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SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS: THE *DOCTRINE*
OF THE MEAN

THE *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning* are often mentioned together. Both constitute a chapter in the *Li chi (Book of Rites)* and were selected by Chu Hsi (1130-1200) to form the "Four Books" with the *Analects* and the *Book of Mencius*. Both became Classics and basic texts for civil service examinations from 1313 until 1905. Both exerted tremendous influence in China in the last eight hundred years, especially on Neo-Confucianism, which looked to them as two of their main sources of inspiration. But they are different in many ways. The *Great Learning* deals with social and political matters, while the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a discourse on psychology and metaphysics. The *Great Learning* discusses the mind but not human nature, whereas with the *Doctrine of the Mean* the opposite is true.¹ The *Great Learning* emphasizes method and procedure, whereas the *Doctrine of the Mean* concentrates on reality. The *Great Learning* is generally rational in tone, but the *Doctrine of the Mean* is religious and mystical. It comes very close to the more mystical aspect of the *Book of Mencius*, and several passages are almost identical in the two works.²

Even before this Classic attracted the Neo-Confucianists, its subtle doctrines had strong appeal to both Taoists and Buddhists. From the fourth to the eleventh century, Taoist and Buddhist scholars wrote commentaries on it, and one Buddhist monk in the eleventh century called himself by the name of the book. It formed a bridge between Taoism and Buddhism and the Confucian school and in this way prepared for the influence of Buddhism and Taoism on Confucianism, thus ushering in the Neo-Confucian movement.

What attracted the Taoists, Buddhists, and the Neo-Confucianists were the two main subjects of the book, the very subjects on which Confucius' pupils "could not hear his views,"³ namely, human nature and the Way of Heaven. Human nature, endowed by Heaven, is revealed through the states of equilibrium and harmony, which are themselves the "condition of the world" and the "universal path." The Way of Heaven transcends time, space, substance, and motion, and is at the same time unceasing, eternal, and evident.

¹ The word "nature" appears only once in the *Great Learning* (ch. 10) and the word "mind" is not found in *The Mean* at all, except in Chu Hsi's and Ch'eng I's remarks.

² Cf. *The Mean*, ch. 20 and *Mencius*, 4A:12; 7B:16.

³ *Analects*, 5:12.

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS

It can readily be seen that the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a philosophical work, perhaps the most philosophical in the whole body of ancient Confucian literature. It is called *chung-yung* in Chinese. In the *Analects*, *chung-yung*, often translated the "Mean," denotes moderation but here *chung* means what is central and *yung* means what is universal and harmonious. The former refers to human nature, the latter to its relation with the universe. Taken together, it means that there is harmony in human nature and that this harmony underlies our moral being and prevails throughout the universe. In short, man and Nature form a unity. Here is an early expression of the theory that was to dominate Chinese thought throughout its history.

The quality that brings man and Nature together is *ch'eng*, sincerity, truth or reality.⁴ The extensive discussion of this idea in the Classic makes it at once psychological, metaphysical, and religious. Sincerity is not just a state of mind, but an active force that is always transforming things and completing things, and drawing man and Heaven (*T'ien*, Nature) together in the same current. Insofar as it is mystical, it tends to be transcendental. But its practical aspect has never been forgotten. In fact, if sincerity is to be true, it must involve strenuous effort at learning and earnest effort at practice. After all, *yung* also means the ordinary, and sincerity is to be tested in ordinary words and ordinary deeds and its truth is understandable to the ordinary man. In the final analysis, the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a Confucian document, and as such it has never deviated from its central interest in practical affairs.

It is obvious that the *Doctrine of the Mean* represents an advance over Confucius. It and the *Great Learning* seem to embody two different ancient Confucian tendencies, just as later Mencius and Hsün Tzu (fl. 298–238 B.C.) represented two different schools of thought. Some scholars have suggested that the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning* are offshoots of the teachings of Mencius and Hsün Tzu, respectively.⁵ This theory is interesting but not substantiated. Mencius and Hsün Tzu are opposed at many points. The *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning* are not, although they are different—one of the reasons why they have been often spoken of together.

Following the list of its major topics and their reference, the work is translated below in full.

Heaven and Man: 13, 20, 22
Human relations: 13, 17, 19, 20
Knowledge and Conduct: 14, 20, 27

⁴ *The Mean*, chs. 20-26, 32. Strangely enough, the subject of *ch'eng* is not discussed in the *Analects*.

⁵ For example, Fung Yu-lan. See his *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 363, 370.

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Mean and Harmony: 1-4, 6-11, 20, 27
Moral virtues: 13, 17, 19, 20, 25
Nature and Destiny: 1, 14, 21, 22, 25, 27
Sincerity: 16, 20-26, 32
Universe: 22, 23, 26, 30
Way (Tao) and Education: 1, 5, 12, 13, 20, 21, 23

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN⁶

Chu Hsi's Remark: "Master Ch'eng I (Ch'eng I-ch'uan, 1033-1107) said, 'By *chung* (central) is meant what is not one-sided, and by *yung* (ordinary) is meant what is unchangeable. *Chung* is the correct path of the world and *yung* is the definite principle of the world.' 'This work represents the central way' in which the doctrines of the Confucian school have been transmitted.' Fearing that in time errors should arise, Tzu-ssu wrote it down and transmitted it to Mencius. The book 'first speaks of one principle, next it spreads out to cover the ten thousand things, and finally returns and gathers them all under the one principle.' Unroll it, and it reaches in all directions. Roll it up, and it withdraws and lies hidden in minuteness. 'Its meaning and interest are inexhaustible.'⁷ The whole of it is solid learning. If the skillful reader will explore and brood over it and apprehend it, he may apply it throughout his life, and will find it inexhaustible."

