

Wang Yangming

Record of Instructions for Practice,

Volume III

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Translated, with Annotations and Commentary,
by George Lawrence Israel

**Wang Yangming: Record of Instructions for Practice, Volume III
Version 2.0**

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ISBN: 9798863678795

Kindle Direct Publishing, October 2023

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Introduction

This is an English translation of the third volume (*juan xia* 卷下) of the *Record of Instructions for Practice* (*Chuan xi lu* 傳習錄). Wang Yangming's followers kept records of statements he made and conversations he held when discussing his Ruist learning with them. During and after his lifetime, these records were compiled in one or more volumes and titled *Record of Instructions for Practice* (or something similar). Many versions, each with different content, were published over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some editions included a volume with a compilation of important correspondence and pedagogical writings. Among these, the three-*juan* version included in the *Complete Works of Sir Wang Wencheng* (*Wang Wencheng gong quan shu* 王文成公全書), which was published by Xie Tingjie 謝廷傑 in 1572, is generally regarded as the most complete and authoritative. Modern editions of the *Record*, such as those published by Wing-tsit Chan and Li Yeming 黎業明, generally follow this one, albeit with slightly different arrangements and textual revision where other editions seemed to call for it. The Table of Contents (*mu lu* 目錄) for Li Yeming's edition, the one most closely followed here, reads as follows (with English added, pagination deleted, and graphs changed from simplified to traditional):

傳習錄序 Preface to the *Record of Instructions for Practice*

傳習錄上 *Record of Instructions for Practice* Volume I

徐愛錄 Xu Ai's Records

陸澄錄 Lu Cheng's Records

薛侃錄 Xue Kan's Records

傳習錄中 *Record of Instructions for Practice* Volume II

答顧東橋書 Letter in Reply to Gu Dongqiao

答周道通書 Letter in Reply to Zhou Daotong

答陸原靜書一 First Letter in Reply to Lu Yuanjing

又 (答陸原靜書二 Second Letter in Reply to Lu Yuanjing)

答歐陽崇一 Reply to Ouyang Chongyi
答羅整庵少宰書 Letter in Reply to Vice Minister of Personnel Luo
Zheng'an
答聶文蔚 Reply to Nie Wenwei
二 (答聶文蔚 二 Second Reply to Nie Wenwei)
訓蒙大意, 示教讀劉伯頌等 Basic Principles of Children's Education:
Instructions for Instructor Liu Bosong and Others
教約 Education Compact

傳習錄下 *Record of Instructions for Practice* Volume III

陳久川錄 Chen Jiuchuan's Records
黃直錄 Huang Zhi's Records
黃修易錄 Huang Xiuyi's Records
黃省曾錄 Huang Shengzeng's Records
黃以方錄 Huang Yifang's Records

Each of these *juan* has its own history prior to the publication of the three-volume *Record*, providing some justification for first publishing this one separately. The third volume (*juan xia* 卷下) consists of records gathered from Wang Yangming's followers by his ardent disciple Qian Dehong 錢德洪 after Wang had passed away in 1529. Qian compiled and edited these over the course of many years and then printed them in 1556 as the *Sequel to the Record of Instructions for Practice* (*Chuan xi xu lu* 傳習續錄). That same year, Qian also printed an edition of the *Record* containing all three *juan*, and this is the edition that Xie Tingjie incorporated into the *Complete Works*, as the first three of thirty-eight *juan*.

For the Chinese characters, I have adhered closely to the Chinese-language editions provided by Wing-tsit Chan and Li Yeming, albeit with occasional alterations to the punctuation. I have also checked the translation against Wing-tsit Chan's *Instructions for Practical Living* and benefited a great deal from it. Furthermore, in translating particular words, I have relied on the vast corpus of English-language publications. For a study and bibliography, see my *Studying Wang Yangming: History of a Sinological Field*. Also, since Wang Yangming often cites classical sources and Song dynasty Ruists, I have tried to provide the original quotations in full beneath each entry, as well as other explanatory notes. Lastly, I also provide a brief prefatory note for some entries, although these may certainly be disregarded.

傳習錄下

Record of Instructions for Practice

Volume III

陳九川錄 Chen Jiuchuan's Records

Chen Jiuchuan 陳久川 lived from 1494 to 1562, during the reigns of the Hongzhi, Zhengde, and Jiajing emperors. His courtesy name was Weijun 惟濬 and his art (style) names were Zhuting 竹亭 and Mingshui 明水. He hailed from Jiangxi Province, Fuzhou Prefecture, Linchuan County 臨川縣. He obtained his *jinsbi* 進士 (the highest examination degree) in 1514 at the impressively young age of twenty. He proceeded to hold a series of offices at the capital (Beijing). In 1519, however, he got himself into serious trouble. Along with other capital officials (Shu Fen, Xia Liangsheng, and Wan Chao), Jiuchuan submitted a memorial to the emperor remonstrating over his plans for a southern trip. The consequence for speaking out was serious punishment: he was forced to wear the cangue for five days and subjected to fifty lashings. After nearly dying, he was cashiered. However, for their courage, these four men, all from Jiangxi, did become quite renowned.

In 1521, in the wake of the Zhengde emperor's untimely death and his cousin Zhu Houcong's ascent to the throne, Jiuchuan was restored to his former office. Thereafter, he held a series of offices in Beijing. However, in 1525, his political adversaries turned the emperor against him and he ended up imprisoned for about two years, after which he was demoted to a guard unit in Fuzhou Province. In 1529, he was relieved of duty and allowed to retire and return home. He then devoted his time to scholarship, self-cultivation, and holding lecture-discussion forums.

Chen Jiuchuan first sought Wang Yangming's instruction in 1515 when Wang was staying in Nanjing. He found Wang's philosophy life changing. When at home Jiuchuan would write letters to his teacher asking about his theory of *ge wu* 格物 and other matters. In 1519, he met up with Wang in Nanchang, and in 1520 he devotedly studied under him in Ganzhou. Finally, in 1524, he also accompanied his teacher in Shaoxing, Zhejiang—Wang Yangming's second hometown. Eventually, Jiuchuan compiled a record of conversations they had held. These records comprise the first twenty entries in volume three of the *Chuan xi lu*.

201: 正德乙亥，九川初見先生於龍江。先生與甘泉先生論「格物」之說。甘泉持舊說。先生曰：「是求之於外了。」甘泉曰：「若

以格物理為外，是自小其心也。」九川甚喜舊說之是。先生又論「盡心」一章，九川一聞卻遂無疑。後家居，復以「格物」遺質，先生答云：「但能實地用功，久當自釋。」山間乃自錄《大學》舊本讀之，覺朱子「格物」之說非是；然亦疑先生以意之所在為物，物字未明。己卯，歸自京師，再見先生於洪都。先生兵務倥傯，乘隙講授，首問：「近年用功何如？」九川曰：「近年體驗得『明明德』功夫只是『誠意』。自『明明德於天下』，步步推入根源，到『誠意』上再去不得，如何以前又有『格致』工夫？後又體驗，覺得意之誠偽，必先知覺乃可，以顏子『有不善未嘗不知，知之未嘗復行』為證，豁然若無疑，卻又多了格物工夫。又思來吾心之靈，何有不知意之善惡？只是物欲蔽了，須格去物欲，始能如顏子『未嘗不知』耳。又自疑功夫顛倒，與『誠意』不成片段。後問希顏，希顏曰：『先生謂格物致知是誠意功夫，極好。』九川曰：『如何是誠意功夫？』希顏令再思體看，九川終不悟。請問。」先生曰：「惜哉！此可一言而悟。惟濬所舉顏子事便是了，只要知身、心、意、知、物是一件。」九川疑曰：「物在外，如何與身、心、意、知是一件？」先生曰：「耳、目、口、鼻、四肢，身也，非心安能視、聽、言、動？心欲視、聽、言、動，無耳、目、口、鼻、四肢亦不能。故無心則無身，無身則無心。但指其充塞處言之謂之身，指其主宰處言之謂之心，指心之發動處謂之意，指意之靈明處謂之知，指意之涉著處謂之物，只是一件。意未有懸空的，必著事物，故欲誠意，則隨意所在某事而格之，去其人欲而歸於天理，則良知之在此事者無蔽而得致矣。此便是誠意的功夫。」九川乃釋然破數年之疑。又問：「甘泉近亦信用《大學》古本，謂格物猶言造道，又謂窮理如窮其巢穴之窮，以身至之也，故格物亦只是隨處體認天理，似與先生之說漸同。」先生曰：「甘泉用功，所以轉得來。當時與說『親民』字不須改，他亦不信。今論『格物』亦近，但不須換『物』字作『理』字，只還他一物字便是。」後有人問九川曰：「今何不疑物字？」曰：「《中庸》曰『不誠無物』，程子曰『物來順應』，又如『物各付物』、『胸中無物』之類，皆古人常用字也。」他日先生亦云然。

During the *yi bai* year (1515) of [the reign of] the Zhengde emperor, [I,] Jiuchuan met Master [Yangming] for the first time, at Longjiang.¹ The Master was discussing theories of *ge wu* 格物 (“rectifying matters”) with Master Ganquan.² Ganquan maintained the old theory (=Zhu Xi’s).

(Zhu Xi said, “The phrase means to exhaustively arrive at the principles of affairs, missing no point as one reaches the ultimate.” [Eno 2016: 12])³ The Master said, “That is to seek it outside.” Ganquan said, “If you regard investigating the principles of things (*ge wu li* 格物理) as external this is to conceive of your mind narrowly.” I was very pleased with the correctness of the old theory. The Master also discussed the “*jinxin* 盡心 (‘exhausts his mind’)” section [in the *Mengzi*]. Upon hearing this, I had no more doubts.

Later, when living at home, I also sent a letter inquiring further about *ge wu*. The Master replied, stating, “If you can just make a serious effort at it, after a time you should understand it for yourself.” [While staying] in the mountains, I also copied down the original (*Record of Rites* [*Li ji* 禮記]) version of the *Great Learning* and read it.⁴ I felt that Master Zhu’s theory of *ge wu* (“investigating things”) was incorrect but also suspected that the meaning of the word *wu* 物 (“thing” or “object”) in Master Yangming’s theory that the object of one’s intention (*yi* 意) constitutes a thing remained unclear.

During the *yi mao* year (1519), while returning from the capital, I paid another visit to the Master in Hongdu (=Nanchang). The Master was pressed by his military duties but took advantage of spare time to lecture and instruct. He first asked, “In recent years, how has your effort to apply yourself to this practice been going?”

[I,] Jiuchuan said, “In recent years, I have learned from personal experience that the effort to ‘illuminate one’s illustrious virtue’ is simply a matter of ‘perfecting the genuineness (the sincerity and truthfulness) of one’s intentions (*cheng yi* 誠意).³ Beginning with ‘illuminating illustrious virtue throughout the world’ and pushing step-by-step through to the root and source, after reaching ‘perfecting the genuineness of one’s intentions,’ one cannot go any further, so why is it that prior to ‘perfecting the genuineness of one’s intentions’ there is still the practice of ‘investigating [things] and extending [knowledge]’?³ Thereafter, with further experience, I felt that I could only determine the genuineness or falsity of my intentions after first becoming aware of them. With Master Yan [Hui]—who ‘When he did something wrong he always knew it; knowing it, he never returned to it’⁵—as validation I suddenly understood, seemingly without any more doubts. However, I still regarded the practice of investigating things as unnecessary. I then thought about my mind’s intelligence (*ling* 靈). How could it not know the goodness or badness of one’s intentions? It is just

that it has been hidden by object desire, and it is necessary to rid (*ge* 格) the object desire. Only then will one be capable of being like Master Yan, always knowing [when one does something wrong]. Nevertheless, I suspected that I had inverted the practice such that they (*zhi zhi* 致知 and *ge wu* 格物) did not form—together with perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions—parts of a whole. Thereafter, I asked [Cai] Xiyān.⁶ Xiyān said, 'The Master's saying that rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物) and realizing knowing (*zhi zhi* 致知) are practices for perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions is excellent.' I asked, 'How does one practice perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions?' Xiyān directed me to reflect upon and experience it again, seeing how it goes. I never did understand it. What do you think?"

The Master said, "How unfortunate! This can be made clear [to you] in a word. The case of Master Yan raised by [you] Weijun is true. What matters is understanding that the body, mind, intention, knowledge, and things are one phenomenon."

[I,] Jiuchuan had doubts and said, "Things are outside. How can they form one phenomenon together with the body, mind, intention, and knowledge?"

The Master said, "Ears, eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs belong to the body. Without the mind, how can they see, hear, speak, and move? If your mind desires to see, hear, speak, and move, without ears, eyes, a mouth, a nose, and the four limbs, it also will be incapable of doing so. Therefore, without the mind there is no body and without the body there is no mind. Pointing only to its filling up space and speaking about it, it is called the body. Pointing to its governing function and speaking about it, it is called the mind. Pointing to what the mind generates, it is called intentions.⁷ Pointing to the intelligent and clear dimension of intentions, it is called knowing. Pointing to the area of concern pertaining to one's intentions, it is called a thing (*wu* 物). These are just one phenomenon. Intentions are not divorced from reality (lit.: suspended in midair). They must involve a matter or thing. Thus, if one desires to perfect the genuineness of one's intentions, then one should rectify (*ge* 格) whatever matter happens to be the object of one's intentions at that moment, ridding one's self-centered (egoic) desire and returning to heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理). Then, with respect to the innate knowing's presence in this matter, it will not be concealed and realization is attainable. This is the practice

of perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions." I subsequently felt relieved because many years of doubt were dispelled.

I also asked, "Recently, Ganquan has also become confident in the original version of the *Great Learning*. He says that to investigate things is like attaining the Way. He also stated that fully investigating principles is like reaching the heart of a lair. One arrives there in person. Thus, investigating things (*ge wu* 格物) also just consists of personally witnessing the principle of Heaven wherever one may be (*sui chu tiren tianli* 隨處體認天理). This seems to be getting closer to matching your theory." The Master said, "Because Ganquan works hard at this he can change [his position]. When I explained to him that the words *qin min* 親民 ('loving the people') did not need to be altered (as Zhu Xi had by interpreting *qin* as *xin* 新 [renew or revitalize]), he also did not believe me. His present explanation of *ge wu* 格物 is also nearer to the truth, but there is no need to change the word *wu* 物 ('thing') to the word *li* 理 ('principle'). Just change it back to the word *wu* 物 and it will be correct."

Thereafter, someone posed a question to me, stating, "Why do you not doubt the word *wu* 物?" I said, "The *Doctrine of the Mean* states, 'without genuineness there would be no things.'⁸ Master Cheng said, 'harmoniously respond to things as they come.'⁹ And then there are the sort of statements like 'leaving things as they are,'¹⁰ and 'having no thing in mind.' These are all cases indicative of how the word [*wu* 物] was commonly employed by the ancients." On another day, the Master also said that this was true.

¹ Longjiang 龍江 refers to the Longjiang *Shuima* postal station (水馬驛) located by Nanjing in Yingtian Prefecture 應天府.

² Ganquan is an art (style) name for Zhan Ruoshui (1466–1560). Zhan and Wang were colleagues and friends, and both made important contributions to the development of the Ming School of Mind.

³ This entire passage concerns the correct interpretation of the first part of the *Great Learning* as well as how it is to be practiced in one's life. The beginning of Zhu Xi's version of the *Great Learning* states, "The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright virtue brilliant; in making the people new; in coming to rest at the limit of the good. Only after wisdom comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one

possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend. Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao. In ancient times, those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to align their households first refined their persons; those who wished to refine their persons first balanced their minds; those who wished to balance their minds first perfected the genuineness of their intentions; those who wished to perfect the genuineness of their intentions first extended their understanding; extending one's understanding lies in aligning affairs. Only after affairs have been aligned may one's understanding be fully extended. Only after one's understanding is fully extended may one's intentions be perfectly genuine. Only after one's intentions are perfectly genuine may one's mind be balanced. Only after one's mind is balanced may one's person be refined. Only after one's person is refined may one's household be aligned. Only after one's household is aligned may one's state be ordered. Only after one's state is ordered may the world be set at peace.” (Eno 2016: 11-12)

⁴ The original version of the *Great Learning* (from the *Li ji* 禮記) also begins in this way, but Zhu Xi significantly rearranged the text that follows, as well as emending it, stressing the priority of the last two steps among the eight outlined above. Wang Yangming believed the original version prioritized *cheng yi* 誠意. In general, this entire passage is complex because Zhu Xi, Zhan Ruoshui, Chen Jiuchuan, and Wang Yangming each had subtly different understandings of the meaning of *zhi zhi* 致知 and *ge wu* 格物. A study parsing this out seems necessary. Regardless, the seriousness with which these scholars discussed the meaning of the Great Learning is evident.

⁵ The “Treatise on the Appended Remarks,” Part B, Section 5.12 of the *Scripture of Change* states, “The Master said, ‘Didn’t the son of the Yan clan [Yan Hui] take pains to come close [to the Way]? When he

did something wrong he always knew it; knowing it, he never returned to it.” (Adler 2020: 293)

⁶ Xiyan is the courtesy name for Cai Zongyan 蔡宗兗. His hometown was Zhejiang Province’s Shanyin County. He was one of Wang Yangming’s earliest followers.

⁷ To maintain consistency with Eno’s translation, I have continued to use “intentions.” However, other translations for *yi* 意, depending on the context, include “inclinations,” “will,” “thought,” and simply “mentation.”

⁸ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 25 states, “Perfect genuineness spontaneously completes things; the Dao spontaneously guides them. Perfect genuineness is the cycle of things ending and beginning anew. Without genuineness there would be no things.” (Eno 2016: 49)

⁹ Cheng Hao’s “Reply to Master Hengqu’s Letter on Calming Human Nature” states, “The constant principle of Heaven and Earth is that their mind is in all things, and yet they have no mind of their own. The constant principle of the sage is that his feelings are in accord with all creation, and yet he has no feelings of his own. Therefore, for the training of the superior man there is nothing better than to become broad and extremely impartial and to respond spontaneously to all things as they come.” (Chan 1963: 525)

¹⁰ The phrase *neng wu ge fu wu* 能物各付物 comes from the *Er cheng yi shu* 二程遺書 *juan* 18, available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=185164>.

202: *The Master explains to Chen Jiuchuan why sitting in meditation is unnecessary: a stability founded on the mind’s fundamental ground can be sustained through all activity.*

九川問：「近年因厭泛濫之學，每要靜坐，求屏息念慮，非惟不能，愈覺擾擾，如何？」先生曰：「念如何可息？只是要正。」曰：「當自有無念時否？」先生曰：「實無無念時。」曰：「如此卻如何言靜？」曰：「靜未嘗不動，動未嘗不靜。戒謹恐懼即

是念，何分動靜？」曰：「周子何以言『定之以中正仁義而主靜』？」曰：「『無欲故靜』，是『靜亦定，動亦定』的定字主其本體也；戒懼之念，是活潑潑地。此是天機不息處。所謂『維天之命，於穆不已』；一息便是死。非本體之念，則是私念。」

[I.] Jiuchuan asked, “In recent years, because I have grown tired of extensive studying, I often wish to practice quiet sitting, to try to stop thinking and worrying. Not only am I unable to do so, I feel even more confused. Why is that?”

Master [Yangming] replied, “How can thinking be stopped? It is just that it should be corrected.” I said, “But should there not be a time when one is not thinking?” The Master replied, “In fact, at no moment are we without thinking.” I said, “If that is so, how can we speak of tranquility?” The Master replied, “Tranquility is never without activity, and activity is never without tranquility. Alertness, caution, and apprehension are thinking, so what need is there to divide activity and tranquility?”¹ I asked, “Why did Master Zhou [Dunyi] say, [the sage] stabilizes [human affairs] with centrality, correctness, humanity, and righteousness but makes tranquility the foundation.”² The Master replied, “‘Because desires are absent one is tranquil’ means the *ding* 定 graph (stable) in [Cheng Hao’s phrase] ‘stable whether one is tranquil or active is the foundation of the [mind’s] original condition (*benti* 本體).³⁻⁴ Alert and apprehensive thinking is full of life. This is the location of the unceasing secret of Heaven (Tian 天) and what is meant by ‘the mandate of Heaven is profound and never-ending.’⁵ Its ceasing is death. Anything that is not the thinking of the original condition is self-centered (egoic) thinking.”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the

great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

² Zhou Lianxi (1017–1073) is an art (style) name of Zhou Dunyi. He was an important Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher. The phrase comes from his “*Taiji tu shuo* 太極圖說 (Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained).”

³ Cheng Hao (1032–1085) was also an important Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher.

⁴ *benti* 本體: (“original condition”) has also been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, viewed in its essential qualities, we say “essence” or “in itself.”

⁵ For this poem, see James Legge’s translation of the *Book of Poetry*, Ode 267.

203: *The Master criticizes Chen Jiuchuan's pursuit of single-pointed concentration and, more generally, meditative absorption leading to cessation, rather calling for a relaxed mindfulness.*

又問：「用功收心時，有聲色在前，如常聞見，恐不是專一。」曰：「如何欲不聞見？除是槁木死灰、耳聾目盲則可。只是雖聞見而不流去，便是。」曰：「昔有人靜坐，其子隔壁讀書，不知其勤惰，程子稱其甚敬。何如？」曰：「伊川恐亦是譏他。」

I also asked, “If at the moment you are applying yourself to collecting your mind you hear and see the sensuality (music and women) before you as you normally would, I am afraid that this cannot count as single-pointed concentration.”

Master [Yangming] replied, “Why do you not wish to hear and see? That is possible only if you are like dead wood and lifeless ashes, deaf and blind.¹ Rather, not [allowing your mind] to wander when seeing and hearing is okay.”

I said, “In the past there was a man who was quiet sitting while his son was reading next door and he had no idea if he was studying hard or being lazy. Master Cheng [Yichuan] praised him for being very reverent. What is that about?”

The Master replied, “I’m afraid that Yichuan was just making fun of him.”²

¹ *Zhuangzi* 2.1.2 states, “Yan Cheng, Ziyou, who was standing in attendance before him, said, ‘How can this be? Can the body really be made like dead wood and the mind like lifeless ashes?’” (Lynn 2022: 19).

² Cheng Yichuan (1032–1085) is an art (style) name for Cheng Yi. He was an important Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher. The story comes from the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumous works of the Chengs of Henan), which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

204: *The contemplative discipline is continuous, a unity of attention and mindfulness, as the unceasing manifestation of our undivided original condition.*

又問：「靜坐用功，頗覺此心收斂。遇事又斷了，旋起個念頭，去事上省察；事過又尋舊功，還覺有內外，打不作一片。」先生曰：「此『格物』之說未透。心何嘗有內外？即如惟濬今在此講論，又豈有一心在內照管？這聽講說時專敬，即是那靜坐時心，功夫一貫，何須更起念頭？人須在事上磨鍊做功夫乃有益。若只好靜，遇事便亂，終無長進，那靜時功夫，亦差似收斂而實放溺也。」後在洪都，復與于中、國裳論內外之說，渠皆云物自有內外，但要內外並著功夫，不可有間耳。以質先生。曰：「功夫不離本體，本體原無內外。只為後來做功夫的分了內外，失其本體了。如今正要講明功夫不要有內外，乃是本體功夫。」是日俱有省。

I also asked, “When quiet-sitting (=meditating) and applying effort, I really feel that my mind is collected. [However,] when I run into some issue that is interrupted again. I then have the impulse to reflect upon and examine myself while engaged with matters, but after those matters pass and I return to my former efforts, I am still conscious of possessing an interior and exterior and that I am unable to unify them.”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “This is because you have yet to understand the theory of rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物). Since when do our minds have an inside and outside? For example, when [you,] Weijun, are discussing these matters here today, how can there be a separate observer within looking after it?² The reverential focus while listening to an exposition is the same as the mental state enjoyed while sitting quietly. The practice is continuous, so why the need for this impulse? People should practice steeling themselves while engaged with life, for only then will they benefit. If you only desire tranquility, when you run into some matter you’ll fall apart, to the end never making any progress. The effort applied while quiet-sitting may seem like collecting oneself but in fact it is giving in to indulgence.”

Thereafter, while in Hongdu, [Master Yangming] further discussed his theory of the interior and exterior with [Xia] Yuzhong and [Shu] Guoshang.³⁻⁵ They both said that [the dualism of] internal and external is intrinsic to things but that internal and external should be united in practice. There cannot be a separation. They ran this by Master [Yangming]. He said, “The practice is not separate from our [mind’s] original condition (*xin zhi bentu* 心之本體), for in origin the original condition is devoid of [the] interior/exterior [dualistic separation]. It is just that thereafter those who

engaged with this discipline divided it into an interior and exterior and lost the original condition. Now, however, it should be clearly explained that with respect to this technique you should not have this internal/external [dualistic separation]. Only then will it be the practice of the original condition.” That day everyone gained in understanding.

¹ In other words, reality is experienced dualistically, as an expression of the separative self-sense.

² Weijun 惟濬 is the courtesy name for Chen Jiuchuan, the interlocutor.

³ Hongdu 洪都 is a historical place name for Nanchang 南昌, Jiangxi.

⁴ Yuzhong 于中 is a courtesy name for Xia Liangsheng 夏良勝 (1480–1538). He hailed from Nancheng County 南城縣, Jianchang Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, obtained his *jinshi* in 1508, and enjoyed a lengthy political career during the reigns of the Zhengde and Jiajing emperors.

⁵ Guoshang 國裳 is a courtesy name for Shu Fen 舒芬 (1484–1527). He was from Jinxian County 進賢縣, Nanchang Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, and obtained his *jinshi* in 1517. Thereafter, he enjoyed a brief political career in service during the reigns of the Zhengde and Jiajing emperors.

205: *Lu Xiangshan, while unrefined in some sense, nevertheless understood the simple and easy, as realized through a mental discipline free of conventional intellectual habits.*

又問：「陸子之學何如？」先生曰：「濂溪、明道之後，還是象山，只還粗些。」九川曰：「看他論學，篇篇說出骨髓，句句似鍼膏肓，卻不見他粗。」先生曰：「然。他心上用過功夫，與揣摩依仿、求之文義自不同。但細看有粗處，用功久，當見之。」

I further asked, “What do you think of the learning of Master Lu?”¹ Master [Yangming] replied, “After [Zhou] Lianxi and [Cheng] Mingdao there was still [Lu] Xiangshan.²⁻³ It is just that he was still a bit unrefined.” [L.] Jiuchuan said, “Looking at his discussion of learning, every essay

speaks to the bones and marrow, and every sentence is like a needle jabbed in the *gaobuang* (heavy breath) [acupuncture point]. I really don't see where he is unrefined.”

The Master stated, “That's true. He did engage in mental discipline, and in a way that was intrinsically different from those who conjecture, imitate, rely on, and copy others, or search for it in the exegesis of texts. But if you look closely, you will see the unrefined areas. After you have applied yourself to this practice for a long time, you should see it.”

¹ Lu refers to Lu Xiangshan (1139–1193). Lu Xiangshan is an honorific name for Lu Jiuyuan, a Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Southern Song dynasty. His hometown was Fuzhou Prefecture.

² Lianxi is an art (style) name for Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073). He was an important Northern Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher.

³ Mingdao is an art (style) name for Cheng Hao (1032–1085). He was also an important Northern Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher.

206: *The Master explains to Chen Jiuchuan where his contemplative practice has gone wrong. He mistakenly believed that the natural moral order (tianli 天理) is separate from the mind. However, the good news is that he can overcome this division by realizing his knowledge of goodness, his pure knowledge of right and wrong, which is always present, discerning the truth.*

庚辰，往虔州再見先生，問：「近來功夫，雖若稍知頭腦，然難尋個穩當快樂處。」先生曰：「爾卻去心上尋個天理，此正所謂理障。此間有個訣竅。」曰：「請問如何？」曰：「只是致知。」曰：「如何致？」曰：「爾那一點良知，是爾自家底準則。爾意念著處，他是便知是，非便知非，更瞞他一些不得。爾只不要欺他，實實落落依著他做去，善便存，惡便去。他這裏何等穩當快樂！此便是格物的真訣，致知的實功。若不靠著這些真機，如何去格物？我亦近年體貼出來如此分明，初猶疑只依他恐有不足，精細看，無些小欠闕。」

During the *gengchen* year (1520), I (=Jiuchuan) travelled to Qianzhou to visit with Master [Yangming].¹ I asked, “Recently, when applying myself [to

moral self-cultivation], although it seems that I have some understanding of the essentials, nevertheless, it has been difficult to find a steady and happy place.”

The Master stated, “You are still trying to find heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理) in your mind.² This is precisely what is referred to as a *li* 理 hindrance.³ There is a trick to this.” I asked, “Can you tell me what it is?” The Master replied, “It is only a matter of realizing the innate knowing.”⁴ I asked, “How does one realize the innate knowing?”

The Master replied, “Your little bit of innate knowing is your own standard. If what your thinking is fixated on is right, then *liangzhi* will know it is right. If it is wrong, then the innate knowing will know it is wrong. It is not susceptible to the slightest deception. You just do not want to deceive it. Really and truly act on the basis of it. If something is good, sustain it. If something is evil, eliminate it. This is just so reliable and cheerful! This is the perfect teaching of rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物) and the correct practice of realizing knowing (*zhi zhi* 致知). If you do not rely on this truth, how can you go about rectifying matters? In recent years, I have as well come to appreciate how obvious it is as this. At first, I still suspected that only relying on the innate knowing would surely be insufficient. But having looked at it very carefully, I see that it hasn’t the slightest imperfection.”

¹ Qianzhou 虔州 is a historical place name for Ganzhou 贛州, Jiangxi.

² *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

³ The Digital Dictionary of Buddhism defines a *li* 理 hindrance as follows: “Noumenal hindrances. These, paired with the phenomenal

hindrances 事障, [are] the two main types of hindrance which impede liberation according to the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*. The noumenal hindrance is defined as the obstruction to correct awareness, the inability to see things as they really are; thus an inability to perceive the emptiness, or thusness, of things. Compared to the ‘phenomenal hindrance,’ the noumenal hindrances are subtler, and so are considered to be a problem for more advanced practitioners.”

⁴ Translations of 良知 *liangzhi* include “extend [and realize] the knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “extension of the innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “reaching good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “the extension of pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe). For *liangzhi*, innate, intuitive, and inborn (knowledge of the good or good knowledge or good knowing) all frequently appear in the literature. *Liangzhi* is one’s natural moral intelligence and native moral insight as well as simply one’s fundamental goodness. Some scholars recommend leaving *liangzhi* untranslated.

207: *Everyone is a sage. Our conscience can never be extinguished, perhaps only obscured, like clouds blocking out sunlight. Such is our intrinsic dignity, about which we should feel confident.*

在虔，與于中、謙之同侍。先生曰：「人胸中各有個聖人，只自信不及，都自埋倒了。」因顧于中曰：「爾胸中原是聖人。」于中起不敢當。先生曰：「此是爾自家有的，如何要推？」于中又曰：「不敢。」先生曰：「眾人皆有之，況在于中，卻何故謙起來？謙亦不得。」于中乃笑受。又論：「良知在人，隨你如何，不能泯滅。雖盜賊亦自知不當為盜，喚他作賊，他還忸怩。」于中曰：「只是物欲遮蔽。良心在內，自不會失，如雲自蔽日，日何嘗失了？」先生曰：「于中如此聰明，他人見不及此。」

[Master Yangming] was in Qian.¹ [Xia] Yuzhong and [Zou] Qianzhi were accompanying him.²⁻³ He said, “Everyone’s heart contains a sage. It is just that they don’t have enough self-confidence about it, so they all end up burying it.” Accordingly, he turned his attention to Yuzhong and said, “You have always had this sage within.” Yuzhong stood up, not daring to

accept it. The Master stated, “This is what you yourself possess, so why do you wish to decline?” Yuzhong then said, “I don’t dare.” The Master replied, “Everyone has one, to say nothing of Yuzhong! So why are you being so reticent? Modesty just won’t cut it.” Yuzhong thus smiled and accepted it.

The Master further explained, “The existence of the innate knowing in people is such that no matter what you do you cannot destroy it. Even a thief knows that he should not be a thief. Call him out for it and he will still be embarrassed.” Yuzhong replied, “It is just that the desire for material things has hidden it from view. The innate knowing lies within, and we cannot lose it. This is like clouds that conceal the sun. When has the sun ever disappeared?” The Master said, “Such is Yuzhong’s intelligence. How can others’ insight match it?”

¹ Qian 虔 is a historical place name for Ganzhou 贛州, Jiangxi Province.

² For Xia Yuzhong, see 204.

³ Qianzhi 謙之 is a style name for Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562). He hailed from Anfu County 安福縣, Ji’an Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, and obtained his *jinsbi* in 1511.

208: *Liangzhi* is your moral compass, an intuitive certainty that seals the truth.

先生曰：「這些子看得透徹，隨他千言萬語，是非誠偽，到前便明，合得的便是，合不得的便非，如佛家說『心印』相似，真是個試金石、指南針。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “After you have seen this [=the innate knowing] clearly, as a thousand utterances and ten thousand statements come before it, the right and wrong and truthfulness or falsity of them will be instantly illuminated. What agrees with it is right and what disagrees with it is wrong. This is akin to what the Buddhists speak of as the ‘mind-seal.’¹ It truly is a touchstone and a compass.”

¹ The Digital Dictionary of Buddhism defines mind-seal (*xin yin* 心印) as follows: “Mental impression, intuitive certainty; the mind is

the Buddha-mind in all, which can seal or assure the truth; the term indicates the direct approach of Chan, asserting independence from language.”

209: 先生曰：「人若知這良知訣竅，隨他多少邪思枉念，這裏一覺，都自消融。真個是靈丹一粒，點鐵成金。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “If someone knows the secret to this teaching of the innate knowing, no matter how many immoral or crooked thoughts he may have, just as soon as the innate knowing becomes aware of them, they all melt away of their own accord. It truly is a granule of efficacious elixir that with one touch transmutes iron to gold.”¹

¹ The expression “a granule of efficacious elixir that with one touch transmutes iron into gold” comes from the *Jingde chuan deng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (The Jingde record of the transmission of the lamp). *Liangzhi* is like an efficacious elixir, dissolving immoral and crooked thoughts right when they appear. Wang Yangming draws an analogy between his practice of moral self-cultivation through the realization of the innate knowing and Chinese external alchemy (*waidan* 外丹), the focus of which is compounding elixirs by refining substances. Here, *liangzhi* is the efficacious elixir. One dissipates evil in the very act of identifying it, and the other turns metal into gold with one touch.

210: *Realization of our intrinsic goodness only deepens over time.*

崇一曰：「先生致知之旨，發盡精蘊，看來這裏再去不得。」先生曰：「何言之易也？再用功半年看如何，又用功一年看如何。功夫愈久愈覺不同，此難口說。」

[Ouyang] Chongyi said, “Sir, you have fully expounded upon the essence and depths of your objective of realizing [the innate] knowing, so it would seem that in this regard we can go no further.”¹

Master [Yangming] replied, “How can you so readily make that claim? Apply yourself to this practice for another six months and see what comes out of it. Do so again for another year and see what comes out of it. The longer you practice this, the more you will sense that it is not the same as before. This is difficult to put into words.”

¹ Chongyi 崇一 is a courtesy name for Ouyang De 歐陽德 (1496–1554). He hailed from Jiangxi Province, Ji'an Prefecture 吉安府, Taihe County 太和縣.

