To the Effort Itself: A Phenomenological Study of Wang Yangming's 王陽明 Theory of Moral Effort

Minglai Dong

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TO THE EFFORT ITSELF: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WANG YANGMING’S 王陽明 THEORY OF MORAL EFFORT

A Dissertation
Submitted to McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Minglai Dong

August 2018
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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WANG YANGMING’S 王陽明 THEORY OF MORAL EFFORT

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ABSTRACT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. L. Michael Harrington

In this dissertation, I phenomenologically clarify the theory on moral effort (gongfu 功夫) of the sixteenth-century Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming (or Wang Shouren 王陽明/王守仁 1472-1529). For Wang, the final purpose of moral effort is to cultivate one’s heart (xin 心) as the subject of consciousness, with the goal of sagehood. The heart is also the foundation on which all methods of moral effort can rely. I argue that Husserl’s phenomenology can shed a light on Wang’s doctrine, for it describes the transcendental structure of all aspects related to consciousness, which are also topics and phenomena studied by Wang’s philosophy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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in the doctoral project. Words of both Chinese and English escape from me, when I try to portray my love and appreciation for you, Juan. In other words, I love you.
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**Chuanxi Lu**  

**Complete Works**  

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**On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness**  

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Introduction: The Importance of Moral Effort for Wang Yangming as a Neo-Confucian

This treatise is an application of the Husserlian phenomenology to the ethics of the Neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming (or Wang Shouren 王陽明/王守仁, 1472-1529). Wang, as a radical thinker, revolutionarily challenged the so-called “Doctrine of Principle” or lixue 理學 represented by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), which was the mainstream of the Neo-Confucian thought of his time. Wang treats himself as an heir of Zhu Xi’s peer Lu Jiuyuan (or Lu Xiangshan 陸九淵/陸象山, 1139-1192), who represents the tradition of the so-called “Doctrine of Heart/Mind” or xinxue 心學. As a successful politician/militarist and an inspiring teacher, Wang yielded not only an intelligent influence, but also a social and political impact on the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). What makes Wang so radical as a Confucian can be found in his doctrine on moral effort (gongfu 工夫), which can be briefly described as the process through which a moral personality is built. According to Qian Mu 錢穆, most Confucian thinkers of the Song Dynasty including Lu Jiuyuan share a similar understanding of the metaphysical foundation of morality, but have crucial disagreements on the proper method of ethical self-cultivation.1 Julia Ching 秦家懿 also maintains that Wang has a “restless search for the ‘right method’ that would direct him to the ultimate goal of human life: sagehood.”2

According to Ching, like most (if not all) Song and Ming Neo-Confucians including Zhu

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Xi, Wang agrees that the most fundamental problem of moral theory is to increase the inner moral status of a person to its highest degree. Wang challenges the doctrine of Zhu Xi not because he disagrees on this final goal of both ethical theory and moral effort, but because he does not believe that this effort should begin from studying and reading Confucian classics. This methodology regarding moral effort of Wang is the clue to this whole dissertation, which interprets important doctrines within Wang’s framework by analyzing his method of moral effort.

One reason for Wang to refuse Zhu Xi’s method of moral effort is that he wants to open the possibility of moral effort for people with lower cognitive talent, or those who do not have the chance to professionally study due to economic or political difficulties. He argues that to follow Zhu Xi’s method of studying is too difficult even for himself, since he failed when he once tried to investigate some bamboos. Chen Lai 陳來 tries to prove that Wang tried Zhu’s method when Wang was eighteen, and Wang in this young age might have misunderstood Zhu Xi. However, even if this event itself happened early, it was mentioned by Wang when he was at least in his middle age. Hence, it is safe to believe that the one who used this example to refute Zhu Xi is the thinker Wang, but not the teenager Wang. At the same time, Wang believes that the method of achieving sagehood should be accessible for everyone, including farmers, craftsmen, and

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merchants, while traditionally, only scholar-officials (shi 士) need read and study, for their job is to rule the state according to words from ancient sages. Wang maintains that in the ancient golden age, “[i]n the four classes of people had different jobs but the same way.”6 Yu Yingshi 余英時 argues that Wang’s doctrine is more friendly to the other three classes because in the Song Dynasty, scholar-officials had more political influence and were still treated as teachers of emperors to some extent, while in the Ming Dynasty they were treated merely as tools and faced a cruel political environment. Also, during Wang’s life-time (late fifteenth and early sixteenth century), the other three classes, especially the class of merchants, began to have stronger social influence.7 Thus, unlike Zhu Xi who often thinks more about scholar-officials, Wang tends to make his theory understandable for people from every class.

The focus of this treatise, however, is on philosophical, rather than historical aspects of Wang’s theory of moral effort. Since the moral effort of ordinary people at the time of Wang could not rely on education, Wang believes that the only reliable foundation for such people to cultivate themselves into sages should be their own subjectivity, which is called the heart (xin 心) by Neo-Confucians.8 The interpretation of this theory should be based on an elaborated description of the heart itself within the framework of Wang. The

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8 See Wang, “Instructing Yang Mao from Taihe 諭泰和楊茂,” in Complete Works, bk. 24, 1013.
strategy of this dissertation is to borrow the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, which, as a philosophical method, offers a tool to describe the transcendental structure of pure consciousness. This strategy was adopted by many scholars writing in different languages for several decades, among which Chen Lai’s comparison of Husserl and Wang in his *Spiritual Realms of Being and Non-Being* 有無之境, first published in 1980, might be the most influential one. Chen Lai’s work inspires not only many works written in Chinese, but also Iso Kern’s phenomenological research on Wang, which was published recently. However, most such studies, including that of Kern, did not attempt to use Husserl’s method to treat Wang’s doctrines as a system, and did not touch many crucial details in the philosophy of Wang. Hence, this treatise is an endeavor to bring Husserl and Wang together in two ways: First, they are both interested in some problems regarding human consciousness and subjectivity. Second, many crucial problems regarding Wang’s theory arise due to the fact that the structure of the heart has not been elaborately studied, on which Husserl’s phenomenological method can shed a light.

Obviously, this strategy can be reasonable only if phenomena related with the heart in Wang’s theory have the same structure as that of phenomena related with pure consciousness. Hence, in the first chapter, I will argue that the relation between the three core notions of Wang, namely, heart, intention (*yi* 意), and thing (*wu* 物), is structurally the same with the relation between the ego as subject of consciousness, acts of consciousness, and objects of consciousness. Husserl famously names this relation as

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intentionality. This parallel between Wang’s theory of heart-intention-thing and Husserl’s phenomenology of intentionality will be the topic of Chapter 1.

Based on Husserl’s theory of intentionality and constitution, it is possible to deal with the fundamental question for the ethics of both Husserl and Wang. Chapter 2 will argue that both philosophers treat emotional intentions as the basic elements of ethics, which constitute objects with values. For both, a moral act is not an act that loves an object with a positive value, but an emotional act that follows some ethical principles. In Chapter 3, I will describe the contents of such principles according to Husserl and Wang, who both believe that principles require people to love other subject as ends but not as means.

