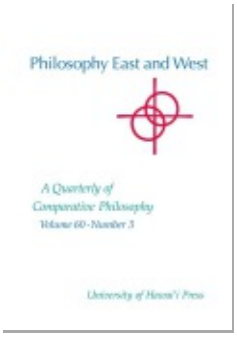

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Thompson, Kirill O.



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THE ARCHERY OF ''WISDOM'' IN THE STREAM OF LIFE: ''WISDOM'' IN THE *FOUR BOOKS* WITH ZHU XI'S REFLECTIONS

Kirill O. Thompson
Foreign Languages and Literatures Department, National Taiwan University

Traditional, premodern philosophies typically attempted to inculcate a state of wisdom, an in-depth comprehension of their respective domains of reflection. Confucius and his follower Mencius introduced a notion of wisdom, but it has lain dormant and largely unexplored during the past two millennia since their time. Confucius' and Mencius' notion of wisdom, its content, and its relation to their other virtues have been puzzles unanswered in the scholarship—not to mention the question, ''Why this long period of dormancy?'' It is time to examine this humanist form of wisdom, and to consider why it was long overshadowed and neglected. In the following, we shall follow the interpretive cues of the philosopher Zhu Xi.

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) was preoccupied with knowledge and understanding. Besides arranging a comprehensive system, he articulated a method of inquiry (investigate things to extend/attain knowledge; investigate things to explore *li* or pattern, patterning). Study and inquiry were hallmarks of Zhu's lifework.[1] As Okada Takehiko observed, Wisdom (*zhi* 智) for Zhu Xi was the highest attainment of the pursuit of inquiry (Okada 1986, pp. 199–200, 207). Wisdom for Zhu indicated one's sensitive discernment and attunement to the patterns (*li* 理) of change, formation, and phenomena. Intriguingly, it also included the perspicacity (*ming* 明) and skill/cunning (*qiao* 巧) to fashion appropriate, adaptive responses to complex, changing situations.

This inclusion of perspicacity and skill/cunning resulted from Zhu's reflections on the notion of ''wisdom'' as it appears in the *Four Books* of early Confucianism. Although the term ''wisdom'' appears infrequently in the *Four Books,* Confucius gave it prominence by mentioning *zhi* 智 together in tandem with *ren* 仁 (humanheartedness, authoritative personhood) and *yong* 勇 (courage) as the necessary virtues of a well-cultivated person (*Analects* 9.29, 14.28).[2] Noteworthy here is that *zhi* for Confucius is an independent virtue, not subservient to *ren,* not confined to the moral vision of *ren.* Rather, one brings *zhi* directly into play in complex or changing conditions, fashioning effective ways to achieve the benefits of *ren* (4.2), thus furthering the Way (*dao* 道) (15.29).

Indications of the Chinese Characters Zhi 知 *and* Zhi 智

Before proceeding, let us consider the Chinese characters for wisdom (*zhi* 智) and knowledge (*zhi* 知). The graph for knowledge (to know) is constructed from the

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arrow radical (*shi* 矢) on the left and the mouth radical (*kou* 口) on the right. The arrow radical is the phonetic indicator, while semantically it suggests shooting at a target or quarry, with the mouth radical indicating verbalization. To me, the graph indicates focusing on a thing or event and being able to articulate or describe it accurately.[3] Accordingly, the Neo-Mohist logicians wrote that *zhi* refers primarily to the capacity to know by acquaintance (as by eyesight), but that *zhi* can also refer to the capacity to know by drawing connections, or inferential knowledge (as by finding).[4] Hence, the Neo-Mohist account maintains the directness of knowledge by acquaintance (as the arrow goes directly to the target), but admits that "seeing" is just "seeing as" until confirmed to be *bona fide* (i.e., the distance to the target or quarry might make one misidentify the object, i.e., take it for something else), and also that drawing connections is conjecture until it is confirmed.[5]

The character for wisdom, *zhi* 智, is composed of the graph for knowledge atop the graph for "to say" or "it has been said" (*yue* 曰), though sometimes it was presented in archaic texts as the similar graph for "sun" (*ri* 日). To me, the character suggests a comprehension with verbal certification. The Neo-Mohists wrote that being "wise" refers to being "perspicacious" (*ming* 明) about something and being "able to verbalize this comprehension clearly."[6] Being wise indicates that one *zhi-zhen* 知真, that is, that one knows the actual situation, the truth. This arrow of wisdom thus penetrates the bull's-eye perfectly.

