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Wang Yang-ming's Doctrine of Innate Knowledge of the Good

WHEN WE READ the works of Wang Yang-ming^b (1472–1529), we notice that the word “head” is used very often. To him, it means not only the root of a tree or the source of a river, but that there has to be the “head” (i.e., a basic principle) in learning and that it is of utmost importance to acquire this “head” in pursuing wisdom. This “head” is *chih liang-chih*,^c that is, “to extend the innate knowledge of the good,” or, to extend man’s innate knowledge of the good to the utmost.*

What does *chih liang-chih* mean? According to Wang, there is no one without a mind. It is only by the activities of the mind that the ears can hear, the eyes can see, the mouth can speak, and the limbs can move.¹ The mind acts when it receives sensations and feelings, and these cause bodily movement, because, if the mind acts at all, it expresses a will toward something.

The mind is always conscious of its own operations, whether good or evil. Therefore, it can be said that, whenever the mind acts toward good or evil, it is conscious of the goodness or evil of its activities. The mind which is conscious of the goodness or evil of its activities and the mind which moves toward good or evil are not different from each other—they are one and the same. Therefore, the fact that evil activities of the mind sometimes arise does not mean that the mind is evil. On the contrary, it is because the mind is originally good that it can be conscious of its good or evil activities. The mind, which is thus absolutely good, is to be called the mind of innate knowledge of the good.²

What, then, does it mean “to extend the innate knowledge of the good”?

* Editor’s note: This term is extremely difficult to translate. Since it means innate knowledge, innate knowledge of the good, and the mind itself, no one English equivalent is completely or precisely appropriate. “Innate knowledge of the good” is used throughout this paper.

¹ Wang Yang-ming, *Ch’uan-hsi Lu*¹ (Japanese, *Den shū roku*) (“Records of Instructions”), Yamada Jun¹ and Suzuki Naoharu,* eds. (rev. ed., Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1941), top, p. 383. Hereafter, *Instructions*.

It means to bring the innate knowledge of the good into full play, knowing that our mind is the innate knowledge of the good itself—that is, when the activities of the mind arise, to develop and perfect the good ones, of which the innate knowledge of the good is conscious, and to check and arrest the evil ones, of which the innate knowledge of the good is also conscious.³ Since these activities of the mind represent the natural will to do something, to develop and perfect the good mental activities means to do the good intended; and to check and arrest the evil mental activities means never to do evil.⁴

This absolutely good mind can distinguish good and evil activities by reflection. But, being the innate knowledge of the good, it knows before the activities take place whether they should or should not be done. If the mind can distinguish by reflection between good and evil activities only after they have taken place, then it must be said that the mind acts blindly at first. This, however, is not the case. Therefore, to extend the innate knowledge of the good is to practice what the mind already knows it should do and not practice what it already knows it should not do.

But then comes the question: Why do we intend to do and actually do what we already know we should not do? This question cannot be answered by reason,⁵ and need not be answered, because, insofar as the mind is innate knowledge of the good, it will soon be aware of the evil of evil activities, and this awareness will cause them to cease of themselves.⁶ Therefore, we can say that it would be better to try to do what the innate knowledge of the good knows to be good than to try to check evil tendencies which have arisen in the mind.

And, moreover, that all of us have the innate knowledge of the good means, according to Wang, that all of us have the ability to do the good, and so he strongly urges us to act naturally and honestly upon what the innate knowledge of the good dictates, instead of following the negative course of

² Wang Yang-ming, *Wang Wen-ch'eng Kung Ch'üan-shu*¹ ("Collected Works of Wang Yang-ming") (Ching ed., reprint of 1572 ed.), Vol. 26. Hereafter *Collected Works*. "Ta Hsüeh Wen"^m section. (Hereafter, section titles will be cited only in list of Chinese characters following footnotes.—Ed. note).

³ *Instructions*, *op. cit.*, top section, p. 367.

⁴ *Ibid.*, bottom section, p. 486.

⁵ Of course, Wang tried to solve this question by dividing the selfish desires from the heavenly principles and by thinking that the selfish desires come out of the human body. But this thought inclines toward Chu Hsi's theory that divides the mind from the body, or the essence of the mind from the mind itself. Wang's essential statement consists in the assertion of the identity of them. Therefore, Wang's latest assertion is the extension of the innate knowledge of the good, instead of advocating the maintenance of heavenly principle and ridding oneself of selfish desires.

⁶ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 454.

checking negative tendencies. The question is how intently and faithfully we can follow our innate knowledge of the good.⁷

We have observed that the innate knowledge of the good already knows what should be done before it acts, but that does not necessarily mean that it already knows what may happen as a result.⁸ It does what it thinks it should do, not because it is dictated to from the outside, but because of itself. So, in order to do the good, the innate knowledge of the good needs no encouragement or support from the outside; on the contrary, when what should be done has not been done, the mind cannot feel calm and delighted and will remain unsatisfied. Therefore, we can say that to extend the innate knowledge of the good is, after all, nothing but to satisfy the mind by bringing the innate knowledge of the good into full play.⁹ And this is the acquisition of wisdom.