Since what is moral is nothing but an emotional act that follows ethical principles, the moral personality as the end of the Confucian moral effort is a person who always tends to act in such moral ways. In Chapter 4, I will study Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of the personal ego with concrete characteristics, for the heart for Wang can also be treated as a person. The end of moral effort is, therefore, to constitute a heart with only moral characteristics. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, for Wang, this process of constituting the moral heart should follow one’s self-knowing of whether a particular intentional act is moral or not. The form of this clear knowing is portrayed by Husserl as the reflective act, which will also be the topic of Chapter 5.
Chapter 1: Intention, Thing, Knowing, and Heart: The Parallel Between the Systems of Wang and Husserl

§1 Wang’s New Reading of The Great Learning as an Expression of His Theory

The task of this chapter is to argue that the structure of the heart, as the core notion of Wang’s doctrine, can be described by Husserl’s phenomenological method, which is used by Husserl to analyze the structure of consciousness. In order to elucidate the whole structure of the heart within Wang’s framework, it is necessary to study elements belonging to this structure, including body (shen 身), heart, intention (yi 意), thing (wu 物), and knowing (zhi 知). I translate terms from classical texts as literally as possible for the sake of convenience, since I will have to compare Wang’s radical readings of such terms with some more traditional interpretations. The text to begin with is “Inquiries on The Great Learning 大學問,” which is a record of Wang’s lecture right before his last military task.1 According to the Neo-Confucian tradition before Wang, The Great Learning itself should be the first text that a pupil ever reads, because it describes the most essential sketch of the steps of effort.2 According to Qian, who is one of Wang’s closest students, Wang treats his new reading of the classic as the beginning of his

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teaching. Many modern scholars consider “Inquiries” not only as the entrance to Wang’s doctrines, but also as the summarization of his whole system. Wang Fansen 王汎森 suggests that in the late Ming Dynasty after the death of Wang, the Yangming school and people following Zhu Xi were still arguing about the proper interpretation of The Great Learning. In the lecture expressing his new reading of the classic, Wang argues:

The body, the heart, the intention, the knowing and the thing constitute the order which their efforts use. While each of them has its own place, they are actually one thing. The ge, the extending (zhizhi 致知), the making sincere (cheng 誠), the rectifying (zheng 正), and the cultivating (xiu 儋) are efforts that the order uses. Though each of them has its own name, they are actually one thing.

In this quotation, Wang gives his counter-position against Zhu Xi’s interpretation of the classic. Before interpreting the counter-position, it may be helpful to have a quick look at both the original classic and the more traditional reading which Wang rejects. According to The Great Learning, there are eight necessary “tasks” for moral effort: to rectify things (gewu 格物), to extend one’s knowing (zhizhi 致知), to make one’s intention sincere

3 See Qian’s notes before “Inquiries,” in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 26, 1066.
5 See Wang Fansen, “The Guiding Principle of Thoughts at the End of Ming Dynasty and the Early Qing Dynasty 明末清初思想中之‘宗旨’,” in Ten Papers on Thoughts of the Late Ming Dynasty and Early Qing Dynasty 晚明清初思想十論 (Shanghai: Fudan University Press 復旦大學出版社, 2004), 110-111.
6 The term gewu (gewu 格物) needs some elucidation here. For Zhu Xi, ge means to investigate, so that to gewu is to investigate things and grasp knowledge about them. Wang, as will be shown later in this chapter, reads ge as rectifying (zheng 正). Since he often explains why ge means correcting to his audiences or readers, I decide to not to translate it when he cites this notion in the classics, only for the sake of convenience.
7 Wang, “Inquiries,” 1069/ 277, translation altered.
(chengyi 誠意), to rectify one’s heart (zhengxin 正心), to cultivate one’s body (xiushen 修身), to give order to one’s family (qijia 齊家), to rule one’s state properly (zhiguo 治國), and to bring peace to the whole world (pingtianxia 平天下). The first five items are internal to a person and should be the “root” for the other three. The relation between these tasks is a universal order of activities for everyone, including the emperor and common people. Zhu Xi treats all these tasks as different kinds of activities, which should be ordered temporally. He reads the term ge as investigation and zhi 致 in zhizhi as amplifying, so that to study things and accumulate knowledge about things should be the first necessary step, with all other steps following it. Zhu Xi believes that ancient sages have the perfect knowledge about both things and moral principles behind things, so the most efficient and safe way of studying is reading words of these sages. Ethical knowledge is the necessary preparation for moral deeds. Thus, before reading and study is accomplished, no further steps of the effort can be carried out, according to Zhu Xi.

Wang’s understanding of the five internal tasks directly attacks the root of Zhu Xi’s system: if the extending is not an activity separated from making sincere and correcting, it will make no sense to argue that this part of this same activity should be done temporally “before” other parts. The activity of reading and learning also loses its priority, since other categories of activities may all be treated as the foundation of moral effort, as long as they are taken as special practices of gewu. Within Wang’s framework, extending one’s knowing can also take place during daily life. He often refers to this methodological strategy of moral effort with the notion “polishing oneself in affairs (shi

shang molian 事上磨練),” which will be discussed with more details in the last chapter of this treatise. 9 The term “knowing (zhi 知)” has different meanings in different periods of Wang’s career. One of its meanings is liangzhi 良知, whose literal translation is good knowledge, and is translated by Chan as the “innate knowledge,” which will be the focus of Chapter 5.

Wang maintains that one can ge things and extend one’s knowing even during condensed political business. 10 Even children who cannot read have their task of gewu, which consists of their daily performances such as cleaning the floor. 11 Thus, for Wang, every activity can be an activity of gewu, as a basic element for moral effort. Moral effort is a task taken in every moment of one’s life, rather than a curriculum beginning from an easy course and ending with a difficult one. This reading of Wang makes moral effort a more universal task, for based on this understanding, even those who cannot read will be able to take gewu as the elemental part of the effort.

§2 The Relation Between the Body and the Heart According to Wang

One problem is that, even if people accept that every daily activity can lead one towards sagehood, it is still unclear why the practice of the heart is the same as the cultivation of the body, because the effort described by Wang seems to be mental, while the body is something physical. One of Wang’s students, Xiao Hui 蕭惠, also realizes this

9 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 204, 185/192.
10 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 218, 193/197-198; and “Replying Lu Binyang 答路賓陽,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 214.
11 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 320, 266/250.
possibility. He points out that “the eyes desire colors, the ears sounds, the mouth tastes, and the four limbs comfort.”¹² He believes that the body, as something physical, is more akin to physical objects than to the heart as its mental master. This means that the effort to completely control this physical body must involve techniques dealing with its physical nature. In other words, the correction of the mental part is not sufficient for the whole combination of the physical and the mental. Wang’s answer to Xiao Hui demonstrates more details of his understanding of body and heart:

What is called your heart is not merely that lump of blood and flesh… What is called your heart is that which can see, listen, speak, and move. It is the nature and heavenly principles. Life is possible only with this nature, and the principle of regeneration of this nature is ren (仁, humanity)… It is called the heart because it masters the whole body. The original substance of this heart is basically heavenly principles… This is your true self. This true self is the master of the body. If there is no true self, there will be no body. Truly, with the true self, one lives; without it, one dies. If you really want to do something for your bodily self, you must make use of this true self, always preserve its original substance, and be cautious over things not yet seen and apprehensive over things not yet heard of, for fear that the true self be injured, even slightly.¹³

It is the original substance of the heart that gives life to the body, while objects which guide the body astray may harm the body. This implies that, according to Wang, the side of the body as a thing is actually not its essence. The essence of the body lies on the side of that which gives life to it. Wang argues that it is absurd to argue that there is a gap between the original substance of the heart and the true essence of the body, because what gives the life is the original substance of the heart. The original substance needs to

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¹³ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 122, 82/80-81, translation altered.
be preserved, which indicates that it is in danger of being obscured. Wang asserts that “[w]hen the heart is free from the obscuration of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of heavenly principles, which requires not an iota added from the outside.”¹⁴ The relation between the original substance and selfish desires is another crucial part of Wang’s whole system, which will be studied in the last two chapters of this dissertation. Here it is sufficient to point out that, according to Wang, losing control of the body and losing the original substance are actually the same to the heart, and so is the effort of dealing with them. Like the iron which does not “choose” the magnet, the body does not choose, but is naturally attracted by the heart.

