

The Thesis of Single-Rootedness in the Thought of CHENG Hao

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CHENG Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) was born in Huangpi 黃陂 in what is the present Hubei Province, where his father was a local administrator. Baichun 伯淳 was his courtesy name, but he was better known as Mingdao 明道. Together with his younger brother CHENG Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), he strove to restore the tradition of Confucius and Mencius in the name of “the learning of the way” (*daoxue* 道學), which eventually developed as the main concern in various schools of Neo-Confucian thought. Although the philosophical views of the two brothers are diverse in some respects, they are usually identified as together as the “Cheng brothers” to signify their common contribution to Neo-Confucian thought.¹

A precocious child, he composed poems at ten, and also excelled in learning. At fifteen he came to study under ZHOU Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073). Although Zhou’s own system of thought had yet to be completed, Cheng felt inspired and resolved to dedicate his whole life to the search for the way (*dao* 道). In 1056, he traveled to the capital Luoyang 洛陽 in preparation for the civil service examination. At this time, he also made the acquaintance of ZHANG Zai 張載 (1020–1077), who was destined to be regarded by posterity as another pillar of the Neo-Confucian school. In the following year Cheng was awarded the *jinshi* degree and made an official of the government. He served in various capacities at various places thereafter, discharging his duties creditably. In 1069, he came to the notice of Shenzong 神宗, the new emperor, who gave him audiences from time to time and opportunities to voice his political views. However, insofar as the emperor gave more weight to the advice of Wang

¹ CHENG Yi took a very different approach from that of CHENG Hao in his understanding of core concepts such as principle (*li* 理), heart/mind (*xin* 心), and the way (*dao* 道) of moral cultivation. Although CHENG Yi has had a tremendous impact on the course of Confucian philosophy, and lived 20 years longer than his brother, I do not think he resolved problems inherent in CHENG Hao’s positions. The similarities and differences between the two brothers needs to be examined at length and in detail, a task which exceeds the scope of this essay.

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Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), leader of the reformation campaign whose ideas CHENG Hao adamantly opposed, Cheng was discredited, demoted to lower offices, and eventually dismissed. In 1072, he returned to Luoyang and there, together with his brother CHENG Yi, built a school, and taught until his death.

The main corpus of CHENG Hao's work comprises conversations as recorded by his disciples, collected in the *Surviving Works of the Two Chengs* (*Er Cheng yishu* 二程遺書). He also wrote short essays, poems, and letters. The best-known essays are “Letter on Stabilizing Nature” (“Ding xing shu” 定性書) and “On Understanding Ren” (“Shi ren pian” 識仁篇). The citations in this essay are mainly from *Collected Works of the Two Chengs* (*Er Cheng ji* 二程集; Cheng and Cheng 1980),² a collection that contains most of the Cheng brothers' writings and conversations. It is an amended edition of the *Complete Works of the Two Chengs* (*Er Cheng quanshu* 二程全書), which includes *Surviving Works* (*Yishu* 遺書), *External Books* (*Waishu* 外書), *Collected Writings* (*Wenji* 文集), *CHENG Yi's Commentary on the Book of Change* (*Zhouyi Cheng shi zhuan* 周易程氏傳), *Interpretation of Classics* (*Jingshuo* 經說), and *Essential Sayings* (*Cuiyan* 粹言). *Surviving Works* consists of sayings by the Cheng brothers recorded by their disciples. In some of these texts the speaker is clearly indicated, but in others not so. Some indicate that the quoted expression was “spoken by the two masters.” For these unassigned sayings it has been a problem to identify the speaker. The modern philosopher MOU Zongsan 牟宗三 was the first person to set criteria for distinguishing between sayings by the two brothers (Mou 1969: 2:5–9). Although Mou's criteria are not completely convincing for some scholars (Guo 2006: 44–47), they are so far the most reliable. One criterion is the style of expression of the two brothers: CHENG Hao liked to express ideas in a “sudden and perfect” (*yuandun* 圓頓) way, whereas CHENG Yi did so in an analytical way. *Yuan* signifies a state of perfection and completeness. It also means an all-inclusive state, in that superficially contrary descriptions are included, since it is believed that the duality in conceptual thinking does not apply to the situation being described. *Dun* refers to a kind of transformation without a gradual process. In Buddhism, sudden awakening is contrasted to gradual awakening. CHENG Hao liked to use a “sudden and perfect” way to describe visions that he experienced when he thought that these visions were not the product of logical reasoning. Because of this special way of expression, ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) found CHENG Hao's sayings nebulous (*hunhun* 渾淪) (Zhu 1986: 5:93).

In his brother's words, the path that led CHENG Hao to find the way was by “browsing through various schools of thought, looking deeply into Daoism and Buddhism for many decades, coming back to the Six Classics and finally attaining it” (Cheng and Cheng 1980: 638). CHENG Hao inherited and developed the thought of classical Confucianism rather than drawing on preceding Neo-Confucian thinkers such as ZHOU Dunyi, SHAO Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077), or

² All page numbers in this essay refer to this work, and unless otherwise indicated, quotations are those of CHENG Hao.

