

Lecture 11

The Principal Issues in Wei and Jin Metaphysics, *Xuanxue*, and Their Metaphysical Content and Value

This series of lectures is intended to present a comprehensive account of the development of Chinese philosophy through the various periods so as to give us a basic understanding of the subject. Only then can we go on to discuss new questions that arose out of this philosophical development, or questions of our own period that deserve our attention, or questions that rose out of contacts with the West. These are all purely philosophical questions. Chinese philosophy of course may have new developments, but making arbitrary groundless claims about them cannot be treated as a discussion of new developments. If we wish to propose new interpretations or trace new questions, we must first go into the subject and obtain an objective understanding of it. We will only be able to discern a new development if we have a grasp of its antecedents. So it is necessary for me to give you a basic understanding of Chinese philosophy.

Hegel once said that philosophy is but the history of philosophy. The whole history of Western philosophy is simply made out of one question followed by another and their mutual criticism and evaluation. So if you do not understand the history of philosophy you will never understand philosophy. Perhaps this is an overstatement, but it is basically true. On the face of it, Western philosophers seem to enjoy building new systems, as if they are not simply continuing the work of their forebears. In fact, all those questions already existed, and all they are doing is proposing new answers or new interpretations. That is what development consists of, so those systems are not constructed in a vacuum.

For example, Russell continued the tradition of English empiricism. His logic, derived from and consolidating Leibniz and those who came after him, thus made its appearance in the *Principia Mathematica* [1910-13] as a complete system. And to take another example, Kant's critical philosophy. His books rarely quote other authors, as if their thoughts are completely new. In fact his questions are directed at Plato, Leibniz, and Hume, Plato representing traditional classical philosophy, Leibniz representing rationalism, and Hume representing English empiricism. And Kant is directed at the

existing questions in these philosophers. Since Kant in his discussions uses the method of logic and not of textual criticism, and looks at the questions rather than at the literary text, he gives the impression of presenting a brand-new philosophy. But in fact he too is presenting new interpretations and new answers to past questions.

Likewise in Chinese philosophy. After Confucius, Mencius delved deeply into the concepts of Confucius and took a step forward. He is therefore a development of Confucius. Thus Mencius himself admitted that he "privately learned from Confucius"¹ and did not say that he "privately learned from Lao Zi." Zhuang Zi is a development of Lao Zi. The Song and Ming Confucians [Neo-Confucians] were a development of the pre-Qin Confucians. People generally think of the Song and Ming Confucians as coming from Buddhism and Daoism, which is wrong. The Song and Ming Confucians delved deeply into the existing thought, and after understanding the fundamental concepts of the pre-Qin Confucian classics—the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Great Learning*—pressed forward. Thus we can say that their thought was new but did not emerge from a vacuum. The Song and Ming Confucians had a grasp of the essentials of the classics, and although their interpretation was not always the proper one, neither was it completely wrong. A modern-day reading of the classics will not necessarily be better than theirs, for each succeeding generation will be further away from the source. People of the present do not have an existential resonance with the learning of the past, and when on top of this you throw in a mish-mash of new concepts, it will become even more difficult to understand the past. The crux of whether there is an understanding lies in whether there is an existential resonance, whether there is a rapport. For example, in the beginning of the Song period, the philosophical climate had turned around so that when Zhou Lianxi [1017-1073] discussed *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *Yijing* Commentaries he was able to hit the mark right a way. That was because there was rapport, there was an existential resonance. All of this is to remind you that only after an objective understanding has been attained can there be new questions and new developments.

Last time we talked about the School of Names, which completed our discussion of the philosophy of the pre-Qin period [pre-255 BCE]. Following the pre-Qin period are the two Han dynasties [BCE 206-221 CE]. However, since the scriptural scholarship

[*jingxue*, study of the classics] of the Two Han contained relatively few philosophical questions, we shall pass over it. In this lecture we will look at the metaphysics [*xuanxue* 玄學, literally “Dark Learning”, Neo-Daoism], of the Wei and Jin period [CE 220-420]. Our main goal will be to consider: First, what were the principal issues of the metaphysics of the Wei-Jin period? Second, what is the principal value and contribution of Wei-Jin metaphysics [*xuanxue*]? Previously I lectured for a year on Wei-Jin *Xuan* metaphysics so I will only discuss these two questions this time and give you a brief overview.²

The Wei-Jin period was not a long one, nor were the Wei-Jin metaphysical [*xuanxue*] texts as numerous as the texts of Buddhism or Song-Ming Confucianism [i.e., Neo-Confucianism]. Nonetheless it represents an important stage in the history of Chinese thought. What Wei-Jin metaphysics sought to promote was Daoism and a Daoist revival. The Sui and Tang period [605-907] imbibed Buddhism and sought to promote Buddhism, while the Song-Ming [960-1127, 1368-1644] period sought to promote Confucianism, all of which represented important stages in Chinese intellectual history. Chinese philosophy is concerned essentially with the Three Teachings, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

The individuals known as “*mingshi*”³ are a unique phenomenon of the Wei-Jin period. The principal players of the pre-Qin period are the “*zhuzi baijia*” [the various philosophers and the hundred schools]. Peculiar to the Wei-Jin period are a breed of men known as *mingshi* [literally “Gentlemen of Note,” noted for their untrammelled style and spirit and their Pure Conversation]. The Confucians of the Song-Ming period are called *lixuejia* [School of Reason-Principle Learning or Neo-Confucians, also translated Rationalists]. In Buddhism the principal players are the *senglü* and *heshang* or monks. In each period the principal players are called by different names, which are determined by the content of their teachings.

The *mingshi* represent a very special breed who express the creativity of the period and are a very amusing group. Being an inevitable product of that age, there was a genuineness about them, and men like them were never again to appear in subsequent ages. Although the *mingshi* of that era were by no means great men, they were nevertheless inimitable.