§3 Wang’s Method of Recovering the Original Substance of the Heart Based on Liangzhi

Therefore, even if the heart may lose its control over the body, the effort to win back this complete and natural relation is only to change the heart. The recovering of the original substance is exactly the same as the recovering of its essence as the true self. Wang says, “The only effort is to get rid of selfish desires and preserve heavenly principles.”¹⁵ Now the problem is, how can this original substance be recovered, if it is veiled?

But the original substance of the heart is (human) nature. (Human) nature is without the non-good, so that the original substance of the heart is without the incorrect. How is it that any effort is required to correct the heart? Because while the original substance of the heart is originally correct, incorrectness

¹⁴ Wang, Chuanshi Lu, chap. 3, 8/7, translation altered.
¹⁵ Wang, Chuanshi Lu, chap. 28, 31/30, translation altered.
enters when intentions and thoughts are diffused (fa 發). Therefore, the one who wants to correct one’s own heart must correct it with (those which are) diffused upon by intentions and thoughts. If one loves the good like loving the beauty when a good thought is diffused in a good way, and hates the evil when an evil thought is diffused, then one’s intentions will always be sincere and heart be corrected.16

It is useful to make a brief remark on the term fa, which is translated as “operate” by Wing-tsit Chan and as “stir” by Ivanhoe.17 While both of them have a good understanding of this word as a philosophical term, it literally means to diffuse or project arrows with a bow,18 which is actually still contained in the philosophical usage of it. The heart is not only the bow that shoots intentions, but also the center of all intentions radiated into the surrounding horizon. Thus, the heart is responsible for the direction of the intentions, which makes it the subject of them. Intentions are “radiated” from the subject towards their objects, and the subject (the heart) here is also the center of things as targets. Wang believes that through attempting to act correctly in particular situations, the heart itself can also get rid of selfish desires. This method is to polish oneself in affairs, as was mentioned above. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to unfold more details of this method, but it is necessary to mention a difficulty that Wang may face. For Zhu Xi, to do good deeds is to practice (jianlü 践履),19 but he doubts “how can one practice if meanings and principles (yili 義理) are not clear for this one?”20 To clarify

17 See Ivanhoe, Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism, 168-169.
18 According to Xu Shen 许慎, its original meaning is to shoot the arrow, see “The Category of Bow (gong 弓),” in Shuowen Jiezi 說文解字 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1981), 270.
19 It literally means to let one’s shoes step on something, or truly walk the way
meanings and principles is to grasp knowledge. Though the original substance truly contains all ethical knowledge, for most people, this source of knowledge is concealed.

Thus for such people, the only source of knowledge is external experience:

Ways and principles are already complete when people are born. The reason why they need to read is that they have not experienced much. Sages had experiences, so they wrote them on pages for people to read. Now we read just in order to see many ways and principles. After we understand them, they belong to our selves originally again, and are not added from outside.21

The first sentence of this quotation from Zhu Xi has the same meaning as the following two famous slogans of Wang: 1) “The heart is the principles.”22 2) “There are not principles external to the heart.”23 These statements mean that all heavenly principles are already available in the heart as its original substance. However, Zhu Xi suggests that only the heart of a sage can completely rely on principles internal to his or her heart, while principles in hearts of the ordinary people could be “reactivated” only through moral effort. Therefore, according to Zhu Xi, for most people, reading is necessary because it is the only lamp available which can light their way back to their original substance.24 The theory which can defend Wang from this possible weakness of this system is his doctrine of liangzhi:

However, an intention diffused may be good or evil, and unless there is a way to make clear the distinction between good and evil, there will be a confusion of truth and untruth. One will not be able to make one’s intentions sincere even

22 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 3, 8/7, translation altered.
23 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 32, 34/33, translation altered.
if one wants to do so. Therefore, one who wishes to make one’s intention sincere must extend one’s knowing (zhizhi)… Zhizhi is not what later scholars understand as enriching and widening knowledge, but simply extending one’s liangzhi…. It is my nature endowed by heaven, the original substance of my heart, and that which is naturally intelligent, shining, clear, and understanding.25

It is clear according to this quotation that liangzhi is related to the original substance in two senses. It can be treated as being identified with the original substance, and is also the “clear seeing” of the substance. The identification between liangzhi and the original substance will be the topic of Chapter 4, and liangzhi as a clear, ethical seeing based on the original substance is the topic of Chapter 5. By reading the term zhi as liangzhi rather than knowledge, Wang is able to argue that the innate good capability of the heart is already sufficient to instruct moral effort.

Another significance of liangzhi, as will be shown in Chapter 5, is that it helps the heart to polish itself when dealing with particular affairs. Wang’s argument for this methodological function of liangzhi in “Inquiries” introduces another important notion in his system, namely, thing (wu 物):

Now, when one sets out to extend one’s liangzhi to the utmost, does it mean something illusory, hazy, in a vacuum, and unreal? No, it means something real. Therefore, zhizhi must consist in gewu. A thing is an event. For every intention diffused, there must be an event corresponding to it. The event to which the intention is directed is a thing. To ge is to rectify (zheng 正). It is to correct what is incorrect so it can return to its original correctness. To rectify that which is not correct is to get rid of evil, and to return to correctness is to do good. That is what is meant by ge.26

To extend one’s liangzhi is not to deal with the nature of an enclosed, lonely subject, but a subject that is always connected with a world full of objects. Objects are connected with the heart, for the heart is the subject of all intentions, which must have things. The task of moral effort dealing with intentions is to make them sincere (chengyi), which, as will be shown later in this chapter, is a process identified with the process of gewu. The process of making intentions sincere does not require knowledge in an intelligent, academic sense, but only requires one to deal with one’s own subjective activities according to the clear knowing of liangzhi.

§4 The Relation Between Heart, Intention, and Thing According to Both Wang and Husserl

The essential correlation between gewu and chengyi raises doubts and critiques against Wang, from both his contemporaries and some modern scholars. To philosophically illuminate difficulties faced by this theory of Wang and to clarify its own structure will be focuses of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. These explorations will use Husserl’s phenomenology, so it is necessary to demonstrate that it is proper to deal with Wang’s doctrine phenomenologically. The possibility of this strategy is based on Wang’s whole doctrine as a system, consisting of heart, intention, thing, and liangzhi, which were briefly introduced above. This system is expressed by Wang himself by two groups of slogans in different periods of his career:
1. The master of the body is the heart. What is diffused from the heart is the intention. The original substance of the will is knowing, and what is directed towards by the intention is a thing.\textsuperscript{27}

2. What is neither good nor evil is the substance of the heart. What may be good or evil is being diffused of the intention. What knows the good and evil is \textit{liangzhi}, and to do the good and remove the evil is \textit{gewu}. \textsuperscript{28}

The first doctrine quoted was recorded by Xu Ai 徐愛 (1487-1517). Hence, Wang must have given this doctrine no later than Xu Ai’s death in 1517, when Wang was forty-seven. According to Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, Xu Ai recorded what he heard from Wang when Wang was in Nanjing between 1505 and 1517.\textsuperscript{29} The second group was mentioned by Wang Ji (or Wang Longxi 王畿/王龍溪, 1498-1583) in a dialogue with Qian Dehong, the recorder of this dialogue, in 1527. This dialogue also happened before Wang’s last military task, so that the second group of doctrines is also an expression of Wang’s late thoughts.

