Neo-Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality

BOOK PROSPECTUS
JeeLoo Liu

CONTENTS: SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Since these selected Neo-Confucians had similar philosophical concerns and their various philosophical positions were based on largely the same Confucian classics, the best way to capture their philosophical variances is to present their views thematically rather than chronologically. The structure of this book lays out the metaphysical foundations for Neo-Confucian theories of mind and morality. The major common themes in Neo-Confucianism include:
1) The relationship between the two constituents of the universe—cosmic principle (*li*) and cosmic force (*qi*);
2) The debate on whether human nature, or human mind, is the exemplification of this cosmic principle;
3) The analysis of the roots of human good and evil as a way to answer the question of what makes human morality possible.

This book is divided into three parts, which deal with these three issues as they evolved from one Neo-Confucian philosopher to the next. The eight philosophers' views are presented in three segments, as this arrangement best captures both the focus of their disagreements and the continuity of the philosophical development of Neo-Confucianism.

Part I.   Neo-Confucian Metaphysics: from Cosmology to Ontology

Neo-Confucians were generally concerned with establishing a moralistic cosmology, or we can say what they developed was a form of *moral metaphysics*. In their view, there is a higher order governing the cosmos, which they call 'heavenly principle', and this higher order has many moral attributes. At the same time, Neo-Confucians also embraced the Chinese philosophical tradition (founded in *Yijing*) of positing a cosmic force (*qi*) as the material/physical foundation of the universe. The major common themes in Neo-Confucian metaphysics include (i) how the universe began and what the original state of the world might have been; (ii) what is the ontological hierarchy of the world — whether there is an abstract, overarching order prevailing over the development of *qi*, and (iii) the relationship between the two essential elements of the universe: cosmic principle (*li*) and cosmic force (*qi*). These will be the key issues in Part I on Neo-Confucian metaphysics.

Chapter 1.   From Nothingness to Infinity: The Origin of Zhou Dunyi's Cosmology

This chapter focuses on Zhou Dunyi's (1017-1073) controversial thesis about the relation between *Wu-ji* and *Taiji*. The controversy revolves around the question of whether Zhou held the view that there was *nothing* at the beginning of the cosmos. The first section of

this chapter will explain the historical controversies on the interpretation of this work. The second section will introduce the philosophical debate on being (*you*) and nothingness (*wu*) prior to Zhou's times, to see whether his *wuji* notion is related to the notion of *wu*. The final section will give a new interpretation of Zhou's notion of *wuji,* and further develop his cosmological view. [Completed]

Chapter 2.   The Basic Constituent of Things: Zhang Zai's Monist Theory of *Qi*

ZHANG Zai (1020-1077) constructed a systematic philosophy that built on the traditional notion of *qi*. He incorporated the notion of *qi* into his metaphysics as well as his ethics. Before ZHANG Zai, there had been cosmogony originating with primordial *qi* (*yuanqi*) and ontology with *qi* as the basic constituent of all things primarily in the Daoist tradition. This chapter will trace the theory of *qi* to its Daoist roots, and see how the notion of *qi* was employed both in their cosmological explanation and in their ontological analysis. It will then introduce the theory of *qi* as developed by ZHANG Zai, and examine how he went back to the theory of *qi* in *Yijing* and used it to develop a Neo-Confucian theory of *qi*. This chapter will reconstruct ZHANG Zai's theory of *qi* as a form of naturalism. [Completed]

Chapter 3.   Cheng-Zhu School's Normative Realism: The Principle or Order of the
              Universe

In contemporary terms, the main issue in this chapter concerns the existence of principles of nature, i.e., whether the universe is a "cosmic accident" or is "driven by specific, eternal laws of nature." The notion of *principle* (or *Heavenly principle*) was already present in ZHANG Zai's theory of *qi*, but it was the Cheng brothers, in particular, CHENG Yi (1033-1107), who expanded on the notion, and their discussion paved the way for the Neo-Confucian discourse on the Principle of Heaven (*tianli*). This chapter begins with the explication of the notion of *principle* (*li*) and its various renditions in English. It then analyzes how the Cheng brothers, and later ZHU Xi (1130-1200), developed an ontological hierarchy that posits *nonreductionism* of principle. It also investigates the relation between the universal *Principle* and particular things. The chapter analyzes the metaphysical worldview presented by CHENG Yi and ZHU Xi as a form of "normative realism." [Needs revision]

