

I₂

First Couplet, Second Line

性相近 . 習相遠
hsing⁴ hsiang¹ chin⁴ . hsi^{2.5} hsiang¹ yüan³

Rhyme: 遠 – 阮 yüan³ (a geographical name).

> 遠 meaning “distant”, carries the third tone. It rhymes with 善 shan³ (# I₁) in a vulgar fashion. When read in the fourth tone, it would mean “to abstain”, be a 願 yüan⁴ rhyme (“to envy”), and would not even rhyme by the ear.

Translation:

There is mutual closeness by nature, mutual estrangement through practice.

> 相 (*W.* 158B) “[a hunter, or a soldier] lurking [behind a] tree”, was endowed with the abstract meaning “mutual”, reportedly because right and left parts of the kanji are both pronounced mu⁴. The sense of humour which Chinese scholars of old display in their etymologies, is noteworthy and surprising.

> 習 (*W.* 159A) “[a young bird’s] first [attempt] to fly”. The lower part of the kanji is not “white” but a shortened 自 “nose” → “first”. It came to mean a relentless “practicing” of something that has already been learned, as in the first apophthegm of the *Lun yüi*:

子曰 . 學而時習之 . 不亦說乎

The Master said: “To learn [something], and [to perfect it by] constant practice, isn’t it indeed a pleasure?”

The commentary defines 時 as 重時 “repeatedly”; and 說 as equaling 悅 : the kanji is therefore to be read yüeh^{4.5} (normal reading shuo^{1.5} “to speak”), it is in fact the best known

example of a spelling mistake that has made it to official acceptance.

Quotation: the entire verse is quoted from the *Lun yü*: see Master Wang's commentary, # 1₂-B.

Master Wang's Commentary

1₂-A

此承上文而言

tz'u³ ch'eng² shang⁴ wen² erh² yen²

The above text is here carried on and explained:

Quotation:

此承上 ... 而言, Master Wang quotes Chu Hsi's commentary on *Lun yü*, HY. 35/17/3 (C., p. 261; L., p. 318), which is the apophthegm immediately following the one quoted above # I₂ = below # 1₂-B). The apophthegm reads:

子曰.唯上知與下愚不移

The Master said: "Only the wise of the highest class and the stupid of the lowest class cannot be changed.

Whereupon Chu Hsi opens his commentary with the statement:

此承上章而言

This extends the above pericope and explains it

Reading just a little further one finds the famous statement:

程子曰.人性本善. q.v. above, 1₁-D, end.

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1₂-B

孔子曰.性相近也.習相遠也

k'ung³ tzu³ yüeh^{1.5}: hsing⁴ hsiang¹ chin⁴ yeh³, hsi^{2.5} hsiang¹
yüan³ yeh³

Confucius said: "There is mutual closeness by nature, mutual estrangement through practice."

This is the literal quotation from *Lun yü*, HY. 35/17/2 (*L.*, p. 318; *C.*, p. 261).

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1₂-C

言 . 人 初 生 時 . 智 愚 賢 不 肖 皆 同 此 性
 yen² jen² ch'u¹ sheng¹ shi², chih⁴ yü² hsien² pu^{4.5} hsiao⁴ chieh¹
 t'ung² tz'u³ hsing⁴

It means that the humans, at the moment of incipient life, all share this nature be they wise, fool, worthy, or degenerate.

And we may add: man or woman, cf. below, # 2-I. Remember that “incipient life” actually means semen ejaculating and implanting itself in the mother’s womb.

> 智 chih⁴ “the wise” (*W.* 131E).

> 愚 (*W.* 23E) yü² “the fool” is “a monkey hearted [person]”.

> 賢 hsien² “eminent man, a State official” shows “the official” in ritual posture; it shows his “hand” with which he helps his sovereign; and it shows a “cowrie”, his salary.

> 不肖 pu^{4.5} hsiao⁴ “the degenerate” is the one who “is not the little meat [of his ancestors]” (*W.* 18J).

Quotations:

First quotation:

初 生 “incipient life” refers us to the *Shu ching* pericope quoted in # 1₁-B: intelligence, fortune and age are decided by Heaven. Cf. also *MENCIUS*, HY. 37/5A/6 (*C.*, p. 524; *L.*, p. 359): it was the doing of Heaven that the sons of Yao and Shun were “degenerates”, viz. did not equal their fathers. There is no contradiction with Master Wang’s statement: the moment when the complex doing of Heaven sets in, is of necessity posterior to the insemination of the womb. The neo-Confucian “Heaven” is a materialistic law of nature: it is not a god who, by his will, determines the fate of humans (cf. 1₁-C).