Since Wang’s thought on \textit{zhi} 知 changes in different phases of his career, the following investigations will only focus on the relation between heart, thing, and intention. I use the following two sentences as its map: 1) What is diffused from the heart is the intention. 2) What is directed towards by an intention is a thing. Here, two relations are touched: that between intentions and their subject, and that between intentions and things. Three factors are involved here: the subject, the acts, and the objects. Obviously, they should be three, rather than two relations: besides the two above, logically there

\textsuperscript{27} Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 6, 13/14, translation altered.


\textsuperscript{29} See Huang, \textit{Philosophical Records of Ming Confucians} 明儒學案 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2008), 220; and Chan, \textit{Detailed Notes and Collected Comments on Chuanxi Lu} 傳習錄詳註集評 (Taipei: Taiwan Student Press 台灣學生書局, 198), 55.
should also be the relation between things and heart. Wang’s theory of intention also covers all of the three, according to him: 1) The intention must have a thing. Namely, it is “transitive” and must have an object. This implies not a one-way dependency, but a mutual one, which means that the intention is also necessary for a thing to be a thing. 2) The intention is not only always correlated with the thing, but is also always presented to the heart. A heart in a proper sense cannot be intention-less. 3). The thing is not independent of the heart, but must be the thing for the heart.

The three factors and their relations are also subject matters of Husserl’s phenomenology of intentionality, as he says in his later life:

Accordingly we have, in the Cartesian manner of speaking, the three headings, ego-cogitatio-cogitata: the ego-pole (and what is peculiar to its identity), the subjective, as appearance tied together synthetically, and the object-poles.\footnote{Edmund Husserl, \textit{Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phanomenologie}, \textit{Husserlina VI} (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 174. Translated by David Carr as \textit{The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology} (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 171. Hereafter is quoted as \textit{Crisis}. Page numbers refer first to the text in German, and second to the English translation.}

The “subjective” factor here is the appearance (Erscheinung) belonging to the ego as the subject, and the object-pole is that which appears (Erscheinendes). The object appears to the subjective side, for which the object is necessary. In the following sections, I will first briefly portray Husserl’s analysis of the ego-cogitatio-cogitata system under the title of intentionality, and then clarify the structural parallel between Husserl’s system and Wang’s heart-intention-thing framework.

\textbf{§5 The Essential Correlation Between Noesis and Noema}
Husserl’s theory of intentionality not only helped him to build his fame as a philosopher in the beginning of his career, but also is the most fundamental tool of his phenomenology throughout his whole life. In *Logical Investigations*, the “starting point” of his career, Husserl describes intentionality in the following way:

If the peculiar character of intentional experiences is contested, if one refuses to admit, what for us is most certain, that being-an-object consists phenomenologically in certain acts in which something appears, or is thought of as our object, it will not be intelligible how being-an-object can itself be objective to us.\(^31\)

According to this quotation, the being of an object is not independent even for a real, independent, existence: something is an object only when it appears or is given to an act. Being-an-object is based on its being-given-to-an-act, and *vice versa*. In the same book, Husserl also offers his understanding of the function of having-an-object in experiences:

Intentional experiences have the peculiarity of directing themselves in varying fashion to presented objects, but they do so in an intentional sense. An object is “referred to” or “aimed at” in them, and in presentative or judging or other fashion… only one thing is present, the intentional experience, whose essential descriptive character is the intention in question…. If this experience is present, then, *eo ipso* and through its own essence (we must insist), the intentional “relation” to an object is achieved, and an object is “intentionally present”; these two phrases mean precisely the same.\(^32\)

According to Husserl, intentional experiences and objects of experiences are mutually necessary to each other: there are no experiences without objects, nor objects without


being intentionally experienced. Within his framework of intentionality, consciousness is a complex structure which contains both the subjective and the objective sides: within this structure, the experience as the intentional act and its objects are essentially correlated with each other. This description of the relation between the intentional act (also named by him noesis) and intentional object (named noema) is the corner stone of Husserl’s phenomenology throughout his whole life, which Husserl emphasizes in multiple materials written in different stages of his life after *Logical Investigations*. One of his studies of intentionality that is essential for this dissertation is his analysis in the first book of *Ideas*. According to this work published in 1913, acts and objects are correlated in the form of constitution, through which objects are constituted by acts. In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl already mentions that each intentional act has two layers: the layer of matter, and the layer of form. In *Ideas I*, the form-material structure is described as a process of “sense-bestowal,” in which the sense bestowed is the form, and that which receives this form is the material. Husserl says, “Every intuitive mental process is precisely noetic; it is of its essence to include in itself something such as a ‘sense’.”33 In other words, senses in the sense-bestowal belong to the side of noeses in *Ideas I*, rather than the side of noemata. An act constitutes its correlated act by bestowing a “sense” to the material underlying this act. Materials which “receive” senses are in a

flow named the “hyletic flow.” According to Husserl, hyletic materials also belong to the noetic side:

(To) all the mental processes designated… as “primary contents”… belong certain “sensuous” mental processes which are unitary with respect to their highest genus, “sensation-contents” such as color-Data, touch-Data and tone-Data, and the like, which we shall no longer confuse with appearing moments of physical things – coloredness, roughness, etc. – which “present themselves” to mental process by means of those (“contents”).

On the side of acts which all belong to a mental stream, there are sensuous contents which form the hyletic flow. These contents are different from properties of the objects. For example, the red as a sensuous datum is different from the redness belonging to a red object. Note that though Husserl uses an “appearing” language to describe the relation between sensuous data and properties of objects, he is not saying that the data are productions of objects which affect the consciousness in a causal way. On the contrary, for him, objects appearing with special properties are “productions” of the sense-bestowal. For the sake of convenience, in this dissertation, I will use the term “objective properties” or “noematic properties” to refer to features on the side of objects, and the term “sensuous data” or “contents” to refer to materials on the noetic side. According to Husserl, such data or contents are “animated by ‘construings’ within the concrete unity of the perception and in the animation exercise the ‘presentive function,’ or as united with the construings which animate them…” In Moran’s words, through the constituting act as a sense-bestowing process, “non-intentional sensations are interpreted and brought into

36 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 75/88, Husserl’s emphasis.
objectifying intentions so as to produce objects for consciousness.”37 That is to say, hyletic contents can be used to yield noematic properties only when they are used to build an object with the help of the sense.

