

Death in Chinese Philosophy

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Excerpts

陆澄录 2 (16)

先生曰：“只念念要存天理，即是立志。能不忘乎此，久则自然心中凝聚，犹道家所谓‘结圣胎’也。此天理之念常存，驯至于美大圣神，亦只从此一念存养扩充去耳。”

(Lu Deng) asked on establishing the will.

The master said: If you want to preserve the principle of heaven with every thought, then that is establishing the will. Once you cannot forget about it, then, in the long run, it will naturally consolidate in the mind, just like the Daoist's saying that you can link up with the sage in your intestines. If you preserve the thought on the principle of heaven constantly, then that is a training (that achieves, what Mengzi called) (fulfilling reality is called) beauty, (a luminous fulfilled reality is called) greatness, (greatness that can be changed is called) sagacity and (and sagacity that cannot be known is called) spirituality. Just starting from the preservation of that thought you can achieve all of that.

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澄尝问象山在人情事变上做功夫之说。

先生曰：“除了人情事变，则无事矣。喜怒哀乐非人情乎？自视听言动，以至富贵、贫贱、患难、死生，皆事变也。事变亦只在人情里，其要只在‘致中和’，‘致中和’只在‘谨独’。”

Once (Lu) Deng asked about (Lu) Xiangshan's theory of the technique of human feelings and the change of affairs.

The master said: Except for human feelings as changing affairs there are no (other) affairs. Are not happiness and anger, sadness and joy human feelings? Beginning with seeing and hearing, speaking and moving all the way to wealth and high esteem, poverty and low esteem, difficulties and catastrophes, death and life, all of them are (nothing but) affairs in change. And changing affairs only exist within human feelings. You simply must keep up with centrality and harmony and while keeping up centrality and harmony be watchful over yourself while alone.

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澄问：“有人夜怕鬼者，奈何？”

先生曰：“只是平日不能‘集义’而心有所慊，故怕。若素行合于神明，何怕之有？”

子莘曰：“正直之鬼不须怕，恐邪鬼不管人善恶，故未免怕。”

先生曰：“岂有邪鬼能迷正人乎！只此一怕即是心邪。故有迷之者，非鬼迷也，心自迷耳。如人好色即是色鬼迷，好货即是货鬼迷，怒所不当怒是怒鬼迷，惧所不当惧是惧鬼迷也。”

Deng asked: There are people that fear ghosts at night, how about that?

The master said: That is a type of person that normally is unable to collect good deeds and therefore has shame in his mind. That is why he is in fear. If he would plainly act in accordance with spiritual clarity, how would there be something to be feared?

Zishen (Ma Mingheng) asked: There is no need to fear an upright ghost; but unfortunately as evil ghosts do not differentiate between humans that do good or evil, there is no way but fearing them.

The master said: Could evil ghosts really confuse an upright person? The single fear itself is (an aspect of) mind! Therefore, that which confuses it is not a ghost, but rather the mind itself. If someone is into sexual pleasures then a sexual ghost will confuse him, when someone is into wealth, then a wealth ghost will confuse him, when someone gets angry

when he should not get angry, then the ghost of anger will confuse him and if someone is afraid where there is nothing to be afraid of, the ghost of fear will confuse him.

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王嘉秀问：“佛以出离生死诱人入道，仙以长生久视诱人入道，其心亦不是要人做不好，究其极至，亦是见得圣人上一截，然非入道正路。如今仕者，有由科，有由贡，有由传奉，一般做到大官，毕竟非入仕正路，君子不由也。仙、佛到极处与儒者略同。但有了上一截，遗了下一截，终不似圣人之全。然其上一截同者，不可诬也。后世儒者又只得圣人下一截，分裂失真，流而为记诵、词章、功利、训诂，亦卒不免为异端。是四家者，终身劳苦，于身心无分毫益。视彼仙、佛之徒，清心寡欲，超然于世累之外者，反若有所不及矣。今学者不必先排仙、佛，且当笃志为圣人之学。圣人之学明，则仙、佛自泯。不然则此之所学，恐彼或有不屑，而反欲其俯就，不亦难乎！鄙见如此，先生以为何如？”

先生曰：“所论大略亦是。但谓上一截、下一截，亦是人见偏了如此。若论圣人大中至正之道，彻上彻下，只是一贯，更有甚上一截、下一截？‘一阴一阳之谓道’，但‘仁者见之便谓之仁，智者见之便谓之智，百姓又日用而不知，故君子之道鲜矣。’仁、智岂可不谓之道？但见得偏了便有弊病。”