So, any concern about other people's opinions of what we are doing is in part an evidence that we are not yet entirely dependent upon the innate knowledge of the good. When we come to realize that the only master whom we must follow is this innate knowledge of the good,¹⁰ it will be evident that there is no other way than to do faithfully whatever may happen, what the innate knowledge of the good commands: if it orders us to go or to stop, to live or to die, we must go or stop, live or die.¹¹ If the world says that we are insane in doing so, we can accept its censure and be at ease,¹² because there is, as stated above, no other road for us to take.

However complicated and varied the events and phenomena in the world may be, we can manage them by this innate knowledge of the good, and at the same time we must say that, because of the very fact that they are complicated and varied, we must rely upon this innate knowledge of the good, knowing it to be our only directing power. Wang regards this innate knowledge of the good as the rudder of a boat: holding it in our hands in times of tempest or in prospect of shoals we need not be afraid of anything.¹³ To follow this innate knowledge of the good is, according to Wang, the way which has been carried down from remote antiquity and will be transmitted to posterity.¹⁴ This Way is the great "Head" for learning, and by following it we find it easy to do the good spontaneously and sincerely.

This doctrine of Wang consists of two ideas: on the one hand, it says that

⁷ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 463.

⁸ It means only that it knows what it should do at the present moment in the present situation. *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 473.

⁹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 427.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 468.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 427.

¹² *Ibid.*, middle, pp. 435, 436.

¹³ *Collected Works*, Vol. 6.^a See also Vol. 33.^o

¹⁴ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 455.

all of us have the innate knowledge of the good (we know what we should do or should not do), and, on the other, it asserts that all of us have enough ability to do what we know we should do. But do we really know what is good and what is evil? And can we really do what we know we should do? Wang did not approve of anybody who doubted this kind of knowledge and this ability.

That everybody has the innate knowledge of the good means that the mind of a sage is not different from that of an ordinary or even an ignorant man. Since this innate knowledge of the good is called "sageliness," there is a sage living within everyone. No one can say in this respect, "This is not the case with me," because this apparently humble attitude means, rather, one's arrogance in wishing to learn and live differently from the sage.¹⁵

Everybody has the innate knowledge of the good, and one becomes either a sage or an ordinary person depending on whether one extends this innate knowledge of the good or not. Since actually there are sages and ordinary persons, can we not say that there are two groups of men, those who can extend this innate knowledge of the good and those who cannot? If this is true, then can we not say that, even if everybody has the innate knowledge of the good, not everybody has the ability to follow it? (It is an infirmity of human nature that we should not always be able to do what we think we should do, or refrain from doing what we think we should not do.) Concerning this point, Wang, admitting the difficulty of extending the innate knowledge of the good, says that to know is easy but to act is difficult.¹⁶ And he also says that a man who extends the innate knowledge of the good easily and naturally is a sage, a man who extends it with effort is a wise man, and a man who cannot extend it is a stupid man.¹⁷

But, if there are really those who cannot extend it, Wang's doctrine of extending the innate knowledge of the good cannot be said to be easy to put into practice sincerely, because it is impossible for some persons. Therefore, the claim of his doctrine that it can be easily practiced by a sincere heart can be maintained only if it is admitted that anyone who really extends the innate knowledge of the good can become a sage. Wang says that a man cannot extend the innate knowledge of the good because he does not resolve to extend it and that anybody can really extend it if he resolves to do so,¹⁸ because the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is possible, not by getting something additional from the outside, but by its own force.¹⁹ Therefore, since the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is possible

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 454.

¹⁷ *Collected Works*, Vol. 8.^p

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 406.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 487.

¹⁸ *Instructions*, top, p. 378.

only because of the very nature of the innate knowledge of the good itself, those who extend it with effort are the same as those who extend it easily and naturally.

Nevertheless, if the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is actually checked in some cases, we still have doubt about the possibility of its extension. Wang, answering this doubt, says that everybody can extend the innate knowledge of the good as soon as he realizes he has it, and that everybody is already extending it, because, as Mencius once said, there exists in human nature the innate knowledge of the good and the innate ability to extend; for example, even children know to love their parents and to respect their elders.²⁰ And we can say that we have the innate knowledge of the good and the ability to extend it only because we are actually extending it. In other words, everybody has the innate knowledge of the good and the ability to extend it simply because there are in fact affections between parents and children, differentiations of functions between husbands and wives, order between elders and young men, righteousness between sovereigns and subjects, and truthfulness among friends.

Does this not mean that we need no effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good? Wang does not think so. To him, all of us have the innate knowledge of the good, but not all extend it. Whether one becomes a sage or an ordinary person depends upon his extension of the innate knowledge of the good, and, since learning is a form of extension, Wang strongly urges us to pursue it. This being the case, the assertion that we have the ability to extend the innate knowledge of the good simply because we are actually extending it must be corrected, for learning as an extension is urged because the innate knowledge of the good is not being extended. At the same time, the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is not possible without its being at the same time actually extended.²¹ If so, this means that everybody is extending and not extending the innate knowledge of the good. How can this dilemma be resolved?