Now what exactly is a *mingshi*? Generally speaking and based on the development of their style, a *mingshi* had first of all to be able to engage in "Pure Conversation" [*qingtan*]. Pure Conversation did not simply mean pleasantly passing the time in conversation. It had to have a specific content, which meant that the talk had to be about the *sanxuan* 三玄 [Three Obscurities, Three Metaphysical Subjects] of *Lao Zi*, *Zhuang Zi*, and *Yi Jing* [Lao, Zhuang, Yi]. There was also a specific manner in which Pure Conversation was conducted. One did not talk in a scholarly or pedantic fashion. In the terminology of the age, one had to "*tanyan weizhong* 談言微中" [make a point subtly in conversation, be witty]. *Tanyan weizhong* meant that one had to use a few simple phrases to make a point aptly and elegantly. Pure Conversation was also attended by specific postures. Most of the *mingshi* liked to engage in Pure Conversation holding a whisk (duster) in the hand, which was a matter of stylishness. Later, stylishness developed into a search for elegance in conversation. Dullness in conversation and a repugnant countenance were to the *mingshi* intolerable. Hence they also stressed beauty of appearance, which is to say they stressed beauty. Only he whose conversation could meet these standards in content, manner, and style could be called a *mingshi*.

The *mingshi* was a standard of value during that era, particularly the Eastern Jin [317-420] period. Only those who qualified as *mingshi* could be counted the aristocrats of that era. And only they could associate with and become candidates for marriage with the contemporary aristocracy. However, the *mingshi* was a personal expression. *Mingshi*-hood was a standard of value for one's personal status in society. Within the families of those *mingshi*, Confucian propriety and morality [*lijiao*, literally "ritualist teaching"] still governed family rules and family tradition. Here then arose a conflict: The Confucian ethos has moral self-cultivation as its foundation, as in "From the Son of heaven to the commoner, they all have moral cultivation as their foundation."⁴ But since the *mingshi* did not cultivate themselves morally, how could they teach others to cultivate themselves morally? Thus we can see that the strict family rules and family traditions only adhered to external rites and customs and not to the spirit of Confucian *lijiao* [propriety and morality]. They only adhered to the appearance of the ritual system. Lacking was the spirit of the system, for the spirit of the era rested with the *mingshi*. There was a fundamental conflict here, a conflict involving life itself.

Beginning from the Wei-Jin period [220-420], a new concept emerged in Chinese society, the concept of *mendi* [social pedigree]. *Mendi* referred to the aristocracy. This concept of social pedigree continued its hold on men's minds to the extent that later on in the Tang dynasty [618-907] even the emperor Tang Taizong [r.627-650] felt inferior to several of the great families of the time. The concept of *mendi* did not appear prior to the Wei-Jin period. Emperor Gaozu [206-194 BCE] of the Han dynasty, who rose to the throne from the position of a commoner, appointed his ministers through a system of selection and recommendation of the deserving. In the turbulence of the Wei-Jin period, this system fell into disrepair, as a result of which it was replaced by the system of "nine grades of the upright" [*jiupin zhongzheng*]. This gradually evolved into the concept of *mendi*, out of which a new aristocracy was formed. *Mendi* represented a value system, just as *mingshi* and Pure Conversation represented a kind of value system.

We can use another example to explain "*tanyan weizhong*" [making a point with subtlety]. Once Wang Yan 王衍 asked Ruan Xiu 阮修: "The Sage [Confucius] talks about *mingjiao* [orthodox Confucian teachings], while Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi talk about *ziran* [self-so, being natural]. What is the difference between *mingjiao* and *ziran*?" If we were to answer in the scholarly way by adducing evidence, that would not be Pure Conversation. Ruan Xiu answered aptly in three simple words: "*Jiang wu tong* 將無同" [In Nothing same, or, They are the same in Nothing]. This was a great delight to Wang Yan, who immediately made him a "*yuan*" [administrator]. This is the famous story known as "the three-word administrator."⁵ The three words "*jiang wu tong*" [In Nothing same] on the one hand make no assertion that Confucian propriety and morality and Taoist naturalness are necessarily the same, and on the other hand neither do they assert that the two are necessarily not the same; in other words they mean that *mingjiao* and *ziran* are not necessarily contradictory. This sort of repartee is a kind of sly humor. This is not the language of science or logic, which is why Mr. Tang Junyi [1909-1978] calls it a heuristic language, a very good description, as it is a language that hints at rather than asserts.

As to the question of Confucian propriety and morality and Taoist spontaneity, the lives of individuals in the Wei-Jin period show that in some individuals the two are contradictory while in others the two are not contradictory. For instance, Ruan Ji [210-

263] said: “How could propriety [*li*], have been established for me?”⁶ That shows that the two are in conflict. Then there was Yue Guang 樂廣 [d.304] who said: “Propriety contains its own joys. Why do they have to do that?”⁷ That shows that the two are not in conflict. “*Jiang wu tong*” [In Nothing same] hints at the latter state. Only those who engaged in Pure Conversation in this fashion could be considered *mingshi*, a type of personality that was never again to appear in later ages. The self-proclaimed *mingshi* of the late Qing [1644-1911] and early Republic [1912-] era are really spurious *mingshi*, far too inferior to the *mingshi* of the Wei-Jin period. Each age has its own unique type of individual. For as the saying goes,

Each age produces its own men of genius,
Who each dazzles for several hundred years.
[*Jiangshan dai you cairen chu* 江山代有才人出,
Ge ling fengsao shubai nian 各領風騷數百年.]

The product of the Wei-Jin period was the *mingshi*, who although not rising to the loftiest state, yet possessed authenticity, and their lives contained a certain inevitability. From the perspective of the Confucian and judged by the ultimate vision of man’s life, there was behind the facade of the *mingshi* considerable desolation and pathos. Life not being simple and smooth, these *mingshi* all met tragic ends. Ruan Ji was the only one who managed to hold on. Most of the others were executed and thus came to a bad end. Because Wang Bi [226-249] was still too young, he did not get dragged into the political vortex. Otherwise he too would hardly have escaped the same fate. This has led me to the thought that the intellectuals of China have their own destiny. Only through their own vigilance and exertions will they be able to preserve their proper destiny and fulfill their own nature. They must not only look to others for understanding and tolerance.

The antecedent of Pure Conversation [*qingtan*] was the Pure Discussion [*qingyi*] of the latter part of the Eastern Han [CE 25-221] dynasty. Pure Conversation and Pure Discussion were different in that each reflected a different age. In Pure Discussion, scholars discussed and criticized politics, representing public opinion. This later led to the Party Proscription Calamity [*danggu zhi hu*]. Because the intellectuals’ participation in politics brought about the proscription of political parties and its tragic denouement, later intellectuals dared not criticize contemporary politics, and as a result developed Pure

Conversation, whose content consisted of the *sanxuan* [three metaphysical subjects]. For the moment we will not get involved with such extraneous issues as the influence of Pure Conversation on society and politics, but will simply look at the principal issues of Wei-Jin *xuanxue*-type of metaphysics itself, as well as its value and contribution.

