

The Is-Ought Correlation in Neo-Confucian *Qi*-Realism: How Normative Facts Exist in Natural States of *Qi*

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I. Introduction

This paper aims to reconstruct the ontology of *qi* in Neo-Confucianism to give it a contemporary outlook so that it could respond to philosophical issues and concerns of our times. The three philosophers selected for this study are three Neo-Confucians of the *Ming* dynasty: Luo Qinshun (1465-1547), Wang Tingxiang (1474-1544) and Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692).¹ In calling *qi*-ontology a form of ‘realism’, my emphasis is on the view that *qi* is real in the sense that it constitutes everything in the world. This view has also been called *qi*-naturalism by contemporary scholars.² This general sense of ontological naturalism merely asserts that all facts are “natural facts” — facts about the natural world. The reconstruction aims to analyze the various claims these three philosophers make with regard to the way *qi* makes up everything in the world and to see if they can collectively compose a coherent ontology. In particular, one issue that will be addressed in this paper is how normative facts can exist in the natural states of *qi*. By “normative facts,” I mean the states of affairs corresponding to normative statements. Norms are standards. “Normative,” broadly understood, means conforming to or constituting a standard of measurement or value. The two sets of normative statements we focus on here are value-statements such as “It is good that *P*” and prescriptive statements such as “It ought to be the case that *P*.” The phrase ‘ought to’ in this context means something’s being the pertinent or the morally right thing. The main issue in this paper is how value and normativity can be derived from the way the world is.

David Hume remarked that many ethicists proceeded from descriptive propositions involving the copulation of *is* to normative propositions concerned with an *ought*, without ever explaining the deductive reasoning behind it.³ This famous comment of Hume has often been taken to be a rejection of the deduction from ‘Is’ to ‘Ought.’ However, Geoffrey Hunter (1962) presents two other possible interpretations. The first one (which Hunter endorses) suggests that Hume is merely objecting to the ethicists’ “failure to explain (failure to give an analysis of)” the relation expressed by ‘ought.’ “He is not saying that ‘ought’ cannot be deduced from ‘is’, only that earlier writers have failed to explain how this deduction is possible.” (Hunter, 1962: 150) The second interpretation is that one *cannot* deduce ought-propositions from is-propositions since ought-propositions are *identical* with certain is-propositions, and it would be “absurd to talk of any sort of inferential move from one to the other.” (Ibid.) Under either interpretation, Hume’s comment is not taken to point out an unbridgeable gap between *is*-propositions and *ought*-propositions such that one can never derive normative statements from descriptive statements. Rather, he merely asks for a deductive explanation of normative statements or a clarification of the relation between some normative statements and descriptive statements.

This paper argues that for Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism, there are certain normative statements that are either identical with, or derivable from, descriptive statements of the

way the world is. Normative facts are facts of nature and there is no dichotomy of fact and value in this worldview. This is a shared view among Confucian philosophers.⁴ As Joseph A. Adler points out, when considering the question whether our linguistic and conceptual distinctions or categories have any objectively real basis, the Confucian answer would be an emphatic “Yes.” “What the Confucian option implies is the claim that human ethical values are reflections or developments of patterns obtaining in the natural world.” (Adler, 1981: 286) Donald N. Blakeley also points out that in Neo-Confucian worldview, a “self and its good get defined and measured not only by the exercise of its own capacities, not only by its place ... within the human community, but also according to its place in the natural world. ‘My good’ cannot be separated from ‘nature’s good’.” (Blakeley, 2001: 38) Within this metaphysical view, value realism or moral realism has its ontological foundation. Humans *ought to* behave in certain ways in order to fit in the way the world *is* because the way the world *is* embodies *value*.

Under analysis, there are two sets of normative facts that Neo-Confucians assert in the realm of *qi*. The first set of normative facts is embedded in the internal logic of the development of *qi*, which they call principle (*li*). The second set of normative facts is manifested in the inherent attributes (such as creation, nourishment, harmony, impartiality) in the effects of *qi* and natural phenomena. This second set of normative facts, which are called ‘*dao*,’ lays down the foundation for human ethics. The two terms, *li* and *dao*, are sometimes used interchangeably, but they have different connotations when applied to things: while *li* is descriptive, *dao* is prescriptive. In other words, *li* depicts the way each thing is essentially, while *dao* depicts how things ought to be. When it comes to humans and what is expected of human conduct, however, the normative force is the same. One *ought to* (in the sense of its being the morally right thing to do) follow the *li* inherent in *qi*; one *ought to* follow the *dao* of heaven and earth. The normative fact pertaining to humans is called the *dao* of humans (*rendao*).