Wang's answer is this: Everybody exerts the innate knowledge of the good, but only to a certain degree. Even a sage does not extend it perfectly.²² Therefore, the difference between a sage and an ordinary man consists in the fact that the former extends the innate knowledge of the good in a greater degree than the latter. It is not that the former extends the innate knowledge of the good while the latter does not.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 487.

²¹ That is, the possibility is inconceivable without actuality or ability.

²² *Collected Works*, Vol. 6.⁴

²³ The difference in quality is nothing but the difference in quantity or degree.

Now, if even a sage cannot extend the innate knowledge of the good perfectly, its *perfect* extension must be impossible for anybody. We can even say that the innate knowledge of the good transcends everybody's mind, that is, nobody has this innate knowledge. According to Wang, when a man knows something perfectly, he naturally practices it, and it is a proof of his imperfect knowledge if he cannot (or does not) practice it perfectly.²⁴

Wang asserts that knowledge and practice are not different in nature from each other. They are two aspects of the same thing, namely, life. Knowledge is the purpose and beginning of practice, while practice is the effort and accomplishment of knowledge.²⁵ This still suggests, of course, that the two are separable, one preceding the other. So, it would be better to say that knowledge is a clear and distinct discernment of practice, while practice is a sincere and vivid attitude of knowledge.²⁶ Knowledge is always involved in practice, and practice in knowledge;²⁷ knowledge that does not involve practice is not real knowledge, and practice not based upon knowledge is not real practice. This means that the innate knowledge of the good that is not extended is not really the innate knowledge of the good and that practice that does not extend the innate knowledge of the good is not real practice.²⁸ It also means that it is innate knowledge of the good that knows the ability to exert it, and that it is the real ability that can extend the innate knowledge of the good.²⁹

However, if the fact that nobody can extend the innate knowledge of the good perfectly means that nobody has the innate knowledge of the good, then a clue for learning is lost and the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good becomes impossible. Then, must it be thought that the problem as to whether we have the innate knowledge of the good or not is nothing but the problem as to whether the degree of clearness and distinctness of our innate knowledge of the good is great or not? For example, some mirrors reflect things clearly and distinctly, and others reflect things only dimly, but all of them are mirrors because they all reflect objects. Similarly, we all have the innate knowledge of the good, but its degree of clearness and distinctness is different with each man, and those who have a clearer and more distinct innate knowledge of the good are called sages, while an ignorant

²⁴ *Instructions*, middle, p. 392.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, top, p. 347.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 391.

²⁷ Susumu Yoshimura, 'Wang Hsüeh Ti Kang' ('The Essentials of Wang's Doctrine') (Kyoto: Kawakatsu Kōhōdō, 1861), top section, p. 31.

²⁸ *Collected Works*, Vol. 27.^t

²⁹ *Instructions*, middle, p. 423. Wang's opinion is founded upon the fact that, as far as we take the view that our life has unity or oneness, we cannot separate mind from body. See *ibid.*, bottom, p. 452.

man's innate knowledge of the good is less clear and distinct.³⁰ If so, the effort to extend it is not only practical effort to put it into action, but is, or must be, rather, intellectual effort, prior to such practical effort, to cultivate the innate knowledge of the good and to make it clearer and more distinct.³¹

But even if—and the more, because—we take the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good to be this intellectual effort, we must say that even a sage does not have a perfect innate knowledge of the good, because, even he does not extend it perfectly, so that the effort to extend it is required of him. But, since the innate knowledge of the good is, according to Wang, perfectly and absolutely good, it must be maintained that the statement that nobody has a perfectly clear innate knowledge of the good means also that nobody has the innate knowledge of the good. Therefore, if we think of the matter from the point of view of the effort, whether practical or intellectual, we must say that nobody perfectly extends the innate knowledge of the good and that, therefore, nobody has it.

Accordingly, the relation between the nature of the innate knowledge of the good and the effort to extend it is such that, if the effort is thought of from the point of view of the nature of the innate knowledge of the good, everybody has the innate knowledge of the good and extends it in some degree, while, if, on the contrary, the nature of the innate knowledge of the good is regarded from the point of view of the effort, nobody perfectly extends it and, therefore, nobody has it. Consequently, we must say that the innate knowledge of the good is inherent in everybody and at the same time that none of us has it. It transcends all of us.