As Husserl himself realizes, the word “sense (Sinn),” along with “sensuous (sinnlich),” means “what is conveyed by the ‘senses’ in normal perception of the external.”38 This makes this term ambiguous. Husserl admits that “After the reduction there becomes apparent an essential kinship among the remaining ‘sensuous’ Data of intuitions of the external.”39 This means that in the term “sensuous data” the word “sensuous” means something related to those properties that we can see, we can hear, and we can touch. Another meaning of this term is used by Husserl in the phrase “sense-bestowal” in section 89 of Ideas I, according to which the “sense” of a tree is essentially different from a particular tree by the fact that the latter can be burnt, but the former cannot.40 In a later part of Ideas I, Husserl explains this essential distinction by describing the sense of the “physical thing” as an “idea” or an “essence.”41 The essence is something that can never burn, and is strictly opposed to external beings. The reason why he uses noesis and noema to describe the two sides of intentionality is that “it is not unwelcome that the word, nous, recalls one of its distinctive significations, namely precisely ‘sense’.”42 Thus, the “sense” bestowed to the materials to constitute an object is the

37 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 164.
38 Husserl, Ideas I, 173/204.
39 Husserl, Ideas I, 173/204.
40 See Husserl, Ideas I, 184/216.
41 See Husserl, Ideas I, 310/356.
42 Husserl, Ideas I, 173/205.
essence of the object, which is on the noetic side. Since Husserl explicitly uses the phrase “the sense of tree,” it is possible that for him, there are also sense of apple, sense of table, or sense of human beings, etc. Again, I will use the term “essence” or “meaning” to refer to the “sense” in “sense-bestowal,” only in order to avoid confusions.

Furthermore, according to Husserl, there are multiple categories of sense-bestowals. Even in a single act there may be multiple meanings or essences bestowed. These different essences constitute a hierarchical system. The most fundamental level is the level on which a “mere object” is given:

... within the full noema... we must separate essential different strata which are grouped around a central “core,” around a pure “objective sense” – around that which, in our examples, was describable with purely identical objective expressions because there can be something identical in the parallel mental processes which are different in sort... we must distinguish different concepts of unmodified objectivities, of which the “object simpliciter,” namely the something identical which is perceived at one time, another time directly presentiated, a third time presented pictorially in a painting, and the like, only indicates one central concept.43

An object can have different levels, among which the level of a mere identification is the most fundamental one. This part of a noema is built by the level of act which bestows an “objective sense,” namely, a meaning of a mere object which is identified with itself. Without a simple self-identification, it is impossible to say that something is this or that. This fundamental layer of act is also named by Husserl in Logical Investigations as “presentation,” which is “the class of objectifying acts.”44 A “mere presentation”

43 Husserl, Ideas I, 189/221-222, Husserl’s emphasis.
44 Husserl, Logical Investigations, B1480-481/2:160.
constitutes a “mere thing,” a “mere this.”⁴⁵ This act can also serve as the fundamental layer, which is necessary for every noetic act which contains a “higher layer.”⁴⁶ According to Ideas I, when being a part of an act with multiple noetic layers, the function of the presentation is to yield the so-called “noematic core.” This core is always woven into a relation with multiple objective properties yielded by sensuous data. The identical object with its multiple noematic properties functions as the core of these properties. Husserl also uses the relation between a substance and its predicates to illuminate this relation between the core and the objective properties.⁴⁷ Here a “predicate” (Prädikate) refers to a property, an attribute of the substance, rather than a word in a sentence. A substance with multiple properties is a single object of a single act, in which multiple data are used to yield the correlated single object.

The objective core is a part of an object built by both the essence of a mere object and multiple noetic contents. It is not the core itself. Though Husserl often uses the term “empty X” to describe the identifying core of an identified object, this X, as Smith realizes, “is not a purely formal, empty place-holder, which would be identical in every noema and every experience.”⁴⁸ Harvey also argues that “the sense-predicates of the ‘object’ underwent a … synthesis of perspectives that, when condensed, provide the rudiments of the essential sense of ‘wax’.”⁴⁹ That is to say, the identified X is not grasped

⁴⁷ See Husserl, Ideas I, 271/313.
without any sense properties. Even for the act that builds a mere “this,” its object of it still shows itself to consciousness through the appearing noematic properties. The X, the core, does not show itself. It is also not proper to say that the properties show themselves: it is the object that shows itself through the properties, by combining them together around the core that cannot show itself.

The level of act which bestows a meaning of “mere this” is fundamental. This level “must be there” in every act with “higher” meanings. In the next chapter, it will be demonstrated that according to Husserl, a feeling is also an act on a higher layer, which means that to grasp a good or bad thing is based on a presentation. In such a case, the ego is not presenting a mere thing, but the mere thing is still “a part” of the good or bad thing as the “full noema.” In the next section of this chapter, however, I will briefly study other forms of intentional objects which are also constituted by their correlated acts.

§6 Different Forms of Intentional Objects Constituted by Noetic Acts

One task of this chapter is to argue that within the framework of Wang, things function as intentional objects, and intentions targeted on things are intentional acts. For both Husserl and Wang, actual physical things, illusions, bodies of other people, and one’s own intentional acts can all be treated as intentional objects. This section will study Husserl’s thoughts on these forms of noemata, while Wang’s theories regarding intentional things will be studied later in this chapter.

a) Actual and Illusionary Things as Intentional Objects
According to Husserl, not only real external existences, but illusions are also intentional objects which are intentionally presented.⁵⁰ He says:

All natural questions, all theoretical and practical goals taken as themes – as existing, as perhaps existing, as probable, as questionable, as valuable, as project, as action and result of action – have to do with something or other within the world-horizon. This is true even of illusions, nonactualities, since everything characterized through some modality of being is, after all, related to actual being.⁵¹

The world is the universal horizon of intentionality for all possible categories of objects. Within the framework on intentionality of Husserl, the meaning of the notion “object” is modified into the broadest sense: anything that can appear as being targeted by an intentional act is an object in a proper sense, even when the act is directed at something unreal. In Logical Investigations, Husserl believes that imaginations or illusions can also be treated as objects of intentionality:

And of course such an experience may be present in consciousness together with its intention, although its object does not exist at all, and is perhaps incapable of existence. The object is “meant,” i.e. to “mean” it is an experience, but it is then merely entertained in thought, and is nothing in reality.⁵²

Husserl points out that it is different manners of acts which intentionally deal with different forms of objects. Hence, the act correlated with an illusion is different from the act of a real thing. Husserl often uses examples such as Zeus or a dragon to argue that the form in which these purely imagined things are grasped is exactly the same with that of

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⁵¹ Husserl, Crisis, 148-149/145-146.
the reality.\textsuperscript{53} When I am imaging the body of a dragon, I am imaging a body that is not inside of me but is flying in the sky. Using the words of McIntyre and Smith, the dragon which does not exist at all is still “something extra-mental.”\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, the same object can be approached in different manners. Both a pious ancient Greek and a modern atheist can intentionally grasp Zeus. For the former, the deity must exist, while for the latter the god is just an imagination. The ancient Greek might be a priest of Zeus and the modern atheist might be a scholar of religious study. In such a case, the ancient intends the figure Zeus through a religious belief, and the modern treats the figure as a theoretical subject matter. According to Husserl, since the real object is an object only by being connected with the act, its existence also belongs to the whole which combines the acts and their objects together:

Thus quite universally we can observe the highly remarkable eidetic peculiarity that, in relation to all the noetic moments the “intentional Object” as “Object” is constituted as having by means of its noeses, every mental process functions as belief-consciousness in the sense of protodoxa … new Objects posited as existent are therewith eo ipso constituted for consciousness; to the noematic characteristics correspond predicable characteristics in the sense-Object as actual and not merely noematically modified predicables.\textsuperscript{55}

The noetic characteristics of acts which treat their objects as actual or illusionary are named by Husserl as “doxic” or “belief-characteristics.” Such an act posits its object with such and such noematic characteristics of being.\textsuperscript{56} It is clear, according to the long

\textsuperscript{53} See Husserl, Logical Investigations, 373/2: 99.