Confucius' Zhi (知，智) *in the Stream of Life*

Confucius might have accepted this epistemological summary of *zhi* 知 (knowledge, to know), but he made more of the problem of epistemic fallibility *in the stream of life.* Knowing that, in practice, things are not always what they appear to be, Confucius affirmed that "true knowledge (wisdom) consists in knowing that you do know what you do know and that you do not know what you do not know" (2.17).[7] Thus, he himself was a studious, observant, inquisitive person. Never content to rest on his laurels or to take anything for granted, Confucius respectfully asked about local customs and values upon entering any new place (1.10, 3.15), and would pursue the answer to any serious question to which he did not know the answer (9.8).

Like Socrates' "ignorance" and *elenchus,* Confucius' epistemic humility and willingness to inquire were the keys to his wisdom. He said he was not born with knowledge but had been inspired to learn by his love of the ancients (7.20). And, when he classified people into those born with knowledge, those who gained knowledge by learning, and those who gained knowledge through adversity, he affirmed that he had gained knowledge by learning (16.9), with the suggestion that learning and experience, if not adversity, were necessary although not sufficient conditions to gaining knowledge. For his part, Mencius affirmed that "It is often through adversity that men acquire virtue, wisdom, skill and cleverness. Such men will keep their hearts under a sense of peril, and use deep precautions against calamity" (7A.18). Zhu Xi offered a summary of Confucius' method: "Even though one's knowledge might not be fully exhaustive, one will be free of the fault of self-

deception (about what one knows). Nor will it diminish what one actually does know. Isn't seeking knowledge in this way perchance to possess the principle of wisdom?"

Due to family poverty, Confucius learned some of the "minor" skills and arts in childhood and youth (9.6), and later, due to not holding high official positions, he became something of a self-styled "Jack-of-all-trades" (9.7). But, as Zhu Xi noted, the Grand Minister interviewing Confucius regarded Confucius' mastery of minor skills and arts to be part and parcel of his sagacity, his wisdom (9.6)—suggesting that adversity and this pattern of experience had given the Master an insight into minor matters not available to learners who had never faced hardship. In addition, this pattern of experience taught the Master that there is a practical finesse to the grasping of major matters as well. The mastery of minor skills tunes one's apprehension of the Way, while one's apprehension of the Way and noble approach to life guide one in dealing with minor matters—lessons that were never lost on Zhu Xi, who admired Confucius' saying, "I learned (the minor things) below in order to penetrate (the major things) above" (14.35).[8]

While the Neo-Mohist logicians kept to the cognitive in defining "knowledge" and "wisdom," the early Confucians placed equal emphasis on the performative, the pragmatic. Knowing *that* involves knowing *how* to respond, that is, what to do; it involves *weighing* matters and then acting on one's sense of appropriateness (*yi* 義) in order to produce the most propitious result. Indeed, the virtues involved in knowing *how* themselves require learning, practice, and skill (17.8). In summary, Wisdom involves seeing through, penetrating, the opacity, the complexity, the flux of human affairs, and then fashioning the most fitting and transformative responses.[9]

The Archery of Wisdom

This emphasis on the performative, pragmatic dimension enlivens the Confucian reading of the *arrow* of knowing, the *archery* of wisdom in the stream of life. For example, placing skill, finesse, and ritual exactitude ahead of raw power, Confucius and the noble ancients valued hitting the bull's-eye over piercing the leather target in archery competition (3.16). Zhu Xi commented that "hitting the mark" was a matter of ritual propriety and of an entirely different category than strength: "For the ancients, archery was an indication of one's attainments in cultivation. Hitting the mark was prized more than piercing the leather . . . because accuracy was something that can be cultivated, but strength was not." And, "In archery, we have something like the way of the well-cultivated person: when the archer misses the mark, he reflects within in seeking the cause" (*Doctrine of the Mean,* 13). Stressing sportsmanship as well as marksmanship, Confucius would not shoot a bird at rest or catch fish by net (7.27). Generally, "A noble steed is valued for its excellent traits, not just for its strength" (14.33). Overhearing a villager quip that he wasn't known for any attainments in particular, Confucius said that between charioteering and archery, he would rather be known for mastery of charioteering (9.2). This reply lays stress on performative perfection and pragmatic efficacy—with charioteering and archery sig-

nifying differing arrays of life skills.[10] In sum, Confucius stressed "hitting the utmost propriety in the common situation (*zhongyong* 中庸)" as the highest but rarely seen life virtue.