211: *One must first directly experience zhi liangzhi 致良知 (realizing the innate knowing) for oneself, and then, over time, the mystery of this long-transmitted secret will only deepen, becoming ever more profound. Thus, after an initial enlightenment, one can always further awaken, as liangzhi is inexhaustible, the infinite depths of our goodness.*

先生問九川：「於致知之說體驗如何？」九川曰：「自覺不同。往時操持，常不得個恰好處，此乃是恰好處。」先生曰：「可知是體來，與聽講不同。我初與講時，知爾只是忽易，未有滋味；只這個要妙，再體到深處，日見不同，是無窮盡的。」又曰：「此『致知』二字，真是個千古聖傳之秘，見到這裏，『百世以俟聖人而不惑』。」

Master [Yangming] asked Jiuchuan, “How has your personal experience with my theory of realizing the innate knowing been going?” Jiuchuan said, “I feel that it differs from before. When I applied this in the past, I never found a place where I felt just right, but this is indeed a good place.”

Master [Yangming] said, “You can see that experiencing this for oneself and listening to expositions are two different matters. When I first explained this to you, I knew that you were merely dismissive and had not tasted it for yourself. Just grasp this profound mystery at a deeper level, and each day your insight will differ from before, as it is inexhaustible.”

He further stated, “These two words—‘zhi zhi 致知’—truly are a secret transmitted through all time by the ancient sages. Once one understands this, ‘If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence, he could apply it and be without confusion.’”¹

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 29 states, “Thus the Dao of the *junzi* is rooted in his own person, confirmed in the common people, assessed against the kings of the Three Eras, all without flaw. When established within heaven and earth it is not rejected. When put to examination by the ghosts and spirits it is not doubted. If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence, he could apply it and be without confusion. ‘When put to examination by the ghosts

and spirits it is not doubted’: such is its understanding of Tian. ‘If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence, he could apply it and be without confusion’: such is its understanding of man.” (Eno 2016: 52)

For Wang Yangming, realizing the good knowing is the Dao of the *junzi*.

212: *The Master tells Chen Jiuchuan why his having divulged Heaven’s secret is no big deal. However, the obvious identity of the manifest and subtle may be lost on those who fail to make the effort to see it.*

九川問曰：「伊川說到『體用一原、顯微無間』處，門人已說是泄天機。先生『致知』之說，莫亦泄天機太甚否？」先生曰：「聖人已指以示人，只為後人掩匿，我發明耳，何故說泄？此是人人自有的，覺來甚不打緊一般。然與不用實功人說，亦甚輕忽，可惜彼此無益；與實用功而不得其要者提撕之，甚沛然得力。」

[I,] Jiuchuan asked, “When [Cheng] Yichuan spoke of the realm where ‘substance and function are of one source and the manifest and subtle are undivided’ his students said that he had divulged Heaven’s secret (*tianji* 天機).¹ Has not your theory of realizing [the innate] knowing, sir, also gone too far in revealing Heaven’s secret?”

Master [Yangming] said, “To teach people, the sages had already pointed it out. It is just that in later times people concealed it. I have merely explained it anew, so why do you say I have divulged it? This is something everyone possesses intrinsically. When you become aware of it, it will seem very insignificant and ordinary. Hence, if you talk about it with those who do not apply meaningful effort, they will be quite dismissive. Unfortunately, this will be of no benefit to anyone. If you instruct those who meaningfully apply themselves to this but haven’t understood the crux of it, they will abundantly benefit.”

¹ Cheng Yichuan (1032–1085) is an art (style) name for Cheng Yi. He was an important Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher. *Tianji* 天機 has also been translated as Heaven’s mechanism. The cited passage is located in the *Henan Cheng shi wai shu* 河南程氏外書 (Additional works of the Chengs of Henan).

213: 又曰：「知來本無知，覺來本無覺，然不知則遂淪埋。」

[Master Yangming] also said, “When knowledge [of the original condition] comes, [you realize that] originally there is no knowledge. When awakening [to the original condition] comes, [you realize that] originally there is no awakening. However, if you do not know then [the original condition of *liangzhi* 良知] will, after all, become submerged and buried [in phenomena].”

Note: This is a difficult passage and I am proffering one possible reading.

214: *The Master teaches his considerate approach to handling friendship.*

先生曰：「大凡朋友須箴規指摘處少、誘掖獎勸意多，方是。」後又戒九川云：「與朋友論學，須委曲謙下、寬以居之。」

Master [Yangming] said, “For the most part, it is best for friends to proffer less in the way of admonishment and criticism and more in the way of an intention to guide, help, encourage, and persuade.” Later, he further cautioned Jiuchuan, stating, “When discussing learning with friends, you should be indirect, do so from a posture of humility, and govern your repose with magnanimity.”¹

¹ The *Classic of Changes* “Commentary on the Words of the Text” for the Qian 乾 Hexagram states, “The noble man accumulates knowledge by studying and becomes discriminating by posing questions. It is magnanimity that governs his repose, and it is benevolence that guides his actions.” (Lynn 1994: 133)

215: *Even when one feels unwell, the happiness intrinsic to the mind's original condition can be sustained.*

九川臥病虔州。先生云：「病物亦難格，覺得如何？」對曰：「功夫甚難。」先生曰：「常快活便是功夫。」

[I,] Jiuchuan was laid up with illness in Qianzhou.¹ Master [Yangming] said, “Inquiring into illness as a [mental] object (*bing wu* 病物) is indeed difficult. How do you feel?” I replied, “This practice is quite difficult.”

The Master said, “Always being cheerful is the practice.”

¹ Qianzhou 虔州 is a historical place name for Ganzhou 贛州, Jiangxi Province.

Note: Wang Yangming often stated that mind in its natural state is happiness or joy.

216: *Acting virtuously yields the courage necessary to straighten out a disorderly mental life.*

九川問：「自省念慮，或涉邪妄，或預料理天下事，思到極處，井井有味，便纏纏難屏，覺得早則易，覺遲則難，用力克治，愈覺扞格。惟稍遷念他事，則隨兩忘。如此廓清，亦似無害。」先生曰：「何須如此，只要在良知上著功夫。」九川曰：「正謂那一時不知。」先生曰：「我這裏自有功夫，何緣得他來？只為爾功夫斷了，便蔽其知。既斷了，則繼續舊功便是，何必如此？」九川曰：「直是難處，雖知，丟他不去。」先生曰：「須是勇。用功久，自有勇，故曰『是集義所生者』。勝得容易，便是大賢。」

[I.] Jiuchuan asked, “When I examine my thoughts and concerns, [I see that] sometimes they involve impropriety and falsity and sometimes I consider in advance how to run the world’s affairs. When my thinking becomes most intense it is orderly and absorbing, so I become wrapped up in it and it is hard to let it go. If I realize this early enough it is easy, but if I realize this belatedly then it is difficult. As I exert myself to control [my thoughts], I become even more aware of contradictions. I only forget about both [the thinking and trying to control the thinking] after I slightly refocus my thinking on other matters. It seems there is no harm in clearing out thinking in this way.”

The Master said, “Why the need to do it like this? You need only direct your disciplined practice to the innate knowing.” I said, “I can truly say that at those moments I am not aware of it.” The Master said, “We have the [capacity for] this discipline within ourselves right here. So how could that happen? Your practice has merely been interrupted, thus concealing this knowing. Since it has been interrupted, proceeding with your former practice will be good. What’s the reason for [controlling and refocusing] like that?”

[I,] Jiuchuan said, “Frankly, it’s a difficult battle. Although I know I should reject the thinking I don’t drive it out.” The Master said, “Courage is necessary. After you apply yourself to this practice for some time, you will possess courage. Therefore, it has been said, ‘[flood-like *qi*] is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right.’¹ Those for whom it is easy to succeed are great worthies!”

¹ *Mengzi* 2A.2 states, “Gongsun Chou asked, ‘What do you mean by “flood-like *qi*”?’ ‘It is hard to describe,’ said Mencius. ‘This is a *qi* that is as vast and firm as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never impairs it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right. It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away.’” (Eno 2016: 40)

217: *The Master comments on the distinction between bookish knowledge and personally meaningful knowledge.*

九川問：「此功夫卻於心上體驗明白，只解書不通。」先生曰：「只要解心。心明白，書自然融會。若心上不通，只要書上文義通，卻自生意見。」

[I,] Jiuchuan asked, “This practice must be clearly experienced psychologically. Just explaining the meaning of books won’t make it understandable.”

Master [Yangming] said, “You need only understand your mind. If your mind is clear, you will easily comprehend books. If you fail to understand them in a personally meaningful way but rather try to do so by interpreting the meaning of language in books, then you will only generate opinions.”

218: *Everything we do is an extension of our moral life and hence the place where our heart gathers righteousness through the extension of our innate knowledge of the good.*

有一屬官，因久聽講先生之學，曰：「此學甚好，只是簿書訟獄繁難，不得為學。」先生聞之，曰：「我何嘗教爾離了簿書訟獄懸空去講學？爾既有官司之事，便從官司的事上為學，纔是真格

物。如問一詞訟，不可因其應對無狀，起個怒心；不可因他言語圓轉，生個喜心；不可惡其囑託，加意治之；不可因其請求，屈意從之；不可因自己事務煩冗，隨意苟且斷之；不可因旁人譖毀羅織，隨人意思處之。這許多意思皆私，只爾自知，須精細省察克治，惟恐此心有一毫偏倚，枉人是非，這便是格物致知。簿書訟獄之間，無非實學；若離了事物為學，卻是著空。」

Because he had heard Master [Yangming] lecture on his philosophy (*xue* 學) for some time, a subordinate official said, “This philosophy is quite satisfactory. It is just that because record-keeping and litigation are so complicated and demanding, I don’t have the time to engage with it.”

When the Master heard this, he replied, “When did I teach you to drop record-keeping and litigation so as to engage in hollow philosophical discussion? Since attending to official matters is already required of you, just make those official matters the object of your learning. Only then will you truly be rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物). Take, for example, presiding over a legal case. You should not get angry because the litigant’s answers have no basis. You should not feel pleased because his answers are clever. You should not deliberately sentence him to greater punishment just because you dislike the person speaking on his behalf. You should not cave by giving him what he wants just because he pleads for leniency. Just because of the difficult and excessive nature of your own workload, you should not issue judgments arbitrarily and perfunctorily. You should not on account of people’s defamation and false allegations follow others’ wishes in handling the case. These kinds of inclinations are all private in nature, and so long as you are aware of them, you must carefully and meticulously examine yourself and overcome and control this, only worrying that you will be biased in the slightest and do an injustice to someone. This is rectifying affairs and extending knowledge (*zhi zhi* 致知). All record-keeping and litigation are the place for true learning. If you depart from practical matters when engaging in learning, that is just pointless.”

219: *The learning of the sages is as simple a matter as our preferences conforming to our natural moral intelligence (liangzhi 良知).*

虔州將歸，有詩別先生云：「良知何事繫多聞，妙合當時已種根。好惡從之為聖學，將迎無處是乾元。」先生曰：「若未來講

此學，不知說『好惡從之』從個甚麼。」敷英在座曰：「誠然。嘗讀先生《大學古本序》，不知所說何事，及來聽講許時，乃稍知大意。」

When I (=Jiuchuan) was preparing to return home from Qianzhou, I composed a poem as a parting gift for Master [Yangming].¹ It said:

Why does *liangzhi* depend on ever more information?

At the moment of mysterious harmonization, the root has already been planted.

Liking and disliking conforming to it is the learning of the sages.

Sending people off and receiving them without planning is the originating [power] of Qian.

Master [Yangming] said, “Had you not come to discuss this learning, you would not know what is being conformed to when saying ‘liking and disliking conforming to it.’” Fuying was present and said, “That’s true. I once read Master [Yangming’s] ‘Preface to the Ancient Version of the *Great Learning*’ but did not understand what it was discussing. Now that I have come and listened to him lecture for a time, I have some understanding of its general meaning.”²⁻³

¹ Qianzhou 虔州 is a historical place name for Ganzhou 贛州, Jiangxi.

² Fuying 敷英 is the style name for Wang Shike 王時柯. He was from Jiangxi Province, Wan’an County 萬安縣, and obtained his *jinsbi* in 1512. See *Ming shi* 明史, *Wang Shike zhuan* 王時柯傳.

³ Wang Yangming’s “Preface to the Ancient Version of the *Great Learning*” referenced here is located in *juan* 7 of his collected works.

220: 于中、國裳輩同侍食，先生曰：「凡飲食，只是要養我身，食了要消化；若徒蓄積在肚裏，便成痞了，如何長得肌膚？後世學者博聞多識，留滯胸中，皆傷食之病也。」

[Xia] Yuzhong, [Shu] Guoshang, and others were eating together with Master [Yangming].¹ He said, “All drinking and eating just serves the

purpose of nourishing our bodies. After we eat, we want it to digest. If it just accumulates and sits in our stomachs, it will become a lump in the abdomen. In that case, how can our muscles and skin grow? The extensive learning and knowledgeability of students of later generations creates a blockage in their bosom, all of which is like illness caused by poor eating habits.”

¹ Yuzhong 于中 is a courtesy name for Xia Liangsheng 夏良勝 (1480–1538). He hailed from Nancheng County 南城縣, Jianchang Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, obtained his *jinsbi* in 1508, and enjoyed a lengthy political career during the reigns of the Zhengde and Jiajing emperors. Guoshang 國裳 is a courtesy name for Shu Fen 舒芬 (1484–1527). He was from Jinxian County 進賢縣, Nanchang Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, and obtained his *jinsbi* in 1517. Thereafter, he enjoyed a brief political career in service during the reigns of the Zhengde and Jiajing emperors.

221: *All people possess liangzhi as the essence, the original condition, of their minds. It is just that the degree to which people are aware of the true condition of their minds varies because the degree of concealment varies. However, all can uncover this by practicing goodness in their daily lives.*

先生曰：「聖人亦是『學知』，眾人亦是『生知』。」問曰：「何如？」曰：「這良知人人皆有，聖人只是保全，無些障蔽，兢兢業業，翼翼自然，便也是學，只是生的分數多，所以謂之『生知安行』；眾人自孩提之童，莫不完具此知，只是障蔽多，然本體之知自難泯息，雖問學克治，也只憑他，只是學的分數多，所以謂之『學知利行』。」

Master [Yangming] said, “The sage also ‘studies to understand it,’ and ordinary people are also ‘born understanding it.’”¹ I asked, “How so?” The Master replied, “Everyone possesses this innate knowing. The sage, however, perfectly sustains it without any obstruction or concealment whatsoever. He is cautious and apprehensive, diligent and circumspect, naturally and unceasingly. This is his learning. It is just that the portion given at birth is greater, which is why it is said [of the sage] that he is ‘born understanding it and practices it through natural ease.’ As for ordinary

people, everyone possesses this knowing in toto from infancy, just that the obstacles and concealments are greater. Nevertheless, the [innate] knowing of the [mind's] original condition is inherently difficult to extinguish. Whether studying or engaging in self-discipline, they rely on it. However, the amount of learning required is greater, which is why it is said of them that they 'learn it by studying and practice it to benefit thereby.'"

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 20 states, "Some are born understanding it, some study to understand it, some come to understand it only in circumstances of duress. But once they understand it, they are all one. Some practice it through natural ease, some practice it to benefit thereby, some practice it by forcing themselves. But once they succeed by means of it, they are all one." (Eno 2016: 45)

黃直錄 Huang Zhi's Records

Huang Zhi lived from 1489 to 1559, during the reigns of the Hongzhi, Zhengde, and Jiajing emperors. His hometown was Jinxi County 金溪縣, Fuzhou Prefecture, Jiangxi Province. His courtesy name was Yifang 以方, and his art (style) name was Zhuofeng 卓峰. He won his provincial examination degree (*juren* 舉人) in 1516 and metropolitan degree (*jinsbi* 進士) in 1523. After obtaining his *juren* degree he spent time studying at the National Imperial University. In 1520, he first returned home and then proceeded to Ganzhou to call on Wang Yangming and study under him for a time. A diligent student, he recorded his teacher's statements and conversations. Volume III contains forty-two entries listed under his name (see also entries 316 to 342, and note that some of those entries were likely not recorded by him).

222: *The Master describes the fundamental ground of our heart-mind, which is like the heavens and the deep, as well as what obstructs recovery of the whole, an opaque narcissism, egoic self-love.*

黃以方問：「先生格致之說，隨時格物以致其知，則知是一節之知，非全體之知也，何以到得『溥博如天，淵泉如淵』地位？」先生曰：「人心是天、淵。心之本體無所不該，原是一個天，只為私欲障礙，則天之本體失了；心之理無窮盡，原是一個淵，只為私欲窒塞，則淵之本體失了。如今念念致良知，將此障礙窒塞一齊去盡，則本體已復，便是天、淵了。」乃指天以示之曰：「比如面前見天，是昭昭之天；四外見天，也只是昭昭之天。只為許多房子牆壁遮蔽，便不見天之全體，若撤去房子牆壁，總是一個天矣。不可道眼前天是昭昭之天，外面又不是昭昭之天也。於此便見一節之知即全體之知，全體之知即一節之知，總是一個本體。」

Huang Yifang asked, “With respect to your theory of rectifying (*ge* 格) and realizing (*zhi* 致), if we realize knowledge by rectifying matters in each moment then this knowledge is just knowledge of one part and not knowledge in its entirety. As such, how does one reach the status of ‘*As arching vastness: he is like the heavens. As depthless springs: he is like the deep!*’”¹

Master [Yangming] replied, “The human mind is the heavens and the deep. There is nothing that the mind’s original condition (*benti* 本體) does not encompass.² In origin it is one heaven, just that it has been obstructed by self-centered desires.³ Hence, heaven’s original condition has been lost. The order (*li* 理) of the mind is inexhaustible. In origin, the mind is one deep, just that it has been blocked out by self-centered desire. Thus, the deep’s original condition has been lost. Now, if you realize the innate knowing (*zhi liang* 致良知) in every thinking moment, entirely removing the obstruction and blockages, then the mind’s original condition will be restored.”⁴

To demonstrate what he meant, he then pointed to the sky, saying, “For example, you see the sky before you. It is a bright sky. All around you can see the sky, and it is also a bright sky, just that it has been hidden from view by buildings’ walls, so you can’t see the whole sky. If you tear down the buildings’ walls, it will just be one sky. You can’t say that what’s before you is the bright sky while what’s outside surrounding it is not. As such, we can see that knowledge of the part is knowledge of the whole and knowledge of the whole is knowledge of the part. It is just one essence (*benti* 本體).”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 31 states, “Only the greatest sage in the world possesses the keen powers of listening and seeing, penetration and wisdom that fit him to approach men as a ruler; the magnanimity, generosity, gentleness, and flexibility that fit him to accommodate others; the vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution that fit him to take a firm grip; the focus, seriousness, balance, and uprightness that fit him to be reverent; the pattern, order, concentration, and incisiveness that fit him to discriminate among different things. As arching vastness, as depthless springs, he brings forth all this according to the times. *As arching vastness*: he is like the heavens. *As depthless springs*: he is like the deep. When he appears, none fail to respect him; when he speaks, none fail to have faith in him; when he acts, none fail to be content.” (Eno 2016: 53)

² *benti* 本體 (“original condition”) has also been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental

state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is we say “essence” or “in itself.”

³ That is, by the desire for self, by egoic self-love, a fundamental narcissism.

⁴ Translations of *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 include “extend [and realize] the knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “extension of the innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “reaching good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “the extension of pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe). For *liangzhi*, innate, intuitive, and inborn (knowledge of the good or good knowledge or good knowing) all frequently appear in the literature. *Liangzhi* is one’s natural moral intelligence and native moral insight as well as simply one’s fundamental goodness. Some scholars recommend leaving *liangzhi* untranslated.

223: *A criterion essential for attaining sagehood is described.*

先生曰：「聖賢非無功業氣節，但其循著這天理則便是道，不可以事功氣節名矣。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “It is not that the sages and worthies are lacking in meritorious deeds and high moral principle. However,

they accord with heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理), which is the Way. Their recognition cannot rest merely on meritorious deeds and high moral principle.”¹

¹ *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

224: *Concerning Zhu Xi's understanding of what motivated Confucius.*

「『發憤忘食』，是聖人之志如此，真無有已時；『樂以忘憂』，是聖人之道如此，真無有戚時。恐不必云『得』，『不得』也。」

[Master Yangming said,] “[Confucius is the sort of man who] forgets to eat when he tries to solve a problem that has been driving him to distraction—the sage’s determination is like this; really, at no time does he stop. ‘Who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries?’—the sage’s Way is like this; really, at no time is he unhappy. I am afraid that there is no need to speak of ‘succeeding’ or ‘not yet succeeding.’”¹

¹ Wang Yangming is referring to Zhu Xi’s explanation of *Analects* 7/19, which states, “The Governor of She asked Zilu about Confucius. Zilu did not answer. The Master said, ‘Why did you not simply say something to this effect: he is the sort of man who forgets to eat when he tries to solve a problem that has been driving him to distraction, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries and who does not notice the onset of old age?’” (Trans. Lau) In his *Collected Commentary on the Analects* (*Lunyu jizhu* 論語集注), Zhu Xi writes, “Because he had not yet succeeded when trying to solve a problem that had been driving him to distraction, [Confucius] forgot to eat. Because he had succeeded, he was full of joy and forgot his worries.” The *Commentary*

is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/lun-yu-ji-zhu/zh>.

225: *The innate knowing (liangzhi 良知) is present in everyone to some degree, but we must all take care to cultivate it correctly, based on that degree of realization. Awakening to our natural wisdom and goodness is a gradual process that can't be forced.*

先生曰：「我輩致知，只是各隨分限所及。今日良知見在如此，只隨今日所知擴充到底；明日良知又有開悟，便從明日所知擴充到底。如此，方是精一功夫。與人論學，亦須隨人分限所及。如樹有這些萌芽，只把這些水去灌溉。萌芽再長，便又加水。自拱把以至合抱，灌溉之功皆是隨其分限所及。若些小萌芽，有一桶水在，盡要傾上，便浸壞他了。」

Master [Yangming] said, “When we realize our [innate] knowing, each of us merely does so according to what our given abilities enable us to attain. If the innate knowing is present to this degree today, then go with what you know today and expand it to the full. If the innate knowing is further awakened tomorrow, then go with what you know tomorrow and expand it to the full. Only by doing things in this way will you have a practice that is discriminating and focused. When discussing learning with others, you must do so according to what they can attain given the limits to their abilities. For example, if a tree has such and such quantity of shoots, then only water it with such and such an amount of water. After the shoots have further grown add more water. From a handspan in thickness to wrapping your arms around it, the watering requirements entirely depend on the natural limits to its potential for growth. If the shoots are tiny, and you have a bucket of water and totally empty it, then you will ruin them by overwatering.”

226: *The Master explains the objective of his tenet of the unity of knowledge and action by directing us toward the intimate place where our thoughts are initiated and asking us to subdue those that are not good. Such is his distinctively Confucian form of mental discipline.*

問知行合一。先生曰：「此須識我立言宗旨。今人學問，只因知行分作兩件，故有一念發動，雖是不善，然卻未曾行，便不去禁止。我今說個知行合一，正要人曉得一念發動處，便即是行了；發動處

有不善，就將這不善的念克倒了。須要徹根徹底，不使那一念不善潛伏在胸中。此是我立言宗旨。」

I asked about the unity of knowing and acting. Master [Yangming] said, “For this, you must understand the basic objective of the philosophy I have expounded. Only because what people learn nowadays divides knowing and acting into two parts, whenever a single thought is generated, even if it is not good, simply because they have not acted on it, they do not proceed to prohibit it. Now, when I speak of a unity of knowing and acting, it is precisely because I want people to understand that the generation of a single thought is already action. If the point of generation possesses immorality, then subdue this immoral thought. It is necessary to penetrate to the root and penetrate to the bottom, not permitting that single immoral thought to remain latent in one’s mind. This is the objective of the philosophy I have expounded.”

Note: A substantial volume of scholarship on the meaning of Wang Yangming’s theory of the unity of knowledge and action is available in English. For a list see my *Studying Wang Yangming: History of a Sinological Field*, or see the work of Yang Xiaomei, Stephen C. Angle, Huang Yong, Lu Yinghua, David Bartosch, and Harvey Lederman, among others.

227: *The Master explains that the sage need not be omniscient or omnipotent; rather, insofar as the sage knows heavenly principle (tianli 天理), specific knowledge will always be available as needed. But for this to happen requires restoring one’s mind to its original condition.*

「聖人無所不知，只是知個天理；無所不能，只是能個天理。聖人本體明白，故事事知個天理所在，便去盡個天理；不是本體明後，卻於天下事物都便知得，便做得來也。天下事物，如名物度數、草木鳥獸之類，不勝其煩，聖人雖是本體明了，亦何緣能盡知得？但不必知的，聖人自不消求知；其所當知的，聖人自能問人，如『子入太廟，每事問』之類。先儒謂雖知亦問，敬謹之至，此說不可通。聖人於禮樂名物，不必盡知，然他知得一個天理，便自有許多節文度數出來，不知能問，亦即是天理節文所在。」

[Master Yangming said:] “There is nothing that the sage does not know simply means that he knows heavenly principle. There is nothing that [the sage] is incapable of doing refers only to the ability to act on heavenly principle. Because the original condition (*benti* 本體) of the sage[’s mind] is clear, for every matter that comes before him he knows where heavenly principle is located and proceeds to fully actualize it. It is not the case that only after his [mind’s] original condition is illuminated does [the sage] then have knowledge of all the affairs and things in the world and proceeds to act on it. All the affairs and things of the world—such as those that belong to the categories of the names of things, rules, grass and trees, and birds and beasts—are innumerable. Even if the original condition of the sage’s mind is clear, how could he acquire full knowledge of all of it? It is just that with respect to what it is not necessary to know, the sage does not need to pursue knowledge of it himself. With respect to what he ought to know, the sage can ask others about it himself. This is of the same category as ‘When the Master (=Confucius) went inside the Grand Temple, he asked questions about everything.’¹ A former scholar said that his inquiring even when he already knew is the highest form of respect and prudence. But this way of stating things doesn’t make sense. With respect to rites, music, and the names of things, there is no need for the sage to know it all. However, if he has knowledge of heavenly principle, then there will be many formalities and rules that naturally derive from it. Being capable of asking when one does not know is also where the formalities of heavenly principle lie.”

¹ *Analects* 3.15 states, “When the Master went inside the Grand Temple, he asked questions about everything. Someone remarked, ‘Who said that the son of the man from Zou understood the rites? When he went inside the Grand Temple, he asked questions about everything.’ The Master, on hearing of this, said, ‘The asking of questions is in itself the correct rite.’” (Trans. Lau) The former scholar is referring to Zhu Xi. He states this in his commentary on this passage in his *Lunyu ji zhu* 論語集注 (Collected commentaries on the *Analects*). The *Commentary* is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/lun-yu-ji-zhu/zh>.

Note: *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

228: *Concerning how immorality arises even when our heart-mind's essential source is the highest good.*

問：「先生嘗謂善惡只是一物。善惡兩端如冰炭相反，如何謂只一物？」先生曰：「至善者，心之本體。本體上才過當些子，便是惡了。不是有一個善，卻又有一個惡來相對也。故善惡只是一物。」直因聞先生之說，則知程子所謂「善固性也，惡亦不可不謂之性」。又曰：「善惡皆天理。謂之惡者本非惡，但於本性上過與不及之間耳。」其說皆無可疑。

[I, Huang Yifang] asked, “Sir, you once said that good and evil are just one thing. Yet, good and evil—these antitheses—are as contrary to each other as ice and burning charcoal. How can you say that they are just one thing?”

The Master replied, “The essence of mind is the highest good. When what is suited to it has been exceeded in the slightest that is evil. It is not like you have a good and then along comes evil in opposition to it. Thus, good and evil are only one thing.”

Because [I, Huang] Zhi heard the Master's theory, I understand what Master Cheng meant when he said, “It is true that human nature is good, but also that evil cannot be said not to be human nature.”¹

[Master Yangming] further stated, “Good and evil are both heavenly principle. What is called evil was not originally evil. It is just that with respect to our original nature there has been some excess or inadequacy.”

All that he explained cannot be doubted.

¹ Citing the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumously compiled works by the Chengs of Henan), which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

229: *The Master distinguishes the naturally moral responsiveness of a mind of total truthfulness, one without self-deception, by analogy with the aesthetics of sense perception.*

先生嘗謂「人但得好善如好好色，惡惡如惡惡臭，便是聖人」，直初時聞之，覺甚易，後體驗得來，此個功夫著實是難。如一念雖知好善，惡惡，然不知不覺又夾雜去了；才有夾雜，便不是好善如好好色、惡惡如惡惡臭的心。善能實實的好，是無念不善矣；惡能實實的惡，是無念及惡矣，如何不是聖人？故聖人之學，只是一誠而已。

Master [Yangming] once said, “If a person can just love the good as he loves a beautiful color and hate evil as he hates a bad odor then he will be a sage.”¹ When [I, Huang] Zhi first heard this, I felt this was very easy to do. Later, having personally experienced it for myself, I realized that this disciplined practice is in fact difficult. For example, although in a single thought one knows loving good or hating evil, yet, without being conscious or aware of it, this [one thought] then mingles with impurity and passes. Once mingled with impurity, that is no longer the mind that loves the good as one loves a beautiful color and hates evil as one hates a bad odor. If one is really and truly able to love the good, then no thinking will not be good. If one is really and truly able to hate evil, then no thinking will reach evil. How is this not a sage? Thus, the philosophy of the sages is just complete genuineness, that’s all.”

¹ The *Great Learning* states, “Making the intentions perfectly genuine means being without self-deceit. It is the same as when we hate a bad odor or like a beautiful color. It describes a process of perfect inner correspondence. For this reason, a junzi is inevitably cautious of his solitude.” (Eno 2016: 17)

230: *People can be categorized based on their ability to follow their nature and cultivate the Way.*

問：「《修道說》言『率性之謂道』屬聖人分上事，『修道之謂教』屬賢人分上事。」先生曰：「眾人亦率性也，但率性在聖人分上較多，故『率性之謂道』屬聖人事；聖人亦修道也，但修道在賢人分上多，故『修道之謂教』屬賢人事。」又曰：「《中庸》一書，大抵皆是說修道的事。故後面凡說君子，說顏淵，說子路，皆是能修道的；說小人，說賢知愚不肖，說庶民，皆是不能修道的。其他言舜、文、周公、仲尼至誠至聖之類，則又聖人之自能修道者也。」

[I] asked: “Your ‘Discourse on Cultivating the Way’ states that ‘to follow your nature is called the Way’ pertains to the work of the sages and ‘to cultivate the Way is called the teaching’ pertains to the work of worthies.”¹

Master [Yangming] replied, “The multitude also follow their natures, it is just that the extent to which following nature is the work of the sages is relatively greater. Thus, ‘to follow your nature is called the Way’ pertains to the sage’s work. Sages also cultivate the Way, but the extent to which cultivating the Way is the work of worthies is greater. Thus, ‘cultivating the Way is called the teaching’ pertains to the worthy’s work.”²

He also said, “On the whole, the *Doctrine of the Mean* always discusses matters of cultivating the Way. Thus, later on [in the text], any gentlemen (*junzi* 君子) under discussion—such as Yan Yuan and Zilu—are all men who were capable of cultivating the Way. When petty people, the wise and ignorant, and commoners are discussed, all of them were people incapable of cultivating the Way. Others discussed who belong to the category of the perfectly truthful and perfectly sagely, such as Emperor Shun, King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Zhongni (=Confucius), are sages naturally able to cultivate the Way.

¹ Wang Yangming’s “Discourse on Cultivating the Way (*Xiu dao shuo* 修道說)” is located in *juan* 7 of his collected works (*Wang yangming wen ji* 王陽明文集).

² The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate

the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37) A. C. Muller translates the first line as, “What Heaven confers is called ‘nature.’ Accordance with this nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called ‘education.’”

231: *So long as heavenly principle (tianli 天理) is sustained, we shall see that the empty stillness at midnight and thinking and reflection during the day—that is, tranquility and activity—are the same, of one mind, rising above duality.*

問：「儒者到三更時分，掃蕩胸中思慮，空空靜靜，與釋氏之靜只一般。兩下皆不用，此時何所分別？」先生曰：「動靜只是一個。那三更時分空空靜靜的，只是存天理，即是如今應事接物的心；如今應事接物的心，亦是循此天理，便是那三更時分空空靜靜的心。故動靜只是一個，分別不得。知得動靜合一，釋氏毫釐差處亦自莫掩矣。」

I asked, “When midnight arrives for the Ruist, and thinking and reflection have been swept away from his mind, such that it is entirely empty and tranquil (*jing* 靜), this is the same as the Buddhist practitioner’s stillness (*jing* 靜). If the two [states of mind, activity and tranquility] are not operative, how are they to be distinguished at this moment?”

Master [Yangming] replied, “Activity and tranquility are just one matter. So long as heavenly principle is being nurtured, that total emptiness and tranquility at midnight is the same as the mind that is responding to matters and receiving things in the present moment. As for the mind that is responding to matters and receiving things right now, if it is also according with this principle (*li* 理), then it is the same as that entirely empty and tranquil awareness at midnight. Thus, activity and tranquility are

just one matter and cannot be divided. Once you understand that activity and tranquility merge together as one, the slight difference with Buddhist practitioners cannot be concealed.”

Note: *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

232: *The Master criticizes followers for being excessively reserved or overly candid.*

門人在座，有動止甚矜持者，先生曰：「人若矜持太過，終是有弊。」曰：「矜持太過，如何有弊？」曰：「人只有許多精神，若專在容貌上用功，則於中心照管不及者多矣。」有太直率者，先生曰：「如今講此學，卻外面全不檢束，又分心與事為二矣。」

[Wang Yangming’s] followers were present. There was one who was very reserved in his manner. The Master stated, “If a person is excessively reserved, in the end that will be a shortcoming.” I said, “Why is being excessively reserved a shortcoming?”

He replied, “A person only has so much spirit. If one specifically focuses their efforts on appearance, then many matters of the heart will not be receiving attention.”

There was one who was too candid. The Master stated, “Nowadays we have been discussing this learning and yet in your outward conduct you are entirely without restraint. This also divides the mind and matters in two.”

233: *We should give our writing careful consideration but not allow ourselves to become overly preoccupied with what we’ve completed.*

門人作文送友行，問先生曰：「作文字不免費思，作了後又一二日，常記在懷。」曰：「文字思索亦無害。但作了常記在懷，則

為文所累，心中有一物矣，此則未可也。」又作詩送人。先生看詩畢，謂曰：「凡作文字，要隨我分限所及；若說得太過了，亦非『修辭立誠』矣。」

A follower composed an essay when sending his friend off on a journey. He asked Master [Yangming] about this, saying, “Writing is invariably mentally taxing. After I finish something, it remains on my mind constantly for one or two days.”

He replied, “There is no harm in thinking over one’s writing. However, if it remains on your mind constantly then you have been fettered by literary composition, and your mind is fixated by an object (*wu* 物: thing). This is not okay.” [The student] then wrote a poem when sending someone off. Seeing that he had completed it, the Master said to him, “All our writing should be in keeping with the limits of our given abilities. If we speak too grandiloquently, that will not count as ‘cultivating our speech and establishing our authenticity.’”

