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TANG CHÜN-I¹

Chang Tsai's Theory of Mind and Its Metaphysical Basis *

I. THE PLACE OF CHANG TSAI'S² THOUGHT IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SUNG (A.D. 960-1279) AND MING (A.D. 1368-1644) PERIODS.

CHINESE PHILOSOPHY DURING the Sung and Ming periods is generally divided into two schools, that of Ch'êng-and-Chu and that of Lu-and-Wang. Yet, the school of Chang Tsai is really a school by itself. The central concept of Ch'êng-and-Chu is reason, that of Lu-and-Wang, mind, and that of Chang Tsai, ether (*ch'i*³). It is generally accepted that the philosophy of the Sung and Ming periods started with Chou Tun-i, whose major work is the *T'ung Shu*. Now, the *T'ung Shu* deals mainly with the ways of spiritual cultivation in order to become a sage or a worthy. As for Chou's "Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate," it would seem too simple except for Chu Hsi's commentary. The *Chêng-mêng*⁴ of Chang Tsai, on the other hand, is a book that seeks consciously to establish a system of philosophy of its own, and thus establishes a theoretical foundation for spiritual cultivation. Ch'êng I critically referred to the book as exhibiting much effort and strain, which meant at that time the lack of mellowed maturity. In our day, however, we can see that the philosophy of Chang Tsai is worked out with much care and detail, though it might not have reached the high level of Ch'êng Hao, Chu Hsi, or Wang Shou-jên. He defined unequivocally such vague terms in traditional Chinese thought as Heaven and man, human nature and the Heavenly decree, spirituality (*shên*⁵) and transformation (*bua*⁶), the mind and the nature, the void⁷ and the ether, the searching for spirituality and the knowledge of transforma-

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¹Chün-i T'ang 唐君毅.

²Chang Tsai 張載, an alternate name is Chang Hêng-ch'ü 張橫 (1020-1077).

³*ch'i* 氣.

⁴*chêng-mêng* 正蒙.

⁵*shên* 神.

⁶*bua* 化.

⁷void 虛 (*bsü*).

tion, complete development of the nature and full realization of the decree, etc. In this respect, only Chu Hsi among the philosophers of this period may be considered Chang's equal.

The philosophy of Chang Tsai proceeds from the existence of the objective universe to the problems of human life, aiming at the overthrow of the prevalent idealism of Buddhism, especially Ch'an Buddhist thought. And yet, his idea about the mind is not without similarity to that of the Ch'an thinkers. Chang Tsai may therefore be taken as the philosophical turning point from Buddhism to Confucianism. The scholars of the two schools of Ch'êng-and-Chu and Lu-and-Wang differ from Chang, in that they are not much interested in discussing nature and the universe. The only exception is Chu Hsi, who, in his theory of the mind, inherited a number of the problems and conceptions of Chang Tsai, pursued them further, and elevated the position of the human mind in the universe. At the time the philosophy of Lu-and-Wang flourished at the end of the Ming Dynasty there came forth one great thinker who reverted to Chang Tsai. That was Wang Fu-chih.⁸ Wang Fu-chih, on the one hand, was interested in the problems of philosophy of the Sung and Ming periods, and, on the other hand, placed much emphasis on the value of history. In this latter emphasis he was joined by Ku Yen-wu and Huang Tsung-hsi, all of whom are the scholars responsible for the intellectual reorientation taking place at the juncture between the Ming and the Ch'ing dynasties. In view of Wang Fu-chih's enthusiasm for Chang Tsai, the value of the philosophy of Chang Tsai throughout the philosophy of the Sung and Ming periods becomes evident. Though Chang was a careful and exact thinker, his language is terse and archaic, frequently expressing his ideas in brief sentences. As a result, he is often misunderstood. If we merely take some of his sayings and try to explain them, we shall often miss his central point. It is for this reason that in this article I shall attempt an over-all discussion of his theory of the human mind, which has been so often misunderstood, together with its metaphysical basis. I think we can grasp the spirit of his thought as a whole if we can truly understand his theory about the human mind. Moreover, one step further from the theory of the human mind of Chang Tsai we have the philosophy of human nature and the reason (*li*) of Ch'êng-and-Chu, and the philosophy of the original mind and intuitive knowledge (*liang-chih*) of Lu-and-Wang. In Chang Tsai's doctrine of the mind, emphasis is placed on its void character, and this void is derived from the Supreme Void,⁹ whereas the concept of reason is made secondary. The Ch'êng-

⁸ Wang Fu-chih 王夫之; an alternate name is Wang Ch'uan-shan 王船山 (1619-1692).

⁹ Supreme Void 太虛 (*T'ai-hsü*).

and-Chu school substituted reason for void and assumed nature as the manifestation of the cosmic reason. Chang says that apart from oneself there is a universe with which one ought to enter into a union. While Ch'êng Hao says, "Every activity of the universe is an activity of myself," and "The universe and oneself are not two, and there is no point of talking about their union," Lu Chiu-yüan says, "The universe is my mind and my mind is the universe." And finally, Wang Shou-jên says that man's intuitive knowledge (*liang-chih*) is the cosmic reason, and that the *liang-chih* of one single man is the *liang-chih* of the universe and of all things. If Chang Tsai had not established for the mind an objective cosmic basis, these philosophers after him would not have been able to elevate the human mind to the same high level as the heavenly mind. And, if one did not comprehend what Chang Tsai called the void of the mind, one would not be able to grasp what the Ch'êng-and-Chu school called reason, or what the Lu-and-Wang school referred to as the original mind that is one with the cosmos and all things.

II. CHANG TSAI'S THEORY OF MIND AS COMPARED TO THAT OF THE CH'AN BUDDHISTS

Chu Hsi particularly admired Chang Tsai's saying, "The mind comprises nature and feeling." And he is fond of quoting Chang thus, "From the Supreme Void, there comes the name of Heaven; from the ether and its transformation,¹⁰ there comes the name of the *tao*; when the void and the ether come together, there is nature, and, when nature and consciousness come together, there is the mind." These utterances are all difficult to understand, and we shall deal with them later. As an introduction to Chang Tsai's doctrine of the mind, let us first note the following saying of his:

From phenomena¹¹ the mind is discerned; preoccupied with the phenomena the mind will be lost. The mind that becomes merely a storehouse for phenomena will be nothing but phenomena. How, then, can it be called the mind?