Wang Jiaxiu asked: The Buddhists lure people into (their) truth by (a teaching on) transcendence of life and death and the (followers of) immortality lure people into (their) truth by (talks about) long life and far sight. Their mind is not set on letting people do evil. When investigating their final goals it can be seen that (their teachings correspond) to the higher level (of learning) of the sages, yet without entering the proper way of the true teaching. Among those that hold office nowadays, no matter, whether they became high officials by taking exams, by offering money or by having good relations, they definitely did not come to office by the proper way and there are necessarily no noble minded (one's among them). Achieved Immortalists and Buddhists are thus quite similar to Confucians. Yet, they (only) have (the aspect) of higher learning and neglect lower learning which in the end makes them not all too similar in completeness (of teaching) with the teaching of the sages. On the other hand, they cannot be accused for being (very much) the same for higher level

(of learning). The Confucians of latter ages on the other hand only achieved the (aspect of) lower learning of the sages and in that split (in learning) miss out on its truth. As time passes they only recite (the classics), elaborate on them in essays, act for utilitarian profit or work on exegetical studies (of the classics) and thus in the end cannot evade to make for a false learning. Comparing them to the four schools they feel bitterly stressed in the end and have not the slightest advantage for themselves and their mind. And if they then look at the followers of the Immortalists and the Buddhists, their clarification of mind and reduction of selfish wishes as well as their transcendence of the world, they will themselves feel somewhat inadequate. If (instead) nowadays' scholars would not need to first criticize Immortalists and Buddhists and earnestly put their will to the learning of the sages, then the learning of the sages would be clear and Immortalists and Buddhists would automatically vanish. Otherwise, that which you learn will fear not to be equal to their teachings and may in the end submit to their wishes. Is that not a big problem? That is my personal understanding, how does the master think about it?

The master said: Generally speaking, I see it the same way. Yet when you speak about higher and lower (levels of) learning that is also a very partial way of seeing things. When discussing the great, central, achieved and proper truth of the sages then above or below are simply united as one; how could there be higher and lower levels? (When the classics say that) 'Yin and Yang are called Dao', yet 'when the humane person sees (the world) he calls it humane and when the wise person sees (the world) he calls it wise, and the people use it every day without even knowing about it and that is why the proper way of the noble man is rare' how could humanity and wisdom not be called the proper way? But if you look at them partially then you will be obscured.

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问仙家元气、元神、元精。

先生曰：“只是一件，流行为气，凝聚为精，妙用为神。”

(Lu Deng) asked about the Immortalists' school's (terms) of original qi, original spirit and original energy.

The master said: That really is just one thing. When flowing out it is called qi, when condensating it is called refined (material), in its wonderful function it is called spirit.

門人薛侃錄 32 (126)

蕭惠問死生之道。先生曰：「知晝夜，即知死生」。問晝夜之道。曰：「知晝則知夜」。曰：「晝亦有所不知乎」？先生曰：「汝能知晝，懵懵而興，蠢蠢而食。行不著，習不察。終日昏昏，只是夢晝。惟『息有養，瞬有存』。此心惺惺明明，天理無一息間斷，才是能知晝。這便是天德。便是通乎晝夜之道而知。更有甚麼死生」？

Su Hui asked about the true concept (dao) of death and life.

The master said: If you know about day and night you also know about death and life.

(The student) asked about the true concept of day and night.

(The master) said: If you know about the day, then you know about the night.

Question: But could there not also be something I do not know about the day?

(The master) said: If you are able to know about the day, (only) muddleheadedly rising, dully eating, acting without evidence and practicing without examination, then at the end of the day you are still dumb and it is just a daydream. It is as (Zhang Zai said) 'you nourish in a breath and exist in a twinkle'. When our mind is completely awake and bright and the universal principle is not interrupted for a single moment, only then are we able to know the day. This is what universal virtue is about. It runs through the true concept of day and night and knowledge. So what could there be about death and life?

《答陸原靜書》 3 (153)

來書云：前日精一之論，即作聖之功否？「精一」之「精」以理言，「精神」之「精」以氣言，氣之條理；氣者，理之運用。無條理則不能運用；無運用則亦無以見其所謂條理。精則精，精則明，精則一，精則神，精則誠，一則精，一則明，一則神，一則誠，原一也。但後世儒者之說與養生之說各湍於一隔，是以不相為用。前日「精一」之論，雖

養精神而發，然而作聖之功，實亦不外是矣。

In your letter you asked whether the discussion on the unity of energy we had the other day applied for the effort of becoming a sage. The energy in the term 'unity of energy' speaks from the perspective of principle, while the energy in the term 'energy and spirit' speaks about it from the perspective of qi. Principles are the structuring principles of qi and qi is the dynamic functionality of principle. Without structuring principles there is no dynamic functionality and without dynamic functionality there is nothing by which one could perceive that which is called structuring principle. Energy makes for energy, makes for clarity, makes for unity, makes for spirituality, makes for honesty; unity makes for energy, makes for clarity, makes for spirituality, makes for honesty. In the origin these are no two different aspects. But in the theories of latter day Confucians and the teachings of prolonging life each have drifted into their specific fields and are therefore not corresponding in their application. Even if we discussed the 'unity of energy' the other day as something that evolves from an energetic spirit that originally is calm and loves nourishment it really is not beyond the effort of becoming a sage.