The following passage of dialogue shows this point clearly:

One day when Wang Ju-chih⁴ returned from an outing, the Master asked him, "What did you see?" He answered, "I saw that all the people on the streets were sages." Then the Master said, "If you saw that all the people on the streets were sages, then they themselves must have seen you were a sage." On another day, Tung Lo-shih⁵ returned from rambling about. When he saw his Master, he said, "Today I saw a strange thing." The Master asked, "What was it?" He answered, "I saw that all the people on the streets were sages." The Master said, "This is a commonplace thing. Why should it be considered strange?"³²

This passage seems to mean that, seeing that Wang Ju-chih, regarding the effort from the point of view of the nature of the innate knowledge of the good, thinks that everybody has the innate knowledge of the good and actually extends it, the Master asked him, "Do you actually extend the innate knowledge of the good perfectly?" Seeing, on the other hand, that Tung, re-

³⁰ It is an infirmity of human nature to mistake the good for the evil, the evil for the good.

³¹ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 473.

³² *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 481.

garding the nature of the innate knowledge of the good from the point of view of the effort, worries himself to find a clue for learning, the Master relieves his worry by saying that everybody has the innate knowledge of the good and is extending it.

Historically, Wang Yang-ming's view that everybody has the innate knowledge of the good was set over against the views of the Confucian scholars of his time, who, neglecting to endeavor to extend the innate knowledge of the good, tried in vain to find the principle outside of the mind. His assertion that nobody has the innate knowledge of the good, on the other hand, was set over against the ideas of the Zen Buddhists of his time, who believed that they already had great wisdom and who, renouncing the world, abandoned ethical effort in the world.

Once Chu Hsi' (1130–1200), in explaining the hidden intelligence in our mind, said that benevolence comes out of wisdom, just as spring comes out of winter. Brotherly love, hatred of injustice, and respect for propriety severally operate as functions of our mind, but, since wisdom has nothing to do other than to discern the good and evil of the love, hate, and respect occurring in our mind, it is a characteristic of wisdom that it is hidden within our mind. And, while love, hate, and respect are all one-sided functions of our mind, wisdom has a two-sided function, i.e., to approve of the good actions of our mind and to disapprove of the evil ones, knowing good ones from evil ones before they actually arise. Chu Hsi believed that the ultimate function of wisdom is to originate all things.³³ And he still held that the fact that the excellent virtue of our mind, which, being empty (or unobstructed), contains many reasons and, being spiritual, acts upon everything and every phenomenon,³⁴ is possible only because of this hidden wisdom of our mind. Therefore, he said that this wisdom is the Master of our mind, the supreme Manager of many reasons, and Ruler of all things.³⁵ Wang Yang-ming accepted Chu Hsi's doctrine, and developed his own theory upon it.³⁶ But, according to Chu Hsi, in order to unfold and develop this hidden wisdom, what is indispensable is the effort to search for specific principles in individual things, as well as the effort of piety to awaken the mind and to make it alive.³⁷

To this, Wang Yang-ming comments as follows:

What does it mean to search for specific principles in individual things? If it means to investigate the principle of every thing, even a leaf and a blade of grass, then we

³³ *Chu Hsi Wen Chi* ("Collected Works of Chu Hsi"), Vol. 58.^{*}

³⁴ Chu Hsi, *Ta Hsüeh Chang Chü* ("Commentary on the Great Learning").

³⁵ Chu Hsi, *Ta Hsüeh Huo Wen* ("Questions on the Great Learning").

³⁶ *Instructions*, top, p. 349.

³⁷ "Questions on the Great Learning."

must say that this kind of search has nothing to do with the moral and ethical attitude of finding out what we should do or should not do, because its field of activity is outside the realm of ethics. The search for the principles of things must be a search for the principle of our minds, and it must be to know what are the benevolence and righteousness of our minds, by which we can practice benevolent and righteous actions.³⁸ The opinion that we can search for principles in other ways than this forces us to divorce the mind from principle and piety from research and to intend to know what even a sage did not know and could not know.³⁹ Therefore, we must recognize that there is no principle outside our minds and that there is no way for any search for principles except by the extension of the innate knowledge of the good. Then, to investigate things does not mean to search for the principle of everything, but, rather, to correct things which exist in our minds, in our wills, and in our intellects,⁴⁰ that is to say, to correct our mental activities and to rectify things which our minds intend to do or have actually done. In a word, it means to make our inner being sincere and pure. And, since there exists nothing outside our minds and since to correct the things of our minds directly means to do good and never to perform evil actions, the investigation of these things is nothing but the extension of the innate knowledge of the good.⁴¹

According to Chu Hsi, however, this mind of ours is actually *one* of many things in the universe, although, as already mentioned, it is empty and spiritual and accordingly contains many principles, and acts upon everything. But, since its spiritual workings are caused, so to speak, passively by responding to things and events, we cannot say that there exists nothing except our mind.⁴² Furthermore, according to Chu Hsi, to search for the principles of many things outside of our mind means to recognize in each thing the Soul of the universe, which gives life to everything, and at the same time such research into natural, physical matters gives us a chance or a clue for recognizing and arousing the essence of our own mind—for even our mind is essentially one with the universe, and the principle of, say, a tree is the same principle as that of our mind, so that there is one Principle in the universe.⁴³ Therefore, if we try to discover the principle only in our mind, leaving out the search into physical matters, we shall be likely, forgetting the littleness of our existence in the universe, to be arrogant, haughty, and disorderly.⁴⁴ Recognition and enlightenment of the true nature of our mind are possible only by investigating the natural things in the universe and revering their greatness and depth.