From an objective intellectual point of view, Wei-Jin metaphysics had a principal topic, namely the issue of “*huitong Kong-Lao*” [reconciling Confucius and Lao Zi]. Wei-Jin was a period that propagated Daoism, and philosophical discussion took Lao Zi [6th ? cent. BCE] and Zhuang Zi [369?-286? BCE] as its norm. Nevertheless, Confucius’s position was not erased, which is to say that the Sage’s position was already established by that time and could not be denied. This, however, led to a problem, which was the aforementioned apparent conflict between Taoist spontaneity [naturalness, freedom] and Confucian propriety and morality. Since Lao-Zhuang [Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi] stressed freedom and Confucianism stressed propriety and morality, this was then the problem of a conflict between Confucianism and Daoism. This was an objective issue in intellectual history, one which developed at this stage of intellectual history. Once this issue emerged, it could not be ignored, and thus the problem of how to reconcile Confucianism and Daoism became the principal issue.

Since Lao-Zhuang became the philosophical standard and the position of the Sage could not be denied by anyone, how then was the position of the Sage as Sage [*shengren*] to be explained? According to the general understanding, the Sage occupied the position of the Sage by virtue of his ability to manifest Dao in his own person. “The Sage” is an honorific, an appellation for someone possessing virtue. Only someone who manifests Dao in his own life, someone who has reached the state where “the Heavenly Principle circulates,” can be counted a sage [*shengren*]. If so, then what is the “Dao” that the Sage realizes in his own person? Men of the Wei-Jin period held that this Dao was none other than the Dao taught by Lao-Zhuang. This then immediately afforded an opportunity to reconcile the conflict between Confucius and Lao Zi, and this is where the Wei-Jin philosophers took their cue. In this way, the reason the Sage was a sage lay in the fact that he could fully manifest in his life the “Dao” taught by Lao-Zhuang.

This kind of integration started with Wang Bi. Pei Hui裴徽 once asked Wang Bi why, since Dao is *wu* [Nothing, Non-being], the Sage did not teach it whereas Lao Zi on

the other hand stressed it particularly? Wang Bi gave an answer that was both very clear and very clever. Wang Bi said: “The Sage embodied and realized *wu* [Nothing, Non-being, Dao] and since *wu* cannot be explained, he did not speak about it. Lao Zi embodied *you* [Being] and so he talked tirelessly of that in which he was deficient.”⁸ “The Sage embodied *wu* [*ti wu* 體無]” means that the Sage realized *wu* in his life. *Ti* means realized and manifested, in other words, practiced in his person. It is the *ti* of “*ti er you zhi* 體而有有之” [personally practice and possess it]. The *ti* of the later Buddhist concept of “*ti fa kong* 體法空” [embody the emptiness of dharmas] also derives from this meaning. “Nothing” [*wu*] must be personally realized and not verbally explicated, and therefore the Sage did not speak of it. And what about Lao Zi? By the remark that “Lao Zi embodied *you*” [Being], Wang Bi means that Lao Zi is still in the state of Being [immanence, i.e., in the phenomenal, earthly world] and is unable to manifest the state of Nothing [transcendence, transcending the earthly world]. This shows that Wang Bi’s valuation of Lao Zi is far lower than his valuation of Confucius. Lao Zi can only explain Nothing and explains it quite correctly. But in the discipline of practising it, he is still in the state of Being, which means he is still unable to reach the state of dissolving it [*hua* 化, transcending the phenomenal earthly world]. As the saying goes,

To be great and dissolving-transcending it [*hua* 化] is called sagely,

To be sagely and unfathomable is called godly.⁹

大而化之之謂聖，

聖而不可知之之謂神。

One who has attained the state of being “great and dissolving-transcending it” is no longer in the state of “Being.”

What do we mean by “in the state of Being”? Zhuang Zi said: “Fishes forget one another in stream and lake, men forget one another in the art of Dao. [魚相忘乎江湖，人相忘乎道術]”¹⁰ Only when man’s mind and soul is in its original non-discriminating [*hunran* 渾然] state of forgetfulness [transcending all dualities, comparisons, and calculations such as self/other, big/small, long/short, so/not-so, good/bad, beautiful/ugly, and returning to contentment in oneself] will the natural springs of action [*tianji* 天機] and the natural direction [*tianqu* 天趣, natural bent] emerge. That is why Zhuang Zi also

said: “When one’s infatuation and desire are deep, one’s innate nature is shallow [其善欲深者，其天機淺].”¹¹ Not only this, but one whose machinating mind [*jixin*機心] is strong is also weakened in the innate nature. To be always in the midst of anxious calculation is a painful thing, and one has to transcend it sometimes so that one may rise above the state of self-consciousness. To transcend self-consciousness does not mean that one is not self-conscious but that it is a state of dissolving and transcendence [*hua*]. Not having reached the state of dissolving means that one has not yet reached the state of the innate nature and natural tendency, which means that one cannot as yet *xiangwang* 相忘 [be forgetful of others]. In one sense, the Chinese are the most human-relations-bound of all people, one with the most difficulty in being forgetful of others. To be strongly bound by human relations makes one feel warm and cosy to be sure, but it is also at times irksome. Zhuang Zi believed that if Dao prevails in the land, it will be possible for people to be forgetful of one another. But when there is no Dao in society, then people will seek their own kind and join with their own party. Then unable to forget one another, they will live in pain. However, if being strongly bound by human relations like the Chinese is irksome, then does it mean that Western people, who give little heed to human relations, are in a state of “forgetting others”? You will be mistaken if you think this is so. This kind of comparison is what Buddhists call “*xiangsi fa liu*相似法流” [dharma of resemblance], an error. Since both are incorrect, it goes to show that “Men are forgetful of one another in the art of Dao” is a very lofty mental state. The ordinary person can sometimes manifest this state, as if he has Dao, but as soon as motives of interest enter in, it will be impossible to be forgetful of others, and this will be a state of “unenlightenment” [*wuming*]. As long as unenlightenment is not eradicated, Nothing will not be able to emerge, and that person will not qualify as a sage. That is why Wang Bi said that “Lao Zi is one who is in the state of Being”, which means that Lao Zi has not ceased to be unenlightened, and has not yet reached the state of Nothing, of forgetting others. Therefore he “talks tirelessly about that in which he is deficient.” It is because he is deficient that he stresses it, which is typical of human nature.