Before moving on to presenting the connection between descriptive truths and normative truths in *qi*-realism, I will first explain the basic theses of this ontology.

II. *Qi*-Realism

Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism claims that all facts are natural facts, natural facts are facts of *qi*; hence, all facts are facts of *qi*. The proper method for investigating nature is not natural sciences, but an investigation of the order, logic, pattern, or the regulative principle, in the realm of *qi*. This investigation requires an understanding of the grand picture of humans’ place within nature, rather than setting humans aside as investigators or observers of nature.

My reconstruction of *qi*-realism identifies the following two theses as the major theses of *qi*-realism:

1. *Qi* is permanent and ubiquitous in the world of nature. There is nothing over and above the realm of *qi*.
2. *Qi* is real in virtue of its causal power. It constitutes everything and is responsible for all changes.

(1) The Permanence and Ubiquity of *Qi*

Both Wang Tingxiang and Wang Fuzhi have written extensively about the permanence and ubiquity of *qi*. Wang Tingxiang rejects Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi’s view that *Dao* begets heaven and earth, and argues that when Neo-Confucians of the Song

dynasty (in particular, Zhu Xi) claimed that before heaven and earth there was Principle (*li*), they held a view not much different from that of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. His own view is that the primordial *qi* (*yuanqi*) exists prior to the formation of heaven and earth. This primordial *qi* is simply the state of *qi* before any concrete thing is formed. “Before heaven, earth and the myriad things were formed, there was only a vast nebulous state of the universe that was barren and vacuous. Since there is no name to distinguish it apart from other things, I call it ‘primordial *qi*.’” (Wang T., 1988: 597) “Before the primordial *qi*, there was no thing, no *Dao* and no Principle.” (Wang T., 1974: 91) According to Wang Tingxiang, before heaven and earth, there was only this primordial *qi*. Beyond the primordial *qi*, there was nothing. After heaven and earth along with myriad concrete things were formed, there emerged all signs of *qi*’s movements and various activities. The post-generation state of *qi* is then called “*yin* and *yang*.” Therefore, the primordial *qi* and the two manifestations of *qi* in *yin* and *yang* are simply different stages of *qi*. Within this pre-existence formless primordial *qi*, the seeds of all life forms are already present: “Before heaven and earth were formed, there was only space. The space is the Great Vacuity (*taixu*), which contained abundant primordial *qi*. *Qi* cannot be separated from vacuity; vacuity cannot be separated from *qi*. The seeds of heaven, earth, sun, moon as well as the multiple phenomena were all contained within.” (Wang T., 1988: 849) Even if nothing has been formed, this primordial *qi* is absolutely “real”: “The two forms of *qi* interacted with each other, and multiple phenomena were thereby manifested. *Qi* is the origin of heaven, earth and the myriad things. Could it not be seen as a real entity?” (Wang T., 1988: 751) This is a cosmogony of Being begetting Being, very different from the Daoist conception of Being derived from Nonbeing.

Wang Fuzhi also thinks that Being does not come from Nonbeing because there was never a Nonbeing. Being simply *is*; in other words, it exists all the time. Nothing — No thing — precedes Being. Wang Fuzhi thinks that there is no beginning or end of the universe. The universe has always been here since *qi* has always been in existence. He argues, “‘*tai*’ means great and unsurpassable, ‘*ji*’ means ‘ultimate’ and it depicts the endmost state of *dao*. The term ‘the Great Ultimate (*Taiji*)’ is simply a description of the combination of *yin* and *yang*. One cannot simply name it *yin* and *yang* to extol its supreme ultimacy, so one names it ‘*Taiji*.’” (Wang F., 1974b: 515) Therefore, the Great Ultimate is not something over and above *yin* and *yang*, from which *yin* and *yang* were initially generated. On Zhang Zai’s notion of the Great Vacuity (*taixu*), Wang Fuzhi comments, “*Yin* and *yang* permeate the Great Vacuity. There is nothing in addition to these two forms of *qi*, and there is no breach or gap. All signs of heaven as well as all forms of earth are all enclosed by *yin* and *yang*.” (Wang F., 1967: Vol. 1, 10) The world consists of *qi* and its manifestations in various material objects. To Wang Fuzhi, the universe is simply the whole of various forms of *qi* — some are material objects and some are not. Individual objects may not exist eternally, but the totality of *qi* has always been here and will never go extinct. *Qi* is reality, and nothing can be more real than the totality of vacuous forms of *qi* and its manifestations in material objects. Nothing precedes reality since nothing precedes the existence of *qi*. This leads to the second thesis: the reality of *qi*.