234: *The Master explains where he differs from Zhu Xi on the meaning of ge wu 格物, rather highlighting the introspective and contemplative meaning of the practice.*

「文公格物之說，只是少頭腦。如所謂『察之於念慮之微』，此一句不該與『求之文字之中』，『驗之於事為之著』，『索之講論之際』混作一例看，是無輕重也。」

[Master Yangming stated,] “Wengong’s theory of investigating things (*ge wu* 格物) simply lacks a basis.¹ Take, for example, what he refers to as ‘investigating it in the subtlety of thought.’ This one phrase should not be placed together with ‘seeking it in the written word,’ ‘testing it in manifest actions,’ or ‘searching for it on the occasions of intellectual discussions,’ and viewed in the same way. This is to lack a sense of relative importance.”

¹ Wengong 文公 is a posthumous title for Zhu Xi 朱熹. The phrases come from his *Daxue huo wen* 大學或問 (Questions and answers concerning the *Great Learning*). This is located in the *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi* (*Zhuzi yu lei* 朱子語類), which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/zh>.

235: *The Master addresses difficult emotions, explaining that they are normal, just that we shouldn't allow ourselves to become attached to them and, consequently, render ourselves unable to respond to life harmoniously, as we can when our heart-mind has returned to its natural state.*

問「有所忿懣」一條。先生曰：「忿懣幾件，人心怎能無得？只是不可有耳。凡人忿懣，著了一分意思，便怒得過當，非廓然大公之體了。故有所忿懣，便不得其正也。如今於凡忿懣等件，只是個物來順應。不要著一分意思，便心體廓然大公，得其本體之正了。且如出外見人相鬪，其不是的，我心亦怒。然雖怒，卻此心廓然，不曾動些子氣。如今怒人亦得如此，方纔是正。」

I asked about the passage “If one possesses anger and resentment [one’s mind will not be fully balanced (*zheng* 正)]” [in the *Great Learning*].¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Anger and resentment and such emotions [discussed in that section]—how could our minds not have these? It is just that you should not be attached to them. All these [emotions] of anger and resentment that a person may have, should they incur the slightest self-centered (egoic) inclinations, then anger will exceed what is appropriate. This is not the open, great impartiality of the [mind’s] essence (*ti* 體). Thus, if you possess anger and resentment, then you will not be in your right [mind]. As for the present, any anger and resentment and such emotions are only a matter of harmoniously responding to things as they come. Don’t attach the slightest bit of self-interest, and then your state of mind will be open and totally impartial, and you’ll attain the correctness of the original condition. For example, if I go outside and see people fighting, I will also be angry over any wrongdoing. However, although angry, my state of mind yet remains open, never stirred in the least. So as for getting angry at people now, only if it is like this will it be correct.”

¹ The *Great Learning* states, “Concerning the phrase, ‘refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind’: If one possesses anger and resentment one’s mind will not be fully balanced. If one is in fear one’s mind will not be balanced. If one takes pleasure in delights one’s mind will not be balanced. If one is anxious and fretful one’s mind will not be balanced. When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste

of the food one eats. This is the meaning of the phrase, ‘refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind.’” (Eno 2016: 18) Another translation of the same passage from the *Great Learning* states, “‘The cultivation of the person lies in the correction of the mind.’ When you are angry, you cannot be correct. When you are frightened, you cannot be correct; when there is something you desire, you cannot be correct; when there is something you are anxious about, you cannot be correct. When the mind is not present, we look, but do not see. We listen, but do not hear; we eat, but don’t taste our food. This is the meaning of ‘the cultivation of the person lies in the correction of the mind.’” (Trans. A. C. Muller)

236: *The Master explains the non-attached, moral commitment of the Ruist, who freely gives the relationships in which we find ourselves their due.*

「先生嘗言『佛氏不著相，其實著了相；吾儒著相，其實不著相。』請問。」曰：「佛怕父子累，卻逃了父子；怕君臣累，卻逃了君臣；怕夫婦累，卻逃了夫婦，都是為個君臣、父子、夫婦著了相，便須逃避。如吾儒有個父子，還他以仁；有個君臣，還他以義；有個夫婦，還他以別，何曾著父子、君臣、夫婦的相？」

“Sir, you once said, ‘The Buddhist’s freedom from attachment to phenomenal appearances is actually attachment to phenomenal appearances. We Ruists’ attachment to phenomenal appearances is in fact our freedom from attachment to phenomenal appearances.’ What did you mean?”

The Master said “The Buddhists fear the father-child bond, so they flee the father-child relationship. They fear the bond between ruler and minister, so they flee the ruler-minister relationship. They fear the bond between husband and wife, so they flee the husband-wife relationship. Because of the attachment to phenomenal appearance entailed by all these—ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife—they must flee and evade them. As for Ruists, when we have a father-son relationship we treat it with humanity (*ren* 仁). When we have a ruler-minister relationship, we treat it with righteousness. When we have a husband-wife relationship, we treat it with attention to the proper roles of each. When have we ever been attached to the phenomenal appearance of the father-son, ruler-minister, and husband-wife relationships?”

黃修易錄 Huang Xiuyi's Records

Huang Xiuyi's courtesy name is Mianshu 勉叔. Nothing else is known about him.

237: *Negative thoughts resemble clouds while positive thoughts resemble the sun on a clear day. Once unwholesome thinking has been dispelled, our mind returns to its naturally open, unbounded, good state.*

黃勉叔問：「心無惡念時，此心空空蕩蕩的。不知亦須存個善念否？」先生曰：「既去惡念，便是善念，便復心之本體矣。譬如日光被雲來遮蔽，雲去，光已復矣。若惡念既去，又要存個善念，即是日光之中添燃一燈。」

Huang Mianshu asked, “When negative thoughts are absent from my mind, it is empty and open. I am not sure if it is still necessary for me to maintain positive thinking?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Since negative thinking has been dispelled, you will have positive thinking. You will have recovered the mind’s original condition.² This is analogous to clouds blocking out sunlight. Once the clouds have passed light returns. If negative thoughts have been dispelled and you still want to maintain positive thoughts that is like lighting up a lamp in the sunlight.”

¹ I have translated *shan nian* 善念 and *e nian* 惡念 as positive and negative thoughts or thinking, giving these terms a distinctly modern flavor. Alternative renderings include good and wholesome thinking and evil and unwholesome thinking.

² *benti* 本體: (“original condition”) has also been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status

as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, as viewed in its essential qualities or attributes, we say “essence” or “in itself.”

238: *Concerning the darkness inside us and our desire for clarity, the Master advises patience, for awareness is like muddied water: for the sediment to settle and clear out, time is necessary. Just sustain your innate knowing, and the darkness within will gradually brighten.*

問：「近來用功，亦頗覺妄念不生，但腔子裏黑窄窄的，不知如何打得光明？」先生曰：「初下手用功，如何腔子裏便得光明？譬如奔流濁水，纔貯在缸裏，初然雖定，也只是昏濁的。須俟澄定既久，自然渣滓盡去，復得清來。汝只要在良知上用功，良知存久，黑窄窄自能光明矣。今便要責效，卻是助長，不成工夫。」

[I] asked, “Recently, having exerted effort, I really feel that misguided thinking no longer arises. However, there is a pitch darkness within my mind, and I don’t know how to brighten it.”

Master [Yangming] replied, “If you have just begun applying yourself to this practice, how could your mind brighten right off? Take, for example, rapidly flowing, turbid water. When you first store it in a jar, even after it becomes still, the water yet remains cloudy. You must wait for it to settle over time and for the sediment to clear itself out and then clarity will return. You should just apply your efforts to the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知).¹ As you sustain it over time, the pitch darkness will brighten on its own. Right now, you want quick results, but that is

like assisting a plant in its growth by pulling on it. That is not the correct way to achieve results.”

¹ Translations of *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 include “extend [and realize] the knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “extension of the innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “reaching good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “the extension of pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe).

239: *The Master explains the foundation of his philosophy of moral self-cultivation and distinguishes it from ideas held in his time by Zhu Xi's adherents.*

先生曰：「吾教人致良知，在格物上用功，卻是有根本的學問，日長進一日，愈久愈覺精明。世儒教人事事物物上去尋討，卻是無根本的學問，方其壯時，雖暫能外面修飾，不見有過；老則精神衰邁，終須放倒。譬如無根之樹，移栽水邊，雖暫時鮮好，終久要憔悴。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “My teaching people that when realizing the innate knowing effort must be applied to rectifying matters indeed comprises a learning with a foundation. You will make progress each day, and as time goes on you will sense that you have greater clarity. The conventional Ruists teach people to seek out and probe every matter and thing, but this is a foundationless mode of learning and inquiry. When young, one can for a time effect a polished appearance, so that no faults are visible. However, as one ages mental functioning declines, and in the end one will surely fall. This is analogous to transplanting a rootless tree by the waterside. Although it may look refreshed for a time, in the end it will wither away.”

240: 問「志於道」一章。先生曰：「只『志道』一句，便含下面數句功夫，自住不得。譬如做此屋，『志於道』，是念念要去擇地鳩材，經營成個區宅；『據德』，卻是經畫已成，有可據矣；『依仁』，卻是常常住在區宅內，更不離去；『游藝』，卻是加些畫采，美此區宅。藝者義也，理之所宜者也，如誦詩、讀書、彈琴、習射之類，皆所以調習此心，使之熟於道也。苟不志道而游藝，卻如無狀小子，不先去置造區宅，只管要去買畫掛做門面，不知將掛在何處？」

[I] asked about the “set my heart on the Way” passage [in the *Analects*].¹

Master [Yangming] said, “The phrase ‘set my heart on the Way’ entails the practices involved in the phrases that follow. You cannot stop with it. For example, in building this house, to ‘set my heart on the Way’ is to think constantly about going to select a location, gathering materials, and planning to finish the construction of a small home. ‘Base myself on virtue’ means that having completed the plan, you can rely on it as a place to live. ‘Lean upon benevolence’ then is always to reside within the small home, never departing from it. ‘Taking my recreation in the arts’ would be to add some paintings, beautifying this small home. The arts are righteousness, what is proper by principle (*li* 理). For example, reciting poetry, reading books, playing the *qin*, and practicing archery are all means by which we train this mind, causing it to mature in the Way. If we take recreation in the arts without having set our hearts on the Way, this is akin to an ill-mannered young man who, without having first built a small home, merely wants to go purchase paintings and hang them up for the sake of appearances. I don’t know where he will hang them.”

¹ *Analects* 7.6 states, “The Master said, ‘I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support and take my recreation in the arts.’” (Trans. Lau)

241: 問：「讀書所以調攝此心，不可缺的。但讀之之時，一種科目意思牽引而來，不知如何以免此？」先生曰：「只要良知真切，雖做舉業，不為心累；總有累亦易覺，克之而已。且如讀書時，良知知得強記之心不是，即克去之；有欲速之心不是，即克去之；有誇多鬪靡之心不是，即克去之，如此亦只是終日與聖賢印對，是個純乎天理之心。任他讀書，亦只是調攝此心而已，何累之有？」曰：「雖蒙開示，奈資質庸下，實難免累。竊聞窮通有命，上智之人，恐不屑此；不肖為聲利牽纏，甘心為此，徒自苦耳。欲屏棄之，又制於親，不能舍去，奈何？」先生曰：「此事歸辭於親者多矣，其實只是無志。志立得時，良知千事萬事只是一事。讀書作文安能累人？人自累於得失耳！」因嘆曰：「此學不明。不知此處擔閣了幾多英雄漢！」

[I] asked, “Reading books is for tending to one’s mental health. It is indispensable. However, when I am reading a sort of desire for success in the civil service examinations distracts me, and I don’t know how to avoid it.”

Master [Yangming] said, “As long as [your realization of] the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) is honest and sincere, even if you are preparing for the examinations, that won’t weigh on you. Even if it does weigh on you, you will easily become aware of this. Just overcome it. For example, when you are reading and *liangzhi* knows that the inclination to memorize forcibly is wrong, then overcome and dispel it. When it knows that the desire for quick results is wrong, then overcome and dispel it. When it knows that an inclination to flaunt writing ability is wrong, then overcome and dispel it. Handling things in this way is also just corroborating with sages and worthies all day long, and an intention pure in heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理).¹ Relying on it while reading books is also just tending to your mental health, so how could there be any distraction?”

I asked, “Although I’ve received your instruction, because my abilities are limited, it really is difficult to avoid distractions. I have heard that success in public life and failure to attain one’s aspirations depend on fate. I am afraid that the wisest do not lower themselves to taking the examinations. This inferior person is distracted and fettered by the desire for recognition and wealth, and very motivated by them, so I just bring this hardship on myself. I would prefer to discard it, but I am bound by duty to my parents, so I cannot drop it. What shall I do?”

The Master said, “Many are those who blame their parents for this predicament. In fact, they just lack commitment. Once you have set your aim, a thousand situations and ten thousand deeds are just one matter for *liangzhi*. How can reading and writing fetter someone? People have merely fettered themselves with [concern over] succeeding and failing.”

The Master thereupon sighed, stating, “This learning is not clear. I don’t know how many good men have been delayed on account of this.”

¹ *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

242: 問：「『生之謂性』，告子亦說得是，孟子如何非之？」先生曰：「固是性，但告子認得一邊去了，不曉得頭腦；若曉得頭腦，如此說亦是。孟子亦曰：『形色，天性也』，這也是指氣說。」又曰：「凡人信口說，任意行，皆說此是依我心性出來，此是所謂『生之謂性』，然卻要有過差。若曉得頭腦，依吾良知上說出來，行將去，便自是停當。然良知亦只是這口說，這身行，豈能外得氣，別有個去行去說？故曰：『論性不論氣，不備；論氣不論性，不明。』氣亦性也，性亦氣也，但須認得頭腦是當。」

[I] asked, “‘What we mean by inborn is nature’: what Gaozi said is true as well, so why did Mengzi criticize him?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “It is certainly nature, but Gaozi only recognized one side and did not understand the main idea. Had he understood the main idea, then speaking in this way would also be correct. Mengzi also said, ‘Your physical appearance is the nature endowed by Heaven.’² This was said from the perspective of *qi* 氣.”

He added, “Whenever people speak carelessly or act arbitrarily, they will also say that they did so by relying on mind and nature. This is what is meant by [the statement] ‘What we mean by inborn is nature.’ Nevertheless, mistakes can indeed happen. If you know the main idea, honoring your innate knowing when speaking and carrying out an action, they will be intrinsically appropriate. However, *liangzhi* is also just this mouth speaking and body acting. How could it place *qi* outside itself and have something else by which to act and speak? Thus, [Master Cheng] said, ‘Discussing nature without discussing *qi* is incomplete; discussing *qi* without discussing nature is incomprehensible.’ *Qi* is also nature and nature is also *qi*. However, you must correctly understand the main idea.”

¹ *Mengzi* 6A.3 states in part, “Gaozi said, ‘The term [nature] simply means [inborn].’ Mencius said, ‘Do you mean that [nature] means [inborn] as [white] means [white]? ‘Precisely.’ ‘As the white of white feathers is the white of snow, and the white of snow is the white of white jade?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Then the nature of a hound would be the same as the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox would be the same as a man’s?’” (Eno 2016: 107)

² *Mengzi* 7A.38 states in part, “Mencius said, ‘A man’s looks and figure are Tian-endowed nature, but only after becoming a Sage does a man know how to move his figure.’” (Eno 2016: 130)

Note: Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

243: *Honor your innate knowing, and you will become immovable.*

又曰：「諸君功夫，最不可助長。上智絕少，學者無超入聖人之理。一起一伏，一進一退，自是功夫節次。不可以我前日用得功夫了，今卻不濟，便要矯強做出一個沒破綻的模樣，這便是助長，連前些子功夫都壞了。此非小過。譬如走路的人遭一蹶跌，起來便走，不要欺人做那不曾跌倒的樣子出來。諸君只要常常懷個『遁世無悶，不見是而無悶』之心，依此良知，忍耐做去，不管人非笑，不管人毀謗，不管人榮辱，任他功夫有進有退，我只是這致良知的主宰不息，久久自然有得力處，一切外事亦自能不動。」又曰：「人若著實用功，隨人毀謗，隨人欺慢，處處得益，處處是進德之資；若不用功，只是魔也，終被累倒。」

[Master Yangming] also said, “Gentlemen, with respect to your practice, forcing growth is the least permissible. Exceedingly few are those with the highest wisdom and intelligence. Students lack the principle for directly achieving sagehood. Rising and falling and advancing and receding are intrinsic to this discipline’s program. Just because the effort you put forth the other day is not benefiting you today, you should not push yourself to effect a flawless appearance. This is to force growth, and it will even ruin that bit of effort you put forth before. This is not a minor error. For example, if a pedestrian suffers a fall, gets back up, and continues walking, he need not deceive others by acting as if he had never fallen. Gentlemen, you need only always to cherish the mindset whereby ‘he conceals himself from the world without regret; although he fails to win approval, he is not depressed.’¹ Honor this innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) and proceed to act with patient endurance. Regardless of people’s ridicule, regardless of people’s slander, regardless of people’s praise or insults, even if we make progress or go backwards with this practice, the authority of

the realization of this innate knowing simply never ceases for us. After some time, we will naturally possess what works for us, and all external matters will be unable to affect us.”

The Master added, “If one really and truly applies himself to this practice, then let someone vilify him, let someone humiliate and disrespect him, and he will benefit from all of it. All of it will be material for advancing in virtue. If one does not apply himself to this practice, then these are just evil spirits that will ultimately bring him down.”

¹ The *Classic of Changes* “Commentary on the Words of the Text” for the “First Yang” of the *Qian* 乾 hexagram states, “A submerged dragon does not act.’ What does this mean? The Master says, ‘This refers to one who has a dragon’s virtue yet remains hidden. He neither changes to suit...the world nor seeks fulfillment in fame. He hides from the world but does not regret it, and though this fails to win approval, he is not sad. When he takes delight in the world, he is active in it, and when he finds it distresses him, he turns his back on it. He who is resolute in his unwillingness to be uprooted, this is a submerged dragon.” (Lynn 1994: 133)

244: *Liangzhi* 良知 is the faculty of intelligence implanted by Tian 天 (Heaven). So long as our narcissistic self-love (egoic desire) does not injure and smother it, this root will just live and grow naturally, on its own.

先生一日出遊禹穴，顧田間禾曰：「能幾何時，又如此長了！」
范兆期在傍曰：「此只是有根。學問能自植根，亦不患無長。」
先生曰：「人孰無根？良知即是天植靈根，自生生不息；但著了私累，把此根戕賊蔽塞，不得發生耳。」

One day Master [Yangming] went on an excursion to Yu Grotto.¹ He noticed the plants sprouting in the fields and said, “Just how much time was required for them to grow to such heights!”

Fan Zhaoqi, who was by his side, said, “That is only because they have a root system. In our pursuit of knowledge, if we can cultivate our own roots, then we need not worry that there won’t be growth.”²

The Master said, “Who lacks roots? Implanted by Heaven (Tian 天), the innate knowing is the root of intelligence. It generates itself endlessly.³

However, it has incurred the fetters of self, causing this root injury by harming and obstructing it, so that it can no longer generate life.”

¹ Yu Grotto was likely a crevice located in Mount Kuaiji, just south of Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province.

² Fan Yinnian 範引年 (style name Zhaoqi 兆期) was from Yuyao, Zhejiang, Wang Yangming’s birthplace. When Wang Yangming returned to Yuyao in 1521, Zhaoqi approached and spent time studying under him. (Li 2021: 433)

³ *zì shēng shēng bù xī* 自生生不息 might also be translated as “[*Liangzhi*] naturally lives and grows without cease.”

245: *The Master offers a lesson on arrogance and humility, proposing that as opposed to seeing the speck in someone else’s eyes, we should first look at ourselves and take notice of the log in our own. Only then will we be able to influence others positively.*

一友常易動氣責人，先生警之曰：「學須反己。若徒責人，只見得人不是，不見自己非；若能反己，方見自己有許多未盡處，奚瑕責人？舜能化得象的傲，其機括只是不見象的不是。若舜只要正他的姦惡，就見得象的不是矣。象是傲人，必不肯相下，如何感化得他？」是友感悔。曰：「你今後只不要去論人之是非，凡當責辯人時，就把做一件大己私克去方可。」

A friend was always quick to anger and blame other people. Master [Yangming] warned him, stating: “Learning requires looking at yourself. If you just blame others, you will only see others’ faults but fail to see where you are wrong. If you are capable of introspection then you will see quite a few areas for improvement, so how do you have the time to criticize other people? The reason [Emperor] Shun was able to change [his brother] Xiang’s arrogance was simply that he chose not to highlight Xiang’s faults. Should Shun have merely wished to correct his guileful and wicked ways, then he would have discerned his faults. As a proud man, Xiang would surely have been unwilling to give ground to others. So how could Shun have inspired him to change?”

Hearing this, his friend was moved to regret. The Master stated, “After today, you should not just go around and talk about what is right

and wrong about other people. Every time you think someone should be criticized and disputed, taking that [inclination] as a big ego to be subdued and dispelled is the right thing to do.”

Note: Xiang was Emperor Shun’s younger brother. His arrogance is discussed in the *Classic of Documents*’ (*Shang shu* 尚書) “Yao Dian 堯典 (Canons of Yao).”

246: *The Master explains his humble approach to argumentative friends, teaching us that nothing is greater than to do good with others.*

先生曰：「凡朋友問難，縱有淺近粗疏，或露才揚己，皆是病發。當因其病而藥之可也，不可便懷鄙薄之心，非君子『與人為善』之心矣。」

Master [Yangming] said, “Whenever a friend tests you with difficult questions, no matter whether he is superficial, crass, putting his ability on display, or showing off, all this is affliction manifesting. You should treat the affliction according to its nature but should not harbor a feeling of disdain. That is not the heart of the gentleman who ‘joins people with people to do good together.’”¹

¹ *Mengzi* 2A.8 states, “Mencius said, ‘When anyone pointed out to Zilu an error that he had made, he was pleased. When Yu heard good speech he bowed. The great Shun surpassed even this. He prized the goodness of others as he prized his own, and would cast off all self-regard to follow others, delighting to emulate them in doing good. In rising from being a farmer, making pots and fishing, to becoming emperor, he drew everything from others. One who draws from others in this way joins people together in doing good, and there is nothing the *junzi* prizes more than joining with people to do good together.’” (Eno 2016: 44-45)

247: 問：「《易》，朱子主卜筮，程《傳》主理，何如？」先生曰：「卜筮是理，理亦是卜筮？天下之理孰有大於卜筮者乎？只為後世將卜筮專主在占卦上看了，所以看得卜筮似小藝。不知今之師友問答，博學、審問、慎思、明辨、篤行之類，皆是卜筮。卜筮

者，不過求決狐疑，神明吾心而已。《易》是問諸天。人有疑，自信不及，故以《易》問天，謂人心尚有所涉，惟天不容偽耳。」

I asked, “With respect to the *Classic of Changes*, while Master Zhu [Xi] emphasized divination by means of tortoise shells and plant stalks, Cheng [Yi’s] *Commentary* emphasized principle.¹ Why so?”

Master [Yangming] said, “Divination is principle and principle is likewise divination. Are there any principles under Heaven greater than divination? It is just that because later generations regarded divination by means of tortoise shells and yarrow stalks exclusively as a form of fortune telling, they saw it as a kind of petty art. They do not understand that nowadays such kinds of things as questions and replies between teachers and friends, wide-ranging learning, detailed inquiry, careful deliberation, clear discernment, and conscientious action are all divination. Divination is nothing more than trying to solve doubts and give our minds spiritual clarity. The *Classic of Changes* directs inquiries to Heaven (Tian 天). People have doubts and lack self-confidence, so they pose questions to Heaven by means of the *Classic of Changes*. They believe that the human mind is still involved, and only Heaven permits of no falsity.”

¹ Cheng Yi 程頤 (1032–1085) was an important Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher. He wrote a commentary on the *Changes* titled *Yichuan Yi zhuàn* 伊川易傳. For a translation, see L. Michael Harrington’s *Yi River Commentary on the Book of Changes*.

黃省曾錄 Huang Shengzeng's Records

Huang Shengzeng (1490–1540) was from Wu County 吳縣, Suzhou Prefecture 蘇州府. His courtesy name was Mianzhi 勉之 and his art name was Wuyue 五岳. He obtained his provincial examination degree in 1531, during the Jiajing emperor's reign. He spent time studying under both Wang Yangming and the Ruist master Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水.

248: *Ultimately, right is determined neither by a preestablished rule nor by our prejudices; rather, right is given by our native moral intelligence.*

黃勉之問：「『無適也，無莫也，義之與比』，事事要如此否？」先生曰：「固是事事要如此，須是識得個頭腦乃可。義即是良知，曉得良知是個頭腦，方無執著。且如受人餽送，也有今日當受的，他日不當受的；也有今日不當受的，他日當受的。你若執著了今日當受的，便一切受去；執著了今日不當受的，便一切不受去，便是『適』、『莫』，便不是良知的本體，如何喚得做義？」

Huang Mianzhi asked, “[Confucius said, ‘The gentleman’s stance towards the world is this:] there is nothing he insists on, nothing he refuses, he simply aligns himself beside right.”¹ Should it be like this for every matter, or not?”

Master [Yangming] said, “It certainly should be like this for every matter. However, for this to work you must first understand the main idea. Right is the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知). Only by understanding that *liangzhi* is the main idea will you have no *idées fixes*. For example, when receiving a gift from someone, there are situations where one should accept it today but should not accept it on another day and situations where one should not accept it today but should accept it on another day. If you are set on the idea that you should accept someone’s gift today and hence accept them all or set on the idea that you should not accept a gift today and hence refuse them all, this is ‘insisting’ and ‘refusing’ and not the original state (*benti* 本體) of *liangzhi*.²⁻³ How can it be called right?”

¹ *Analects* 4.10 states, “The Master said, ‘In his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is

on the side of what is moral.” (Trans. Lau) “The Master said, “The *junzǐ*’s stance towards the world is this: there is nothing he insists on, nothing he refuses, he simply aligns himself beside right.” (Eno 2015: 15)

² *benti* 本體: (“original condition”) has also been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, as viewed in its essential qualities or attributes, we say “essence” or “in itself.”

³ Translations of *liangzhi* include “knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe), among others. For *liangzhi*, innate, intuitive, and inborn (knowledge of the good or good knowledge or good knowing) all frequently appear in the literature. *Liangzhi* is one’s natural moral intelligence and native moral insight as well as simply one’s fundamental goodness. Some scholars recommend leaving *liangzhi* untranslated.

249: *Don't think in an evil way.*

問：「『思無邪』一言，如何便蓋得三百篇之義？」先生曰：「豈特三百篇？六經只此一言便可該貫；以至窮古今天下聖賢的話，『思無邪』一言，也可該貫。此外更有何說？此是一了百當的功夫。」

I asked, “How can ‘Don’t think in an evil way’—this one [poetic] phrase—encompass the meaning of the three hundred verses [in the *Classic of Poetry*]?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Why only the three hundred verses? This one phrase alone can cover and explain the Six Classics. The single phrase ‘Don’t think in an evil way’ can even cover and explain the words of all the sages and worthies under Heaven from ancient times to the present. Aside from this, what else is there to say? This is a practice whereby when you succeed once the rest will follow.”

¹ *Analects* 2.2 states, “The Master said: “The three hundred verses of the *Book of Odes* can be summed up in a single phrase: [Don’t think in an evil way].” (Trans. Muller)

250: *On the distinction between the transcendent mind of the Way and the self-centered (egoic) mind.*

問道心，人心。先生曰：「『率性之為道』，便是道心。但著些人的意思在，便是人心。道心本是無聲無臭，故曰『微』。依著人心行去，便有許多不安穩處，故曰『惟危』。」

I asked about the mind of the Way and the human mind.¹ Master [Yangming] said, “‘To follow our nature is called the Way’ refers to the mind of the Way.² But should the slightest of human purposes affect it, it becomes the human mind. In origin, the mind of the Way has no sound or odor. Thus, it is said to be ‘subtle.’ If you yield to the human mind and act, you will have many areas of insecurity. Thus, [the human mind] is said to be ‘imperiled.’”

¹ The “Counsels of the Great Yu” in the *Classic of Documents* states in part, “The mind of man is restless, prone (to err); its affinity to what

is right is small. Be discriminating, be uniform (in the pursuit of what is right), that you may sincerely hold fast the Mean.” (Trans. Legge) This is Legge’s translation of “*ren xin wei wei, dao xin wei wei; wei jing wei yi, yun zhi que zhong* (人心惟危，道心惟微；惟精惟一，允執厥中).” Here, *ren xin wei wei, dao xin wei wei* has been modified as, “The human mind is imperiled, the mind of the Way is subtle.”

²The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

251: *People vary in their natural ability to understand matters of a higher nature, but with proper guidance and through an orderly process, all can achieve sagely insight.*

問：「『中人以下，不可以語上』，愚的人與之語上尚且不進，況不與之語，可乎？」先生曰：「不是聖人終不與語。聖人的心，憂不得人人都做聖人；只是人的資質不同，施教不可躐等。中人以下的人，便與他說性，說命，他也不省得，也須謾謾琢磨他起來。」

I asked, “[Master Kong said] ‘To those who are below average, the highest subjects may not be announced.’¹ If you speak of the highest subjects to an ignorant person, he still won’t make any progress, let alone not speaking to him at all. Is that acceptable?”

Master [Yangming] said, “It is not that the sage will never speak to him. The heart of the sage is such that he worries he will not succeed in

making all people become sages. It is just that people's natural abilities differ. When teaching one cannot skip over a stage. If you speak of nature and life's circumstances to someone who is below average, he will not understand. One must slowly carve and polish him."

¹ *Analects* 6.19 states, "The Master said, "To those whose talents are above mediocrity, the highest subjects may be announced. To those who are below mediocrity, the highest subjects may not be announced.'" (Trans. Legge)

252: *The Master distinguishes three levels of knowledge: memory, comprehension, and knowledge of our original status as pure being, that is, awakened awareness of our mind's inherent reality.*

一友問：「讀書不記得，如何？」先生曰：「只要曉得，如何要記得？要曉得已是落第二義了，只要明得自家本體。若徒要記得，便不曉得；若徒要曉得，便明不得自家的本體。」

A friend asked, "Why is it that when I read books, I don't remember what I've read?"

Master [Yangming] said, "You should just comprehend them. Why do you need to memorize them? The need to comprehend has already descended to a secondary level of meaning. You need only become clearly aware of your own original condition. If you are only trying to memorize, you will not comprehend. If you are only trying to comprehend, you will be incapable of becoming clearly aware of your own original condition."

253: *At the height of learning, the mind is full of life, like flowing waters. Sustain this good knowledge, without interruption.*

問：「『逝者如斯』，是說自家心性活潑潑地否？」先生曰：「然。須要時時用致良知的功夫，方才活潑潑地，方才與他川水一般；若須臾間斷，便與天地不相似。此是學問極至處，聖人也只如此。」

I asked, "[When Master Kong said] 'What passes away is, perhaps, like this' did he mean that his own mind and nature are full of life, or not?"¹

Master [Yangming] said, “That is the case. You must always apply yourself to the discipline of realizing your innate knowing, and only then will you be full of life, only then will you be like the river’s waters. If interrupted for only a moment, you will no longer resemble heaven and earth. This is the highest realm of learning. Even for a sage this holds true.”

¹ *Analects* 9.17 states, “While standing by a river, the Master said, ‘What passes away is, perhaps, like this. Day and night it never lets up.’” (Trans. Lau)

254: *Integrity is more important than life itself, for failure to adhere to moral principles places fulfilling our fundamental humanity at risk.*

問「志士仁人」章。先生曰：「只為世上人都把生身命子看得來太重，不問當死不當死，定要宛轉委曲保全，以此把天理都丟去了。忍心害理，何者不為？若違了天理，便與禽獸無異，便偷生在世上百千年，也不過做了千百年的禽獸。學者要於此等處看得明白。比干、龍逢，只為他看得分明，所以能成就得他的仁。」

I asked about the passage [in the *Analects* stating] “[For] gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence [while it is conceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished].”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Simply because people on this earth take their lives too seriously, and do not question whether one ought to die or ought not to die, rather insisting on preserving their lives intact through tactfulness and accommodation, they discard heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理).² With hearts hardened to injustice, is there anything they would not be willing to do? If one violates heavenly principle, then one is no different from a bird or beast. Even if one ignobly drifts along on this earth for a hundred or a thousand years, one has done no more than live as a bird or beast for a thousand or a hundred years. A learner should understand such things very clearly. Simply because they saw things clearly, Bigan and Longfeng were able to accomplish their humanity.”³

¹ *Analects* 15.9 states, “The Master said, ‘For gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek

to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished.” (Trans. Lau)

² *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind. Wang Yangming often speaks of nurturing and sustaining (or preserving) this, of becoming pure in the principle of Heaven, and hence according with it.

³ Bigan and [Guan] Longfeng were high ministers of the Shang dynasty who were, according to legend, executed for remonstrating against the immoral conduct of their rulers.

255: *Our own conscientious consciousness is the judge that really matters.*

問：「『叔孫武叔毀仲尼』，大聖人如何猶不免於毀謗？」先生曰：「毀謗自外來的，雖聖人如何免得？人只貴於自修，若自己實實落落是個聖賢，縱然人都毀他，也說他不著，卻若浮雲掩日，如何損得日的光明？若自己是個象恭色莊、不堅不介的，縱然沒一個人說他，他的惡慝終須一日發露。所以孟子說『有求全之毀，有不虞之譽』，毀譽在外的，安能避得？只要自修何如爾。」

I asked, “Shusun Wushu made defamatory remarks about Zhongni: Why is it that even a great sage cannot avoid defamation?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Defamation comes from outside. Even if someone is a sage, how can he avoid it? People should only hold their own improvement in high regard. If someone is really and truly a sage or worthy, even if everyone slanders him, he won’t be bothered by it. This is just like clouds screening out the sun. How can they harm the sun’s light? If someone appears respectful and serious but is neither strong nor upright, even if no one speaks badly about him, surely, one day his ugliness will be laid bare. Thus, Mengzi said, “There is slander that comes from

seeking to maintain integrity, and there is unwarranted praise.² Slander and praise are external. How can one escape them? What matters is only how one improves oneself.”

¹ *Analects* 19.24 states, “Shu-sun Wu-shu made defamatory remarks about Chung-ni. Tzu-kung said, ‘He is simply wasting his time. Chung-ni cannot be defamed. In other cases, men of excellence are like hills which one can climb over. Chung-ni is like the sun and the moon which one has no way of climbing over. Even if someone wanted to cut himself off from them, how could this detract from the sun and the moon? It would merely serve the more to show that he did not know his own measure.’” (Trans. Lau)

² *Mengzi* 4A.21 states, “Mengzi said, ‘There is unwarranted praise, and there is slander that comes from seeking to maintain integrity.’” (Van Norden 2008: 99)

256: *Meditating in solitude and cultivating stillness should not become a means of escaping life's circumstances.*

劉君亮要在山中靜坐。先生曰：「汝若以厭外物之心去求之靜，是反養成一個驕惰之氣了；汝若不厭外物，復於靜處涵養，卻好。」

Liu Junliang wanted to practice quiet-sitting in the mountains. Master [Yangming] said, “If you go in search of tranquility because you feel wearied by the things around you, you will nurture instead an arrogant and lazy temperament. If you don't feel wearied by the things around you, and then return to cultivating tranquility, that will be better.”