\textsuperscript{55} Husserl, Ideas I, 217-218/253, my emphasis.

\textsuperscript{56} See Husserl, Ideas I, 214/249.
quotation above, that a posited object is not external to its doxic act, but is constituted by the act. An doxic act which doubts or denies the existence of its object is a modification of the doxic belief of an actual object.⁵⁷ However, both forms of doxic acts are based on presentation. Husserl argues, “All of this is transferred to the full ‘posita,’ i.e., to the unities of sense-core and the being-characteristic.”⁵⁸ It was mentioned in the last section that the noematic core of an object is constituted by the layer of presentation. Hence, an object that is posited contains not only the “empty X,” but also the noematic property of being actual or illusionary. This indicates that its correlated act also contains two noetic layers, and the believing characteristic is nothing but a higher layer which is built on the fundamental layer of mere presentation. This posited object is not a “mere object,” but a “full noema” with all its properties on different levels.

According to Husserl, an actual object is also constituted by an act on the subjective side. This theory may be read as a subjective idealism, which Husserl himself explicitly rejects by saying that a theory based on the absolute consciousness is not a “Berkeleyan idealism.”⁵⁹ How his theory of constitution can avoid being such an idealism is a topic that received interest from many scholars, but it is not necessary to elaborate all the details of this epistemological issue in this dissertation, for the task of it is only to deal with Wang’s ethical theories with the help of Husserlian phenomenology.⁶⁰ Here, a brief

description of Husserl’s position is sufficient. For him, objects which can be real or not are transcendent, and they must be constituted as things with different sides: when some sides are originally given to the ego, others of the same object must be “hidden.” This form of givenness of transcendent objects is named by Husserl “adumbration.”

Different sides of an adumbrated object are given to the ego in a temporal sense, and a transcendent object can be constituted as real only when these different sides of it are in a continuous harmony: the ego who treats an object as real must anticipate properties of the same object to show it in a new temporal moment. If such an anticipation is disappointed, the ego will realize that the object is an illusion. As Lampert points out, each new side of the object in a continuous experiences “fits into a pre-existing scheme; it fulfils an anticipation.”

Based on this temporal grasp of the harmony between different noematic properties, an actual object is not magically created by the ego. Husserl claims that “in the process of perceiving, the sense itself is continually cultivated and is genuinely so in steady transformation, constantly leaving open the possibility of new transformations.” That is to say, whether the side of a building that I will see in the next moment will fulfill my

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63 Husserl, Ideas I, 74-75/87-88.


anticipation of the building as a real one is “hanging in an open possibility.” An open possibility, by its definition, is beyond my arbitrary control. Also, within the external horizon, there are always parts which are not attentively grasped, but are only passively co-existing with the object actively constituted.⁶⁷ Objects co-existing in the background can also be things that are hidden, like the landscape on the other side of a mountain. Such co-existences are also undetermined possibilities: before I raised my head from the table, I could not know the scene outside my window, for I was not actively constituting it as an object. In such a case, the undetermined scene is still in the background of my consciousness: I passively “know” that the scene “is there,” though I do not know whether the sun has set or not. The scene, as an open possibility, is not something that I can freely and arbitrarily control. More importantly, since my attentive power can “skip” from an object to another, what was previously in the background can be “brought” to the foreground. Through this structure, I can grasp physical objects as something that will continue to be, even if I no longer look at them. That is to say, I constitute them as objects whose existence are independent from me.

That the constitution theory is not a subjective idealism will also help us to clarify a necessary problem regarding Wang’s understanding of gewu, which will be stated in the next chapter. It is so because Wang’s thoughts regarding external things are also similar to Husserl’s theory of intentional constitution.

b) Other People as Subjects Intentionally Given

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⁶⁷ See Husserl, Ideas I, 49/52.
It was mentioned above that according to Husserl, all phenomena presented in the world are constituted in the form of intentionality. In *Crisis*, Husserl treats this world not only as a physical world, but also as a cultural one, which is a life-world for human beings. In the cultural world, I meet other people who share this world with me. Now the question is, are other people, along with their conduct, intentional objects according to Husserl? Husserl’s answer is revealed in the following quotation:

> Among the objects of the life-world we also find human beings, with all their human action and concern, works and suffering, living in common in the world-horizon in their particular social interrelations and knowing themselves to be such.68

According to this quotation, other human beings, with their “human actions,” are all objects of the life-world, though they are “more than objects.” In *Cartesian Meditations*, this world as a social or cultural world, is “given orientedly on the underlying basis of the Natural common to all and on the basis of the spatiotemporal form that gives access to Nature and must function also in making the multiplicity of cultural formations and cultures accessible.”69 Nature, as a more fundamental level of world, is also built intersubjectively: it is grasped to be objective when the ego realizes that it is “shared” and “agreed upon” by other egos.70 Therefore, in 1928, Husserl tended to think that other people, intended to as other bodies with other egos “in” these bodies have an even higher priority than nature. It is true that on this level there is as yet no conduct in a social or

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68 Husserl, *Crisis*, 148-149/146.


cultural sense, but the motion of other bodies are also not physical or merely spatial. Zahavi realizes that “the kinaesthesis is not merely an experiencing of a bodily position or movement. It is an experiencing of my bodily position and movement, and often an experiencing of a movement executed by me. That is, the kinaesthesis often includes an awareness of oneself as agent.”\textsuperscript{71} If my awareness of my body always demonstrates it as a part of myself as an agent with intentionality, then motions of other bodies appearing to be similar to mine in the pre-social world must also belong to other agents, rather than being simply physical movements. In short, they are intentional objects, even when deprived of their social and cultural properties. Note that Husserl is not arguing that other people are only objects like tables or trees for me: in Chapter 3, I will argue that through their bodies, I grasp them as other rational subjects who necessarily have their bodies. That is to say, they are also subjective poles for their noetic acts. When stating that they are also objects in the life-world, Husserl is only suggesting that their bodies, as necessary “media” for me to grasp their subjectivities, can only be constituted by me in an intentional and noetic way, as will also be shown in Chapter 4.

c) Intentional Acts Themselves as Intentional Objects

It was briefly shown above that other people are intentionally presented through empathy. The empathy helps me understand others who are “similar to me.” This, obviously, requires a self-understanding, which is also intentional. Husserl points out that

one form of self-understanding is to intentionally grasp one’s own acts as intentional objects:

…its\textsuperscript{72} essence involves the essential possibility of a reflective turning of regard and naturally in the form of a new cogitatio that, in the manner proper to a cogitatio which simply seizes upon, is directed to it…. By acts directed to something immanent, more generally formulated, by inten\textsuperscript{73}tive mental process related to something immanent, we understand those to which it is essential that their intentional objects, if they exist at all, belong to the same stream of mental process to which they themselves belong.

An immanent object belongs to the same mental process, the same stream of consciousness in which the intentional act towards this immanent object itself can be found. The form of the act constituting such an immanent object is special and different from that of an act constituting an external thing, for “[o]nly in reflection do we ‘direct’ ourselves to the perceiving itself and to its perceptual directedness to the house.”\textsuperscript{74} The reflection is an act which treats the perceiving as its immanent object, which is also an intentional act, targeted on the house. The perceived house and the reflection upon the perceiving have different phenomenological structures, which will be carefully studied in the last chapter. As has been said, whether this object of the act is actual or not does not change the intentional structure between the object and the act. Husserl pushes this statement even further by saying that an intentional act belonging to the same mental process “is and remains its <Object> meant, objectivated, and the like, no matter if the corresponding ‘actual Object’ precisely is or is not in actuality, if it has been annihilated.