"Phenomena" here means the appearances of things perceived by the mind and the impressions and ideas left on the mind due to its perceptions. Generally, the mind is known first through the impressions and ideas left by the mind's perceiving its objects. Western introspective psychology, for instance, tries to understand the mind by the impressions and ideas in the

¹⁰ Ether and its transformation 氣化 (*ch'i-bua*).

¹¹ Phenomena 象 (*bsiang*).

mind. Empiricists like Berkeley, Hume, and Mill take the mind as simply a collection of innumerable impressions and ideas. But, in traditional Chinese thought, it is the activity of the mind that is emphasized. Even when Chinese thinkers deal with the problems of mental perception, the emphasis is not placed on the impressions and ideas left in the mind so much as on the ability of the mind to produce these impressions and ideas of objects and to make them pass away, which might be attributed to the apprehensive function of the void of the mind. This notion has been discussed most by such ancient philosophers as Chuang Tzŭ, Hsün Tzŭ, and Kuan Tzŭ. The theory of "experiencing nothingness" of the philosophers of the Wei (220–264) and Chin (265–419) periods, Wang Pi¹² and Ho Yen,¹³ is just another expression of the void character of the mind. In traditional Chinese thought, mind is seldom taken as a collection of numerous ideas and impressions, for ideas and impressions come and go constantly in the mind. When they are there, they are there; when they are gone, they are gone. Since the comings and goings replace and cancel each other, we cannot really locate these impressions and ideas in our minds, and let them be taken as the determinant of its nature, nor can we take the mind as a collection of impressions and ideas of objects. As for the perception of the mind, one can call it only the function of pure consciousness, which is capable of producing any phenomenon, impression, or idea, and yet, it is also capable of transcending all these and producing others. Hence, the nature of the mind is void. This way of thinking, I believe, is the basic conception in traditional Chinese thought toward an understanding of the mind. The Indian Vijñānavāda school of Buddhism also holds the theory that "the mind is a collection." But this is not the popular Buddhist school with the Chinese. Though in the end the Vijñānavāda school also teaches the changeability and inconstancy of the mind as a collection which is devoid of any self-nature and which is illusory and not real, its first step is always "the mind is a collection." According to this theory, the human mind is a collection of innumerable actual or potential ideas. But the fundamental theory of the Ch'an school, a school founded by Chinese themselves, teaches that one should not try to understand the mind by the appearances, impressions, and ideas left on the mind. They insist that the mind is not to retain or hold on to any impression, appearance, or idea, so that our mind might really become manifest and our original nature revealed. For this reason, though the Ch'an school is not a realism that assumes things as being outside one's mind, yet it is not an idealism that takes things as mental ideas inside one's mind. It

¹² Wang Pi 王弼, (226–249).

¹³ Ho Yen 何晏, (d. 249).

imposes on the mind a kind of bondage and restriction to say that there are things outside the mind, and it is also a bondage to the mind for one to say that things are located in the mind. Therefore, the Ch'ans sometimes "snatch away the environment but not the man," sometimes "snatch away the man but not the environment," and sometimes "snatch away both the man and the environment." One who sees the mind by the phenomena of things and ideas sees it only in terms of its objects and its states, and fails really to understand the mind and to know the apprehensive function of the void of the mind. And yet, the Ch'ans cannot permit one to insist on the character of the apprehensive function of the void of the mind either, for to permit such an insistence would be to permit an instance of holding-on. When detained and held on to, the void character of the mind is no longer void. Therefore, sometimes the Ch'ans would "snatch away neither the mind nor the environment." The Ch'ans devote themselves especially to the attainment of "non-abiding."¹⁴ Their Sixth Patriarch, Hui Nêng,¹⁵ came to this apprehension when he heard the following saying from the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, "The mind is born when it dwells on nothing." When nothing is dwelt upon, "no idea refers to its preceding condition." This is "non-abiding." When the mind is not contaminated by anything from the environment, this is "non-ideation." When self-ideation leaves its environment behind, this is "non-appearance." The book by Hui Nêng says, "Non-ideation is the origin, non-appearance is the frame, non-abiding is the essence." The non-abiding doctrine of the Ch'ans relegates the past to the past, the present to the present, and the future to the future, and no succeeding idea is attached to its preceding idea. As each moment is cut off from the next moment, the opposition of the external and the internal, or the subjective and the objective, naturally disappears, and Buddhahood is attained through sudden enlightenment. If a person will make a resolution and disjoin the relation of past, present, and future, he will at that very moment be able to make manifest his mind, his nature will be revealed, and he will gain deliverance. The main objective of the Ch'ans lies in "deliverance," and all they say has to do with one's spiritual cultivation rather than with ontological substance. What they have said is to be blotted away as soon as it is said, and nothing in what they say is meant to make clear anything in particular. Actually it is not what we call philosophy. Yet, from the standpoint of philosophy, we can say that the basic spirit of the Ch'an school comes from a deep apprehension of the void nature of the mind—the mind that can produce any phenomena or impressions

¹⁴ Non-abiding 無住 (*wu-chu*).

¹⁵ Hui Nêng 慧能 (638–713).

and ideas and yet can transcend them all. This concept of the Ch'ans comes from traditional Chinese thought, and, in turn, the philosophy of the Sung and Ming periods develops itself from Ch'an. For this reason, the Sung and Ming philosophers agreed in taking the void and intuitive nature of the mind seriously.

Now, let us go back to the quotation from Chang Tsai which we gave at the beginning of Section II. What Chang means is this: though we know at first the existence of our mind because of the phenomena, that is, the objects and their impressions and ideas, yet our mind, if it holds on to the phenomena and allows itself to be submerged in them, will lose its void and intuitive nature. The mind that preserves the phenomena will become phenomena and will no longer be mind. All this comes from traditional Chinese thought on understanding the mind, and accords with the spirit of Ch'an.