⁶ Originally a chapter in the *Li chi* (*Book of Rites*), evidently it existed in the early Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) independently. Moreover, commentaries in the Han and Liang (502-557) times were written on it as an independent work, although these commentaries are no longer extant. As in the case of the *Great Learning*, great interest in it arose in the Sung period (960-1279). Both Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-1086) and Ch'eng Hao (Ch'eng Ming-tao, 1032-1085) wrote commentaries on it. But it was Chu Hsi who brought it into prominence. He redivided the old text, the one used in Cheng Hsüan's (127-200) commentary, the *Li chi cheng-i* or Correct Meanings of the *Book of Rites* (in the Thirteen Classics Series), into thirty-three sections without altering the order of the text. Thus the text became much clearer. He accepted the account in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih-chi* (Records of the Historian), ch. 47. (See French translation by Chavannes, *Les mémoires historiques*, vol. 5, p. 431), that Confucius' grandson Tzu-ssu (492-431 B.C.) was the author. Many modern scholars refuse to accept the theory; some have dated it around 200 B.C. The work is not consistent either in style or in thought. It may be a work of more than one person over a considerable period in the fifth or fourth century B.C. English translations by Legge, "The Doctrine of the Mean," and Ku Hung-ming, "Central Harmony," follow Chu Hsi's sectioning, while Hughes, "The Mean-in-Action," follows the Cheng Hsüan text. In our translation, Chu Hsi's arrangement is followed.

⁷ The term *hsin-fa* is Buddhist, meaning transmission from mind to mind without the use of words. Ch'eng borrowed the term but used it in an entirely different sense, taking *hsin* (mind) to mean "central," and emphasizing the use of words.

⁸ *I-shu* (Surviving Works), 7:3b, 14:1a, 18:30a; *Wai-shu* (Additional Works), 11:1b, both in ECCS.

1. What Heaven (*T'ien*, Nature) imparts to man is called human nature. To follow⁹ our nature is called the Way (*Tao*). Cultivating the Way is called education. The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way. Therefore the superior man is cautious over what he does not see and apprehensive over what he does not hear. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden and nothing more manifest than what is subtle. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself when he is alone.

Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused it is called equilibrium (*chung*, centrality, mean). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish.

Chu Hsi's Remark. "In the above first chapter, Tzu-ssu relates the ideas which had been transmitted to him, as the basis of discourse. First, it shows clearly that the origin of the Way is traced to Heaven and is unchangeable, while its concrete substance is complete in ourselves and may not be departed from. Next, it speaks of the essentials of preserving, nourishing, and examining the mind. Finally, it speaks of the meritorious achievements and transforming influence of the sage and the spirit man in their highest degree. Tzu-ssu's hope was that the student should hereby return to search within himself to find these truths, so that he might remove his selfish desires aroused by external temptations, and realize in full measure the goodness which is natural to him. This is what scholar Yang meant when he said that this chapter is the quintessence of the whole work.¹⁰ In the following ten chapters, Tzu-ssu quotes Confucius in order fully to develop the meaning of this chapter."

2. Chung-ni (Confucius) said, "The superior man [exemplifies] the Mean (*chung-yung*).¹¹ The inferior man acts contrary to the Mean. The

⁹ Interpretation according to Cheng Hsüan, *Chung-yung chu* (Commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*).

¹⁰ Although none of the commentators in the *Chung-yung chang-chü* (Commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*) in the *Ssu-shu ta-ch'üan* (Great Collection of Commentaries on the Four Books) mentioned the name of the man, this refers to Yang Shih (Yang Kuei-shan, 1053-1135). In his *Chung-yung huo-wen* (Questions and Answers on the *Doctrine of the Mean*), Chu Hsi repeatedly commented on Yang's theories. The particular remark in question, however, is not found in the *Yang Kuei-shan chi* (Collected Works of Yang Shih). It was probably transmitted orally and was well known to scholars.

¹¹ The term *chung-yung*, literally "centrality and universality," has been trans-

superior man [exemplifies] the Mean because, as a superior man, he can maintain the Mean at any time. The inferior man [acts contrary to]¹² the Mean because, as an inferior man, he has no caution."

3. Confucius said, "Perfect is the Mean. For a long time few people have been able to follow it."¹³

4. Confucius said, "I know why the Way is not pursued. The intelligent go beyond it and the stupid do not come up to it. I know why the Way is not understood.¹⁴ The worthy go beyond it and the unworthy do not come up to it. There is no one who does not eat and drink, but there are few who can really know flavor."

5. Confucius said, "Alas! How is the Way not being pursued!"

6. Confucius said, "Shun¹⁵ was indeed a man of great wisdom! He loved to question others and to examine their words, however ordinary. He concealed what was bad in them and displayed what was good. He took hold of their two extremes, took the mean between them, and applied it in his dealing with the people. This was how he became Shun (the sage-emperor)."

7. Confucius said, "Men all say, 'I am wise'; but when driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, none knows how to escape. Men all say, 'I am wise'; but should they choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to keep it for a round month."

8. Confucius said, "Hui¹⁶ was a man who chose the course of the Mean, and when he got hold of one thing that was good, he clasped it firmly as if wearing it on his breast and never lost it."

