a student's question about Mencius' statement that "there is no better way to nurture one's heart/mind than by having few desires" (*Mencius* 7B.35), Cheng states:"this is easy to understand, but what deserves our greatest appreciation is his statement that'the principle and rightness please (*yue* 悅) my heart/mind just as meat pleases my palate.' However, what is really important is [for the heart/mind] to experience the pleasure of being in accord with moral principle and rightness in just the same way that the palate takes pleasure in tasting meat" (*Waishu* 12.425). Here Cheng emphasizes that joy comes from one's heart/mind nurtured by moral principle and not from our sense organs when affected by their preferred objects. Thus, in another place commenting on the same passage of *Mencius*, he states that, "in investigating the principle, one should know how to apply one's heart/mind according to greater or lesser urgency. If one arduously exerts oneself without finding joy, how can one nourish the heart/mind?" (*Yishu* 3.66). So, what is crucial is not only to do things according to moral principles, but to find joy in doing so.

Here it is important to see how joy as the highest goal of Confucian self-cultivation is similar to and yet also different from the joy in our common sense understanding. For Cheng, first of all, joy means to be without doubt and worry. For example, he exclaims:"What a joy it is to be without any hesitancy in one's interactions with other human beings" (*Yishu* 18.193). A joyful person is one who has reached the realm of no worry and no doubt. Second, to have joy is to act naturally and not to exert any artificial effort. We should find joy in being in line with rightness and moral principle, but Cheng asks, "why are there people today who have set their mind on rightness and principle and yet cannot feel joy in their heart/mind? This is because they try to help them to grow. One certainly needs to preserve them in one's heart/mind. However, if one exerts too much artificial effort, one will not be doing things naturally but instead be trying to change the natural cause" (*Yishu* 2a.42). In other words, if you need to exert any special effort to do something, you will not feel joy. Only when you act naturally and spontaneously can you feel joy. In the former, it is as if you are using a stick to pick up something and so unavoidably you will feel something unnatural, while in the latter, it is as if you are using your own hand to pick up something and there is nothing uneasy (see *Yishu* 2a.22).

For Cheng, it is in this sense that joy (*le*) and music (*yue*) are closely related. Although pronounced differently, *le* and *yue* share the same Chinese character. In the *Analects*, Confucius states that one's morality is "stimulated by odes, established by rules of propriety, and perfected by music" (*Analects* 8.8). Here, among odes, rules of propriety, and music, Confucius ranks music as the highest. To explain this, Cheng points out that "when'stimulated by odes and established by rules of propriety,' one needs to make an effort, whereas when 'perfected by music,' there is no forced effort involved" (*Yishu* 2a.15). One does

not need to exert any effort because music brings one joy, which is made clear by Mencius: "the essence of music (*yue* 樂) is to enjoy (*le* 樂) the two [humaneness and rightness], naturally resulting in joy (*le* 樂). As soon as joy arises, it cannot be stopped, and one cannot help but dance with the feet and wave with the hands" (*Mencius* 4A.27).

What Cheng means by joy is the same as our common sense understanding: to act without hesitance, without impediment, spontaneously, and naturally. It is, however, also clear that in terms of what brings one joy, Cheng holds a very different view from the common conception of joy. He laments that "people today often find joy in things they should not and cannot find joy in things they should; love things they should not and do not love things they should. This is all because they do not know what is important and what is not important" (*Yishu* 25.317). Normally wealth brings one joy, while poverty causes one pain. However, while Confucians do not deny wealth as a source of joy, one's joy should not come from one's immoral actions. In contrast, the primary source of joy is moral action, and such joy should not be affected by one's poverty or wealth. As a matter of fact, to perform a moral action may require one to endure physical pain or even to sacrifice life. Thus, in the famous passage in which he talks about a farmer who has true knowledge of the pain caused by a tiger, Cheng states,

> One should have the heart/mind that "has a feeling of being in hot water when seeing something evil." If so, a person will be truly different. . .. Virtue is something one gets from one's inner heart/mind. When one is virtuous, there is no need for any forced effort, although a learner does need to exert such effort. In ancient times, there were people who were willing to sacrifice their bodies and lives. If they do not have genuine knowledge, how could they do it? One needs truly to understand that rightness is more important than life. (*Yishu* 15.147)

Of course, poverty and sacrifice of life do not in themselves bring one joy. They cause pain to sages just as they do to common people. However, if such poverty and sacrifice can be avoided only by violating moral principles, for sages, it is more painful to avoid them. In contrast, one will feel joy by enduring poverty and sacrifice if this is necessary for one to abide by moral principle. This sense of joy is very different from our common sense understanding.

Thus, Cheng's answer to the question "Why be moral?" is that it is a joy to be moral. Is this answer enough to motivate those who pose the question now to act morally? In one sense, it is: it is entirely rational for them to perform moral action, since it is a joy to do so. In another sense, however, it is not. The person who poses the question may further ask: even though I can feel joy in being moral, why do I have to be moral, since I can also feel joy in being immoral? Cheng's answer to this question is surprisingly simple: to be moral is characteristic of being human.

According to Cheng, "what makes human beings different from animals is that humans have the nature of humanity and rightness. So if one loses the heart/mind and does not want to recover it, the person is no different from an animal" (*Yishu* 25.323). This position, of course, is consistent with Mencius'

view: "whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human; whoever is devoid of the heart of shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of courtesy and modesty is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human" (*Mencius* 2A.6). Elsewhere, Mencius said that "the distinction between humans and beasts is very little. Inferior persons abandon this difference, whereas superior persons preserve it" (*Mencius* 4B.19). When a student asked whether Mencius meant that the difference between superior persons and inferior persons lies precisely in preserving or abandoning this little difference between humans and beasts, Cheng replied affirmatively:"Indeed. Humans have the heavenly principle only. If one cannot preserve it, how can one be a human?" (*Yishu* 18.214–215). Immediately after this, a student asked about Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) alleged comment: even if one has a snake-like body, cow-like head, and beak-like mouth but has a distinctive heart, how can we regard the person as non-human? On the other hand, even if there is someone with a rosy face aglow, who has a human appearance but a heart of a beast, how can it be regarded as a human? Although Cheng says that he cannot remember this passage clearly, he agrees that "the only thing a human being must do is to preserve the heavenly principle" (*Yishu* 18.215); when this heavenly principle "is lost to a small extent, one becomes a barbarian; when it is lost to a great extent, one becomes a beast" (*Yishu* 17.177). So, ultimately, Cheng's answer to the question "Why should I be moral?" is: because you are a human being. It is rational for a human being to seek joy. It is true that joy can be sought either by following moral principle or by doing immoral things. However, since the distinctive mark of being human is the possession of a moral heart, and a human being is essentially a moral being, one should seek joy in being moral.

Can One Be Moral?