Nevertheless, on the whole, Chang Tsai's theory of mind is different from that of the Ch'ans on three points: first, the Ch'ans make no reference to the objective and cosmic origin of the void and intuitive mind; second, the Ch'ans have nothing to say about the virtue and value content of the mind; and, third, the Ch'ans are silent on the practice of social ethics through the complete realization of the mind and its nature. In the eyes of Chang Tsai, the key to all these three points may be found in the Ch'ans' lack of interest in the objective and cosmic origin of the mind and its intuitive and void character. Hence, this will be the central point of our discussion in this essay. It is because they are interested in seeking the immediate enlightenment of the mind that the Ch'ans fail to pay much attention to the cosmic origin of the human mind. When emphasis is laid on the enlightenment of the mind, it is not necessary to ask what is the origin of the mind, for, when we raise such a question, we are already assuming the mind to be a thing, and to seek a firm grasp of it. Here we run into the Ch'an taboo from the outset. Furthermore, the Ch'ans have inherited the Buddhist theory already worked out by the various sects that the mind is existent from the very beginning, even before one is borne by his parents. This is an idealist cosmology. Chang Tsai, of course, does not subscribe to this idealistic cosmology, but holds that the mind, or the nature of the mind, has its origin in an objective universe. This is the metaphysics of the Great Harmony¹⁶ (*Magnum Harmonicum*) involving the identity of the ether and the void. On the one hand, he says that the human mind ought to "seek existence in the void," and, on the other hand, he says that the void of the mind depends upon the "Tao of the Universe, according to which there is no existence but what

¹⁶ Great Harmony 太和 (T'ai-bo).

is found in the void." It is because he does not think that the mind can be kept separate from the body that Chang seeks to find an origin of the mind in the objective universe. Since the body cannot have existed from the very beginning, neither can the mind. Our body is given us by our parents, and nourished by the things in the universe. Just as the body owes its existence to an external universe, so should the nature of the mind. From the standpoint of origination, all things in the objective universe constitute the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated ether-void. Considered from its aspect as the Supreme Void, the Great Harmony is Heaven; from its aspect as ether-transformation, it is *Tao*. As man is produced by this Great Harmony of undifferentiated ether-void, he is naturally endowed with the *Tao* of the Supreme Void and ether-transformation as his nature. The nature of man reveals itself when in contact with things, and this is called consciousness. As to mind, it is the combination of this consciousness with the nature that can perceive from its void and intuitive character. When man becomes conscious of a thing, he expresses in accordance with the ether that is in him his attitude toward the thing. This is the man's emotion and will toward things. Hence, Chang Tsai says (as quoted at the beginning of Section II), "From the Supreme Void, there comes the name of Heaven; from the ether and its transformation, there comes the name of the *Tao*; when the void and the ether come together, there is nature, and, when nature and consciousness come together, there is mind." And he also says, "The mind comprises nature and feeling."

III. THE MEANING OF ETHER STATED IN MODERN TERMS

It is not easy for people to understand properly Chang Tsai's theory that the origin and nature of the mind lie in the existence of the objective universe. Often it is taken as a sort of materialism like that of the West. Not only this, but, in addition, his explanation of the Great Harmony of the universe and the nature of man in terms of the void and ether-transformation puts him especially under the difficulty of the independence between the void and the ether and makes his view seem like dualism. Yet, in truth, Chang Tsai's theory of the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether is, after all, just ether. What he calls void, though it looks like something lying outside ether-transformation, is actually inside the ether.

If we want to have a true grasp of what he is trying to say, we must know what ether means in traditional Chinese thought. The conception

of ether (*ch'i*) is a peculiar conception in Chinese thought. In olden days, Chinese came to know its meaning by experience, and, in our time, it is usually taken as a kind of matter. For example, Fung Yu-lan and others take ether as the same as Aristotle's matter in Western philosophy. Actually this is wrong. In the usage of past Chinese philosophers, the word ether (*ch'i*) could mean either something spiritual, as in ambition (*ch'i-chih*) or something vital, as animation (*shêng-ch'i*), or something material, as geogaseity (*ti-ch'i*). And these three kinds of ether are usually treated by Chinese thinkers as belonging together, so that the ether that denotes something material may at the same time denote something spiritual or vital. Ether in traditional Chinese thought is completely unlike matter as understood by Western science or philosophy. In Plato's and Aristotle's thought, matter is usually contrasted with the forms of things. Everything has its form, but form alone does not constitute a thing. That to which form adheres or that which gives form its actuality is matter. But in Chinese thought, whether the term "ether" denotes something spiritual, material, or vital, it is a conception prior to form and matter. Ether does not have a definite determination as form does, nor does it have the resistant corporeality of matter. From the ancient apocryphal treatises of the Six Classics to the Yin-Yang followers and the Confucianists of the later periods, it is generally agreed that the material universe has ether first and form next. When the form is set, tending toward a definite direction, and making it difficult for any other thing to penetrate, then we have matter. Before the appearance of quantum theory and theory of relativity, modern scientists of the West used to be of the opinion that the fundamental character of physical matter was inertia and impenetrability. Chinese philosophers have never adopted such a view, for they hold that the idea of matter is subsequent to form and ether. And, when dealing with the problems of nature and the universe, it is a very common Chinese assumption that *matter comes from form, and form comes from ether*. It is also improper to take Aristotle's primary matter to explain ether in Chinese philosophy, because Aristotle's primary matter is a potentiality absolutely without any form. This is evidently a remaining substratum after the form has been subtracted by logical analysis, whereas ether in Chinese thought, though formless, can assume any form. It is not restricted by any definite form, but is inclusive of all forms. Therefore, ether may be said to be a formlessness surpassing forms and yet containing forms; and it is not absolutely without form. And, whether we are considering the primary matter of Aristotle or the matter of Western science before modern physical quantum theory and relativity theory, matter in

the West was not active but passive, waiting for some external force to set it in action, while in Chinese thought ether is invariably active, or, in other words, there may be said to be force within it. It is not an absolute formlessness or a sub-formal matter or potentiality, but a real existence that is capable of motion or quietude, and of assuming a definite form while also capable of transcending one form to assume another form. The characteristic of this existence lies in the process in which it assumes definite forms successively and successively transcends them. When it assumes a definite form, it becomes a definite thing, and this means the condensation of the ether, or the ether in its masculinity. When it transcends this given form and causes it to disintegrate, this means the dispersion of the ether, or the ether in its femininity. The capability of ether to act so is force. To understand clearly the formlessness of ether, we have to take a synthetic conception of these three ideas, forming, transcending, and force. To understand the actuality of ether, we also have to take a synthetic conception of existence and process. Therefore, ether may be defined as an existential process, within which there is the mutation of forms, or as an existence within which there is the process of the mutation of forms. On this theory, ether may be regarded as a primary metaphysical principle for the explanation of the universe. This is my explanation stated in modern terms of the concept of ether in traditional Chinese thought according to its generally accepted meaning.