ZHANG Zai. Among many theses in CHENG Hao's thought, "single-rootedness" (*yiben lun* 一本論) is the most distinctive. It is also the most problematic, both literally and philosophically. The thesis of single-rootedness presents the relationship between Heaven (*tian* 天) and the human, and between that of *dao* and instruments (*qi* 器) and vital energy (*qi* 氣). This thesis also involves the concepts of heart/mind and human nature (*xing* 性). In this essay I examine this thesis with regard to these particular domains.

Heaven and the Human

The term "single-rooted" appears in the following passages by CHENG Hao:

Dao is single-rooted. Someone might say, "To subsume sincerity (*cheng* 誠) within the heart/mind is not as good as subsuming the heart/mind within sincerity; to form a trinity with Heaven and Earth (*tiandi* 天地)³ with perfect sincerity is not as good as uniting with other people and things with perfect sincerity." This is still double-rooted (*er ben* 二本). Knowing not to be double-rooted is the way of earnest respectfulness that leads to peace throughout the entire world (Cheng and Cheng 1980: 1:117–118).

If it is not single-rooted, how is it possible that "when [the great man] proceeds heaven (*xian tian*), heaven does not act contrary to him; when he follows after heaven he abides by the seasons of heaven"? (ibid.: 1:43)

The meaning of single-rootedness can be apprehended through its opposite: double-rootedness:

Heaven and the human originally are not two. There is no need to speak of union. (Ibid.: 1:81)⁴

The cold of winter and heat of summer are *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. That by which they are moved and transform is divine (*shen* 神). "Divine is without confines" and therefore "Change is without a body." If, like some, you conceive a Heaven distinct from the human and say that it cannot be subsumed within the human, you imply that the divine has confines. This is double-rooted. (Ibid.: 1:121)

"The extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things." Investigation means "approaching." It is double-rooted to interpret investigation to mean "abiding in things." (Ibid.: 1:129)

The expression "Heaven and the human originally are not two" unequivocally means that they are one. CHENG Hao explicitly expressed this thought in the sentence "there is no gap between Heaven and the human":

Now, even if it is understood that "desiring it is good," one still needs to have it within oneself in order to talk about sincerity. On this understanding, sincerity is the way of

³ CHENG Hao sometimes used "heaven and earth" in a metaphysical sense which equates with *dao*, but sometimes he used them to signify a material entity. Hereafter I will use upper case for the former meaning and lower case for the latter.

⁴ The speaker of the above two passages has not been specified. The editor of *Song - Yuan Case Studies* (*Song - Yuan xue'an* 宋元學案) combined them and included them in the "case study" of CHENG Hao ("Mingdao xue'an" 明道學案). Mou thought that the combination was a mistake (Mou 1969: 94). Nevertheless, the ideas are in line with the first passage quoted above and therefore probably should be attributed to CHENG Hao.

uniting inner and outer. However, not to see things as one is merely a product of the mind.⁵ Apart from the body there is nothing but principle and on this basis we can speak of uniting Heaven with humans. Yet the unity of Heaven and humans has already become a subject on which ignorant people have applied themselves. There is no gap between Heaven and humans. If one is not able to embody [sincerity] fully then one cannot nurture and cultivate [things]. To talk about assisting nurture and cultivation is already to talk in a way that is removed from humans. (Ibid.: 1:33)

The premise that Heaven and humans are one entails that “there is no need to speak of the union” of Heaven and humans. By the same token, “to form a trinity with Heaven and Earth with perfect sincerity” and “to unite with others and things with perfect sincerity” presupposes that the individual is separated from Heaven and Earth or from other people and things. Similarly, if sincerity and the heart/mind are one, it is nonsense to say either “to subsume sincerity within the heart/mind” or “to subsume the heart/mind within sincerity.” Both expressions presuppose that sincerity and the heart/mind are two separate things. This criticism also applies to the issue of “subsuming Heaven within humans” (ibid.: 1:121). Therefore the ideas behind these criticisms are twofold: individual persons, Heaven and Earth, as well as other people and things, are one; and sincerity and the heart/mind are one.

In what sense are humans and Heaven and Earth one? This is intelligible only in the sense that “the way of humans and the way of Heaven and Earth are the same.” CHENG Hao understood the way of Heaven and Earth—sometimes expressed as the way of Heaven (*tian dao* 天道), or just the way (*dao*)—not merely as a transcendent and abstract entity, because for him its truthfulness lies in its concrete manifestations. *Dao* manifests itself in every form of existence, but its full manifestation is in sages. In other words, a sage is a person who completely embodies *dao*. We can say that a full-blooded sage is *dao*. Therefore the expression “humans and Heaven and Earth are one” is not a description of fact, but rather a description of a vision, an experience which can be achieved only by moral cultivation and practice. Because of this, the expression in question is neither a logical nor an empirical truth which can be justified by conceptual analysis or by empirical examination. Conceptually speaking, sincerity and the heart/mind are two notions with totally different connotations and denotations. To speak empirically, it is legitimate to talk about “containing the heart/mind with sincerity” or “containing sincerity with the heart/mind.” Furthermore, striving to become a sincere person is a common goal for Confucian thinkers. Whether the goal is to subsume (sincerity, Heaven, etc.), or to assist (nurturing and cultivating things), or to unite (humans and Heaven and Earth), they all presuppose that humans and *dao* are two. However, from CHENG Hao’s perspective, they are one. We can see that the perspective Cheng adopted is based on the highest achievement of moral practice. The two-ness signifies the empirical fact which can be transcended by human effort.