\textsuperscript{72} The cegotatia’s.

\textsuperscript{73} Husserl, Ideas I, 67-68/78-79, Husserl’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{74} Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 72/33, Husserl’s emphasis.
An illusionary noema not only will not make its act become a non-act, but also will not prevent its correlated act of imaging from being an immanent object to another act. I can imagine a dragon or Zeus. I know what is imagined by me is an illusion. Through this reflective knowing, the imagining also “exists for me” as an immanent object, even though its own object does not exist.

**d) Essences as Objects of Eidetic Seeing**

The last form of noema is pure essence like purely mathematical concepts. Husserl famously claims that “seeing an essence is also precisely intuition, just as an eidetic object is precisely *an object.*” An eidetic intuition of an essence is the grasp of the concept “in person,” “as itself.” More importantly, the eidetic seeing “makes this object given,” which implies that this seeing is also an intentional act which constitutes the essence as its object. In a later section of this chapter, I will also briefly argue that for Wang, reading and studying are also intentions, whose objects are cognitive knowledge.

**§7 Intentional Objects as Objects for the Ego**

According to Husserl, every object must be the target of an act, and different kinds of objects are correlated with different kinds of intentional acts. Physical things in the external world, whether actual or not, other people in a cultural life-world, and even

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76 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 11/9, my emphasis.
intentional acts themselves, are all intentional objects, constituted by intentional acts. To intentionally grasp an intentional act is a reflective act, which belongs to the same mental stream with its object as my mental process. By saying that multiple, different acts all belong to my mental stream, it is presupposed that I must be the “same I.” As Husserl says in the second book of Ideas, which was written during the 1920s:

What we find then is ourselves as the spiritual Ego related to the stream of lived experiences – “spiritual” here is used in a mere general sense, referring to the Ego that has its place precisely not in Corporeality; e.g., I “think” (cogito), i.e., I perceive, I represent in whatever mode, I judge, I feel, I will, etc., and I find myself thereby as that which is one and the same in the changing of these lived experiences, as “subject” of the acts and states.77

As an ego, I am the self-identified subject, which means that this ego can be treated as a Cartesian “res cogitans,” though in later chapters I will also study Husserl’s analyses of the form of ego which “must be with its body.” It is shown in the quotation above that this thinking being is also a subject of judging, feeling, and willing, which are not instinctive reactions belonging to a body, but intentional acts belonging to the spiritual, mental stream of an ego. For Husserl, acts are not scattered pearls, but are linked together in a necklace named the mental process. Every act “brings with itself the mark” of belonging to an ego. The ego functions as the chain of the necklace because all these pearls are “made” by it:

In the accomplishment of each act there lies a ray of directedness I cannot describe otherwise than by saying it takes its point of departure in the “Ego,”

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78 See Husserl, Ideas II, 97/103.
which evidently thereby remains undivided and numerically identical while it lives in these manifold acts, spontaneously takes an active part in them, and by means of ever new rays goes through these acts toward what is objective in their sense.\(^79\)

According to this quotation, different acts are like rays “radiated” from the heart as the single and individual “light source.” Acts as rays are linked together because they all “come from the same place,” which makes them belong to the same “owner,” namely, the ego. Using words of Moran, the ego, as the pure and transcendental ego, “is not a part of any mental process but is a necessary condition of these processes,”\(^80\) for without the source of light, no rays of light are possible.

To connect acts together as its own acts seems to be the subjective “capacity” of the ego. However, I avoided using the term “capacity” in the discussion above because if the function of being the identical subject of act was a capacity, then the ego would have the “freedom” to determine whether the capability should be used or not. It is true that Husserl describes the ego as a free subject.\(^81\) But this freedom does not mean that the ego can “shrink back” to itself, without having any acts radiated from it. He explicitly claims in Ideas I that “We can define a ‘waking’ Ego as one which, within its stream of mental processes, continuously effects consciousness in the specific form of the cogito.”\(^82\) That is to say, the definition of an ego is an ego which is contiguously serving as the identical pole of the mental stream. The “waking life” of the ego, as a stream of mental process, is

\(^{79}\) Husserl, Ideas II, 98/104, my emphasis.

\(^{80}\) Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 171.

\(^{81}\) Husserl, Ideas II, 98-99/104-105.

\(^{82}\) Husserl, Ideas I, 64/72.
a “continuously unbroken chain of cogitationes.” Note that though it is also claimed on the same page that within this chain of acts, there are always some non-acting parts, it does not mean that there are temporal moments in which the ego ceases to act intentionally. This statement actually means that in the horizon of every intentional moment, there are always some “objects” which are not actually “realized” by the ego: they only “co-exist” there as the background. The possibility of grasping objects passively implies that there must also always be at least one actual object along with these potential ones, for it is also non-sense to say “background” without a “foreground.” The ego in its waking life, therefore, is also an active subject because it can only change the direction of its active attention, but can never “shut it down.”

One important question arises from the term “waking ego”: is sleeping also considered as a part of the “waking life,” according to Husserl? Many scholars have already used the phenomenological methodology to study the problem of dreams, which means that they simply accept the waking-ness of the consciousness in the dream. However, there seems to be no materials from Husserl himself that can directly answer this question. There is only an indirect one that might be useful here. In Ideas I, Husserl mentions that whether an external object is real or illusionary may change in time:

It can always be that the further course of experience necessitates giving up what has already been posited with a legitimacy derived from experience. Afterwards one says it was a mere illusion, a hallucination, merely a coherent dream, or the like.

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83 Husserl, Ideas I, 64/72-73.
85 Husserl, Ideas I, 86/102, my emphasis.
Here a dream is equated with an illusion that may be realized to be “unreal.” In order for a dream to be realized to be something illusionary, it must be grasped intentionally. This means that an ego may believe the centaur that it sees in the dream to be true, but then realizes that it is not by being awakened. As is demonstrated above, for Husserl an illusion is also an intentional object correlated with an act. The dream is realized to be a dream only when the ego awakes. This means that the dream must be something “in the memory” for the realization. The dream, as something directed at by a memorial reflective intentionality, is thus also an intentionality belonging to the same mental process.

For Husserl, therefore, an intentional act and the ego are necessary to each other, though in a different form from that through which the act and the object are necessarily connected. Every act, as a part belonging to a mental process, must be an act of the ego, and every ego in its waking life must continuously serve as the identical subject pole for all acts belonging to it.

§8 All Noemata as Objects for an Ego via the Medium of Noeses of the Ego

The two sections above discussed the relation between intentional acts and objects, and that between the ego and acts. The next task is, therefore, to study Husserl’s theory of the relation between the ego and objects. An immediate conclusion based on previous sections is that the ego must be continuously directed to objects in its waking life, for it must have acts, and acts must have their objects. Acts are the media through which the
ego is necessarily connected with the objects. Since all acts are acts of the ego, objects are also objects for the ego. Husserl says, “Objects exist for me, and are for me what they are, only as objects of actual and possible consciousness.” He also claims that “our experiential evidence of the world lacks also the superiority of being the absolutely primary evidence.” If the evidence of the world is still not apodictic, then apodictic evidence must be found, otherwise not only the world, but also all positive sciences would be groundless. Husserl’s solution to this Cartesian task is his theory of the phenomenological reduction:

We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude; we parenthesize everything which that positing encompasses with respect to being: thus the whole natural world which is continually “there for us,” “on hand,” and which will always remain there according to consciousness as an “actuality” if we also choose to parenthesize it…. Thus I exclude all sciences relating to this natural world… I make absolutely no use of the things posited in them.