IV. CHANG TSAI'S THEORY OF IDENTIFICATION OF THE "ETHER" WITH THE "VOID"

This traditional conception of ether in Chinese thought, as discussed above, was accepted by Chang Tsai. Therefore, he always tied up the idea of transformation to the idea of ether and spoke of ether-transformation. Chang represented an advancement over the scholars of the Ch'in (221–206 B.C.) and Han periods (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) in the discussion of ether, in that he emphasized the void nature of the ether and insisted upon it. He said: "Empty and void is the ether." Though the scholars of the Ch'in and Han periods knew that the ether had neither any fixed form nor any fixed matter, they rarely discussed the ether in terms of the void. The authors of the apocryphal treatises on the Six Classics were in the habit of talking about the original ether as the origin of the universe. The Taoists, on the other hand, emphasized void and non-being and occasionally took non-being as the origin of all things, and thus suffered from a one-sided emphasis on the void and non-being. Chang objected to all

these contrasts between being and non-being and between void and concretion. Besides, according to him, the "void" as advocated by the Buddhists still implies an opposition to "being." What Chang wanted to do was to achieve a synthesis of the "ether" of the scholars of the Ch'in and Han periods with the "non-being" or "void" of the Taoists and Buddhists. The result of this synthesis is a return to the conception contained in the ancient text of "The Commentary on the *Book of Changes*" as presented in a new expression.

This new explanation, if we analyze it, may be said to contain two aspects: the vertical and the horizontal.

The vertical aspect: Beginning with the fact that all things constituted of form and matter (as stated above, not in the sense of Aristotelian form and matter) are incessantly coming to be, on the one hand, and being dissolved to become other things, on the other hand, Chang concludes that all things are in an "incessant process of appearing and disappearing." When they appear, the Taoists call it being and the Buddhists call it generation. When they disappear, the Taoists refer to it as non-being and the Buddhists refer to it as extinction. But this contrast of being with non-being and generation with extinction, in Chang's view, is applicable only to the existence of form and matter but not to the ether itself from which both form and matter are derived. Here we must advance from the conception of form and matter to the conception of ether. But how can we achieve such an advance? It is to be realized that since all form and matter pass from generation into extinction and from being into non-being, the existence of form and matter is at the same time their non-existence. And that which truly exists in the universe is only the existential process from existence to non-existence and from non-existence to existence. And this is just the cyclic movement of the ether. This conception of the cyclic movement of the ether comprehends in a synthesis the two contrasting conceptions of being and non-being and void and concretion. If we take the standpoint of the cyclic movement of the ether and observe the generation or being and extinction or non-being of things, we shall not consider generation or being as merely being or generation, but as being containing non-being and generation containing extinction; nor shall we consider extinction or non-being as merely extinction or non-being, but as non-being containing being or extinction containing generation. This is to say, the generation or coming-to-be of things is concretion and yet concretion containing within itself void, while extinction or non-being of things is void and yet void containing within itself the seeds of concretion. The passing from being to non-being is not really entering into non-being but entering into the

realm of the invisible, and similarly the coming from non-being to being is but emerging from the realm of the invisible to that of the visible. To substitute the visible and the invisible for being and non-being is to achieve a synthesis of being and non-being as well as one of void and concretion. It is from such a cosmological point of view that Chang defined his Great Harmony as "the constant unity of being and non-being."

He said:

If one should assume that the ether is created out of the void, then one would be beset by the difficulty of the discrepancy between reality and its activity,¹⁷ as void is infinite while the ether is finite.

Those who uphold the idea of *nirvāṇa*¹⁸ (i.e., extinction) proceed along a single-track path without any provision for return, while those who insist on the idea of generation and being are dazzled by the existence of things and overlook their transformations. Though these two schools are widely apart, both fail equally as far as following the right way is concerned.

The void and the ether are identical.

The Supreme Void without form is the substance of the ether.

Chang Tsai further upheld the knowledge of the cause of the visible and invisible in place of the knowledge of the cause of being and non-being. He said:

When it (the ether) condenses one cannot but call it being. But when it disperses, one must not call it non-being. Therefore, when the sages had carefully observed Heaven and earth, they only said they knew the cause of the visible and invisible and did not say they knew the cause of being and non-being.

When form is there we know the cause of the invisible; when form is not there we know the origin of the visible.

The above quotations are from the chapter on "The Great Harmony."

The cause of the visible and invisible is also the reason things appear and disappear, disappear and appear. And this reason rests in the fact that the ether is void while it is concrete and concrete while it is void, i.e., the ether is not just concrete but contains also the void in its very nature.

The second aspect of the explanation that Chang Tsai offers for his theory of the inseparability of the ether and the void may be called the horizontal aspect. Everything is generated through intercourse between other things, and this thing is, in turn, in intercourse with other things to generate still other things. Hence, the ether is both many and one, both diffused and united. The ether, therefore, is not just a concrete thing, but has in it the limpid and void nature. This view goes back directly to "The Commentary

¹⁷ Reality and its activity 體用 (*t'i-yung*).