9. Confucius said, "The empire, the states, and the families can be put in order. Ranks and emolument can be declined. A bare, naked weapon can be tramped upon. But the Mean cannot [easily] be attained."

10. Tzu-lu¹⁷ asked about strength. Confucius said, "Do you mean the strength of the South, the strength of the North, or the strength you should cultivate yourself? To be genial and gentle in teaching others and not to revenge unreasonable conduct—this is the strength of the people

lated as moderation, the Mean, mean-in-action, normality, universal moral order, etc. According to Cheng Hsüan, *yung* means the ordinary and *chung-yung* means using the Mean as the ordinary way. According to Chu Hsi, it means neither one-sided nor extreme but the ordinary principle of the Mean. The Mean is the same as equilibrium and harmony in ch. 1.

¹² Following Wang Su's (195-256) text.

¹³ A similar saying is found in *Analects*, 6:27.

¹⁴ Some eleventh-century scholars thought that the word "pursued" and "understood" should be interchanged, for intelligence and stupidity pertain to understanding while worthiness and unworthiness pertain to action.

¹⁵ Legendary sage-emperor (3rd millennium B.C.).

¹⁶ Name of Confucius' favorite pupil, Yen Yüan (521-490 B.C.).

¹⁷ Confucius' pupil, whose family name was Chung and private name Yu (542-480 B.C.).

of the South. The superior man lives by it. To lie under arms and meet death without regret—this is the strength of the people of the North. The strong man lives by it. Therefore the superior man maintains harmony [in his nature and conduct] and does not waver. How unflinching is his strength! He stands in the middle position and does not lean to one side. How unflinching is his strength! When the Way prevails in the state, [if he enters public life], he does not change from what he was in private life. How unflinching is his strength! When the Way does not prevail in the state, he does not change even unto death. How unflinching is his strength!”

11. “There are men who seek for the abstruse, and practice wonders. Future generations may mention them. But that is what I will not do. There are superior men who act in accordance with the Way, but give up when they have gone half way. But I can never give up. There are superior men who are in accord with the Mean, retire from the world and are unknown to their age, but do not regret. It is only a sage who can do this.”

12. “The Way of the superior man functions everywhere and yet is hidden. Men and women of simple intelligence can share its knowledge; and yet in its utmost reaches, there is something which even the sage does not know. Men and women of simple intelligence can put it into practice; and yet in its utmost reaches there is something which even the sage is not able to put into practice. Great as heaven and earth are, men still find something in them with which to be dissatisfied. Thus with [the Way of] the superior man, if one speaks of its greatness, nothing in the world can contain it, and if one speaks of its smallness, nothing in the world can split it. The *Book of Odes* says, ‘The hawk flies up to heaven; the fishes leap in the deep.’¹⁸ This means that [the Way] is clearly seen above and below. The Way of the superior man has its simple beginnings in the relation between man and woman, but in its utmost reaches, it is clearly seen in heaven and on earth.”

Chu Hsi's Remark. “The above twelfth chapter contains the words of Tzu-ssu, which are meant to clarify and elaborate on the idea of chapter 1 that the Way cannot be departed from. In the following eight chapters, he quotes Confucius here and there to clarify it.”

13. Confucius said, “The Way is not far from man. When a man pursues the Way and yet remains away from man, his course cannot be considered the Way. The *Book of Odes* says, ‘In hewing an axe handle, in hewing an axe handle, the pattern is not far off.’¹⁹ If we take an axe

¹⁸ Ode no. 239.

¹⁹ Ode no. 158.

handle to hew another axe handle and look askance from the one to the other, we may still think the pattern is far away. Therefore the superior man governs men as men, in accordance with human nature, and as soon as they change [what is wrong], he stops. Conscientiousness (*chung*) and altruism (*shu*) are not far from the Way. What you do not wish others to do to you, do not do to them.

“There are four things in the Way of the superior man, none of which I have been able to do. To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To serve my ruler as I would expect my ministers to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To serve my elder brothers as I would expect my younger brothers to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me: that I have not been able to do. In practicing the ordinary virtues and in the exercise of care in ordinary conversation, when there is deficiency, the superior man never fails to make further effort, and when there is excess, never dares to go to the limit. His words correspond to his actions and his actions correspond to his words.²⁰ Isn't the superior man earnest and genuine?”

Comment. It is often said that Confucianism teaches only the “negative golden rule,” not to do to others what one does not want them to do to him. However, the golden rule is here positively stated, that is, to do to others what one expects others to do to him. There is no question about the positive character of the Confucian doctrine which is clearly stated in terms of conscientiousness and altruism.²¹

14. The superior man does what is proper to his position and does not want to go beyond this. If he is in a noble station, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honorable station. If he is in a humble station, he does what is proper to a position of poverty and humble station. If he is in the midst of barbarian tribes, he does what is proper in the midst of barbarian tribes. In a position of difficulty and danger, he does what is proper to a position of difficulty and danger. He can find himself in no situation in which he is not at ease with himself. In a high position he does not treat his inferiors with contempt. In a low position he does not court the favor of his superiors. He rectifies himself and seeks nothing from others, hence he has no complaint to make. He does not complain against Heaven above or blame men below.²² Thus it is that the superior man lives peacefully and at ease and waits for his destiny (*ming*, Mandate

²⁰ See above, ch. 2, comment on *Analects*, 2:18.

²¹ *ibid.*, comment on *Analects*, 4:15. For a discussion on *chung-shu*, see Appendix.