《答歐陽崇一》 3 (170)

來書又云：師云：「為學終身只是一事，不論有事無事，只是這一件。若說寧不了事，不可不加培養，卻是分為兩事也。」寂意覺料力衰弱，不足以終豐者，良知也。寧不了事，且加休冬，致知也。如何卻為兩豐？若事變之來，有事勢不容不了而精力雖衰，稍鼓舞亦能支持，則持志以帥氣可矣。然言動終無氣力，畢事則困憊已甚，不幾於暴其氣已乎？此其輕重緩急，良知固未嘗不知，然或迫於事勢，安能傾精力？或因於精力，安能傾事券？如之何則可？「寧不了事，不可不加培養之」意，且與初學如此話亦不為無益。但乍兩事看了，便有病扁。在孟子言必有事焉，則君子之學終身只是「集義」一事。義者，宜也，心得其宜之謂義。能致良知則心得其宜矣，故「集義」亦只是致良知，君子之酬酢萬變，當行則行，當止則止，當生則生，當死則死，斟酌調停，無非是致其真知，以求自慊而已。故「君子素其位而行」，「思不出其位」。凡謀其力之所不及，而強其知之所不能者，皆不得為致真知，而凡「勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，動心忍性以增益其所不能」者，皆所以致其真知

也。若雲寧不了事，不可不加培養者，亦是先有功利之心，計較成敗利鈍而愛憎取舍於其間，是以將了事自阡一事，而培養又別作一事，此便有是內、非外之意，便是自私用智，便是「義外」，便有「不得於心，勿求於氣」之病，便不是致真知以求自慊之功矣。所云「鼓舞支持，畢事則困憊已甚」，又云「迫於事勢，因於精力」，皆是把作兩事做了，所以有此。凡學問之功，一則誠，二則為。凡此皆是致真知之意，欠誠一真切之故。《大學》言「誠其意者，如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自慊。」曾見有惡惡臭，好好色，而須鼓舞支持者乎？曾見畢事則困憊已甚者乎？曾有迫於事勢，因於精力者乎？此可以知其受病之所從來矣。

... Righteousness is appropriateness. When the mind achieves its appropriateness it is called righteousness. If one is able to reach original knowledge of goodness then the mind has achieved its appropriateness. Therefore (the term in Mengzi) 'accumulating righteousness' also just refers to reaching knowledge of original goodness. That is when the noble man in his exchange with all the myriad changes acts the way he should act, stops where he should stop, lives where he should live and dies where he should die. He deliberates and intervenes, there is no more wrong and right in arriving at his true knowledge and by this simply attains self fulfillment. ...

《門人陳九川錄》 1 (201)

先生曰：「先儒解格物為格天下之物，天下之物如何格得？且謂一草一木亦皆有理，今如何去格？縱格得草木來，如何反來誠得自家意？我解格作正字義，物作事字義，《大學》之所謂身，即耳目口鼻四肢是也。欲修身，便是要目非禮勿視，耳非禮勿聽，口非禮勿言，四肢非禮勿動。要修這個身，身上如何用得工夫？心者身之主宰，目雖視而所以視者心也，耳雖聽而所以聽者心也，口與四肢雖言動而所以言動者心也，故欲修身在於體當自家心體，當令廓然大公，無有些子不正處。主宰一正，則發竅於目，自無非禮之視；發竅於耳，自無非禮之聽；發竅於口與四肢，自無非禮之言動；此便是修身在正其心。然至善者，心之本體也。心之本體，那有不善？如今要正心，本體上何處用得功？必就心之發動處才可著力也。」

The master said: A former scholar has explained *ge wu* as meaning that one should explore all the things under heaven, but how could I explore all things under heaven? Furthermore

