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SPECIAL THEME

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Neo-Confucian Theory of Mind as a Discourse of the Infinite: The Lu-Wang School

Abstract This paper is a second-order study of *xinxue* 心學 (the Neo-Confucian theory of mind from the Lu-Wang school). Having shown the difficulty of fitting the theory into philosophical or religious discourse, the paper will argue that it is more appropriate to see *xinxue* as a special variety of the "discourse of the infinite," that is, discourse concerning the infinite, which will bring forth action. In this light, Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 and Wang Yangming's 王陽明 theory on the internal experience of the unity of mind is to be seen less as description of mental life than as an effort to adhere to the spirit of Mencius: they insist on the unity of the internal experience of mind, without allowing its intensity to be reduced in the explanatory theory of *lixue* 理學 (theory of principles) espoused by Cheng Yi 程頤 and Zhu Xi 朱熹, and, in this way, strive to reaffirm Mencius's proclamation about the goodness of human nature. More importantly, the discourse as a whole works to enhance the status of the sage as someone who embodies *tianli* 天理 (the highest moral principle of the universe). This mode of discourse has the performative force of bringing forth moral actions. The real subject of *xinxue* is not what Lu and Wang claim it to be, e.g. the essentially good human nature or the infinite moral mind. Rather, the subject of *xinxue* is that which reveals itself through a series of effortful discursive activities and in the moral practice thereby produced. The subject of *xinxue* that emerges from this continuous process of striving is a special subject even within the Confucian tradition, whose attention is directed mainly towards the internal experience of the unity of mind. This subject threatens to interrupt the intellectual as well as socio-political operations established by *lixue,* and therefore engenders a series of conflicts.

Keywords *xinxue*, discourse of the infinite, metaphysics, irreducibility, subject

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, remarkable advances have been made in the study of *xinxue*. Among the philosophical interpretations of *xinxue*, the Kantian reading and the phenomenological reading have impressed people with a philosophical rigor previously unseen by Chinese philosophers, while the latest developments in the philosophy of mind allow people to see *xinxue* in light of new discoveries in brain science and the resultant new understanding of the nature of consciousness. There is no denying that those engaged in comparative philosophy, including myself, cannot but find these readings philosophically enlightening. However, what is equally evident is that there has long been unease about seeing Confucianism as a typical philosophical discourse. While some scholars still find Max Weber's categorization of Confucianism as a religion convincing, other scholars, mainly in the field of the history of ideas, focus on the historical context from which the school of *xinxue* emerged as a socio-political force. In this paper, I will propose a new reading of *xinxue* which, I believe, will do justice to both the philosophical as well as the non-philosophical aspects of *xinxue*: I will see it as a special variety of what I call the discourse of the infinite. I will show that if we treat *xinxue* in this way, we can shed new light on the Neo-Confucian theory of mind and even on Confucianism in general.

This paper is divided into four sections. In section 2, I will first delineate the general features of the discourse of the infinite in order to show how it cuts across philosophy, religion, and other discourses. I will then examine two senses of "infinite" that are often used in various types of discourse. I will show that as a special variety of the discourse of the infinite, *xinxue* manages to deploy these two senses, and thereby maintains within itself the tension that has existed in the Confucian tradition since its birth in the pre-Qin period. In section 3, I will lay out the background from which *xinxue* emerged as a tradition that has always been fraught with tension. I will argue that Mencius's proclamation that human nature is essentially good, and his invocation of the feeling of commiseration, is paradigmatic in that it sets up an exemplary model of justification which is not philosophically justifiable—that Mencius made his claims about the goodness of human nature and about the internal experience of commiseration mutually supportive. In the discourse of *xinxue*, the validity of this model rests on the authority of the sage and is never questioned. Within the model there lurk tensions as well as performative forces capable of producing actions. In section 4, I will first trace the process by which *xinxue* emerged from *lixue* as a disruptive force. I will show that the creators of *xinxue*, Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming, initiated this process by invoking Mencius and by emphasizing the unity of the internal experience of the mind, which is irreducible to the conceptual framework of *lixuxe*. Then I will examine Lao

Siguang's (勞思光) Kantian reading and Iso Kern's phenomenological reading of Wang Yangming's idea of *liangzhi* 良知 (innate knowledge). While greatly appreciating their philosophical insights, I will argue that it is not adequate to see Lu and Wang as engaged solely in philosophizing. Although they made some progress in understanding the nature of mind, we will not be able to pinpoint the true nature of their discourse if we see their work only from a philosophical viewpoint. For theirs is not a pure philosophical discourse: Lu and Wang did not intend to rely solely on philosophical justification, which would necessitate that they construe the sage as a rational person on equal footing with themselves. I will show that they have rather assigned the sage an extremely lofty place, that they consider his words to carry enormous weight, and that they hold that these words need no rational justification. I will argue that even though their claim about the absolute goodness of human nature or of the infinite moral mind is philosophically unjustifiable, the very making of this claim and the subsequent inauguration of a discourse to justify it is of great cultural significance, for while the real subject of *xinxue* might not be what they believe it to be, the subject of *xinxue* is nevertheless revealed in the effort of their discursive activities and in the subsequent moral practice brought about by the discourse.[1] This subject, owing to its obsession with internal experience, will, however, clash with the subject of *lixue*, which focuses on a different kind of experience which is incommensurable with the intuitive experience of the mind.