⁵ Here the mind refers to an empirical/habitual mind (*xixin* 習心), therefore I use “the mind” to distinguish it from the heart/mind (*benxin* 本心).

When one reaches the highest achievement, the two-ness or duality would be included by the one root: *dao*. Once one sees this one-ness, it is trivial, if not wrong, to talk about assisting Heaven and Earth or uniting humans and *dao*.

Saying that humans and *dao* are one, is a “sudden and perfect” mode of expression. It is perfect because in the vision that it reveals, there are no more differentiations between *dao* and its manifestations, between inner and outer, or between heart/mind and its full actualization. In this perfect state, the duality of “to assist and being assisted,” “to subsume and being subsumed,” and to “unite and being united” also dissolve. It is sudden because *dao* and human do not gradually become one. They are one as soon as an individual achieves the vision and fully embodies *dao*. *Dao* and humans are one in a “sudden and perfect” way and this state needs to be expressed also in a “sudden and perfect” way. The idea of doing away with words like “assist,” “subsume,” and “unite” were presented in the passages quoted above, and here are some more sayings in which this idea is embedded: “In saying ‘to experience the cultivation of Heaven and Earth,’ the word ‘experience’ still remains. Merely this is the cultivation of Heaven and Earth. There should not be another Heaven and Earth apart from this one” (ibid.: 1:18). This means that when an agent has really experienced the cultivation of Heaven and Earth, he or she is already identical with the cultivation of Heaven and Earth. This is because Heaven and Earth manifest themselves in their cultivation, which in turn manifests itself in the cultivation of the agent. If there were Heaven and Earth apart from that embodied in the agent, then Heaven and Earth would be abstract entities independent of humans, and which humans cannot fully grasp. Then there would be a gap between Heaven and humans. In CHENG Hao’s words: “To talk about assisting nurture and cultivation is already to talk in a way that is removed from the humans” (ibid.: 1:33):

In all cases, accounts of “fully filling” (*chongsai* 充塞) resemble having the frame of a container and then filling it with vital energy. But this is merely an approximate analogy used to describe [the state of filling up]. Vital energy is vital energy, how can it be said to be “fully filling”? Just like “to nurture” is only “to nurture,” how can it be said to “assist”? “Assisting” and “fully filling” are altogether other activities. (Ibid.: 1:35)⁶

CHENG Hao took the expression “full respect leads to the peace of the entire world” as an instance to illustrate the meaning of single-rootedness. How can full respect by an individual lead to the peace of the entire world? This can make sense only when it is understood as a partial description of the highest vision. Through full respect an individual becomes the full manifestation of *dao*, under which the entire world is at peace. Now it is obvious that the way of a sage is no different from the way of Heaven and this is what single-rooted means. This meaning is clearly presented in the following passage:

By perfect sincerity one can take part in (*zan* 贊) the cultivation of Heaven and Earth, and then one can form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. The meaning of *zan* is “take

⁶ The speaker of this saying has not been specified. *Song-Yuan xue’an* includes it in “Mingdao xue’an.” Judging from the content as well as the style, it should be attributed to CHENG Hao.

part in.” It means “when [the great man] precedes heaven, heaven does not act contrary to him; when he follows after heaven he abides by the seasons of heaven.” *Zan* does not mean helping. There is only one sincerity, how can one speak of helping? (ibid.: 1.133)

The claim that “there is only one sincerity” means that sincerity is both the way of Heaven and Earth and the way of humans. If there is only one way, then with perfect sincerity an agent is already taking the way of Heaven and Earth, and it is more appropriate to say that he or she contributes to the way rather than helps Heaven and Earth. However, sincerity is usually understood as a state of mind or attitude that enhances an agent’s moral cultivation, therefore it is considered a virtue. So in what sense can a human virtue also be shared by Heaven and Earth? We may find the answer in the following passage:

“Heaven and earth have fixed positions and Change (*yi* 易) operates between them”: this is nothing but respect. Being respectful is therefore unceasing. It is only sincerity and respect that are able to generate things yet omit nothing. Without sincerity there would be nothing. It is said in the *Book of Odes*, “The decree of Heaven, how profound it is and unceasing. Was it not apparent, the purity of King Wen’s virtue?” “Purity likewise is unceasing.” Being pure never stops. (Ibid.: 1.118)