Mencius' Reflections on the Qualities of Zhi

For his part, Mencius sought to distinguish between "sagacity" and "wisdom" for the purposes of distinguishing Confucius from three other sages, as well as to highlight the significance of "wisdom" (5B.1). Each of the three other sages had one principal virtue or idea to which he cleaved: one was known for his purity, one for his responsibility, and the other for his accommodations. Confucius, in contrast, was known for his timeliness (*shi* 時); he was the "timely sage" who tailored his actions *situationally.* Mencius remarked: "Wisdom is like a skill (*qiao* 巧), shall I say, sagacity is like strength. It is like shooting a bird from beyond a hundred paces. It is due to your strength that the arrow reaches the target, but it is not due to your strength that it hits the mark" (ibid.). For Mencius, the quality of wisdom played two roles in hitting the mark. First, wisdom gives the proper direction: knowing what to strike and where to aim. Second, wisdom incorporates the skill involved in drawing a bead on the target—not by rigidly following a set of rules but, importantly, by making adjustments according to changing circumstances—for example, by taking measure of the wind, draft, and distance (Shun 1997, p. 68; Varela 1999, p. 31). For Mencius, the quality of sagacity is sufficient for carrying out policies or plans when the conditions are set, but wisdom is required in the early stages when conditions are uncertain. As he said, the effort of "starting to put things into order is the business of wisdom, while completing that ordering is the work of sagacity" (5B1).

The "wise" are thus sensitive to flux, and are able to read and respond to change: they are resourceful and can hit the target under varying conditions. They see the writing on the wall. In the words of Varela, "The intelligent awareness that Mencius describes . . . should guide our actions, but *in harmony with the texture of the situation at hand, not in accordance with a set of rules of procedures*" (Varela 1999, p. 31; italics added). Shun goes on to indicate two requirements for initiating appropriate conduct that is consistently "on the mark": first, one must be flexible oneself, and second one must be adept at weighing and assessing circumstances (p. 69). Confucius was known for his flexibility, as is attested both by statements by him and by descriptions of him in the *Analects* (e.g., 4.10, 9.4, and 13.20). Interestingly, historian Barbara Tuchman makes the same case *via negativa* in tracing several major follies of history—from Troy to Vietnam—to leaders' lack of flexibility and the ability to read and respond to a changing reality—in her terms, to their blockheadedness, vanity, and stubbornness, to their refusal to adjust tactics in the light of changing circumstances, even to accept plain facts (Tuchman 1984).

Confucius introduced the term *quan* 權 (weigh, assess) to signify the ability to weigh and assess situations, then to devise the most propitious responses. Discussing two worthy officials, Yuzhong and Yiyi, who had been dismissed from their posts,

Confucius said: "In seclusion, they spoke freely, lived purely, and in retirement acted with discretion *according to the exigencies of the times (quan)*" (18.8). Zhu Xi commented: "Dwelling in seclusion, with goodness alone, they complied with the purity of the Way; speaking and acting freely, they complied with the measure *(quan)* of the Way." Significantly, at 9.30, Confucius goes on to suggest that *quan* is or should be a *cultivated, higher-order ability*: "We may study together but still arrive at a different comprehension of the Way; we may share a comprehension of the Way but still take a different stance. We may take a common stance and yet differ in our *quan.*" D. C. Lau here renders *quan* as "moral discretion," James Legge as the capacity to "weigh *occurring events,*" and Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont as "weigh things up."[11]

Mencius and Zhu Xi regarded the exercise of *quan* as an indispensable skill in the repertoire of the well-cultivated person. Their sense was that the *li* 禮 (norms and rites) constituting society and guiding interpersonal relations and intercourse were necessarily incomplete; for example, the *li* didn't cover all possible situations, they didn't cover all of their relevant situations suitably, they sometimes presented conflicting norms, and they sometimes undercut their own purpose. To the reflective person, this is to be expected, for while the norms and rites and institutions are fixed and static, everything else—from situations to even customs—is in flux. Additionally, human relations and affairs are complex and multirelational, yielding conflicting demands; the human heart itself is unfathomable, and human needs and interests change.[12] This was a reason why Zhu Xi advocated a life of inquiry: one keeps studying the classics (and not just the classics) and reflecting within while sensitively gauging *(quan)* the changing situations without. One keeps in touch with basic values and noble impulses, in the light of which one strives to fashion propitious responses to change that will be on target and "hit the mark." In this way, one who possesses wisdom will *suitably* overturn the norm or rite in preserving the Way in conduct (Thompson 2002a).

We are here reminded of Martha Nussbaum's reflection on ethical dilemmas that Socrates raises in the *Republic.* She is led to question whether, "a morality based on rules and principles . . . can . . . be adequate to the complex contingencies of life," and whether we mustn't "cultivate, along with reverence for principle, . . . faculties of discretion or discernment that can help us when we meet a difficult case that does not seem to be fully handled by the existing rule" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 24).