2 The Discourse of the Infinite and Its Special Mode in *Xinxue*

By "discourse of the infinite" I mean *discourse about that which is said to be infinite*.[2] One may immediately relate it to metaphysical discourse since the

[1] Here I draw my inspiration from Lacan and Badiou's theories of the subject.

[2] To describe the mode of the discourse of the infinite, we need to focus on various factors. First, as we are dealing here with a discourse or language game, the way language is used and the rules to be followed are key factors to be attended to. This covers a wide range of usages, from philosophical reasoning to religious narrative, as well as the use of many other apparatuses. Second, in this discourse what is talked about is something predicated as infinite. As mentioned above, the term "infinite" can be used in at least two senses. It is not hard to imagine that a host of objects are subsumed under it, including the infinite divine Being about which religious discourse talks, Spinoza's substance, Hegel's absolute, Levinas's otherness of the Other, Mou Zongsan's infinite mind, and the mathematical concept of infinity that Badiou calls on. This implies that thought about infinity is always involved in this discourse. And this thought, when neutralized, is a factor we need to examine carefully. Third, as a discourse, it is to be thought of as a part of human life—discourse means a discursive activity which is meant to bring change to the real world, and this may lead to tension.

latter concerns metaphysical objects that are often thought of as being infinite.[3] However, not every discourse of the infinite is metaphysics. While metaphysical discourse operates by projecting an object that is beyond the physical and by working out a symbolic system in an attempt to unite with that object, some discourses of the infinite appeal to some absolute experience which is irreducible to the prevalent symbolic system and tend to disrupt the operation of the prevailing metaphysics.[4] This is because the term "infinite" can be used in different senses, of which two are most relevant here: in the first sense, "infinite" is used to predicate the one/whole metaphysical object to the extent that it has nothing outside itself to determine itself; in the second sense, "infinite" comes close to "irreducible." Discourse of the infinite in the first sense belongs to metaphysics; discourse of the infinite in the second sense falls away from metaphysics—its basic operation differs from that of metaphysical discourse in that it tends to seize upon some absolute experience which is irreducible to the ready-made symbolic system and employs all sorts of discursive strategies to bring this otherwise indiscernible experience to prominence, and thereby to initiate action.

As we can see, the discourse of the infinite can be subdivided into different varieties. Yet they all share one common feature: they all invoke the term "infinite." As the infinite *per se* is by definition unspeakable, a common strategy is to appeal to some kind of medium, be it sensual experience, or philosophical speculation. In most cases, the medium is represented as a symbolic system, and is believed to be adequate to the infinite. While many such claims to capture the infinite are not philosophically justifiable, it is culturally crucial to aim at the infinite—it is usually a decisive moment in a cultural tradition when an outstanding figure makes a claim about the infinite and seizes upon a certain medium as providing access to or evidence for the infinite, and inaugurates a discourse about it. We can say that this is the moment when one *chooses to be determined* by a certain aspect of her being.[5] Her subjectivity is less what she believes it to be than what it reveals itself to be in her decision about how to achieve the infinite, and in her subsequent striving to insist on her own path to the infinite.

Another important feature of the discourse of the infinite is that the symbolic system employed by one such discourse can be incommensurable with that of another kind. This is especially so when the term "infinite" is used in different senses. For example, the experience of the face as discussed by Levinas cannot

[3] Most metaphysical discourses claim to tell the whole story about reality and attempt to bestow meaning upon human existence.

[4] As an example we need only to mention the experience of the face in Levinas.

[5] I'm inspired at this point by Zizek (2012, 212–13).

be explained away by the speculative system of Spinoza, though both claim to point to the infinite. This is precisely because the term "infinite" is used in the above-mentioned two senses: Spinoza uses "infinite" to refer to the substance which is thought of as one/whole, whereas in Levinas "infinite" is used show the otherness of the Other which resists the reduction of conceptual thinking. Irreducibility or incommensurability between discourses may cause each discourse to compete with others: one discourse has to strive to make use of its own symbolic system and consequently produce one kind of action while ignoring the media of other discourses, and even resisting the actions brought about by them.

I will argue that *xinxue*, because it is a discourse that, while projecting the infinite moral mind as the ultimate reality, appeals to the irreducible internal experience of the universal mind, and particularly to the feeling of commiseration as its manifestation, can be seen as a discourse of the infinite in both of the above mentioned senses. And, most importantly, it is a discourse created by and heavily dependent upon Mencius the sage. Although the sage engages in philosophical reasoning from time to time, it is important not to see him solely as a philosopher. This is because the most significant quality of the sage is that he does not only reflect on the nature of the human being or on the structure of reality, but rather makes a cultural decision by proclaiming the one infinite metaphysical object (be it absolutely good human nature, the original substance of mind, or—in Mou Zongsan's 牟宗三 language—the free infinite mind), and by seizing upon the immediate feeling of commiseration as a manifestation of the infinite substance, the sage is actually creating a unique mode of discourse, i.e. *gongfulun* 功夫論 (the discourse of moral cultivation),[6] brings about action from this evanescent feeling. I will show that seeing *xinxue* as a discourse of this kind, and not simply as a philosophical discourse or as a religion, can shed new light on Neo-Confucianism. It will do justice not only to the philosophical elements of *xinxue*, but also to its non-philosophical elements, and even to its social-political elements.

3 Tension in the Confucian Tradition and the Emergence of *Xinxue*

Given that the tension in the Confucian tradition is often downplayed by scholars, I intend first to lay the tensions bare. I believe that this is a necessary procedure, because only against this backdrop can the emergence of *xinxue* be accurately

[6] *Gongfulun* involves meditations and other kinds of training and aims at initiating moral actions.

presented.