It is essentially with these brief words that Wang Bi integrates Confucius and Lao Zi. Since only the Sage can manifest Dao, the Sage is a person of the first rank. In the

"Table of Men of Past and Present [*gujin renwu biao* 古今人物表]" of the *Han Shu* [*History of the Han Dynasty*], men through the ages are divided into nine grades, with the Sage belonging to the first grade and Lao Zi belonging to the fourth grade.¹² This shows us that although the Wei-Jin period promoted Daoism, it by no means denied the position of the Sage. This was how the Sage was viewed in every period of Chinese history.

This leads to yet another concept, namely the concept of "Perfect Teaching" [*yuan jiao*, Perfect Doctrine]. If the Sage manifested Nothing [*wu*] without talking about it, then how did he manifest it? He manifested Nothing in his everyday practical life and not by going into the deep mountains and secluding himself. But was not "Being" [*you*] in his everyday life? Where would "Nothing" [*wu*] be? Nothing was in the midst of it, Dao was in the midst of it. Using the terminology of the time, the practical everyday life was *ji* 迹 tracks, while Nothing was *ben* 本, ground. This then is the Theory of Tracks and Ground [*jiben lun* 迹本論]. This was a new concept introduced by the Wei-Jin period. The theory of tracks and ground originated with Wang Bi and prevailed for a very long time, extending to the period of the Northern [386-535] and Southern [420-589] dynasties. Wang Bi used this theory to reconcile the contradictions between Confucianism and Daoism.

On the surface, the life of the Sage consisted completely of tracks. If there were any signs of seclusion, it was only in the earliest stage of spiritual cultivation. When he reached the true state of sageliness, his life was completely inseparable from practical existence. But although inseparable from tracks, he was able to take Nothing as his grounding, as a result of which he succeeded in putting his life on a harmonious and solid footing. His whole life being inseparable from tracks and immersed in tracks is what the Daoists call *wu bu wei* 無不為 [nothing not done, i.e., doing everything]. On the other hand, nothing not done has to have *wu wei* [doing nothing (against one's nature)] as its grounding, in other words, *wu wei er wu bu wei* 無為而無不為 [doing nothing yet doing everything], namely Nothing serving as the grounding for practical life. Generally men have only tracks but no ground, as a result of which they are ordinary men and not sages. Herein is hidden the concept of Perfect Teaching. Later on, the Perfect Teaching [*yuanjiao*] of Buddhism also derives from this concept, which is called "the perfection of

tracks and ground” [*jiben yuan* 迹本圓]. In Guo Xiang [d.312 CE]’s annotation of *Zhuang Zi* he talks about *jiming* 迹冥 [*ji*, tracks, the manifest, or propriety and morality; and *ming*, the unseen, or the hidden agreement with Dao],¹³ which also means the same thing.

In Guo Xiang’s annotation of *Zhuang Zi*, who represents *jiming yuanrong* 迹冥圓融 [*ji*, tracks, the manifest, and *ming*, the hidden, perfectly dissolved and fused]? It is Emperor Yao [legendary sage-king, 3rd ? millennium BCE].¹⁴ Yao represents Perfect Teaching [wherein the worldly life and the spiritual life, or transcendence, are fused], the highest model of the human being, the sage. Xu You 許由, Wu Guang 務光¹⁵ and others do not represent the highest state. Most people when they read the "Roaming" [*Xiaoyao you*] chapter in *Zhuang Zi* believe that Zhuang Zi’s intention is to exhalt Xu You. In fact Xu You does not make the mark; he can only qualify as Hinayana [the smaller vehicle in Buddhism], a biased type, biased towards the *ming* 冥 [hidden, Nothing, transcendent, side]. Only Yao can represent the state of Perfect Teaching [fusing immanence, or being in this world, and transcendence, being in a transcendent world].

Then there is the concept of “*tian xing*天刑” [heavenly punishment] mentioned in the "Symbols of Virtue Fulfilled” [*De Chong Fu*] chapter.¹⁶ And in *Zhuang Zi*'s the "Great Ancestral Teacher” [*Da Zongshi*] chapter Confucius calls himself “a victim of heaven” [*tian zhi luming* 天刑戮民].¹⁷ ” Who can be released whom heaven punishes?” is looking at Confucius from the point of view of Shushan Wuzhi 叔山無趾. Shushan Wuzhi belonged to the biased and extreme type of Daoism. Based on this, it would still be difficult to determine whether Zhuang Zi was using the model of Perfect Teaching to exhalt the Sage. At the least, Guo Xiang’s annotation of *Zhuang Zi* went a step further by introducing the concept and state of Perfect Teaching. This represented a new development, opening up a new philosophical vista. This development cannot be termed an error, nor did it violate the original meaning of Daoism, for Lao Zi also spoke of “*he guang tong chen* 和光同塵” [merge its glare, blend with its dust].¹⁸ Chinese philosophy is always both transcendent and immanent, with the two integrated, which is the mode of Perfect Teaching.

Reconciling the contradictions between Confucius and Lao Zi by means of the theory of tracks and grounding and the mode of Perfect Teaching was the principal philosophical issue of the Wei-Jin period. From the perspective of intellectual history, there was indeed at the time the question of whether Confucianism and Daoism were in conflict. And once this question emerged it could not be ignored, and so it became a major issue. For example, in the Southern and Northern dynasties period [420-589] and the Sui-Tang period [589-907] the principal issue was the absorption of Buddhism. To the Confucians of the Song-Ming [960-1644] period the issue was how to confront Buddhism and Daoism and propagate Confucianism, while in our own period the question is how we should integrate Chinese culture with Western culture. Each is the principal issue of its period.

From here we can go a step further and look at the contribution of Wei-Jin *xuanxue* [Dark Learning, Neo-Daoism]. The content of *xuanxue* consists of the metaphysical principles of Daoism. The contribution of Wei-Jin metaphysics was to develop the metaphysical principles [*xuanli* 玄理, Dark, or obscure, profound principles] of Daoism one step further. Intellectually, *xuanli* represent a very high state. To understand their contribution, we must first of all have a correct understanding of these principles and make a careful analysis of them.