Mencius at 7A.26 again compares Confucius to three other sages, this time in order to distinguish between authentically *zhongyong* 中庸 (hitting the utmost propriety in the common situation) and merely sticking to a static Mean. Each of the other three sages stood for his respective guiding principle. They included the egoist Yang Zhu 楊朱, who would not pull out a hair to benefit the empire; the altruist Mo Di 墨翟, who would "shave his head and show his heals"[13] if it would benefit the empire; and the "moderateist" Zimo 子莫, who held a middle position between these two. To Mencius, even though Zimo's position came closer to "hitting the mark" (*zhong* 中), his "holding to the middle without proper measure (*quan* 權) was no different than holding to one extreme" (Lau 1979, p. 188). Or, in Legge's

rendering, "holding it without leaving room for *exigencies of circumstances* becomes like their holding to one point" (Legge 1892, p. 465). "We dislike people who hold to one extreme, for they do injury to the Way by singling out one consideration at the expense of a hundred others." Zhu Xi commented:

> Weighing means taking measure of things and striking their balance. To hold on to the Mean without weighing (taking measure) is stubbornly to cling to one idea of the Mean and *not understand transformation.* It is just to hold on to one side.... [Master Cheng] also said, "*Zhong* itself is not something that can be grasped." With comprehension, one sees that all things and affairs have their natural/spontaneous *zhong*.... This chapter indicates that what is precious for the Way is *zhong,* and what is precious for *zhong* is *quan. (Sishu jizhu)*

Water and Mountains, Water and Change

Let us consider Confucius' preoccupation with water and mountains, with water and change. Looking down at a river, he said, "On and on it flows like this! Never ceasing, day or night" (9.17). At the same time, he regarded Mount Tai and the Pole Star as points of reference, value orientations (2.1, 3.6). His best disciple, Yan Hui, thus said of Confucius' teaching, "The more I look up at it, the higher it appears. The more I bore into it, the harder it becomes. I see it before me, suddenly it is behind me" (9.11). Mastery of values and self-discipline provide one with the necessary concentration and steadfastness for grasping difficult situations aright. Still, one must remain flexible and perceptive—discerning—in responding to and dealing with a changing world. Hence, "The wise delight in water, the benevolent delight in mountains. The wise are active, the benevolent steadfast. The wise are joyous, the benevolent enjoy longevity" (6.21). Ultimately, people have to draw upon their inner resources in sensitively observing and responding to the flow of events. Thus, when Confucius said he would like to leave off speaking (i.e., teaching verbally) and his students questioned him how they then could expect to learn from him, he replied that the heavens do not speak, and yet the four seasons revolve in order and everything takes place (17.19).

In a passage that Zhu Xi deemed "poetic," Mencius wrote:

> When Confucius ascended the eastern mountain, the state of Lu appeared small; when he ascended Mount Tai, the Empire seemed small. So, one who has contemplated the seas finds it difficult to appreciate other waters, and one who has studied under a Sage finds it difficult to appreciate others' teachings.... There is an art of contemplating water. One must observe the foam in the waves: sunlight and moonbeams illuminate the slightest fissures. Flowing water will not proceed until it has filled all the hollows along its course, and the adept whose will is set on the Way will not attain it until he has mastered all of the elements (thus forming a beautiful pattern). (7A.24)

Benevolence (*ren* 仁, authoritative personhood) and the Way (*dao* 道) provide the value perspective for wisdom, yet the exercise of wisdom expresses one's sensitive discernment of change and circumstance won by perceptive experience and in-

quiry, guided by one's sense of appropriateness (*yi* 義): *Ren* signals one to pull the arrow from the quiver; *yi* orients one in directing the bow; inquiry and assessment inform one in drawing a bead; and finally, wisdom (*zhi* 智) is the *cultivated skill dedicated to hitting the mark,* particularly when it is obscure or in flux.

Concluding Reflections

Cognitively, wisdom consists in knowing the actual state of affairs, the true: (*zhizhen* 知真). There is the suggestion in this view that the person, the archer, penetrates the obscurity and changes to comprehend a hidden, "real" state of affairs. In the Western tradition, this suggestion would signal the reality-appearance dichotomy, the hidden presence of an unchanging reality or truth, which underlies the changes and varieties we experience. Traditional Chinese philosophy, however, was based on the reality of change, and was rooted in an event ontology. Relation, not substance, formed the ultimate texture of things,[14] and so Confucius' wisdom consisted in his recognition and reading of change. For Zhu Xi, Confucius stood out from other sages because he understood change and transformation; he stood out as the sage of timeliness. For Mencius, Confucius' Way was not a fixed doctrine but a sensitive way of looking, so that one's responses accorded with the natural pulse and propensities of things. Seeking to *zhizhen,* Confucius observed the rotating heavens and flowing streams and wished, if he were given fifty more years of life, to inquire more deeply "into the *Changes,* so he might avoid major faults" (7.16).