Second quotation:

The *locus classicus* of the four categories of human beings is *Li chi*, Chung yung 4 (*C.*, p. 31; *L.* p. 387):

(1) *The Master said: “I know how it is that the path [of the Mean] is not walked in: – The knowing go beyond it, and the stupid do not come up to it. I know how it is that the path [of the Mean] is not understood: – The men of talents and virtue go beyond it, and the worthless do not come up to it. (2) There is no body but eats and drinks. But they are few who can distinguish flavours.” (Legge)*

The quoted form, however, is to be found in the commentary to this apophthegm (see below, # 1₂-E). In order to render the text more intelligible, Master Wang changed the original 知 chih¹ “to know” into 智 chih⁴ “the wise”.

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1₂-D

本相近而無別也

pen³ hsiang¹ chin⁴ erh² wu² pieh^{2.5} yeh³

At the root we are close to one another: there is no difference.

Cf. supra # 1₁-G: “*In this, nobody differs in the least from Yao and Shun.*”

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1₂-E

及乎知識既開. 氣稟各異

chi^{2.5} hu¹ chih¹ shih^{4.5} chi⁴ k'ai¹ . ch'i⁴ pin³ ko^{4.5} yi⁴

But once knowledge and experience develop, the personalities are all diverse.

> 知識 is a compound listed *MTH.*, 932.44 : “knowledge and experience; common sense”. It would be tempting to translate it simply with “intelligence” (as does *R.*, 1315), but here this would amount to an error, because, as will be shown, intelligence is the result of knowledge and experience, namely the result of learning.

> 氣稟 is also listed in *MTH.*, 554 (a) 20: “natural endowment or disposition”. This does not fit the present context, which is obviously no longer talking about “natural endowment”

(which was shown to be good and equal to all) but about a later stage of development. *R.*, 4988 “*Veranlagung, Wesen*”. This last definition is best, i.e. “personality”; cf. also the paraphrase of *M.*, 6.1759.193: “the personality which is gained by cultivation”. It also fits an earlier occurrence, namely in the commentary to the *incipit* of *Chung yung* (quoted # I₁):

性道雖同而氣稟或異

Although the natural ways are the same for all, personalities are somewhat different.

The commentary to *Chung yung* 4 (second quotation of # 1₂-C) says:

智愚賢不肖之過不及則生稟之異而失其中也
The wise, the fool, the worthy, the degenerate, all are sinners either through excess or through want. Hence, there occurs an alteration of the gifts they received at their conception, and they lose their equilibrium.

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1₂-F

資之敏者則爲智·識之闇者則爲愚
 循乎理者則爲賢·縱乎欲者則爲不肖
 tzu¹ chih¹ min³ che³ tse^{2.5} wei² chih⁴;
 shih^{4.5} chih¹ an⁴ che³ tse^{2.5} wei² yü²;
 hsün² hu¹ li³ che³ tse^{2.5} wei² hsien²;
 tsong⁴ hu¹ yü^{4.5} che³ tse^{2.5} wei² pu^{4.5} hsiao⁴.

*Wise is the one whose wit is smart;
 a fool the one whose mind is shut;
 stick to the rules and you make a career;
 follow your whim and you make a disgrace.*

These definitions appear to be school folklore. They may not rhyme but their rhythm is good (initial 平 tone in 1 and 3; initial 去 tone in 2 and 4; 去 tone ending 1 and 4; 下平 ending 2 and 3); and their psychology fits boys rather than solemn scholars. The last definition, in particular, reminds us of the banter quoted # I₁: “nature is radically lazy”. None of

these definitions are to be found, either through the *Purple Pearl*, nor among the scores of definitions quoted in *M*.

> 理 “the rules”. Chinese thought does not distinguish between the natural, the social and the ethical order – a distinction painfully familiar to us since the famous *Il Principe* of Niccoló Macchiavelli. To li³ there is most definitely a metaphysical dimension resulting from the macrocosmic-microcosmic equations characteristic of Chinese thought: e.g. the emperor’s virtue, or vice, is responsible for the correct, or faulty, alternation of the seasons (cf. *Yüeh ling*). Consequently, a setback in an official’s career will not be considered as a mere hardship, but as a cosmic mal-functioning totally inexplicable. To us westerners, the complaints uttered on such occasions appear to be out of all proportion.

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1₂-G

反之秉彝之善性. 不既大相遠乎

fan³ chih¹ ping³ yi² chih¹ shan⁴ hsing⁴

pu^{4.5} chi⁴ ta⁴ hsiang¹ yüan³ hu¹

Once the goodness of the natural standards is perverted, do then not the diverse characters differ greatly from one another?