The question "Can I be moral?" is related to the issue of *akrasia* or weakness of the will or incontinence. While the issue of *akrasia* belongs to a broader theory of action, our concern here is primarily with its moral implication. Often we hear it said that "I know it is the right thing to do but I just cannot do it" or "I know it is the wrong thing to do but I just cannot help but do it." According to Donald Davidson—who has single-handedly determined the general direction of contemporary philosophical discussion on the issue of weakness of the will—"in doing x an agent acts incontinently if and only if: (a) the agent does x intentionally; (b) the agent believes there is an alternative action y open to him; and (c) the agent judges that, all things considered, it would be better to do y than to do x" (Davidson 1970: 22). For example, if a person knows that, all things considered, it is better to refrain from smoking, which he believes he can, and yet still smokes intentionally, this person then acts akratically. Against the Socratic tradition that denies the possibility of weakness of the will (Plato

1963a: 358b–365d; Aristotle 1963: Book VII, Chapter 3), Davidson clearly affirms that weakness of the will is possible, and he sets it as his task to explain *how* it is possible (Davidson 1970, 1982). Davidson's view has since dominated contemporary discussion of this issue (McIntyre 1990: 386; Audi 1979, 1990).[3]

Although technically the issue of weakness of the will does not arise for Confucians, the relation of knowledge and action central to this issue is also central to the Confucian tradition. If weakness of the will is possible, then one may claim that although I know I should be moral, I may be unable to be moral. For this reason, holding a view of knowledge as prior to and implying action, Cheng effectively denies the possibility of weakness of the will. He makes it clear that knowledge will necessarily lead to action. Although there are people who can act (either blindly or under coercion) without knowing, there is no one who knows and yet cannot act. Thus, while one should not refrain from acting before one knows, "one's forced (*mianqiang* 勉強) action cannot be long lasting" (*Yishu* 18.187). So what is important is to acquire knowledge: "When knowledge is profound, action will be thorough. No one ever knows without being able to act. If one knows without being able to act, the knowledge is superficial. Because they know the danger, people do not eat poisonous herbs when hungry, and do not tread on water and fire. People do evil things simply because they lack knowledge" (*Yishu* 15.164). All those who do not act appropriately lack the proper knowledge, and all those who have the proper knowledge will necessarily act. It is a contradiction, on his view, to claim that one knows and yet is unable to act: "So if one knows what is immoral and still does it, this is not genuine knowledge. If it is genuine knowledge, one will certainly not do the immoral thing" (*Yishu* 2a.16). Cheng's view, that one who knows what is good will necessarily do good and people do evil things only because they do not know, seems contrary to common sense. Our common sense assumes that one has two different faculties: the intellect, which recognizes what something is, and the will, which decides what is to be done. So it is possible that one may have a perfect knowledge of something (the function of the intellect) and yet decides to not act according to this knowledge or even act against this knowledge (the job of the will).

In order to make the counter-argument and explain apparent phenomena in our everyday life that seem to suggest the existence of weakness of the will, Cheng distinguishes between two senses of knowledge, in three different ways. First, there is a distinction between profound knowledge and shallow knowledge. For example, he argues that "it is not that people do not know. The reason that one is not willing to act is that knowledge is shallow and belief is not firm" (*Yishu* 23.305). So he acknowledges the possibility of someone who knows and yet does not act according to this knowledge. However, on his view, this is a shallow knowledge; it is not something one firmly believes in. When knowledge

[3] For a more detailed discussion of the issue of weakness of the will in the Western philosophy, see Huang (2008a: 439–444).

is profound and one firmly believes in it, one cannot fail to act upon this knowledge. For Cheng, shallow knowledge cannot be regarded as knowledge in its proper sense as it does not dispose one to act.

Second, he makes the distinction between genuine knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知) and ordinary knowledge (*chang zhi* 常知):

> Genuine knowledge is different from ordinary knowledge. There was a farmer who had been hurt by a tiger. Upon hearing that the tiger was hurting people, everyone was scared, but the farmer's composure was different from everyone else's. Tigers can hurt people; this is something even children know, but they do not have genuine knowledge. Genuine knowledge is the kind that the farmer has. Therefore a person who knows that something is not good and still does it does not have genuine knowledge. Had one had genuine knowledge, one would not have done it. (*Yishu* 2a; 16; see also *Yishu* 18; 188)

This distinction between genuine knowledge and common knowledge is the same distinction between profound knowledge and shallow knowledge. Thus, in another place where he uses the same example of a tiger, he first says that "knowledge is all different. While some is profound, some is shallow"; then, after telling the story of a tiger and farmer, he concludes that this farmer

> has genuine knowledge of the tiger. The profound knowledge of a learner is similar.... A learner ought to seek genuine knowledge; only then can one claim to have the knowledge and act naturally. When I was twenty years old, I could interpret the Classics without much difference from the way I am doing today. However, what I get from the Classics today is very different from what I got then. (*Yishu* 18.188)

As Cheng often used the story of a tiger and a farmer to illustrate genuine knowledge, scholars tend to think that his distinction between genuine knowledge and ordinary knowledge is one between knowledge from direct experience and that from indirect experience.[4] For Cheng, however, although genuine knowledge must be from direct experience, not all knowledge from direct experience is genuine knowledge. Genuine knowledge is from a special kind of direct experience: inner experience. This is clear from Cheng's above discussion about a learner's genuine knowledge and his own experience with the interpretation of the Classics. It is only in this sense of knowledge that he claims that "with genuine knowledge, no one will fail to act" (*Waishu* 6.388).

However, the most important and also most controversial distinction that Cheng makes is the one between knowledge of/as virtue (*de xing zhi zhi* 德性之知) and knowledge from hearing and seeing (*wen jian zhi zhi* 聞見之知), first developed by Zhang Zai 張載. For Cheng, "knowledge from seeing and hearing is not knowledge of/as virtue. It results from the contact between one thing and another thing and therefore is not internal. The knowledge of those erudite and skillful persons belongs to this type of knowledge. Knowledge of/as virtue

[4] For example, Pang Wangli argues that "genuine knowledge is from direct experience and originates from the heart/mind, whereas ordinary knowledge is from indirect experience. Genuine knowledge comes from life experience and practice, whereas ordinary knowledge comes from hearsay" (Pang 1992: 152).

does not rely upon hearing and seeing" (*Yishu* 25. 317). In this distinction, whereas knowledge from seeing and hearing is external knowledge (whether from direct experience or indirect experience), knowledge of/as virtue is internal knowledge coming from inner experience. Thus, Cheng claims that "learning, generally speaking, cannot be obtained by knowledge from hearing. One can obtain it only by its being apprehended in one's own heart/mind (*mo shi xin tong* 默識心通). If a learner wants to learn something, the learner has to be sincere in seeking the illumination from the principle. The best way to get it is the sudden enlightenment" (*Yishu* 17.178). Because it is internal, it is important to get it by oneself (*zi de* 自得) and not to be imposed upon from the outside, as it cannot be communicated by words (*Cuiyan* 2.1253).

Zi de became an important concept for Cheng.[5] This concept derives from Mencius, who says that "superior persons explore deeply into *dao* in order to get it by themselves (z*i de*). When they get it by themselves, they will be at ease in it; when they are at ease in it, they can draw deeply upon it; when they can draw deeply upon it, they can rely on it to deal with everything properly. For this reason, superior persons want to get it by themselves" (*Mencius* 4B.14). Cheng uses this Mencian idea of getting *dao* by oneself to explain the idea of knowledge of/as virtue. Sages can of course teach us about moral principles, but unless we really grasp it from our own heart/mind, it remains merely knowledge of hearing and seeing, which will not be able to motivate us to act according to such moral principles. Therefore, in his view, "nothing is more important in learning than to get it by oneself. Because one does not get it from outside, it is called self-getting" (*Yishu* 25.316).