This passage conveys the message that sincerity and respect⁷ are the way of Change (and of *dao*) and are also the virtues that make King Wen a great king. The commonality between sincerity in the way of Heaven and the way of a great person is that both have the characteristic of ceaselessness. By sincerity Heaven produces and reproduces unceasingly. Similarly, by sincerity a person enhances his or her awareness and activates his or her moral creativity. This activity can also be considered an unceasing act of production and reproduction in the moral realm. For Heaven, the unceasing process of production results in the endless nurture and cultivation of people and things, and this is the same for humans. CHENG Hao makes this clear by saying that “Heaven and humans are unceasing” (ibid.: 1.119). The connection between Heaven and humans as putatively featured in the above-cited ode originally appeared in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and CHENG Hao here elaborated the idea embedded in it only based on his own understanding. Cheng maintained that Heaven fully manifests itself through sincerity in the activity of production and reproduction and it can be said that there is no Heaven apart from this activity.⁸ Therefore Heaven and the way of Heaven (the activity of production) are identical. Furthermore, since the

⁷ Although sincerity and respect bear different connotations, they can be regarded as constituting a single way of Change.

⁸ HUANG Yong understands MOU Zongsan’s view of principle (*li*) to be “some thing, some entity, some substance, whose fundamental feature is to act.” He argues that “*li* remains a being, although a being that always acts. This is what Mou meant by CHENG Hao’s *li* as ‘something with both being and activity’ ” (Huang 2007: 198). I doubt that Huang’s understanding of Mou is accurate. Although Mou sometimes spoke of the substance (*ti* 體) of Change, or heart/mind, or *dao*, sincerity, human nature etc., he always emphasized that this substance can only be understood as function or activity. Therefore the relationship between the substance and activity is not a substance-attribute relationship, rather, they are one thing with different names (Mou 1969: 137).

way of Heaven is sincerity, Heaven is identical with sincerity. A perfectly sincere person in his or her unceasing production and reproduction is identical with sincerity itself and thus with Heaven. This is the ontological ground for humans and Heaven being one.

The Heart/Mind and Heaven

CHENG Hao's thesis of single-rootedness not only presents itself in the relationship between Heaven and the human, it also does so in the relationship between Heaven and the heart/mind. Since it is the heart/mind that is responsible for the activity of production and reproduction, it is natural to claim that heart/mind and Heaven are one. This is not a novel claim but is one based on an interpretation of *Mengzi* 7A.1: "He who fully exhausts his heart/mind apprehends his nature. Apprehending his nature, he apprehends Heaven." CHENG Hao revised Mencius' wording to express his own emphasis: "The heart/mind alone is Heaven. By fully exhausting one's heart/mind one can apprehend one's own nature. By fully apprehending one's own nature one will apprehend Heaven. (One version reads: 'the nature is heaven'). We should adopt this [relationship] and should not search outside" (ibid.: 1.15).⁹ "The great man unites his virtue with heaven and earth and his brightness with the sun and the moon', they are not outside him" (ibid.: 1.120). To exhaust an agent's heart/mind fully already presupposes that the agent who exhausts, and the heart/mind that is exhausted, are two separate things. For CHENG Hao, only through sincerity can the agent fully exhaust his or her own heart/mind, but sincerity is not something outside the heart/mind, since the former is already implicit in the latter. Therefore to exhaust means to become conscious of. As related in the previous section, Heaven is sincerity and there is only one sincerity: once an agent becomes fully conscious of his or her implicit sincerity, he or she is identical with Heaven. On this understanding, the agent does not need to "apprehend" Heaven by his or her heart/mind in such a way that Heaven and the heart/mind are two separate things. Again, the claim that Heaven and the heart/mind are one is expressed in a "sudden and perfect" way in that the expression is made from the perspective of someone who has accomplished the highest vision:

The heart/mind possesses virtue from Heaven. If the heart/mind is not fully exhausted then it is because the virtue from Heaven has not been fully exhausted, then how can it apprehend the nature and Heaven? When one's own heart/mind has been fully exhausted then it can also fully exhaust [the nature of] other people as well as [that of] things and form a trinity with Heaven and Earth and take part in nurturing and cultivating. "To take part in" means to nourish directly. (Ibid.: 1.78)

⁹ The speaker is not specified. *Song-Yuan xue'an* includes it in "Mingdao xue'an." Judging from the content as well as the style, it should be attributed to CHENG Hao (Mou 1969: 95).

The speaker of the above passage is not identified. If read in the context of the thesis of single-rootedness, however, it supports CHENG Hao's view that in order to form a trinity with Heaven and Earth, one needs only to exhaust one's own heart/mind. The underlying reason is "mere heart/mind itself is Heaven."

The following passage shows that the virtue of the heart/mind is no different from the virtue of Heaven and Earth. "Mingdao [CHENG Hao] said, 'The decree of Heaven, how profound and unceasing it is, isn't this loyalty (*zhong* 忠)? Heaven and earth change and the wood and grass flourish, isn't this empathy (*shu* 恕)?'" (ibid.: 1.392). Loyalty and empathy are ordinarily considered as virtues of the heart/mind, yet here they are used to describe *dao* and its manifestations. It is quite clear from this that humans understand *dao* through their own virtues, which are innate in the heart/mind. Therefore humans do not follow the virtues conferred by Heaven, rather, they see *dao* in terms of these virtues.

