

basis that Hui-yüan's fictitious opponent in this final dialogue challenges the Buddhist doctrine of karma and transmigration.

*Question:* . . . The receipt of spirit is limited to one life. When the life is exhausted, the breath evaporates, and it is the same as nothing. The spirit, though it is more subtle than matter, is still a transformed manifestation of the yin and the yang. When they have been transformed there is life; when they are transformed again there is death. When they come together there is a beginning; when they disperse there is an end. If one reasons from this, one must know that the spirit and the body are transformed together, and that originally they are of the same line. The subtle and the gross are one breath, and from beginning to end they have the same abode. While the abode is whole, the breath comes together and there is a spirit; when the abode crumbles, the breath disperses and the light goes out. When it disperses, it returns what it has received to the Great Origin. When it has perished, it returns to a state of nothingness. Return and termination are natural destinies. Who could create them? . . . Also, the spirit resides in the body as fire is in the wood. While [the body] lives [the spirit] exists, but when [the body] crumbles [the spirit] must perish. When the body departs the soul disperses and has no dwelling. When the tree rots the fire dies out and has nothing to attach to. That is the principle. Even if the matter of sameness and difference were obscure and difficult to clarify, the doctrine of being and nonbeing must rest in coming together and dispersion. Coming together and dispersion is the general term for the change of the breath; it is the birth-and-death of the myriad changes.

In his reply Hui-yüan explains the principle of reincarnation in terms of individual lives or destinies. The key Chinese word here is *shu*, literally "number," which refers to the individual life-span or allotted destiny. At the same time, however, it has Buddhist overtones suggesting the process of multiple causation (karma) which determines the individual lot in life, and thus, in its most general sense, the world of multiplicity subject to endless change and transmigration.

*Answer:* What is the spirit? It is subtlety that has reached the extreme and become immaterial. The extreme of subtlety cannot be charted by the trigrams and explanations [of the *Book of Changes*]. Therefore the sage calls it "more subtle than matter" and so names it. . . .

The spirit is in perfect accord and has no creator; it is subtle to the

extreme and has no name. In response to beings it moves; borrowing an individual lot [i.e., the life of an individual person] it acts. It responds to things but it is not a thing; therefore though the things may change it does not perish. It borrows a lot [in life] but it is not itself that lot; therefore though the lot be run out, it does not end. Having feelings, it can respond to things; having intelligence, it can be found [embodied] in allotted destinies. There are subtle and gross destinies and therefore the nature of each is different. There are bright and dull intellects and therefore their understanding is not always the same. If one reasons from this, then one knows that change is felt by the feelings, and that the spirit is transmitted through change. Feelings are the mother of change, and the spirit is the root of the feelings. The feelings have a way of uniting with physical things, and the spirit has the power of moving imperceptibly. But a person of penetrating perception returns to the Source, while one who is lost in the principle merely runs after physical things<sup>10</sup>. . . .

Feelings and things possessing a destined lot and the changes they occasion have no bounds. Causes and conditions closely interlock, and imperceptibly transmit and transfer. Were it not for those of penetrating vision, who would know of their transformations and who would know of their coming together? I beg leave to prove it for your sake, my worthy opponent, by recourse to fact. The passage of fire to firewood is like the passage of the soul to the body. The passage of fire to different firewood is like the passage of the soul to a new body. If the former firewood is not the latter firewood, then we know that the way in which the finger exhausts its duty is past comprehension.<sup>11</sup> If the former body is not the latter body, then one understands that the interaction of the feelings and the individual destiny is profound. The person in error, seeing the body wither in one life, thinks that the spirit and the feelings perish with it. It is as if one were to see the fire die out in one piece of wood, and say that all fire had been exhausted for all time.

<sup>10</sup>That is, the enlightened person attains Nirvāna (which for Hui-yüan means that the soul returns to its point of origin), while the victim of error suffers endless reincarnation.

<sup>11</sup>This is an allusion to the closing sentence of the *Chuang Tzu*, ch. 3, which reads (according to the traditional interpretation), "If the finger fulfills its duty in adding firewood, then the transmission of the fire knows no exhaustion." Hui-yüan interprets this to mean that, just as the fire moves from the old firewood to the new, so the soul moves from the old body to the new. For him this is very important, since in his view it is a corroboration from a secular Chinese source of the Buddhist theory of reincarnation.



INTRODUCTION TO  
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