¹⁸ *Nirvāṇa* (or extinction) 寂滅 (*chi-nieh*).

on the *Book of Changes*," in which all explanations about the generation of things are given in terms of the intercourse between other things. The generation of things through the intercourse of other things is like the birth of the child through the intercourse between its parents. But the intercourse of things is also the mutual prehension¹⁹ of things. And from the fact that one thing canprehend another we can see that the thing must have the void within itself in order to be able to absorb the other. And this void must be within the thing or within the ether out of which the thing is generated, but never outside. Here, if we accept the ordinary view about form and matter, every form would be a concrete thing, and what is beyond would be all void, void and form thus becoming mutually exclusive, as Newtonian physics teaches, namely, matter exists in an infinite vacuum. This view is just what Chang firmly rejects. Thus he says: "If one should hold that phenomena were the things visible in the Supreme Void, things and the void would be independent of each other. Then, form would be just form, and nature would be just nature, and form, nature, Heaven, and man would all be separate existences unrelated to one another, and one would fall into the difficulty of the Buddhists, who consider the mountains, rivers, and the earth itself as illusory." Therefore, the void of a thing must be understood as lying within the thing and, in fact, lying within its generating ether, which contains the void in itself. And the void of the ether of a thing may be perceived in the process of the generation and transformation brought about through the constant intercourse of the thing with other things. When a thing enters into intercourse with other things, it transcends its own corporeal existence and extends itself into what is beyond itself. This is just what we have said about the function of the ether. The function of the ether of a thing is to enable the thing to transcend its own corporeal existence andprehend in the other thing so as to have intercourse with it. It is the ether of man, for example, that makes him transcend his own corporeal existence and extend itself so as to reach the corporeal existence of the woman andprehend her in his spirit in order to have intercourse with her. The function of ether, therefore, is the function that enables the ether with its inner void toprehend within itself concrete existence. We must, then, deeply realize this theme of ours: Whenever a thing is in intercourse with another, it is always that the thing by means of its void contains the other andprehends it. Opinions similar to this have been held by Western contemporary philosophers, such as Bradley and Whitehead. Bradley compares the wolf's devouring of a lamb to man's relation of prehension

¹⁹ Prehension 涵攝 (*han-sheb*).

with other things, which he calls "feeling." Whitehead extended this view to cover all the existential relations among things and called them "prehension." In his book *Process and Reality*, he declares that this view of his is not in accord with the traditional thought of the West, but comes close to Chinese philosophy. He is indeed right. Chinese traditional thought about nature, from the *Book of Changes* down, has consistently maintained that the mutual relation and influence among things is a relation of intercourse and prehension. But Chang Tsai was the first to point out clearly and definitely that what makes the intercourse and prehension between things possible is the intrinsic void of the ether, and that it is this void nature of the ether that is the basis of the intercourse and prehension among things. There is constant generation and concretion of things in the universe because the ether of all things in the universe is fundamentally void. Hence, Chang said: "The *Tao* of Heaven and earth consists in nothing other than taking the completely void as the concrete." Again, "The virtue of Heaven and earth is but the void." It is by the void, according to him, that things can diffuse their ether and extend themselves to other objects, and thus the "one" becomes manifest in the "many." And this activity of extension by virtue of the void is called by Chang spirit (*shên*⁵), and by "*shên*" here he means "to extend." [The word "*shên*" in Chinese has a double meaning. The one is "to extend" and the other is "spirit."—Tr. note.] By the intercourse and prehension among things through this void-extension, there is transformation of these things and generation of new things, which activity Chang Tsai calls transformation (*hua*⁶). "Extension" causes the intercourse and union of two things or diffused ether. "Transformation" causes the dissolution of two things or diffused ether in the generation of a new thing. *Shên* becomes manifest where the process runs from contraction to extension, from quietude to motion, from submergence to emergence, and from defeat to victory. And *hua* becomes manifest where the process runs in the reverse direction. Extension and transformation, transformation and extension, and all things in the universe are generated without end.

Therefore, Chang Tsai said:

(1) The Great Harmony that is the *Tao* contains in it the principle of interaction between emerging and submerging, ascending and descending, and motion and quietude, which sets going the process of stress and strain, victory and defeat, and contraction and extension. . . . As it is diffused and spread it becomes visible ether; as it illumines and penetrates it becomes invisible spirituality. Unless one knows the ceaseless and modulating activity of the sunbeams, one is not in a position to know the Great Harmony.

(2) A thing cannot exist in isolation. Unless it was made manifest through the processes of identification and differentiation, extension and contraction, and beginning and ending, a thing would not be a thing. An activity is produced when it has its beginning and end, but there is activity only when there is interaction in the nature of identification and differentiation and mutual supplementation between things. Unless there is activity, a thing would not be a thing.

(3) Where there is unity, there is spirituality; where there is duality, there is transformation.

If there is duality, there will be interaction; since originally it is all one, there will be unity.

Spirituality, or *shên*, is the virtue of Heaven; transformation, or *hua*, is the way of Heaven. Its virtue is its substance; its way is its function. And both become one in the ether.

All the phenomena and appearances in the universe are but so many dregs of the process of spirituality-transformation.

The conclusion from the above quotations is this: Things are brought into being through the extension and contraction of the ether that has become diffused due to its void nature.

Each so-called thing is but a process of beginning and ending, extension and contraction. It is generated through the intercourse of preceding things, and therefore, unless there is transformation of preceding things, a thing will not be brought into existence. Now that this thing is here, it is in turn in intercourse with other things and engaged in activity. And were it not for the spirituality, i.e., extension, character in the thing, it could not have produced any activity. Since the generation of a thing depends on the transformation of preceding things, there must be a difference between the thing generated and the preceding things. On the other hand, since this thing is a successor and continuation of the preceding things, there must also be a degree of unity between them. The fact that this thing and other things are in intercourse producing activity indicates that there is a difference between them, and, yet, at the point of their intercourse there must also be a unity between them. The difference between one thing and another means that it has what the other lacks and vice versa. Since everything has certain qualities and lacks others, things come into intercourse. And it is by this intercourse that things have their activities. Therefore, a thing could not have any activity if there were no "interaction" in the nature of identification, differentiation, and mutual supplementation," and a thing without activity would not be a thing. All the above is meant to make it clear that the activity-thing (event) finds its place only in the process of the invisible transformation of the Great Harmony that consists of the undifferentiated

cosmic void-ether and that is by no means an immutable matter. Neither is the ether itself then an immutable matter. For this reason Chang Tsai said that "unless one knows the ceaseless and shuffling activity of the sunbeams, one is not in a position to know the Great Harmony." This is a very apt description of the interacting prehension of the ether, due to its void nature.