²² A similar saying is found in *Analects*, 14:37.

of Heaven, fate),²³ while the inferior man takes to dangerous courses and hopes for good luck. Confucius said, "In archery we have something resembling the Way of the superior man. When the archer misses the center of the target, he turns around and seeks for the cause of failure within himself."

15. The Way of the superior man may be compared to traveling to a distant place: one must start from the nearest point. It may be compared to ascending a height: one must start from below. The *Book of Odes* says, "Happy union with wife and children is like the music of lutes and harps. When brothers live in concord and at peace, the harmony is sweet and delightful. Let your family live in concord, and enjoy your wife and children."²⁴ Confucius said, "How happy will parents be!"

16. Confucius said, "How abundant is the display of power of spiritual beings! We look for them but do not see them. We listen to them but do not hear them. They form the substance of all things²⁵ and nothing can be without them. They cause all people in the world to fast and purify themselves and put on the richest dresses to perform sacrifices to them. Like the spread of overflowing water they seem to be above and to be on the left and the right. The *Book of Odes* says, 'The coming of spiritual beings cannot be surmised. How much less can we get tired of them?'²⁶ Such is the manifestation of the subtle. Such is the impossibility of hiding the real (*ch'eng*)."

17. Confucius said, "Shun was indeed greatly filial! In virtue he was a sage; in honor he was the Son of Heaven (emperor); and in wealth he owned all within the four seas (China). Temple sacrifices were made to him, and his descendants preserved the sacrifices to him. Thus it is that he who possesses great virtue will certainly attain to corresponding position, to corresponding wealth, to corresponding fame, and to corresponding long life. For Heaven, in the production of things, is sure to be bountiful to them, according to their natural capacity. Hence the tree that is well taken care of is nourished and that which is about to fall is overthrown. The *Book of Odes* says, 'The admirable, amiable prince displayed conspicuously his excellent virtue. He put his people and his officers in concord. And he received his emolument from Heaven. It protected him, assisted him, and appointed him king. And Heaven's blessing came again and again.'²⁷ Therefore he who possesses great virtue will surely receive the appointment of Heaven."

²³ On the doctrine of waiting for destiny, see above, ch. 3, comment on Mencius, Additional Selections, 7A:1.

²⁴ Ode no. 164.

²⁵ This is Chu Hsi's interpretation of *t'i-wu* in his *Chung-yung chang-ch'ü*. See also below, ch. 30, n.83.

²⁶ Ode no. 256.

²⁷ Ode no. 249.

18. Confucius said, "King Wen was indeed the only one without sorrow! He had King Chi for father and King Wu²⁸ for son. His father laid the foundation of [the great work of the Chou dynasty] and his son carried it on. King Wu continued the enterprise of King T'ai,²⁹ King Chi, and King Wen. Once he buckled on his armor [and revolted against wicked King Chou of Shang], the world came into his possession, and did not personally lose his great reputation throughout the empire. In honor he was the Son of Heaven, and in wealth he owned all within the four seas. Temple sacrifices were made to him, and his descendants preserved the sacrifices to him.

"King Wu received Heaven's Mandate to rule in his old age. Duke Chou³⁰ carried to completion the virtue of King Wen and King Wu. He honored T'ai and Chi with the posthumous title of king. He sacrificed to the past reigning dukes of the house with imperial rites. These rites were extended to the feudal lords, great officers, officers, and the common people. If the father was a great officer, and the son a minor officer, when the father died, he was buried with the rite of a great officer but afterward sacrificed to with the rite of a minor officer. If the father was a minor officer and the son was a great officer, then the father was buried with the rite of a minor officer but afterward sacrificed to with the rite of a great officer. The rule for one year of mourning for relatives was extended upward to include great officers, but the rule for three years of mourning was extended upward to include the Son of Heaven. In mourning for parents, there was no difference for the noble or the commoner. The practice was the same."

19. Confucius said, "King Wu and Duke Chou were indeed eminently filial. Men of filial piety are those who skillfully carry out the wishes of their forefathers and skillfully carry forward their undertakings. In spring and autumn they repaired their ancestral temple, displayed their ancestral vessels and exhibited the ancestral robes, and presented the appropriate offerings of the season. The ritual of the ancestral temple is in order to place the kindred on the left or on the right according to the order of descent. This order in rank meant to distinguish the more honorable or humbler stations. Services in the temple are arranged in order so as to give distinction to the worthy [according to their ability for those services]. In the pledging rite the inferiors present their cups to their superiors, so that people of humble stations may have something to do. In the concluding feast, honored places were given people with white hair, so as to follow the order of seniority. To occupy places of

²⁸ King Wen (r. 1171-1122 B.C.) was the founder of the Chou dynasty. King Wu (r. 1121-1116 B.C.) was his successor.

²⁹ King Chi's father.

³⁰ King Wu's brother (d. 1094 B.C.).

their forefathers, to practice their rites, to perform their music, to reverence those whom they honored, to love those who were dear to them, to serve the dead as they were served while alive, and to serve the departed as they were served while still with us: this is the height of filial piety.

"The ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth are meant for the service of the Lord on High, and the ceremonies performed in the ancestral temple are meant for the service of ancestors. If one understands the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and the meaning of the grand sacrifice and the autumn sacrifice to ancestors, it would be as easy to govern a kingdom as to look at one's palm."