(2) The Reality of *Qi*

The reality of *qi* is a shared assumption among all Neo-Confucians. *Qi* is real in that it constitutes things and it brings about changes. WANG Tingxiang says, “Even though *qi* has no visible form, it is nonetheless a real thing. Our nose and mouth can inhale it and our hands can touch it. It is not a void that has no concreteness whatsoever.” (Wang T., 1974: 231) In other words, *qi* is formless but concrete; though invisible, it is perceptible via other senses.

The realness of *qi* can be established by recourse to what Jaegwon Kim (1993) has called “Alexander’s Dictum”: “To be real is to have causal powers.” In Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism, *qi* does have causal powers in the following sense: *Qi* is both the *material cause* of all things and the *efficient cause* of all changes. The three Neo-Confucians investigated in this essay all accept this view. On the theme that *qi* is real in the sense of being the material cause of all things, Wang Tingxiang says, “What is within or without heaven is *qi*; what is contained in earth is also *qi*. All objects, whether lacking or having substantial forms, are all *qi*. *Qi* is the substance that penetrates all creatures above and below.” (Wang T., 1974: 4) Wang Fuzhi also holds the view that the material universe is saturated with the flow of *qi*, and every material object is nothing but the aggregate of the two kinds of *qi* – *yin* and *yang*. Wang Fuzhi adopts Zhang Zai’s view that *qi* condenses into solid forms and concrete things, while concrete things again disintegrate back to formless *qi*. *Qi* exists from the beginning of the universe and is in constant movement and transformation. Forms and the formless are simply various stages of the manifestations of *qi*. Wang Fuzhi says, “When *qi* disintegrates and returns to the state of Great Vacuity, it is simply resuming its original state of intermingling harmony, not annihilation. When *qi* comes together to generate myriad things, it is simply the unwavering nature of this intermingling harmony, not an illusory becoming.” (Wang F., 1967: Vol. 1, 5) His view is that the basic element of the universe is one — *qi*, which has two original forms — *yin* and *yang*. Through the interaction and intermingling movement of *yin* and *yang*, everything gets generated, persists in time for a while, and then eventually disintegrates back to the mobile state of *yin* and *yang*. The movement of *yin* and *yang* is responsible for the creation and disintegration of all things. *Qi* is thus real in the sense of being the material cause of all concrete things.

Furthermore, *qi* is also real in the sense of being the efficient cause of changes of phenomena in nature as well as in the human world. Luo Qinshun says, “Penetrating heaven and earth, persisting from the ancient past to the present day, *qi* is the only thing there is. *Qi* is inherently one, and yet it has motion and rest: it moves to and fro, it undergoes transformations such as opening and closing, ascending and descending. All developments of *qi* continue in endless cycles. What was once obscure becomes salient; what was once salient returns to obscurity. It constitutes the climatic changes of the four seasons; it enables the germination, growth, storage and dormancy of all things.” (Luo, 1990: 4) The changes of the four seasons, creation and destruction, life and death, and even the developments of human affairs, are all accountable by the fluctuation of *qi*. Causal explanations in terms of *qi* are possible exactly because *qi*’s movements cause things to exist and to change.

It is in this active, effective, interacting and intermingling movement of *qi* that we see the normative facts displayed both as the cosmic pattern and as moral paradigms.

III. The First Set of Normative Facts: The Principle (*Li*) is the Natural Order Inherent in *Qi*

A normative fact is a state of affairs that “corresponds to a true normative statement.” (Skorupski, 2000: 134) By the same token, a descriptive fact is a state of affairs that corresponds to a true descriptive statement. In this section, I will analyze the relationship between the descriptive facts of the movement of *qi* and the normative facts of human affairs as asserted by these three Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists.

What separates Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists from the school of Zhu Xi is their insistence on the status of *li* as the inherent, not transcendent, principle of *qi*'s movements. *Li* is not a formal cause of *qi* as ZHU Xi depicts the relationship; there is also no top-down determination from the realm of *li* to the realm of *qi*. The fluctuation of *qi* itself has inevitability, or we might say, an internal logic. This internal logic is the principle (*li*) inherent in *qi*, and it is both the regulative principle of how things *are* in nature and the normative principle to which humans *ought to conform*.