It is to be noticed that this cosmological view of Chang Tsai is drastically different from that of Western materialism and naturalism for still another reason. The latter contend that the universe itself is amoral, or, in Bertrand Russell's words, ethically neutral. Chinese traditional thought, from "The Commentary on the *Book of Changes*" down to the Confucianists of the Han, and even the Sung and Ming, to the contrary, is convinced that the universe is filled with moral values, sometimes expressed in terms of originating growth,²⁰ prosperous development,²¹ advantages,²² and correct firmness,²³ and sometimes in terms of human-heartedness, righteousness, decorum, and wisdom. Here again, Chinese thought is very similar to Whitehead's view that the existential process of the universe is a process for the realization of values, for the cosmological view handed down from "The Commentary on the *Book of Changes*" holds that the whole existential process in the universe is a process of generation and evolution through intercourse. And the generation and evolution of a thing are themselves activities of positive values, and exhibit a moral character. Hence, this natural universe is still a universe filled with moral values, no matter whether the human mind has achieved self-consciousness or not and whether the human spirit has any part in it or not. According to Chang, the void nature of the ether is the basis for the objective existence of values, since he insists that all intercourse is made possible by the void nature of the ether. That is why he said, "Heaven and earth take the void for their virtue, for the supremely good is the void." The whole process of the generation and evolution of things engendered by intercourse of the ether due to its void-concretion nature is the process of ether-transformation, and may also be said to be spiritual⁵ transformation.⁶ It follows from the above that the sum-total of the world of objective existence is also the sum-total of the world of value-laden existence. This value might also be referred to as righteousness from the angle of the constant differentiation and comple-

²⁰ Originating growth 元 (*yüan*).

²¹ Prosperous development 亨 (*hêng*).

²² Advantage 利 (*li*).

²³ Correct firmness 貞 (*chên*).

tion of things, for righteousness means the attainment of completion by one and all. This value might be referred to as human-heartedness from the angle of the constant generation and intercourse of things, for human-heartedness means the sharing of the same feeling by me and others. The differentiated completion of things is an indication of the multiple extension of the ether, whereas the intercourse and formal or material dissolution of things for the generation of new things is an indication of the dissolution of the ether or of the multiple transformation of the ether. Chang Tsai said: "When human-heartedness permeates itself in all transformations, it transcends all individual corporeality; when righteousness submerges itself in spirituality, i.e., extension, it transcends all restrictions." Inasmuch as the cosmos possesses the way and virtue of Heaven, e.g., extension (spirituality) and transformation, human-heartedness, and righteousness, it follows that man should examine spirituality and know transformation and serve Heaven and earth, and venerate them as we do our parents so as to be in harmony with heavenly virtue and thereby achieve sagehood.

V. THE MEANING OF THE NATURE OF THE MIND

The reason that a mere man with his body no taller than six feet is in a position to serve Heaven and earth and be in harmony with heavenly virtues does not lie in the human mind as such, but in the nature that makes it possible for the mind to have consciousness. This nature of man is bestowed on man by the objective universe, or Heaven, and this nature is intrinsically in our body. Our share of the ether from the objective universe is indeed very little, considered merely from our six-foot body. And if the ether that Chang talks about were just matter, then the attitude between me and the world external to me could be only one of opposition or utilization so that each might maintain its own material body, since the matter endowed upon me is not the matter endowed upon others. And consequently it would be very difficult to speak of intuitive knowledge about the external world and moral values, as well as veneration toward the cosmos or harmony with heavenly virtue, thereby achieving sagehood. But the ether, according to Chang, is not matter, but possesses the void nature by which it can have intercourse and prehension with other things. Therefore, although a man's share of the cosmic ether is very little, the void nature of this ether enables him to transcend the material limit set by that same ether. The cosmic ether that man has received has been endowed by Heaven, and so Chang said, "The Decree lies within the ether." At the same time, the nature of man

transcends the material limit of the body as formed by the ether, and so Chang said, "The nature penetrates beyond the ether." But Chang Tsai also said, "Actually, the ether itself has neither interior nor exterior, and we are using a figure of speech when we speak of the 'within' and the 'beyond.'" Since the nature of the ether in man can transcend the limit of the body, by this nature man can reach to infinite extension within which to direct his consciousness and emotions toward other objects. Take this for example: Here below is my bodily existence, and there above are the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky. Considered spacially, of course, they are in different spaces and separate existences. But we can become conscious of these heavenly bodies. Why? We may say that this is caused by the radiation energy of these bodies that is infused into our sense perception, but we may also say it is caused by the power of our perception and consciousness that reaches out to the heavenly bodies. But how can our perceiving power reach those bodies in the heavens? If we answer and say that our perceiving power originates in our sense organs, then we must admit, on the one hand, that our perceiving power can transcend the space that our body occupies, and, on the other hand, that this perceiving power is generated through the expenditure of the form-matter of our body or through the self-dissolution of our material body. In short, this power of sense perception is a kind of ether. And it is this ether of ours that reaches out into the heavenly bodies, when our power of sense perception reaches them. It is improper to say, therefore, that our bodily ether—the ether that is produced by the self-transcendence and self-dissolution of the material body—exists in isolation from the external world, although our body and the celestial bodies are in different spaces and separate existences. The fact that the form-matter of our body can transmute and dissolve itself so as to send forth the ether of the power of sense perception is proof that the form-matter of our body is in the first place nothing but the ether. The ether is related to external things, is not in isolation, and in it the internal and external are unified. The fact that we meet things and perceive them everywhere and that perception is not restricted to any specific object or space is direct proof that the ether that is in us is in complete communication with the ether of the universe and all things. And, finally, the fact that we come into contact with things and perceive them, and also act toward them from the attitudes and emotions excited in us, is proof of the infusion of our ether into the ether of objects.