20. Duke Ai⁸¹ asked about government. Confucius said, "The governmental measures of King Wen and King Wu are spread out in the records. With their kind of men, government will flourish. When their kind of men are gone, their government will come to an end. When the right principles of man operate, the growth of good government is rapid, and when the right principles of soil operate, the growth of vegetables is rapid. Indeed, government is comparable to a fast-growing plant.⁸² Therefore the conduct of government depends upon the men. The right men are obtained by the ruler's personal character. The cultivation of the person is to be done through the Way, and the cultivation of the Way is to be done through humanity. Humanity (*jen*) is [the distinguishing characteristic of] man,⁸³ and the greatest application of it is in being affectionate toward relatives. Righteousness (*i*) is the principle of setting things right and proper, and the greatest application of it is in honoring the worthy. The relative degree of affection we ought to feel for our relatives and the relative grades in the honoring of the worthy give rise to the rules of propriety. [If those in inferior positions do not have the confidence of their superiors, they will not be able to govern the people].⁸⁴

Comment. The sentence "Humanity is [the distinguishing characteristic of] man" is perhaps the most often quoted on the subject of humanity (*jen*). In Chinese it is "*jen is jen*," the first *jen* meaning humanity and the second referring to man. It is not just a pun, but an important definition of the basic Confucian concept of humanity, for to Confucianists, the virtue of humanity is meaningless unless it is involved in actual human relationships. This is the reason Cheng Hsüan defined it as "people living together," the definition

⁸¹ Ruler of Lu (r. 494-465 B.C.).

⁸² Some say that Confucius' words stop here, the rest being Tzu-ssu's elaboration.

⁸³ Cf. *Mencius*, 7B:16.

⁸⁴ Cheng Hsüan correctly pointed out in his commentary that this sentence is duplicated near the end of the chapter and is therefore superfluous.

to which scholars of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912) returned in their revolt against the Neo-Confucianists of the Sung dynasty who interpreted *jen* as a state of mind.⁸⁵

"Therefore the ruler must not fail to cultivate his personal life. Wishing to cultivate his personal life, he must not fail to serve his parents. Wishing to serve his parents, he must not fail to know man. Wishing to know man, he must not fail to know Heaven.

"There are five universal ways [in human relations], and the way by which they are practiced is three. The five are those governing the relationship between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between elder and younger brothers, and those in the intercourse between friends. These five are universal paths in the world.⁸⁶ Wisdom, humanity, and courage, these three are the universal virtues. The way by which they are practiced is one.

"Some are born with the knowledge [of these virtues]. Some learn it through study. Some learn it through hard work. But when the knowledge is acquired, it comes to the same thing. Some practice them naturally and easily. Some practice them for their advantage. Some practice them with effort and difficulty. But when the achievement is made, it comes to the same thing."

Confucius said, "Love of learning is akin to wisdom. To practice with vigor is akin to humanity. To know to be shameful is akin to courage. He who knows these three things knows how to cultivate his personal life. Knowing how to cultivate his personal life, he knows how to govern other men. And knowing how to govern other men, he knows how to govern the empire, its states, and the families.

"There are nine standards by which to administer the empire, its states, and the families. They are: cultivating the personal life, honoring the worthy, being affectionate to relatives, being respectful toward the great ministers, identifying oneself with the welfare of the whole body of officers, treating the common people as one's own children, attracting the various artisans, showing tenderness to strangers from far countries, and extending kindly and awesome influence on the feudal lords. If the ruler cultivates his personal life, the Way will be established. If he honors the worthy, he will not be perplexed. If he is affectionate to his relatives, there will be no grumbling among his uncles and brothers. If he respects the great ministers, he will not be deceived. If he identifies himself with the welfare of the whole body of officers, then the officers will repay him heavily for his courtesies. If he treats the common people as his own

⁸⁵ See Chan, "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept *Jen*," *Philosophy East and West*, 4 (1955), 295-319.

⁸⁶ See above, ch. 3, comment on *Mencius*, Additional Selections, 3A:4.

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children, then the masses will exhort one another [to do good]. If he attracts the various artisans, there will be sufficiency of wealth and resources in the country. If he shows tenderness to strangers from far countries, people from all quarters of the world will flock to him. And if he extends kindly and awesome influence over the feudal lords, then the world will stand in awe of him.

"To fast, to purify, and to be correct in dress [at the time of solemn sacrifice], and not to make any movement contrary to the rules of propriety—this is the way to cultivate the personal life. To avoid slanderers, keep away seductive beauties, regard wealth lightly, and honor virtue—this is the way to encourage the worthy. To give them honorable position, to bestow on them ample emoluments, and to share their likes and dislikes—this is the way to encourage affection for relatives. To allow them many officers to carry out their functions—this is the way to encourage the great ministers. To deal with them loyally and faithfully and to give them ample emoluments—this is the way to encourage the body of officers. To require them for service only at the proper time [without interfering with their farm work] and to tax them lightly—this is the way to encourage the common masses. To inspect them daily and examine them monthly and to reward them according to the degree of their workmanship—this is the way to encourage the various artisans. To welcome them when they come and send them off when they go and to commend the good among them and show compassion to the incompetent—this is the way to show tenderness to strangers from far countries. To restore lines of broken succession, to revive states that have been extinguished, to bring order to chaotic states, to support those states that are in danger, to have fixed times for their attendance at court, and to present them with generous gifts while expecting little when they come—this is the way to extend kindly and awesome influence on the feudal lords.