***Dao* and the Instruments and Vital Energy**

The relationship between *dao* and vital energy is discussed in the following passage: "'Above form it is *dao*, below form it is instruments (形而上為道，形而下為器)'—the emphasis must be stated in this way. *Dao* is also the instruments and the instruments are also *dao*. So long as *dao* exists, then matters of present or future, self or others are irrelevant" (ibid.: 1.4).¹⁰ The sentence "above form it is *dao*, below form it is instruments" is a modification of a much cited sentence from the "Great Appendix" (*xici* 繫辭) of the *Book of Change* (形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器). A.C. Graham noted that DAI Zhen 戴震 (1723–1777) had discussed the difference between "what is meant by" (*zhi wei* 之謂) and "is called" (*wei zhi* 謂之). Since CHENG Hao clearly stated that in the version of the sentence as it appears in the "Great Appendix" "is called" cannot be changed to "what is meant by" (ibid.: 1.361), then Graham, after DAI Zhen, came to the conclusion that, according to CHENG Hao, *dao* and instruments are the same but are simply called by different names to refer to the stages designated as above form and below form (Graham 1992: 124). However, as shown in the passage cited above, CHENG Hao stated that *dao* and instruments are one without analyzing the wording of the sentence used in the "Great Appendix." In what sense are *dao* and instruments the same? It is not from a naturalistic view that all things in nature¹¹ are *dao*, nor is it the case that CHENG Hao's thinking was so nebulous that he was somehow incapable of distinguishing between the two. CHENG Hao admitted that speaking analytically, *dao* and instruments are differentiated by

¹⁰ The speaker of this saying has not been identified. *Song-Yuan xue'an* includes it in "Mingdao xue'an." MOU Zongsan attributes it to CHENG Hao (Mou 1969: 22).

¹¹ ZHONG Caijun (1992) has argued that there was naturalistic element in CHENG Hao's thought. I return to this in Section 6.

“above form” and “below form.” He further claimed that it had to be said in this way, which meant that it was necessary to make the differentiation. Nevertheless, he said that *dao* is also instruments and instruments are also *dao*. This is also a “sudden and perfect” way of expression. *Dao* is nothing but its manifestation in instruments. All instruments, when their natures are fully actualized, embody *dao*.

This view can also be found in another passage: “Outside *dao* there are no things and outside things there is no *dao*, so that between heaven and earth there is no direction to go which is not *dao*” (Cheng and Cheng 1980: 1.73).¹² However, only a person who has achieved perfect vision can see this. Embracing this vision is a “sudden and perfect” experience and it needs to be expressed accordingly to avoid conceptual analysis.

For CHENG Hao the relationship between *dao* and instruments is analogous to that between *dao* and vital energy.

According to the “Great Appendix,” “Above form it is called *dao*, below form it is called instruments.” And, it is said, “[The sage, fixing the lines of the hexagrams,] established them according to the way of Heaven, calling them *yin* and *yang*, and according to the way of Earth, calling them soft and hard, and according to the way of humans, calling them humaneness (*ren* 仁) and rightness (*yi* 義).” And, it is said, “The *yin* and *yang* in alternation are what is meant by *dao*.” The *yin* and *yang* are also below form, but they are called *dao*; this statement is enough to make it perfectly clear how ‘above’ and ‘below’ are to be distinguished. *Dao* has never been anything but these; it is essential for humans to be aware of it in silence. (Ibid.: 1.118)

Here, on the one hand, CHENG Hao adopted the view from the “Great Appendix” that *yin* and *yang* are below form and, on the other, claimed that they are *dao*. Unlike his brother CHENG Yi, he did not interpret “the alternation of *yin* and *yang* is what is meant by *dao*” to mean “that by which *yin* and *yang* alternate is *dao*” (ibid.: 1.67). For CHENG Hao, *dao* manifests itself in *yin* and *yang*, which are the original form of vital energy. It was perfectly clear for him that although *yin* and *yang* are below form, they represent *dao* which is above form. Again, to say that *yin* and *yang* are *dao* is expressed in a “sudden and perfect” way means that from the perspective of perfect vision, *dao* is nothing other than its activity of producing. Moreover, in a “sudden and perfect” perspective, the distinction of above and below is transcended. Therefore he said, “*Dao* has never been anything but these [i.e. the *yin* and *yang*].” Now it is apparent that the transcendence has presupposed the distinction. In the last sentence CHENG Hao asked people to be aware of it in silence since he was sure that it cannot be grasped by conceptual thinking, through which distinctions are made.

According to the “Great Appendix” the activity of production and reproduction is what is meant by Change. CHENG Hao regarded it as the divine function of *dao* (“The function of production and reproduction is divine”; ibid.: 1.128). As discussed above, *dao* is nothing other than its activity (Change), it is also

¹² The speaker has not been identified but the views expressed are consistent with CHENG Hao’s thought.

nothing apart from its function. In this sense *dao*, Change, and the divine are one, with different names to refer to different aspects:

‘The operations of high Heaven are without sound or smell.’ Its substance is called Change, its principle is called *dao*, its function is called divine, and its decree for humans is called the nature (ibid.: 1.4).