Zi de requires active reflection on one's inner experience: "It is easy to learn but difficult to know; it is easy to know but difficult to know by one's inner experience" (*ti er de zhi* 體而得之) (*Yishu* 25.321). Here the word *ti* 體, through which one can get knowledge of/as virtue by oneself, is extremely important for Cheng in particular and for Confucian self-cultivation in general. In recent years, Tu Weiming has written extensively on the conception of *tizhi* 體知, knowledge or knowing through *ti* 體 (see various articles in Tu 2002). While literally the word *ti* means "body," as Tu correctly points out, its meaning is not exhausted by this English word. Of course, knowledge of/as virtue will necessarily be manifested in the body, which was pointed out by Mencius (*Mencius* 7A.21). This is also what Cheng states:"whatever one gains within will necessarily be manifested without" (*Yishu* 18.185). However, this is still related to Cheng's view that one who has knowledge will necessarily act upon that knowledge.

[5] In his study of Neo-Confucianism, de Bary devotes a whole chapter to this idea in his book, *Learning for One's Self*. On his view, *zide*—which he translates as "getting it by or for oneself"—has two important senses: "One, relatively low-keyed, is that of learning or experiencing some truth for oneself and deriving inner satisfaction therefrom. Here *zide* has the meaning of'learned to one's satisfaction,' 'self-contented,' 'self-possessed.' The other sense of the term is freighted with deeper meaning: 'getting it or find the Way in oneself" (De Bary 1991: 43); and he relates this second sense to the one used in *Mencius* 4B.14.

Here we are concerned with *ti* through which one's knowledge is gained in the first place. Tu Weiming points out that

> recognition through *ti* (*tiren* 體認), awareness through *ti* (*ticha* 體察), justification through *ti* (*tizheng* 體證), understanding through *ti* (*tihui* 體會), tasting through *ti* (*tiwei* 體味), appreciation through *ti* (*tiwan* 體玩), inquiry through *ti* (*tijiu* 體究), and knowledge through *ti* (*tizhi* 體知) are all very different from knowledge, observation, verification, taste, and understanding in general sense. (Tu 2002: 331–332)

Tu correctly warns against understanding *knowledge* from *ti* as something one gets from one's body. However, he does not clearly tell us what this *ti* means. For Cheng, the word *ti* here is used both as a noun and as verb. First, as a noun, it refers to *xin* 心, one's heart/mind, which Mencius calls *dati* 大體, literally "the great body," in contrast to our physical body, which he calls *xiaoti* 小體, literally "the small body" (*Mencius* 6A.15).[6] That is why Cheng says in the previously quoted passage that one can obtain it only by its being "apprehended in one's own heart/mind" (*mo shi xin tong* 默識心通). In his commentary on *The Doctrine of Mean*, he contrasts knowledge of/as virtue with knowledge from hearing and seeing, as the latter "is not what one gets from *xin* (heart/mind)" (*Jingshuo* 8.1154). Second, as a verb, *ti* refers to the activity of the heart/mind. It is extremely important to understand the "heart" part of the *xin* in its role in getting knowledge of/as virtue. Knowledge from hearing and seeing is not merely something one gets from one's sense organs. It also requires the "mind" part of the *xin* to play its role, as it is something that one needs to understand, justify, and prove. However, only when knowledge is also grasped by the "heart" part of the *xin* can it become knowledge of/as virtue, knowledge that one not only possesses but is also ready to act upon.

From the above discussion, deep knowledge, genuine knowledge, and knowledge of/as virtue is the sort of knowledge one gains through one's inner experience, understood by one's mind, grasped by one's heart, and therefore is knowledge that disposes one to act accordingly. Shallow knowledge, common knowledge, and knowledge from hearing and seeing is the sort of knowledge one gains through external experience. Even if it is understood by the mind, it is not grasped by the heart and therefore does not incline one to act accordingly. The so-called *akrate* or weak-willed person, on this view, is one who has knowledge only in the latter sense. Since knowledge in the latter sense, strictly speaking, cannot be called knowledge, we can say that the weak-willed person acts from ignorance.[7] However, genuine knowledge, profound knowledge, or knowledge of/as virtue, which makes it possible for one to take delight in being

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[6] It is interesting to note that, while in the Western philosophical tradition, body and mind are usually considered as two separate entities, in this Confucian tradition, they are both regarded as *ti*: one is the small *ti* and one is the great *ti*.

[7] Thus, although it is wrong for Feng Richang 馮日昌 to claim that "knowledge from hearing and seeing is what Cheng Yi valued most" (Feng 1991: 175–177), as well as for Lu Lianzhang 盧連章 and Chen Zhongfan 陳鍾凡 to claim that these two types of knowledge are equally important (see Lu 2001: 142 and Chen 1996: 104), there is still a distinction between a person

moral, is something that everyone can get as long as one tries. So everyone not only should and also can be moral. For Cheng, the difference between superior persons and inferior persons is only that the former make an effort to acquire the moral knowledge through their own hearts/minds, whereas the latter do not make such effort. Moreover, there is such a difference not because superior persons are endowed with the ability that the inferior persons do not have. Rather it is because inferior persons give up on themselves. Thus, in his commentary on the *Book of Change*, when asked why there are people who cannot be transformed, Cheng Yi replied:

> If one cultivates oneself to become good, there is no one who cannot be changed. Even those who are extremely unintelligent can also gradually make moral progress. Only those who lack self-confidence and do not trust themselves (*zibao* 自暴) and those who abandon themselves and do not want to make any effort (*ziqi* 自棄) cannot be transformed to enter the *dao* even if they are surrounded by sages. These are what Confucius refers to as the stupid below. (*Zhouyi Cheng shi zhuan* 4.956)[8]

How to Be Moral

Most moral theories we are familiar with advocate a common morality, as they assume that moral agents and moral patients are similar in all morally relevant aspects. For example, the moral imperative, "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you," commonly known as the "Golden Rule," and its negative formulation: "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you," sometimes also called the "Silver Rule," are based on the idea that what I as a moral agent like or dislike is precisely what others as recipients of my actions, whoever they are, like or dislike. This idea on which the Golden Rule, in both its positive and negative formulations, is grounded is problematic. As Alan Gewirth points out,

> the agent's wishes for himself *qua* recipient may not be in accord with his recipient's own wishes as to how he is to be treated. . . . Thus. . . this may inflict gratuitous suffering on [the recipient]. . . . For example, a person who likes others to quarrel with him or

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with knowledge of hearing and seeing and one who is without this knowledge, for one's knowledge of hearing and seeing can be transformed into knowledge of/as virtue. It is in this sense that Qian Mu 錢穆 pointed out that "it is not that we do not need knowledge from hearing and seeing; it is rather that we need the effort of thinking over and above hearing and seeing" (Qian 2001: 68). This, however, does not mean that all knowledge of/as virtue comes from knowledge of hearing and seeing, as Wen Weiyao 溫偉耀 argues (Wen 1996: 158). For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between these two types of knowledge, see Huang (2008a: 449–451).

[8] It is in this connection particularly interesting to see the unique interpretation Cheng Yi gives of two controversial passages in the *Analects*: "People can be made to follow [the way] but cannot be made to know it" (8.9); and "Only the wise above and stupid below cannot be transformed into each other" (17.3). For a detailed discussion of this interpretation in contrast to the common interpretations, see Huang (2008b).