"There are nine standards by which to govern the empire, its states, and the families, but the way by which they are followed is one. In all matters if there is preparation they will succeed; if there is no preparation, they will fail. If what is to be said is determined beforehand, there will be no stumbling. If the business to be done is determined beforehand, there will be no difficulty. If action to be taken is determined beforehand, there will be no trouble. And if the way to be pursued is determined beforehand, there will be no difficulties.³⁷ If those in inferior positions do not have the confidence of their superiors, they will not be able to govern the people. There is a way to have the confidence of the

³⁷ According to K'ung Ying-ta (574-648; see *Li chi cheng-i*): There will be no limit to its possibility.

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superiors: If one is not trusted by his friends, he will not have the confidence of his superiors. There is a way to be trusted by one's friends: If one is not obedient to his parents, he will not be trusted by his friends. There is a way to obey one's parents: If one examines himself and finds himself to be insincere, he will not be obedient to his parents. There is a way to be sincere with oneself: If one does not understand what is good, he will not be sincere with himself. Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of man. He who is sincere is one who hits upon what is right without effort and apprehends without thinking. He is naturally and easily in harmony with the Way. Such a man is a sage. He who tries to be sincere is one who chooses the good and holds fast to it.

"Study it (the way to be sincere) extensively, inquire into it accurately, think over it carefully, sift it clearly, and practice it earnestly. When there is anything not yet studied, or studied but not yet understood, do not give up. When there is any question not yet asked, or asked but its answer not yet known, do not give up. When there is anything not yet thought over, or thought over but not yet apprehended, do not give up. When there is anything not yet sifted, or sifted but not yet clear, do not give up. When there is anything not yet practiced, or practiced but not yet earnestly, do not give up.³⁸ If another man succeed by one effort, you will use a hundred efforts. If another man succeed by ten efforts, you will use a thousand efforts. If one really follows this course, though stupid, he will surely become intelligent, and though weak, will surely become strong."

Comment. The five steps of study, inquiry, thinking, sifting, and practice could have come from John Dewey.

21. It is due to our nature that enlightenment results from sincerity. It is due to education that sincerity results from enlightenment. Given sincerity, there will be enlightenment, and given enlightenment, there will be sincerity.

Chu Hsi's Remark. "In the above twenty-first chapter, Tzu-ssu continues Confucius' idea in the preceding chapter of the Way of Heaven and the way of man as a basis for discussion. In the following twelve chapters, Tzu-ssu reiterates and elaborates the idea of this chapter."

22. Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop

³⁸ Chu Hsi's interpretation: Either do not study at all, or do not give up until what you studied is all understood, etc.

the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.

Comment. Whether this chapter refers to rulers, as Cheng Hsiian and other Han dynasty scholars contended, or to the sage, as Chu Hsi and other Sung scholars thought, is immaterial. The important point is the ultimate trinity with Heaven and Earth. It is of course another way of saying the unity of man and Heaven or Nature, a doctrine which eventually assumed the greatest importance in Neo-Confucianism.³⁹

23. The next in order are those who cultivate to the utmost a particular goodness. Having done this, they can attain to the possession of sincerity. As there is sincerity, there will be its expression. As it is expressed, it will become conspicuous. As it becomes conspicuous, it will become clear. As it becomes clear, it will move others. As it moves others, it changes them. As it changes them, it transforms them. Only those who are absolutely sincere can transform others.

24. It is characteristic of absolute sincerity to be able to foreknow. When a nation or family is about to flourish, there are sure to be lucky omens. When a nation or family is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens. These omens are revealed in divination and in the movements of the four limbs. When calamity or blessing is about to come, it can surely know beforehand if it is good, and it can also surely know beforehand if it is evil. Therefore he who has absolute sincerity is like a spirit.

25. Sincerity means the completion of the self, and the Way is self-directing. Sincerity is the beginning and end of things. Without sincerity there would be nothing. Therefore the superior man values sincerity. Sincerity is not only the completion of one's own self, it is that by which all things are completed. The completion of the self means humanity. The completion of all things means wisdom. These are the character of the nature, and they are the Way in which the internal⁴⁰ and the external are united. Therefore whenever it is employed, everything done is right.

Comment. In no other Confucian work is the Way (Tao) given such a central position. This self-directing Way seems to be the

³⁹ See below, pp. 524, 666, 752.

⁴⁰ It is not clear whether this refers to sincerity, the character of the nature, or the Way.

same as the Tao in Taoism. But the difference is great. As Ch'ien Mu has pointed out, when the Taoists talk about Tao as being natural, it means that Tao is void and empty, whereas when Confucianists talk about Tao as being natural, they describe it as sincerity. This, according to him, is a great contribution of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.⁴¹ It should also be pointed out that with Confucianists, "The Way is not far from man."⁴² Contrary to the Tao of Taoism, the Confucian Tao is strongly humanistic.

26. Therefore absolute sincerity is ceaseless. Being ceaseless, it is lasting. Being lasting, it is evident. Being evident, it is infinite. Being infinite, it is extensive and deep. Being extensive and deep, it is high and brilliant. It is because it is extensive and deep that it contains all things. It is because it is high and brilliant that it overshadows all things. It is because it is infinite and lasting that it can complete all things. In being extensive and deep, it is a counterpart of Earth. In being high and brilliant, it is a counterpart of Heaven. In being infinite and lasting, it is unlimited. Such being its nature, it becomes prominent without any display, produces changes without motion, and accomplishes its ends without action.⁴³