Having understood the truth that when we perceive an object or when we act toward it our ether is in communication with the universe and all things, we can affirm that this doctrine of Chang Tsai and typical material-

istic views are fundamentally opposed to each other—the views of materialism that observe the form-matter existence of our body and the other things and conclude: “I am nothing more than myself, and things themselves in the universe are outside myself, and, therefore, I am absolutely unable to know them immediately, and all that I can do is to react to the stimuli received from them; or, I am but myself, and my nature is just to conserve and maintain the matter of this body of mine”—such materialistic views overlook the fact that I and my body as such are fundamentally derived from the ether. The form-matter of my body is not a constant thing but is always in a process of transformation and intercourse with other things. The process of transformation means the process of transmutation of the thing, and intercourse with other things means penetration into them. Hence, the nature by which I am constituted to be I is actually my power of transcending myself and taking unto myself things and persons that used to be other than I. And the form-matter that has become the form-matter of my body is also that which is constantly being formed by the condensation of cosmic ether and constantly being dissolved and diffused back into the cosmic ether. Therefore, I can never hold that there is an I or my body existing separately from other things in the universe; neither can I say that my nature is merely to conserve and maintain my material body. On the contrary, I should say that my nature is to enter into intercourse with all things in the universe, and by the void nature of the mind it is to perceive all,prehend all, regarding other persons and things as myself, and it is universally to bestow our emotions and wills to all things with which we have intercourse. For this reason, when Chang Tsai discusses nature, he discusses nature together with feeling and spirituality (extension). He said:

“Feeling is the spirituality of nature, and nature is the concretion of feeling.”

“When it makes things marvelous it is called spirituality, when it gives things their concretion it is called nature.”

“Nothing is excluded from concretion, and concretion is called the nature of things.”

The reason nature can give all things their concretion is not that there is such a thing as nature besides the ether, but that the void of the ether gives concretion to all things and excludes none. This void of the ether is the basis for man’s having intercourse with all things, for his extending his ether into them, and expressing to them his inclinations.

Therefore, Chang Tsai said:

At the extreme the nature merges with the void.

That which cannot be entirely without feeling is nature.

When we have understood that the nature according to Chang Tsai is to be regarded as the ether in us transcending our material body and having intercourse with all things in the universe because of its void nature, then we see why he said that human nature is good and that the nature has in itself the qualities of human-heartedness and righteousness, for all the virtues of human-heartedness and righteousness come out of the denial, abnegation, and transcendence of oneself. That human nature at the extreme can "merge with the void" means self-oblivion. And human-heartedness and righteousness are but self-oblivion and communication with others, regarding others as oneself and giving completion to others together with oneself. Thus the goodness of human nature is justified and established, and our moral conduct becomes metaphysically and cosmologically based. And we should henceforth magnify and extend our mind so that we might feel "All men are my brothers and all things are my kin," and that we might wish "Establishment is to establish all, wisdom is to render everyone wise, love is to love universally, and completion is not just to make oneself complete.

Such would be the fullest realization of one's mind and thereby of one's nature, and even the decree of Heaven. And such a man is in a position to be the human-hearted son of society and the filial son of Heaven and earth, and thereby to have come into harmony with heavenly virtue and achieve sagehood.

VI. THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE NATURE OF THE ETHER-MATTER²⁴

The most difficult part in Chang Tsai's theory of mind and nature comes in his distinction between the nature of the universe and the nature of the ether-matter. The former is said to be completely good, while the latter sometimes inclines man to evil. Therefore, if one wants to be in harmony with heavenly virtue and strive to be a sage, the most important part of his cultivation lies in transforming the ether-matter in him. The transformation of the ether-matter is to make manifest the nature of the universe that is in him. This is apparently a dualistic theory of human nature. But Chang Tsai's metaphysical view seems to be, as explained above, a monism of the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether. Since the way of Heaven is completely good, how is it that man should also possess a nature of ether-matter that inclines him toward evil? There is evidently a contradiction here, but how real is it? This we feel called upon to explain.

In speaking of the nature of the universe and the nature of the ether-matter, Chang Tsai does not place the two natures in opposition to each

²⁴ Ether-matter 氣質 (*ch'i-chih*).

other on the same level of existence. Fundamentally, the nature of man is just the nature of the universe. And this nature is in direct communication with the ether or the way of the universe. The nature of the ether-matter is generated when the nature of the universe is concealed by ether-matter, and is therefore the nature that appears after the ether of the universe has by condensation become the material body of man. The emphasis in the nature of the "ether-matter" is laid on the part of "matter" and not on the part of "ether." Hence, Chang Tsai said, "Upon the formation of the body, there appears the nature of the ether-matter." This is to say, from the standpoint of the original ether from which man derives his form, man has no such thing as a nature of the so-called ether-matter. The nature of the universe is based on an objective cosmos. The nature of the ether-matter of individual man or other individual things, however, can be stated only in terms of the individual form-matter that has been produced, for this nature is groundless in terms of the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether, of the objective universe. In those same terms, the evil that comes out of the ether-matter in man is also groundless. But how does man happen to have a nature of the ether-matter to incline him to evil upon his generation, since man is generated from the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether? This is because the ether which is in itself formless can undergo condensation and appear in various forms. And, when it appears as form-matter, the ether may be said to be particularized or individualized. It is because of this particularization or individualization that material bodies (including men and things) are set opposite to one another, and by this opposition they become obstructions to one another. All evils of man are the result of his selfishness and self-insistence that in turn are due to opposition and obstruction. Having acquired his body of form-matter, man has also acquired the inclination to be in mutual opposition and obstruction to other men and things, and out of such an inclination come all his selfish passions. This inclination is the nature that arises in man after he has acquired his body, and this is the nature of the ether-matter in man, the nature that is the origin of all evil in man. This so-called nature, therefore, of the ether-matter is the secondary nature that prevails when the ether has become form-matter and has lost its limpid and spiritual void. Therefore, Chang Tsai said:

The ether originates from the void and, therefore, it is at first clear and formless. When it becomes agitated for generation, it undergoes the process of condensation and becomes visible. Becoming visible means being placed in opposition (against other visible things); being placed in opposition means acting contrarily to one another; and contrariety results in enmity. But enmity will have to resolve itself

in harmony. Therefore, both love and hate originate from the Supreme Void and will ultimately result in desires and passions.