Two key ideas that Confucius taught deserve special attention here: the idea of the rectification of names and the idea of *ren* 仁 (benevolence, love for other human beings, or human-heartedness).[7]

At first glance, the idea of the rectification of names seems only to concern statecraft and social management. It may look like a brutal imposition of social roles and their concomitant duties, and is commonly thought of as conservative. If, however, we take into consideration the historical situation, it will soon be clear to us that it was in the spirit of *ren* that Confucius made this prescription. Recall that the world into which Confucius was born was one of disorder: self-seeking feudal lords were only too ready to stop recognizing the king of the Zhou 周 dynasty as their common lord. Usurpations on all levels were common, and society as a whole was on a fast track toward disintegration. According to Confucius's diagnosis, this severe social disorder was mainly caused by people's unwillingness to play the roles the Zhou sanctioned for them. The only way to restore order, in his view, was to persuade everyone to resume his or her social role by acting in accordance with his or her "name," that is, the name of his or her social role. Confucius believed that the repetitive practice of rituals could serve to reaffirm the roles and duties of rulers and ministers.

Confucius's seemingly conservative teaching on the rectification of names does not have to be thought of as being a simple defense of the ruling class. It can be argued that his real concern was that the whole of society should operate in the spirit of *ren.*

In *The Analects*, *ren*, as the "perfect virtue," has numerous manifestations. Yet, they all point to a central meaning: loving other human beings. However, in this context, "human being" is a general name only retroactively given to particular individuals who are each to be loved in a particular way. Therefore, in one's attempt to understand of the idea of *ren* one will face the following problem: as universal virtue, *ren* is supposed to be achieved equally by all people regardless of their place on the social ladder; yet at the same time, it must serve as the foundation for the hierarchical order of society. Confucianism is often criticized by the Mohists for not promoting love for every member of society in equal measure. In response to this critique, one possible answer the Confucians may give is that the universality of *ren* lies in the fact that the human being equally shares the duty of loving others in "the most appropriate way," that is, the duty of loving each person as demanded by the ethical relation in which the parties stand. This implies that the recognition of the one to be loved in the ethical context of the *wulun* 五倫 (five ethical relations) precedes the exercise of *ren*. In other words, one should be clear about who the person to be loved is, and then love the

[7] For various interpretations of the idea of *ren*, see Chan (1969).

person accordingly. Another possible answer might go like this: either a person in the ethical relation can *naturally* develop the ability to love *appropriately*, or she knows what an appropriate way is and tries to practice it until it becomes natural to love others in a particular way. If this answer holds, then *ren* is not necessarily a matter of following an abstract principle of loving everyone equally, and the idea of *ren* can be made compatible with the doctrine of the rectification of names.

Mencius, though claiming a lineage with Confucius, should be regarded as the real inaugurator of the discourse of *xinxue*. To solve the puzzle of the perfect virtue of *ren*, Mencius made the proclamation that *there must be a moral mind with a good nature that guarantees the actualization of ren in an infinite number of concrete situations.* To support this proclamation, Mencius picked out the feeling of commiseration as the manifestation of good human nature. This is a crucial moment in the determination of the character of Chinese culture.

In showing King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 his own potential to become a benevolent ruler, Mencius points to the king's feeling of commiseration at the sight of the trembling ox which is to be sacrificed. According to Mencius, the feeling of commiseration with the suffering animal is a manifestation of the human-heartedness of the king. For King Xuan's situation, the Confucian theory of the rectification of names already sounds unrealistic, if still reasonable. The theory of the rectification of names demands that each person do his or her duty in order to deserve their title, or name. This implies that King Xuan himself should use the framework of the five relations to direct his behavior. However, the feeling he shows for another being (the ox) does not follow this procedure. Rather, it happens prior to the process of cognition. What is more, the being with which he commiserated could not be located in the five relations. Yet, although the commiseration he felt was not sanctioned as a duty it is precisely this immediate feeling that Mencius valued. Mencius successfully convinces the king that his evanescent feeling of commiseration for the animal is invaluable, because it is an important piece of evidence of his being human. The idea of *xing* 性 (human nature), one of the key creations of Mencius, is put in a sharp contrast with the nature of *qinshou* 禽獸 (lower animals).

Mencius also famously invoked the feeling of commiseration for a young child who is about to fall into a well, and here again, the one to be commiserated with is not in any of the five ethical relations to the subject. Mencius draws on this feeling to show that its immediacy allows it to initiate action prior to any utilitarian calculations, and even prior to the consideration of ethical obligation. In Mencius's eyes, it is this little piece of evidence that shows that we humans can be distinguished from lower animals. It is also based on this evidence that Mencius proclaims that the substance of the human mind is originally good. (Lu Xiangshan and others would later call it the infinite mind, infinite in the sense

that it is not yet confined by selfish desire.) Mencius contended that if we are to be good (i.e. be a human) instead of evil (i.e. be a lower animal), we need to cherish and sustain this emotive power of commiseration.

Mencius's distinction between humans and lower animals may give us the impression that he was engaged in a sort of anthropological description. Yet Mencius was not bent on accumulating empirical data about human nature or animal nature. His distinction should be viewed less as description than as prescription—he was actually reaffirming the Confucian cultural decision by proclaiming that human nature *must be* essentially good; that we *choose* to be distinguished from lower animals by choosing the *siduan* 四端 (the four beginnings or four sprouts) as our essential characteristics. We will come back to this in the next section.