> intrigue with him would be authorized by the golden rule to quarrel with others or involve them in network of intrigue regardless of their own wishes in the matter. (Gewirth 1980: 133)[9]

It is true that there are numerous expressions of the Golden Rule in classical Confucianism as well. In its negative form, Confucius asks us: "Do not do unto others what you do not want to be done to yourself" (*Analects* 15.24); in its positive form, Confucius tells us that "a person of *ren*, desiring to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others and, wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent" (*Analects* 6.28). In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, after a similar statement, "what you do not wish others to do to you, do not do to them," Confucius says:

> There are four things in the way of the superior man, none of which I have been able to do. To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To serve my ruler as I would like my ministers to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To serve my elder brothers as I would expect my younger brothers to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me: that I have not been able to do. (*Zhongyong* 23; in Chan 1962: 101)

Finally, in the *Great Learning,* there is the following passage:

> What a man dislikes in his superiors, let him not show it in dealing with his inferiors; what he dislikes in those in front of him, let him not show it in preceding those who are behind; what he dislikes in those behind him, let him not show it in following those in front of him; what he dislikes in those on his right, let him not apply it to those on the left; and what he dislikes in those on the left, let him not apply it to those on the right. (*Daxue* 10; in Chan 1962: 92)

For Cheng, however, the Golden Rule behind these various expressions is not central to Confucianism. Confucius says that "there is one thing that goes through my teachings" (*Analects* 4.15). What Zengzi says, in the same chapter of the *Analects*, that this one thing is nothing but the Golden Rule, has been commonly accepted as the correct interpretation of what Confucius had in mind about this one thread. However, Cheng claims that this one thing that goes through Confucius' teaching is not the Golden rule but *ren* (*Yishu* 23.307). Cheng acknowledges that the Golden Rule is indeed "not far from *dao*" (*wei dao bu yuan* 違道不遠), is "close to *ren*" (*jin hu ren* 近乎仁), is "the doorway to *ren*" (*ru ren zhi men* 入仁之門), and is "a way to practice *ren*" (*ren zhi fang* 仁之方) (*Yishu* 7.97), but he insists that it is not *ren*. Why? "Because it takes one's own likes and dislikes as criteria in one's interactions with others, and so it has not reached the level of selflessness (*wuwo* 無我)" (*Yishu* 22b.275). For Cheng, a person of *ren* is selfless; and when one is selfless, one can deal with others according to their standard and not one's own.

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[9] For a more detailed discussion of the problem of the Golden Rule as well as its plausible alternative, see Huang (2005b). For a discussion of the alternative in relation to Confucianism in general and to the Cheng brothers in particular, see Huang (2005a).

The Golden Rule can be a way to practice *ren* because, on the one hand, although there are differences between moral agents and moral patients, often there are also similarities; and when such similarities exist, the Golden Rule can be practiced. On the other hand, it is much more difficult to deal with others according to their likes and dislikes than according to one's own likes and dislikes, as one needs to know the unique likes and dislikes one's patients may have. So when nothing or not enough is known about the object of one's action and some action has to be taken, one may practice the Golden Rule as the second best way, a way that is near to *ren* but is not *ren*. This practice itself can become a way to learn about others (to see whether one's own likes and dislikes are indeed shared by others).

For this reason, instead of the Golden Rule, Cheng pays more attention to the idea of love with distinctions, implicit in the *Analects* and explicit in the *Mencius*. This idea is commonly understood to mean that there should be different degrees of love for different kinds of people: stronger love for one's family and weaker love for others; stronger love for one's immediate neighbors and weaker love for strangers; stronger love for virtuous people and weaker love for evil people; stronger love for humanity and weaker love for other living beings. For example, even Tu Weiming, the most prominent Confucian today, claims that "the responsibility to care for one's own family, clan, kin, neighborhood, village, county, society, nation, world, cosmos is differentiated into varying degrees of intensity" (Tu 1999: 29). This interpretation seems to have some textual evidence in Mencius' debate with the Mohists. In Mencius' view, "the Mohist idea of universal love amounts to a denial of one's father" (*Mencius* 3B.9). Thus, in response to Yizi's 夷子 Mohist conception of "universal love without distinction," Mencius asked: "Does Yizi truly believe that a man loves his brother's son in the same way as he loves his neighbor's new-born baby?" (*Mencius* 3B.9). It is here that we have the classical expression of the Confucian conception of love with distinctions implied in Mencius' criticism of the Mohist idea of love without distinction.

Cheng, however, provides a different and more plausible interpretation of love with distinctions with his idea of "one principle with different manifestations (*li yi fen shu* 理一分殊)." Cheng develops this idea in his response to a concern raised by one of his students, Yang Shi 楊時, regarding Zhang Zai's 張載 "Western Inscription" ("Xi ming" 西銘). At the beginning of this text, Zhang claims:

> Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. . . . Respect the aged—this is the way to treat them as elders should be treated. Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak—this is the way to treat them as the young should be treated. . . . When the time comes, to keep oneself from harm—this is the care of a son. To rejoice in heaven and to have no anxiety—this is filial piety at its purest. (Zhang 1978: 62; English translation in Chan 1962: 497)

Apparently struck by the first few sentences here which emphasize the unity with ten thousand things, YANG Shi worried that ZHANG Zai may have succumbed to the Mohists' mistaken doctrine of universal love without distinctions.[10] In response, Cheng makes it clear that "the'Western Inscription' has the same function as Mencius' view of human nature as good and his notion of nourishing one's vital force. This is nothing that the Mohists can match"; and immediately after this Cheng develops his idea of *li yi fen shu*:

> "Western Inscription" explains one principle with various manifestations, whereas Mozi insisted on two roots without distinction. The problem with various manifestations (*fen shu* 分殊) [without the one principle] is that private desires will prevail and *ren* will be lost, while the problem with [the one principle] without various manifestations is universal love without rightness. (*Wenji* 9.609)

On the one hand, Cheng claims that Confucian love is a universal love: love for all people and things, thus *li yi* (one principle). On the other hand, he claims that if love for different people and things is to be appropriate, it must be differentiated, thus *fen shu* (many manifestations). On his view, those sentences in the "Western Inscription" that emphasize one's unity with the ten thousand things show why love should be universal, while such examples as respect for the aged, deep love for the orphaned and the weak, parents' care of their children, and children's filial piety toward their parents show that love for different people should be differentiated. In other words, the Confucian idea of love with distinction, according to Cheng, is not love of different degrees but love of different kinds. It does not mean that one should love some people more than others. Rather it means that one should love different people in different ways, each appropriate to its distinct object. If, on the one hand, we pay attention only to the one principle (*li yi* 理一) and ignore its diverse manifestations (*fen shu*), we will commit the Mohist mistake of universal love without distinctions: loving all in the same way without taking into consideration the uniqueness of each object of love; on the other hand, if we pay attention only to a particular manifestation of love and ignore the one principle of which it is manifestation, we may commit the Yangist mistake of self-love, as we will not be able to extend this love to others.[11]

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[10] Indeed, the Mohist term for universal love, *jian ai* 兼愛, is used by Zhang in a different passage:"Nature is the one source of ten thousand things. It is not something that only I have privately. Only great persons can fully realize the *dao*. Therefore, their establishing [themselves] must be establishing all, their knowing must be knowing all, and their love must be universal love (*jian ai* 兼愛)" (Zhang 1978: 21).