257: 王汝中、省曾侍坐。先生握扇，命曰：「你們用扇。」省曾起對曰：「不敢。」先生曰：「聖人之學不是這等捆縛苦楚的，不是妝做道學的模式。」汝中曰：「觀仲尼與曾點言志一章略見。」先生曰：「然。以此章觀之，聖人何等寬洪包含氣象。且為師者問志於群弟子，三子皆整頓以對。至於曾點，飄飄然不看那三子在眼，自去鼓起瑟來，何等狂態？及至言志，又不對師之問目，都是狂言。設在伊川，或斥罵起來了。聖人乃復稱許他，

何等氣象！聖人教人，不是個束縛他通做一般，只如狂者便從狂處成就他，狷者便從狷處成就他。人之才氣如何同得？」

Wang Ruzhong and [Huang] Shengzeng were sitting together [with Master Yangming].¹ With a fan in hand, the Master directed us, saying, “You all use the fan.” Shengzeng stood up and replied, saying, “I don’t dare.”

The Master said, “The sage’s teaching is not so constraining and miserable as this; it is not a matter of dressing oneself up as a learning of the Way scholar.” Ruzhong said, “Look at the section where Zhongni and Zeng Dian discuss one’s heart’s desire and you can more or less see it.”²

The Master stated, “True. Looked at from the perspective of this section, one sees just how generous and tolerant a sage’s disposition can be. Furthermore, when the Master asked the group of students about their aspirations, three straightened up with a serious reply. As for Zeng Dian, laid-back as he was, he paid no attention to the other three, rather proceeding to play his zither. How reckless is that! And when the time came to speak his heart’s desire, he didn’t reply to what had been asked, and everything he said was reckless. Had it been [Cheng] Yichuan, he might very well have begun chastising him. The Sage, however, still praised him. What style! When the Sage taught people, he did not intend to constrain everyone with one pattern. For the reckless, he would work with their recklessness to bring them to success, and for the overscrupulous, he would work with their scrupulousness to bring them to success. How could people’s talents and temperaments be the same?”

¹ Ruzhong is an art name for Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583). His courtesy name is Longxi 龍溪. He was from Shanyin Prefecture 山陰府, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming’s most important followers, playing a key role in developing and disseminating his teachings.

² Zhongni refers to Confucius (Master Kong). *Analects* 11.26 states, Zilu, Zeng Xi, Ran Yōu, and Gongxi Hua were sitting in attendance. The Master said, “Put aside for now that I am so much as a day older than you. You are always saying, ‘My talents are unrecognized.’ If some person were to recognize and give you position, what ability could you offer?” Zilu boldly replied first. “Let there be a state of

a thousand war chariots, wedged between great neighboring states, harassed by invading armies and plunged in famine as a consequence. If I were given authority to act, I would within three years endow that state with valor and a sense of purpose.” The Master smiled at him. “Qiu, what about you?” Qiu replied, “Let there be a territory sixty or seventy *li* square, perhaps fifty or sixty. If I had authority to act, I would within three years ensure that the people had sufficient means. As for *li* and music, they would have to await a *junzi*.” “Chi, what about you?” Chi replied, “I cannot say I would be able to do this, but I would like to try: At ceremonies in the ancestral temples or diplomatic meetings, wearing ceremonial cap and robes, I would wish to be a minor officer of ceremony.” “Dian, what about you?” The rhythm of his zither slowed, it rang as he laid it down and rose. “My thoughts differ from the others’,” he said. “There is no harm in that,” said the Master. “After all, each of us is simply speaking his own heart.” “In late spring,” said Zeng Dian, “after the spring garments have been sewn, I would go out with five rows of six capped young men and six rows of seven boys. We would bathe in the River Yi, and stand in the wind on the stage of the Great Rain Dance. Then chanting, we would return.” The Master sighed deeply. “I am with Dian,” he said. The other three disciples went out, but Zeng Xi lingered behind. Zeng Xi said, “What about the words of the other three?” The Master said, “After all, each was simply stating his heart’s desire.” “Why did you smile at Yóu?” “To manage a state one needs *li*, and his words showed no deference, that is why I smiled.” “As for Qiu, he was not aspiring to manage a state, was he?” “How can one see a domain of sixty or seventy square *li*, or even fifty or sixty, as other than a state?” “As for Chi, he was not aspiring to manage a state, was he?” “Ancestral halls and diplomatic affairs—what are these if not matters of a feudal state? Moreover, if Chi were a minor officer, who would be a major one?” (Eno 2015: 56–58)

258: *The sages of ancient times taught people the simple and easy.*

先生語陸元靜曰：「元靜少年亦要解五經，志亦好博。但聖人教人，只怕人不簡易，他說的皆是簡易之規。以今人好博之心觀之，卻似聖人教人差了。」

Speaking to [his student] Lu Yuanjing, Master [Yangming] said, “When you were young, Yuanjing, you wished to engage in exegesis of the Five Classics.¹⁻² You were also ambitious about your interest in erudition. However, when sages taught people, they only worried that they were incapable of the simple and easy. What they spoke about was always guidelines for the simple and easy. Considering people’s love for erudition nowadays, it rather seems that sages taught people incorrectly.”

¹ Lu Yuanjing 陸元靜 was a follower of Wang Yangming. His given name was Cheng 澄 and his hometown was Gui’an County 歸安縣, Huzhou Prefecture 湖州府, Zhejiang Province. He first met Wang Yangming in 1514 or 1515 in Nanjing, when Wang was serving as chief minister of the Nanjing Court of State Ceremonial. Lu obtained his *jinsshi* in 1517.

² The Five Classics refers to the *Classic of Odes*, *Classic of Documents*, *Classic of Changes*, *Classic of Poetry*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. These are lengthy and difficult books, but from a young age, children (primarily boys) who were or hoped to become a member of the elite scholarly class were expected to study them.

259: 先生曰：「孔子無不知而作，顏子有不善未嘗不知。此是聖學真血脈路。」

Master [Yangming] said, “Master Kong never acted without knowledge, and whenever Master Yan [Hui] had a misdeed, he never failed to realize it.¹⁻² This is the true bloodline of the learning of the sages.”

¹ *Analects* 7.28 states, “The Master said: ‘Maybe there are people who can act without knowledge, but I am not one of them. Hear much, pick the best and follow it; see much, and keep a record of it: this is still the best substitute for innate knowledge.’” (Leys 1997: 32) “The Master said, “There may be those who act without knowing why. I do not do so. Hearing much and selecting what is good and following it; seeing much and keeping it in memory: this is the second style of knowledge.” (Trans. Legge)

²The *Commentary on the Appended Phrases*, part two, section five, of *the Classic of Changes* states, “The Master said: “The scion of the Yan clan [Yan Hui] is just about perfect! Whenever he had a misdeed, he never failed to realize it, and, realizing it, never committed it again.” (Lynn 1994: 85)

260: 何廷仁、黃正之、李侯璧、汝中、德洪侍坐。先生顧而言曰：「汝輩學問不得長進，只是未立志。」侯璧起而對曰：「珙亦願立志。」先生曰：「難說不立，未是必為聖人之志耳。」對曰：「願立必為聖人之志。」先生曰：「你真有聖人之志，良知上更無不盡。良知上留得些子別念掛帶，便非必為聖人之志矣。」洪初聞時心若未服，聽說到此，不覺悚汗。

He Tingren, Huang Zhengzhi, Li Houbi, [Wang] Ruzhong, and [Qian] Dehong were sitting together [with Master Yangming].¹⁻⁵ He looked at them and said, “If you have been unable to make progress in your intellectual inquiries this is only because you have yet to firmly commit yourselves.”

Houbi stood up and replied, stating, “Hong is also willing to make a firm commitment.” The Master said, “It would be difficult to say that yours is not a firm commitment, but it is not yet a definitive commitment to sagehood.” He replied, “I am willing to make a definitive commitment to sagehood.”

The Master said, “If you really have this commitment to sagehood, then with respect to the innate knowing nothing will remain incomplete. If in your innate knowing you have retained the slightest of distracting thoughts that are affecting it, then it is not a definitive commitment to sagehood.” When [De]hong first heard this, he did not seem to believe it, but having listened up to this moment, he unwittingly sweat from fear.

¹ He Tingren's 何廷仁 (1485–1551) hometown was Yu County 雩縣, Jiangxi Province. His courtesy name was Xingzhi 性之 and his art name was Shanshan 善山.

² Zhengzhi 正之 is the courtesy name for Huang Honggang 黃宏綱 (1492–1561). His home town was Yu County 雩縣, Jiangxi Province. He first sought instruction from Wang Yangming in 1517, when Wang

was serving as grand coordinator of Southern Gan and residing in Ganzhou.

³ Li Houbi's 李侯璧 given name is Hong 珙. He was from Zhejiang, Yongkang County 永康縣.

⁴ Ruzhong is an art name for Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583). His courtesy name is Longxi 龍溪. He was from Shanyin Prefecture 山陰府, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's most important followers, playing a key role in developing and disseminating his teachings.

⁵ Dehong 德洪 is a courtesy name for Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574). His hometown was Yuyao County 余姚縣, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's first followers and remained a committed one throughout his life, playing a key role in the dissemination of Wang's teachings.

261: *Liangzhi* 良知 is the ultimate reality, the source of creation and transformation and of our spontaneous joy, should we recover it completely and perfectly.

先生曰：「良知是造化的精靈。這些精靈，生天生地，成鬼成帝，皆從此出，真是『與物無對』。人若復得他完完全全、無少虧欠，自不覺手舞足蹈；不知天地間更有何樂可代？」

Master [Yangming] said, “The innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) is the spirit of creation and transformation. This spirit begets heaven and earth, and forms demons and thearchs. All are produced by it. Truly, ‘nothing is equal to it.’¹ If a person can recover the innate knowing completely and perfectly, without the slightest flaw, he will, without realizing it, spontaneously dance with joy. I don’t know what other happiness amid heaven and earth could serve as a substitute for it.”

¹ Citing the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumously compiled works by the Chengs of Henan), *juan* 2, which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

Note: The CJKV English Dictionary defines *jingling* 精靈 as “ethereal, spiritual” and as a “primal ether or vapor that is the source of the myriad things.” In this case, the translation follows Kong Yingda’s use of the term in his commentary on the *Classic of Changes*. Otherwise, it more commonly means “spirits of the dead,” or simply “spirits.”

262: *An important lesson about the nature of the contemplative practice, with a warning over the sickness incurred by a fondness for emptiness.*

一友靜坐有見，馳問。先生答曰：「吾昔居滁時，見諸生多務知解口耳異同，無益於得，姑教之靜坐。一時窺見光景，頗收近效；久之漸有喜靜厭動、流入枯槁之病，或務為玄解妙覺，動人聽聞。故邇來只說致良知。良知明白，隨你去靜處體悟也好，隨你去事上磨鍊也好，良知本體原是無動無靜的。此便是學問頭腦。我這個話頭，自滁州到今亦較過幾番，只是『致良知』三字無病。醫經折肱，方能察人病理。」

A friend was quiet sitting and experienced insight. He hurried over to ask about it. Master [Yangming] replied, “In the past, when I was staying in Chuzhou, I saw how students expended most of their efforts on discursive knowledge and passing on what they had heard of disparities and agreements and that this was of no benefit to their grasping it themselves.¹ For the time being, I instructed them to sit in meditation. They quickly caught a glimpse of the scene, obtaining some significant immediate results. Over time, they gradually developed a fondness for tranquility and aversion to activity and were drawn into the malady of withering away.² Others occupied themselves with impressing others with their esoteric explanations of subtle awakenings. Recently, for this reason, I have only been saying realize the innate knowing (ㄗㄏㄧ ㄌㄧㄤㄗㄏㄧ 致良知). When *liangzhi* is evident, your seeking personal insight in quietude is okay and your polishing and tempering yourself with the affairs of life is okay as well. From the beginning, the original condition of the innate knowing is neither in motion nor still. This is the basis for intellectual inquiry. From [my time in] Chuzhou until now, I have also weighed this argument several times. The three words ‘ㄗㄏㄧ ㄌㄧㄤㄗㄏㄧ 致良知’ alone are flawless. Only after a doctor has gone through the experience of breaking his own forearm will he be able to examine the pathology of disease.”

¹ Wang Yangming resided in Chuzhou from the tenth month of 1513 to the fourth month of 1515.

² Referring to the practice of mental concentration leading to absorption in trance states.

Note: *benti* 本體 (“fundamental state”) has also been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, as viewed in its essential qualities or attributes, we say “essence” or “in itself.”

263: *On sustaining the unbounded innate knowing and transcending the separative self-sense.*

一友問：「功夫欲得此知時時接續，一切應感處反覺照管不及。若去事上周旋，又覺不見了。如何則可？」先生曰：「此只認良知未真，尚有內外之間，我這裏功夫不由人急心，認得良知頭腦是當，去樸實用功，自會透徹。到此便是『內外兩忘』，又何心事不合一？」

A friend asked, “Through practice, I wish to have this innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) continue uninterrupted at every moment. Instead, I feel that I am unable to manage all the stimuli eliciting responses from me. If I proceed to deal with matters, I sense that *liangzhi* has disappeared. What would be a good way to handle this?”

Master [Yangming] said, “This happens only because your recognition of *liangzhi* yet remains untrue, and you still possess a separation between the internal and external. This practice of mine cannot be helped by a person’s impatience. If you properly recognize the gist of *liangzhi* and proceed simply and honestly to apply it in practice, naturally, you will understand completely. Reaching this point is ‘forgetting both the interior and exterior.’¹ So how can the mind and affairs fail to be unified?”

¹ Referring to Cheng Hao’s “Reply to Zhang Zai’s Letter on the Stabilizing of Human Nature,” where it states in part, “Instead of looking upon the internal as right and the external as wrong, it is better to forget the distinction. When such a distinction is forgotten, the state of quietness and peace is attained.” (De Bary 1999: 692–693) To forget the inner and outer is not to become unconscious but rather to transcend the separative self-sense.

264: *Cleverness and discursive knowledge alone cannot be relied on for acquiring insight into the innate knowing, such that its goodness fully radiates. Rather, personal issues preventing purification and transformation of the psychological life must be overcome.*

又曰：「功夫不是透得這個真機，如何得他充實光輝？若能透得時，不由你聰明知解接得來，須胸中渣滓渾化，不使有毫髮沾帶始得。」

[Master Yangming] further said, “If your efforts fail to penetrate through to an understanding of this true secret to success, how can you make its full goodness radiate outward?¹ If there is a moment where you penetrate through to an understanding of it, that won’t happen by receiving it with your cleverness and discursive knowledge. You must purify and transform the dregs in your mental awareness, not allowing them to obstruct in the slightest. Then you will understand it.”

¹ The true secret is the innate knowledge of the good, *liangzhi* 良知. *Mencius* 7B.25 states, “Haosheng Buhai asked, ‘What kind of a man is Yuezhengzi?’ Mencius said, ‘He is a good man, a faithful man.’ ‘What do you mean by [good] and [faithful?].’ ‘A man worth having is called good. A man who possesses goodness in himself is called faithful. One who is filled with goodness is called excellent. A man whose full goodness radiates outward is called great. A great man who transforms others is called a sage. One who transforms others like a sage without their awareness is called spirit-like. Yuezhengzi’s quality lies within the first two, but below the other four.’” (Eno 2016: 136–137)

265: *Liangzhi* 良知 is your wise teacher. It is the Way.

先生曰：「『天命之謂性』，命即是性。『率性之謂道』，性即是道。『修道之謂教』，道即是教。」問：「如何道即是教？」曰：「道即是良知。良知原是完完全全，是的還他是、非的還他非，是非只依著他，更無有不是處，這良知還是你的明師。」

Master [Yangming] said, “‘That which is ordained by Heaven is called our nature’: the ordained is our nature. ‘Following our nature is called the Way’: our nature is the Way. ‘To cultivate the Way is called the teaching’: the Way is the teaching.”

I asked, “Why is the Way identical to the teaching?”¹ [The Master] replied, “The Way is the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知). In origin, the innate knowing is complete and perfect. It affirms what is right as what is right and what is wrong as what is wrong. In matters of right and wrong just conform to it, and there will be no more mistakes. As always, this *liangzhi* is your wise teacher.”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching.” (Eno 2016: 37) An alternative rendering might be, “What Heaven confers is called the nature. Following our nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching.”

266: *On the intrinsic attributes of the mind's original condition. The mind's essence is the practice.*

問：「『不睹不聞』是說本體，『戒慎恐懼』是說功夫否？」先生曰：「此處須信得本體原是不睹不聞的，亦原是戒慎恐懼的。戒慎恐懼不曾在不睹不聞上加得些子。見得真時，便謂戒慎恐懼是本體，不睹不聞是功夫亦得。」

I asked, "Is 'what he does not see and what he does not hear' speaking to the [mind's] original condition (that is, it's essence), and 'alert, vigilant, and apprehensive' talking about the practice?"¹

Master [Yangming] replied, "Here you must trust that in origin the original condition is what one does not see and what one does not hear as well as alert, vigilant, and apprehensive. Alertness, vigilance, and apprehension have never added anything to what is not seen and not heard. Once you see it clearly, saying that alertness, vigilance, and apprehension is the original condition and what one does not see or hear is the practice also works."

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, "That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby." (Eno 2016: 37)

267: 問「『通乎晝夜之道而知』」。先生曰：「良知原是知晝知夜的。」又問：「人睡熟時，良知亦不知了。」曰：「不知，何以一叫便應？」曰：「良知常知，如何有睡熟時？」曰：「嚮晦宴息，此亦造化常理。夜來天地混沌，形色俱泯，人亦耳目無所

睹聞，眾竅俱翕，此即良知收斂凝一時；天地既開，庶物露生，人亦耳目有所睹聞，眾竅俱闢，此即良知妙用發生時。可見人心與天地一體，故『上下與天地同流』。今人不會宴息，夜來不是昏睡，則是妄思魔寐。」曰：「睡時功夫如何用？」先生曰：「知晝即知夜矣。日間良知是順應無滯的，夜間良知即是收斂凝一的，有夢即先兆。」

Someone asked about, “He penetrates the Way of day and night and understands it.”¹ Master [Yangming] said, “From the beginning, the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) knows the day and the night.”

He also asked, “When someone is in a deep sleep, *liangzhi* is also unaware.” The Master replied, “If unaware, why is it that right when called it responds?” He said, “If *liangzhi* always knows, how can we have periods of deep sleep?” The Master replied, “Going in before dark for rest: this is also a constant principle of nature.² At night, heaven and earth are a formless mass, shapes and colors entirely disappear, people’s ears and eyes see and hear nothing, and the many organs all cease in their activity. This is the time when *liangzhi* is gathered in and absorbed in oneness. After heaven and earth dawn, the myriad things show life, people’s ears and eyes see and hear something, and the many organs begin functioning, that is when the wondrous functioning of *liangzhi* manifests. From this, one can see that the human mind forms one body with heaven and earth. Thus, [the gentleman’s] workings join together with heaven above and earth below.”³ He asked, “When sleeping how do I apply the practice?” The Master said, “To know [how to practice during] the day is to know [how to practice during] the night. During the day *liangzhi* is ideally responding, without obstruction. During the night *liangzhi* is gathered in and absorbed in oneness. If you have a dream, it is a portent.”

¹ The “Treatise on the Appended Remarks,” part A, section 4.4 in the *Classic of Changes* states, “He encompasses the transformations of Heaven and Earth and does not transgress. He completes all things without omission; he penetrates the Way of day and night and understands it. Therefore spirit has no location and change [*yi*] has no [fixed] structure.” (Adler 2020: 268)

²The *Classic of Changes*’ “Commentary on the Greater Images” for the *sui* 隨 hexagram states, “Within the lake there is thunder: Following. The superior person goes in before dark for rest.”

³ *Mengzi* 7A.13 states in part, “Mencius said, ‘Wherever the *junzi* passes he transforms, and where he dwells it is as though the spirits prevail. His workings join together with Tian above and earth below. How could one speak of this as some minor benefit?’” (Eno 2016: 125–126)

Note: Translations of *liangzhi* include “knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe), among others. For *liangzhi*, innate, intuitive, and inborn (knowledge of the good or good knowledge or good knowing) all frequently appear in the literature. *Liangzhi* is one’s natural moral intelligence and native moral insight as well as simply one’s fundamental goodness. Some scholars recommend leaving *liangzhi* untranslated.

268: *Our nighttime psychophysical state, undisturbed by desire, brings us near to mind as it is in its primordial state, and hence to the natural functioning of the innate knowing. Bringing this to fruition during the day penetrates the Way of day and night.*

又曰：「良知在夜氣發的方是本體，以其無物欲之雜也。學者要使事物紛擾之時，常如夜氣一般，就是『通乎晝夜之道而知』。」

[Master Yangming] further said, “Because it is unmixed with a desire for things, the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) that manifests amid the night *qi* 氣 is the original condition.¹ Learners should always make those times when one is disturbed by matters resemble the night *qi*. This is the meaning of ‘he penetrates the Way of day and night and understands it.’”²

¹ Regarding the night *qi*, Mencius 6A.8 states in part, “Despite the rest such a man may get between night and day, and the restorative *qi* that

the morning brings, the things he does day after day destroy these effects, and in time little will he resemble other men in what he likes and hates. When this destruction is repeated, the *qi* he stores up each night will not be enough to preserve what was originally in him, and when the night *qi* can no longer preserve that, then he is not far from a beast.” (Eno 2016: 111)

²The *Classic of Change* “Treatise on the Appended Remarks,” part A, section 4.4 states, “He encompasses the transformations of Heaven and Earth and does not transgress. He completes all things without omission; he penetrates the Way of day and night and understands it. Therefore spirit has no locations and change [*yi*] has no [fixed] structure.” (Adler 2020: 268)

Note: Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

269: *Wang Yangming describes the attributes of liangzhi, the primordial or original condition of our mind. Empty and formless, everything arises in it, but nothing becomes an obstacle to it.*

先生曰：「仙家說到虛，聖人豈能虛上加得一毫實？佛氏說到無，聖人豈能無上加得一毫有？但仙家說虛，從養生上來；佛氏說無，從出離生死苦海上來，卻於本體上加卻這些子意思在，便不是他虛，無的本色了，便於本體有障礙。聖人只是還他良知的本色，更不著些子意在。良知之虛，便是天之太虛；良知之無，便是太虛之無形。日、月、風雷、山川、民物，凡有貌象形色，皆在太虛，無形中發用流行，未嘗作得天的障礙。聖人只是順其良知之發用，天地萬物俱在我良知的發用流行中，何嘗又有一物起於良知之外能作得障礙？」

Master [Yangming] said, “When Daoists speak of voidness (*xu* 虛), how can the [Ruist] sage add one iota of substance (*shi* 實) to that voidness? When Buddhists speak of nonexistence (=nonbeing), how can the sage add one iota of being to that nonexistence? However, when Daoists speak of voidness, they do so from the perspective of

nourishing life. When Buddhists speak of nonexistence, they do so from the perspective of escaping the sorrowful ocean of life and death. Both add these purposes to the [mind's] original condition (*benti* 本體), and this is not its true character as voidness and nonexistence. Consequently, the original condition becomes obstructed. The sage simply returns to the natural character of his innate knowing, without allowing the slightest self-centered inclinations to affect it. The voidness of *liangzhi* is the Great Void of the cosmos. The nonexistence of *liangzhi* is the formlessness of the Great Void. Sun, moon, wind, thunder, mountains, rivers, people, and things—all that has an appearance, image, form, or color—all manifest and flow forth within the formlessness of the Great Void, never becoming an obstacle to the cosmos. The sage merely follows the functioning of his *liangzhi*, and heaven, earth, and the myriad things exist within *liangzhi*'s manifestation and flowing forth (*fayong liuxing* 發用流行).¹ Can there still be one thing that arises outside *liangzhi* and that is able to become an obstacle to it?"

¹ Taking each graph individually, *fayong liuxing* 發用流行 might read as manifestation, functioning, flow, and operation.

270: 或問：「釋氏亦務養心，然要之不可以治天下，何也？」先生曰：「吾儒養心未嘗離卻事物，只順其天則自然，就是功夫。釋氏卻要盡絕事物，把心看做幻相，漸入虛寂去了，與世間若無些子交涉，所以不可治天下。」

Someone asked, "Buddhists also endeavor to cultivate the mind. However, in a word, they are incapable of governing all under Heaven. Why so?"

The Master replied, "When we Ruists cultivate the mind we never depart from the lifeworld (*shimin* 事物: lit. events and things). We merely accord with what is natural to Heaven's rules.¹ This is the practice. The Buddhists, on the other hand, wish to abandon the lifeworld entirely. Regarding the mind as illusory, they gradually sink into emptiness and silence, and no longer seem to have the slightest connection to the world. This is why they are incapable of governing all under Heaven."

¹ The *Classic of Changes*' "Commentary for the Words of the Text" for the Qian hexagram states, "'The originating [power] of Qian,' 'using [all] 9s,' displays Heaven's rules." (Adler, 2020: 64)

271: *The Master speaks to what anyone should recognize as virtuous and aberrant.*

或問異端。先生曰：「與愚夫愚婦同的，是謂同德；與愚夫愚婦異的，是謂異端。」

Someone asked about heterodoxy. Master [Yangming] stated, “What is the same for any unsophisticated husband or wife is called common virtue; what differs with any unsophisticated husband or wife is called heterodox.”¹

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 12 states, “The Dao of the *junzi* is broad yet hidden. Any husband or wife may partake in knowledge of it, yet reaching to its ultimate nature, there is that which even the sage does not know of it. Even an unworthy husband or wife may practice of it, yet reaching to its ultimate nature, there is that of it which even the sage cannot practice. Heaven and earth are great indeed, yet there are still those things which lead men to despair in them.” (Eno 2016: 40)

272: *So long as you act morally, your heart will remain untroubled.*

先生曰：「孟子不動心與告子不動心，所異只在毫釐間。告子只在不動心上著功，孟子便直從此心原不動處分曉。心之本體原是不動的，只為所行有不合義便動了。孟子不論心之動與不動，只是集義，所行無不是義，此心自然無可動處。若告子只要此心不動，便是把捉此心，將他生生不息之根反阻撓了，此非徒無益，而又害之。孟子集義工夫，自是養得充滿，並無餒歉；自是縱橫自在，活潑潑地。此便是浩然之氣。」

Master [Yangming] said, “The difference between Mengzi and Gaozi’s [notion of the] unmoving heart is located in minutiae.¹ Gaozi only directed his efforts to not troubling the heart. Mengzi, however, sought clarity directly from the heart’s originally unmoving place. In origin, the heart’s fundamental state is unmoving. It only becomes troubled because one’s actions do not conform to righteousness. Mengzi did not talk about the heart’s becoming troubled or remaining unmoving, just about accumulating acts of right. If all that one does is righteous, naturally, this heart will have no areas where it can become troubled. As for Gaozi’s just wanting this heart to remain unmoving, this is to try to get ahold of the heart, which rather obstructs the root of the heart’s ceaseless generation. Not only is this of no benefit, it will also

do harm to the heart. Through Mengzi's practice of accumulating acts of right, the heart is nurtured to the full and will as well have no starved *qi* 氣. Through it, the heart is freely present of itself and full of life. This is the flood-like *qi*."

¹ *Mengzi* 2A.2 states in part, Gongsun Chou said, "May I inquire about the formulas that you and Gaozi used to attain an unmoving heart?" Mencius replied, "Gaozi's rule was, 'If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart. If you cannot find sanction for a course of action in your heart, do not search for it in your *qi*.' I agree to the formula, 'If you do not find it in the heart, do not search for it in the *qi*.' But it is unacceptable to say, 'If you do not find it in the teachings, do not search for it in your heart.' The will is the leader of the *qi*, and *qi* is something that fills the body. Wherever the will leads the *qi* follows. Thus there is a saying, 'Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.'" Gongsun Chou said, "On the one hand you have said, 'Wherever the will leads the *qi* will follow.' But you have also said, 'Grasp your will and do not dissipate your *qi*.' Is there not an inconsistency?" Mencius answered, "When the will is unified, it moves the *qi*. But when the *qi* is unified, it can move the will. For example, when you see a man stumble or rush about, this is the action of his *qi*. In such cases, it has turned back upon the heart and moved it." Gongsun Chou said, "May I presume to inquire how you, Sir, excel?" "I can interpret what speech means," replied Mencius, "and I nurture well my flood-like *qi*." Gongsun Chou asked, "What do you mean by 'flood-like *qi*'?" "It is hard to describe," said Mencius. "This is a *qi* that is as vast and firm as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never impairs it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right. It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away." (Eno 2016: 39)

273: 又曰：「告子病源，從性無善無不善上見來。性無善無不善，雖如此說亦無大差，但告子執定看了，便有個無善無不善的性在

內；有善有惡又在物感上看，便有個物在外。卻做兩邊看了，便會差。無善無不善，性原是如此，悟得及時，只此一句便盡了，更無有內外之間。告子見一個性在內，見一個物在外，便見他於性有未透徹處。」

[Master Yangming] also said, “The source of Gaozi’s malady should be understood with respect to [his idea that] ‘human nature is neither good nor bad.’ ‘Human nature is neither good nor bad’: Although stating things this way is also not altogether wrong, nevertheless, Gaozi viewed it rigidly. Thus, within us we have a nature that is neither good nor bad, and good and bad are looked for in the perception of things (*wu* 物), so you have an external object (*wai wu* 外物). But this is to see it as divided into two sides, which can be a mistake. Neither good nor bad: human nature is originally as such. When you reach this insight, then this sentence alone is sufficient, and you no longer have the distinction between internal and external. Gaozi perceived a nature within and perceived an object without, so we see that with respect to nature there are areas that he had not yet fully comprehended.”

274: *Unity manifests in its purest form in the innate knowing.*

朱本思問：「人有虛靈，方有良知。若草木，瓦石之類，亦有良知否？」先生曰：「人的良知，就是草木，瓦石的良知。若草木，瓦石無人的良知，不可以為草木瓦石矣。豈惟草木，瓦石為然？天地無人的良知，亦不可為天地矣。蓋天地萬物與人原是一體，其發竅之最精處，是人心一點靈明。風雨露雷，日月星辰，禽獸草木、山川土石，與人原只一體。故五穀，禽獸之類，皆可以養人，藥石之類，皆可以療疾，只為同此一氣，故能相通耳。」

Zhu Benshi asked, “Because people possess the void spiritual intelligence, they possess the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知). Do classes [of objects] like plants and trees, tile and stone also possess *liangzhi*?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “People’s *liangzhi* is also the *liangzhi* of plants and trees, tile and stone. If plants and trees, tile and stone did not have people’s *liangzhi*, they could not be plants and trees, tile and stone. Yet how could this only be the case for plants and trees, tile and stone? If heaven and earth did not have people’s *liangzhi*, they could not become heaven

and earth. That is because heaven, earth, and the myriad things (that is, the cosmos) originally form one body with human beings. The place where this unity manifests most purely is that little bit of spiritual illumination (*lingming* 靈明) in the human mind. Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun and moon, stars, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, earth and stones originally form one body with human beings. It is for this reason that such classes [of objects] as the five grains, birds, and beasts can nourish man and that such classes as medicine and minerals can heal diseases. Since they share the same *qi*, they penetrate one another.”

¹ Zhu Benshi 朱本思 is Zhu Dezhi 朱得之. Benshi is his courtesy name. His hometown was Jingjiang County 靖江縣, Changzhou Prefecture 常州府, Southern Metropolitan Area.

Note: For *lingming* 靈明, the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism gives as a basic translation “spiritual luminosity.” In his scholarship, David Bartosch has translated this as “spiritual brightness.” Because Wang Yangming is referring to the mind, Wing-tsit Chan translates this as “clear intelligence.” “Clarity of intellect” would also work.

Note: A translation maintaining fidelity to the historical setting would translate *ren* 人 as “man,” as does Wing-tsit Chan.

275: *Nothing under Heaven is external to silent mind.*

先生遊南鎮。一友指巖中花樹問曰：「天下無心外之物。如此花樹，在深山中自開自落，於我心亦何相關？」先生曰：「你未看此花時，此花與汝心同歸於寂；你來看此花時，則此花顏色一時明白起來，便知此花不在你的心外。」

Master [Yangming] was touring Nanzhen.¹ A friend pointed to flowering trees on a cliff and said, “Nothing under Heaven (*tianxia* 天下) is external to mind. Flowering trees such as these, which naturally blossom and drop their blossoms deep in the mountains—what have they to do with my mind as well?”

The Master said, “Prior to looking at them, these flowers and your mind had returned together to silence. When you go and look at these flowers, their colors are immediately illuminated. From this, you can see that these flowers are not external to your mind.”

¹ Nanzhen 南鎮 refers to the location of Nanzhen Miao 南鎮廟 (Shen Miao 神廟) in Mount Kuaiji.

276: 問：「大人與物同體，如何《大學》又說個厚薄？」先生曰：「惟是道理自有厚薄，比如身是一體，把手足捍頭目，豈是偏要薄手足？其道理合如此。禽獸與草木同是愛的，把草木去養禽獸，又忍得；人與禽獸同是愛的，宰禽獸以養親與供祭祀、燕賓客，心又忍得；至親與路人同是愛的，如箠食豆羹，得則生，不得則死，不能兩全，寧救至親，不救路人，心又忍得；這是道理合該如此。及至吾身與至親，更不得分別彼此厚薄。蓋以仁民愛物皆從此出，此處可忍，更無所不忍矣。《大學》所謂厚薄，是良知上自然的條理，不可踰越，此便謂之義；順這個條理，便謂之禮；知此條理，便謂之智；終始是這條理，便謂之信。」

I asked, “[You say that] the great man and [the myriad] things form one body. Why does the *Great Learning* also speak of [the distinction between] the important (*hou* 厚: thick) and the trivial (*bo* 薄: thin)?”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Only because in principle there is this distinction between the important and trivial. For example, the body is one whole. How is using the hands and feet to protect the head and eyes intentionally trivializing the hands and feet? It should in principle be like this. Birds and beasts and grass and trees should be similarly loved, but using grass and trees to raise birds and beasts is still bearable. People and birds and beasts should be similarly loved, but slaughtering birds and beasts to care for parents, supply offerings for sacrifices, and entertain guests at a banquet is still psychologically bearable. Our closest relatives and a stranger encountered on the street should be similarly loved. Yet, if having the scoop of rice or cup of soup means surviving and not having it means dying, and one is unable to accommodate both, rather preferring to save the relative and not the stranger, this is also psychologically tolerable. This is because it should in principle be like this. As for oneself and close relatives, one cannot continue drawing a distinction between self and other and the important and trivial, because a humane concern for people and love for things both develop from this. If [drawing distinctions] is tolerated here, then nothing will be considered intolerable. What the *Great Learning* refers to as the important and trivial is an order natural to the innate knowing that cannot be transgressed. This is what is called righteousness. Abiding by this order is

called ritual etiquette. Understanding this order is called wisdom. Always acknowledging this order is called faith.”