According to Wang Yang-ming, however, mankind is the Soul of the universe, and the essence of our mind is the unity of all things in the uni-

³⁸ *Instructions*, middle, p. 396.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 405.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 397.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 70.⁷

⁴⁴ *Chu Hsi Yü Lei*² ("Classified Conversations of Chu Hsi"), Vol. 124.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 431.

⁴² "Collected Works of Chu Hsi," Vol. 58.²

verse.⁴⁵ To regard our mind as *one* of many things in the universe is to divorce the self from others, and to make this great and wide mind small and narrow.⁴⁶ To extend the innate knowledge of the good of this mind of ours does not mean at all to act in a disorderly manner following our private and selfish desires; it means, rather, to extend benevolence, which is the unity of all things in the universe. The search for the principles of things outside of the mind means to put our mind in opposition to other things, making it smaller. In that case, we could by no means hope to acquire the satisfaction of the mind, however much intellectual knowledge we may accumulate, and it would be impossible for us to practice benevolence; i.e., to achieve the good regulation of the family, orderly government, and world peace. Whoever, thus separating knowledge from practice, is engaged in trivial research regarding things outside of the mind does not recognize that the mind embodies the principles of things and that there is no way of learning except that of bringing to light (or revealing) the excellent virtue of the mind and loving people by means of the extension of the innate knowledge of the good.⁴⁷

But what Chu Hsi asserts is that this attitude cannot exhaust the Way, because, though it can be conceded that our ethical effort is nothing but the revealing of the principle of our mind, yet there must be for the extension of the innate knowledge of the good political and economical institutions, educational systems, and religious rituals. Since the innate knowledge of the good is not empirical but inborn, the way of its extension may be said to be simple and easy.⁴⁸ (This is possible by turning our attention to the recognition of our own mind.) But, just because of the very fact that it is innate, the practical extension of the innate knowledge of the good cannot be achieved solely by itself. For its satisfactory and general extension there must be careful examination of things by experience, i.e., by scientific and historical research into physical and social matters, as, for example, a study of ceremonial institutions.⁴⁹ Without this kind of intellectual knowledge about Nature and society, the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good for the purpose of acting with benevolence, which is the unity of the universe, will surely prove to be in vain, for practice in politics is not a matter only for our heart, but what is most important is how far our benevolent

⁴⁵ *Instructions*, middle, p. 435.

⁴⁶ *Collected Works*, Vol. 26.^m

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Instructions*, middle, p. 406.

⁴⁹ Chu Hsi, *I-li-ching-chüan-t'ung-chieh*,^{aa} ("A Running Commentary on the Book of Manners").

heart can be efficacious when it puts its benevolent intentions into practice socially.⁵⁰

But, according to Wang Yang-ming, to accept the fact that the innate knowledge of the good is not empirical but inborn does not mean or involve the denial of experience.⁵¹ On the contrary, experiences are possible only because of the innate knowledge of the good and, furthermore, they can become efficacious only when they are led by this knowledge. We can obtain technical knowledge and ability by extending the innate knowledge of the good, but, when such knowledge and ability are not led by the innate knowledge of the good, they become vain and harmful. So, we must know that what is most important is not the acquisition of these things but the satisfaction of our mind. This is the reason we must declare that the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is the head of learning, and, therefore, that to search for knowledge outside of our mind is wrong, and that all the ways of learning except that of the extension of the innate knowledge of the good are erroneous.⁵²

Now, on the other hand, Wang Yang-ming speaks well of those Buddhists who study the mind, its nature and order, and who value highly the spiritual awakening and satisfaction of the mind, while there are many who are engaged in trivial knowledge, philological and literal learning.⁵³ But he asserts that the defect of the Buddhists lies in their looking for the principle of the mind without searching for that of other things.⁵⁴ It is true that there exists nothing outside of our mind, but it is also true that there can be no mind if no other things exist, because this innate knowledge of the good is nothing but the sincere will to perform benevolent acts, which unite us with the universe, and the revelation of our virtue is nothing but the practice of love toward all people by the extension of the innate knowledge of the good. But the Buddhists speak as if it were possible to study our mind without loving the people—this is their error. In other words, it is true that the innate knowledge of the good is the great root of the world, but only when it is extended will it become the splendid Way of the world.⁵⁵ Yet, the Buddhists think that the mind is already the splendid Way of the world and, therefore, that they have only to investigate and explain the mind, so that they need not worry themselves about their family, the State,

⁵⁰ See Masatsugu Kusumoto,^{ab} *Shu-kwai-an no ni-i-gyo*^{ac} ("Two Posthumous Works of Chu-hui-an"), in *Annual of Philosophy* (No. 14), (Fukuoka: Philosophical Society of Kyushu University, 1953).

⁵¹ *Instructions*, middle, p. 425.