[11] It is important to note that, while Cheng's emphasis on *fen shu* makes him a moral particularist, his emphasis on *li yi* sets him apart from that group, particularly the more radical ones who undermine the significance of moral experience. For example, stressing moral particularity, John McDowell argues that from our moral experiences we can get nothing but "the capacity to get things right occasion by occasion" (McDowell 1998: 94); and Jonathan Dancy maintains that "there is nothing than one brings to the new situation other than a *contentless* ability to discern what matters where it matters, an ability whose presence in us is explained by our having undergone a successful moral education" (Dancy 1993: 50; emphasis added). For Cheng however, because of *li yi*, our appropriate love in one

Understanding love with distinctions in light of one principle with various manifestations better enables us to understand Mencius' distinction between three kinds of love:"a superior person loves things but is not humane (*ren*) to them. He is humane (*ren*) to people in general but is not affectionate (*qin*親) to them. He is affectionate to his parents, humane to people, and loves all things" (*Mencius* 7A.45). Here, love, *ren*, and affection should not be understood as three different degrees of the same love, but as three different kinds of love, appropriate to three different kinds of moral patients: things, humans, and parents. In this connection, the two different attitudes Confucius recommends toward two different kinds of people—"virtue" toward virtuous people and "uprightness" toward bad people—should also be understood as two different kinds of love appropriate to these two different kinds of people. It is also in this sense that we can understand why Confucius claims that "only a person of *ren* knows how to love people and hate people" (*Analects*: 4.14). In other words, from the Confucian point of view, "hate," just as "love," is a kind of love in a more general sense. On the one hand, the most fundamental meaning of *ren* is to love, and so the person of *ren* who knows how to love and hate is a loving person; on the other hand, as Wing-tsit Chan has pointed out, "hate" here does not have any connotation of ill will (Chan 1962: 25 n. 53). It is, rather, one's profound feeling of regret that one's beloved moral patient lacks what he or she or it should have. So the reason that Confucians want to make distinctions or discriminations is not to decide whom or what we should love or love more and whom or what we should not love or love less; it is rather to decide how to love everyone and everything in ways most appropriate to the person or thing.

To love different people and things in ways appropriate to them, one has to learn about the uniqueness of the object of one's love. In this sense, although Cheng would agree with Mencius that *ren*, of which various kinds of love are manifestations, is internal to the person who loves, the actual shape the love takes is determined externally by the object of one's love. Thus, commenting on the famous statement of Confucius that "to overcome oneself and return to propriety is *ren"* (*Analects* 12.1), Cheng states that to overcome oneself is "to treat things according to things themselves and not according to ourselves" (*Yishu* 11.125). Obviously, true love cannot be a transcendent love. It has to be based on one's empirical knowledge of the particular object of love. Otherwise, one would not be able to know the uniqueness of the object of love and therefore would not be able to love the object in an appropriate way.[12] For Cheng, this is the main distinction between superior persons and inferior persons: "the

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situation, for example our love for our parents, can teach us how to love in a different situation, for example our love for our neighbors' parents, in far more than a contentless way.

[12] Here I agree with David Wong that "loving well requires more of a knowing how than a knowing that. It involves being able to yield to the other's wishes and claims at the right time and in the right way, and being able to refuse these wishes and claims at the right time and in the right way" (Wong 1989: 255–256).

anger of inferior persons comes from themselves, while the anger of the superior persons comes from things [they are angry at]" (*Yishu* 23.306).[13]

From Virtue Ethics to Virtue Politics

Our examination of Cheng's moral philosophy has focused on personal self-cultivation: Why should one be moral? Can one be moral? How can one be moral? In this context, it is important to examine critically a common observation: Confucianism is strong as a personal ethics but weak as a political philosophy. Obviously, the validity of this observation depends on the appropriate distinction between the personal and the political. The distinction is legitimate to a certain degree. The moral agent that personal ethics is concerned with is the individual; it is about what an individual person should be and/or do. In contrast, the moral agent that political philosophy is concerned with is society or, more particularly, the government; it is about how society should be structured and run. However, this does not mean that the personal and the political are separate, as many contemporary political liberals believe. Liberalism claims that the political is not personal, and the personal is not political. It claims that political philosophy is concerned only with setting up the rules of games that people play in the public square. It has no business to do with what kinds of people, good or bad, virtuous or vicious, altruistic or egoistic, are out there playing the games, as long as they follow the rules.[14] Many contemporary feminist thinkers have challenged the liberal idea that the personal is not political, as family relationships, for example, are not entirely personal things but are very much political (Okin 1989, 2005). However, they tend to agree on the other side of the same liberal coin: the political is not personal: the type of political institution will not affect the kinds of persons living within it.[15] While

[13] This is similar to what Aristotle says: "Those who are not angry at the thing they should be angry at are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the right way, at the right time, or with the right persons" (*Aristotle* 1963: 1126a.5–6).

[14] This liberal position is based on the time-honored idea that even a band of robbers needs just rules to be effective. For example, in his *Republic*, Plato says that "utter rascals completely unjust are completely incapable of effective action" (Plato 1963a: 352e). Later, Saint Augustine makes a similar point: "Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of confederacy; the booty is divided by the law agreed upon" (Augustine 1963: IV.4). At the center of the liberal tradition, Immanuel Kant (1965) also claims that "however harsh it must sound, the problem of establishing a state is soluble even for a nation of devils (as long as they are rational)" (cited in Höffe 1992: 142).

[15] For example, although Rawls acknowledges that his principles of justice are chosen by people in the original position who are self-interested (Rawls 1999: 12), such liberals as Robert Audi and Edwin Baker argue that such principles will not make all people self-interested: self-interested people are not allowed to go beyond the bounds of the principles, whereas altruistic people can decide to contribute their just shares to others (Baker 1985: 917–920; Audi 1989: 294).

some communitarians (Sandel 1982: 34) and the so-called academic Marxists (Cohen 2002: 119; Murphy 1999: 878) are strong in challenging this liberal idea, they are weak in providing feasible alternatives. In this section I shall discuss Cheng's moral philosophy as one that links the personal and political by focusing on his conception of propriety (*li* 禮).

The importance of *li* in the Confucian tradition is too obvious to ignore and much scholarship has been devoted to it. However, scholarly discussions of Confucian *li* so far have largely been informed by Xunzi's formulation. This is quite understandable. It is almost a consensus among scholars that, of Confucius' two most important ideas, *ren* 仁 (humaneness) is most profoundly developed by Mencius, whereas *li* is most systematically expounded by Xunzi. I shall emphasize that even though Mencius did not have as comprehensive a theory of *li* as that of Xunzi, he had quite a different understanding of it, which was later fully developed by Song and Ming Neo-Confucians. Particularly striking about this different understanding of *li* are the following points: (1) The goal of government by propriety is to ensure that people will take delight in following rules of propriety instead of regarding them as external restrictions forced upon them; (2) external rules of propriety, while aiming to regulate people's feelings, actually have their origin in people's natural feelings; and (3) such natural feelings have their metaphysical foundation in principle (*li* 理), the ultimate reality of the world.[16]

First, propriety is usually understood as rules to regulate people's lives. In this sense, their function is similar to that of laws. Of course, the purpose of punitive law, unless used as a provisional supplement to rules of propriety, is to threaten people so that they dare not do what laws prohibit. Thus, it is because of fear of punishment rather than from a sense of shame that people do not break the law. This is the main distinction Confucius tries to make between the two in the famous *Analects* passage: "If you lead people with political measures (*zheng* 政) and keep them in order with punitive laws, common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame; if you lead them with virtue (*de* 德), and keep them in order with propriety (*li* 禮), they will have a sense of shame and not make trouble" (*Analects* 2.3). Even with this distinction between rules of propriety and laws, however, most people still need to make some effort to follow the rules of propriety. As we have seen, *Analects* 8.8 states that moral actions "start from the odes [the *Book of Odes*], are established by propriety [the *Book of Propriety*], and are completed in music (the *Book of Music*)," Cheng maintains that efforts still need to be made with regard to odes and propriety, while no such efforts are needed with music (*Yishu* 1.5). Again, in explaining the passage in *Analects* 6.27, "The superior person is versed in learning and is restrained with rules of propriety and thus will not overstep what is right,"

[16] So for Cheng, *li* (propriety) means three different things: external rules, human feelings, and human nature (which is identical to *li* [principle]). I hold a different view from Wong Wai-ying, according to whom, ultimately *li* means external rules and therefore has only an auxiliary function in moral development in Cheng's philosophy (Wong 2003).