Zhu Xi sometimes regarded the investigation of things as proceeding in a step-by-step *ascending* process, culminating in a penetrating comprehension (*Great Learning* [大學], "Supplement" to chap. 5), a higher synthetic illumination, ultimately, of the *taiji* 太極 (supreme polarity). The present inquiry, however, shows that Zhu's concern in his notions of inquiry, knowledge, and wisdom was to inform life practice, and the purpose of inquiry for him resolved into grasping specific situations and fashioning felicitous responses. Thus, while he presented inquiry as a quest for ever higher patterns and truths in his "Supplement" to the *Great Learning,* the actual content of the process of inquiry was to stay focused on specifics. As one inquires into more and more specific situations, one becomes acquainted with deeper and more basic patterns (*li* 理) of change, structure, balance, and composition, which afford one a surer grasp of the new situations that one goes on to investigate. Zhu rationalized this position with the organic saying, "*Li* (pattern, patterning) is one, but its manifestations are myriad" (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊). Again, like Confucius, he thought that one can penetrate the higher only by studying the lower, and criticized those who would study the Way or *li* in themselves, in abstraction from real situations or events.

Echoing Varela's account of Mencius' position, we can say that Zhu's purpose in conducting inquiry and exercising wisdom was less to achieve a purely rational grasp of higher, abstract forms than to cultivate a nuanced, holistic, responsive sensitivity to the immanental patterns of change and transformation. Summed up in metaphors of *taiji* 太極 (supreme polarity) and *tianli* 天理 (natural patterning), and

the like, these patterns were for Zhu always to be experienced embodimentally and responded to situationally, "ecologically." Thus, rather than "to gather a situation under a[n abstract] rule" by describing the situation under "categories we may call cognitive," the approach of Confucius, Mencius, and Zhu Xi was "to see [Gestalt] correspondences and affinities," so that "the situation [would] become much more textured. All relevant aspects [would] thus [be] included, not just those which fit the reduction of a categorical analysis" (Varela 1999, p. 28). And the point would lie in one's reflective ability to make skillful, well-tailored responses that hit the mark and transform the situation.

Returning to our initial question as to why Confucius' notion of wisdom has lain largely dormant for over two millennia, the answer lies in the rise and persistence of bureaucratic, dynastic China. Whereas Confucius' other virtues, such as *ren, yi,* and *li,* could be cast in the service of the court and civil hierarchies, *zhi* involves the incendiary sparks of innovation and free and critical thinking that are the bane of every authoritarian regime, and thus was not stressed.

Case I. Ren 仁 *(Human-heartedness, Authoritative Personhood) and* Zhi 智 *(Wisdom)*

At 4.2, Confucius says that "People who are not of *ren* (not *renzhe* 仁者) are unable to long endure adversity or enjoy happy circumstances. People of *ren* are contented in being of *ren;* the wise bring benefit by *ren.*" People of *ren* lead contented and fulfilling lives in the sense that they appreciate their position in the social nexus, fulfill their interpersonal obligations, and pursue the common good in their conduct. Their cultivation and sense of purpose guide them through adversity and easy times alike. People of *ren* are cultivated to manifest *ren* in their lives; the wise (*zhizhe* 智者), however, are particularly discerning and have an abundance of reflective life experience, learning, practice—and derring-do. Beyond embodying and expressing *ren* and the other standard virtues of a well-cultivated person (*junzi* 君子), they grasp the patterns of change and formation and the roots of harmony, et cetera. Thus, beyond taking ease in being of *ren,* the wise consciously bring *ren* and the other virtues to bear when they see problems or better ways to benefit humanity.

The term *li* 利 means benefit, profit, or utility, but applies variously to individuals, groups, society, humanity, nature, et cetera, according to rhetorical context and speaker intention. The (Confucian) wise would see the larger context of events and human affairs; then, when they "brought benefit," it would not just be for themselves or their clan, but rather for a larger group—society, humanity, or nature. Moreover, the wise could be more effective at doing this than people of *ren* per se because, whereas people of *ren* would be constrained to follow ingrained norms of upright interpersonal relationships and conduct, the wise would tend to have more cognitive resources at their disposal to fashion creative responses that would better manifest and bear the fruits of *ren* and the other virtues.