The present age is fond of talking about analysis, but no matter what analytical method we use we must first grasp two basic principles: First, no matter whether we agree with it or not, we must first clearly analyze the original meaning of the text in order to arrive at a correct understanding of it. Second, if those questions are not altogether vacuous and absurd, then our analysis must not ultimately analyze away the question. In general British and American scholars of analytic philosophy do not observe these two conditions, with the result that most of them end up by analyzing away the question.

For example, ever since Wittgenstein, the philosophers who analyze language like to use the analysis of solipsism as an example (the solipsism centered on the neural system), then drawing the conclusion that solipsism is meaningless. This is to analyze away the question. Is solipsism indeed meaningless? Russell once said that all philosophy is “philosophy under a hat.” All those particulars that are perceived by us are inseparable from the egocentric. Recent epistemology has taken this as its point of

departure, focusing on how those particulars emerging from the egocentric acquire objectivity, how they can be externalized, objectified. This is also the question dealt with in Kant's epistemology. His discussion of the category is to enable subjective representations to involve the object. Russell's realism also begins with this question, a very important one in epistemology. Kant and Russell each have a different method of analysis, and different answers, but they did not cancel out the question, they did not analyze away the question. If the question is to be analyzed away, then why do we need the question at all?

The questions of Chinese philosophy are also different from the speculative questions in Western philosophy. A speculative question may be entirely wrong, while the subjects of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism are all intensional truths. An intensional truth cannot be totally wrong. Speculative questions can easily produce illusions. For example, the antinomy criticized by Kant consists of a number of illusions. But Kant still maintains that such illusions are natural and unavoidable, and therefore they must always be clarified by critical philosophy.¹⁹ Such illusions are rare in Chinese philosophy. You may say that you do not understand Confucius's *ren* [humanity] and Lao Zi's *wu* [Nothing, Non-Being] at all, but you cannot say they are illusions. Thus in analyzing these questions, we should analyze and define them objectively and correctly, and we must not analyze away the question.

I am not against analysis, and I am even in favor of everyone having some training in analysis. But we should not merely promote analysis, exhalt analysis. Analysis is a kind of work that has to be done. Questions should be discussed and analyzed. Russell's *Principia Mathematica* deals solidly with questions and is not just propaganda or promotion. Analysis is not something that is easy. It requires solid discipline. When appropriately employed, analysis is a great aid in dealing with questions. The most difficult kind of analysis is Kant's critical analytic. Russell, following the tradition of Leibniz, stressed logical analytic, which is comparatively easier.

With this kind of tradition behind them, the British know how to analyze and how to do it fastidiously. This represents the British character. To this manner of analysis I have given a name, "delicate and clever" [*xianqiao* 纖巧]. On the positive side, it is indeed skilful, like using a fine knife to carve wood, where arduous carving produces

something very delicate, but something that at the slightest touch can break into pieces and disappear. So from another side, something so extremely fine will produce problems. That is why I prefer not to take this road, preferring rather the Kantian analysis of the eighteenth century, which won't get us into trouble.

Although the analytic philosophers maintain that analysis is only a method and does not espouse any doctrine, in fact it is a doctrine in itself. Behind it stands a constraint, namely the teaching, doctrine, they espouse. That is why the result of their analysis is either the distortion of the original meaning, or the disappearance of the question. Whenever they analyze a few statements by Hegel, they will usually make Hegel the object of their derision. But are Hegel's statements indeed meaningless? That sort of attitude is wrong, where they do not seek an objective understanding but first jump to the conclusion that the other position is meaningless, where they have turned their subjective lack of understanding into objective meaninglessness. This is just illogical, and is simply not analytic. Wittgenstein's thought was likewise exquisitely clever. Highly gifted in logic and exceptionally strong in philosophical intuition, he was often capable of making incisive statements, but all the same he does not impress one as a great philosopher. This sort of analytic philosophy has its allures, however, and once you are seduced, it will not be easy to shake off its charms. All the same, a solid training in analysis is good and should be undertaken.

The trend these days [1978] is to show the delicate and clever. If philosophy wishes to lead the age, it should not roll along with it. Rather, it should discover its flaws and make corrections. For Chinese philosophy to produce new developments, it must first obtain a correct understanding of the issues, and a proper understanding calls for a thorough analysis, but without analyzing away the issues. If we do this step by step, new questions will arise naturally, for new questions do not rise out of a vacuum.

With respect to *xuan* metaphysical principles, they are *xuan* principles when looked at objectively, but when looked at subjectively they are metaphysical wisdom. *Xuanli* and *xuanzhi* [metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom] are inseparable. The wisdom in *xuanli* is none other than *xuanzhi*. This is the unique contribution of Daoism. From here we can go on to look at the question of integrating Confucianism and Daoism.

As previously mentioned, Yue Guang said: “There is joy within propriety and morality itself; why do they have to do that? [名教之內自有樂地，何必乃桷。]” This statement seems to have reconciled the contradictions between naturalness [*ziran*, spontaneity, freedom] on the one hand and propriety and morality [*mingjiao*] on the other, but if we look closer, we will see that it really cannot integrate the two, for there is a hidden contradiction here. Likewise with “*Jiang wu tong*” [they are the same in Nothing]. For “*wu*” [Nothing, without] is common to both, and can be explained by either school. To use *wu* to integrate the two is passable but not complete. The Sage has also said: “When does heaven ever speak? The four seasons revolve, the myriad things are born. When does heaven ever speak?”²⁰ He also said: “I shall be without [*wu*] surmise, without insistence on certainty, without inflexibility, without ego [毋意，毋必，毋固，毋我].”²¹ The *Book of History* [*Shu Jing*] says: “Without [*wu*] leaning and slanting, without contriving to love good... without contriving to hate evil. Without bias, without partiality, the Way of the King is wide and open. Without bias and without partiality, the Way of the King is level and smooth. [無偏無陂。 。 。 。 無有作好。 。 。 。 無有作惡。 。 。 。 無偏無黨，王道蕩蕩，無黨無偏，王道平平。].”²² The *Shijing* [*Book of Poetry*] says: “The heaven above carries all without [*wu*] sound or smell. [上天之載，無聲無臭。]”²³ All of which shows that Confucianism can also discuss *wu*, but *wu* cannot exhaust the Sage’s Way [Dao]. Since both schools can discuss *wu*, I shall use a Buddhist term to describe *wu* as a common principle, a “shared dharma” [*gongfa*]. God may also be explained by means of *wu* [Nothing], but God is not *wu*. Confucianism can also discuss *wu*, but *wu* is not the substance of Confucianism. Not only this, but even Buddha-womb [Ch. Rulai zang, Skt.*tathagatagarbha*, womb, embryo, of Buddhahood] and Brahman can similarly be explained by means of *wu*. From this we may see that *wu* has no unique definition or determination. Hence it is common, and therefore we call it a “common principle.”