As we can see, Mencius sets up an exemplary model of justification: his claim about the goodness of human nature and about internal experience, such as the feeling of commiseration, are made mutually supportive. Because Mencius was raised to the status of a sage in the discourse of *xinxue*, this model is not to be questioned. It compels one to attend to her internal feeling of commiseration in an infinite number of situations in order to reaffirm that human nature is originally good. On the other hand, the belief in this originally good nature encourages Confucians to seize upon the evanescent feeling of commiseration and to persistently transform this feeling into moral deeds.

In Mencius we can also detect a turn toward the internal experience of one's mind. This new twist allows one to become obsessed with the internal experience of commiseration and also promotes the infinite self-love of the moral subject: to strive toward the good, one needs to keep her eyes open for a subjective feeling which is also a feeling for others and to seek to repeat this feeling whenever it is glimpsed. Yet this obsession with an internal experience of seemingly infinite depth may threaten to weaken one's consciousness of rules, which is entangled with a fear of externally-imposed heavenly retribution or punishment. This may partly explain why, between the Han and Tang periods, *Mencius* remained a marginal text among the Confucian Classics. However, in the Song and especially the Ming periods, Mencius's long-silenced voice was raised again as a group of Neo-Confucians started to challenge the Confucianism of the Han and Tang.

The dominant Confucian discourse in the Tang was a narrative designed to legitimize imperial rule. It sketched a genealogy of the Confucian tradition as a process of decline from the Golden Age of the Former Kings who were perfectly attuned to the Way, punctuated with drastic ruptures and minor revivals. Against this backdrop the Tang rulers were portrayed as sage-like kings who managed to restore Confucianism to its long-lost prominence. In keeping with the doctrine of correspondence between Heaven and the human

being, the feats of these sage kings were understood to have been favored by Heaven, as shown through auspicious signs such as peace and prosperity on earth. Yet, this story was only partially borne out in the early Tang, and was soon met with counter-examples.[8]

The failure of the Tang ideology forced the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians to develop new theories of *qi*, *li, xin,* and *xing*.[9] The idea of the unity of Heaven and the human being in the Han and Tang was illustrated through the doctrine of correspondence between Heaven and the human being. This doctrine was mainly responsible for giving an account of the interaction between the ruler's behavior and the corresponding dispositions of Heaven. When this doctrine failed, it was not the idea of unity between Heaven and the human being that was questioned, but rather the explanation of the correspondence. The common feature of Neo-Confucianism at this point was that it set out to present a universal model of the cosmos which governed all beings in it, rulers and ruled alike. In this story it is not the king or high priest-like Confucians who are privileged but rather the philosopher-like Confucian thinkers who could provide the most tenable account of this unity.

Among the Song Neo-Confucian thinkers, Zhu Xi was definitely the most comprehensive. Based on the ideas of *li* 理 (pattern, principle), *qi* 氣 (psycho-material force) and *taiji* 太極 (the Principle of principles), Zhu Xi formulated a highly comprehensive metaphysical system: *lixue*. *Lixue* represented an attempt to provide an all-encompassing theory of the whole universe, which naturally included the phenomenon of mind. With regard to mind, Zhu Xi was more interested in giving an account of the function of mind with the concepts of *li* and *qi*, tending to treat the subjective experience of mind not as primary but as derivative, something that could be explained away with the concepts of *li* and *qi.* Zhu Xi also managed to secure the ontological status of mind qua emergence from other beings by describing the genesis of the universe. His idea of gaining knowledge in order to know the mind seems to stress that the purpose of gaining knowledge of the structure of *li* and the operation of *qi* is to know the mind, because this knowledge can shed light on how our mind functions, and because this knowledge is in the mind, to gain more knowledge would mean to enlarge the mind.[10]

However, Zhu Xi's theory of mind, comprehensive as it is, fails to do justice to the subjective experience of the unity of mind. His explanatory account of the function of mind tends to reduce the intensity of the immediate feeling of

[8] For the ideological transition from the Han and Tang periods to the Song and Ming periods, see Bol (2008).
[9] Ibid.
[10] For Zhu Xi's theory of mind, see Cheng (2008, 51–62).

commiseration.

Zhu's theory of mind is supposed to be a constituent part of the organic whole of his metaphysics. However, according to him, there are two minds, the *daoxin* 道心 (the mind of the Way) and the *renxin* 人心 (the human mind). This would imply that there are two discrete *li*'s of mind. This betrays Zhu's understanding of the mind: it only concerns the function of a kind of being, which is marked by a certain operation of *qi* governed by corresponding *li.* Different regions of operation tend to conflict with each other.

The *lixue* of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi is a highly sophisticated theory which demands much more space than it can be afforded in a paper. Suffice it to say that by focusing on the metaphysical explanation from the third-person viewpoint, Cheng-Zhu *lixue* bypasses the intuitive or subjective experience of the unity of mind, and thus his metaphysical explanation cannot but be fragmented.

4 *Xinxue* as a Discourse of the Infinite: Its Emergence, Its Mode and Its Strategy

In this section, I will first examine how *xinxue* emerged as a rupture from within the tradition of the Song Neo-Confucianism; then I will show why *xinxue* should be seen neither as philosophy nor religion; finally I will try to capture the mode of *xinxue* as a special kind of discourse of the infinite and analyze some of its key strategies.