The Way of Heaven and Earth may be completely described in one sentence: They are without any doubleness and so they produce things in an unfathomable way. The Way of Heaven and Earth is extensive, deep, high, brilliant, infinite, and lasting. The heaven now before us is only this bright, shining mass; but when viewed in its unlimited extent, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations are suspended in it and all things are covered by it. The earth before us is but a handful of soil; but in its breadth and depth, it sustains mountains like Hua and Yüeh without feeling their weight, contains the rivers and seas without letting them leak away, and sustains all things. The mountain before us is only a fistful of straw; but in all the vastness of its size, grass and trees grow upon it, birds and beasts dwell on it, and stores of precious things (minerals) are discovered in it. The water before us is but a spoonful of liquid, but in all its unfathomable depth, the monsters, dragons, fishes, and turtles are produced in them, and wealth becomes abundant because of it [as a result of transportation]. The *Book of Odes* says, "The Mandate of Heaven, how beautiful and unceasing."⁴⁴ This is to say, this is

⁴¹ *Ssu-shu shih-i* (Explanation of Meanings of the Four Books), 1953.

⁴² See above, *The Mean*, ch. 13.

⁴³ Perhaps this is a step further than described in *The Mean*, ch. 23 and the translation should be "becomes prominent without any display, can change others without moving them, and complete [the self and all things, as in *The Mean*, ch. 25] without any action."

⁴⁴ Ode no. 267.

what makes Heaven to be Heaven. Again, it says, "How shining is it, the purity of King Wen's virtue!"⁴⁵ This is to say, this is what makes King Wen what he was. Purity likewise is unceasing.

27. Great is the Way of the sage! Overflowing, it produces and nourishes all things and rises up to the height of heaven. How exceedingly great! [It embraces] the three hundred rules of ceremonies and the three thousand rules of conduct. It waits for the proper man before it can be put into practice. Therefore it is said, "Unless there is perfect virtue, the perfect Way cannot be materialized." Therefore the superior man honors the moral nature and follows the path of study and inquiry. He achieves breadth and greatness and pursues the refined and subtle to the limit. He seeks to reach the greatest height and brilliancy and follows the path of the Mean. He goes over the old so as to find out what is new.⁴⁶ He is earnest and deep and highly respects all propriety. Therefore when occupying a high position, he is not proud, and when serving in a low position, he is not insubordinate. When the Way prevails in the country, he can rise to official position through his words. When the Way does not prevail in the country, he can preserve himself through silence. The *Book of Odes* says, "Intelligent and wise, he protects his person."⁴⁷ This is the meaning.

Comment. The two different approaches through "honoring the moral nature" and "following the path of study and inquiry" represent the two tendencies between the rationalistic Neo-Confucianism of Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi on the one hand and the idealistic Neo-Confucianism of Lu Hsiang-shan (Lu Chiu-yüan, 1139-1193) and Wang Yang-ming (Wang Shou-jen, 1472-1529) on the other. They were the issue between Chu and Lu in their famous debate in 1175.⁴⁸

28. Confucius said, "To be stupid and like to use his own judgment, to be in a humble station and like to dictate, to live in the present world and go back to the ways of antiquity—people of this sort bring calamity on themselves. Unless one is the Son of Heaven, he does not decide on ceremonies [of social order], make regulations, or investigate (determine) the form and pronunciation of characters. In the world today, all carriages have wheels of the same size, all writing is done with the same characters,⁴⁹ and all conduct is governed by the same social re-

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ The same saying appears in *Analects*, 2:11.

⁴⁷ Ode no. 260.

⁴⁸ See below, ch. 33, sec. 31, and comment on it.

⁴⁹ Many modern writers have pointed out that these were not conditions of the fourth century B.C. but of the Ch'in dynasty (221-206 B.C.) when writing and measurements were unified.

lations. Although a man occupies the throne, if he has not the corresponding virtue, he may not dare to institute systems of music and ceremony. Although a man has the virtue, if he does not occupy the throne, he may not dare to institute systems of music and ceremony either."

Confucius said, "I have talked about the ceremonies of the Hsia dynasty (2183-1752 B.C.?), but what remains in the present state of Ch'i (descendant of Hsia) does not provide sufficient evidence. I have studied the ceremonies of the Shang dynasty (1751-1112 B.C.). They are still preserved in the present state of Sung (descendant of Shang). I have studied the ceremonies of the [Western] Chou dynasty (1111-770 B.C.). They are in use today. I follow the Chou."⁵⁰

29. If he who attains to the sovereignty of the world has three important things [ceremonies, regulations, and the form and pronunciation of characters], he will make few mistakes. However excellent may have been the regulations of former times, there is no evidence for them. Without evidence, they cannot command credence, and not being credited, the people would not follow them. However excellent might be the regulations made by one in a low position, his position is not an honored one. The position not being honored does not command credence, and not being credited, the people would not follow them. Therefore the Way of the true ruler is rooted in his own personal life and has its evidence [in the following] of the common people. It is tested by the experience of the Three Kings⁵¹ and found without error, applied before Heaven and Earth and found to be without contradiction in their operation, laid before spiritual beings without question or fear, and can wait a hundred generations for a sage [to confirm it] without a doubt. Since it can be laid before spiritual beings without question or fear, it shows that he knows [the Principle of] Heaven. Since it can wait for a hundred generations for a sage without a doubt, it shows that he knows [the principles of] man. Therefore every move he makes becomes the way of the world, every act of his becomes the model of the world, and every word he utters becomes the pattern of the world. Those who are far away look longingly for him, and those who are near do not get weary of him. The *Book of Odes* says, "There they do not dislike him, here they do not get tired of him. Thus from day to day and night to night, they will perpetuate their praise."⁵² There has never been a ruler who did not answer this description and yet could obtain early renown throughout the world.