¹ The *Great Learning* states, “From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, refining one’s person is the root. That roots should be disordered yet branches ordered is not possible. That what should be thickened is thin yet what is thin becomes thick has never yet been so. This is the meaning of knowing the root.” (Eno 2016: 13) KS Vincent Poon translates this as follows: “From the Son of Heaven to the ordinary layman, everyone (壹) takes the cultivation of oneself as one’s foundation. For one to have a disorderly (亂) foundation yet end up (末) to govern well is not possible indeed (矣). What one considers important with much gravity (厚), one takes it lightly with little regard (薄); and (而) what one considers trivial with little regard (薄), one takes it with importance and gravity (厚); such instances never existed. This is called knowing one’s foundation; this is called pursuing one’s knowledge to the utmost degree.” (Poon 2022)

277: *The essence of mind is the knowledge of right and wrong occasioned by experiencing.*

又曰：「目無體，以萬物之色為體；耳無體，以萬物之聲為體；鼻無體，以萬物之臭為體；口無體，以萬物之味為體；心無體，以天地萬物感應之是非為體。」

[Master Yangming] further stated, “Eyes have no essence; the colors of the myriad things are their essence. Ears have no essence; the sounds of the myriad things are their essence. The nose has no essence; the odors of the myriad things are its essence. The mouth has no essence; the flavors of the myriad things are its essence. The mind has no essence (*ti* 體); [the knowledge of] right and wrong occasioned by experiencing and responding to heaven, earth, and the myriad things is its essence.”

Note: *ganying* 感應 (“experiencing and responding to”) is usually translated as stimulus and response, feeling and responding, perceiving and responding, or influences and responses, among others.

278: 問「夭壽不貳」。先生曰：「學問功夫，於一切聲利、嗜好俱能脫落殆盡，尚有一種生死念頭毫髮掛帶，便於全體有未融釋處。人於生死念頭，本從生身命根上帶來，故不易去。若於此處見得破，透得過，此心全體方是流行無礙，方是盡性至命之學。」

I asked about “never waver for fear of death.”¹ Master [Yangming] said, “If you are able with the discipline of intellectual inquiry to cast off entirely recognition, aggrandizement, and indulgences, but thoughts of mortality still affect you in the slightest, then the entirety [of your mental awareness] will have areas still not yet integrated and released. But concern over mortality comes along with the body’s life potential, so it is not easy to let it go. If you are able to see and penetrate through to an understanding of this, only then will the entirety of mind flow forth unobstructed, only then will this be a learning of fully developing one’s nature and arrive at the workings of fate.”

¹ *Mengzi* 7A.1 states, “He who exhausts his mind knows his nature; to know one’s nature is to know Tian. The way to serve Tian is to preserve the mind and nourish the nature. The way to stand waiting for Tian’s commands (*ming*) is this: never waver for fear of death, just cultivate your person and await them.” (Eno 2016: 124)

279: 一友問：「欲於靜坐時將好名，好色、好貨等根，逐一搜尋，掃除，廓清，恐是剝肉做瘡否？」先生正色曰：「這是我醫人的方子，真是去得人病根，更有大本事人，過了十數年，亦還用得著。你如不用，且放起，不要作壞我的方子！」是友愧謝。少間，曰：「此量非你事，必吾們稍知意思者為此說以誤汝。」在坐者皆悚然。

A friend asked, “When quiet sitting, if you are trying, one after another, to locate, sweep away, and eradicate the roots of the desire for recognition, sex, wealth, and so on, I am afraid this is like cutting out a piece of flesh to graft it onto a wound. Is this wrong?”

With a serious look, the Master said, “This is my prescription for healing people, which really will remove the root cause of the ailment. Even if someone with greater natural ability uses it for over ten years, he will still be able to apply it. If you are not going to use it, then set it aside for the time being. Don’t ruin my prescription!”

This friend apologized out of embarrassment. A moment later, [Master Yangming] said, "I'm guessing this is not your doing. It must be that a follower of mine with a superficial understanding misled you when speaking about this." Those present were all frightened.

280: *Again, the Master cautions against a mindset that says the innate knowing can be realized through more elucidation. Holding up an object may be preferable to further explanation.*

一友問功夫不切。先生曰：「學問功夫，我已曾一句道盡，如何今日轉說轉遠，都不著根！」對曰：「致良知蓋聞教矣，然亦須講明。」先生曰：「既知致良知，又何可講明？良知本是明白，實落用功便是，不肯用功，只在語言上轉說轉糊塗。」曰：「正求講明致之之功。」先生曰：「此亦須你自家求，我亦無別法可道。昔有禪師，人來問法，只把塵尾提起。一日，其徒將其塵尾藏過，試他如何設法。禪師尋塵尾不見，又只空手提起。我這個良知就是設法的塵尾。捨了這個，有何可提得？」少間，又一友請問功夫切要。先生旁顧曰：「我塵尾安在？」一時在坐著皆躍然。

A friend inquired about misdirected practice. Master [Yangming] said, "I once fully explained the discipline of intellectual inquiry in one sentence. Why is it that nowadays the more one talks about it the wider of the mark one becomes, all without mastering the fundamentals." [His friend] replied, saying, "I have heard you teach about realizing the innate knowing, but it still needs to be discussed clearly."

The Master said, "Given that you already understand realizing the innate knowing, what more needs to be clearly discussed? The innate knowing is, originally, clear. So long as you are really applying yourself to the practice it will be. If you are unwilling to do so, only talking about it, the more you discuss it the more muddled it will become."

His friend said, "Clearly discussing how to practice realizing the innate knowing is precisely what I am trying to do." The Master said, "This as well is something that you yourself must find. I just have no other method to explain. In the past, there was a Chan master. Someone came to inquire about the Dharma, and he merely held up a deer-tail duster. One day his student hid the deer-tail duster to see how the master would lay down the Dharma. The Chan master looked for the duster but did not see it, so he

just raised up his empty hand. This innate knowing of mine is indeed a deer-tail duster for laying down the Dharma. If you have discarded this, what can you hold up?” A moment later, another friend asked about the essentials of practice. The Master looked to his side and said, “Where is my deer-tail duster?” At that moment, all those present became animated.

281: 或問「至誠前知」。先生曰：「誠是實理，只是一個良知。實理之妙用流行就是神，其萌動處就是幾。誠神幾，曰聖人。聖人不貴前知；禍福之來，雖聖人有所不免，聖人只是知幾，遇變而通耳。良知無前後，只知得見在的幾，便是一了百了。若有個前知的心，就是私心，就有趨避利害的意。邵子必於前知，終是利害心未盡處。」

Someone asked about, “[Through the Way of being] perfectly genuine [one may possess] foreknowledge.”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “Genuineness is true principle, just the innate knowing. The wondrous functioning and flow of true principle is spirit. The place where it sprouts into action is the incipient. ‘One who is genuine, spiritual, and incipient is called a sage.’² The sage does not place importance on foreknowledge. Even a sage cannot escape the advent of calamity and fortune. The sage only knows the incipient [phase]. When he encounters change he just knows how to respond. The innate knowing has no temporal phases (lit.: before and after). So long as one is able to recognize the present incipient phase, the main problem is solved and all will follow. If you have the desire for foreknowledge, this is egoic (self-centered) mind, and the intent to go after what benefits you and avoid what harms you. Master Shao’s insistence on foreknowledge is in the final analysis a matter of areas where a mindset of profit and harm has yet to be eliminated.”³

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 24 states: “Through the Dao of being perfectly genuine one may possess foreknowledge.” (Eno 2016: 49)

² Citing Zhou Dunyi’s *Penetrating the Scripture of Change* (*Tong shu* 通書), section 4, “Sagehood (*sheng* 聖).” (Adler 2014: 208)

³ Referring to Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077 CE), a Neo-Confucian scholar of the Northern Song dynasty.

282: *The essence of mind is like the sun, effortlessly illuminating all things.*

先生曰：“无知无不知，本体原是如此。譬如日未尝有心照物，而自无物不照，无照无不照，原是日的本体。良知本无知，今却要有知，本无不知，今却疑有不知，只是信不及耳。”

Master [Yangming] said, “Unknowing and all-knowing: the [mind’s] original condition has always been like this. For example, the sun has never intentionally illuminated things. Yet, there are no things that it does not illuminate. Without [intentionally] illuminating everything is illuminated: from the beginning this has been the sun’s natural state. The innate knowing is originally unknowing, yet now we want it to possess knowledge. Originally, there is nothing that it does not know, yet we now suspect that it lacks knowledge. We simply do not have enough faith in it.”

283: *Realizing the innate knowing brings clarity to our sense perception and cognitive abilities.*

先生曰：「『惟天下至聖，為能聰明睿知』，舊看何等玄妙，今看來原是人人自有的。耳原是聰、目原是明、心思原是睿知，聖人只是一能之爾，能處正是良知。眾人不能，只是個不致知，何等明白簡易！

Master [Yangming] said, “Only the greatest sage in the world possesses the keen powers of listening and seeing, penetration and wisdom’: In the past, this seemed so mysterious and profound, but now it appears that from the beginning this was something everyone possessed intrinsically.¹ Originally, ears hear acutely, eyes see clearly, and thinking is penetrating and wise. The sage is just completely capable of all this, that’s all, and he can maintain it precisely because of the innate knowing. That the multitudes are unable to do so merely owes to their not having realized this knowing. How obvious, simple, and easy!”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 31 states, “Only the greatest sage in the world possesses the keen powers of listening and seeing, penetration and wisdom that fit him to approach men as a ruler; the magnanimity, generosity, gentleness, and flexibility that fit him to accommodate others; the vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution that fit him to take a firm grip; the focus, seriousness,

balance, and uprightness that fit him to be reverent; the pattern, order, concentration, and incisiveness that fit him to discriminate among different things. As arching vastness, as depthless springs, he brings forth all this according to the times. *As arching vastness*: he is like the heavens. *As depthless springs*: he is like the deep. When he appears, none fail to respect him; when he speaks, none fail to have faith in him; when he acts, none fail to be content.” (Eno 2016: 54)

284: 問：「孔子所謂遠慮，周公夜以繼日，與將迎不同何如？」先生曰：「遠慮不是茫茫蕩蕩去思慮，只是要存這天理。天理在人心，亙古亙今，無有終始。天理即是良知，千思萬慮，只是要致良知。良知愈思愈精明，若不精思，漫然隨事應去，真知便粗了。若只著在事上茫茫蕩蕩去思，教做遠慮，便不免有毀譽得喪，人欲攬入其中，就是將迎了。周公終夜以思，只是『戒慎不睹，恐懼不聞』的功夫；見得時，其氣象與將迎自別。」

I asked, “How are what Master Kong said about thinking far ahead and the Duke of Zhou’s [raising his head in thought] all day and into the night any different from catering to others’ needs?”¹⁻²

Master [Yangming] replied, “Giving thought to difficulties in the future does not mean indiscriminately going about thinking and deliberating. One need only sustain this heavenly principle. From ancient times to today heavenly principle has remained present in the human mind. It has no end or beginning. Heavenly principle is the innate knowing. In a thousand thoughts and ten thousand concerns, just try to realize this innate knowing. The more you think with the innate knowing the clearer it becomes. If you are unable to think intelligently, casually responding to whatever happens to you, then genuine knowing will coarsen. If you just go around thinking indiscriminately about affairs, this is called giving thoughts to difficulties in the future. Then, [worry over] slander and praise and gains and losses will be unavoidable, and human desire will work its way in. This is [what is meant by] catering to others’ needs. The Duke of Zhou’s [raising his head in thought] all day and into the night is just the practice of being ‘alert and vigilant about what one does not see, apprehensive about what one does not hear.’³ When you understand this, the distinction between his style and catering to others’ needs will become obvious.”

¹ *Analects* 15.12 states, “The Master said, ‘He who gives no thought to difficulties in the future is sure to be beset by worries much closer at hand.’” (Trans. Lau)

² *Mengzi* 4B.20 states, “Mencius said, ‘Yu hated fine wine and loved fine advice. Tang held to the mean and set no fixed criteria in appointing worthy men. King Wen regarded his people as though he were treating their wounds, and gazed towards the Dao as though first glimpsing it. King Wu never took those close to him for granted nor forgot those who were distant. The Duke of Zhou aspired to join the greatness of all three dynasties in carrying out these four principles. When in some respect he did not match up, he would raise his head in thought, all day and into the night, and then, chancing to grasp the solution, he would sit awaiting the dawn.’” (Eno 2016: 82–83)

³ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

285:問：「『一日克己復禮，天下歸仁』，朱子作效驗說，如何？」先生曰：「聖賢只是為己之學，重功夫不重效驗。仁者以萬物為體，不能一體，只是己私未忘。全得仁體，則天下皆歸於吾仁，就是『八荒皆在我闔』意，『天下皆與其仁』亦在其中。如『在邦無怨，在家無怨』，亦只是自家不怨，如『不怨天，不尤人』之意，然家邦無怨於我亦在其中，但所重不在此。」

I asked, “If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the world would consider

humanity to be his?': Master Zhu [Xi] explained this with respect to results.¹ What do you think?"

Master [Yangming] said, "Sages and worthies only engaged with a learning that is for oneself. They stressed the effort and not the results. The humane person regards the myriad things as one body (*yi ti* 一體). If he is unable to form a whole (*yi ti* 一體) [with the myriad things], that is only because he has failed to give up his egoic (self-centered) self. When the body of humanity is perfectly realized, all under Heaven will return to my humanity. This is the meaning of 'the eight corners are all within my room.'² 'Everyone under Heaven considers humanity to be his' is included in this as well.³ As for '[Do not do to others what you would not wish done to you.] Then there can be no complaint against you, in your state or in your household,' this is also just a matter of you yourself having no complaints, similar to what is meant by 'I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame men.'⁴⁻⁵ However, the household and state having no complaints against me is included in this as well, just that the emphasis does not lie here."

¹ *Analects* 12.1 states, "Yan Yuan asked about ren. The Master said, 'Conquer yourself and return to *li*: that is *ren*. If a person could conquer himself and return to *li* for a single day, the world would respond to him with ren. Being ren proceeds from oneself, how could it come from others?' Yan Yuan said, 'May I ask for details of this?' The Master said, 'If it is not *li*, don't look at it; if it is not *li*, don't listen to it; if it is not *li*, don't say it; if it is not *li*, don't do it.' Yan Yuan said, 'Although I am not quick, I ask to apply myself to this.'" (Eno 2015: 59)

² Citing Lu Dalin's 吕大临 *Ke ji ming* 克己铭.

³ Citing Zhu Xi's commentary on *Analects* 12.1.

⁴ *Analects* 12.2 states, "Zhonggong asked about ren. The Master said, 'When you go out your front gate, continue to treat each person as though receiving an honored guest. When directing the actions of subordinates, do so as though officiating at a great ritual sacrifice. Do not do to others what you would not wish done to you. Then there can be no complaint against you, in your state or in your household.'

Zhonggong said, ‘Although I am not quick, I ask to apply myself to this.’” (Eno 2015: 59)

⁵ *Analects* 14.35 states, “The Master said, ‘No one recognizes me!’ Zigong said, ‘How is it that this is so?’ The Master said, ‘I do not complain against Tian, nor do I blame men. I study what is lowly and so get through to what is exalted. Is it not Tian who recognizes me?’” (Eno 2015: 94)

286: 問：「孟子巧力、聖智之說，朱子云：『三子力有餘而巧不足。』何如？」先生曰：「三子固有力亦有巧。巧力實非兩事。巧亦只在用力處，力而不巧，亦是徒力。三子譬如射，一能步箭，一能馬箭，一能遠箭。他射得到，俱謂之力，中處俱可謂之巧。但步不能馬，馬不能遠，各有所長，便是才力分限有不同處。孔子則三者皆長。然孔子之和，只到得柳下惠而極；清，只到得伯夷而極；任，只到得伊尹而極，何曾加得些子？若謂『三子力有餘而巧不足』，則其力反過孔子了。巧力只是發明聖智之義，若識得聖智本體是何物，便自了然。」

I asked, “Regarding Mengzi’s discourse on skill and strength and sageliness and wisdom, Master Zhu [Xi] said, ‘The three gentlemen (=Boyi, Yi Yin, and Liu Xiahui) had more than enough strength, but their skillfulness was insufficient.’ Why so?”¹⁻²

The Master said, “The three gentlemen indeed had strength as well as skill. In fact, skill and strength are by no means two separate matters. Skill as well is only demonstrated where strength is applied. If one has strength but not skill, then the strength will just be wasted. Take, for example, the three gentleman and archery. One can shoot arrows while walking, another while riding, and another from a distance. If they can hit the target, all will be said to have strength. If they can hit the bullseye, all will be said to have skill. However, one can shoot while walking but not while riding, and another while riding but not from a distance. That each has his own strengths means that his talents are limited to different areas. Master Kong was adept at all three skills. Nevertheless, his [virtue of] harmony could only reach Liu Xiahui’s at its apogee, his purity could only reach Boyi’s at its apogee, and his responsibility could only reach Yi Yin’s at its apogee. When did he ever add the slightest bit more [to these

virtues]? If one says that ‘the three gentlemen have more than enough strength, but their skillfulness was insufficient,’ then their strength, to the contrary, exceeded Master Kong’s. Skill and strength just clarify the meaning of sageliness and wisdom. If you know what kind of thing the original condition (*benti* 本體) of sageliness and wisdom is, naturally, you will become clear about it.”

¹ *Mengzi* 5B.1 states in part, “Mencius concluded, ‘Bo Yi was the sage of purity; Yi Yin was the sage of responsibility; Liuxia Hui was the sage of harmony; Confucius was the sage of timeliness. We call Confucius “the great coda.” By this we mean that he is like the great musical climax, where the brass gongs peal and the jade chimes ring. The peal of the brass gongs signals the start of the culmination and the ring of the jade chimes brings the coda to its close. The start of the culmination is like the work of wisdom; the close of the coda is like the work of sagehood. *Wisdom can be compared to craft and sagehood to strength.* Like an arrow shot from beyond a hundred paces: that it reaches the target is a matter of strength; that it hits the bullseye is not a matter of strength.” (Eno 2016: 98–99; italics mine)

² Citing Zhu Xi’s commentary on the *Mengzi*.

287: *The innate knowing is identical to Heaven.*

先生曰：「『先天而天弗違』，天即良知也。『後天而奉天時』，良知即天也。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “When he precedes Heaven, Heaven does not oppose him’: Heaven is the innate knowing. ‘When he follows Heaven he respects Heaven’s timing’: the innate knowing is Heaven.”¹

¹ The “Commentary on the Words of the Text” for the Qian 乾 hexagram in the *Classic of Changes* states, “The great person’s virtue matches that of Heaven and Earth; his clarity/brightness [*ming* 明] matches that of the sun and moon; his sense of sequence matches that of the four seasons; his sensitivity to the auspicious and ominous matches that of ghosts and spirits. When he precedes Heaven, Heaven

does not oppose him; when he follows Heaven, he respects Heaven's timing. As Heaven does not oppose him, how can humans? How can ghosts and spirits?" (Adler 2020: 66)

288: *Liangzhi* 良知 is the sense of right and wrong.

「良知只是個是非之心，是非只是個好惡。只好惡就盡了是非，只是非就盡了萬事萬變。」又曰：「是非兩字，是個大規矩，巧處則存乎其人。」

[Master Yangming said,] “The innate knowing is just the sense of right and wrong. Right and wrong is just a matter of loving [right] and hating [wrong].¹ Loving and hating alone fully covers all matters of right and wrong. Right and wrong alone fully covers all affairs and all change.” He also said, “The two words ‘*shi fei* 是非’ are general rules. Skillful application depends on the person.”

¹ Or, stated more mildly, liking and disliking.

289: *Everyone can distinguish right and wrong by beginning with that little bit of moral illumination we all have within.*

「聖人之知如青天之日，賢人如浮雲天日，愚人如陰霾天日，雖有昏明不同，其能辨黑白則一。雖昏黑夜裏，亦影影見得黑白，就是日之餘光未盡處。困學功夫，亦只從這點明處精察去耳。」

[Master Yangming said,] “The sage’s [innate] knowing is like the sun on a clear day. The worthy’s knowing is like the sun on a partly cloudy day. The benighted person’s knowing is like the sun on an overcast day. However, although the degree of dimness and brightness differs, the ability of each to distinguish black and white is the same. Even on a dark night each can still vaguely discern black and white. This owes to sunlight that has not yet entirely faded into the night. The practice for [those who understand it only in] circumstances of duress or [through] study also takes as its starting point careful investigation of this little bit of brightness.”¹

¹The *Doctrine of the Mean* 20a states in part, “Some are born understanding it, some study to understand it, some come to understand it only in circumstances of duress. But once they understand it, they are all one. Some practice it through natural ease, some practice it to benefit thereby, some practice it by forcing themselves. But once they succeed by means of it, they are all one.”

290: *The Master compares the innate knowing (liangzhi 良知) to sunlight and feelings to clouds, and speaks to the simple and easy, profoundly penetrating practice by which the clouds naturally come and go.*

問：「知譬日，欲譬雲，雲雖能蔽日，亦是天之一氣合有的，欲亦莫非人心合有否？」先生曰：「喜、怒、哀、懼、愛、惡、欲，謂之七情。七者俱是人心合有的，但要認得良知明白。比如日光，亦不可指著方所，一隙通明，皆是日光所在。雖雲霧四塞，太虛中色象可辨，亦是日光不滅處，不可以雲能蔽日，教天不要生雲。七情順其自然之流行，皆是良知之用，不可分別善惡。但不可有所著。七情有著，俱謂之欲，俱為良知之蔽。然纔有著時，良知亦自會覺，覺即蔽去，復其體矣。此處能勘得破，方是簡易透徹功夫。」

I asked, “[The innate] knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) can be compared to the sun and desire to clouds. Although clouds can conceal the sun, yet they are still something that the sky’s one *qi* 氣 should possess. Are not all desires as well something the human mind should have?”

Master [Yangming] replied, “Happiness, anger, grief, fear, love, hate, and desire are called the seven feelings. The human mind should have all seven of these, but *liangzhi* must be recognized clearly. Take, for example, sunlight: You cannot even identify it with a particular direction or location. All the light passing through a gap is the location of sunlight. Even should clouds and fog block out every direction, you can still distinguish colors and forms in the Great Void. This is the indestructible aspect of sunlight. You cannot instruct the sky not to produce clouds just because clouds can conceal the sun. When the seven feelings follow their natural flow, they are all the functioning of *liangzhi*, and you cannot distinguish them as being good or bad. You just shouldn’t be attached [to them]. When you possess attachment to the seven feelings, they are all called [self-centered] desires,

and all of them become an obstacle to *liangzhi*. However, just as soon as there is attachment, *liangzhi* will naturally become aware of it, and once aware the obstacle will be removed and the [original] condition restored. It is only after you break through to an understanding of this point through investigation that the practice becomes simple, easy, and penetrating.”

Note: Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

291: 問：「聖人生知安行是自然的。如何？有甚功夫？」先生曰：「知行二字即是功夫，但有淺深難易之殊耳。良知原是精精明明的。如欲孝親，生知安行的，只是依此良知實落盡孝而已；學知利行者，只是時時省覺，務要依此良知盡孝已；至於困知勉行者，蔽錮已深，雖要依此良知去孝，又為私欲所阻，是以不能，必須加『人一己百、人十己千』之功，方能依此良知以盡其孝。聖人雖是生知安行，然其心不敢自是，肯做困知勉行的功夫。困知勉行的，卻要思量做生知安行的事，怎生成得？」

I asked, “That sages are born understanding it and practice it with ease is natural.¹ Why? What do they practice?”

Master Yangming said, “Knowing (*zhi* 知) and acting (*xing* 行)—these two words—are the practice. However, there is a disparity between shallow and deep and difficult and easy [practice]. The innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) is originally pure and clear. Take, for example, the desire to serve one’s parent with dutiful respect. Those who are born understanding it and practice it with ease simply accord with *liangzhi*, genuinely practicing filial piety to the utmost. Those who study to understand it and practice it to benefit thereby just always need to be introspective and self-aware, tasking themselves with fully practicing filial piety by conforming to *liangzhi*. As for those who come to understand it only in circumstances of duress and practice it by forcing themselves, the concealment and shackling are already serious, so even should they wish to practice filial piety perfectly by conforming to *liangzhi*, because they are blocked by egoic (self-centered) desire, they are unable to do so. They must exert the effort whereby ‘When others can do one, demand that you do one hundred; when others can do ten, demand that you do one thousand.’² Only then will they be able to

practice filial piety perfectly by conforming to this *liangzhi*. Although the sage is born understanding it and practices it with ease, nevertheless, he does not dare to be overly self-confident and is willing to put forth the same effort as those who come to understand it only in circumstances of duress and practice it by forcing themselves. However, if those who come to understand it only in circumstances of duress and practice it by forcing themselves ponder attempting what those who are born understanding it and practice it with ease do, how could they succeed?”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 20a states in part, “There are five things that extend throughout the world and three means of practicing them: ruler and minister; father and son; husband and wife; elder and younger brother; friend meeting friend. These five form a universal Dao for the world. Wisdom, humanity, valor: these three form the universal virtues for the world. There is but a single means of putting them into practice. Some are born understanding it, some study to understand it, some come to understand it only in circumstances of duress. But once they understand it, they are all one. Some practice it through natural ease, some practice it to benefit thereby, some practice it by forcing themselves. But once they succeed by means of it, they are all one.” (Eno 2016: 45)

² The *Doctrine of the Mean* 20e states, “Study broadly, inquire probingly, contemplate carefully, distinguish clearly, practice sincerely. If there remain things unstudied, do not act upon what you have not mastered. If there remain things unprobed, do not act upon what you do not understand. If there remain things un contemplated, do not act upon what you have not grasped. If there remain aspects indistinct, do not act upon what is not clear to you. If there remain aspects unpracticed, do not act upon what you cannot sincerely do. When others can do one, demand that you do one hundred; when others can do ten, demand that you do one thousand. He who fully masters this Dao, though ignorant, shall surely become enlightened; though weak, shall surely become strong.” (Eno 2016: 48)

292: *Our heart's natural condition is one of peace and happiness, always at rest, insofar as emotions stay true to themselves.*

問：「樂是心之本體，不知遇大故，於哀哭時，此樂還在否？」
先生曰：「須是大哭一番了方樂，不哭便不樂矣；雖哭，此心安處是樂也。本體未嘗有動。」

I asked, "If 'happiness is the mind's original condition, then when we encounter a major loss [of a parent] and cry out in grief, is this happiness still present?"

Master [Yangming] replied, "One must first cry hard and then there will be happiness. Without crying there will be no happiness. Although one is crying, this mind's secure place remains happiness. The [mind's] original condition has never been set in motion."

293: 問：「良知一而已。文王作《象》，周公繫《爻》，孔子贊《易》，何以各自看理不同？」先生曰：「聖人何能拘得死格？大要出於良知同，便各為說，何害？且如一園竹，只要同此枝節，便是大同；若拘定枝枝節節都要高下大小一樣，便非造化妙手矣。汝輩只要去培養良知，良知同，更不妨有異處。汝輩若不肯用功，連筍也不曾抽得，何處去論枝節？」

I asked, "The innate knowing is just the same. King Wen composed the [hexagram] 'Judgements (*tuán* 象),' the Duke of Zhou wrote the [hexagram] 'Line [Statements] (*yao ci* 爻辭),' and Master Kong wrote [the commentaries on] the *Classic of Changes*. Why did each treat the principles [of the *Changes*] differently?"

Master [Yangming] said, "How could a sage be confined by inflexible forms? So long as the fundamentals deriving from the innate knowing are the same, even if each offers his own theory, what harm could there be? Take, for example, bamboos in a garden. So long as the branches and knots are similar, they are essentially the same. If the height and size of the branches and knots must be rigidly prescribed, this will not be the wondrously skillful work of nature. You all just proceed to cultivate the innate knowing. So long as the innate knowing is alike, areas of disagreement will no longer matter. If you all are unwilling to apply yourself to the practice, then even the bamboo shoots won't have sprouted, so where can you go to discuss branches and knots?"

294: 鄉人有父子訟獄，請訴於先生，侍者欲阻之，先生聽之。言不終辭，其父子相抱慟哭而去。柴鳴治入問曰：「先生何言，致伊感悔之速？」先生曰：「我言舜是世間大不孝的子，瞽瞍是世間大慈的父。」鳴治愕然，請問。先生曰：「舜常自以為大不孝，所以能孝；瞽瞍常自以為大慈，所以不能慈。瞽瞍只記得舜是我提孩長的，今何不會豫悅我，不知自心已為後妻所移了，尚謂自家能慈，所以愈不能慈；舜只思父提孩我時如何愛我，今日不愛，只是我不能盡孝，日思所以不能盡孝處，所以愈能孝。及至瞽瞍底豫時，又不過復得此心原慈的本體。所以後世稱舜是個古今大孝的子，瞽瞍亦做成個慈父。」

A village had a father and son who were suing each other, and they brought their case before Master Yangming. An aide wished to prevent them from doing so, but Master Yangming heard them out. Before he had finished speaking to them, the father and his son embraced each other, cried their hearts out, and departed. Chai Mingzhi came in and asked, “What did you say, sir, that moved them to regret their mistakes so quickly?”¹

The Master said, “I said that Shun was the world’s most unfilial son, whereas (his father) Gusou was the world’s most loving father.” Mingzhi was shocked. He asked [Master Yangming] what he meant. The Master explained, “Shun always saw himself as the most unfilial, which is why he was able to be filial. Gusou always saw himself as the most loving, which is why he was incapable of loving-kindness. He only bore in mind that he had raised Shun from a young age, asking himself why Shun is now unable to please him.² He did not realize that his heart had already been changed by his subsequent wife, yet believing that he could be loving. That is why he became even more incapable of loving-kindness. Shun only thought about how his father had loved him while raising him from a young age, believing that if he now no longer loved him, that could only be because I am incapable of serving him perfectly with filial piety. Each day he reflected upon where he had been incapable of perfectly demonstrating his filiality, which is why he kept getting better at it. When Gusou was pleased [by Shun], he had merely restored the loving-kindness original to his mind’s natural state. Thus, later generations praised Shun for being the most filial son from ancient times to the present, and Gusou as well turned out to be a loving father.”

¹ Nothing certain is known about Chai Mingzhi.

² *Mengzi* 4A.28 states, “Mencius said, ‘When the whole world turned towards him with great delight, only Shun could look upon this as he would look upon a trifle. One is not fully a man when one cannot please one’s parents, and one is not fully a son when one cannot obey them. Shun exhausted the *dao* of service to his parents, and Gusou was finally pleased. And when Gusou was pleased the world was transformed, and the conduct of all the fathers and sons in the world was settled. This is called Great Filiality.’” (Eno 2016: 79)

295: 先生曰：「孔子有鄙夫來問，未嘗先有知識以應之，其心只空空而已。但叩他自知的是非兩端，與之一剖決，鄙夫之心便已了然。鄙夫自知的是非，便是他本來天則，雖聖人聰明，如何可與增減得一毫？他只不能自信，子與之一剖決，便已竭盡無餘了。若夫子與鄙夫言時，留得些子知識在，便是不能竭他的良知，道體即有二了。」

Master [Yangming] said, “When a rustic came to put a question before Master Kong, he never replied to the rustic with knowledge he already possessed. His mind was just completely blank. He only pressed the rustic with the rustic’s own knowledge of the opposing sides of right and wrong, analyzing and solving it together with him, and in his own mind the rustic then understood it clearly. The right and wrong the rustic knows for himself is the rule of Heaven originally possessed by him. Even with the intelligence of the sage, how could the slightest bit be added to or subtracted from it? He is just unable to trust himself. When the Master analyzed and solved it together with him, [the right and wrong he knows for himself] had already been fully exhausted, with nothing remaining. When speaking to the rustic, if Master Kong had left him with some information, he would not have been able to exert the rustic’s innate knowing to the full, and the essence of the Way would have been sundered in two.”¹

¹ *Analects* 9.7 states, “The Master said, ‘Do I possess knowledge? No, I do not. A rustic put a question to me and my mind was a complete blank. I kept hammering at the two sides of the question until I got everything out of it.’” (Trans. Lau)

296: 先生曰：「『烝烝乂，不格姦』，本註說象已進進於義，不至大為姦惡。舜徵庸後，象猶曰以殺舜為事，何大姦惡如之！舜只是自進於乂，以乂薰烝，不去正他姦惡。凡文過掩隱，此是惡人常態，若要指摘他是非，反去激他惡性。舜初時致得象要殺己，亦是要象好的心太急，此就是舜之過處；經過來乃知功夫只在自己，不去責人，所以致得克諧，此是舜動心忍性，增益不能處。古人言語，俱是自家經歷過來，所以說得親切，遺之後世，曲當人情。若非自家經過，如何得他許多苦心處？」

Master [Yangming] said, “[Shun has been able] to lead them gradually to self-control, so that they (no longer) proceed to wickedness.”¹ A commentary says that Xiang was already advancing in righteousness and unlikely to engage in serious treachery and wickedness. [Yet,] after Shun was summoned (by Yao) to serve, Xiang still plotted to kill him every day. What greater treachery and wickedness than this is there? Shun merely made his own progress in exercising self-control, influencing [Xiang] with his self-control rather than trying to correct Xiang’s treachery and wickedness. Glossing over one’s mistakes and concealing one’s crimes are par for the course for bad people. If Shun had pointed out where Xiang was right and wrong, this would rather have exacerbated his bad nature. When Shun first incurred Xiang’s desire to kill him, this was also because he was overly anxious in his desire to change Xiang for the better. This was where Shun was mistaken. Having gone through this, Shun then understood that the task is to focus on oneself, and not to go and criticize others. Thus, he was able to accomplish living in harmony [with his family]. This was where Shun’s heart was motivated, his nature was hardened, and what he was capable of doing grew. The words of the ancients were all based on what they had personally experienced. That is why they are stated so sincerely and when transmitted to later generations still completely reflect people’s sentiments. If one has not gone through this oneself, how could one understand all his painstaking effort?”

¹ Wang Yangming is referring to a dialogue in the “Yao dian 堯” of the *Classic of Documents*. With his aides, Yao discusses Shun, his eventual successor: “The Di said, ‘Ho! (President of) the Four Mountains, I have been on the throne seventy years. You can carry out my commands—I will resign my place to you.’ The Chief said, ‘I have not the virtue; I should disgrace your place.’ (The Di) said, ‘Show me some one among the illustrious, or set forth one from among the

poor and mean.' All (then) said to the Di, 'There is an unmarried man among the lower people, called Shun of Yu.' The Di said, 'Yes, I have heard of him. What have you to say about him?' The Chief said, 'He is the son of a blind man. His father was obstinately unprincipled; his (step-)mother was insincere; his (half-) brother Xiang was arrogant. He has been able (however), by his filial piety to live in harmony with them, and to lead them gradually to self-government, so that they (no longer) proceed to great wickedness.' The Di said, 'I will try him; I will wive him, and thereby see his behaviour with my two daughters.' (Accordingly) he arranged and sent down his two daughters to the north of the Gui, to be wives in (the family of) Yu. The Di said to them, 'Be reverent!'" (Trans. Legge)

297: 先生曰：「古樂不作久矣；今之戲子，尚與古樂意思相近。」未達，請問。先生曰：「《韶》之九成，便是舜的一本戲子；《武》之九變，便是武王的一本戲子。聖人一生實事，俱播在樂中，所以有德者聞之，便知他盡善盡美與盡美未盡善處。若後世作樂，只是做些詞調，於民俗風化絕無關涉，何以化民善俗？今要民俗反樸還淳，取今之戲子，將妖淫詞調俱去了，只取忠臣、孝子故事，使愚俗百姓人人易曉，無意中感激他良知起來，卻於風化有益，然後古樂漸次可復矣。」曰：「洪要求元聲不可得，恐於古樂亦難復。」先生曰：「你說元聲在何處求？」對曰：「古人制管候氣，恐是求元聲之法。」先生曰：「若要去葭灰黍粒中求元聲，卻如水底撈月，如何可得？元聲只在你心上求。」曰：「心如何求？」先生曰：「古人為治，先養得人心和平，然後作樂。比如在此歌詩，你的心氣和平，聽者自然悅懌興起，只此便是元聲之始。《書》云『詩言志』，志便是樂的本；『歌永言』，歌便是作樂的本；『聲依永，律和聲』，律只要和聲，和聲便是制律的本。何嘗求之於外？」曰：「古人制候氣法，是意何取？」先生曰：「古人具中和之體以作樂，我的中和原與天地之氣相應，候天地之氣，協鳳凰之音，不過去驗我的氣果和否，此是成律已後事，非必待此以成律也。今要候灰管，必須定至日，然至日子時，恐又不準，又何處取得準來？」

Master Yangming said, "Ancient music has not been played for a long time. Today's opera is still similar to the feel of it." [Dehong] did not understand and asked what he meant. The Master said, "The *Shao Music* in nine acts was a musical performance composed by [Emperor] Shun, and

the nine variations of *Wu Music* was a musical performance composed by King Wu.¹ True events in the life of sages are disseminated through musical compositions. Thus, when a person who possessed virtue listened to it, he knew in what respect [*Shao Music*] was thoroughly beautiful and thoroughly good and [*Wu Music*] was thoroughly beautiful but not thoroughly good.² When later generations composed music, they merely made the tonal patterns and rhyme schemes for lyric verse. It had absolutely nothing to do with people's customs and morals and manners. How could it civilize the people and change their customs for the better? Nowadays, if we want people's customs to revert to simplicity and honesty, we must take hold of today's opera and discard all the decadent and lascivious verse, only retaining the stories of loyal ministers and filial sons, making it easy for all uncultured common people to understand, subconsciously inspiring and evoking their innate knowing. Then it will be of benefit to morals and manners and ancient music can be gradually restored.”