he said that each grass and each tree has its principle, how should I explore them? And even if I had explored all grasses and trees, how should I come back to make my intentions sincere? I explain the character *ge* to mean 'to correct', the character 'thing' to mean 'affair', and that which the *Daxue* calls *shen* (body, self) corresponds to the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs. If you therefore want to cultivate *shen* (yourself/body), then your eyes should not look at that which is not ritually correct and your ears should not listen to what is not ritually correct, your mouth should not speak what is not ritually correct and your four limbs should not move in a ritually incorrect way. If you want to cultivate this body/yourself, how could you exert effort on your *shen* (yourself/body)? The mind is the ruler of the body (*shen*). Even if the eyes see, that which actually sees is the mind, even if the ears hear, that which actually hears is the mind, the mouth and the four limbs may speak and move, but what actually is speaking and moving is the mind. Therefore if you want to cultivate yourself/body (*shen*) at a substantial level then you ought to go for the substance of your mind and you should do this in an all pervasive and impartial way so that there is not a single aspect that is not corrected. Once the ruler is corrected then it will issue its agency to the eye, which will then have no perception of something that is not ritually correct; it will issue its agency to the ear, that then will have not hearing of something that is not ritually correct; it will issue its agency to the mouth and the four limbs, that then will have no ritually incorrect expressions or moving. That what is meant by cultivating your body lies in making your mind correct. And the utmost good is the original structure of the mind, so how could the original structure of the mind have something that is not good? Now if you want to make your mind upright, from where should you start to apply an effort relating to the original structure? You can only gain force (in this effort) if you approach the point where the mind (itself) issues a stirring.

《門人黃省曾錄》 7 (254)

問志士、仁人章。先生曰：「只為世上人都把生身命子看得太重，不問當死不當死，定要宛轉委曲保全，以此把天理卻丟去了，忍心害理，同者不為。若違了天理，便與禽獸無異，便偷生在世上百千年，也不過做了千百年的禽獸。學者要於此等處看得明白；比干、龍逢，只為也看得分明，所以能成就得他的仁。」

Question on the topic of willful scholar and humane man.

The master said: It is simply a problem of people in the world taking their physical life and their allotment all too seriously. Without asking whether it is appropriate to die or not they tortuously want to preserve their (physical) integrity, (even if that means) to through away universal principle. Hardening their mind and damaging principle is something that someone agreeing (to willfulness and humanity) would not do. Once you go against the universal principle you are no different from the wild animals. And even if you were able to drift along in life in this world for hundreds of thousands of years, you still would not be anything but thousands of hundreds of years of an animal (life). Those that learn should look upon this point clearly in order to gain understanding. (The martyr sage of the Shang era mentioned in the *Lunyu*) Bi Gan and (Xia) Long Feng acted on that and saw that most distinctively. That is why they were able completely achieving humaneness.

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先生曰：「良知是造化的精靈，這些精靈，生天生地，成鬼成帝，皆從此出，真是與物無對。人若復得他完完全全，無少虧欠，自不覺手舞足蹈，不知天地閑更有何樂可代。」

The master said: Original good knowledge is the energetic force of creation; this energetic force brings forth heaven and earth, completes ghosts and ancestors; it all comes out from this and there truly is no opposition with things. If man does retrieve it completely and fully without the least deficit then he will be unconsciously moving as if dancing and unknowingly there will be no joy that could substitute it between heaven and earth.

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先生游南鎮，一友指巖中花樹問曰：「天下無心外之物，如此花樹，在深山中自開自落，於我心亦何相關？」先生曰：「你未看此花時，此花與汝心同歸於寂。你來看此花時，則此花顏色一時明白起來。便知此花不在你的心外。」

The master was travelling in Nanzhen when a friend pointed at the flowers and trees on the slopes (of the hills) and asked: ‚If there are no things outside of the mind, how come that (the flowers) blossom and wither in the deep mountains all by themselves? And how do they then relate to my mind?’ The master answered: ‚At the time when you did not see these flowers, these flowers and your mind return to tranquility. When you come to see these flowers then the color of these flowers will become clear at that time. From this you can tell that these flowers are not outside of your mind.’

30 (277)

又曰：「目無體，以萬物之色為體；耳無體，以萬物之聲為體；鼻無體，以萬物之臭為體；口無體，以萬物之味為體；心無體，以天地萬物感應之是非為體。」...

(The master) also said: ‚The eyes have no substance, they take the appearance of the myriad things as substance; the ears have no substance, they take the sound of the myriad things as their substance; the nose has no substance, it takes the smells of the myriad things as its substance; the mouth has no substance, it takes the taste of the myriad things as its substance; the mind has no substance, it takes the immediate reactions to what is right and wrong of the myriad things as its substance.’ ...

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先生曰：「無知無不知，本體原是如此。譬如日未嘗有心照物，而自無物不照。無照無不照，原是日的本體。良知本無知，今卻要有知；本無不知，今卻疑有不知，只是信不及耳！」

The master said: ‚Knowing nothing as there is nothing that is not known, that is what the original substance is like. You can compare it with the sun that does not have the mind (the intention) to illuminate things, yet as of themselves all things are illuminated. Illuminating everything without illumination that is the original substance of the sun. The original knowledge of good has no knowledge, yet you will definitely have knowledge. In the origin there is nothing unknown, but now you doubt that there is not enough knowledge, this is just because you lack faith.’