‘Production and reproduction are what is meant by Change’; it is this which Heaven regards as its way (*dao*). It is production which Heaven regards as its way, and what succeeds this productive principle is goodness. (Ibid.: 1.29)¹³

For CHENG Hao, substance, activity, and function are not in a relation of opposition. The substance itself is activity and function. However, this assertion does not spring from a “sudden and perfect” perspective. On the contrary, the following passage is expressed in the “sudden and perfect” way: “Outside vital energy there is no divinity, outside divinity there is no vital energy. If it is said that the pure is divine, then is the impure not divine?” (ibid.: 1.121).

Elsewhere CHENG Hao used both an analytic and a “sudden and perfect” way to discuss the relationship between the divine and vital energy, and of that between Heaven and humans: “The cold of winter and heat of summer are *yin* and *yang*. That by which they are moved and change is divine. ‘The divine is without confines’ and therefore ‘Change is without substance.’ If, like some, you conceive of Heaven as distinct from humans and say that humans cannot embrace it, you imply that the divine has confines. This is double-rooted” (ibid.: 1.121). Describing phenomenal change to be a function of the divine is expressed in an analytic way, but to understand that Heaven and humans are one requires a “sudden and perfect” perspective. Although CHENG Hao was aware of the different realms to which *yin* and *yang* and the divine belong, he also maintained that Heaven (or *dao* or the divine) is not independent of the humans.

I have shown in this section that the single-rootedness of *dao* presents itself not merely in the Heaven-human relationship, but also in the *dao*-vital energy relationship. In the next section I discuss the ground in human nature that makes the union of humans with Heaven possible.

Human Nature and Vital Energy

In the passage quoted in the last section, CHENG Hao explained his view on human nature. This same passage provides hints on how it is possible that humans and Heaven can be one: “‘The operations of high Heaven are without sound or smell.’ Its substance is called Change, its principle is called *dao*, its function is called divine, and its decree for humans is called the nature” (ibid.: 1.4). The classical view that human nature is ordained or decreed by Heaven or

¹³ The speaker of these two passages has not been specified. *Song-Yuan xue’an* includes it as part of “Mingdao xue’an.” Judging from the content as well as the style, it should be attributed to CHENG Hao.

dao can be considered as the ground for the possibility of the union of Heaven and humans. Furthermore, this ground renders possible “apprehending his nature, he apprehends Heaven” (*Mengzi* 7A:1). What has Heaven decreed? It is the unceasing power of production and reproduction:

“The supreme virtue of Heaven and Earth is to produce.” “From the generative forces of Heaven and Earth the myriad things evolve.” “Inborn is what is meant by the nature.” It is most excellent to look into the vital impulses of the myriad things, this is “the Originating (*yuan* 元) is the leader of goodness,” which is what is meant by *ren*. Since humans are one thing with Heaven and Earth, why should they belittle themselves? (Cheng and Cheng 1980: 1.120)

The view that “inborn (*sheng* 生) is what is meant by the nature” is attributed to Mencius’ contemporary Gaozi 告子 and means that what is attained at birth constitutes the nature of the human. This expression admits that all the inborn qualities of life such as desires, natural dispositions, and abilities constitute human nature therefore the nature is neither good nor bad. In quoting Gaozi’s claim, together with the sentences from the “Great Appendix,” CHENG Hao is emphasizing the significance of giving life or producing. This led Graham to translate *sheng* here as “the life in us” (Graham 1992: 111). Nevertheless, CHENG Hao was not “borrowing” the expression from Gaozi to illustrate the act of giving life but rather was quoting it in its original meaning. He did so because he thought that being given life implies receiving all the inborn qualities mentioned above. In this sense he endorsed Gaozi’s view that the myriad things are the same in that they possess inborn qualities to become an individual, although he did not agree with Gaozi that all these qualities are held in common.¹⁴ Inborn qualities make one individual being different from another, or at least one species different from another. However, apart from inborn qualities, the productive power in every single thing was decreed when it is produced. The same productive power is shared by each of the myriad things, and this is the most important reason for claiming that all the myriad things are the same. Being the virtue of Heaven and Earth, this productive power is also the virtue of every existing thing. It is presented in their vital impulse and is the origin of goodness. (I will come back to this later). Sharing this unceasing productive power with Heaven and Earth, humans can be one with the latter. Furthermore, since the productive power shared by the myriad things is the same, human and the myriad things can (in principle) become one:

The reason it is said that the myriad things are all one substance (*ti*) is that all have this [same] principle—it is simply because it is from there that they come. “Production and reproduction is called Change.” Once things are produced, all possess this principle complete. (Cheng and Cheng 1980: 1.33)¹⁵

¹⁴ This is shown in his original notes under the quotation from Gaozi.

¹⁵ The speaker of this saying has not been identified. Both MOU Zongsan and A.C. Graham attribute it to CHENG Hao (Mou 1969: 55; Graham 1992: 124).