[Dehong] said, “Even if [I,] Hong wanted to find the original tones it would not be possible. I am afraid that recovering ancient music is difficult.” The Master said, “Where is it that you believe one should search for the original tones?” I replied, “I am afraid that using pitch pipes for awaiting the *qi* 氣 (vital energy) [belonging to a solar term] was the method the ancients used to search for the original tones.”³ The Master said, “If you want to search for the original tones in the ashes of reeds or millet grains, that will be like fishing the moon out of the water. How can you possibly succeed? You can only search for the original tones in your own mind.”

I asked, “How does one search for them in the mind?” The Master said, “When the ancients governed, they first fostered harmony and peace in people's hearts and then composed music. Take, for example, singing poetry here. If you are enjoying a harmonious and peaceful state of mind, those listening will naturally feel delighted and become inspired. This by itself is the beginning of the original tones. The [*Classic of Documents*] says, ‘poetry expresses the heart's intent.’ The heart's intent is the foundation of music. [The *Documents* says,] ‘Singing is the prolonged utterance of that expression.’ Singing is the basis for making music. [The *Documents* says,] ‘The notes accord with the prolonged utterance and are harmonized by pitch pipes.’ The pitch pipes are just for harmonizing the notes. Harmonizing notes is the foundation for making pitch pipes. How could the original tones be found on the outside?”

I said, “What was the reasoning behind the ancients’ method of using pitch pipes to await the *qi* [belonging to a solar term]?” The Master said, “The ancients only made music after they were in complete possession of the [mental] state of centered harmony. In origin, my centered harmony corresponds with the *qi* of heaven and earth. Awaiting the *qi* [of the solar terms] between heaven and earth and harmonizing with the sounds of the *fenghuang* are no more than to experimentally verify whether my psychophysical energy is or is not in fact harmonious. These are matters that come after making musical pipes. It is not that this must first take place in order to make the musical pipes. Today, if we want to wait for the ashes [to fly out of] the pipes, we must first determine the day of the winter solstice. However, the *zishi* hours (23:00–1:00) of the winter solstice may very well not be accurately determined. Where, then, can we acquire a standard?”

¹ Referring to the “Yi and Ji” chapter in the *Classic of Documents*’ “Book of Yu,” which states in part, “When the nine parts of the service, as arranged by the Di, have all been performed, the male and female phoenix come with their measured gambolings (into the court).” (Trans. Legge)

² Referring to Master Kong. The *Analects* 3.25 states, “The Master said of the Shao music, ‘It is thoroughly beautiful and thoroughly good.’ Of the Wu music he said, ‘It is thoroughly beautiful, but not thoroughly good.’” Robert Eno notes, “The Shao music was an orchestral ballet said to have been composed by the legendary Emperor Shun, who was raised to the throne because of his virtue. The Wu music was a dance of the conquest in war of the evil last king of the Shang by the Zhou founder, King Wu. (‘Wu’, in both the name of the king and the name of the music, means ‘martial.’)” (Eno 2016: 13)

³ The *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the later Han Dynasty) states, “The *qi* of Heaven manifests through light and shadow, while the *qi* of Earth manifests through vibrations—that is, pitch [*li*].... At the winter solstice the *yang qi* begins to move, the musical pitches are high and clear, the shadows are long, the *huangzhong* pitch is penetrating, and the dusts [*hui*] of the earth begin to rise.... The method for awaiting the [seasonal] *qi* requires building a room with three concentric walls,

doors closed, crevices thoroughly sealed, and heavy felt blankets laid all around. Within the room are wooden stands with a pipe for each pitch, arranged in accordance with the points on the compass, outsides raised and insides low [sitting in the earth]. Reed ashes [*hu*] are poured to fill the inner ends of the pipes, which are observed for their correspondence with the calendar. When the *qi* [of a particular season] arrives the ashes fly out of the corresponding tube. If moved by the *qi*, the ashes disperse, but if moved by wind or human hand they collect. In the palace twelve pipes of jade were used and the waiting only carried out for the two solstices. At the Spirit Terrace [royal observatory] sixty pipes of bamboo were watched according to the dates of the calendar.” (Wang and Schoenberger 2019: 446–447)

Note: Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

298: 先生曰：「學問也要點化，但不如自家解化者，自一了百當。不然，亦點化許多不得。」

Master [Yangming] said, “In learning you should want guidance and teaching [from friends and teachers], but this is inferior to learning by unraveling it yourself. If you succeed once, the rest will follow. Otherwise, even with much guidance and teaching from others you will not get it.”

299: 「孔子氣魄極大，凡帝王事業，無不一一理會，也只從那心上來。譬如大樹，有多少枝葉，也只是根本上用得培養功夫，故自然能如此，非是從枝葉上用功做得根本也。學者學孔子，不在心上用功，汲汲然去學那氣魄，卻倒做了。」

[Master Yangming said,] “Master Kong’s boldness was enormous. All the endeavors of the emperors and kings—there were none that he did not learn to appreciate one by one, doing so only with his heart-mind. Take, for example, a large tree. No matter how many branches and leaves it may have, the effort to cultivate it was only applied to the roots and trunk, and thus it could naturally grow to this extent. It is not that the roots and trunk were grown by working on cultivating the branches and leaves. If learners don’t apply themselves to their heart-minds when studying Master Kong,

rather impatiently proceeding to emulate his boldness, then they are doing things in reverse.”

300: *The Master warns against fixing mistakes belatedly, as it may lead to the habit of covering one's tracks.*

「人有過，多於過上用功，就是補甑，其流必歸於文過。」

[Master Yangming stated,] “If someone makes mistakes and applies most of his effort to correcting them, this is like fixing an earthenware cauldron. This abuse will surely lead to glossing over one's faults.”

301: 「今人於吃飯時，雖無一事在前，其心常役役不寧，只緣此心忙慣了，所以收攝不住。」

[Master Yangming stated,] “Nowadays, when people are eating, although nothing whatsoever is going on for them, their minds are always preoccupied and ill at ease. Simply because this mind is accustomed to being taxed, they are unable to collect themselves and bring it under control.”

302: 「琴瑟、簡編，學者不可無。蓋有業以居之，心就不放。」

[Master Yangming stated,] “*Qin*, *se*, and books: scholars cannot go without them. If one dwells in his undertakings, then his mind will not be lost.”

Note: A *qin* 琴 is a seven-stringed zither, and a *se* 瑟 is a bridge zither, normally with twenty-five strings. Wang Yangming is referring more generally to music.

303: *The Master criticizes the educated in his time.*

先生嘆曰：「世間知學的人，只有這些病痛打不破，就不是『善與人同』。」崇一曰：「這病痛只是個好高不能忘己爾。」

Master [Yangming] sighed and said, “Those of the world who understand intellectual inquiry have only this fault that they are unable to overcome: they

don't 'prize the goodness of others as they prize their own.'" [Ouyang] Chongyi said, "The fault is just aiming too high and being unable to give up one's ego."²

¹ *Mengzi* 2A.8 states, "Mencius said, 'When anyone pointed out to Zilu an error that he had made, he was pleased. When Yu heard good speech he bowed. The great Shun surpassed even this. He prized the goodness of others as he prized his own, and would cast off all self-regard to follow others, delighting to emulate them in doing good. In rising from being a farmer, making pots and fishing, to becoming emperor, he drew everything from others. One who draws from others in this way joins people together in doing good, and there is nothing the *junzi* prizes more than joining with people to do good together.'" (Eno 2016: 44–45)

² Chongyi 崇一 is the courtesy name for Ouyang De 歐陽德 (1496–1554). He hailed from Taihe County 太和縣, Ji'an Prefecture 吉安府, Jiangxi Province. He became a devoted follower of Wang Yangming and disseminated his ideas throughout his life.

304: 問：「良知原是中和的，如何卻有過、不及？」先生曰：「知得過、不及處，就是中和。」

I asked, "Originally, the innate knowing is centered and in harmony.¹ So why is it that there is overshooting the mark and falling short?"²

The Master replied, "Knowing where you are overshooting the mark and falling short is precisely being centered and in harmony."

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, "That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the

great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

² *Analects* 11.16 states, “Tzu-kung asked, ‘Who is superior, Shih or Shang?’ The Master said, ‘Shih overshoots the mark; Shang falls short.’ ‘Does that mean that Shih is in fact better?’ The Master said, ‘There is little to choose between overshooting the mark and falling short.’” (Trans. Lau)

305: *Extending our innate knowing (zhi liangzhi 致良知) is like adhering to Confucius’s version of the golden rule—“Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.” Empathy is intrinsic to our hearts, the source of our better judgment.*

「『所惡於上』是良知，『毋以使下』即是致知。」

[Wang Yangming stated], “That which you detest in your superior refers to the innate knowing. ‘Do not employ upon your subordinates’ means extending this knowledge.”¹

¹ The *Great Learning* states, “That which you detest in your superior, do not employ upon your subordinates. That which you detest in your subordinates, do not employ to serve your superior. That which you detest in those who are before you, do not employ to lead those behind you. That which you detest in those who are behind you, do not employ to follow those before you. That which you detest in him on your right, do not employ when engaged with him on your left. That which you detest in him on your left, do not employ when engaged with him on your right. This is the Dao of the carpenter’s square.” (Eno 2016: 21)

Analects 15.24 states, “Tzu-kung asked, ‘Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?’ The Master said, ‘It is perhaps the word *shu*. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.’” (Trans. Lau)

Analects 4.15 states, “The Master said, ‘Ts’an! There is one single thread binding my way together.’ Tseng Tzu assented. After the Master had gone out, the disciples asked, ‘What did he mean?’ Tseng Tzu said, ‘The way of the Master consists in doing one’s best and in using oneself as a measure to gauge others. That is all.’” (Trans. Lau)

306: 先生曰：「蘇秦、張儀之智，也是聖人之資。後世事業文章，許多豪傑名家，只是學得儀、秦故智。儀、秦學術，善揣摩人情，無一些不中人肯綮，故其說不能窮。儀、秦亦是窺見得良知妙用處，但用之於不善爾。」

Master [Yangming] said, “The resourcefulness of Su Qin and Zhang Yi is also the sages’ natural endowment.¹ As for the undertakings and writings and many heroes and eminent experts of later generations—people had merely learned from [Zhang] Yi and [Su] Qin’s age-old resourcefulness. [Zhang] Yi and [Su] Qin’s science was skillfulness at analyzing human sentiment, and they never failed to determine the key to a person. Thus, their theories are inexhaustible. [Zhang] Yi and [Su] Qin also caught a glimpse of the wondrous operation of the innate knowing, just that they applied it to things that were not good.”

¹ Su Qin (late 4th century BCE) and Zhang Yi (d. 310 BCE) were political advisors who lived during the Warring States Period.

307: *The Master speaks of the paradox of the nondual duality of the unmanifest and manifest.*

或問未發已發。先生曰：「只緣後儒將未發已發分說了，只得劈頭說個無未發已發，使人自思得之。若說有個已發未發，聽者依舊落在後儒見解。若真見得無未發已發，說個有未發已發，原不妨，原有個未發已發在。」問曰：「未發未嘗不和，已發未嘗不中。譬如鍾聲，未扣不可謂無，即扣不可謂有，畢竟有個扣與不扣，何如？」先生曰：「未扣時原是驚天動地，即扣時也只是寂天寞地。」

Someone asked about [the mental state] before [emotions] arise and [mental states] after [the] arising [of emotions].¹ Master [Yangming]

replied, “Only because later Ruists spoke of before and after arising separately, I had no choice but to begin by asserting that a before and after arising do not exist [as separate states], so as to get people to think it through for themselves. If I were to say that before and after arising exist [as separate states], those listening would yet remain with the opinions of later Ruists. If you truly recognize that a before and after arising do not exist [as separate states], saying that they do would never have become an obstacle, because originally a before and after arising exists.”

He asked, “[The state] before arising is never without harmony and [states] after arising are never without centeredness. Take, for example, the sound of a bell. Before it has been struck, one cannot say that it has no sound. After striking it, one cannot say that it has sound. Nevertheless, there is still the distinction between striking and not striking it. Is this correct?”

The Master replied, “The moment prior to striking it alarms the heavens and shakes the earth, whereas the moment after striking it merely stills heaven and silences earth.”

¹ Others have translated “arise (*fa* 發)” as “emerge” and “manifest.” The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

308: 問：「古人論性，各有異同，何者乃為定論？」先生曰：「性無定體，論亦無定體。有自本體上說者，有自發用上說者，有自源頭上說者，有自流弊處說者。總而言之，只是這個性，但所見有淺深爾。若執定一邊，便不是了。性之本體原是無善、無惡的，發用上也原是可以為善、可以為不善的，其流弊也原是一定善、一定惡的。譬如

眼，有喜時的眼，有怒時的眼；直視就是看的眼，微視就是覷的眼。總而言之，只是這個眼。若見得怒時眼，就說未嘗有喜的眼；見得看時眼，就說未嘗有覷的眼，皆是執定，就知是錯。孟子說性，直從源頭上說來，亦是說個大概如此；荀子性惡之說，是從流弊上說來，也未可盡說他不是，只是見得未精耳。眾人則失了心之本體。」問：「孟子從源頭上說性，要人用功在源頭上明徹；荀子從流弊說性，功夫只在末流上救正，便費力了。」先生曰：「然。」

I asked, “When the ancients discussed human nature, they each had areas of disagreement and agreement. Which [theory] is the definitive argument?”

Master [Yangming] said, “Human nature has no fixed form, and their arguments as well have no definitive shape. Some spoke of it from the perspective of its original condition, some from the perspective of its manifestation and functioning, some from the perspective of its source, and some from the perspective of the abuses to which it may lead (in the course of its manifestation and functioning). In sum, it is just this [human] nature, but their opinions merely varied in terms of shallowness and depth. If one insists on [the correctness of] one aspect, one will be wrong. In origin, good and bad are absent from the original condition of [human] nature. In terms of manifestation and functioning, originally, it is possible for nature to become good and for it to become bad. Originally, the abuses to which it may lead are definitely good or bad. This may be compared to eyes. There is the expression in eyes during happy moments and the expression in eyes during angry moments. Gazing straight ahead is looking eyes and stealing a glance is squinting eyes. In a word, it is just the same eyes. If you saw the expression in eyes during angry moments, then you will say there were never happy eyes. If you saw looking eyes, then you will say there were never squinting eyes. Each is insistent [on one perspective], which we know is mistaken. When Mengzi discussed human nature, he spoke of it specifically in terms of its source and also said that it is probably as such. Xunzi’s theory that human nature is bad is stated from the perspective of the abuses to which it may lead. One cannot say definitively that he was wrong, only that what he understood was yet inaccurate. As for the multitudes, they have lost the mind in its original condition (*xin zhi bentu* 心之本體).”

I asked, “Mengzi spoke of nature from the perspective of its source because he wanted people’s practice at its source to be lucid. Xunzi spoke

of nature from the perspective of the abuses to which it may lead because he wanted people to amend themselves only in the last stages. This is wasted effort.”

The Master said, “That is correct.”

309: *As liangzhi 良知 awakens a silence descends.*

先生曰：「用功到精處，愈著不得言語，說理愈難。若著意在精微上，全體功夫反蔽泥了。」

Master [Yangming] stated, “When you reach a refined place through your practice, you will find yourself increasingly unable to express it in language, and speaking rationally about it will become more difficult. If you are overly attentive to the refined and subtle then the entirety of your practice will instead become obstructed.”

310: *Lu Xiangshan’s student, the Song Ruist Yang Jian, was overly fixated on the ineffable, what transcends sense perception.*

「楊慈湖不為無見，又著在無聲無臭見上了。」

[Wang Yangming stated,] “Yang Cihu was not without insight; it is just that he was fixated on his insight into the soundless or odorless.”¹⁻²

¹ Yang Cihu is Yang Jian 楊簡 (1141–1226). He was a Neo-Confucian philosopher who lived during the Southern Song dynasty and studied under Lu Xiangshan, as one of his most important students. He likewise developed a philosophy of mind.

² The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before

they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

Note: For the ineffable in Wang Yangming’s philosophy, see the work of David Bartosch.

311: *The Master explains that the states of consciousness we pass through each day are analogous to the course of the history of the world. However, the innate knowing is prior to all states and all times, present from time immemorial.*

「人一日間，古今世界都經過一番，只是人不見耳。夜氣清明時，無視無聽，無思無作，淡然平懷，就是羲皇世界；平旦時，神清氣朗，雍雍穆穆，就是堯、舜世界；日中以前，禮儀交會，氣象秩然，就是三代世界；日中以後，神氣漸昏，往來雜擾，就是春秋、戰國世界；漸漸昏夜，萬物寢息，景象寂寥，就是人消物盡世界。學者信得良知過，不為氣所亂，便常做個羲皇已上人。」

[Master Yangming said,] “In a single day, people traverse the history of the world from ancient times to present, just that they are unaware of it. When the nighttime atmosphere (*qi* 氣) is pure and clear and one does not see or hear, one does not think or act, and one is detached and calm, this is the world of Emperor [Fu] Xi. Early in the morning, when one’s spirits are fresh and psychophysical energy (*qi* 氣) is clear, and one feels harmonious and serene, that is the world of [the emperors] Yao and Shun. Before noon, when people observe ritual etiquette and ceremony in their interactions and the atmosphere is orderly, that is the world of the three dynasties. After noon, when one’s spirit and *qi* gradually fade, and dealings are complicated and troubling, that is the worlds of the Spring and Autumn [Period] and Warring States [Period].¹ As it gradually darkens with nightfall and the myriad things come to rest, and the scene becomes still and desolate, this is the world where people vanish and things perish. If a learner can trust in the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知), remaining undisturbed by [habitual] *qi* 氣, then he can always be a person from time immemorial (lit.: a person who lived before Fuxi).”

¹ Ulrich Theobald writes, “Fu Xi 伏羲, also written 伏犧 or 伏戲, also called Mi Xi 宓羲 (also written 宓犧), or Pao Xi 包犧, (also written 包羲, 炮犧, or 庖犧), is one of the Three Augusts三皇 or Five Emperors五帝 of Chinese mythology. He is therefore known as Xi Huang 犧皇 or Huang Xi 皇羲 ‘August Shepherd.’ His cognomen is Tai Hao 太皞 (also written 太昊) ‘Great Brightness’, his tribal name Huang Xiong 黃熊氏” (ChinaKnowledge.de, accessed December 6, 2022). Yao and Shun were two of the five semi-legendary emperors of Chinese mythology. The three dynasties are the Xia (c. 2100–1600 BCE), Shang (1600–1050 BCE), and Zhou (c. 1046–256 BCE) dynasties. The Spring and Autumn (c. 770–475 BCE) and Warring States (c. 475–221 BCE) Periods belong to the Eastern Zhou dynasty (771–256 BCE).

Note: Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

312: 薛尚謙、鄒謙之、馬子莘、王汝止侍坐。因嘆先生自征寧藩已來，天下謗議益眾。請各言其故。有言先生功業勢位日隆，天下忌之者日眾；有言先生之學日明，故為宋儒爭是非者亦日博；有言先生自南都以後，同志信從者日眾，而四方排阻者日益力。先生曰：「諸君之言，信皆有之。但吾一段自知處，諸君俱未道及耳。」諸友請問。先生曰：「我在南都已前，尚有些子鄉愿的意思在。我今信得這良知真是真非，信手行去，更不著些覆藏。我今纔做得個狂者的胸次，使天下之人都說我行不掩言也罷。」尚謙出曰：「信得此過，方是聖人的真血脈。」

Xue Shangqian, Zou Qianzhi, Ma Zixin, and Wang Ruzhi were sitting together [with Master Yangming].¹⁴ They bemoaned how ever since Master [Yangming] quelled the [rebellion by the] Ning Princely Establishment (in 1519), those under Heaven slandering and criticizing him were becoming more numerous. He asked each of them to explain why this was happening. One said that because his recognition for meritorious achievement, influence, and status were growing more illustrious every day, those under Heaven jealous of him were daily becoming more numerous. One said that because his philosophy was

becoming more widely known every day, those defending the validity of Song Ruists were as well daily growing in number. One said that ever since he had spent time [serving as an official] at the Southern Capital (=Nanjing), like-minded men who trusted and followed him were becoming more numerous every day. Thus, in every direction, those who sought to exclude and block him were becoming more aggressive with each passing day.”

The Master said, “I trust, gentlemen, that what each of you has stated is all true. However, not one of you has yet to speak to a piece of this that I have come to understand for myself.”

His friends asked him what he meant. The Master said, “Before I lived at the Southern Capital, there was yet some of the mentality of the good men of the villages in me.⁵ Now, I trust [that what] this innate knowing [knows is] truly right and truly wrong, uninhibitedly performing, with no need to conceal or hide anything. Only now have I begun to act like those with a reckless mindset. Even if everyone under Heaven said that my conduct is not in line with my speech, it would not matter to me.”

Shangqian stood up and said, “Trust in this innate knowing alone is the true lifeblood of the sages.”

¹ Shangqian 尚謙 is a courtesy name for Xue Kan 薛侃 (d. 1545). His hailed from Jieyang County 揭陽縣, Chaozhou Prefecture 潮州府, Guangdong Province, and obtained his *jinsbi* in 1517.

² Qianzhi 謙之 is a style name for Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562). He hailed from Anfu County 安福縣, Ji’an Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, and obtained his *jinsbi* in 1511.

³ Zixin 子莘 is one of Ma Mingheng’s 馬明衡 courtesy names. His hometown was Putian County 莆田縣, Xinghua Prefecture 興化府, Fujian Province. He obtained his *jinsbi* in 1514 and was one of Wang Yangming’s most prominent followers in Fujian.

⁴ Ruzhi 汝止 is a courtesy name for Wang Gen (1483–1540). He was one of Wang Yangming’s most prominent followers and the founder of the Taizhou School.

⁵ *Analects* 17.13 states, “The Master said, ‘The good men of the village are thieves of virtue.’” Eno notes, “The ‘good men’ are those who use the prestige of age to protect their position without accepting any ethical challenge. They appear virtuous, but have no moral substance.” (Eno 2014: 19)

313: 先生鍛鍊人處，一言之下，感人最深。一日，王汝止出遊歸，先生問曰：「遊何見？」對曰：「見滿街人都是聖人。」先生曰：「你看滿街人是聖人，滿街人到看你是聖人在。」又一日，董蘿石出遊而歸，見先生曰：「今日見一異事。」先生曰：「何異？」對曰：「見滿街人都是聖人。」先生曰：「此亦常事耳，何足為異。」蓋汝止圭角未融，蘿石恍見有悟，故問同答異，皆反其言而進之。洪與黃正之、張叔謙、汝中丙戌會試歸，為先生道：「塗中講學，有信有不信。」先生曰：「你們拿一個聖人去與人講學，人見聖人來都怕走了，如何講得行！須做得個愚夫愚婦，方可與人講學。」洪又言：「今日要見人品高下最易。」先生曰：「何以見之？」對曰：「先生譬如泰山在前，有不知仰者，須是無目人。」先生曰：「泰山不如平地大，平地有何可見？」先生一言翦裁，剖破終年為外好高之病，在座者莫不悚懼。

The way Master [Yangming] molds people is by moving them most deeply with one remark. One day, Wang Ruzhi went out for a walk.¹ When he returned, the Master asked him, “When you were taking a walk, what did you see?” He replied, “I saw that the people crowding the streets were all sages.” The Master said, “You saw them as sages, but the people crowding the streets instead looked upon you as a sage in their midst.”

On another day, Dong Luoshi went out for a walk and returned.² He called on Master Yangming and told him, “Today I saw something curious.” The Master said, “What was curious?” He replied, “I saw that the people crowding the streets were all sages.” The Master said, “This is also just a normal state of affairs. What was so curious about it?”

Basically, although the question was the same, because Ruzhi’s talent was yet rough around the edges and Luoshi seemed vaguely to get it, the replies differed. In each case, he furthered their understanding by stating what they had said contrariwise.”

After we took the *bingxu* year (1526) metropolitan examination, when [I,] Dehong, Huang Zhengzhi, Zhang Shuqian, and [Wang] Ruzhi returned, I told Master Yangming, “When we lectured on learning along the way, some people believed us and some did not.”³

The Master said, “You all masqueraded as sages and proceeded to lecture people about learning. When they saw sages coming their way they all ran off in fear. How could you lecture to them successfully? You have to present yourself as an unsophisticated husband and wife and then you will be able to lecture to people about learning.”

[I, De]hong also said, “Nowadays, discerning the quality of people’s character is most easy.” The Master said, “How does one discern it?” I replied, “For instance, you, sir, are like Mount Tai rising before us. If there is someone who does not know to look up in admiration, then he must be blind.” The Master said, “Mount Tai is not as vast as a plain, and what can be discerned on a plain?”

The Master tailors with a remark, dissecting and eliminating our chronic flaws of looking for the answers outside ourselves and aiming too high. All those present were scared.

¹ Ruzhi 汝止 is a courtesy name for Wang Gen (1483–1540). He was one of Wang Yangming’s most prominent followers and the founder of the Taizhou School.

² Referring to Dong Yun 董運 (1458–1534), whose art (style) names were Luoshi 蘿石 and, late in life, Cong wu dao ren 從吾道人. He was from Haiyan County 海鹽縣, Zhejiang Province. In 1524, when he was traveling in Shaoxing, Dong heard that Wang Yangming was lecturing in the area and went to hear him speak, becoming his student.

³ Zhang Shuqian 張叔謙 is Zhang Yuanchong 張元冲. Shuqian was his style name, and Fufeng 浮鋒 was his art (courtesy) name. His hometown was Shanyin County 山陰縣, Zhejiang Province. He obtained his *jinsshi* (presented scholar) degree in 1538. He was a follower of Wang Yangming.

314: *The Master expresses his fondness for his student Zou Shouyi, comparing him to Yan Hui.*

癸未春，鄒謙之來越問學，居數日，先生送別於浮峰。是夕，與希淵諸友移舟宿延壽寺。秉燭夜坐，先生慨悵不已，曰：「江濤煙柳，故人倏在百里外矣！」一友問曰：「先生何念謙之之深也？」先生曰：「曾子所謂『以能問於不能，以多問於寡，有若無，實若虛，犯而不校』，若謙之者，良近之矣。」

During spring of the *guinei* year [of the Jiajing emperor's reign] (1523), Zou Qianzhi came to Yue to inquire about learning.¹⁻² After staying for several days, Master [Yangming] saw him off at Fufeng. That evening, together with [Cai] Xiyuan and other friends, the Master traveled by boat to and stayed over at Yanshou Temple.³

While we were sitting around at night holding candles, the Master kept expressing his despondency. He said, “[Past] waves on the river and fog over the willows, an old friend is suddenly over one hundred *li* away!”

A friend asked, “Why are you missing Qianzhi so much?” Master [Yangming] said, “This is what Zengzi meant by ‘To be able yet to ask the advice of those who are not able. To have many talents yet to ask the advice of those who have few. To have yet to appear to want. To be full yet to appear empty. To be transgressed against yet not to mind. It was towards this end that my friend used to direct his efforts.’⁴ For someone like Qianzhi, this is very fitting.”

¹ Zou Qianzhi 鄒謙之 is Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562). Zou hailed from a prominent clan of Anfu County 安福縣, Jiangxi Province. In 1511, Zou placed first in the metropolitan examination. As Wang Yangming was an examiner, Zou caught his attention. After serving for a year at the prestigious Hanlin Academy in Beijing, Zou returned home to care for his father, remaining for nine years. During that time, he attracted a following of students, but the seemingly different methods for developing one's moral character proposed by the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean*, two classics central to the Cheng-Zhu learning of principle, perplexed him. In 1519, when Wang was stationed in Jiangxi, Zou called on him and inquired about it. Wang's reply so inspired him that he declared discipleship, becoming one of

his most committed followers and, by some accounts, the one who most accurately understood the Master's philosophy. The Ming court recalled Zou to office in 1522, but his position on a controversial political issue angered the emperor. In 1524, by imperial order, the court imprisoned Zou and demoted him to a humble office. Thereafter, Zou rose slowly through prestigious appointments in Nanjing and Beijing. In 1541, however, after a fire broke out in the imperial ancestral temple, he submitted a memorial urging reforms and counselling mutual respect between ruler and officials. For this, he was compelled to resign. Upon returning home, he spent the remaining twenty years of his life devoting himself to teaching. (Zou 2007: vol. 2, 27.1368–70)

² Here, Yue refers to Shaoxing Prefecture, where Wang Yangming was then living.

³ Xiyuan is the courtesy name for Cai Zongyan 蔡宗兗. His hometown was Zhejiang Province's Shanyin County. He was one of Wang Yangming's earliest followers.

⁴ *Analects* 8.5 states, "Tseng Tzu said, 'To be able yet to ask the advice of those who are not able. To have many talents yet to ask the advice of those who have few. To have yet to appear to want. To be full yet to appear empty. To be transgressed against yet not to mind. It was towards this end that my friend used to direct his efforts.'" (Trans. Lau)

315: 丁亥年九月，先生起復征思、田。將命行時，德洪與汝中論學。汝中舉先生教言曰：「無善無惡是心之體，有善有惡是意之動，知善知惡是良知，為善去惡是格物。」德洪曰：「此意如何？」汝中曰：「此恐未是究竟話頭。若說心體是無善無惡，意亦是無善無惡的意、知亦是無善無惡的知、物是無善無惡的物矣。若說意有善惡，畢竟心體還有善惡在。」德洪曰：「心體是天命之性，原是無善無惡的。但人有習心，意念上見有善惡在。格、致、誠、正、修，此正是復那性體功夫。若原無善惡，功夫亦不消說矣。」是夕侍坐天泉橋，各舉請正。先生曰：「我今將行，正要你們來講破此意。二君之見，正好相資為用，不可各執一邊。我這裏接人原有此二種。利根之人，直從本

源上悟入。人心本體原是明瑩無滯的，原是個未發之中。利根之人一悟本體即是功夫，人已內外一齊俱透了。其次不免有習心在，本體受蔽，故且教在意念上實落為善去惡，功夫熟後，渣滓去得盡時，本體亦明盡了。汝中之見，是我這裏接利根人的；德洪之見，是我這裏為其次立法的。二君相取為用，則中人上下皆可引入於道；若各執一邊，眼前便有失人，便於道體各有未盡。」既而曰：「已後與朋友講學，切不可失了我的宗旨：無善無惡是心之體，有善有惡是意之動，知善知惡的是良知，為善去惡是格物。只依我這話頭隨人指點，自沒病痛。此原是徹上徹下功夫。利根之人，世亦難遇。本體功夫一悟盡透，此顏子、明道所不敢承當，豈可輕易望人？人有習心，不教他在良知上實用為善去惡功夫，只去懸空想個本體，一切事為俱不著實，不過養成一個虛寂。此個病痛不是小小，不可不早說破。」是日德洪、汝中俱有省。

In the ninth month of the *dinghai* year (1527), Master [Yangming] was recalled to office [and appointed] to quell the uprisings in Sien and Tianzhou.¹ When he was preparing to set out for his assignment, [Qian] Dehong and [Wang] Ruzhong were discussing learning.²⁻³ Citing the Master's teaching, Ruzhong said, "The absence of good and evil is the essence of mind (that is, mind in its original state). The presence of good and evil is the workings of the intentions (*yi* 意). What knows good and knows evil is the innate knowing. To do good and rid evil is to rectify matters (*ge wu* 格物)."⁴

Dehong asked, "What does this mean?" Ruzhong said, "Perhaps this is not his definitive argument. If one says that good and evil are absent from the mind-essence (that is, mind in its original state), then intentions are also intentions devoid of good and evil, knowing is also knowing devoid of good and evil, and matters (*wu* 物) are matters devoid of good and evil as well. If one says that intentions possess good and evil, then it necessarily follows that good and evil are present in the mind-essence (*xinti* 心體)."

Dehong said, "The mind-essence is our nature ordained by Heaven, originally devoid of good and evil. However, because people have conditioned minds, they perceive the presence of good and evil in their intentions. Rectifying [matters], realizing [knowledge], perfecting the genuineness [of our intentions], righting [the mind], and cultivating [the self]—these are precisely the practices for restoring the reality of our nature. If good and evil are originally absent (from intentions), then there is no need to talk about practice."

That evening, they sat together [with Master Yangming] at the Tianquan (Heavenly Spring) Bridge. Each repeated what he had said and asked for correction. The Master said, “Your coming to discuss and resolve the meaning of this is precisely what I wanted to happen as I get ready to depart today. Fortunately, both of your opinions, gentlemen, are mutually beneficial, and you should not insist on sticking to one side. Here, when I receive and guide people, there have always been these two types. Those with keen faculties enter enlightenment directly from the root and source. Originally, the original condition (*benti* 本體: the root or fundamental state) of the human mind is transparent and unobstructed. It is the centeredness prior to [the] arising of experience. Those with keen faculties immediately realize that the original condition is the practice. Self and other and interior and exterior are all simultaneously penetrated. Those second to them invariably have a conditioned mind, and the original condition has suffered concealment. For the time being, I instruct them really and truly to do the good and rid the evil in their thinking. After their efforts have matured, and once the sediment has been completely removed, the original condition will be entirely illuminated. Ruzhong’s standpoint is how I greet those here with keen faculties. Dehong’s standpoint is how I establish a method for those second to them. Gentlemen, if the two of you utilize each other’s ideas complementarily, then both those with above and those with below average intelligence can be brought into the Way. If each of you sticks to one side, you will mishandle the people right before your eyes, and each of them will fail to fully comprehend the reality of the Way.”