⁵² *Collected Works*, Vol. 6.^{ad}

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7.^{ae}

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*^{af}

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8.^{ag}

and the world, however disorderly these may become. The attitude of these Buddhists, who seek only for self-satisfaction, without thinking of the principles of other matters or of ethical orders, falls easily into selfishness. Therefore, we can say that the minds of these Buddhists are not the universal mind, which does not put itself in opposition to things, but a private, selfish, and egocentric mind, which is put in a position relative to things.⁵⁶ In opposition to this, what is called the self-satisfaction of Confucianism is the satisfaction of the great ego, which makes no distinction between ego and non-ego, or between what is inside the mind and what is outside it, and which unites all things in the universe. So, the investigation and explanation of this mind is no other than loving the people, and this mind of the great ego is the mind without ego,⁵⁷ the mind with neither an outside nor an inside. On the other hand, since the Buddhists emphasize what is inside the mind and neglect what is outside, their mind is a smaller and relative one and is opposed to things.

The Buddhists, however, challenge the Confucians as follows: Is the innate knowledge of the good really the mind without ego? The most genuine and basic function of the innate knowledge of the good, which is a clue by which we can extend the innate knowledge of the good at first, is, according to Wang Yang-ming, piety toward parents and elders.⁵⁸ Though the innate knowledge of the good is the sincere heart willing to practice benevolence,⁵⁹ which unites all things in the universe, it has love which is naturally different in degree with each object it loves—it has more love for animals than for inanimate things, more love for human beings than for animals, and, among human beings, more love for parents, brothers, sisters, husbands, and wives, or sovereigns, subjects, and friends, than for strangers, and this is not by self-interest but because of the natural function of the innate knowledge of the good.⁶⁰ If so, this natural function of benevolence is (so the Buddhists think), after all, based upon ego, although benevolence proceeds from love for family and friends and expands to all people in the world and to all things in the universe. Such a mind as stands on ego cannot comprehend the essence and truth of the mind.

But Wang Yang-ming asserts that we have the Way and that it is here not merely to look at but to practice. No knowledge is possible if it is separated from practice. Buddhists pretend to realize the Way by the act of separation from the family and the State. But the knowledge gained in this

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7.^{ah}

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8.^{ai}

⁵⁸ *Instructions*, top, p. 371.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 440.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 441.

way must be very wrong, because the fact that they avoid the family and the State and escape from them in order to see the Way naturally presupposes that they are already attached to a certain form of family or State, and it is possible only by not being involved in that form when staying in it that we should not be worried by it. Buddhists intend to escape from the family and the State in order to see the mind which is opposed to, and transcends, them, thinking that there can be such a mind. If they knew that there can be no such mind and that the true mind has no distinction between ego and non-ego, between what is inside itself and what is outside, they could realize that the Way is not to be looked at but to be put into practice, directed by the egoless mind. So, what can be said with assurance is that, when we are in an order made up of parents and children, we must always give our love to them and must return righteousness to the order of sovereign and subjects in which we find ourselves.⁶¹ As this attitude is directly to realize the egoless mind and also to exert the innate knowledge of the good, there is no other way. In opposition to this, Buddhists imagine that there could be mind independent of the principles of things and of ethics. They believe that they can see that mind, that they can obtain great wisdom in doing so, and they are enjoying themselves, satisfied in the state of Nothing. That is their error, because they think that wisdom and the innate knowledge of the good can exist other than through the extension of the innate knowledge of the good.

If, as observed above, the fault of Chu Hsi's disciples consists in their thought that they can see the principles of things outside of the mind, and the fault of Buddhists lies in their thinking that they can see the mind outside of the principles of things, then Wang Yang-ming's criticism of both schools is the negation of the possibility to see the Way. Why can we not see the Way? One reason is that, since the Way is of life, we cannot stay at one place, and another is that, though the Way is immanent in our life, it also transcends our life.

The fact that everybody has mind or the innate knowledge of the good means that everybody knows what he ought or ought not do. But this mind, which makes such ethical judgments, is not only intellectual; it is also emotional,⁶² liking good and hating evil, and this emotional kind of mind is perceptive of such things as pains and itches.⁶³ And just as, feeling an itch on the skin, we naturally scratch the itchy part, so the innate knowledge of the good is directly the will to love or to hate, and then this will realizes itself by producing bodily movements. Therefore, the fact that we have the in-

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 461.