The myriad things are all one because they completely possess the principle (of production) once they are produced. It also follows that they are complete within themselves and do not need to attain anything outside them to become one with Heaven and Earth: “ ‘The myriad things are all complete within themselves.’ This is so not only of humans but of all things; it is from here that all have emerged” (ibid.: 1.34).¹⁶

In a passage previously cited (ibid.: 1.120), CHENG Hao used Gaozi and the “Great Appendix” to make the point that the myriad things, including humans and things, obtain the productive power from Heaven as their nature. Therefore the nature of production is the same for humans and things. I have also shown that it is the inborn qualities—vital energy or native endowment—which differentiate humans from things. Since the vital energy of things is impure or turbid, they are unable to actualize their own nature, much less extend their nature to actualize the nature of others. Only humans can nurture and cultivate things and form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. Following the last sentence of the last passage quoted, we read:

The only difference is that things are incapable of extending it to others, whereas humans are capable of doing so. But does being capable mean that it [principle] has been increased a little bit? Does being incapable mean it has been diminished a little bit? All principles are present, complete and fully disposed (ibid.: 1.34).

Humans can extend whereas things cannot because the vital energy of things is turbid. But it cannot be said that other things do not have this [principle]. (Ibid.: 1.33)

It is clear that for CHENG Hao, humans and things possess the complete principle of production or *dao* once they come into existence, therefore ontologically they have the same nature as each other and also as Heaven. Nevertheless in reality they are different since they are endowed with different inborn qualities. This has the potential to hinder their capacity to actualize their own nature if this nature is obscured.

“Production and reproduction is what is meant by Change”; it is this which Heaven regards as its *way*. Heaven regards production alone as its *way*. What succeeds this productive principle is goodness. Goodness has the sense of Originating (*yuan* 元). “The Originating is the leader of goodness.” That the myriad things all have the impulses of spring is what is meant by “What succeeds [the way] is goodness; that in which it is completed is the nature.” But its completion depends on the myriad things completing their natures of themselves. (Ibid.: 1.29)¹⁷

Ontologically Heaven has decreed the principle of production as the nature of the myriad things. In this sense, they are all complete within themselves. However, in the final sentence of the above passage it is claimed that they should complete their natures themselves. This means that in order to succeed the

¹⁶ The speaker of this saying has not been identified. Both MOU Zongsan and A.C. Graham attribute it to CHENG Hao (Mou 1969: 57; Graham 1992: 124).

¹⁷ The speaker of this saying has not been specified. *Song-Yuan xue'an* includes it in “Mingdao xue'an.” A similar passage by CHENG Hao is found at Cheng and Cheng (1980: 135). MOU Zongsan and A.C. Graham attribute it to CHENG Hao (Mou 1969: 136; Graham 1992:111).

productive principle, the myriad things have to actualize the principle which is present within their nature merely as potential. Nevertheless, among the myriad things only humans can fulfill this requirement, and therefore goodness can apply only to humans.

Good and Bad

Good and bad are commonly regarded as two contrasting attributes but in CHENG Hao's thesis they spring from one root. According to CHENG Hao, the principle of Heaven subsumes good as well as bad events: "There are good and bad events; all are heavenly principle. Within the principle of Heaven some things must be good and some bad for it is inherent in the condition of things to be unequal" (ibid.: 1.17). For Cheng, the duality of good and bad, just like other contrary qualities, is conceptually as well as factually accepted as a necessary part of principle. From a metaphysical point of view, both good and bad should be accepted equally.

Of the principles of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things, none stands alone; all must have opposites. All are as they are naturally; it is not that they have been [purposely] arranged. Each time I think of them at midnight, "before I know it, my hands begin to dance them out and my feet step in time to them" [*Mengzi* 4A.27]. (Ibid.: 1.121)

All the myriad things have their opposites (*dui* 對); there is an alternation of *yin* and *yang*, of good and bad. *Yin* diminishes when *yang* grows; bad is reduced when good increases. This principle, how far can it be extended? Humans just need to understand this. (Ibid.: 1.123)

The ideas expressed in these passages conform to the long tradition of Chinese philosophy which holds that both sides of various complementary pairs are necessary components of the cosmos. ZHONG Caijun 鍾彩錦 points out that this view has a tone of naturalism (Zhong 1992: 18).¹⁸ Nevertheless, the necessary existence of the bad does not imply that it is normatively justified to commit morally bad actions.

When talking about what is morally good and bad, CHENG Hao was upholding Mencius' view that human nature is good, albeit with his own interpretation:

"Inborn is what is meant by the nature." The nature is vital energy, vital energy is the nature: it is what is inborn. In the endowment of vital energy which humans receive at birth, there will in principle be both good and bad; but this does not mean that we are born with good and bad as two contrasting things present in our nature from the first.

¹⁸ One form of naturalism takes things that appear in the realm of phenomena as the entire content of metaphysical being. In this sense CHENG Hao's thought resembles a kind of naturalism. Nevertheless, for CHENG Hao behind the appearance of the realm of phenomena there is the operation of principle. Therefore I do not think it is appropriate to attribute naturalism to his thought.