After a moment had passed, [Master Yangming] further stated, “In the future, when discussing learning with friends, you absolutely must not lose track of my fundamental objective. The absence of good and evil is the essence of mind. The presence of good and evil is the workings of the intentions. What knows good and knows evil is the innate knowing. To do good and rid evil is to rectify matters. Just adhere to my argument in this matter and suitably instruct people and, naturally, there will be no failings. This truly is a practice that thoroughly penetrates through to the higher and lower. In this world, one is unlikely to encounter people with keen faculties. With one awakening fully penetrating through to the practice of the original condition—this is something for which even Master Yan [Hui] and [Cheng] Mingdao would not dare to assume responsibility. How could we so easily expect this of others? People have

conditioned minds. If we do not teach them truly to apply the practice of doing good and ridding evil through their innate knowing, as opposed to baselessly thinking about the original condition, all their actions will be unsound. In the end, they will have done nothing more than nurture emptiness and silence. This malady is by no means minor, and one cannot but expose it sooner.”

That day, both Dehong and Ruzhong attained some insight.

¹ Sien and Tianzhou were native prefectures located in Guangxi Province where conflict between native chieftains and the Ming state had broken out. In 1527 Wang Yangming was ordered by the Ming court to proceed to the region and pacify the unrest.

² Dehong 德洪 is a courtesy name for Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574). His hometown was Yuyao County 余姚縣, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming’s first followers and remained a committed one throughout his life, playing a key role in the dissemination of Wang’s teachings.

³ Ruzhong is an art (style) name for Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583). His courtesy name is Longxi 龍溪. He was from Shanyin Prefecture 山陰府, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming’s most important followers, playing a key role in developing and disseminating his teachings.

⁴ Wing-tsit Chan’s translation of this passage is, “In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil. When the will becomes active, however, such a distinction exists. The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil. The investigation of things is to do good and remove evil.” (Chan 1962: 243) Iso Kern’s translation is, “The absence of good and evil is the substance of the heart (mind). The presence of good and evil is the movement (psychic activity) of the intentions. Knowing the good and knowing the evil is the original knowledge. Doing the good and removing the evil is the rectification of actions (affairs).” (Kern 2018: 273-274) It should be noted here that “inclinations” and “thinking” can also be suitable translations of *yi* 意. For more on this issue and other

translations see the work of Kwong-loi Shun, Harvey Lederman, and Jana Rosker, among others.

Note: *benti* 本體 been translated as the “inherent reality” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], “original substance” (Wing-tsit Chan), “ultimate reality” (Julia Ching), “fundamental state/condition” (N. Serina Chan), “original natural condition” (Harvey Lederman), “root-system of vitality” (David Bartosch) “original status as pure being” (Dong Ping 董平), and “essence” (Charles Muller). It is the essential source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian’s secret. The intrinsic reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming’s philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, “fundamental” and “original” seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say “original condition” or “fundamental state” and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, as viewed in its essential qualities, we say “essence” or “in itself.”

316: 先生初歸越時，朋友蹤跡尚寥落，既後四方來遊者日進。癸末年已後，環先生而居者比屋，如天妃、光相諸刹，每當一室，常合食者數十人，夜無臥處，更相就席，歌聲徹昏旦。南鎮、禹穴、陽明洞諸山遠近寺刹，徒足所到，無非同志遊寓所在。先生每臨講座，前後左右環坐而聽者，常不下數百人。送往迎來，月無虛日，至有在侍更歲，不能遍記其姓名者。每臨別，先生常嘆曰：「君等雖別，不出在天地間，苟同此志，吾亦可以忘形似矣。」諸生每聽講，出門未嘗不跳躍稱快。嘗聞之同門先輩曰：「南都以前，朋友從遊者雖眾，未有如在越之盛者。」此雖講學日久，孚信漸博，要亦先生之學日進，感召之機申變無方，亦自有不同也。

When Master [Yangming] first returned to Yue, friends’ footprints were still sparse.¹ Thereafter, the volume of people coming to visit him

from all over grew every day. After the *guimei* year [during the reign of the Jiajing emperor] (1523), many were those residing all around the Master. In each room in Tianfei, Guangxiang, and other temples, dozens of people often ate their meals together. At night, when there was no place to lie down, people took turns sleeping, and the sound of singing could be heard from dusk to dawn. As for the nearby and distant temples located on Nanzhen, Yuxue, Yangming Grotto and other mountains, so long as people could reach them, they all served as places for like-minded friends to take an excursion and stay over.

Whenever the Master made an appearance and lectured, an audience typically composed of no fewer than several hundred people surrounded him on all sides. Throughout each month, not a day went by without sendoffs and greetings. Some even remained by his side assisting him for over a year, and yet all their names cannot be recalled. Whenever he bid someone farewell, the Master would sigh with emotion, and say, “Gentlemen, although you are departing, you won’t pass beyond the boundaries of heaven and earth. So long as we share the same aspirations, it is okay if your appearance slips from my memory.” Every time, upon hearing him lecture and departing from the room, there were no students who did not jump with joy.

I once heard a fellow disciple from the senior generation say, “Prior to staying at the Southern Capital (=Nanjing), although he was accompanied by a large number of friends, it never matched the liveliness of Shaoxing.” On the one hand, this was a consequence of holding lecture forums for an extended period and ever more substantial numbers of believers. But most fundamentally, this also resulted from the Master’s daily progress in learning and his technique for inspiring [students], responding dynamically from no place in particular. Naturally, this differed from before.

¹ Yue refers to Shaoxing Prefecture 紹興府, Zhejiang Province, one of Wang Yangming’s hometowns. Note that this account was recorded by Wang Yangming’s disciple Qian Dehong 錢德洪.

黃以方錄 Huang Yifang's Records

Huang Yifang's given name was Zhi 直. He lived from 1489 to 1559, during the reigns of the Hongzhi, Zhengde, and Jiajing emperors. His hometown was Jinxi County 金溪縣, Fuzhou Prefecture, Jiangxi Province. His courtesy name was Yifang 以方 and his art (style) name was Zhuofeng 卓峰. He won his provincial examination degree (*juren* 舉人) in 1516 and his metropolitan degree (*jinsbi* 進士) in 1523. After obtaining his *juren* degree he spent time studying at the National Imperial University. In 1520, he first returned home and then proceeded to Ganzhou, Jiangxi, to call on Wang Yangming and study under him for a time. A diligent student, he recorded his teacher's statements and conversations. Volume III of the *Chuan xi lu* categorizes forty entries as his records (see also entries 222 to 236). However, it should be noted that the following twenty-seven entries comprising this section were not all recorded by him. According to Li Yeming (2021: 517), 317 through 326 were recorded by him, 341 and 342 were recorded by Huang Shengzeng, and the remaining entries (327 to 340) were likely recorded by Qian Dehong.

317: 黃以方問：「『博學於文』為隨事學存此天理，然則謂『行有餘力，則以學文』其說似不相合。」先生曰：「《詩》、《書》、六藝皆是天理之發見，文字都包在其中，考之《詩》、《書》、六藝，皆所以學存此天理也，不特發見於事為者方為文耳。『餘力學文』，亦只『博學於文』中事。」或問「學而不思」二句。曰：「此亦有為而言。其實思即學也，學有所疑，便須思之。『思而不學』者，蓋有此等人，只懸空去思，要想出一個道理，卻不在身心上實用其力以學存此天理，思與學作兩事做，故有罔與殆之病。其實思只是思其所學，原非兩事也。」

[I.] Huang Yifang asked, “[You say that] ‘widely versed in literature and the arts’ means learning to preserve heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理) as one encounters matters.¹ However, Master Kong also said, ‘[A young man should be filial within his home and respectful of elders when outside, should be careful and trustworthy, broadly caring of people at large, and should cleave to those who are humane.] If he has energy left over, he may

study the refinements of literature and the arts.”² These statements do not seem to be in agreement.”

Master [Yangming] said, “The *Classic of Poetry*, *Classic of Documents*, and Six Arts are all manifestations of heavenly principle, and all literature is included within their purview. Examining the *Classic of Poetry*, *Classic of Documents*, and Six Arts, [one can see that] they are all means by which one learns to preserve heavenly principle. What belongs to literature is not limited to what is expressed in conduct. ‘If he has energy left over, he may study the refinements of literature and the arts’ is just something included in ‘widely versed in literature and the arts.’”

Someone asked about the two sentences, “If one learns from others but does not think [, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril].”³ The Master said, “This too is something Master Kong stated for a reason. In fact, thinking is learning. If you doubt something when learning, it is necessary to think it over. ‘Thinks but does not learn’—there are probably people of this sort. They just go about thinking without any basis, trying to think up a reason. Yet they do not conscientiously apply their effort to themselves for the purpose of learning to preserve this heavenly principle, making thinking and learning two separate matters. Thus, you have the maladies of bewilderment and being in peril. Actually, thinking is just thinking about what you are learning. Originally, these were not two separate matters.”

¹ *Analects* 6.27 states, “The Master said, “The gentleman widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the rites can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for.” (Trans. Lau) *Tianli* 天理 has been translated as “the principle of Heaven,” “heavenly principle,” “cosmic pattern,” “the principle of Nature,” “Heavenly pattern-principle,” among others. For Wang Yangming, *tianli* is the natural order patterning the moral life in all its goodness and perfection. It is an ideal realm. *Li* is primarily moral law, and the moral life as it is ideally and objectively, here and now, when liberated from narcissistic self-love, from egoic desire, from errant mind.”

² *Analects* 1.6 states, “The Master said: A young man should be filial within his home and respectful of elders when outside, should be careful and trustworthy, broadly caring of people at large, and should

cleave to those who are *ren*. If he has energy left over, he may study the refinements of culture (*wen*).” (Eno 2015: 1–2)

³ *Analects* 2.15 states, “The Master said, ‘If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.’” (Trans. Lau)

318: 先生曰：「先儒解『格物』為『格天下之物』，天下之物如何格得？且謂『一草一木亦皆有理』，今如何去格？縱格得草木來，如何反來誠得自家意？我解『格』作『正』字義，『物』作『事』字義。《大學》之所謂『身』，即耳、目、口、鼻、四肢是也。欲修身便是要目『非禮勿視』，耳『非禮勿聽』，口『非禮勿言』，四肢『非禮勿動』。要修這個身，身上如何用得工夫？心者身之主宰。目雖視而所以視者心也。耳雖聽而所以聽者心也。口與四肢雖言、動而所以言、動者心也，故欲修身在於體當自家心體，常令廓然大公，無有些子不正處。主宰一正，則發竅於目，自無非禮之視；發竅於耳，自無非禮之聽；發竅於口與四肢，自無非禮之言、動。此便是修身在正其心。然至善者，心之本體也。心之本體，那有不善？如今要正心，本體上何處用得功？必就心之發動處纔可著力也。心之發動不能無不善，故須就此處著力，便是在誠意。如一念發在好善上，便實實落落去好善；一念發在惡惡上，便實實落落去惡惡。意之所發，既無不誠，則其本體如何有不正的？故欲正其心在誠意。工夫到誠意始有著落處。然誠意之本，又在於致知也。所謂『人雖不知，而已所獨知』者，此正是吾心良知處。然知得善，卻不依這個良知便做去；知得不善，卻不依這個良知便不去做，則這個良知便遮蔽了，是不能致知也。吾心良知既不能擴充到底，則善雖知好，不能著實好了；惡雖知惡，不能著實惡了，如何得意誠？固致知者，意誠之本也。然亦不是懸空的致知，致知在實事上格。如意在於為善，便就這件事上去為；意在於去惡，便就這件事上去不為。去惡固是格不正以歸於正，為善則不善正了，亦是格不正以歸於正也。如此，則吾心良知無私欲蔽了，得以致其極，而意之所發，好善去惡，無有不誠矣。誠意工夫，實下手處在格物也。若如此格物，人人便做得。『人皆可以為堯舜』，正在此也。」

The Master said, “Earlier Ruists interpreted ‘*ge wu* 格物’ as ‘investigating everything under Heaven,’ but how can everything under Heaven be investigated?”

Moreover, [Master Cheng Yi] said ‘even each blade of grass and each tree all have a principle,’ but how can we proceed to investigate that now?¹ And even if we have successfully investigated grass and trees, how do we turn around and perfect the genuineness of our intentions? I explain the meaning of *ge* 格 with the word ‘to rectify (*zheng* 正)’ and the meaning of *wu* 物 with the word ‘matters (or affairs, *shi* 事).’ What the *Great Learning* calls the ‘person (*shen* 身)’ is the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and four limbs.² If you wish to cultivate the person then your eyes should not look unless it is in accordance with the rites, your ears should not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites, your mouth should not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites, and your four limbs should not move unless it is accordance with the rites.³

“If you want to cultivate this person, how should practice be applied to it? The mind is the master of the person. Although eyes can see it is the mind that employs them for seeing. Although ears can hear it is the mind that employs them for hearing. Although the mouth speaks and the four limbs move it is the mind that employs them for speaking and moving. Thus, if you want to cultivate the person, it will hinge on recognizing the condition of your own mind, on always making it open and highly impartial, without the slightest incorrectness. Once the master is rectified, what appears to the eyes will naturally not derive from looking not in accordance with the rites, what appears to the ears will naturally not derive from hearing not in accordance with the rites, what appears from the mouth and is expressed by the four limbs will naturally not derive from speaking or moving not in accordance with the rites. This is why [the *Great Learning* says that] cultivating the person depends on rectifying the mind.

“However, the highest good is the original condition of mind (*xin zhi bentu* 心之本體). How could the mind’s original condition possess anything bad? If you now wish to rectify your mind, where is it in the [mind’s] original condition that effort should be directed? For effort to be applied effectively it must be applied to the place where mental activity is generated. When generated, mental activity cannot but possess some immorality, so effort must be applied here. This is [why the *Great Learning* states that rectifying the mind] hinges on perfecting the genuineness of your intentions. If a thought to love what is good occurs, then seriously proceed to love what is good. If a thought to hate evil occurs, then seriously proceed to hate evil.

“Now that nothing arising from one’s intentions is ungentle, how can the mind’s original condition possess anything improper? Hence, if you

desire to rectify your mind, it will depend on perfecting the genuineness of your intentions. Only when the practice reaches the point of perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions will it have a reliable foundation. However, the basis for perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions lies with realizing knowing. What Zhu Xi spoke of as 'what people do not know but I alone know'⁴ is precisely the location of my mind's innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知).⁵ However, if you know the good but are unable to comply with *liangzhi* by proceeding to act on it or if you know the immoral but are unable to comply with *liangzhi* by not proceeding to act on it, then this innate knowing will be concealed. This is what the inability to realize knowing means. Since I am unable to expand my mind's innate knowing to the full, although I know to love the good, I am unable truly to love it, and although I know to hate evil, I am unable truly to hate it, so how can I perfect the genuineness of my intentions? That is why realizing knowing is the basis for perfecting the genuineness of your intentions.

"However, this does not mean that realizing knowing takes place in a vacuum. Knowledge should be realized by rectifying real situations. For example, if your intention is to do good, then on this matter at hand proceed to do good. If your intention is to rid evil, then on this matter at hand proceed to do no evil. To rid evil is, of course, to rectify morally incorrect [thinking] in order to return [the mind] to rightness. When good is done immorality is rectified. This is likewise to rectify the morally incorrect in order to return to rightness. In this way, my mind's innate knowing will not be concealed by self-centered desire as well as enabled to attain its perfection, and whatever intentions arise, all loving good and ridding evil will be genuine. The practical place for setting about practicing perfecting the genuineness of one's intentions hinges on rectifying matters. If matters are rectified in this way, everyone will be able to do it. [Mengzi's] statement that 'every man can become a Yao or Shun'⁶ means exactly this."

Note: *benti* 本體 ("original condition") has also been translated as the "inherent reality" (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald) [of mind, or mind/heart, or mind and heart, or heart, here used largely interchangeably], "original substance" (Wing-tsit Chan), "ultimate reality" (Julia Ching), "fundamental state/condition" (N. Serina Chan), "original natural condition" (Harvey Lederman), "root-system of vitality" (David Bartosch) "original status as pure being" (Dong Ping 董平), and "essence" (Charles Muller). It is the essential

source of mind, the fundamental ground, the foundation of stable mind, stable through stillness and motion, intrinsically vigilant, life itself, the location of Tian's secret. The inherent reality of mind is central to all of Wang Yangming's philosophizing. Because no one English translation seems adequate, I have chosen not to use the same one consistently. However, "fundamental" and "original" seem best to convey the meaning of *ben* 本, while *ti* 體 can be translated as condition/state or constitution/essence/in-itself depending on the emphasis of the passage. In sum, insofar as a state/condition is emphasized (in a contemplative, psychological, or experiential sense), we say "original condition" or "fundamental state" and insofar as the emphasis is that which makes it what it is, as viewed in its essential attributes, we say "essence" or "in itself."

¹ Citing the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumously compiled works by the Chengs of Henan), *juan* 18, which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

² The *Great Learning* states, "The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright virtue brilliant; in making the people new; in coming to rest at the limit of the good. Only after wisdom comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend. Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao. In ancient times, those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to align their households first refined their persons; those who wished to refine their persons first balanced their minds; those who wished to balance their minds first perfected the genuineness of their intentions; those who wished to perfect the genuineness of their intentions first extended their understanding; extending

one's understanding lies in aligning affairs. Only after affairs have been aligned may one's understanding be fully extended. Only after one's understanding is fully extended may one's intentions be perfectly genuine. Only after one's intentions are perfectly genuine may one's mind be balanced. Only after one's mind is balanced may one's person be refined. Only after one's person is refined may one's household be aligned. Only after one's household is aligned may one's state be ordered. Only after one's state is ordered may the world be set at peace.” (Eno 2016: 11–12)

³ *Analects* 12.1 states, “Yen Yuan asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence. If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others.’ Yen Yuan said, ‘I should like you to list the items.’ The Master said, ‘Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.’ Yen Yuan said, ‘Though I am not quick, I shall direct my efforts towards what you have said.’” (Trans. Lau)

⁴ Citing Zhu Xi's *Daxue zhang ju* 大學章句 (Commentary on the Great Learning in chapters and sentences), which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/da-xue-zhang-ju1/zh>.

⁵ Translations of *zhi liangzhi* include “extend [and realize] the knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “extension of the innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “reaching good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “the extension of pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe).

⁶ Citing *Mengzi* 6B.2.

319: *The Master recounts his struggle to understand the meaning of ge wu 格物 in the Great Learning, and how it changed over the course of a long intellectual journey, until he reached a different understanding of it than one he believed Zhu Xi held.*

先生曰：「眾人只說『格物』要依晦翁，何曾把他的說去用？我著實曾用來。初年與錢友同論做聖賢要格天下之物，如今安得這等大的力量？因指亭前竹子令去格看。錢子早夜去窮格竹子的道理，竭其心思，至於三日，便致勞神成疾。當初說他這是精力不足，某因自去窮格，早夜不得其理，到七日，亦以勞思致疾。遂相與嘆聖賢是做不得的，無他大力量去格物了。及在夷中三年，頗見得此意思，乃知天下之物本無可格者。其格物之功，只在身心上做，決然以聖人為人人可到，便自有擔當了。這裏意思，卻要說與諸公知道。」

Master [Yangming] said, “Everyone just says that in the matter of *ge wu* 格物 (‘investigating things’) one should follow Huiweng (=Zhu Xi), but when has anyone ever proceeded to apply what he discussed?¹ I once seriously tried it out. When I was young my friend [Mister] Qian and I discussed together how being a sage or worthy entails investigating all things under Heaven. Nowadays, though, how could one possess such extraordinary ability? Consequently, I pointed to bamboo located in front of a pavilion and told him to go investigate it and see what happens. From early in the morning until late in the evening, Mister Qian exhaustively investigated the bamboo’s principle, mentally exerting himself to the limit, but on the third day his spirits were drained to the point where he fell ill. At the time, I said this happened because his mental energy is insufficient, so I also proceeded to investigate it fully, but from morning to evening failed to understand its principle. On the seventh day, mental exhaustion also caused me to fall ill. Thereafter, we lamented together that becoming a sage or worthy was unattainable because we lacked the extraordinary ability Master Zhu had for investigating things. Later, when living among natives for three years, I acquired substantial insight into what this means, realizing that from the beginning it was not possible to investigate all things under Heaven.² The discipline of investigating things can only be carried out on oneself. I came firmly to believe that everyone can become a sage and, as such, will naturally be able to undertake this. This interpretation is just exactly what I wanted to speak about with you gentlemen, so that you know.”

¹ Huiweng was an art name for the Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹.

² Wang Yangming's first experimentation with investigating bamboo took place when he was fourteen, in 1486, or perhaps slightly later, at the very latest by the early 1490s. Three years living among natives refers to the time he spent in Guizhou, from 1507 to 1509. Thus, he had been struggling with the meaning of *ge wu* for nearly two decades before he came to the conclusion that it meant the actions one undertakes to rectify matters on account of knowledge gained through moral introspection.

320: 門人有言邵端峰論童子不能格物，只教以灑掃，應對之說。先生曰：「灑掃，應對就是一件『物』。童子良知只到此，便教去灑掃、應對，就是致他這一點良知了。又如童子知畏先生長者，此亦是他良知處。故雖嬉戲中，見了先生長者，便去作揖恭敬，是他能格物以致敬師長之良知了。童子自有童子的格物致知。」又曰：「我這裏言格物，自童子以至聖人，皆是此等工夫。但聖人格物，便更熟得些子，不消費力。如此格物，雖賣柴人亦是做得，雖公卿大夫以至天子，皆是如此做。」

One of [Wang Yangming's] followers was talking about how, when he was discussing children's inability to investigate things (*ge wu* 格物), Shao Duanfeng explained that they should be taught only to sprinkle and sweep the ground and to answer and reply.¹ The Master said, "Sprinkling and sweeping and answering and replying are just one 'thing' (*wu* 物).² When a child's innate knowing has reached only to this extent, teaching him to sprinkle and sweep and answer and reply is having him extend this little bit of innate knowing. Also, take for instance a child's knowing that he should respect his teachers and elders: this is also where his innate knowing is to be found. Thus, even if he is playing, when he sees a teacher or elder he will go over and bow respectfully. This is his ability to align matters (*ge wu* 格物) by extending his innate knowledge of respect for teachers and elders. Children naturally possess the child's method of aligning matters and extending knowledge (*zhi zhi* 致知)."²

He also said, "What I speak of here as aligning matters is the kind of practice that all people—from children to sages—undertake. However,

when a sage aligns matters, he does so more proficiently, without needing to expend effort. When matters are aligned in this way even someone who sells firewood can also do it. Whether nobility, officials, or even the emperor, all proceed to act in this manner.”

¹ Shao Duanfeng 邵端峰 was from Renhe County 仁和縣, Zhejiang Province. He became a presented scholar (*jinsbi* 進士) in 1508. In 1520, when Wang Yangming was grand coordinator of Jiangxi, he served under him as an education official. His given name was Rui 銳 and his courtesy name was Siyi 思抑. Duanfeng was his art name. (Li 2021: 526)

² Here I use “align” as opposed to “rectify” because the implication of the social actions undertaken here is not that something was wrong beforehand, but rather that the children are simply acting on their inborn knowledge of the good and aligning their actions with the moral knowledge it yields.

321: *Knowing right from wrong is easier than carrying out what one knows to be right.*

或疑知行不合一，以「知之匪艱」二句為問。先生曰：「良知自知，原是容易的。只是不能致那良知，便是『知之匪艱，行之惟艱』。」

Someone doubted that knowing and acting can be unified and inquired about this by citing two lines [from the *Classic of Documents*]: “It is not the knowing that is difficult [; carrying it out is difficult].”¹

Master [Yangming] said, “The innate knowing is naturally able to know.² From the get-go this is easy. It is just that people are unable to put this innate knowing into practice. That is the meaning of ‘It is not the knowing that is difficult; carrying it out is difficult.’”

¹ The line comes from the “Charge to Yue II (*Shuo ming zhong* 說命中)” in the “Book of the Shang Dynasty (*Shang shu* 商書)” of the *Classic of Documents*.

² *Zizhi* 自知 can also be translated as “spontaneously knows,” and has been translated as “automatically knows.” As such, this “moral knowledge” is natural knowledge.

Note: A substantial volume of scholarship on the meaning of Wang Yangming's theory of the unity of knowledge and action is available in English. For a list see my *Studying Wang Yangming: History of a Sinological Field*, or see the scholarship of Yang Xiaomei, Stephen C. Angle, Huang Yong, Lu Yinghua, David Bartosch, and Harvey Lederman, among others.

322: 門人問曰：「知行如何得合一？且如《中庸》言『博學之』，又說個『篤行之』，分明知行是兩件。」先生曰：「博學只是事事學存此天理，篤行只是學之不已之意。」又問：「《易》『學以聚之』，又言『仁以行之』。此是如何？」先生曰：「也是如此。事事去學存此天理，則此心更無放失時，故曰『學以聚之』；然常常學存此天理，更無私欲間斷，此即是此心不息處，故曰『仁以行之』。」又問：「孔子言『知及之，仁不能守之』，知行卻是兩個了。」先生曰：「說『及之』，已是行了；但不能常常行，已為私欲間斷，便是『仁不能守』。」又問：「心即理之說，程子云『在物為理』，如何謂心即理？」先生曰：「在物為理，『在』字上當添一『心』字，此心在物則為理。如此心在事父則為孝，在事君則為忠之類。」先生因謂之曰：「諸君要識得我立言宗旨。我如今說個心即理是如何，只為世人分心與理為二，故便有許多病痛。如五伯攘夷狄、尊周室，都是一個私心，便不當理，人卻說他做得當理，只心有未純，往往悅慕其所為，要來外面做得好看，卻與心全不相干。分心與理為二，其流至於伯道之偽而不自知。故我說個心即理，要使知心理是一個，便來心上做工夫，不去襲義於外，便是王道之真。此我立言宗旨。」又問：「聖賢言語許多，如何卻要打做一個？」曰：「我不是要打做一個，如曰『夫道，一而已矣』，又曰『其為物不二，則其生物不測』，天地聖人皆是一個，如何二得？」

A follower asked, "How does one attain the unification of knowledge and action? For instance, the *Doctrine of the Mean* says 'study broadly' while also speaking of 'practicing sincerely.'¹ Clearly, knowledge and action are two separate parts." Master [Yangming] said, "Studying broadly just means learning to sustain heavenly principle in every matter. Practicing sincerely just means the intention to learn to do this without interruption."

He also asked, "The *Classic of Changes* states '[the gentleman] accumulates knowledge by studying' but also says 'benevolence guides his actions.'² Why is this?" The Master said, "It is the same. If in every matter one proceeds to learn how to sustain this heavenly principle, then this mind will no longer

have moments where it is scattered. Thus, the *Changes* states, “[the gentleman] accumulates knowledge by studying.” However, if one is always studying how to sustain this heavenly principle, such that it is no longer interrupted by self-centered (egoic) desire, this is the realm where mind is unceasing. Thus, the *Changes* states, “benevolence guides his actions.”

He also asked, “Master Kong said, ‘What is within the reach of a man’s understanding but beyond the power of his benevolence to keep is something he will lose even if he acquires it.’³ Knowledge and action really are two things.” The Master said, “Stating ‘what is within the reach of’ is already action. However, if one is unable always to act, then self-centered desire has already interrupted it. This is what is meant by ‘beyond the power of his benevolence to keep.’”

He further asked, “Concerning your theory of the identity of mind and principle, Master Cheng [Yi] said, ‘What exists in things (*zai wu* 在物) is principle.’⁴ How can you say that mind is identical with principle?” The Master said, “[In the phrase] ‘what exists in things is principle,’ the word ‘mind’ should be added before the word ‘exists (*zai* 在).’ This mind’s presence in things (*xin zai wu* 心在物: mind’s engagement with/directedness towards matters) is principle. For example, in serving one’s father, this mind’s presence is the principle of filial piety. In serving one’s ruler, this mind’s presence is the principle of loyalty, and so on.”

Accordingly, the Master said to them, “Gentlemen, you must understand the fundamental objective of the philosophy I have expounded. The reason why I now say that mind is principle is that everyone has divided mind and principle in two, with all the resulting maladies. This is like the five hegemonies driving out the barbarians and revering the house of Zhou. All this derived from self-centered considerations and thus did not conform to moral principle. Yet, because their minds are insufficiently pure, people say that what they did conformed to moral principle. They always admire what the hegemonies do, concerned only with making the façade look good, when in reality this has nothing to do with the mind. Without their realizing it, the abuse of dividing mind and principle in two leads people to the falsity of the Way of the hegemonies. Thus, when I say that mind is principle, I wish to give people to understand that mind and principle are one, so that they apply themselves with their minds, as opposed to proceeding to seize acts of righteousness outside. This is the genuine Way of the ruler. This is the fundamental objective of the philosophy I have expounded.”

He also asked, “The sages and worthies have said a lot, so why boil it down to one thing?” The Master said, “It is not that I want to boil it down to one thing. As [Mengzi] said, ‘There is only one Way and no other.’⁵ Or [as the *Doctrine of the Mean*] states, ‘[The Dao of heaven and earth may be thoroughly described in a single phrase:] As a thing, it possesses no duality, hence the way it gives birth to things cannot be fathomed.’⁶ Heaven and earth and the sage are all one. How can they be divided in two?”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 20 states in part, “Study broadly, inquire probingly, contemplate carefully, distinguish clearly, practice sincerely.” (Eno 2016: 48)

² The *Classic of Changes*’ “Commentary on the Words of the Text” for the second yang of the *qian* hexagram states in part, “The noble man accumulates knowledge by studying and becomes discriminating by posing questions.... It is magnanimity that governs his repose, and it is benevolence that guides his actions.” (Lynn 1994: 133)

³ *Analects* 15:33 states, “The Master said, ‘What is within the reach of a man’s understanding but beyond the power of his benevolence to keep is something he will lose even if he acquires it. A man may be wise enough to attain it and benevolent enough to keep it, but if he does not rule over them with dignity, then the common people will not be reverent. A man may be wise enough to attain it, benevolent enough to keep it and may govern the people with dignity, but if he does not set them to work in accordance with the rites, he is still short of perfection.’” (Trans. Lau)

⁴ The phrase comes from the *Henan Cheng shi cui yan* 河南程氏粹言, which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=880244&remap=gb>.

⁵ Citing *Mengzi* 3A.1.

⁶ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 26 states in part, “The Dao of heaven and earth may be thoroughly described in a single phrase: As a thing, it possesses no duality, hence the way it gives birth to things cannot be

fathomed. The Dao of heaven and earth is broad, is deep, is high, is bright, is distant, is enduring.” (Eno 2016: 49–50)

323: 「心不是一塊血肉，凡知覺處便是心，如耳目之知視聽，手足之知痛癢，此知覺便是心也。」

[Master Yangming said,] “The mind is not a chunk of blood or flesh. Wherever there is awareness that is the mind. Take, for example, the ears’ and eyes’ awareness of sight and sound, and the hands’ and feet’s awareness of pain and itching. This awareness is the mind.”¹

¹ Wing-tsit Chan translates *zhijue* 知覺 as consciousness (Chan 1963: 252).

324: *The Master explains to Huang Zhi the kinds of mental discipline he has in mind when he teaches rectifying matters.*

以方問曰：「先生之說格物，凡《中庸》之『慎獨』及集義、博約等說，皆為格物之事？」先生曰：「非也。格物即慎獨、即戒懼。至於集義、博約，工夫只一般，不是以那數件都做格物底事。」

[Huang] Yifang asked, “According to your exposition of rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物), are the *Doctrine of the Mean’s* formulation of ‘vigilance in solitude,’ [Mengzi’s formulation of] accumulating right acts, and [Master Kong’s statement on] being widely versed [in culture but] brought back to essentials [by the rites] all cases of rectifying matters?”¹⁻³

The Master said, “That is not the case. To rectify matters is to exercise vigilance in solitude, and to be alert and apprehensive. As for accumulating right acts and being widely versed and brought back to essentials, the practice is just the same. It is not at all the case that I regard those several items all as acts of *ge wu*.”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not

see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude.” (Eno 2016: 37)

² *Mengzi* 2A.2 states, “Gongsun Chou asked, ‘What do you mean by ‘flood-like *qi*?’ ‘It is hard to describe,’ said Mencius. ‘This is a *qi* that is as vast and firm as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never impairs it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right. It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away.’” (Eno 2016: 40)

³ *Analects* 6.27 states, “The Master said, ‘The gentleman widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the rites can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for.’” (Trans. Lau)

325: 以方問「尊德性」一條。先生曰：「『道問學』即所以『尊德性』也。晦翁言『子靜以尊德性誨人，某教人豈不是道問學處多了些子』，是分『尊德性』、『道問學』作兩件。且如今講習討論，下許多工夫，無非只是存此心，不失其德性而已，豈有『尊德性』只空空去尊，更不去問學？問學只是空空去問學，更與德性無關涉？如此，則不知今之所以講習討論者，更學何事？」問「致廣大」二句。曰：「『盡精微』即所以『致廣大』也，『道中庸』即所以『極高明』也。蓋心之本體自是廣大底，人不能『盡精微』，則便為私欲所蔽，有不勝其小者矣。故能細微曲折無所不盡，則私意不足以蔽之，自無許多障礙遮隔處，如何廣大不致？」又問：「精微還是念慮之精微，是事理之精微？」曰：「念慮之精微，即事理之精微也。」

[I, Huang] Yifang asked about the passage [with the phrase] “honors his virtuous nature.”¹ The Master stated, “Following the path of inquiry and learning’ is how one ‘honors one’s virtuous nature.’ Huiweng (=Zhu Xi) said, [Lu] Zijing taught people honoring the virtuous nature. When I instruct people how could it not be with a little more in the way of following the path of inquiry and learning?² This is to divide ‘honoring

one's virtuous nature' and 'following the path of inquiry and learning' into two parts. Furthermore, with respect to lecturing, practicing, and discussion these days, the many efforts made at practicing are just for nurturing this heart-mind, so that its virtuous nature is not lost. How can one 'honor one's virtuous nature' by just vainly doing the honoring without carrying out any inquiry and study? Are inquiry and study only a matter of vainly going about inquiry and study without any connection to one's virtuous nature? If so, then I don't understand what matters are being studied nowadays during the lecturing, practicing, and discussions."

I asked about the two phrases in "extends himself to the broadest expanse and exhausts the essence of the minute." The Master said, "'Exhausting the essence of the minute' is how one 'extends oneself to the broadest expanse.' 'Taking the mean in action is his Dao (path)' is how one 'reaches to the pole of the high and bright.' The mind's original condition (*xin zhi bentu* 心之本體) is intrinsically broad and expansive. If someone is unable to 'exhaust the essence of the minute,' self-centered (egoic) desire has concealed the original condition and there is an extreme narrowmindedness. Thus, if one can exhaustively probe the fine, subtle, and complex, self-centered desire will not be sufficient to conceal the original condition, and it will naturally no longer possess the many areas of obstruction and blockage. How can one not extend oneself to the broadest expanse?"

I also asked, "Is the essence of the minute the essence of the minute in thinking and deliberation or is it the essence of the minute in the principles underlying matters?" The Master said, "The essence of the minute in thinking and deliberation is the essence of the minute in the principles underlying matters."

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 27 states, "Hence the *junzi* honors his virtuous nature and takes learning as his Dao. He extends to the broadest expanse and exhausts the essence of the minute. He reaches to the pole of the high and bright and takes the mean in action as his Dao." (Eno 2016: 51) A. C. Muller translates this as follows: "Therefore the Noble Man esteems his virtuous nature and follows the path of inquiry, extending himself in breadth and greatness, penetrating all subtleties, penetrating its height and brilliance, following the course of the actualization of the Mean."