The theory that contends that the human nature received from the universe is good but that when man's ether becomes form-matter there appears the ether-matter that inclines man to be bad does not envisage in man simultaneously two equal natures, but, rather, considers them as in a sequence. From the standpoint of the beginning, man has only the nature of the universe; and from the standpoint of the end man has come to have the nature of the ether-matter. But how can it be that a good beginning should have a bad end? Since the view from the end demonstrates clearly that man has a nature of the ether-matter to incline him to evil, that on the basis of his body man stands in mutual opposition and obstruction with other men and things, and that man generates feelings of love and hate all on the basis of selfishness, why not let us judge the beginning by the end and say that human nature is originally bad and that even the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether, of the objective universe contains in it an element of evil? But, according to the Confucian tradition of Chinese thought on the problem of good and evil in man and the universe, one may proceed from the good of the beginning to the evil of the end but may not proceed from the evil of the end to infer the evil content of the beginning or to attribute the evil of the end to the beginning. For example, if we call nature the beginning and passion the end, then we cannot attribute the evil of passion to nature. Similarly, if we call the universe and the way of Heaven the beginning and man and man's nature the end, then we cannot attribute the evil in man and man's nature to Heaven and what Heaven has endowed in man. There is a parallel in the West. According to Christianity, God is the creator of man, and yet the sin of man cannot be attributed to God himself or God's creation, for the evil of man can be regarded only as a part of man. This is exactly Chang's view. As for the reason why the evil, caused by the nature of the ether-matter in man, cannot be attributed to Heaven, this is because it is simply impossible for evil to exist from the standpoint of Heaven, for from this standpoint there is no form-matter existence in this universe (including man) that will not eventually be dissolved and return to the Supreme Void or the Great Harmony. For this reason the mutual opposition and obstruction among things are only temporary. The nature of the ether-matter in man can be said to exist only when man's form-matter exists. There is the nature of the ether-matter in man, not in Heaven. Hence, there is evil in man, not in Heaven. Heaven not only does not have the nature of the ether-matter, but has the nature that makes all things that have evolved from the ether into form-matter

be eventually dissolved and return to the Supreme Void and the Great Harmony. Heaven not only does not have any evil, but has the nature that deprives man of his form-matter to which evil adheres. Hence, in the universe as a whole or in the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated ether-void evil has no roots. Whatever is generated from the universe is generated through the intercourse of prior things by virtue of the void. That is, this generation results from the process of self-transcendence and ether-transformation of things from their form-matter existence. It may also be said that things are generated through the spiritual way and the virtue of the goodness of Heaven. Therefore, the nature by which things are generated can be said to be good only because this very nature is also the decree that Heaven gives for its coming into existence. And the evil can be admitted only with respect to the state of things after they have acquired their form-matter existence, but never attributed to the objective universe from which they have derived their existence.

To sum up, the nature of man in its origin is the nature of the universe, which is completely good, for the universe or the origin of the objective universe, the Great Harmony of the undifferentiated void-ether, is supremely good without evil. It is for this reason that man's heart cannot be truly at rest in remaining selfish, self-assuming, and mean even though the nature of the ether-matter in man inclines him to be such. And when man cannot be truly satisfied in being always motivated from his bodily considerations, he must transcend the holding-ons and the passions of his form-matter existence and make manifest the nature of the universe that is in him with its capacity for being void, in order to extend his mind and fully develop his mind and to help others as well as himself to be perfect and thereby to become a sage. The reason man is not to be selfish and self-insisting but should be motivated by human-heartedness and righteousness and become a sage is also that the nature of the ether-matter in man is not his true nature. One cannot realize his true self if he confines himself within the shell of his material body. The one way out is, therefore, to extend his mind fully, to nurture the human-heartedness and righteousness in his nature completely, and to employ his material body for the assistance of others as well as himself, in order to find the heavenly way that is capable of "gladdening all hearts" and "facilitating all wishes," so that one's true nature may be realized. And this way of realizing oneself is, according to Chang Tsai, to pursue the way to the extreme and to extend the nature to the full, and then the nature will be in harmony with the virtue of Heaven. Thus, the ether-matter that is received by the decree of Heaven will be

changed in conformity with the way. In Chang's own language, this is "To establish the decree," i.e., to make human destiny conform to heavenly decree. Referring to Heaven, Chang Tsai says, "Spirituality is Heaven's virtue, and transformation Heaven's way"; while referring to man, he says, "Nature is Heaven's virtue, and decree Heaven's rule." (Heaven's way differs from Heaven's rule in that the former is used mostly in connection with the universe, the latter with man. On this point, Chang Tsai is quite different from the Ch'êng-and-Chu school.) When the nature of man and the decree of Heaven are in tune, man can truly be said to be the filial son of Heaven and earth, and to have arrived at a state in which Heaven and man are unified and man becomes a sage. When one reaches the state of the sage, the nature of ether-matter is identified with the nature of the universe. Therefore, Chang said, "The nature of the ether-matter is sometimes rejected by the superior man." Hence, the nature of the ether-matter that can incline a man to evil is not rooted in the origin of the universe, nor can it adhere to the life of the sage and the superior man. It has but a temporary existence during the period after a man's birth and before his mind is fully extended and the nature of the universe in him has come to its realization.

VII. CONCLUSION

Chang Tsai's theory on the nature of the mind as discussed in this paper may be summed up under five points as follows:

(1) The human mind as a knower is void and intuitive and is not a collection of ideas and impressions, and, therefore, one should not discuss the mind in terms of impressions and ideas.

(2) The reason the human mind can be void and intuitive is that it has its origin in an objective universe, i.e., in the Great Harmony, in which the ether and the void are undifferentiated and being and non-being are one, or in the way of Heaven that is both void and concrete and by which the process of ether-transformation is in operation.

(3) The process of ether-transformation or the process of the extension and reversion of the objective universe embodies in itself the heavenly way or heavenly virtue that are similar to the moral nature or the virtues of human-heartedness and righteousness among men. Therefore, man should strive to extend his mind fully so as to come into harmony with the heavenly way and heavenly virtue.

(4) The reason man can come into harmony with the heavenly way and heavenly virtue is that by the void of the ether (this is actually human

nature) he canprehend all things in the universe, though his share of the ether of the universe is very little. Therefore, human nature contains the qualities of human-heartedness and righteousness, and human nature is good.

(5) Man has the nature of the ether-matter, but it is not on the same level as the nature of the universe. The nature of the ether-matter has no basis either in the origin of the universe or in the personality of a sage, and, therefore, is not truly the nature of man. The man who wishes to realize his true nature, however, must apply himself to the discipline by which the ether-matter is transformed and made more limpid and better able to enter into intercourse with other things—whereof Chang Tsai has set down a whole system of cultivation of moral virtues. But this paper cannot concern itself with that.