> 秉彝 see # 1₁-D.

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1₂-H

此無他

tz’u³ wu² t’o¹

There is no difference.

Quotation:

In order to answer the question of # 1₂-G, Master Wang quotes *MENCIUS, HY. 54/7A/36* (L., p.471; C., p. 625). Notice that the phrase does not quite fit our context: here the litotes is

meant to provide a positive answer to a question; there it underlines the similarity of two examples. These two examples illustrate how the social and the material positions affect our deportment and moral character. The second example is followed by the remark quoted here: *there is no difference*, namely between the first example, and the second, as stated by the commentary:

孟子又引此事爲證

Mencius has introduced this [second] anecdote as a further example.

Fine! But why use a quotation that does not quite fit? What Master Wang does is referred to, technically, as “the duck-and-drake method”, 鴛鴦格 yüan¹ yang¹ ke², a major tool of Chinese literary expression. Ducks and drakes, more precisely “mandarin ducks” (*anas galericulata* “the small-wig duck”, the flaming male and the drab female) are paragons of Chinese matrimonial fidelity (see *Odes* 216 and 229:7): should the birds of one couple be out of each other’s sight, they at once call out and answer each other. In rhetoric the “duck-and-drake” is an indirect quotation: the intended meaning is not expressed by the quoted passage, but by another passage which is in some way linked to the one quoted. A fine duck-and-drake is valued highly, as it shows taste and learning, viz. the belonging to a given society; for it stands to reason that such a mode of expression works only within a society where everybody is intimately familiar with the same books – as would, in the West, be the case among clergymen, of one quoting to a colleague the last line of Psalm 52: “Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad”, in order to intimate what the psalm says in line 5, namely, that our government “are but workers of iniquity who eat up my people as they eat bread.” Indeed, the “duck and drake method” was a choice device by which to express subversive political opinions.

Presently Mencius has made his point by showing two instances in which a prince, because of his princely

department, was recognised as being a person of authority; and he concludes:

況居天下之廣居者乎

How much more [should] a [peculiar air distinguish] him whose position is in the wide house of the world! (Legge)

This is what Master Wang is aiming at. As we are all equal at the moment of conception and all equally good, it is through learning and practice that we come to differ from each other; and the “superior man” distinguishes himself more than any other from ordinary people, including princes.

The comportment of the “superior man” is described in *MENCIUS, HY. 22/3B/2* (L., p. 265; C., p. 437):

To dwell in the wide house of the world (understand: at Court), *to stand in the correct seat of the world* (understand: to exercise honourably the charge of an Imperial official), *and to walk the great path of the world* (understand: to be successful); *when he obtains his desire* (understand: when he gets appointed), *to practice his principles for the good of the people; and when that desire is disappointed, to practice them alone; to be above the power of riches and honours to make dissipated, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend: – these characteristics constitute the great man.* (Legge)

This definition of the “great/superior man” 大丈夫 ta⁴ chang⁴ fu¹, namely the great minister of State, epitomises the moral ideal of Confucianism, and the aim of Confucian education proposed in this children’s primer. It also provides a logical link between what has been explained so far and the general conclusion, which is about to follow.

N.B.: This ideal, fine as it is, is (like any ideal) highly theoretical, of course – in China just as anywhere else on earth. In China, however, we observe the paradox that, throughout her long history, governments and administrations emphatically preached “the good of the people” on the one hand; yet, on the other hand, concern for the prosperity of one’s own family was considered legitimate. In fact, the good of one’s own family (namely one’s parents’ ease) was actually

considered as having moral precedence over the public good. Up to the present day, a Chinese State official who was only moderately wealthy would meet with the criticism: “How can he be a good official when he not even succeeds in prospering his own family?!” Such an argument is based on innumerable Confucian texts, but in particular on the double catena developed in the *Great learning*, I (L., p. 357:4 - 359:5; C., p. 3-4): “*The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue...*” &c.

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1₂-I

習氣使然也

hsi^{2.5} ch'i⁴ shih³ jan² yeh³

Habit makes it so.

> 習氣 is listed *Cd.*, p. 727c as “*habitude*”; *MTH.*, 2499.22 precisely “evil habit” does not apply here – rather the next entry, 23: 成了習氣 “become a habit”. Good habits are responsible for good qualities, bad habits for bad qualities.