² Huiweng is an art name for the Song dynasty Ruist philosopher Zhu Xi.

326: *The Master draws a distinction between those who talk about human nature and those who have witnessed human nature.*

先生曰：“今之论性者纷纷异同，皆是说性，非见性也。见性者无异同之可言矣。”

Master [Yangming] said, “Nowadays, those coming along one after another expounding their differing opinions on human nature are all just talking about the nature but have not seen it. Those who have seen human nature have no differences or similarities to discuss.”

Note: Regarding *jian xing* 見性, the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism states, “To see one’s own originally enlightened mind. To behold the Buddha-nature within oneself, a common saying of the Chan school, as see for example, in the phrase ‘seeing one’s nature, becoming Buddha’ 见性成佛.”

327: *The Master speaks of the horizon where the rule of Heaven (Tian 天) flows.*

問：「聲色、貨利，恐良知亦不能無。」先生曰：「固然。但初學用功，卻須掃除蕩滌，勿使留積，則適然來遇，始不為累，自然順而應之。良知只在聲色、貨利上用功，能致得良知精精明明、毫髮無蔽，則聲色、貨利之交，無非天則流行矣。」

I said, “I am afraid that even the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知) cannot avoid [our desires for] sensual pleasures, material things, and money.”

The Master stated, “That is certainly the case, but when you first begin learning and apply yourself to this practice, you should sweep them away and clean them out, not allowing them to remain and accumulate. Only then, as you happen to encounter them, will you no longer be fettered by them, naturally according [with *liangzhi* 良知] as you respond to them. If you are only practicing this with sensual pleasures, material things, and money, so long as you are able to realize *liangzhi* purely and

clearly, without the slightest concealment, when you come into contact with sensual pleasures, material things, and money, it will be nothing but the flowing forth and operation of the rule of Heaven (*tian* 天則).”

328: *The Master exhorts his students to practice what they have learned.*

先生曰：「吾與諸公講致知，格物，日日是此，講一二十年俱是如此。諸君聽吾言，實去用功，見吾講一番，自覺長進一番；否則，只作一場話說，雖聽之亦何用？」

Master [Yangming] said, “Gentlemen, when I expound upon realizing [the innate] knowing (*zhi zhi* 致知) and rectifying matters (*ge wu* 格物) with you, every day it is this. Even if I expound upon it for another ten or twenty years, it will always be like this. Gentlemen, if you listen to what I say and really proceed to practice it, each time you see me lecture, you will realize for yourself that you have advanced a step. Otherwise, we are merely holding a session of talk. Although you’ve heard it, of what use is it?”

329: *The mind’s essence—mind in its natural state—is both perpetually still and motionlessness and perpetually experiencing insight.*

先生曰：「人之本體，常常是『寂然不動』的，常常是『感而遂通』的。『未應不是先，已應不是後』。」

Master [Yangming] said, “A person’s original condition (*benti* 本體) is always silent and motionless and always penetrating upon stimulation.¹ [Cheng Yi said,] “The state prior to responding does not come before and the state of responding does not come after.””²

¹ The *Classic of Change*, “Treatise on the Appended Remarks,” part A, section 10, states, “The *Yi* is without thought and without action; silent and unmoving, when stimulated it penetrates [connects] all circumstances under Heaven” (Adler 2020: 279). In his *The Classic of Changes*, “Commentary on the Appended Phrases,” part one, section 10, Richard John Lynn translates this as, “The *Changes* is without consciousness and is without deliberate action. Being utterly still it

does not initiate movement, but when stimulated it is commensurate with all the causes for everything that happens in the world” (63). “Acted on” has been translated as “stimulated” and “aroused.”

² Citing the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumously compiled works by the Chengs of Henan), *juan* 15, which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

330: *Nature is always present, even if not in the sense of something physical that can be perceived. The same holds true for the innate knowing, in its original status as pure being. Through the correct discipline, the innate knowing can be brought to realization.*

一友舉「佛家以手指顯出，問曰：『眾曾見否？』眾曰：『見之。』復以手指入袖，問曰：『眾還見否？』眾曰：『不見。』佛說還未見性。此義未明。」先生曰：「手指有見，有不見，爾之見性常在。人之心神只在有睹有聞上馳驚，不在不睹不聞上著實用功。蓋不睹不聞是良知本體，戒慎恐懼是致良知的工夫。學者時時刻刻常睹其所不睹，常聞其所不聞，工夫方有個實落處。久久成熟後，則不須著力，不待防檢，而真性自不息矣。豈以在外者之聞見為累哉！」

A friend asked, “A Buddhist held out his fingers and asked, ‘Has everyone seen them before?’ The crowd of monks said, ‘We’ve seen them.’ He then withdrew his fingers into his sleeves and asked, ‘Can everyone still see them?’ The crowd of monks said, ‘We can’t see them.’ The Buddhist said they had not yet seen nature. The meaning of this is unclear.”

Master [Yangming] explained, “Fingers can both be seen and not be seen, but your ability to see your nature is always present. A person’s attention only rushes along with what is seen and what is heard, and effort is not conscientiously applied to what is not seen and not heard. What is not seen and not heard refers to the original condition of the innate knowing (*liangzhi benti* 良知本體). Being alert, vigilant, and apprehensive is the practice of realizing the innate knowing.¹ In each moment, a learner should always see what he cannot see and always hear what he cannot hear. Only then will the practice have a steady locus. With some time, after the practice matures, it will no longer be necessary to try hard at it or to

be guarded and controlling, and true nature will naturally generate itself unceasingly. How could things heard and seen on the outside become a hindrance?”

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 1 states, “That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature; to lead by our nature is called the Dao; to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching. One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao. Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear. Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle. Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude. Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world. Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.” (Eno 2016: 37)

331: *The practice is continuous.*

問：「先儒謂『鳶飛魚躍與必有事焉，同一活潑潑地。』」先生曰：「亦是。天地間活潑潑地無非此理，便是吾良知的流行不息；致良知便是必有事的工夫。此理非惟不可離，實亦不得而離也。無往而非道，無往而非工夫。」

I asked, “A former Ruist said that the kite flies and the fish leap¹ and your task must always be before you² are similarly full of life.”³

Master [Yangming] said, “That is true as well. There is no vitality amidst heaven and earth that is not this natural order (*li* 理), which is the unceasing flowing forth and operation of my innate knowing. Realizing the innate knowing is in fact the practice of always having the task before us. Not only can we not separate ourselves from this natural order, in fact, there is also no way to do so. There is nowhere one can go that is not the Way and nowhere one can go that is not the practice.”

¹ The *Book of Odes* poem 239 states, “The hawk flies up to heaven; The fishes leap in the deep. Easy and self-possessed was our prince; Did he not exert an influence upon men?” (Trans. Legge)

² The *Mengzi* 2A.2 states, “Gongsun Chou asked, ‘What do you mean by ‘flood-like *qi*?’ ‘It is hard to describe,’ said Mencius. ‘This is a *qi* that is as vast and firm as can be. If one nurtures it by means of straightforward action and never impairs it, then it will fill all between heaven and earth. It is a *qi* that is a companion to righteousness and the Dao. Without these, it will starve away. It is generated through the long accumulation of acts of right. It is not something that can be seized through a single righteous act. If in your actions there is any sense of inadequacy in your heart, it will starve away. This is why I say that Gaozi never really understood righteousness. He looked for it in external standards other than the heart. But your task must always be before you and you must not go making small adjustments. The task of nurturing this *qi* must never be forgotten by the heart, but you must not meddle and try to help it grow. Don’t be like the simpleton from the state of Song.’” (Eno 2016: 40)

³ Citing the *Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumously compiled works by the Chengs of Henan), *juan* 3, which is available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=704165>.

Note: Translations of *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 include “extend [and realize] the knowledge of the good” (Julia Ching), “extension of the innate knowledge of the good” (Wing-tsit Chan), “reaching good knowing” (Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald), and “the extension of pure knowing” (Philip Ivanhoe).

332: *The Master calls upon his students to establish their unwavering commitment to become sages.*

先生曰：「諸公在此，務要立個必為聖人之心。時時刻刻，須是『一棒一條痕、一搥一拳血』，方能聽吾說話句句得力。若茫茫蕩蕩度日，譬如一塊死肉，打也不知得痛癢，恐終不濟事，回家只尋得舊時伎倆而已，豈不惜哉？」

Master [Yangming] said, “Gentlemen, your task here is to establish your absolute resolve to become sages. Only if in every moment ‘one strike leaves one mark and one slap leaves blood on the palm’ will you then

be capable of listening to me speak and benefiting from each sentence.¹ Going through life aimlessly can be compared to a chunk of dead flesh: even when beaten it does not feel pain or itching. I am afraid that to the end you will be of no benefit to the matter. When you return home, you will merely find the ruses of former times. Is that not a pity?”

¹ “One strike leaves one mark and one slap leaves blood on the palm” comes from the *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi (Zhuzi yu lei 朱子語類)*. It means that in carrying out a task one does so seriously and with determination. Available at the Chinese Text Project. See <https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/117/ens>.

333: *Huang Zhi inquires about the process of moral self-cultivation.*

問：「近來妄念也覺少，亦覺不曾著想定要如何用功。不知此是工夫否？」先生曰：「汝且去著實用功，便多這些著想也不妨，久久自會妥帖。若纔下得些功，便說效驗，何足為恃？」

I asked, “Recently, I feel that I have less in the way of misguided thinking and, as well, find that I have never worried that effort must be applied in a certain way. I don’t know whether this can count as practicing self-cultivation?”

Master [Yangming] said, “For the time being, you should proceed with seriously applying yourself to this practice. Even if you have more of these considerations this won’t impede you. After some time, this will naturally become satisfying. If you speak of results right after you begin practicing, how could that be sufficiently reliable?”

334: *Liangzhi is your life’s root; acting on it establishes your life’s potential.*

一友自嘆：「私意萌時，分明自心知得，只是不能使他即去。」先生曰：「你萌時，這一知處，便是你的命根；當下即去消磨，便是立命功夫。」

A friend sighed to himself saying, “When a selfish inclination first emerges, I am capable of knowing it clearly in my own mind. Yet, I am unable immediately to rid myself of it.”

Master [Yangming] said, “When your [inclination] emerges, this single locus of knowing is indeed the basis of your life. Immediately moving to dispel it is precisely the task of establishing one’s life potential.”

335: *The Master distinguishes one’s inborn human nature from the psychophysical endowment. It is the latter that nurtures the differences that emerge between people over time.*

「夫子說『性相近』，即孟子說『性善』，不可專在氣質上說。若說氣質，如剛與柔對，如何相近得？惟性善則同耳。人生初時，善原是同的，但剛的習於善則為剛善，習於惡則為剛惡；柔的習於善則為柔善，習於惡則為柔惡，便曰相遠了。」

“Master Kong’s statement that ‘men are close to one another by nature’¹ is the same as Mengzi’s statement that ‘human nature is good’² and should not be explained only with respect to the psychophysical endowment. If we are speaking about the psychophysical endowment, then, for example, firmness and yielding are mutually opposed, so how can they be close to one another? People are the same only because human nature is good. When people are first born, their goodness is originally the same. However, when the firm practice the good, they develop a strong goodness, and when they practice evil, they develop a strong evil. When the yielding practice the good they develop a weak goodness, and when they practice evil they develop a weak evil.³ Thus, with each passing day men diverge.”

¹ *Analects* 17.2 states, “The Master said: ‘Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge as a result of repeated practice.’” (Trans. Lau)

² *Mengzi* 3A.1 states, “When Duke Wen of Teng was still only the heir apparent he traveled to the state of Chu. His route took him through Song, and there he visited with Mencius, who expounded to him the doctrine that humans are by nature good, his words everywhere referring to the sage kings Yao and Shun.” (Eno 2016: 55)

³ The discussion of strong and weak and good and evil refers to Zhou Dunyi’s 周敦頤 *Tong shu* 通書 (*Penetrating the Scripture of Change*),

“Shi di 7 師弟七 (The Teacher)”: “Someone asked, ‘Who makes all under Heaven good?’ Reply: ‘The teacher.’ ‘What do you mean?’ ‘[He is the one whose] nature is simply in equilibrium between firm and yielding and good and evil.’ ‘I do not understand.’ Reply: ‘Firmness is good when it is right [or appropriate], direct, decided, dignified, capable and certain. It is evil when it is violent, narrow, and limited. Yielding is good when it is compassionate, docile, and mild. It is evil when it is weak, indecisive, and treacherous.’” (Adler 2014: 208)

336: 先生嘗語學者曰：「心體上著不得一念留滯，就如眼著不得些子塵沙。些子能得幾多？滿眼便昏天黑地了。」又曰：「這一念不但是私念，便好的念頭亦著不得些子，如眼中放些金玉屑，眼亦開不得了。」

Once, when Master [Yangming] was speaking to students, he said, “The mind-essence (*xinti* 心體: that is, mind’s original condition) cannot allow one thought to remain, just like eyes cannot tolerate the slightest bit of sand or dust. How much can be permitted before our eyes are completely blacked out?” He also said: “This one thought means not only self-centered thoughts—even good thoughts as well cannot be tolerated in the least. If a fragment of gold or jade is placed in an eye, it also won’t be able to open.”

337: 問：「人心與物同體，如吾身原是血氣流通的，所以謂之同體；若於人便異體了，禽獸、草木益遠矣，而何謂之同體？」先生曰：「你只在感應之幾上看，豈但禽獸、草木，雖天地也與我同體的，鬼神也與我同體的。」請問。先生曰：「你看這個天地中間，甚麼是天地的心？」對曰：「嘗聞人是天地的心。」曰：「人又甚麼叫做心？」對曰：「只是一個靈明。」「可知充天塞地中間，只有這箇靈明。人只為形體自間隔了。我的靈明，便是天地、鬼神的主宰。天沒有我的靈明，誰去仰他高？地沒有我的靈明，誰去俯他深？鬼神沒有我的靈明，誰去辯他吉凶、災祥？天地、鬼神、萬物離卻我的靈明，便沒有天地、鬼神、萬物了；我的靈明離卻天地、鬼神、萬物，亦沒有我的靈明。如此，便是一氣流通的，如何與他間隔得？」又問：「天地、鬼神、萬物，千古見在，何沒了我的靈明，便俱無了？」曰：「今看死的人，他這些精靈游散了，他的天地萬物尚在何處？」

I asked, “[You say that] the human mind and things form one body. This is like my body, where blood and *qi* 氣 have always circulated, and thus it is said that it is one body.¹ However, with respect to other people this body is separate. Birds and beasts and grass and trees are even more distant. So how can it be said that they have the same body?”

The Master said, “You are only seeing it from the threshold of experiencing and responding (*ganying zhi ji* 感應之幾).² Why only birds and beasts, and grass and trees? Even heaven and earth also form one body with me, and ghosts and spirits form one body with me as well.”

I asked him to explain. The Master said, “If you look around this universe (*tiandi* 天地: heaven and earth), what is the mind of the universe?” I replied, “I have heard that human beings are the mind of the universe.” The Master said, “What is it then that is called the mind of human beings?” I replied, “It is just a single light of spirit (*lingming* 靈明: that is, intelligence).”³

[The Master explained,] “From this we can know that what fills the universe pervasively is just this single light of spirit. Because of their physical bodies people have separated themselves. My intelligence (*lingming* 靈明) is the master of heaven and earth and ghosts and spirits. If heaven does not have my intelligence, who will look up to its heights? If earth does not have my intelligence, who will look down to its depths? If ghosts and spirits do not have my intelligence, who will discriminate good and bad luck and calamity and happiness? If heaven and earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things depart from my intelligence, then heaven and earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things will no longer exist. If my intelligence departs from heaven and earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things, then my intelligence will as well no longer exist. As such, it is one circulating *qi*, so how can one be separated from it?”

I also asked, “Heaven and earth, ghosts and spirits, and the myriad things have always existed. Why is it that without my intelligence they no longer exist?” The Master said, “Now, when you look at the body of a dead person, his spirit has wandered off and dispersed. Where are his heaven, earth, and myriad things yet located?”

¹ Depending on context, *qi* 氣 has been variously translated as “matter-energy,” “ether,” “psychophysical stuff,” “vital energy,” or “material force.”

² *ganying* 感應 (“experiencing and responding”) is usually translated as stimulus and response, feeling and responding, perceiving and responding, or influences and responses, among others.

³ For *lingming* 靈明, the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism gives as a basic translation “spiritual luminosity.” In his scholarship, David Bartosch has translated this as “spiritual brightness.” Spiritual intelligence and clarity of intellect are also satisfying translations, as well as just simply “intelligence” or “intellect.” Wang Yangming is referring to the mind. Thanks to Marco Andreacchio for proposing “light of spirit” and, more simply, “intellect/intelligence.” Wing-tsit Chan translates this as “clear intelligence.”

338: 先生起行征思，田，德洪與汝中追送嚴灘。汝中舉佛家實相，幻相之說。先生曰：「有心俱是實，無心俱是幻；無心俱是實，有心俱是幻。」汝中曰：「有心俱是實，無心俱是幻，是本體上說功夫；無心俱是實，有心俱是幻，是功夫上說本體。」先生然其言。洪於是時尚未了達，數年用功，始信本體功夫合一。但先生是時因問偶談，若吾儒指點人處，不必借此立言耳。

Master [Yangming] departed for his journey to quell uprisings in Si[en] and Tian[zhou].¹ [Qian] Dehong and [Wang] Ruzhong followed along to see him off at Yantan.²⁻⁴ Ruzhong brought up the Buddhist theory of the true and illusory marks [of dharmas].

The Master said, “The discriminating mind of attachment is entirely real, no mind is entirely illusory; no mind is entirely real, the discriminating mind of attachment is entirely illusory.”

Ruzhong said, “The discriminating mind of attachment is entirely real, no mind is entirely illusory’: this is to speak of the disciplined practice (*gongfu* 功夫) from the perspective of the [mind’s] original condition (*benti* 本體). ‘No mind is entirely real, the discriminating mind of attachment is entirely illusory’: this is to speak of the mind’s original condition from the perspective of the practice.”

The Master affirmed his explanation. At the time, [De]hong had yet to fully understand. He came to trust that the original condition and the practice are unified only after having applied himself to this discipline for several years. However, at that moment, because he was asked, the Master

spoke casually. In matters of providing guidance for people, we Ruists need not reference this to expound our ideas.

¹ Sien and Tianzhou were native prefectures located in Guangxi Province where conflict between native chieftains and the Ming state had broken out.

² Dehong 德洪 is a courtesy name for Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574). His hometown was Yuyao County 余姚縣, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's first followers and remained a committed one throughout his life, playing a key role in the dissemination of Wang's teachings.

³ Ruzhong is an art name for Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583). His courtesy name is Longxi 龍溪. He was from Shanyin Prefecture 山陰府, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's most important followers, playing a key role in developing and disseminating his teachings.

⁴ Yantan 嚴灘, which is also called Yanling Lai 嚴陵灘, is located Tonglu County 桐廬縣, Zhejiang Province.

339: *Huang Zhi recounts an incident illustrative of his teacher's patient benevolence and sympathy.*

嘗見先生送二三耆宿出門，退坐於中軒，若有憂色。德洪趨進請問。先生曰：「頃與諸老論及此學，真真鑿方枘。此道坦如大路，世儒往往自加荒塞，終身陷荊棘之場而不悔，吾不知其何說也！」德洪退謂朋友曰：「先生誨人，不擇衰朽，仁人憫物之心也。」

I once saw Master [Yangming] see two or three elderly gentlemen out his gate. He returned and sat down in the veranda, appearing worried. [I, Qian] Dehong approached him and asked him about it.¹ The Master said, “Just now, when discussing this learning with the elderly gentlemen, [it was like] using a square tenon for a round mortice. This Way is as level as a broad road. The conventional Ru (scholars) always muddle it up and obstruct it. To the end of their lives, they are trapped

in a field of thistles and thorns but never regret it. I really don't know what to say to them!"

[L.] Dehong took leave and said to my friends, "When the Master teaches people, he does not refuse the aged and decrepit. That is his heartfelt sense of benevolence towards others and sympathy for things."

¹ Dehong 德洪 is a courtesy name for Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574). His hometown was Yuyao County 余姚縣, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's first followers and remained a committed one throughout his life, playing a key role in the dissemination of Wang's teachings.

340: *On the dangers of the vice of arrogance (or false pride) and its origins in narcissistic self-love: the heart's original condition is one of a humble selflessness.*

先生曰：「人生大病，只是一傲字。為子而傲必不孝，為臣而傲必不忠，為父而傲必不慈，為友而傲必不信。故象與丹朱俱不肖，亦只一傲字，便結果了此生。諸君常要體此。人心本是天然之理，精精明明，無纖介染著，只是一無我而已，胸中切不可有，有即傲也。古先聖人許多好處，也只是無我而已，無我自能謙。謙者眾善之基，傲者眾惡之魁。」

Master [Yangming] said, "In life the greatest fault is simply *ao* 傲 ('arrogance'), this one word. A child who is arrogant will surely not be respectful (*xiao* 孝: filial). A minister who is arrogant will surely not be loyal. A father who is arrogant will surely not be kind. A friend who is arrogant will surely not be trustworthy. Thus, both Xiang and Dan Zhu's unworthiness as well come down to just this one word—arrogance, which is why their lives ended up as they did.¹ Gentlemen, you should always be aware of this. In origin, the human mind is the natural order (*tianran zhi li* 天然之理), sagacious and lucid, without the slightest defilement from attachment, simply a selflessness and no more. In your heart you should not possess a self-centered ego. If you do you will be arrogant. The many good characteristics of the sages of ancient times merely amounted to selflessness. With selflessness, one is naturally humble. Humility is the foundation of all that is good. Arrogance is the chief of all that is bad."

¹ Xiang was Emperor Shun's younger brother, and Dan Zhu was Emperor Yao's son. Their arrogance is discussed in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書) "Yao Dian 堯典 (Canons of Yao)" and "Yi Ji 益稷 (Yi and Ji)," respectively.

341: *Huang Zhi speaks of the mystery of the innate knowing, and why it is difficult to grasp. His teacher cites the Classic of Changes, differentiating two types of knowledge, knowledge readily ascertained and knowledge acquired through penetrating the simple and easy, the most refined and subtle, the Way, which has no fixed form and normally remains unseen.*

又曰：「此道至簡至易的，亦至精至微的。孔子曰：『其如示諸掌乎。』且人於掌，何日不見，及至問他掌中多少文理，卻便不知。即如我『良知』二字，一講便明，誰不知得？若欲的見良知，卻誰能見得？」問曰：「此知恐是無方體的，最難捉摸。」先生曰：「良知即是《易》『其為道也屢遷，變動不居，周流六虛，上下無常，剛柔相易，不可為典要，惟變所適。』此知如何捉摸得？見得透時，便是聖人。」

[Master Yangming] also said, "This Way is the simplest and easiest as well as the most refined and subtle. Confucius said, 'as though it lay in his palm.'¹ And is there a day that a person does not see his palms? Yet, if you ask him how many lines and patterns they have, he will have no idea. This is just like my '*liangzhi* 良知 (innate knowing),' these two words. Once explained, they are clear. Who would not understand? But should someone truly desire to acquire knowledge of it, who will be capable of seeing it?"

I asked, "I have to say that this knowing has no location and no [fixed] form.² It is the least ascertainable."

The Master said, "*Liangzhi* is [what the *Classic of*] *Changes* [describes as], 'As a Way it is always shifting. It fluctuates and moves without rest, revolving and flowing through the six vacancies, rising and falling with no constancy, the firm and yielding [lines] changing into each other. They cannot be considered fixed essences, as they simply change along with circumstances.'³ This knowledge—how can it be ascertained? Right when you penetrate through to an understanding of it, you will be a sage."

¹ The *Doctrine of the Mean* 19 states, "The suburban rite of sacrifice ministers to the Lord on High; the rituals of the ancestral shrines

minister to one's forbears. He who comprehends the rite of the suburban sacrifice or the meaning of the great spring and autumn sacrifices can rule a state as though it lay in his palm.” (Eno 2016: 43–44)

² Part A, 4.4 of the “Treatise on the Appended Remarks” of the *Scripture of Change* states, “He encompasses the transformations of Heaven and Earth and does not transgress. He completes all things without omission; he penetrates the Way of day and night and understands it. Therefore spirit has no location and change [y] has no [fixed] structure.” (Adler 2020: 268)

³ Part B, 8.1 of the “Treatise on the Appended Remarks” of the *Scripture of Change* states, “The *Yi* as a book cannot be kept at a distance; as a Way it is always shifting. It fluctuates and moves without rest, revolving and flowing through the six vacancies, rising and falling with no constancy, the firm and yielding [lines] changing into each other. They cannot be considered fixed essences, as they simply change along with circumstances.” (Adler 2020: 296)

342: 問：「孔子曰：『回也，非助我者也』，是聖人果以相助望門弟子否？」先生曰：「亦是實話。此道本無窮盡，問難愈多，則精微愈顯。聖人之言本自周遍，但有問難的人胸中窒礙，聖人被他一難，發揮得愈加精神。若顏子聞一知十，胸中了然，如何得問難？故聖人亦寂然不動，無所發揮，故曰非助。」

I asked, “Confucius said, ‘Hui is no help to me at all.’¹ Is that because the sage does in fact expect of his followers that they will help him?”

Master [Yangming] replied, “That is true as well. This Way is fundamentally inexhaustible. The more challenging questions are asked the more what is refined and subtle about it becomes evident. The sage’s words have always been exhaustive, but the person asking challenging questions is mentally blocked. When he tests the sage with difficult questions, the sage gives an even more spirited exposition. When someone like Master Yan [Hui] is told one thing he understands ten because his mind is clear, so why does he need to ask difficult questions?² Thus, the sage remains silent and unstirred, and does not elaborate. That is why [Confucius] said he is ‘no help.’”

¹ *Analects* 11.4 states, “The Master said, ‘Hui is no help to me at all. He is pleased with everything I say.’” (Trans. Lau)

² *Analects* 5.9 states, “The Master said to Zigong, ‘Who is the better man, you or Hui?’ ‘How dare I compare myself with Hui? When he is told one thing he understands ten. When I am told one thing I understand only two.’ The Master said, ‘You are not as good as he is. Neither of us is as good as he is.’” (Trans. Lau)

343: *The Master distinguishes examination preparation and success from making progress in self-cultivation.*

鄒謙之嘗語德洪曰：「舒國裳曾持一張紙，請先生寫『拱把之桐梓』一章。先生懸筆為書，到『至於身而不知所以養之者』，顧而笑曰：『國裳讀書中過狀元來，豈誠不知身之所以當養？還須誦此以求警？』一時在侍諸友皆惕然。」

Once, when Zou Qianzhi was speaking to [Qian] Dehong, he said, “Shu Guoshang once took a sheet of paper and asked Master [Yangming] to write the passage with ‘a parasol or catalpa tree a mere handspan in thickness.’¹⁻⁴ The Master raised his brush and started writing. When he got to [the part that says,] ‘But when it comes to our own persons we don’t know how to nurture them,’ he looked over at him and said with a smile, ‘Guoshang studied and obtained the *optimus* ranking [in the palace examination]. Does he really not know how to nurture himself? Is it still necessary to recite this for the purpose of exhorting himself?’ At that time, those many friends who were in his company all appeared cautioned.”

¹ Zou Qianzhi 鄒謙之 is Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562). Zou hailed from a prominent clan of Anfu County 安福縣, Jiangxi Province. In 1511, Zou placed first in the metropolitan examination. As Wang Yangming was an examiner, Zou caught his attention. After serving for a year at the prestigious Hanlin Academy in Beijing, Zou returned home to care for his father, remaining for nine years. During that time, he attracted a following of students, but the seemingly different methods for developing one’s moral character proposed by the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean*, two classics central to the Cheng-Zhu learning of principle, perplexed him. In 1519, when Wang was

stationed in Jiangxi, Zou called on him and inquired about it. Wang's reply so inspired him that he declared discipleship, becoming one of his most committed followers and, by some accounts, the one who most accurately understood the Master's philosophy. The Ming court recalled Zou to office in 1522, but his position on a controversial political issue angered the emperor. In 1524, by imperial order, the court imprisoned Zou and demoted him to a humble office. Thereafter, Zou rose slowly through prestigious appointments in Nanjing and Beijing. In 1541, however, after a fire broke out in the imperial ancestral temple, he submitted a memorial urging reforms and counselling mutual respect between ruler and officials. For this, he was compelled to resign. Upon returning home, he spent the remaining twenty years of his life devoting himself to teaching. (Zou 2007: vol. 2, 27.1368–70)

² Dehong 德洪 is a courtesy name for Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574). His hometown was Yuyao County 余姚縣, Zhejiang Province. He was one of Wang Yangming's first followers and remained a committed one throughout his life, playing a key role in the dissemination of Wang's teachings.

³ Guoshang 國裳 is a courtesy name for Shu Fen 舒芬 (1484–1527). He was from Jinxian County 進賢縣, Nanchang Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, and obtained his *jinsshi* in 1517, after which he enjoyed a brief political career during the reigns of the Zhengde and Jiajing emperors.

⁴ *Mencius* 6A.13 states, “Mencius said, ‘When it comes to a parasol or catalpa tree a mere handspan in thickness, if we wish it to thrive we know how to nurture it. But when it comes to our own persons we don’t know how to nurture them. How could it be that we love our own persons less than these trees? How utterly thoughtless!’” (Eno 2016: 112)

錢德洪跋 Qian Dehong's Epilogue

嘉靖戊子冬，德洪與王汝中奔師喪至廣信，訃告同門，約三年收錄遺言。繼後同門各以所記見遺。洪擇其切於問正者，合所私錄，得若干條。居吳時，將與《文錄》並刻矣，適以憂去未遂。當是時也，四方講學日眾，師門宗旨既明，若無事於贅刻者，故不復營念。去年，同門曾子才漢得洪手抄，復傍為採輯，名曰《遺言》，以刻行於荊。洪讀之，覺當時採錄未精，乃為刪其重複，削去蕪蔓，存其三分之一，名曰《傳習續錄》，復刻於寧國之水西精舍。今年夏，洪來游蘄，沈君思畏曰：「師門之教久行於四方，而獨未及於蘄。蘄之士得讀遺言，若親炙夫子之教；指見良知，若重睹日月之光。惟恐傳習之不博，而未以重複之為繁也。請哀其所逸者增刻之，若何？」洪曰：「然。師門致知格物之旨，開示來學，學者躬修默悟，不敢以知解承，而惟以實體得，故吾師終日言是而不憚其煩，學者終日聽是而不厭其數。蓋指示專一，則體悟日精，幾迎於言前，神發於言外，感遇之誠也。今吾師之沒未及三紀，而格言微旨漸覺淪晦，豈非吾黨身踐之不力，多言有以病之耶？學者之趨不一，師門之教不宣也。」乃復取逸稿，採其語之不背者，得一卷。其餘影響不真，與《文錄》既載者，皆削之。并易中卷為問答語，以付黃梅尹張君增刻之。庶幾讀者不以知解承，而惟以實體得，則無疑於是錄矣。嘉靖丙辰夏四月，門人錢德洪拜書於蘄之崇正書院。

In the winter of the *wuzi* year (1528) of the Jiajing emperor's reign, [I, Qian] Dehong and [Wang] Ruzhong were hurriedly traveling to our teacher's funeral. Upon reaching Guangxin¹ we sent notice of his death to fellow followers [of his school], inviting them to collect and record his wise sayings within the next three years. Thereafter, fellow followers each sent what they had taken down. [I, De]hong selected those that were salient inquiries and combined them with private records, coming up with a certain number. When I was staying in Wu [=Suzhou], I was preparing to print them together with a *Literary Record [of Sir Yangming]*, but as it happened, I had to leave to mourn the loss of my mother and was unable to accomplish my goal.

At that time, followers were lecturing on his philosophy all over the place and growing more numerous each day. Because the fundamental

objectives of our teacher's school had become well understood, it seemed that there was no need to engage in this kind of redundant publishing, so I no longer worried about it. Last year, Mr. Zeng Caihan, a fellow follower, obtained my handwritten manuscript.² He then gathered more elsewhere and edited it, giving it the title [*Record of the*] *Surviving Words [of Sir Yangming]* and publishing it in Jingzhou.³ After I read it, I felt that what had been selected for inclusion at the time was yet inaccurate, so I deleted anything repetitious and cut back the overgrowth, titling it *Sequel to the Record of Instructions for Practice* and publishing it at the Shuixi Studio in Ningguo.⁴

During summer of this year, I came here to see Qi[chun] County 蕪[春縣].⁵ Mr. Shen Siwei said, "The doctrines of our teacher's school have been circulating for some time in every direction. They have only failed to reach Qichun. When the scholars of Qichun were able to read the *Surviving Words*, it was as if they had received personal instruction from the Master. It directed them to see the innate knowing (*liangzhi* 良知), as if witnessing anew the light of the sun and moon. I fear that the dissemination of these instructions for practice remains insufficiently extensive and do not feel that duplicating it is troublesome. Can you please gather missing content that was left out so I can publish an expanded edition. How about it?"

[I, De]hong said, "Okay. Our school's fundamental objectives of realizing knowing and rectifying matters (*zhi zhi ge wu* 致知格物) are for guiding those who come to learn. Students cultivate this for themselves and quietly apprehend it. They dare not receive it with discursive thinking, rather grasping it solely through authentic realization. Thus, our teacher spoke all day long about this, never worrying that it might be vexing, and students listened to him all day long and yet never felt tired of the repetition. As his instruction became more focused, [students'] insight became more profound. Subtle signs appeared before words were spoken, and a marvelous spirit arose that went beyond his words, all on account of a sincere gratitude they felt for his influence on them. As of today, we have not yet reached three *ji* 紀 (=36 years) since our teacher's death, and yet it seems that his adages and subtle aims are gradually falling into obscurity. How is this not the harm done by our coterie failing to exert sufficient effort in our personal practice and talking too much? If the direction in which students are moving is not the same, then the doctrines of our teacher's school will fail to be disseminated."

Consequently, I took the scattered [unpublished] manuscripts, selected discourse from them not at odds [with the Master's teaching], and obtained one volume. Anything remaining that was an inauthentic imitation or already recorded in the *Literary Record* was omitted, and the middle volume was also changed into a question-and-answer format. This was delivered to Mr. Zhang, magistrate of Huangmei County, for publication as an expanded edition. Hopefully, the reader will not receive it with discursive thinking, rather grasping it solely through authentic realization, for then he will have no doubts about this record.

Respectfully penned by [Wang Yangming's] follower Qian Dehong at Qi[chun's] Chongzheng Academy during the fourth month of the thirty-fifth (*bingchen*) year of [the reign of the] Jiajing [emperor].

¹ Guangxin is a prefecture located in Jiangxi Province.

² Zeng Caihan 曾才漢 was from Taihe County 泰和縣, Jiangxi. His courtesy name was Mingqing 明卿 and his art (style) name was Shuangxi 雙溪. He obtained his *jurem* 舉人 degree in 1528. (Li 2021: 553)

³ Jingzhou 荊州 is a city located in Hubei Province.

⁴ The Shuixi Studio (or academy) was established by followers of Wang Yangming in Jing County 涇縣, Ningguo Prefecture 寧國府.

⁵ Qichun County 蘄春縣 is located in Hubei Province.

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