Luo Qinsuen explains the descriptive fact of *qi* as having an internal order in its movement. He says, “In all complexities and amidst all entanglements, there is after all no chaos. There is the way *qi* is, even if no one knows why it is so, and this order is *li*. It is not something originally different, which has to depend on the function of *qi* or adheres to *qi* in order to operate.” (Luo, 1990: 5) All changes in the motion of *qi* follow a certain routine. For instance, if *qi* is moving away, it shall turn back; if *qi* is coming toward, it shall move away. Luo calls such a pattern “the turning point (*zhuan-zhe-chu*) of *qi*,” and says, “*Li* is simply the principle of *qi* and it has to be observed at the turning points of *qi*. Once a movement goes the other way, it would come this way; once it comes this way, it would return to the other way. This is exactly the turning point of *qi*.” (Luo, 1990: 68)

Wang Fuzhi's view of principle (*li*) is similar. According to Wang Fuzhi, *li* is the inherent logic or the pattern of the distribution, as well as the development, of *qi*. Wang describes this internal logic as what *qi* “necessarily is”; in other words, *qi* cannot possibly deviate from this logic. This principle or internal logic is described by Wang Fuzhi as “once *yin* and once *yang* (*yi yin yi yang*),” which is also called ‘*Dao*’. The development of *Qi* consists in the perpetual movement of *yin* and *yang*. If one rises, the other falls. *Yin* and *yang* constantly seek each other and thus the two forms of *qi* necessarily intermingle. The flow of *yin* and *yang* is constantly dynamic, but the total amount of *qi* in the whole *Taiji* remains constant over time. As a result, as one form of *qi* expands, the other must be condensed. A balance between *yin* and *yang* in any given object or at any given time frame can be reached, but because of the dynamic nature of the flow of the two forms of *qi*, it is impossible to maintain this balance forever. Take the life cycle of a man for example: when he grows from an infant to adulthood, the *qi* that keeps expanding in him is *yang*.⁵ But at some point when *yang* reaches its maximum, *yin* must take over and thus the man starts to grow old, sick and eventually dies. Everything is a *Taiji* in itself; hence, everything has its own cycle of *yin* and *yang*. However, the end of one entity does not destroy the balance of the totality: One life can terminate in due course; another life would emerge in due course too. The cycle of four seasons is another good example of the constant rotation between the two forms of *qi*. This constant rotation between *yin* and *yang* is what Wang Fuzhi sees as the principle of *qi*. The cyclical condensation and expansion of the two forms of *qi* becomes inevitable. This manifested regularity is what *qi* necessarily demonstrates, but according to Wang Fuzhi, it is because this is how *qi*

actually IS. He says, “*Qi* is originally with an inherent principle (*li*).” (Wang F., 1974a: 666)

Wang Fuzhi further asserts that the descriptive fact of *qi*'s inherent order is the same as the regulative fact of *qi*'s operation. In Wang Fuzhi's words, “The principle (*li*) is nothing but the principle of *qi*. It is simply *how qi must be.*” (italics mine) (Wang F., 1974a: 660) *Qi* cannot possibly deviate from this cosmic order, which is present from the beginning of the universe. According to Wang, the original state of the intermingling of the Great Harmony (*taihe*), “necessarily contains the order as well as the tendency to mutually oscillate.” (Wang F., 1967: 1) The necessity also becomes a regulative force on the operation of *qi*. This cosmic order is what *qi* is, and to what *qi* necessarily conforms.

We have seen that both Luo Qinshun and Wang Fuzhi define the principle of *qi* as the internal logic/order of the interchange and distribution of *yin* and *yang*. *Li* is what *qi* must obey; at the same time, the progression of *qi* naturally as well as necessarily obeys this logic. I shall now summarize the descriptive fact they assign to *qi* as follows, simplified as D1 to represent the first descriptive statement:

D1. There is an inevitable reversal in the expansion of *yin* and *yang*; hence, there are inevitable turning points in the development of *qi*. Such a pattern of inevitable rotation between *yin* and *yang* is the order (*li*) of *qi*.

Another dimension of this regulative principle is manifested in the constitution of particular things. Since everything is composed of *yin* and *yang*, the regulative principle in *qi* becomes the regulative principle of particular things. Wang Tingxiang, for example, explains that *yin* and *yang* are simply different functions of *qi* and together they make up various things. Each combination has its own internal logic, and this logic becomes the determinate nature (*li*) within each thing. Wang Tingxiang takes particular *li* to be the determinate nature in myriad things: “Heaven has the *li* of heaven, earth has the *li* of earth, humans have the *li* of humans and things have the *li* of things. What remains obscure has the *li* of obscurity while what is manifested has the *li* of manifestation. Each is different, and yet on the whole all things are transformations of *qi*.” (Wang T., 1974: 99) He also relates *li* to *qi* and calls the determinate nature (*li*) “the seeds of *qi* (*qizhong*).” (Wang T., 1988: 754) Various categories of things will always keep their own categories through thousands of years, and this is because there is constancy in the seeds of *qi*. Humans' taking up the appearance of their ancestors after a few generations is also the demonstration of the return to the seeds of *qi*. What myriad things share in common, according to Wang Tingxiang, is simply that they are all transformations of *qi*.