⁶² *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 474.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 488.

nate knowledge of the good does not mean that there is hidden in our minds the intellect which apprehends the good and evil of the things we are doing, but, rather, that our bodies move according to what the innate knowledge of the good orders, which means, in a word, that we are living. We can say that, because of the innate knowledge of the good, which is thus the source of our lives, our bodies can live.⁶⁴

Now, if we human beings are living because of this innate knowledge of the good, then this innate knowledge of the good as the principle of all life can also be found in trees and grass, birds and animals, even in mountains, rivers, and stones. Only because of the innate knowledge of the good can heaven be heaven, the earth be the earth,⁶⁵ and thus the innate knowledge of the good is the Spirit of the universe⁶⁶ and the Life of all things, incessantly growing vividly and interrupted by no means at any moment.⁶⁷ So, we should not be satisfied to know the innate knowledge of the good, which is moving vividly in accordance with life; it is useless to try to discover the innate knowledge of the good when we stand still. The innate knowledge of the good presents itself as an evident fact, but, at the same time, so far as it is Life itself, we cannot know it fully or adequately.⁶⁸

But to assert that the innate knowledge of the good is the source of life or Life itself may be to take the attitude of accepting all living things as they are and of thinking that there is no evil thing or good thing in actual life, everything being recognized merely as a fact. If we take this attitude, does it not cause us to be selfish and to do disorderly acts? Once, on the basis of this question, Chu Hsi made the criticism that the theory that the mind is principle is no other than Kao Tzu's⁶⁹ doctrine, which readily accepts all things as natural.⁶⁹

Wang Yang-ming challenges this criticism. As far as the innate knowledge of the good is the principle of life, certainly its essence may be neither good nor evil. But that the living are living, that life continues to be life, does not mean that life retains itself in the state of neither good nor evil, but that life is always flowing, transcending itself, for, if life stays in the same state, it will be corrupted. It was wrong of Kao Tzu to think that the judgment of ethical value should have nothing to do with life, whose function of transcending itself he could not realize.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, top, p. 383.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 471.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 468.

⁶⁷ *Collected Works*, Vol. 7.⁴¹

⁶⁸ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 492.

⁶⁹ *Chu Hsi Yü Lei*, Vol. 124.

⁷⁰ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 470.

Then is it not true that the view that the real significance of life is in this self-transcending power leads again to the error of the Buddhists, who teach that there is neither good nor evil in life? On the one hand, Kao Tzu takes the view that in life there is neither good nor evil in the sense that there is nothing which transcends life, but, on the other hand, Buddhists think that the principle of life lies in the fact that life transcends itself—the former view is that of Being, and the latter is that of Nothingness. Upon what, then, does Wang Yang-ming base his teaching? We can find it in this: that, while he approves of the thought of Kao Tzu and of that of the Buddhists, so far as the innate knowledge of the good is life, he criticizes both of them because they easily fall into a one-sided view of life, and he endeavors to make the innate knowledge of the good, the absolutely good, with its own essence and functions, the master of our life. He thinks that the true significance of our lives lies in the denial of Nothingness.⁷¹

Accordingly, this standpoint regarding the innate knowledge of the good is the kind of attitude toward life which suggests that we fall neither into disorderly acts nor, absorbed in Nothingness, into improper pleasures. It is the view that life transcends human beings and at the same time is immanent in social life.⁷² And the only way left is to follow life's movements, which are immanent in social life, while at the same time transcending it. We should expect, however, that this Way is no longer to be seen or to be known, but to be practiced and realized. As a benevolent man takes this way to be benevolent and a wise man regards it as wisdom, neither of these attitudes can exhaust the whole Way, for each recognizes only one side of the Way.⁷³ And the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good is not to try to see or hear what we can neither see nor hear.⁷⁴ It is because the innate knowledge of the good has much fear and reverence for Life itself that the innate knowledge of the good as the principle of life can be said to be the innate knowledge of the good.⁷⁵ And that the innate knowledge of the good has much fear and reverence does not mean that we are to stay in this state of fear and reverence but that our existence is moved and carried along in accordance with the revelation of the innate knowledge of the good. In this respect, the innate knowledge of the good has neither

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 420.

⁷² On the one hand, Wang says that the essence of our mind is neither good nor evil, and, on the other hand, that it is absolutely good. On these statements, Masatsugu Kusumoto asserts that the innate knowledge of the good, being the Nothingness, realizes the Being, and, at the same time, being the Being, it always returns to Nothingness. See his "Yōmei Gakuno Seishin"^{ak} ("The Spirit of Wang Yang-ming's Doctrine"), *Tetsugaku Zasshi*,¹ 711 (1950), 63.

⁷³ *Collected Works*, Vol. 7.^{am}

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Instructions*, top, p. 382.

knowledge nor ignorance,⁷⁶ and the Way can be seen only in the sense that the wind can be caught and a shadow can be picked up.⁷⁷

After all, the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good is the effort to return to the essence of our mind,⁷⁸ and that is the effort to make the innate knowledge of the good manifest, which is only to accept, making nothing of the ego, persons, birds, animals, grass, and trees as they really are. This making nothing of the ego does not mean falling into Nothingness, and accepting things in that way does not mean being involved with them or being carried away by them. Both the ego and things are corrected by the innate knowledge of the good, which reveals itself clearly.