The ontological substance of Confucianism is “*ren*” [humanity, humaneness]. Nothing [*wu*] is a spiritual state [*jingjie* 境界, vision] in which *ren* is manifested. Clearly this is a question with two levels. *Ren* pertains to the substance, ontological level, and *wu* to the functional [soteriological] level. These two levels must not be confused. Daoism’s

strength lies in the functional level. It has fully elaborated on the principles on this level without touching upon other questions. This is the basis of the school of thought and its distinctive character. That is why I have often said that in a certain sense Daoism is strong in philosophical flavor and weak in doctrinal flavor. In philosophy universality is stressed, and the questions posed by Daoism has this kind of universality, which is why we say that it is strong in philosophical flavor. But since it is universal and shared or common, then we cannot use it to integrate it with Confucianism, for it would not resolve the issue.

Therefore the question has two levels: the [ontological] substance-level question is the warp, and the functional-level question is the woof. Both levels are present in Confucianism, whereas only the functional level question or the woof is present in Daoism. Daoist metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom both appear on the functional level. Questions on the [ontological] substance-level cannot be *xuan* [dark, profound, mysterious] and cannot contain paradoxes [*diaogui*],²⁴ for the ontological-being level is concerned with objective-reality principles. Cheng Yichuan[1033-1108] and Zhu Zi [Zhu Xi, 1130-1200] both said: “There is nothing more real than *li* 理 [reason, Principle, Universal Truth] in the world [天下無實於理者].” The metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom represented in paradoxes are all expressed on the functional level. The statements of the Chan [Zen] sect of Buddhism can express both levels, for example, “It is [*ji* 即] the mind that is Buddha” [*ji xin shi fo* 即心是佛] points to the ontological level, while “Not having a mind is Dao” [*wu xin wei dao* 無心為道] points to the functional level, to *prajñā*-wisdom. All paradox in Buddhism is expressed in *prajñā* wisdom. The Emptiness principles [*kong li* 空理, the teaching that phenomena are empty of ontological substance] of Buddhism are in themselves not metaphysical principles, but the reasoning that expresses *prajñā*-wisdom is metaphysical principles. Since Daoism only emphasizes the aspect of *xuan* metaphysical principles [*xuan li*] and *xuan* metaphysical wisdom [*xuanzhi*], its main contribution also lies in its introduction of the mental state on the functional level. The metaphysical principles expressed in paradoxes are very striking in *Zhuang Zi*, namely in the so-called “outlandish theories, profligate statements, and capricious terms 謬悠之說，荒唐之言，無端崖之辭.”²⁵ The

prajñā-wisdom of Buddhism is also expressed in paradoxes, and also belongs to reasoning on this level. *Prajñā* is a common principle to be acknowledged by both Mahayana and Hinayana, and there are distinctions of higher and lower mental states. In this sense, the metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom that are peculiar to Daoism are also a common dharma. Thus after Daoism was promoted through Wei-Jin *xuan* metaphysics, *xuan xue*, Chinese philosophers were immediately able to accept Buddhism, the first to be accepted being the metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom of *prajñā*.

As to method of expression, *xuanli* and *xuanzhi* and *prajñā* are all common dharmas, belonging to the functional [soteriological] level of “Not having a mind is Dao.” In the terminology of the Wei-Jin period, it is called “*jiming yuan* 迹冥圓” [the perfection of the manifest and the hidden]. *Ming* 冥 [unseen, hidden] is the aspect of *wu wei* [without doing, without contriving]. The aspect of *wu bu wei* [nothing not done, doing everything] is the aspect of tracks, the manifest. Using the terminology of the *prajñā* sūtras [Wisdom sūtras], it is “Not jeopardizing the Provisional Names [*jiaming* 假名, also False Names, things of the phenomenal, sensible, world] and speaking of the Real Character [*shixiang* 實相, realness, reality] of dharmas.”²⁶ Real Character [*shixiang*] refers to the unseen ground [*ming*]; and “not jeopardizing the Provisional Names” refers to tracks [*ji*]. The Daoist contribution lies in fully developing the perfect fusing [*yuanrong* 圓融] of this *jiming* [the manifest and the hidden]. It is necessary that we squarely confront this contribution on the functional level, and by doing this we will have exceeded the traditional attitude. The Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties were unable to solidly face this *xuanli* and *xuanzhi* of perfect fusing, and of course they also opposed the *prajñā*-wisdom of Buddhism, with the result that they looked upon it as heresy. Today if we are able to squarely face the contribution of Wei-Jin philosophy, namely the Daoist contribution, then we need not adopt this attitude. (See Lecture 7 on the question of the two levels.)