30. Chung-ni (Confucius) transmitted the ancient traditions of Yao and Shun, and he modeled after and made brilliant the systems of King Wen and King Wu. He conformed with the natural order governing the

⁵⁰ Cf. *Analects*, 3:9.

⁵¹ Founders of the Hsia, Shang, and Chou dynasties.

⁵² Ode no. 278.

revolution of the seasons in heaven above, and followed the principles governing land and water below. He may be compared to earth in its supporting and containing all things, and to heaven in its overshadowing and embracing all things. He may be compared to the four seasons in their succession, and to the sun and moon in their alternate shining. All things are produced and developed without injuring one another. The courses of the seasons, the sun, and moon are pursued without conflict. The lesser forces flow continuously like river currents, while the great forces go silently and deeply in their mighty transformations. It is this that makes heaven and earth so great.

31. Only the perfect sage in the world has quickness of apprehension, intelligence, insight, and wisdom, which enable him to rule all men; magnanimity, generosity, benignity, and tenderness, which enable him to embrace all men; vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution, which enable him to maintain a firm hold; orderliness, seriousness, adherence to the Mean, and correctness, which enable him to be reverent; pattern, order, refinement, and penetration, which enable him to exercise discrimination. All embracing and extensive, and deep and unceasingly springing, these virtues come forth at all times. All embracing and extensive as heaven and deep and unceasingly springing as an abyss! He appears and all people respect him, speaks and all people believe him, acts and all people are pleased with him. Consequently his fame spreads overflowing over the Middle Kingdom (China, the civilized world), and extends to barbarous tribes. Wherever ships and carriages reach, wherever the labor of man penetrates, wherever the heavens overshadow and the earth sustains, wherever the sun and moon shine, and wherever frosts and dew fall, all who have blood and breath honor and love him. Therefore we say that he is a counterpart of Heaven.

32. Only those who are absolutely sincere can order and adjust the great relations of mankind, establish the great foundations of humanity, and know the transforming and nourishing operations of heaven and earth. Does he depend on anything else? How earnest and sincere—he is humanity! How deep and unfathomable—he is abyss! How vast and great—he is heaven! Who can know him except he who really has quickness of apprehension, intelligence, sageliness, and wisdom, and understands character of Heaven?

33. The *Book of Odes* says, "Over her brocaded robe, she wore a plain and simple dress,"⁵⁴ for she disliked the loudness of its color and patterns. Thus the way of the superior man is hidden but becomes more

⁵⁴ Ode no. 57, actually a paraphrase.

prominent every day,⁵⁴ whereas the way of the inferior man is conspicuous but gradually disappears. It is characteristic of the superior man to be plain, and yet people do not get tired of him. He is simple and yet rich in cultural adornment. He is amiable and yet systematically methodical. He knows what is distant begins with what is near. He knows where the winds (moral influence) come from. And he knows the subtle will be manifested. Such a man can enter into virtue.

The *Book of Odes* says, "Although the fish dive and lie at the bottom, it is still quite clearly seen."⁵⁵ Therefore the superior man examines his own heart and sees that there is nothing wrong there, and that he is not dissatisfied with himself. The superior man is unequalled in the fact that he [is cautious] in those things which people do not see. The *Book of Odes* says, "Though the ceiling looks down upon you, be free from shame even in the recesses of your own house."⁵⁶ Therefore the superior man is reverent without any movement and truthful without any words. The *Book of Odes* says, "Throughout the sacrifice not a word is spoken, and yet [the worshipers are influenced and transformed] without the slightest contention."⁵⁷ Therefore the superior man does not resort to rewards and the people are encouraged to virtue. He does not resort to anger and the people are awed. The *Book of Odes* says, "He does not display his virtue, and yet all the princes follow him."⁵⁸ Therefore when the superior man is sincere and reverent, the world will be in order and at peace. The *Book of Odes* says, "I cherish your brilliant virtue, which makes no great display in sound or appearance."⁵⁹ Confucius said, "In influencing people, the use of sound or appearance is of secondary importance." The *Book of Odes* says, "His virtue is as light as hair."⁶⁰ Still, a hair is comparable.⁶¹ "The operations of Heaven have neither sound nor smell."⁶²

Chu Hsi's Remark. In the above thirty-third chapter, Tzu-ssu returns to the ideas of "carrying out to the limit" and "exhausting the most refined" (discussed in previous chapters) to search for their source. Furthermore, he extends the discussion to include the effort of the learner who, for his own sake, learns to be careful while alone—an effort which, through earnestness and reverence, culminates in the glory of world peace. Then he further praises the

⁵⁴ Cf. *Lao Tzu*, ch. 24.

⁵⁵ Ode no. 192.

⁵⁶ Ode no. 256.

⁵⁷ Ode no. 302.

⁵⁸ Ode no. 269.

⁵⁹ Ode no. 241.

⁶⁰ Ode no. 260. Both Chu Hsi and Cheng Hsüan believed that this sentence was uttered by Confucius.

⁶¹ Chu Hsi considered this sentence and the rest to be by Tzu-ssu. Cheng Hsüan and K'ung Ying-ta, however, considered them to be by Confucius.

⁶² Ode no. 235.

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wonder of all this, and does not stop until he describes it as being without sound or smell. What he does is to pick out the essence of the whole work and talk about it in simple terms. He felt deeply and most earnestly as he instructed people by going over the points again and again. Should the student not apply his mind to the utmost [in studying this work]?"