These reflections perhaps help us to understand and resolve some apparent conflicts in Confucius' comments on the minister Guan Zhong, who displayed wisdom

and brought the benefits of *ren* to people while remaining lacking in the more socially recognized cultivation of *ren* itself. Accordingly, on the one hand Confucius remarks that Guan Zhong did not understand the rites (of noble tradition and good form) (3.22), but on the other he admits that when Guan Zhong seized three hundred households from the Bo clan, he did so in such a way that, "although the Bo clan was left with only coarse rice to eat," they never spoke ill of Guan Zhong to the end of their days (14.9), that is to say, Guan Zhong's treatment of the Bo clan fulfilled a higher and perhaps unexpected dimension of *ren.* (I suspect that the "accepted" practice of the day would have been to kill off the Bo clan.)

When Confucius' students, taking a more ritualistic view of *ren,* asked whether Guan Zhong hadn't fallen short of *ren* in departing—and not himself dying—when his Prince Qiu was killed, Confucius suggested that Guan Zhong had fulfilled a broader sense of *ren* in his judicious conduct and leadership: "Many times did Guan Zhong assemble the various feudal lords, and it was always through Guan Zhong's influence rather than a resort to arms. Such was his *ren* (authoritative conduct)! Such was his *ren*!" And, "When Guan Zhong served as prime minister for Duke Huan, he enabled the duke to become leader of the various feudal lords, uniting and bringing order to the empire. Even today people still benefit from his largesse. If there were not Guan Zhong, we would likely be wearing our hair loose and folding our robes to the left (i.e., we would be living under the barbarian tribes). Should we expect that he would have the earnestness of some country yokel, managing to strangle himself in an irrigation ditch with no one the wiser?" (14.17, following Ames and Rosemont).

Case II. Bo-li Xi as a Model for Understanding Confucius' Wisdom: Mencius *5A9*

The story of Bo-li Xi resembles the story of Guan Zhong above in two respects. First, it turns on the distinction between apparent or conventional *ren* and true or deep *ren.* (Cf. the apparent virtue of the village "worthy," the so-called "thief of virtue" [*Analects* 17.23; *Mencius* 7B37].) Second, whereas a person of *ren* is contented in being of (or practicing) *ren,* the wise seek to bring benefits through *ren.* Hence, Mencius denies stories that question Bo-li's apparent *ren,* and then tells of his true *ren,* which was realized through Bo-li's flexibility and ability to weigh circumstances along the way to attaining an official position whence he could bring benefit to people.

Speaking in the same breath of Guan Zhong (who had been released by the prison warden) and Bo-li (who had been released from the cattle market), Mencius at 6A15 makes the point that when Heaven is "about to place a great burden on a person, [it] always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship and frustrates him so as to shake his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies. As a rule, a person can mend his ways only after he has made mistakes. It is only when a person is frustrated that he is pressed to innovate."

Mencius 5A9 reads:

Wan Zhang asked, "Some say that Bo-li Xi sold himself to a keeper of cattle in Qin for five sheep skins, and tended his cattle to attract the attention of Duke Mo of Qin. Is this true?"

"No," said Mencius, "It is not. These were fabrications by people who had nothing better to do. Bo-li Xi was a native of Yu. Jin offered the jade of Qiu Ji and the horse of Qu in exchange for permission to send troops through the territory of Yu in order to attack Guo. Gongshi Qi advised against accepting the gift, but Bo-li Xi remained silent. He knew that the ruler of Yu was beyond advice and left for Qin. He was seventy then. If at that age he did not know that it was undignified to secure a chance to speak to Duke Mo of Qin through feeding cattle, could he be called 'wise'? Yet, could he be called 'unwise' when he remained silent, knowing that advice would be futile? Again, can he be said to be 'unwise' when, after being elevated to office in Qin, he decided to help Duke Mo, seeing in him a man of great achievement? When serving as prime minister of Qin, he was responsible for the distinction his prince attained in the Empire, and posterity has found him worthy of being remembered. Was this the achievement of a man of no ability? To sell oneself into slavery in order to help one's prince towards achievement is what even a self-respecting villager would not do. Are you saying that was the act of a good and wise man?"

In a posting to the online Confucius discussion list (9 March 2004), Thomas C. wrote that Mencius at 5A9 presents Bo-li Xi (Pai-li Hsi) as a "wise man" and a model for understanding Confucius, not only for his integrity but also for his ability to "adapt to changing circumstances with flexibility" (Thomas tc266@hotmail.com).

Case III. Shun as a Model of Human-heartedness and Wisdom

Mencius gives two portrayals of the sage king Shun that reflect the king's devotion to basic interpersonal ethics on the one hand and his flexibility and adaptability (*quan* 權) on the other. The basic ethical values in the early classical tradition were filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and fraternity (*ti* 悌). These were taken to be the roots of other interpersonal ethical concepts, culminating in human-heartedness (*ren* 仁).