Cheng points out that "this is not what one gets by oneself (*zide* 自得), and so one cannot but feel some reluctance in compliance with it" (*Yishu* 6.95).

Unlike the laws of legalism in ancient China and in contemporary Western societies, Confucian rules of propriety do not simply compel people to do good and to avoid doing wrong. They are, rather, tools to cultivate the good human nature inherent in everyone so that people will eventually be able to follow the rules of propriety without making any extraordinary effort. Thus, Cheng states: "If one has cultivated a habit of not looking, listening, talking, or acting against propriety, how can one feel *li* as external rules?" (*Yishu* 6.82). This is the stage that Cheng relates to the joy that is characteristic of music. In the above-mentioned *Analects* passage (8.8), in addition to odes and propriety, Confucius also mentions music (*yue*). Thus, commenting on "completed with music," Cheng says that music makes one feel joy in following the rules of propriety: one "will spontaneously wave one's hands and dance" (*Yishu* 11.128). At that point, the rules of propriety are no longer felt to be something imposed from outside to constrain one's inner feelings, but have become something internal to motivate a person's actions. Just like a person who dances to music with naturalness and joy, so a person performs moral actions without any awareness of external rules requiring him or her to perform such actions. In contrast, one enjoys the inner pleasure in performing such actions. Thus, Cheng points out, "the complete transformation means one's realization of the oneness between the principle and one's self. Before the transformation, one acts as if using a ruler to measure things and so some errors are unavoidable. After the transformation, one's self is the ruler and the ruler is oneself" (*Yishu* 15.156). In another place, instead of the ruler, he uses the analogy of a scale to explain the rules of propriety: "Without a scale, one has no way to know how much a thing weighs. However, sages know how much a thing weighs without using [external] scales: sages themselves are scales" (*Waishu* 6; 384).

Second, *li* for Cheng is also one's inner feeling. In the above, we have seen *li* as external rules for action, which moral cultivation internalizes. For Cheng, however, the source of such rules is not external. Of course, it is sages who established these rules. Yet, following Mencius, Cheng argues that "the sages established rules of propriety *according to* human feelings" (*yuan ren qing* 緣人情) (*Yishu* 6.87; my emphasis). In other words, rules of propriety are not merely to cultivate human feelings; they also originate in human feelings. For Cheng, "Everything has its own rule. That of fathers culminates in kindness, that of sons in filial piety, that of kings in humanness (*ren*), and that of ministers in reverence. . .. Sages can have a well-ordered society, not because they create rules for things, but because they let everything follow its own rule" (*Zhouyi Cheng shi zhuan* 4.968). Thus sages did not create rules of propriety out of nothing. They simply formulated rules people naturally follow. In other words, although rules of propriety seem external when applied by sages to regulate people's actions, their origin is internal: "There are things that come from the heavenly principle. For example, bees and ants know how to protect their kings, and jackals and otters know how to offer sacrifice. In the same way, propriety

comes from human feeling" (*Yishu* 17.180). Propriety becomes one of the distinguishing marks of being human.[17] It is in this sense that Cheng draws a distinction between the tools of propriety (*li zhi qi* 禮之器) and the root of propriety (*li zhi ben* 禮之本):"The root of propriety lies in the feelings of people, according to which sages guide people. The tools of propriety originate in the customs of people, which the sages use to regulate people" (*Yishu* 25.327). For Cheng, the tools of propriety, those external rules, must be based on the root of propriety, human feelings.

Finally, for Cheng, *li* belongs to human nature. In addition to the distinction between the root of propriety (*li zhi ben*) and the tools of propriety (*li zhi qi*), he also distinguishes the metaphysical (*xing er shang* 形而上) and phenomenal (*xing er xia* 形而下) aspects of *li*. Sages establish rules of propriety so that people

> can appropriately handle the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. Their phenomenal dimension (*xing er xia*) is their application in ways to eat, drink, wear cloth, and use utensils. Their metaphysical (*xing er shang*) dimension is subtle, without sound and smell. Common people follow them with great effort, the worthy practice them, and sages act from them. (*Wenji* 668)

External rules (*li zhi qi*) are established on the basis of the original human feelings (*li zhi ben*). However, where do such human feelings as *li zhi ben* come from? They come from human nature. Cheng claims that innate human nature distinguishes humans from other beings, where the distinguishing mark of being human is the five cardinal virtues: humanity, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness. When human nature is aroused by external things that come into contact with the human body, human feelings are aroused. On the one hand, when such human feelings are natural (that is, are not distorted by one's selfish desires), our original human nature is cultivated. On the other hand, when such human feelings have gone astray, they harm human nature. The distinction between enlightened people and unenlightened people is that the former direct human feelings in accordance with human nature (*xing qi qing* 性其情), while the latter do the opposite (*qing qi xing* 情其性). So, while external rules of propriety are based on human feelings, human feelings are based on human nature. Thus, Cheng states that "if there is human nature, there will be human feelings. How can there be human feelings without human nature?. . . . Human feelings do not come from outside. They are rather inner responses to what is outside" (*Yishu* 18.204). So for Cheng, while human feelings are indeed aroused by the contact of the human body with external things, they do not come from these external things but from innate human nature.

More importantly, human nature is no different from principle (*li* 理). For example, Cheng claims that "human nature is principle and principle is human

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[17] In their study of the Cheng brothers, Pan Fuen 潘富恩 and Xu Yuqing 徐余慶 also note this: "humanity, rightness, propriety, and wisdom all originate from people's feelings. They are made systematic by rulers above and then applied to the people" (Pan and Xu 1988: 160).

nature" (*Yishu* 22a.292); and "human nature is principle, which is the same whether you are [sage] Yao or Shun or a common person" (*Yishu* 18.204). Since propriety is inherent in and part of human nature, Cheng also identifies propriety with principle, both of which are pronounced as *li*: "*Li* 禮 (propriety) is nothing but not to look, listen, talk, and act against *li* 理 (principle). *Li* (propriety) is *li* (principle). Everything that is not heavenly principle is selfish desire" (*Yishu* 15.144), and "whatever is against *li* (propriety) is against *li* (principle)" (*Zhouyi Cheng shi zhuan* 1.699).

From the above, we can observe a significant difference between contemporary political liberalism and Cheng's Neo-Confucian vision of society. For political liberals, the sole job of a government is to establish a set of rules fair to all people who play the games governed by these rules. These rules do not aim to make people virtuous, nor will they make them vicious. For Cheng, however, this liberal idea not only assumes that human nature is bad, but will further make people bad, as shown most powerfully by Confucius in the *Analects* passage quoted at the beginning of this section. It is for this consideration that Cheng focuses on government by propriety, with a central focus on cultivating people's virtue so that government becomes less and less important. It is in this sense that we can regard Cheng's theory of government as a virtue politics.