From the method of expressing Daoist metaphysical principles and metaphysical wisdom and the wisdom of Buddhist *prajñā*, a new question emerges, namely the question of analytical [*fenjie* 分解] discourse and non-analytical discourse. If we wish to

analyze Chinese philosophy, we should also understand this question. Generally speaking, all of Western philosophy is expressed analytically, whatever the type of analysis, whether it be critical analysis, logical analysis, or linguistic analysis. Ever since Plato, Western philosophy has stressed the analytic, with the “non-analytic” that I am talking about here appearing rarely. In China, it was the Daoist Zhuang Zi who made a formal allusion to the question of analytical discourse and non-analytical discourse. Lao Zi still belonged to the analytical mode. In Buddhism, Śākyamuni Buddha in the beginning taught in the analytic mode, and called it discriminating or differentiating discourse [*fenbie shuo* 分別說 or *chabie shuo* 差別說]. But at a certain stage it was necessary to teach through the non-analytical method, and consequently Buddhism formally introduced the question of analytical discourse [*fenbie shuo*] and non-analytical discourse [*fei fenbie shuo*]. This was the Buddhist contribution. The non-analytical mode of expression as found in *Zhuang Zi* and Buddhism simply does not appear in Western philosophy. That is why the contribution of Chinese philosophy to this area is larger, whereas the contribution of Western philosophy is larger in the analytical area. Although Hegel adopts the dialectical method and not the analytical method, the process in which he demonstrates his dialectic is expressed in the analytical mode. This is still far different from the non-analytical mode expressed in *Zhuang Zi* or *prajñā*. Hegel’s dialectical method must also be squarely faced; it is also very significant. But if we wish to make a full study of the analytical method and the non-analytical method as a formal, objective question, we must do it through Chinese philosophy before we can arrive at a thorough understanding of this huge realm of reason and truth` [*lijing*, 理境] . This is a new question that emerges when we in the present age discuss traditional philosophy.

For us to understand this realm of reason and truth, it is necessary that we face the paradoxes in *Zhuang Zi* and the *prajñā* sūtras. We cannot dismiss them lightly, nor can we make frivolous claims that they belong to the sphere of logic. Take, for example, the statement “*Prajñā* is not *prajñā*, that is called *prajñā*” [*Bore fei bore, shi zhi wei bore* 般若非般若是之謂般若].²⁷ If you think this is simply two propositions in which “*prajñā*” has two different meanings, and so they do not contradict each other, nor violate logic, then you will decide that this sort of paradox does not fall outside the sphere of logic. This line of thinking would be mistaken, for the statement is not a proposition at all and

cannot be explained as propositions. A proposition has its boundaries and its meaning, made very clearly in analytic philosophy. The world of the proposition is the world of science. Consequently anything that can be expressed as a proposition can be clearly stated. The value and meaning of man's life cannot be expressed in propositions, and so they do not belong to the world of propositions and lie outside its sphere. This is Wittgenstein's claim, one that is very significant and suggestive. Since logic falls within the sphere of propositions, then according to Kant and Hegel logic belongs to the sphere of understanding. God does not belong to the sphere of understanding. His understanding is also different from that of man, it being divine understanding. Of course, with respect to the universality and all-encompassing nature of logic, even God cannot be contrary to logic. He does not create evil nor does He create contradiction. However, from another point of view, only God is most universal and most transcendent. This "universality" then is obviously different from the universality of logic; this tells us that the analytic and the non-analytic must be discussed separately.

If we are able to squarely confront the two different questions of the analytical mode of discourse and the non-analytical mode of discourse, then we can dissolve the taboo of the Neo-Confucians of the past. Confucians can also talk about the aspect of *wu*. We should not brand Wang Yangming [1472-1528] a Buddhist just because he made statements in this area. That would be wrong and unfair. The level of non-analytical discourse is a common dharma, of which all are allowed to speak. For example, Cheng Mingdao [1032-1085] said: "Heaven and Earth's constancy is mindless [*wu xin*, without mind], its mind encompassing all things [天地之常，以其心普萬物而無心]; the sage's constancy is heartless [*wu qing*, without feeling], his heart following all affairs [聖人之常，以其情順萬事而無情]."²⁸ This is a paradox, but it is also contained in the Dao of the Sage. "Heaven's constancy" is an [ontological] substance question. "Is heartless, its mind encompassing all things" is simply "Being mindless is Dao." By speaking on both levels together, a paradox is formed. We should not say that it comes from Buddhism and Daoism as soon as we see this sort of paradox. Confucianism can also touch this vast realm of reason and truth.

The main contribution of Wei-Jin metaphysics is that it trains people to value the non-analytical aspect of reason and truth, which is not an easy thing to do. Even Hegel's

dialectical method is not easy to understand, much less this kind of metaphysics taught in Daoism or *prajñā* which goes a step further and which is even less easy to understand. However, it is also very important, and requires that we all make some effort to grasp it.

In this lecture we have described two questions: one the contemporary issues of Wei-Jin metaphysics, and one the content and value of Wei-Jin metaphysics itself. Once we enter into an understanding of this, then we will be able to know some of the new questions that can develop out of Chinese philosophy. That will then contribute to the development of both Chinese and Western philosophies.

Transcribed by Yi-hsien Hu 胡以嫻

Copyright©2004,2014 Julie Lee Wei. All rights reserved.

¹ *Mencius* 4B.22.2: "Mencius said: I did not have the opportunity of being a disciple of Kong Zi [Confucius]. I have privately learned from him through others."

² Mou gave a course on Wei-Jin metaphysics during 1977.

³ See Mou Zongsan, *Caixing yü Xuan Li (Material-Nature and Xuan Principles)* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1974), ch.3, sect. 1, "The Emergence of the *Mingshi*."

⁴ See *Da Xue [The Great Learning]* 1.6, "Text of Confucius."

⁵ See *Shi Shuo Xin Yu [New Account of Tales of the World]* 4, "Wenxue": "Ruan Xuanzi 阮宣子 (Xiu) was a man of excellent repute. The *taiwei* [Grand Marshall] Wang Yifu 王夷甫 (Yan 衍) met with him and said: 'Are Lao-Zhuang [Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi] similar to or different from the Sage's teachings?' Wang replied: '*Jiang wu tong g* 將無同 [In Nothing same, or, Perhaps Nothing same i.e., they are the same in Nothing].' The *taiwei* was pleased with his reply and appointed him an administrator. This became known as the three-word administrator.'" Elsewhere in the *Jin Shu [History of the Jin dynasty]*, the names are given as Ruan Zhan 阮瞻 and Wang Rong 王戎. See *Jin Shu, juan 49*, "Biography of Ruan Zhan": "Rong asked him: 'Since the Sage stressed *mingjiao* [names and moral teaching], while Lao-Zhuang elucidated *ziran* [spontaneity], were they making the same point or were they making different points?' Zhan said: '*Jiang wu tong* ' [In Nothing same]. Rong exclaimed and sighed over this, and then commanded that Wang be employed. People called him The Three-Word Administrator."

⁶ *Jin Shu, juan 49*, "Ruan Ji Zhuan" [Biography of Ruan Ji]: "Once, when Juan's older brother's wife set out to visit her parents, Ruan went to say goodbye. When criticized for this he said: 'How could propriety have been established for me?'"