I shall now summarize his depiction of this descriptive fact of *qi* as D2:

D2. Each form of existence and every state of affairs has its own principle that is inherent in *qi*. There are as many principles as there are things made by *qi*.

D1 and D2 constitute *qi*-realism's affirmation that order and value are inherent in various states of nature. Not only does the development of natural states of affairs inevitably obey a certain internal logic, but also does the constitution of particular things inevitably follow particular constitutive principles. One problem that may arise for *qi*-realism is the problem of evil: how does it account for the presence of massive destructions and other sorts of imperfection in nature? Here I shall propose a solution: separating diachronic balance and harmony from temporary imbalance and disruption. *Qi*

is in constant fluctuation and there are some intermediate states of affairs that do not exemplify the perfect balance of *yin* and *yang*; there are also some concrete things and people that do not contain a harmonious combination of *yin* and *yang*. Clearly some “*is*” is not “*good*” or what “*ought to be* the case.” To analyze the relation between fact and value in the context of Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism, I argue that we should separate several senses of “*is*”:

Is₁: *Is* in the overall case — what exists is the logic and order in the movement of *qi* and the cosmic pattern in *qi*'s generation of all things.

Is₂: *Is* in the particular case of determination — what exists is the determinate nature in each kind of concrete existence.

Is₃: *Is* in the transitory stage of the interchange between *yin* and *yang* — what exist are all sorts of temporary states in the cyclical movement between *yin* and *yang*.

The first sense of *is*₁ is overarching cosmic principle in *qi*; the second sense of *is*₂ is determinate nature in things. In both cases, “what is” is identified with “what is inevitably so” and “what is good.” However, in the third case, when we are only looking at the transitory stage of *qi*'s development at a given moment, this existing state of affairs is not a normative fact since it will soon change into the next state. From the perspective of the grand picture, all states of affairs are what *qi* naturally generates because they are how *yin* and *yang* naturally develop in their interchange. But at each temporal interval, the balance between *yin* and *yang* is mostly not in perfect harmony and thus will soon change into a different state. For example, according to Wang Fuzhi, the rotation of *yin* and *yang*, when exemplified in human history, is presented as the pattern of “one prosperity followed by one chaos (*yi zhi yi luan*).” Wang claims that the establishment of the historical world manifests the interchange between *yin* and *yang*. When *yang* is enhanced (as a result of human effort as well as the natural development of *qi*), it results in prosperity and order. When *yin* is enhanced, it results in decline and chaos. Since *Dao* is simply “one *yin* and one *yang* succeeding each other (*yi yin yi yang*),” human history necessarily has the pattern of “one prosperity and one chaos succeeding each other.” This is a natural pattern exemplified in human history: “One prosperity and one chaos (*yi zhi yi luan*), such is heaven (*tian*), just like the sun brings us day and night, the moon has its wax and wane.” (Wang F., 1976:1108) To say that chaos is part of the natural pattern is not to accept chaos as it is, since humans should still aim to restore order and prosperity in times of chaos.⁶ I argue that for *qi*-realism, in cases of massive destruction and social chaos, the existing state is not the normative state. The descriptive fact is only a normative fact when the statement depicts the logic and pattern of *qi*'s developments diachronically (*is*₁) or *qi*'s constitution of particular things (*is*₂).

What is the connection between the regulative cosmic principle inherent in *qi*, the multiple principles manifested in particular things, and the normative principle that governs human conduct? How do we derive normative statements of human affairs from these descriptive statements of the natural world? What is *qi*-realists' analysis of the connection between *Is* and *Ought*? *Qi*-realists themselves did not provide any deduction either. Here I will just present my attempt at formulating such a derivation for *qi*-realism:

1. The world of nature is governed by the cosmic principle of *qi*, and everything has its own principle of *qi* since everything is constituted by *qi*.
2. All things and all events are ultimately regulated by the principle of *qi* and any temporary deviation will only result in disruption and even destruction.

3. Human beings are part of the world of *qi* and human conduct has a great impact on the world of nature.
4. Therefore, human beings ought to (it is the morally right thing to do) respect the principle of things in their treatment of things and ought to aim at restoring balance of *yin* and *yang*.

This derivation shows that humans' moral obligations stem from humans' existence in nature. It is because humans *are* part of nature that humans *ought to* behave in ways that conform to the natural order of things. What defines human beings (their principle [*li*] or their nature [*xing*]) further prescribes humans' moral obligations.