Moral Metaphysics

Our discussion of human nature brings us to Cheng's moral metaphysics. The philosophical ideas that Cheng helped to foster are often referred to as "Neo-Confucian" in Western scholarship. Although there have been numerous explanations of what is "new" in Neo-Confucian philosophy (see, for example, Mou 1990: 1.11–18; Chang 1963: 43–55), its distinguishing characteristic is the development of a moral metaphysics as an ontological articulation of moral values advocated by classical Confucians, similar to the one Charles Taylor provides for modern liberal values (Taylor 1989). Whereas Charles Taylor identifies three sources of good that constitute the goodness of modern liberal values (nature, reason, and God), Cheng maintains that there is only one source of good that constitutes the goodness of Confucian values: *li* 理. For this reason, the Neo-Confucian philosophy that Cheng initiated is most commonly called "the learning of principle" (*li xue* 理學) in Chinese scholarship. The term *li* has been variously translated in English, and in previous sections I have largely followed the most common translation of "principle," although, as it will become clear in this section, I shall suggest that it is best translated as creativity or life-giving activity.[18]

[18] In recent years, some scholars, following Willard Peterson, prefer to interpret and translate *li* as "coherence" (Ziporyn 2008, Angle 2009). By coherence, Peterson means the "straight-forward sense of 'the quality or characteristic of sticking together,' with the connotations varying according to context" (Peterson 1986: 14). I agree with Peterson that this interpretation is flexible enough to accommodate almost all occurrences of *li* in the writings of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi.

As many scholars have pointed out, the term *li* has been present in texts long before Cheng's time (Chen 1991: xvii–xviii; Tang 1985: 21–69; Mou 1990: 1.1–4). It is with Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao, however, that *li* not only obtains, for the first time, the central place in a philosophical system, but it is also regarded as the ultimate reality of the universe. For example, Cheng Yi states that "only because there actually is *li* can there actually be a thing; only because there actually is a thing can there actually be a function" (*Cheng shi jingshuo* 8.1160). So it is clear that for Cheng, *li* is ontologically prior to things. It explains not only how a thing exists but also why a thing is such a particular thing instead of something else. If there is no *li*, there can be no things; and things can exist because of *li*. It is in this sense that Cheng uses the term *li* interchangeably with many other terms, such as *dao*, heaven, nature, divinity, and heart/mind that have been traditionally used to refer to the ultimate reality. For example, he states that "when in heaven, it is destiny (*ming* 命); when in rightness, it is *li* 理; when in human beings, it is nature (*xing* 性); when controlling the body, it is heart/mind (*xin* 心). As a matter of fact they are all the same *dao"* (*Yishu* 18.204).[19]

As the ultimate reality of the ten thousand things, *li* is the same in all things: "There is only one *li* under heaven, and so it is everywhere. It is changeless from heaven to earth and can be traced back to the eras of the three kings" (*Yishu* 2a.38). Cheng further asserts that "the *li* of ten thousand things between heaven and earth is not different from each other" (*Jingshuo* 1.1029); and so "the heart/mind of one person is also the heart/mind of the heaven and earth; the *li* of one thing is also the *li* of the ten thousand things" (*Yishu* 2a.13). However, at the same time, Cheng also talks about different *li* of different things. There are not only *wu li* 物理, the *li* of things, but also *ren li* 人理, the *li* of human affairs. Thus Cheng states that "whatever I can see is a thing, and everything has its *li*. For example, fire producing warmth, and water giving out coldness, and one's being a king or a minister, a father or a son, all these are *li"* (*Yishu* 19.247). Here Cheng talks about both *wu li* (the *li* of being fire and water) and *ren li* (the *li* of being a king and a minister, and a father and a son).[20] More concretely, Cheng

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However, this strength perhaps is also its weakness: it is so flexible that it becomes very vague. In particular, it cannot catch the meaning of *li* as the life-giving activity (*sheng* 生) that I think is its central meaning, at least in Cheng, and that I will stress in this section.

[19] Lu Lianzhang 蘆連章 is wrong to claim that for Cheng, while *li* is primary, other categories such as *tian*, *xing* (nature), *xin* (heart-mind), and *ming* (destiny) are secondary (Lu 2001: 116). In contrast, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 is fundamentally right in pointing out that "the substance, the principle, and the function refer to heavenly creativity. . . and so change, *dao*, and divinity are all different names for the *tian dao* 天道 (heavenly way) itself" (Mou 1990: 2.23).

[20] Qian Mu 錢穆 was wrong to claim that there is only *wu li* 物理 (*li* of things), but no *ren li* 人理 (*li* of humans) in Neo-Confucian philosophy (Qian 1991: 228). In Qian's distinction between the classical Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius and the Neo-Confucian philosophy of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi 朱熹, classical Confucians talked about *dao*, which includes only the *dao* of heaven and of human, but not the *dao* of things; Neo-Confucians talked about *li* which includes only the *li* of heaven and things but not a specific *li* for humans.

claims that "everything in the world can be understood in light of *li*. Wherever there is a thing, there is a standard; and everything has its *li"* (*Yishu* 18.193). Thus when asked whether one can understand ten thousand *li* by investigation of one thing, Cheng's answer is categorically negative (see *Yishu* 18; 188). In other words, there are not only *li* of things and *li* of human affairs, but there are even different *li* for different things and for different human affairs.

To understand the relationship between one *li* and many different *li*, we need to return to Cheng's idea of "one principle with many manifestations" (*li yi fen shu* 理一分殊). Since everything has its *li*, and *li* is ontologically prior to things, manifestations of one *li* in ten thousand things are no different from the manifestations of one *li* in ten thousand *li*. Here it is important to see that, when Cheng says that ten thousand *li* lead to one *li*, he does not mean that there is one *li* over and above ten thousand *li*, as if over and above all different particular kinds of love, there were a general love. Whenever one loves, one loves in a particular way. One can never love in a general way. Thus it is important to observe that, when explaining the idea of one principle with many manifestations, Cheng does not use the metaphor of one moon reflected in ten thousand rivers (*yue ying wan chuan* 月映萬川) as it was used in Buddhism before him and by Zhu Xi after him. The reason is that this metaphor suggests that there is one real or true *li* (moon) that is over and above ten thousand *li* (reflections of the moon in ten thousand rivers). The moon can exist without its reflections in ten thousand rivers, but the one *li* for Cheng cannot be separate from ten thousand *li*.[21]

Thus, despite the claim that Cheng's *li* has some similarity with Plato's Forms (Chang 1963: 47; Fung 1953: 507; Hou et al. 1997: 501; Li 1986: 66), for Cheng, although *li* is indeed ontologically prior to things, it does not exist outside things. Interpreting the statement in the *Book of Change* that "the unceasing transition between *yin* and *yang* is *dao*," Cheng claims that "*dao* is not *yin* and *yang*. *Dao* is the unceasing transition between *yin* and *yang"* (*Yishu* 3.67). Although he denies that *li* or *dao* is the *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, he affirms that *li* is the unceasing transition between *yin* and *yang*. It is thus clear that *li* cannot be outside these vital forces. On this, Cheng was clear:"There is no *dao* if there is no *yin* and *yang*. The *becoming so* of *qi* is *dao*. *Yin* and *yang* are *qi*, which is physical, while *dao* is metaphysical" (*Yishu* 15.162).[22]

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[21] Mou Zongsan proposed an alternative interpretation by distinguishing two different kinds of *li*: *li* as the ontological/metaphysical foundation of the universe (as expressed in such claims as "the reason ten thousand things form one body is that they all have this *li*"), and *li* as the natural tendencies of particular things (as expressed in such claim as "ten thousand things all have their own *li*"). As the former, there is only one *li* under heaven; but as the latter, each thing has its own unique *li* (Mou 1990: 2.81).