Some are good from infancy, some are bad from infancy; that they are so is due to their endowment of vital energy. The good is of course the nature, but the bad must also be recognized as the nature. (Ibid.: 10–11)¹⁹

As discussed in the previous section, CHENG Hao used Gaozi's view of "inborn is what is meant by the nature" to maintain that the myriad things are endowed with inborn qualities as well as the principle of production when they are formed with vital energy. Both of these endowments constitute their nature. In other words, the nature, with the principle of production as its content, is embodied in the vital energy of an individual with certain inborn qualities. In this sense, nature and vital energy are inseparable. There is good and bad vital energy that makes some people good from infancy and some bad. While acknowledging that vital energy constitutes part of the nature, he upheld Mencius' claim that "the nature is good" and supported it by the idea embedded in the sentence "what succeeds it is goodness" in the "Great Appendix." In this sentence "it" refers to *dao*. For CHENG Hao, the unceasing productive power of *dao* is the good in itself (which is also the origin of the good), and is decreed to humans as human nature. When looking from *dao* to humans, it is the decree of Heaven, whereas looking from humans to *dao*, it is an act of succeeding. No matter which way we look, nature is good. The cause of badness is vital energy. When an individual is formed and his or her nature is mixed with vital energy, then badness might appear. But, as quoted above, CHENG Hao said the bad should also be recognized as the nature. It sounds confusing, if not contradictory, to say that the nature is good and simultaneously that the nature also consists of badness. This is due to the fact that such a claim involves two senses of the nature. One refers to the act of following after or succeeding the *dao* and the other refers to the inborn qualities endowed in an individual when formed. CHENG Hao was aware of this ambiguity:

"Inborn is what is meant by the nature." Nothing can be said of that which precedes the birth of humans, a state of stillness. As soon as we speak of the nature it has already ceased to be the nature. Usually when people speak of the nature, they are only talking about "what succeeds it is goodness," for example, the saying of Mencius that the nature is good. (Ibid.)

CHENG Hao thought that it is not proper to speak of the nature before an individual is born. When an individual is born, his or her nature is decreed from the way of Heaven (*dao*) which exists before his or her birth. CHENG Hao also recognized that when an individual is born with vital energy, then the nature we speak of is such that it has already mixed with vital energy and has ceased to be the original nature. According to the phrase, "inborn is what is meant by nature," however, even though it has ceased to be the original nature, it should be regarded as nature as well. Therefore the two senses of nature, i.e. that before birth and that after birth, have different implications concerning the

¹⁹ The speaker of this saying has not been specified. *Song-Yuan xue'an* includes it in "Mingdao xue'an."

good or bad attribution of the nature. The nature before one's birth is good (which is what "what succeeds it is goodness" means). After birth, the nature is mixed with vital energy and can be good or bad. However, usually when people speak of the nature, they are only talking about "what succeeds it is goodness." CHENG Hao also adopted this common practice and thus asserted that the nature is good. He used a water parable to illustrate that "this does not mean that we are born with good and bad as two contrasting things present in our nature from the first": water is originally clean and if it becomes muddy it is only because it has been polluted:

Whatever happens to it, it is still water. But some flows right to the sea without ever being polluted; this needs no effort to keep it clean. Some is certain to get progressively muddier before it has gone far; some gets muddy only after it has gone a long distance. Some has plenty of mud, some only a little; although the muddy water is different from the clean, it must still be recognized as water. This being so, it is necessary that man should accept the duty of cleansing and regulating it. The water will be cleaned quickly if his efforts are prompt and bold, slowly if they are careless. But when it is cleaned it is still only the original water; it is not that clean water has been fetched to replace the muddy, nor is it that the muddy has been taken away and put on one side. The cleanliness of the water corresponds to the goodness of the nature. Hence it is not that good and bad are two contrasting things within the nature which emerge separately. (Ibid.)

When water is clean, it does not possess a particular quality to render its cleanliness. The cleanliness of water is embodied in the water itself, without anything added to it. Therefore when we say that the water is clean, it only indicates the purity of the water. In this sense although "the water is clean" is not analytically true, "the pure water is clean" is. If we take this as an analogy, then goodness is not something added to nature to render the latter good, but rather is something already embodied in nature. We can see from the above discussion that the goodness which belongs to the original nature has transcended the duality of good and bad (inclinations). In this sense we may say good and bad have one root: the unceasing power of production of *dao*.

Conclusion

We have seen that the thesis of single-rootedness of CHENG Hao is presented in the domain of Heaven and humans, heart/mind and Heaven, *dao* and instruments and vital energy, human nature and vital energy, and finally in the good and the bad. Some of these relationships were expressed in a "sudden and perfect" way and some were not. All the surface dualities are integrated in *dao*, which signifies the unceasing power of production and reproduction, and which manifests itself in humans as well as other things. Taking this thesis as the metaphysical background, CHENG Hao's claims regarding the ways of moral practice and cultivation should be easier to understand.

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