Chapter 4.   Wang Fuzhi's Theory of Principle Inherent in *Qi*

In this chapter, we focus on the further developments of the philosophy of *qi* under WANG Fuzhi's (1619-1692) construction. Due to the scarcity of translations (Wing-tsit Chan's *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* contains only a snippet of Wang's twenty-some volumes), WANG Fuzhi is by far the most undeservingly neglected Neo-Confucian in the English-speaking world. WANG Fuzhi was a great synthesizer of the theory of *qi* and the theory of *principle*: his basic view is that principle is inherent in *qi*. This chapter will open with Wang Fuzhi's metaphysics and extend to his views on the human world. For Wang Fuzhi, the realm of *Heaven* and the realm of humans are simply one unified whole. There is no transcendent realm beyond the human world, and it is the same

element, *qi*, and the same *principle,* which permeate the realm of Heaven and the realm of humans. Hence, his metaphysical view underlies his philosophy of human affairs, in particular, his philosophy of human nature, his moral philosophy, as well as his philosophy of human history. This chapter depicts Wang Fuzhi's philosophy as the philosophy of *Principle Inherent in Qi*, since it is the relation between *Li* and *Qi* that explains everything for him. [Needs revision]

Part II.   Human Nature and Human Mind

The main topic of Part II constitutes a major debate among representative Neo-Confucians. This part will explain the philosophical implications of the well-known debate between the *School of Nature* and the *School of Mind*. The former is represented by the brothers, CHENG Hao and CHENG Yi, as well as ZHU Xi, who claim that cosmic principle is exemplified in human nature. The latter is represented by LU Xiangshan and WANG Yangming, who take human mind to be the actual realization of cosmic principle. This debate concerns the metaphysical or psychological foundations of morality. The first school constructs a moral philosophy that takes moral attributes as *intrinsic* to human existence; the second focuses on moral intuitions and moral actions as ways to *foster* moral agency. The analysis of this rich and longstanding debate will be presented from the fresh perspective of contemporary moral psychology. Broadly construed, moral psychology investigates the connection between humans' moral behavior and their psychological foundation. Neo-Confucians had varying responses to the question of what makes human morality possible, and many of them developed a sophisticated moral psychology, in which they analyzed the relation between morality and the mind's many functions.

Chapter 5.   Metaphysics of Mind: from ZHANG Zai to the Cheng Brothers

ZHANG Zai affirms a universal "moral essence" in human existence, but also acknowledges various biological needs and temperamental differences in individuals. This chapter examines ZHANG Zai's view of human nature, and connects his moral theory to his metaphysical view. According to ZHANG Zai, the purity or impurity of *qi* in each being is responsible for the good or the bad in different lives. After explicating ZHANG Zai's "double human nature" theory, this chapter will analyze the Cheng brothers' theory of human nature and human mind. The analysis will focus on their view on the roots of good and evil, and their theories on the normativity of human emotions: propriety (*li*) and rectitude (*yi*). [work-in-progress]

Chapter 6.   Zhu Xi's Metaphysics of Mind: The Metaphysical Foundations of Morality

This chapter focuses on ZHU Xi's famous slogan: *Human nature is Principle* or "Cosmic principle is exemplified in human nature." It places ZHU Xi's theory of human nature in the context of his moral metaphysics. According to ZHU Xi, the highest form of principle is simply the Heavenly Principle or the Great Ultimate. In this context, principle takes on a moral dimension. Zhu Xi says, "The Great Ultimate (*Tai-ji*) is simply the principle of

the highest good." This supreme principle is the principle with moral attributes, such as humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. Since there is only one all-encompassing principle of the whole universe, the universe itself is endowed with moral attributes. It is a moralistic universe. Under this worldview, ZHU Xi advocates the theory of moral essence ("nature"). [Not yet written.]

Chapter 7.   Lu Xiangshan and WANG Yangming's Metaphysics of Mind

This chapter continues the investigation of the universal principle in nature as well as in humans. Neo-Confucians all believed that this universal principle is inherent in all particular things. CHENG Yi and ZHU Xi's view is that the principle inherent in each object constitutes the nature of the thing. LU Xiangshan (1139-1193) advocated the view that the universal principle is inherent in the human mind. WANG Yangming (1472-1529) went further and asserted that the mind *is* principle itself. This chapter analyses the views of Lu and Wang and shows how they depict a different metaphysics of mind from that of the Cheng-Zhu school. It further explains Wang's famous *one body* thesis "We are one body with the world" in the context of his metaphysics – in particular, his theory of *qi*. [Not yet written]

Chapter 8.   WANG Fuzhi's Theory Of the Daily Renewal Of Human Nature and Moral Psychology

WANG Fuzhi's theory of human nature is also grounded in his metaphysics: *qi* is constantly changing; hence, human nature is not simply what one is endowed with at birth; it is also what is developed throughout one's life. According to WANG Fuzhi, as we continue to interact with the natural environment and to receive the permeations of *qi*, our natural qualities and our moral essence can become developed and perfected on a daily basis. This is his ingenious thesis of the *daily renewal of human nature*. He developed a sophisticated moral psychology to analyze the connection between morality and mind. This chapter analyzes Wang Fuzhi's moral philosophy, and explains how he establishes the foundation of morality on humans' natural emotions and desires. [Needs revision]