As a Song Neo-Confucian, Lu Xiangshan was familiar with *lixue,* and saw himself as working in the tradition of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Zhang Zai 張載 and the Cheng brothers 二程. That such Neo-Confucian terms as *li, qi,* and *dao* 道 (the Way) still frequently appeared in his works indicates that he did not intend to drastically break with the mainstream Song Neo-Confucian School, nor did he deliberately set out to found a new school of *xinxue*. The idea put forth by Zhang Zai in the *Xi Ming* 西銘, that one should experience the whole universe as one, is not only not abandoned, but is so radicalized that the way to experience the oneness of the universe is held to be strictly identical with the intuitive experience of the unity of the one infinite mind.

Lu's originality can first be found in his critique of Zhu Xi's theory of *li,* or *lixue.* In Lu's eyes, *lixue* fails to take the most essential things as the point of departure—the students of *lixue* are encouraged to start their study by investigating the fragmented phenomena of the outside world. This, Lu believes, will misguide the students because once their attention is directed to minor issues they will never be able to intuit the real origin of the universal principle of the world, for in focusing on the outside world one will become lost in the diverse, heterogeneous operations of things, the principles of which are only derivatives

of the universal principle, and not vice versa. Lu remarked:

> Students of today only pay attention to details and do not search for what is of central importance. Mencius said, "He who exerts his mind to the utmost knows his nature. He who knows his nature knows Heaven (Nature). There is only one mind. My mind, my friends' mind, the mind of the sages thousands of years ago, and the mind of sages thousands of years to come are all the same. The substance of the mind is infinite. If one can completely develop his mind, he will become identified with Heaven. (Chan 1963, 585)

Lu is often accused of doing no more than repeating the same statements: "the mind is one" and "the mind is the principle." By contrast, Zhu Xi, by far the more systematic thinker, formulated a rather sophisticated explanatory theory of mind based on the concepts of *li* and *qi*. However, the explanatory power of Zhu's theory did not impress Lu, because in Lu's view, various mental activities, as well as concepts developed to explain these activities, are all achieved by the mind: they are nothing but the diverse manifestations of the one mind.

> Po-mien asked, "What is meant by exerting the mind to the utmost? What is the difference between mind, capacity, nature, and feeling?" The Teacher said, "What you say is also details. However, this is not your fault, my friend; it is the defect of the entire world. When scholars read today, they only try to understand words and do not go further to find out what is vital. As to feeling, nature, mind, and capacity, they are all one thing in general and simply happen to be expressed differently." (Chan 1963, 585)

Lu contended that the experience of the unity of mind is the most real experience and must also be taken as the most primary, and not as derivative. Invoking Mencius, Lu held that the universal Principle resides only in this mind, and can be accessed by means of sincere introspection. Lu called it the *benxin* 本心 (original mind), understanding it as the infinite One which lacks nothing and which needs no explanation through turning to heterogeneous conceptual systems.

> Mencius said, "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small. The ordinary people cast it away, while the superior man preserves it." What is cast away is the mind. That is why Mencius said that some people "cast their original mind away." What is preserved is this mind. That is why Mencius said that "The great man is one who does not lose his child's heart." (What Mencius referred to as) the Four Beginnings (of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, that is, the sense of commiseration, the sense of shame,

> the sense of deference and compliance, and the sense of right and wrong) are this mind. It is what Heaven has endowed in us. All men have this mind, and all minds are endowed with this principle. The mind is principle." (Chan 1963, 579)

In Lu's talk of the mind we can detect the two senses of the infinite mentioned above: the mind as one/whole and the original mind which produces such irreducible experiences as commiseration.

Lao Siguang pointed out that Lu's "mind" here, called *benxin*, is a term inherited directly from Mencius; it signifies what we today may term the human mind's self-awareness of values, for in Mencius "mind" means precisely the consciousness of all values. What Mencius means by the four beginnings or four sprouts, then, are the manifestations of this consciousness of values in everyday life. Lu Xiangshan was convinced that the mind *is* the principle, meaning that the consciousness of values is the ground for the criteria of all values. Yet Lao Siguang goes on to read Lu's thought as something like Kantian philosophy, attempting to make a transcendental argument. Lao holds that Lu's idea of mind signifies the transcendental capacity of the self-consciousness of values which can be either awakened or relegated to oblivion; it is important not to confuse it with empirical fact (see Lao 2005, 286–87). We will come back to this point when we discuss Wang Yangming's philosophy.

Lu Xiangshan and other Neo-Confucians' emphasis on the irreducibility of the experience of the unity of mind and its primary ontological status prepared the way for Wang Yangming, who finally pushed *xinxue* to its peak. Wang came to be aware that the very awareness of the principles of the universe (Zhu Xi's *li* as manifested in the particulars) is nothing but the achievement of the mind. Furthermore, the principles are of nothing other than the mind's own making, because for the mind to be aware of something is to contain this thing within the mind itself. The principles that determine how one should treat other people do not exist in the people to be treated but in one's own mind. In Wang's *Chuanxi Lu* 傳習錄 (*Instructions for Practical Living*) we read:

> I said, "If the highest good is to be sought only in the mind, I am afraid not all principles of things in the world will be covered." The Teacher said, "The mind is principle. Is there any affair in the world outside of the mind? Is there any principle outside of the mind?" I said, "In filial piety in serving one's parents, in loyalty in serving one's ruler, in faithfulness in intercourse with friends, or in humanity in governing the people, there are many principles which I believe should not be left unexamined."
>
> The Teacher said with a sigh, "This idea has been obscuring the understanding