Quotation:

使然, Master Wang holds on to the *MENCIUS* pericope quoted above (1₂-H). The present quotation, the “drake”, immediately precedes the “duck” (proof that our guess was right). It reads:

其居使之然也

That he (namely, the prince) *looked so* (viz. as he did, namely, like a prince) *was occasioned by his position.*

Notice that Master Wang replaced the Mencian “his social position” by “habits”: they are prerequisite for, and prevalent in, the social position of State officials; and “their habits” include appropriate manners as well as appropriate knowledge. We are no longer in a feudal society where the position decides education; but in a neo-Confucian order where education decides position (at least in theory).

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1₂-J

惟君子爲能有養正之功

而不使幼稚之性移於不善也

wei² chün¹ tzu³ wei⁴ neng² yu³ yang³ cheng⁴ chih¹ kung¹
 erh² pu^{4.5} shih³ yu⁴ chih⁴ chih¹ hsing⁴ yi² yü² pu^{4.5} shan⁴ yeh³

One is a gentleman because one is able to secure the achievement of nourishing the right, and to prevent the deterioration of the character of youth.

> 幼稚, literally “young and youthful”, can be found in many places, cf. *M.*, 4.9193.96: it appears not to be a specific quotation, rather is it the normal term for “small children” (cf. 幼稚園 the “kindergarten”).

> 移 “to transplant rice, to change one condition to another” (cf. I₂-A, quotation). The kanji shows a “plant of rice” and the kanji “many”, for, when transplanted, the one rice plant grows up to twenty offshoots. Hence the meaning is not simply “to change”, but “to change and make proliferate”; hence: “to allow evil to abound” – “evil”, or perhaps better: “vice, unsocial behaviour”.

Quotations:

Copious quoting renders the sentence somewhat complex.

First quotation:

君子能, *Li ki*, Chih yi, *HY*. 33/18 (*C.*, II, p. 529):

唯君子能好其正. 小人毒其正

Only the gentleman knows to further his own good; ordinary men poison their own good.

Master Wang has changed:

– 唯 wei² “only” into 惟 wei² “to be”;

– 好其正 “to love, to favour, one’s own good”, viz. “what is good for one’s own self” (antonym of 毒 tu^{2.5} “to hate, to poison”) into 養正 “to feed the good”, or rather, “to nourish what is right”, in anticipation of # 2-A.

– Most important, the 其 “his own” has disappeared, meaning: Master Wang talks not of gentlemen who would develop their own virtuous dispositions, but – one does not

exclude the other – of gentlemen fathers who are able to encourage the right dispositions in their sons, and prevent their children from developing in the wrong direction.

Second quotation:

養正 is quoted from the *Yi ching*, *HY.* 3/91392: 2),

1) (p. 5b (top) 蒙以養正聖功也 *to set untaught children on the correct path by means of [appropriate] training, is the achievement of a saint*. However, according to Master Wang, one does not really need to be a “saint”; it is enough to be an honest gentleman. This quotation anticipates on # 2-A. (*WILHELM*, p. 407: “to strengthen what is right in a fool is a holy task.”; cf. the popular saying 蒙養作聖 *MTH.*, 4437 (a)12.: “*early training will make a man into a sage*”.)

2) (p. 18a top) 養正則吉也 *If one provides nourishment for what is right, good fortune comes* (*WILHELM*, p. 520). Confucianism viewed riches derived from learning as the only legitimate ones, hence (in sharp contrast to Western standards) a fortune accumulated in public employment. As the present oracle puts it:

天地養萬物。聖人養賢以及萬民

Heaven and Earth nourish all beings; the Holyman (viz the Son of Heaven) nourishes the officials and thus reaches the multitude of nations.

> 賢 see # 1₂-C ; *Wilhelm* (p. 521): “men of worth”. For the diet of the chief, see *GRANET*, p. 395 & ff.

Third quotation:

不善 occurs frequently in the classics, cf. e.g. the *MENCIUS* passage quoted supra, # I₁. However, the only passage that fits the present context – and fits it beautifully – appears to be *MENCIUS*, *HY.* 21/3A/4 (*L.*, p. 255; *C.*, 428): blaming the interlocutor for showing interest in the doctrine of some heterodox teacher, Mencius ends his argument with the words:

子是之學亦爲不善變矣

... *your studying this [doctrine] will likewise bring about a change for the worse.*

... namely “the unsocial, the subversive”. Granted that erudition brings (good) fortune; but not just any erudition: heed should be taken of orthodoxy. Heterodoxy, by definition, is conducive to rebellion against the established order. This is but the first allusion to this logion; a second allusion comes in # II; and the actual quotation occurs in # 2-E. (For a similar idea, cf. # 1₁-A, 端.)