Part III.   The Cultivation of Virtue, Moral Personality, Moral Action and the Construction of A Moral World

Part III continues from Part II and reconstructs Neo-Confucians' moral philosophy in the context of contemporary virtue ethics and developmental psychology. While Part II provides the metaphysical foundation of moral attributes, Part III deals with the implementation of Neo-Confucian moral programs. We will be analyzing various Neo-Confucians' views on the realization of moral ideals both in the individual and in the world. In this context, we will also examine the various methods of moral knowledge proposed by these Neo-Confucian philosophers. Neo-Confucians' moral theories are best understood as falling within the category of virtue ethics. A great challenge of virtue ethics comes from situationism, the view that there are no *global character traits*, which empirical scientists can invoke as the explanatory basis for humans' moral behavior.

According to situationism, situations trump character; therefore, the aim of virtue ethicists to cultivate moral character or robust moral traits is misguided. Several chapters in Part III will address this challenge and examine how each Neo-Confucian philosopher's proposal on cultivating moral virtue *could* meet the challenge of situationism.

Chapter 9.   ZHANG Zai on Cultivating Moral Personality: A Social-Cognitive Model

In this chapter, we shall reconstruct ZHANG Zai's moral philosophy in the context of *moral character development* in cognitive science and moral psychology. This chapter will explicate ZHANG Zai's moral program in terms of the socio-cognitive model of moral personality development, since the key elements in ZHANG Zai's moral program match the key features of the socio-cognitive model. ZHANG Zai's moral philosophy is a moral program that depicts moral development as progressive, primarily cognitive and originating in autonomous volition. Individual agents must be self-regulating in choosing the right goals; they must learn from others through reading, discussion with friends, and emulating the highest moral exemplars – the sages. Their moral development is partly the result of proper social influences (such as schooling and societal rules of propriety), partly the realization of self-governance and self-regulation. [Completed]

Chapter 10.   The Cheng-Zhu School's Virtue Epistemology and Virtue Ethics

Whereas ZHANG Zai's moral philosophy can be analyzed in terms of the social-cognitive model, the moral theory of the Cheng brothers is closer to that of *globalism*, the claim that there are "robust" moral traits that one can sustain across situations. The Cheng brothers acknowledge that these moral traits need to be *cultivated*, and the aim of their moral teaching is to define the essential virtues that lay the foundations for a *stable* moral personality. This chapter explicates the Cheng brothers' virtue ethics as well as ZHU Xi's view on virtues. It will investigate whether the form of virtue ethics developed out of the Cheng-Zhu school can meet the challenge of situationism. This chapter also analyzes the Cheng-Zhu school's theory of moral knowledge as a form of virtue epistemology that treats *knowing* as a form of "apt performance" (Sosa's term). [Half-completed]

Chapter 11.   Wang Yangming's Theory of Innate Moral Knowledge: From Knowledge
                 to Virtues

This chapter focuses on WANG Yangming's theory of *Liangzhi*, the innate faculty of *pure knowing* or *moral consciousness*. It analyzes Wang's notion of *Liangzhi* as a form of higher-order perception [HOP]. A higher-order perception is an "introspective consciousness" or "the inner perception of current states and activities in our own mind" (Armstrong). WANG Yangming's teaching of *Liangzhi* stresses the mind's intuitive *seeing* right from wrong. This faculty comes with birth; hence, everyone is endowed with this pure knowing faculty. Our knowing right from wrong is a form of moral intuition, which is inherent in us at the start of our moral cultivation. To Wang, the most important task *is* to teach the philosophy of *Liangzhi* as an innate faculty within all people. Only when one has embraced this philosophy can one achieve the moral/spiritual

transformation that Wang aims to bring about in his audience. The whole moral program is built on the individual's innate faculty of moral knowledge. This chapter also analyzes WANG Yangming's theory of knowledge presented in his thesis of *the unity of knowledge and action*. It will investigate what Wang Yangming means by "knowledge" and what he sets up as the aim of knowledge as well as the satisfaction conditions for knowledge. [work-in-progress]

Chapter 12.   Constructing a Moral World: from ZHANG Zai to WANG Fuzhi

This chapter concludes Neo-Confucian moral theories with the socioethical program of moral cultivation developed by ZHANG Zai and WANG Fuzhi. The main idea behind this program is that to construct a moral world, it is not enough to focus only on the moral agent's *isolated* moral conscience or moral sentiments. The conscience or moral sentiments have to be integrated into the whole society, such that moral conduct becomes a social norm. This chapter examines how WANG Fuzhi's theory, based on some of ZHANG Zai's ideas, leads to a realistic proposal for constructing a moral world. [Needs revision]