> of people for a long time. Can they be awakened by one word? However, I shall comment along the line of your question. For instance, in the matter of serving one's parents, one cannot seek for the principle of filial piety in the parent. In serving one's ruler, one cannot seek for the principle of loyalty in the ruler. In the intercourse with friends and in governing the people, one cannot seek for the principles of faithfulness and humanity in friends and the people. They are all in the mind, that is all, for the mind and principle are identical. When the mind is free from the obscuration of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of the Principle of Nature, which requires not an iota added from the outside. When this mind, which has become completely identical with the Principle of Nature, is applied and arises to serve parents, there is filial piety; when it arises to serve the ruler, there is loyalty; when it rises to deal with friends or to govern the people, there are faithfulness and humanity. The main thing is for the mind to make an effort to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature." (Chan 1963, 667)

The key move that Wang made was recognizing in the experience of the *xinti* 心體(substance of the mind) the real ground of morality, which he called—following Mencius—*liangzhi,* literally the innate knowledge of the good. "This innate knowledge of the good," Wang says in *Daxue wen* 大學問 (*Inquiry on the Great Learning*), "is what Mencius meant when he said, 'The sense of right and wrong is common to all men.' The sense of right and wrong requires no deliberation to know, nor does it depend on learning to function. This is why it is called innate knowledge. It is my nature endowed by Heaven, the original substance of my mind, naturally intelligent, shining, clear, and understanding" (Chan 1963, 665). Elsewhere, Wang manifestly declared *liangzhi* to be the real substance of the human mind.

According to Lao Siguang, *liangzhi* is used by Wang Yangming in two senses: first, to denote the real substance of mind which marks the unchanging moral subjectivity of the human being, and second, to denote the function of this subject, which is the transcendental capacity of knowing the good. In the former sense, *liangzhi* is akin to Mencius's idea of absolutely good human nature eternally endowed by Heaven. It is substantial to the extent that it is being-in-itself and is originally free from the corruption of selfish desires. All good emotive expressions and deeds are believed to be the manifestations of this real substance of mind. In the latter sense, *liangzhi* is understood as the consciousness of values which makes moral judgments possible in concrete situations; as the transcendental capacity of subject, it is not caught in the causal chain of the empirical domain, and does not undergo change (Lao 2005, 316–29). According to Lao, Wang conceived of the consciousness of values as an autonomous domain, totally independent of natural or social sources.

Lao's interpretation is influenced by Mou Zongsan, whose famous Kantian reading of the Neo-Confucian and Confucian tradition in general marks a great achievement in the history of contemporary new Confucianism. Modeling on the Kantian transcendental argument, Lao is able to articulate the otherwise vague discourse of the Neo-Confucians. Yet, the problem remains that it is hard to square the idea of moral mind as understood by *xinxue* with the moral subjectivity conceived of by Kant.

It is well known to anyone familiar with Kant's moral philosophy that he elaborates on the idea of goodness in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. There, he is, as Otfried Höffe points out, engaged in meta-ethical thinking—absolute goodness, or the good without qualification, is said to be nothing other than good will (Höffe 1994, 141). In this meta-ethical thinking about moral goodness, no material content concerning what should be done with regard to other people is involved except for the principle that a moral subject always acts in accordance with pure practical reason without allowing human will to contradict itself. This betrays the most important presupposition of Kant's philosophy: that human being, though finite, is essentially rational; therefore, it must appeal to no capacity other than pure reason in establishing itself as a rational moral subject. This is a very different understanding of moral subjectivity from the Confucian one.

Although Mencius and the Lu-Wang School did not thematize the problem of the meaning of goodness, we can nevertheless distill their conviction in that regard on the plane of meta-ethics. As we have seen in the first section, Mencius's idea of the human being's good nature was intended to solve the problem left by Confucius, that is, what causes one to naturally love a person in the most appropriate manner. Because Confucius's central concern was with achieving *ren* by maintaining the perfect order of society as a whole, it is not too much to say that Confucius's idea of goodness would mean both order maintained by natural/ethical love and love achieved through natural/ethical interactions. So, when Mencius proclaimed that human nature is good, this good human nature qua the real substance of the human mind is meant to guarantee once and for all the actualization of the idea of goodness. Mencius's invocation of the feeling of commiseration as a manifestation of the good nature of the human being indicates that he understood the idea of goodness in such a way that it shows up as a kind of affectivity afforded with the power of naturally feeling the suffering of the others and spontaneously acting accordingly. Mencius's is a conviction that human nature is good in that it is characterized by both passivity and spontaneity, and it must be distinguished from the animal nature discussed by Gaozi 告子. The entire tradition of *xinxue* relies upon this conviction held by Mencius, the sage who occupies the place immediately next to Confucius.

As we can see, Mencius's idea of goodness is in sharp contrast with Kant's.

Yet, in Lao Siguang's exposition, Wang Yangming's doctrine of *liangzhi* is treated as if he were talking about purely rational moral subjectivity, much as a Kantian philosopher might. This would mean that Wang was engaged in objective philosophical reasoning independent of the personal conviction held by the sage.