[22] I disagree with Hon Tze-ki's distinction between *li* and *qi*: "While *li* is structured and orderly, *qi* is dynamic and creative. While *li* provides the universe with a system of operation, *qi* sets the universe in motion, propelled by the duality of *yin* and *yang*. To move unceasingly, the universe requires both the structure of *li* and the dynamism of *qi*" (Hon 2003: 44). Cai Fanglu 蔡方鹿 also argues that "on the relationship between *li* and things, Cheng believes that

Then what precisely is *li* that ontologically determines *qi* and things and yet is inseparable from them? Although many scholars have realized that it is wrong to regard *li* as something similar to Plato's Forms insofar as the latter can be considered to be independent of concrete things, still it is quite common to regard *li* as the common essence of things, or the common law that governs these things, or the universal principle these things follow, or the general pattern these things exhibit, so far as this essence or law or principle or pattern is not considered as separable from these actual things. In my view, however, such a reified understanding of Cheng's *li* (understood as some *thing*, even if something invisible) is wrong; instead, I argue that *li* for Cheng is primarily not some *thing*, but an *activity* of things. It is in this sense that in his commentary on the *Book of Change* Cheng claims that "Confucians in the past have all seen the heart/mind of the heaven and earth as something quiet. Only I myself argue that we should see it as activity" (*Yishu* 18.201). By activity Cheng means creativity or life-giving activity (*sheng* 生). Thus he states that "*li* as life-giving activity is natural and ceaseless" (*Yishu* 15.167). The reason Cheng believed that the existence of the ten thousand things is due to *li* is not that *li* is considered as something independent from things. It is, rather, that the life-giving activity of the ten thousand things has ontological priority over the ten thousand things that have the life-giving activity. Without the life-giving activity, the ten thousand things would be nothing. Of course, the life-giving activity is always the life-giving activity of the ten thousand things, and the ten thousand things are always things that have the life-giving activity. In another place, Cheng states that "*dao* is the natural life-giving activity of ten thousand things. A thing's coming into being in the spring and its growing in the summer are both *dao* as the life-giving activity. . . . *Dao* is the unceasing natural life-giving activity" (*Yishu* 15.149).[23] This understanding of *li* as life-giving activity has its evidence in Cheng's interpretation of a few other terms he uses interchangeably with *li*. For example, Cheng relates *li* to the heart/mind, both that of humans and that of heaven and earth. He also interprets it in terms of life-giving activity:"the heart/mind is

there first exists *li* and then there exist things" (Cai 1996: 69–79). In contrast, I think Pang Wanli 龐萬里 is right: Cheng Yi believes that *li* and *qi* "cannot exist independently from each other. When there is one there must be the other. Therefore, the order of *li*, *qi*, and image is made in terms of their importance and not in terms of their temporal order" (Pang 1992: 95).

[23] This interpretation of Cheng's *li* as life-giving activity has some similarity with A.C. Graham's interpretation of it as growth. However, Graham arrives at an interpretation of life-giving activity (*sheng*) that is not very far from the Christian idea of creation, despite his own claim otherwise. For example, he argues that "the Song philosophers do not conceive the origin of things as 'creation' by Someone standing outside the universe, but as 'breeding' growth' (*sheng*) from Something at the root of the universe. . . . It is precisely because the production and growth of things is not explained by preceding physical causes that it is necessary for them to postulate an unseen source out of which things are continually manifesting themselves" (Graham 1992: 108–109). Here, Graham assumes that for Cheng, the ten thousand things originate from "Something at the root of the universe," an "unseen source." This "Something unseen" simply does not exist for Cheng. For them everything can be seen, what cannot be seen is the life-giving activity, *li*, which is not a thing.

nothing but the *dao* of life-giving activity (*sheng dao*). Because of this heart/mind, one's body is born. The heart/mind of commiseration is the *dao* of life-giving activity for humans" (*Yishu* 21b.274).[24]

It is also through his interpretation of *li* as the life-giving activity that we can understand that Cheng's metaphysics of *li* is a moral metaphysics, an ontological articulation of Confucian values, as it is closely related to the central Confucian moral value, *ren* (humaneness). *Ren*, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness are the five cardinal Confucian virtues. Among these five virtues, *ren* is the most important as in one sense it includes all other virtues (*Yishu* 2a.14) and in another sense it leads other virtues. Thus, in his ontological articulation of Confucian values, Cheng primarily focuses on *ren*. What is *ren*? After he said that "the atmosphere of life-giving activity (*sheng yi* 生意) is most spectacular," his brother CHENG Hao stated that " 'what is great and originating becomes (in humans) the first and chief (quality of goodness).' This quality is known as *ren*. *Ren* is something that makes for oneness with heaven and earth" (*Yishu* 11.120). In other words, *ren* is good not only because it is a human value; it is actually no different from the ultimate reality, the life-giving activity. *Ren* thus not only has to be understood in relation to the idea of *tian* as *li*, which is life-giving activity, but it can also be seen as nothing but this life-giving activity. To be alive is *ren*, to be dead is the lack thereof. With this CHENG Yi completely agrees. In his view, "the heart/mind is just like the seed of grains. *Ren* is nothing but human nature as life-giving activity" (*Yishu* 18; 184). Here Cheng makes an explicit connection between *li* as life-giving activity and moral goodness. In other words, ultimate reality itself is moral.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented CHENG Yi's philosophical ideas with a focus on his moral philosophy. I have tried to show that, after almost a millennium, we still have a lot to learn from it, and a lot that we can learn from it we cannot learn from elsewhere. First, his explanation of why one should be moral is more convincing than any alternative that we can find in the West. Plato and Aristotle also tell us that to be moral is a joyful thing, but they fail to show, as they intend to, that being moral is constitutive of being human, as they regard rationality instead of morality as the distinguishing mark of being human, all the while

[24] The interpretation I present here differs from the one advanced by MOU Zongsan, who claims that CHENG Yi, unlike his brother CHENG Hao, thinks that *li* is static (Mou 1990: 1.44 and 2.78). Mou's view has not only been generally accepted by scholars in Taiwan, many of whom are Mou's students; it has also become popular among scholars in mainland China. For example, PANG Wanli also argues that the two brothers understood *li* differently: whereas CHENG Hao understood it from the perspective of change and movement, CHENG Yi understood it from the perspective of the static structure of things. Pang also cites ZHANG Dainian, among others, in support of this interpretation (Pang 1992: 59).

unable to make the direct link between rationality and morality. Second, Cheng's view that moral knowledge necessarily inclines one to act is also similar to the views of Socrates and Aristotle in denying the possibility of weakness of the will. However, his distinction between superficial knowledge of seeing and hearing and profound knowledge of/as virtue enables him to explain, better than Socrates and Aristotle, apparent cases in which people have knowledge and yet cannot act upon the knowledge. Third, as we enter a global village, where our immediate neighbors include people with habits and customs, ideas and ideals, cultures and religions, very different from ours, Cheng's unique interpretation of love with distinction as loving different people and things in ways that take into consideration their uniqueness is extremely significant. Fourth, we have been used to liberal political theory which is based on the idea that the political is not personal. However, Cheng's idea of government by virtue and propriety shows why the liberal idea is wrong. A political system does not merely set up the rules of games people play but it also affects the type of people who play the game: government exclusively by punitive laws make people vicious, while government primarily by virtue and propriety will make people virtuous. Finally, most of us have moral intuitions and hold some moral values without reflecting upon them. Cheng's moral metaphysics helps us not only to affirm such intuitions and values but further articulate, ontologically, why such intuitions are right and such values are good.

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