At *Mencius* 7A35, Taoying asks:

"When Shun was Emperor and Gaoyao was the judge, if the Blind Man (Shun's father) killed a man, what was to be done?"

"The only thing to do was to apprehend him."

"In that case, wouldn't Shun try to stop it?"

"How could Shun stop it? Gaoyao had his authority from which he received the law."

"Then what would Shun have done?"

"Shun looked at casting off the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried his father off on his back and fled to the sea coast and lived there happily, never giving a further thought to the Empire."

Confucius expressed a similar sense of basic ethical values at 13.18:

The governor of the state of She said to Confucius, "In our village, there is a fellow nicknamed 'Straight-shooter.' When his father pilfered a head of sheep, he reported him to the authorities."

> Confucius replied, "In our village, those who are called 'straight' are quite different than this. A father will cover for his son, and a son for his father. Indeed, our sense of being 'straight' lies in such conduct."

(The Chinese nickname here is literally "Straight-Person" [*zhi-gong* 直躬], but since the Chinese expression for person *[gong]* used in this passage depicts a person [*shen* 身] on the left holding a bow [*gong* 弓] on the right, I have taken the liberty of rendering the expression as "Straight-Shooter.") According to the foregoing discussion, this person, having a weak or uncertain sense of basic ethical values, would have the shortcoming of adhering rigidly to a norm, standard, or artificially defined Mean, and thus be lacking in humility, flexibility, discretion, and, above all, wisdom.

Interestingly, Plato presents the priest Euthyphro as a "Straight-Shooter" who regards suing his father (for wrongful death in a case in which Euthyphro was not himself directly involved) to be an example of a "pious act," in the Platonic dialogue *Euthyphro.* For Socrates, such a suit would have been neither pious nor filial.

Mencius 7B6 reads: "When Shun lived on dried rice and wild vegetables, it was as though he was going to do this for the rest of his life. But when he became Emperor, clad in precious robes, playing on his lute, with the two daughters [of Yao] in attendance, it as though this was what he had been used to all of his life."

Notes

1 – See Gardner 1986 and 1990, and Chan 1967, chaps. 2 and 3, "The Essentials of Learning" and "The Investigation of Things," respectively. See also Thompson 2002a. The *Zhuzi yulei* also contains several sections devoted to learning and inquiry.

2 – While never claiming wisdom for himself, Confucius said that from age forty he was "not perplexed" (i.e., not of two minds) (2.4), which matched the definition he gave of *zhi* (9.29, 14.28). On wisdom and *ren,* see Case I above.

3 – There is much that we register in mind, whether observations or ruminations, that are recorded there but remain preverbal or only semiverbal. Generally, though, we are prepared to verbalize them on demand. When we are unable to verbalize an item, we tend to say we did not know it after all. Hence, verbalizability serves as an initial criterion of "knowing" (or, at least, "acquaintance").

4 – The Neo-Mohists mention this sense of knowing by drawing connections after introducing the term *lu* 慮 (to think, reflect), which they liken to "peering" or "seeking." Confucius used the term *si* 思 to indicate "thinking" or "reflecting." For Confucius, worthwhile thought or reflection should closely reflect one's experience and learning. One who attempts to act "wisely" without having taken the trouble to learn will tend to become dissipated (17.8). Mencius (4B.26) and the Daoists also criticize the exercise of unseasoned "wisdom" (cleverness) as not very cognizant of or attuned to the "natural tendencies" (*xing* 性) (Graham 1986, pp. 49–53).

5 – Harbsmeier (1993) makes the case that distinguishing between "seeing" (*bona fide* seeing) and "seeing as" (seeing one thing as another) was a key epistemological problem for early Chinese philosophers.

6 – In correspondence, Harbsmeier reports that in the *Guodian* 郭店 bamboo slips, the lower element of the graph for "wisdom" is "sun" 日 rather than "say" 曰, which would connote "illumination" more than "verbal affirmation."

7 – Confucius gave this account of true knowledge to Zilu, who was bold and impetuous. Zhu Xi opines that it was because of Zilu's tendency to press what he did not know as true that Confucius addressed this lesson to him in particular. (See also 17.23.)