Liangzhi in the second sense, that is, understood as the transcendental capacity to know good and evil, concerns a function of the conscious mind, and is fit for the task of phenomenological description. But as will soon be revealed, when we examine Iso Kern's masterly phenomenological analysis, there remains a gap between *liangzhi* as the transcendental capacity to know good and evil, and *liangzhi* as interpreted by Kern as something like Husserl's concept of *Inneresbewustsein*.

Kern's interpretation focuses on *liangzhi* in the sense of self-knowing, and tends to see Wang Yangming's theory as something close to phenomenological description. According to Kern, Wang's thinking concerning *liangzhi* evolved: in the beginning, Wang used the idea in a sense very close to Mencius's, denoting the human being's innate knowledge which enables one to automatically love his/her parents and to respect his/her elder siblings; later, Wang was able to distinguish between the substance of mind (*xinti*), which is manifested in the unity and own-ness of its experience, and its various functions. In this sense *liangzhi* is exercised as the intentional act of the consciousness that either points to something else or to itself. Kern tends to see *liangzhi* as something like, among other things, what Husserl calls *Ineresbewusstsein* (internal consciousness) or *Urbewusstsein* (ur-consciousness), that is, the pre-reflexive act of consciousness which is directed to the consciousness of something else, namely, the consciousness that knows itself knowing something. The key point here is that the two acts of knowing are believed to happen simultaneously (see Geng 2012, 167–87, 126–33). The difficulty with this reading of Wang Yangming, as Kern himself seems to have already realized, lies in fact that in Wang's works *liangzhi* is definitely the capacity to know whether an idea is good or evil, whereas Husserl's discovery of internal consciousness only shows a fact about consciousness—that consciousness is always the consciousness that is directed simultaneously toward something else and toward itself. The latter act only confirms the containment of the object of the former act within consciousness; in other words, internal consciousness only knows that consciousness knows its object as it is. Internal consciousness does not make a moral judgment, or at least, not the moral judgment as Confucians know it. There is obviously a gap between internal consciousness as consciousness knowing its own knowing and *liangzhi* as consciousness knowing whether the idea that arises in itself is good or evil. How would one bridge the gap? Suppose Wang Yangming had known Husserl's description of consciousness: he would have had

no reason to reject it as an inaccurate description of the reality of the mind, yet he would accept it only as a necessary condition and not a sufficient condition of moral consciousness—for moral judgment has other ground than the internal consciousness of the mind. It is nothing other than what Wang called the real substance of the mind, that is, *liangzhi* in the first sense. Like Mencius's idea of the goodness of human nature, *liangzhi* in the first sense guarantees its manifestation in the intuitive knowledge of good and evil.

As we can see, in Iso Kern's reading, Wang Yangming is like a phenomenologist whose main interest is in how the mind works, for whom Mencius would be regarded as no more than a moral psychologist who made a significant discovery about the human mind. The criterion of good or evil is, then, articulated but not created by the Confucian discourse. In this case, *liangzhi* is compared with the accurate description of consciousness by modern phenomenology and is believed to be the counterpart of *Ineresbewusstsein*. But in Wang's eyes, Mencius was not merely another philosopher who discovered facts; he was, as the sage, the only person entitled to proclaim that things must be like this, and that we choose to be like this.

So, what is the nature of the discourse of *xinxue*? Like phenomenology, it holds on to the first person perspective and insists on the experience of the unity of the mind. Though it does not thematize the problem of intentionality, it relies on the about-ness of consciousness to carry on its operation. It has even discovered something akin to *Inneresbewusstsein*. However, *xinxue* makes a stronger claim than an accurate phenomenological description can justify by claiming that self-knowing is not only the simultaneous knowing of mental activity, but also knowing *a priori* the highest moral principle (*tianli*), and believing that this capacity marks the true nature of mind.

Is this something like a transcendental argument? There are definitely some argumentative elements in it, insofar as it attempts to show that the infinite moral mind which is originally good produces concrete moral practice. Yet there is no hope of reconstructing it as a valid transcendental deduction.

The key point about the discourse of *xinxue* is that it does not see Mencius as a mere philosopher who made factual discoveries about mental life or human reason. In the discourse of *xinxue,* Mencius is always regarded as a figure with a unique place in the Confucian tradition, whose pronouncements carry sagely authority. As Wang Yangming declares in *Instructions for Practical Living*, the sage knows everything; whatever he knows is identical with *tianli*; he is capable of everything, and everything that he does is an instance of *tianli.* That is why the following beliefs are never questioned, but only reaffirmed in intentional moral practice: human nature is essentially good, the infinite mind is the ground of moral practice, and the feeling of commiseration is the manifestation of the infinite mind or good human nature.

And yet, *xinxue* is also not a religious discourse, because it does not rely on a supernatural power to establish moral norms. Although Mencius proclaims that *xing* (human nature) is endowed by Heaven, the doctrine as a whole does not rest on the belief that the mandate of Heaven is the absolute ground for justification. Mencius invokes Heaven only to reinforce the proclamation of the goodness and universality of human nature. The authority that Mencius relies on is that of the former sage kings and Confucius, not Heaven.