Then, should it be said that such an effort is, after all, an effort which makes us too busy and drives us away from the tranquillity of mind, in which truth can be contemplated with understanding? Wang Yang-ming does not think in that way. If the innate knowledge of the good is the knowledge of the small ego of the mind, which is always opposed to things, then to endeavor to extend this knowledge will make us too busy—we shall be driven away with busy thoughts and acts. But Wang Yang-ming asserts that, since the innate knowledge of the good makes our small mind void and empty, and the empty mind is the mind without ego, there is nothing which the small ego should know and practice. If there were anything which the ego is to know and practice, the ego would surely become arrogant by this knowledge and practice, however good and praiseworthy they may be. But to know and practice in accordance with the innate knowledge of the good is the way of humility.⁷⁹ This is the appropriate attitude for the egoless mind to take, and, therefore, when we know and practice something in this way, knowledge and practice belong to the innate knowledge of the good, which has nothing to do with the ego, and is egoless. This observation makes us understand what Wang Yang-ming said of the mind of a mad person who behaves according to what the true ego wills.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, seeing that the innate knowledge of the good always reflects, comprehends, practices, and acts, should it be said that the vivid revelation of the innate knowledge of the good is inclined to activity rather than to tranquillity? According to Wang Yang-ming, the revelation of the innate knowledge of the good is nothing but what the way of change (*i*^h) means, i.e., activity in tranquillity, tranquillity in activity.⁸¹ Of course, we sometimes find only activity or tranquillity, but these are caused only by chance.⁸² It must

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 473.

⁷⁷ *Collected Works*, Vol. 7.^{am}

⁷⁸ Masatsugu Kusumoto, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁷⁹ *Instructions*, bottom, p. 492.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 481.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 417.

⁸² *Ibid.*, top, p. 378.

be conceded that there are occasions of the expansion of the innate knowledge of the good and occasions of its contraction (just as there are four seasons in a year) and that the sensations and feelings which the innate knowledge of the good has when it comes into contact with events are, of course, called the activities of the innate knowledge of the good, while the calmness in which the innate knowledge of the good remains when not in contact with events is called its tranquillity.⁸³ But the original tranquillity which the innate knowledge of the good has does not increase at all even if the innate knowledge of the good comes into contact with events, and the function of the innate knowledge of the good itself does not decrease at all even if there is no event. In other words, the "what has not yet happened" of the innate knowledge of the good can be found in the "what has already happened," and, conversely, the "what has already happened" is found in the "what has not yet happened." Moreover, there is no "what has not yet happened" of the innate knowledge of the good except "what has already happened" to it, and vice versa. Though the innate knowledge of the good has times of tranquillity and activity by chance, the innate knowledge of the good finds itself always settled, in times of both tranquillity and activity, and, therefore, we cannot divide its essence and function into tranquillity and activity.⁸⁴

Accordingly, the effort to extend the innate knowledge of the good must be a constant and incessant effort through tranquillity and activity, following the movements of the innate knowledge of the good. If we move when the innate knowledge of the good is in the state of tranquillity, we shall be wrong, violating the essence of the innate knowledge of the good, and, if we remain motionless at the time of its activity, we shall be just as wrong, because we shall be ignoring the function of the innate knowledge of the good.⁸⁵ And so, the way of extending the innate knowledge of the good, which is to make us servants of the innate knowledge of the good, our master, and to make its essence and function complete and splendid, is the natural way to follow, and it is to be carried on by the following of the innate knowledge of the good both in tranquillity and in activity. Therefore, it is a delightful way of learning⁸⁶ and living both in tranquillity and in activity, which is easy for us to take into our sincere heart, just like going on an even road.⁸⁷ "The Way is thus simple and easy!"⁸⁸ was the teaching which Wang Yang-ming came to acquire through his stormy life, full of many difficulties, and which he never tired of teaching ardently to his disciples.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, bottom, p. 469.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, middle, p. 417.

⁸⁵ *Collected Works*, Vol. 5.^{an}

⁸⁶ *Instructions*, middle, p. 423.

⁸⁷ *Collected Works*, Vol. 8.^{ao}

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6.^{ap}

^a 猪城博之
^b 王陽明
^c 致良知
^d 王汝止
^e 董蘿石
^f 朱熹
^g 告子
^h 易
ⁱ 傳習錄
^j 山田準
^k 鈴木直治
^l 王文成公全書
^m 大學問
ⁿ 寄鄒謙之第四書

^o 年譜三、正德
 十六年卒已
^p 書魏師孟卷
^q 寄鄒謙之第三書
^r 吉村晋
^s 王學提綱
^t 與顧性賢書
^u 朱子文集
^v 答陳器之問
 玉山講義
^w 大學章句
^x 大學或問
^y 讀大紀
^z 朱子語類

^{aa} 儀禮經傳通解
^{ab} 楠本正繼
^{ac} 朱晦庵の二遺業
^{ad} 與馬子莘
^{ae} 別湛甘泉序
^{af} 象山文集序
^{ag} 書朱守乾卷
^{ah} 重修山陰縣學記

^{ai} 書王嘉秀請益卷
^{aj} 惜陰說
^{ak} 陽明學的精神
^{al} 哲學雜誌
^{am} 見齋說
^{an} 答倫彥式
^{ao} 書孟源卷
^{ap} 寄安福諸同志