Before we finish this section, I need to make a further clarification of the connotation of the term 'principle (*li*)'. Even though moral statements and nonmoral statements involving the term 'principle (*li*)' share the same general intension of the term: order or pattern, this does not entail that "the principle of natural phenomena" and "the principle of human affairs" pick out the same nonmoral natural properties and moral properties. Principles in particular things vary from one thing to another; the principles of cows and horses are not the same as the principle of human beings. The principle of human beings, according to most Neo-Confucians, is the moral essence or inborn nature of human beings. To cultivate morality is to understand and extend one's moral essence (one's *xingli*). The moral imperative is to strive for balance of *yin* and *yang* in the individual, in the community and in the world. This principle of human beings is closely related to principles of various things in nature. The study of order or patterns in particular things helps one understand the overarching principle of the world, thereby giving one insights on the proper way to deal with states of affairs of the world. This explains why Neo-Confucians emphasize the importance of "investigation of things" (*gewu*) to exhaustively study various "principles." In their worldview, the study of nature and moral knowledge are closely interrelated.

The next section explores another respect in which the world of human affairs and the world of nature are connected: under the conviction of "value realism."

IV. The Second Set of Normative Facts: The *Dao* of Heaven, Earth and Men

Neo-Confucian metaphysics is a form of value naturalism, under which natural phenomena such as heaven and earth are all ascribed values that we humans should recognize and further foster. Zhu Xi, for example, talked about the "virtues" of heaven and earth as "origination, flourishing, advantage and firmness (*yuan heng li zhen*)" of life forms. (Chan, 1974: 594) According to Donald N. Blakeley, "It seems obvious to Zhu Xi that human virtue is not the only true virtue. Although human virtue has its own distinctive features, it is viewed as a part of the virtue of nature." (Blakeley, 2001: 43) Since value exists in the state of nature, value is real and it exists independently of human construction. In this section I shall show how Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists construct their version of value realism. The foundation of such value realism is posited in the causal power of *qi* in its constitution of the myriad things. *Qi*'s operation causes the existence, changes and disintegration of all things. This function of *qi* has been called the function of "generation and regeneration (*shengsheng*)" by *qi*-realists. To Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists, this function is the foundation of a form of value realism that builds on the value of life and creation. *Qi* generates and sustains life; the function is carried on in things that

qi creates; hence, heaven and earth also manifest the virtue of generation and sustenance of life. In the Confucian worldview, *there is* a moral reality – value is exemplified not just in human conduct and human conception, but also in the way the world is.

Wang Tingxiang sees virtues in the operation of *qi* and he takes the most fundamental virtue of all to be the virtue of generation and regeneration [*shengsheng zhi de*]. The assignment of virtue to *qi* itself is the basis for his moral realism. According to a contemporary scholar Wang Junyan's analysis, "The primordial *qi* follows the model of 'To generate and to regenerate is the great virtue'. Under the condition that there is necessity and normativity inherent within the mutual generation of *yin* and *yang*, nature itself is endowed with a sense of moral creation. This sense of morality is not an empty one, but morality in the real sense." (Wang J., 2005: 41) Wang Fuzhi also thinks "there is nothing that is not good in *qi*." [Wang F., 1974a: 10: 2] The goodness of *qi* lies not just in its having an internal logic (*li*), but also in its having the virtues associated with creation — the function of *qi* is to create life with success and to further the wellbeing of all creatures with perseverance. This moralized *qi* is the foundation of Wang Fuzhi's moral realism.

A challenge for moral realists is to be able to provide deduction of moral statements from nonmoral statements. Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists derive Ought-statements in the moral sense from Is-statements in the moral sense on the basis of the word '*dao*'. The word '*dao*' means both "what is" and "what ought to be." The question 'is *dao* after all what one ought to do?' is thus no longer an open question as is Moore's question "Is pleasure after all good?" The analyticity of such statements as "One ought to follow *dao*" constitutes the basis of Neo-Confucian moral realism. A common presumption of all Neo-Confucians is: there are descriptive statements of heaven and earth's *dao*, and there are normative statements of humans' *dao*. These descriptive and normative statements incorporate the same concept. According to a contemporary scholar Shi Yanping, this is the premise that all Neo-Confucians share (Shi, 2004) — whether they are from the Cheng-Zhu School, Lu-Wang School or Luo-Wang *qi-realism* school.

The content of *dao* for humans is simply to assist *qi*'s as well as heaven and earth's function of generation and sustenance of life. We may call "the *dao* of humans" a normative principle *Dao*:

The *Dao* of humans is to emulate heaven and earth in their attribute of generation and regeneration; one ought to assist heaven and earth in completing the generation of life.