These observations compel us to see *xinxue* as a special mode of discourse in the Confucian tradition. This discourse, which can be traced to Mencius, is not a philosophical discourse, though there is no lack of philosophical argument within it, nor is it a religious discourse, though it shares some common features with such discourse. *Xinxue* is rather a discourse that takes the infinite mind or originally good human nature as the ultimate reality while seizing upon the irreducible experience of commiseration as the manifestation of the infinite mind, and then develops a series of strategies to keep this experience alive and bring forth actions. To see *xinxue* in this light demands that we take a neutral attitude toward the beliefs that the substance of mind is essentially good and that the moral mind is manifested in the feeling of commiseration. This is because the human being is always overdetermined by virtually countless elements, and to make an objectively true statement about its nature one would need to pinpoint every single determining element, which would demand a transcendent viewpoint possessed by none but God.[11] To take a somewhat skeptical view of these beliefs does not however mean that we can deny their significance altogether. As a matter of fact, these beliefs do not have to be objectively true in order for the discourse dependent on them to be valuable. These beliefs are of tremendous significance in that Mencius, in the spirit of Confucian idea of *ren*, proclaimed that human nature is essentially good, and chose to pick out the feeling of commiseration from among thousands of other varieties of human experience that could equally characterize human nature, arguing that the human being *ought to* be characterized by this kind of emotion. Yet, this proclamation should first and foremost be seen as a cultural decision made by a sage. It needs no philosophical justification.

An important contribution made by Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming to the discourse of *xinxue* is their fortification of Mencius's status as a sage, and the subsequent establishment of Mencius's central ideas as lying beyond the pale of philosophical reasoning. Also important was their bringing to prominence the intuitive experience of the unity of mind, and their emphasis on its moral

[11] If what Mencius was doing in picking out the feeling of commiseration is nothing other than demonstrating an objective fact about human nature, i.e. that human nature is essentially good, then this demonstration can hardly be a valid one, because one can always pick out a devilish instinct to prove that human nature is essentially evil, as Xunzi 荀子 might.

character.[12] The significance of this theory lies also in its resistance to the reduction of the experience of mind to Zhu Xi's explanatory theory of *li* and *qi*. In this respect, *xinxue*'s significance rests on its insistence on what we might call today the subjective or phenomenological stance, and its resistance to the cosmologico-physical stance. Though there is a gap between the experience of the unity of mind and claims about the infinite mind and the innate capacity to know the good, following Mencius's exemplary model of justification—that is, justifying the proclamation of the goodness of human nature by focusing on the internal experience of the universal mind—enables Lu and Wang to develop a discourse with a strong performative force capable of producing actions. Some important strategies of this discourse can be found in the following quotations from Wang's *Instructions for Practical Living*:

> The Teacher said, "The innate knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man. For at bottom Heaven, Earth, the myriad things, and man form one body. The point at which this unity manifests in its most refined and excellent form is the clear intelligence of the human mind. Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun and moon, stars, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, earth and stones are essentially of one body with man. It is for this reason that such things as the grains and animals can nourish man and that such things as medicine and minerals can heal diseases. Since they share the same material force, they enter into one another." (Chan 1963, 685)

> The Teacher said: "Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your mind." (Chan 1963, 685)

> The Teacher said, "The eye has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the colors of all things. The ear has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the sounds of all things. The nose has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the smells of all things. The mouth has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the tastes of all things. The mind has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the right or wrong of the influences and responses of Heaven, Earth, and all things." (Chan 1963, 685)

[12] It is widely agreed that discussions about the experience of unity of mind were highly attuned to the intellectual climate of the Song and Ming, when Buddhism was popular.

> There is no human nature that is not good. Therefore there is no innate knowledge that is not good. Innate knowledge is the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. It is the state of broadness and extreme impartiality. It is the original substance that is absolutely quiet and inactive. And it is possessed by all men. (Chan 1963, 683)

> The Teacher said, "Just look at the matter from the point of view of the subtle incipient activating force of their mutual influence and response. Not only animals and plants, but heaven and earth also, form the same body with me. Spiritual beings also form the same body with me." (Chan 1963, 690)

Here we can see Wang Yangming make several moves:

(1) By appealing to the perceptive and meaning-giving power of the mind, Wang attempts to convince his students that the real origin of the whole universe is *liangzhi* qua *xin zhi benti* (心之本體, the real substance of the mind), and that this mind is identical with their own minds.

(2) He points out that this one substance of the mind is broad in that there is nothing outside it. In other words, it has nothing from without to determine it. This is exactly the first sense of "infinite."

(3) He emphasizes that the substance of the mind, which is quiet and inactive, is absolutely impartial, and is originally good. This implies that one should try her best to maintain this perfect state and avoid losing it or deviating from it. This move appeals to human desire for the good. Yet this idea of goodness is derived from Mencius, and is different from that conceived by Kant.

(4) He urges his students to watch closely "the subtle incipient activating force of their mutual influence and response" (the feeling of commiseration is the strongest) to confirm the sense of oneness with the universe. This is meant to bring to prominence the evanescent experience, which is often indiscernible through the lenses of other conceptual systems, and which because of this is infinite in the second sense. With this kind of discursive training, certain moral practice can be made to happen in the real world.

This discursive practice of *xinxue* is meant to cultivate a special kind of subject. Yet the real subject of *xinxue* is not what the Neo-Confucians of the Lu-Wang school believed it to be, i.e. the infinite mind, but rather is revealed in their inauguration of the discourse of *xinxue* and its various discursive activities, and in the subsequent moral practice brought about by this discourse. However, this subject, which is obsessed with the infinite depth of internal experience, is bound to clash with the subject of the Cheng-Zhu school's *lixue* since the latter focuses on the exploration of the patterns of the external world based on the theory of *li* and *qi*, and tends to explain away the intuitive experience of the unity of mind. The clash between these two varieties of subject will definitely inflict

tensions in the force field of socio-political practice.

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