⁷ *Jin Shu, juan 43*, "Yue Guang Zhuan" [Biography of Yue Guang]: "At that time Wang Cheng, Hu Mu, Fu Zhi and the others lived abandoned lives as a form of being enlightened, even to the point of doing such things as going about naked. Guang smiled when he heard of it, saying: 'Why do they have to do that when *mingjiao* [names and moral teaching] has its own pleasures?'"

⁸ See *San Guo Zhi [Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms]*, *juan 28*, "Zhong Hui Zhuan," [Biography of Zhong Hui], annotation quoting "Biography of He Shao and Wang Bi": "Wei...asked Bi: 'If Nothing is indeed that on which the myriad things rest, why is it that the Sage does not speak about it whereas Lao Zi propounds it ceaselessly?' Bi replied 'The Sage embodies Nothing [makes Nothing his substance] and because Nothing cannot be explained, he doesn't talk about it. Lao Zi is one who embodies Being, and so he talks tirelessly about that in which he is deficient.'" See also *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* 4, "Wenxue".

⁹ See *Mencius* 7B.25.7. [Translator's note: "Dissolve" (*hua* 化) means to dissolve and transcend all dualities or distinctions of the sensible world such as great/not-great, high/low, good/bad, this/not-this, self/other and so on, and reach the absolute, the state of Nothing (*wu*), or transcendence, according to Mou. "Dissolve" also means dissolving distinctions or boundaries between transcendence and immanence (this world based on the senses) so that transcendence and immanence are identical to each other (*ji* 即), and one is both in this world and in the transcendent, other, world. See Mou, *Yuan Shan Lun* (Theory of the Perfect Good), Taipei: Student Book Co., 1985, page. 282-283. Lao Zi, is still in the state of Being, and has not reached transcendence. --j]w]

¹⁰ See *Zhuang Zi* 6, "Da Zongshi" [The Great Ancestral Teacher]. [Translator's note: "Forget" here means forgetting and transcending all oppositions of the sensible world such as self/other, big/small, long/short, so/not-so, good/bad, beautiful/ugly, living/dying, and so on, where all distinctions are dissolved in a seamless whole or One (*hunran* 渾然), where all are laid flat and equalized, a state where each returns to one's self, sufficient and content in one's own nature and portion or lot, and not transgressing on another. See Mou, *Caixing yu xuanli* (Material Nature and Xuan Principles), Taipei: Student Book Co., 1993, page 184.—j]w]

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Han Shu* [History of the Han Dynasty], *juan* 20, "Gujin Renwu Biao" [Table of Personages Past and Present] 8.

¹³ See *Zhuang Zi*, Guo Xiang's annotation. For example: "...[the sage-king] Yao is *ming* [in silent agreement with Dao], his tracks follow Yao..."

¹⁴ See *Zhuang Zi*, "Xiaoyao You" [Carefree Roaming], the section "Yao abdicated in favor of Xu You", and Guo Xiang's annotation.

¹⁵ *Zhuang Zi*, "Wai Wu [External Things]" chapter: "When Yao gave the empire to Xu You, Xu You fled from him. When Tang gave it to Wu Guang, Wu Guang was angry with him."

¹⁶ *Zhuang Zi*, "De Chong Fu" [Symbols of Integrity Fulfilled] chapter: "Lao Dan [Lao Zi] said: 'Can we simply remove the distinction between death and life, and between the permissible and the impermissible, so as to unfasten their clamps and fetters?' Wu Zhi said: 'Heaven has imposed these punishments. How can they be unfastened?'"

¹⁷ *Zhuang Zi*, "Da Zongsi" chapter: "Zi Gong said: 'However, what method will you, Master, rely on?' Confucius replied: 'I, Qiu, am one of the multitude who will be slaughtered by heaven. All the same, I shall share the government of the state with you.' " [Translator's note: "Victim or heaven" or "slaughtered by heaven" means live the earthly existence, or take part in earthly affairs. Confucius eschews the life of retreat from worldly affairs into transcendence. In Buddhist terms, that would be the way of the Smaller Vehicle (Hinayana), where one is concerned only with self-salvation and not with the salvation of other sentient beings. --j]w]

¹⁸ See *Lao Zi*, chapters 4 and 56: "Blunt its sharpness, resolve its confusion, merge with its glare, blend with its dust." [Translator's note: "Dust" stands for earthly existence.--j]w]

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (B351-B355).

²⁰ *Analects* 17.19, "Yang Huo" : "Confucius said: 'I wish to be silent.' Zi Gong said: 'If you do not speak, what are we to transmit?' Confucius replied: 'When does heaven speak? The four seasons move along, the myriad things are born. When does heaven ever speak?'"

²¹ *Analects* 9.4, "Zi Han": "Confucius renounced four things: *Wu yi*, *wu bi*, *wu gu*, *wu wo* 毋意, 毋必, 毋固, 毋我 " [I shall be without surmise, without insistence on certainty, without inflexibility, without ego.]” Translation by James Legge.

²² See *Shang Shu* [Book of History], "Hong Fan [The Great Plan]" chapter.

²³ See *Shi Jing* [Book of Poetry], "Da Ya [Greater Odes], Wen Wang [King Wen]" chapter.

²⁴ *Zhuang Zi*, "Qi Wu Lun [On the Equality of Things]" chapter: "'I, Qiu, and you are both dreaming. When I say that you are dreaming, that is also dreaming.' This kind of talk is called *diaogui* [paradox]."

²⁵ See *Zhuang Zi*, "Tianxia [All Under heaven]" chapter.

²⁶ See *Boro Jing* [Prajñā Sūtra. i.e., *Maha-prajnaparamita Sutra*], "San Hua 散華" chapter, number 29.

²⁷ *Jingang Jing* [Diamond Sūtra]: "Buddha spoke of *prajñā pāramitā* which is not *prajñā pāramitā* which is named *prajñā pāramitā*."

²⁸ See *Er Cheng Quan Shu* (*Complete Works of the Cheng Brothers*), *Mingdao Wenji* [*Collected Works of Mingdao*], *juan* 3: "Reply to Mr. Henqu 橫渠's 'Letter on the Fixity [Determinateness] of Human Nature.'"