This normative fact pertains to humans alone, since human beings have a special status in this moral world. According to Neo-Confucians, humans are the only species who are endowed with a moral nature; hence, humans have a special mission – the *dao* of humans. From this one normative principle (*dao*), we can derive many other virtues, such as benevolence, sincerity, impartiality, etc., which are instrumental to the fulfillment of this normative principle.

Luo Qinshun says, "The *dao* of heaven is nothing but *what is*; the *dao* of humans is nothing but *what ought to be*. What *ought to be* is simply what is inviolable in *what is*. How does one know that it is inviolable? One sees that felicity ensues from following this *dao*, while misfortune ensues from violating it. This is what is meant by the claim that heaven and men share the same principle (*li*)." (Luo, 1990: 23) This quote shows an

interesting connection between the “*is*” in the natural world and the “*ought*” in the human world. The “*is*” belongs to the world of nature, while the “*ought*” belongs to the world of humans. However, the “*ought*” in the realm of humans is at the same time the inviolable rule in nature. Therefore, there is an identity relation between the *is*-statements and the *necessity*-statements pertaining to nature. From this identity, there generates a normative fact for the way humans ought to act, which is called the *dao* of humans. If we formulate his reasoning, we can have the following argument:

1. The *dao* of heaven is nothing but *what is*; the *dao* of humans is nothing but *what ought to be*.
2. *What ought to be* is simply what is inviolable in *what is*.
3. If humans violate the *dao* of heaven, they will suffer ill consequences.
4. If one does not wish to suffer ill consequences, then one ought to act in accordance with the *dao* of heaven.
5. Therefore, the *dao* of humans ought not to violate the *dao* of heaven.
6. Therefore, humans ought to aim to improve the living conditions for other people and other creatures.

Premise #3 and #4 in the above argument seem to turn the normative statement of *dao* into a form of *hypothetical imperative*. However, not all Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists employ this kind of reasoning. Wang Fuzhi, for example, considers the normative principle of *dao* to be a form of *categorical imperative*: it is simply what one ought to do as a human being. He says, “There is simply one *dao*. In heaven it is the *hao* of heaven; in humans it is the *dao* of humans. The *dao* of humans cannot go against the *dao* of heaven.” (Wang F., 1967: 280) “The sage fulfills the *dao* of humans to match the virtue of heaven. Matching the virtue of heaven is to persevere in preserving the principle (*li*) of life; fulfilling the *dao* of humans is to be active in corresponding to the auspice (*ji*) of life.” (Wang F., 1977: 55) Furthermore, humans have the moral obligation to complete and accomplish what heaven and earth have started: the generation of life. Wang says, “Heaven and earth’s generation of life begins with humans.... It is really humans who actually carry the duty of manifesting the functions of heaven and earth.” (Wang F., 1977:48) Wang’s view can be reformulated into the following derivation of *ought* from *is*:

1. The *dao* of heaven is to generate and sustain life.⁷
2. The *dao* of men is to emulate the *dao* of heaven.
3. The *dao* of humans is what *one ought to do* as a member of the human species.
4. Therefore, one ought to assist others in the improvement and completion of their lives.

In this derivation, the second premise “The *dao* of men is to emulate the *dao* of heaven and earth” serves as a “moral bridge” that links the normative moral statement of human conduct with the descriptive moral statement of the way heaven and earth function. The origin of this premise can be found in the moral metaphysics implicit in the *Analects* and explicit in *Yijing*. In this moral metaphysics, heaven, earth and humans are posited as the “Three Powers” (*sancai*) - each possessing qualities required to fulfill the task of the generation and completion of life. *Yijing* describes the Three Powers as the *dao* of heaven, the *dao* of earth and the *dao* of humans. From the perspective of Confucian moral metaphysics, it is a natural fact that heaven with its heavenly

phenomena such as sunlight and rain make life possible; it is also a natural fact that earth with its earthly phenomena such as the soil sustains and nourishes life. Naturally heaven and earth are without intent and without volition, but they do function this way and their functions manifest these attributes. Human beings are situated between heaven and earth; they have a moral commandment to continue the operation of heaven and earth. As Wang Fuzhi sees it, humans do not just emulate heaven and earth; humans' efforts are what complete and give value to the functions of heaven and earth. He says, "What naturally 'Is' (*ziran*) is heaven and earth, but what takes charge (*zhuchi*) is humans. Humans are the heart of heaven and earth." (Wang F. 1977: 51) For instance, heaven and earth can produce life, but they can also destroy life. Humans can observe nature and work with the natural rhythm of things to gain the maximum benefits of good times and to make the best use of bad times. This is what makes humans one of the "Three Powers." Furthermore, humans' contribution is what unifies the Three Powers: "The boundary between heaven and earth is very close, while the *dao* of humans makes the tertiary contribution." (Wang F. 1977: 199) The moral realism established here places humans at the center of a world of real value: humans do not create value; value is instantiated in the world of nature itself.