8 – Tradition has it that Confucius' learning (teaching) did not reflect any single teacher. He admired the Way of the early Zhou kings and articulated his own sense of the Way (with an attendant set of virtues), based on his study and his perception of noble and base conduct that he observed in the people around him (19.22). This tells me that his teaching did not express an ideological truth but was more a reflection of his own nuanced sense of the Way and noble way of life. Zhu Xi comments:

> Know that "I studied below in order to comprehend above" was Confucius' account of his own reflective self-cultivation. . . . The deeper meaning of this lies beyond most people. Heaven alone knows its mystery. It could be said that among Confucius' students, only Zigong had the wisdom to comprehend it. . . . Unfortunately, it seems that he didn't comprehend it completely. . . . It could be said that the process of studying human affairs below then is (the way to) comprehend the *tianli* (natural patterning) above. But, if one just practices without observing, one will not be able to comprehend above. (*Sishu jizhu* 四書集註)

Zigong did not fully appreciate the role of mastering minor skills and arts. Indeed, the notion of *zhongyong* 中庸 (hitting the utmost propriety in the common situation) already affirms the unity of lower and upper, minor and major. Some other classical thinkers thought that, in some instances, skills can reflect a person's higher attunement. Zhuangzi intimates this idea in portraying skilled craftsmen, athletes, and people with special knacks as being particularly in tune with the Way in the sense that their talents and skills reflect and express their attunement with the natural pulse, patternings, and propensities of the Way (Graham 1981; Thompson 1988). Even Mencius comments: "A master carpenter or carriage-maker can pass on to another the rules of his craft, but he cannot make him *skillful*" (7B.5). That requires a not-directly-transferable inner attunement and discernment.

9 – Ames (1988), Ames and Hall (2001), Ames and Rosemont (1998), and Hall and Ames (1987) have defended a pragmatic reading of knowledge and wisdom for Confucius and the *Four Books*. I view Zhu Xi's notions of *yi* 義 (appropriateness) and *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 (inquiry) in a similar light (Thompson 1988 and 2002a, respectively). At the same time, Confucius and Zhu Xi stressed

that a propitious knowing *how* depends on a prescient knowing *that.* Zhu quotes Fan Zhongyuan's comment on 17.8: "Zilu was too bold in doing good. The reason for his deviations (from *zhong,* "hitting the mark") was that he *was unable to be fond enough of learning to realize it.* Therefore, the Master told him this, and mentioned being bold and firm, making good on one's word, and being frank in order to remedy Zilu's particular excesses" *(Sishu jizhu).* Varela also writes: "[S]uppleness reveals one of the key elements in the person who has cultivated his expertise, for his expertise contains the intelligent awareness that Mencius calls *[zhi]. One cannot overemphasize the importance of [the] learning dimension*" (Varela 1999, p. 31; italics added). Shun mentions that *yi* (sense of appropriateness) reflects one's personal cultivation and bent, while *zhi* involves more one's *adeptness at weighing a situation overall* in fashioning a suitable response (Shun 1997, p. 71). As an expression of *zhi,* however, the significance of *yi* broadens to what is appropriate from the broader perspective of the people, the community (6.22). Raphals, perhaps influenced by Xunzi's rhetoric, undervalues the role of learning and cultivation for Mencius. The idea of transformation or change for the better is implicit throughout the *Four Books.* Particularly striking is Confucius' pronouncement: "At one stroke Qi can be made into a Lu, and Lu, at one stroke, can be made to attain the Way" (6.24).

10 – Archery, for example, could represent one's skill in taking individual action, while charioteering could represent one's skill at orchestrating events. Archery and charioteering both were among the "Six Arts" (六藝) deemed essential in the cultivation of noble youth in ancient China.

11 – Zhu Xi in the *Zhuzi yulei,* chap. 24, devotes several pages to this passage, focusing on the term *quan,* which tends to go unnoticed in the scholarship. Importantly, Zhu says that one must have achieved the status of a worthy (*xianren* 賢人) to be qualified to exercise *quan.* He also incorporates the ideas of *yi* 義 (appropriateness) and *zhong* 中 (hitting the mark) in explaining the exercise of *quan*: "*Quan* [weighing, assessing] involves applying [one's cultivated sense of] *yi* with circumspection.... One weighs according to one's sense of appropriateness; thereupon, one hits the mark. *Yi* is like the balance or scale; *quan* is like the procedure of balancing/weighing something on that scale; while *zhong* is obtaining the thing's perfect balance."

12 – There was the recognition that even one's own heart was unfathomable. Zhu Xi treasured the following verse by his teacher Liu Zihui: "Man digs into the darkness of his self / To bring forth the pure light of mature wisdom" (Okada 1986, p. 208).

13 – The "heals" of his palms. This meant something like working one's fingers to the bone, even in foul conditions, and thus signified doing one's utmost, to the extent of going beyond the call of duty.

14 – See Needham's discussions (1956, pp. 199–200 and 478).

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