Conclusion: Neo-Confucian Ethical Naturalism

This paper gives a preliminary outline of Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism both as a metaphysical and as an ethical theory. From the above analysis, we see that for Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists, some descriptive facts of the operation of *qi* are identified with the normative facts of the internal logic of *qi*'s movement. At the same time, normative facts about human responsibility and ethical norms are derivable from some descriptive facts of the attributes of natural phenomena; in particular, the attributes of generating, nourishing and sustaining life. Hume's (alleged) query about the derivation of Ought-statements from Is-statements can be responded in this way: the *Ought* is already inherent in the *Is*. There is no question of derivability in this moral metaphysics since there is no Is/Ought dichotomy.

On the basis of the identity between descriptive facts and normative facts of the internal logic in the operation of *qi*, and the derivability of some normative facts from descriptive facts of nature, Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism develops a form of ethical naturalism that is very different from Western ethical naturalism. I list here three definitions of 'ethical naturalism' that do not appeal to natural sciences as the scope of 'nature' (and thus do not exclude Neo-Confucian ethical naturalism by default):

1. "Ethical naturalism is the claim that moral facts and properties just are natural facts and properties." "Ethical naturalism claims that moral facts are nothing more than familiar facts about the natural, including social, world." (Brink 1989: 22, 156)
2. "[Ethical naturalism] is the doctrine that moral facts are facts of nature. Naturalism as a general view is the sensible thesis that *all* facts are facts of nature." (Harman 1973: 17)
3. Ethical naturalism is the view that a moral judgment "can be reduced to or expanded by analysis or definition to" another nonmoral statement "which has the same meaning or significance and which contains no moral terms." (Garner & Rosen 1967: 228)

By these definitions, Neo-Confucian *qi*-realists certainly embrace ethical naturalism. Because the universe is ascribed non-intentional moral attributes; it is a moral universe. Facts of *dao* of heaven, *dao* of earth as well as *dao* of humans are all facts of nature.

One could of course question how anything in nature could be *good* without human moral judgments, or how any non-intentional phenomenon could be assigned any virtue. This is a complicated issue. From a contemporary Western perspective, there cannot be any non-intentional attributes and such attributes must be merely a human projection of value onto the world of nature. This is where Neo-Confucian metaphysics differs the most from contemporary Western metaphysics. From outside the system, we could question whether this is a form of anthropomorphism. However, Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics is a rational, coherent system of thought that provides an alternative worldview. Under this worldview, value and good are real in a robust sense — they are really what we can observe in nature. A defense of the Neo-Confucian ethical naturalism would be the topic for another paper. The present paper only aims to trace its ontological foundation to *qi-realism*.

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Notes:

¹ The analysis given here to Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism applies to other Song-Ming Neo-Confucian *qi*-realism, in particular, to Zhang Zai's philosophy. This paper only focuses on these three philosophers for textual support.

² There are many others who use ‘naturalism’ to interpret this kind of *qi*-ontology. See Liu Youming 2009; Yang Rubin 2005, 2006.

³ Hume says, “I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds from some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the

usual copulation of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought* or *ought not*, express some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it." (Hume 1739/2010, 257).

⁴ As Robert Neville put it, "[t]he Chinese tradition is a powerful antidote to the fact/value distinction." (Neville, 2003: 318) A. C. Graham (1983; 1985) also points out that the Is/Ought dichotomy does not apply in Daoist ethics either. Graham argues that the Daoist injunction "Respond with awareness" can link Is and Ought. In his explanation, "the underlying logic of the [D]aoist position escapes the dichotomy of fact and value, because the spontaneous unlike the willed can be evaluated solely in terms of awareness." (Graham, 1983: 21)

⁵ The division of *yin* and *yang* in things is not as clearcut as such. There are always elements of *yin* and *yang* at each moment and in all things. What is depicted here is simply the dominant form of *qi*.

⁶ For a detailed discussion on Wang Fuzhi's view of principle (*li*) in human history, see Liu, JeeLoo, 2001.

⁷ Confucianism assigns positive value to life alone; hence, the content of its *Dao* consists in the virtue of the generation and regeneration of life (*shengsheng*). Daoism, on the other hand, assigns positive value to both life and death; hence, its *Dao* consists in treating all states of nature equally.