The phenomenological reduction stops using the self-evidence of the surrounding world, including scientific knowledge derived from this evidence. This reduction is not a refusal of the ordinary belief of the world, for the refusing is already a positing, in Husserl’s own words. The result of the reduction, or what is left by a complete reduction, is nothing but the pure ego itself:

86 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 99/63, my emphasis.
87 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 57/17.
88 Kerstern translates the part of the sentence “wenn es uns auch beliebt, sie einzuklammern” as “even if we choose to parenthesize it,” but it seems that the “auch” here means “still” or “also,” rather than “even.”
89 Husserl, Ideas I, 56-57/61, translation altered.
… consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute
essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion. It therefore remains
as the “phenomenological residuum,” as a region of being which is of essential
necessity quite unique and which can indeed become the field of a science of a
novel kind: phenomenology.91

The reduction, as a mental act which takes all doubtable beings as its objects, cannot
touch the whole mental process to which this individual act belongs, so that the ego of
this mental process is also undoubtable for the reduction. This residuum is also the
foundation of all items within the bracket of the reduction. As Zahavi points out, the ego
is the “condition” of all intentional objects, for objects are constituted through its acts.92
For Husserl, actual things and other people who are real are also intentional objects,
which means that they are also constituted by the ego, for the ego is necessary for all its
intentional acts, which, as was mentioned above, constitute their objects.

For Husserl, noesis and noema are essentially correlated in the form of constituting
and being constituted. This structure of constitution also makes all noemata “objects for
the ego,” for the ego is the subjective pole of all its acts. Wang’s understanding of the
heart, intention and thing can be interpreted by Husserl’s phenomenology of
intentionality described above. This investigation also requires studies of Wang’s
understanding of the relations between intentions and things, between intentions and the
heart, and between things and the heart.

§9 The Relation Between Things and Intentions According to Wang

A thing is the target of an intention. In a dialogue recorded in the third book of *Chuanxi Lu*, Wang portrays the relation between intention and thing in a more complete form:

As the operation of the heart, it is called the intention…. And as that to which the intention is attached, it is called a thing…. The intention never hangs in a vacuum. It is always connected with some thing or affair.93

A thing is nothing but that which an intention is necessarily connected with. More importantly, no intention can be free from such a target. This mutual dependence between the intention and the thing is obviously similar to the relation between noema and noesis of Husserl, as was discussed previously. This structural parallel has been noticed by many scholars. As Jung Hwa Yol points out in 1965, the intention which plays a central role for Wang’s doctrine, as “the activity of *hsin,*” is “an intentional act in the widest sense… that is best described as ‘intentionality’ in the phenomenological sense.”94 Chen Lai also realizes that the function of the intention for Wang is similar to that of noesis in Husserl’s system, and the function of the thing is similar to that of the noema.95 Chen Lai’s study is specifically important: after the first publication of his book in the 1980s, many other scholars, like Chen Lisheng 陳立勝, Chen Shaoming 陳少明 and Zhang Zailin

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張再林, began to use the schema of intentionality to study Wang’s theory like Chen Lai himself.96

One problem regarding these phenomenological studies of Wang written in Chinese is that they all claim that in the statement “whatever is targeted by the intention is wu,” the character wu 物 is not referring to external things such as flying hawks and flowing rivers, but to human affairs (shi 事) such as respecting one’s elders.97 Put more simply, according to this approach, for Wang, the term wu only signifies social and ethical actions so that to say things are targets of intentions means nothing but that one should take care of one’s own attitudes as acts of dealing with such affairs. This reading has some solid textual proofs. Wang himself claims that the term wu is referring to affairs.98 This reading is also accepted by some of his close students such as Wang Ji and Xu Ai.99 Modern scholars following Chen Lai’s strategy thus correctly assert that gewu as correcting things does not change the state of the existence of things. However, though their studies correctly grasp both Wang and Husserl to some extent, these scholars are problematic in some other ways. That the term wu can signify affairs cannot lead to the conclusion that it only has this meaning. For example, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, one of the most important figures of the twentieth-century Neo-Confucian school, defines Wang’s


98 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap.137, 104/104; and “Inquiries,” 1071/ 279.

term “affair” as “an action of life” such as the action of using a table. However, this action also has its own object, namely, the table, so that Mou and his student Cai Renhou both wonder whether the table itself can be named as a thing within Wang’s framework.\(^{100}\) In *Chuanxi Lu*, there are two materials which can serve as clues for their questions:

1. The heart is naturally able to know. When *it perceives the parents*, it naturally knows that one should be filial. When *it perceives the elder brother*, it naturally knows that one should be respectful.\(^{101}\)

2. A master of man’s body is called the heart. When the heart diffuses, we have filial piety when *it meets the father*, loyalty when *it meets the lord*, and so on to infinity.\(^{102}\)

According to these two quotations, the heart perceives or meets *parents, brothers and lords*. They are human beings whose “mode of being” is more similar to that of external beings such as tables, rather than that of human actions. Using Mou’s words, to respect one’s elder is an “action of life” like the action of using the table, so that the elder plays a similar role for the action of respecting like the function of the table for the action of using. Since the elder can be the target of the heart through the intention-thing schema, the table is also a thing in the same sense. This leads to the conclusion that for Wang, besides affairs, external things in the common sense can also be treated as *wu*.

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\(^{101}\) Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 8, 15/15, translation altered, and my emphasis.

\(^{102}\) Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 38, 37/34, translation altered, and my emphasis.
§10 Other People as Targets of Intentions

The parent as a thing within Wang’s framework also reminds us that according to Husserl, other people are given to the ego intentionally. Note that this does not mean that other people are only objects, but that their subjectivities are also grasped by me through their bodies, which can be constituted intentionally. This similarity can be supported implicitly by other materials in Wang’s works. One example of affairs that Wang himself mentions is dealing with lawsuits. One task of a Chinese official in ancient times like those of Wang himself was to judge family affairs of the people.103 In a legal struggle between a father and a son that Wang himself treats, he points out that the son thinks himself to be filial and the father believes himself to have love, and the two finally accept Wang’s claim.104 Here the son’s intention is targeted at serving his father, while the intention of the official is targeted at the son’s action of serving. This implies that for a political intention, its object is another combination of intention and thing, for according to Wang, the serving is an affair. It then becomes possible that for Wang, an action which is taken as a thing can also be an intention. Now if the son’s intention is towards serving, then the serving itself may also be an intention, which must contain its own thing, namely, the parents. The parents, on the contrary, are not activities themselves. Here are, therefore, three levels of intentions-things: On the first level, the son’s judgment upon the son himself is a thing of Wang’s observation as an intention. On the second level, the

103 This task is based on the Confucian political philosophy, which is another topic beyond the scope of this dissertation.

104 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 294, 242/231.
intention is the son’s judgment, while the thing is his service for his father. And finally, the intention is serving or the will to serve, and the thing is the father. This account may also work for Mou’s example of using the table: the using as an action is targeted as a thing, which implies that it is also an intention, with the table as its thing.

§11 Illusions, Intentions Themselves, and Knowledge as Things

It seems now that according to Wang, both external things such as tables and other people such as one’s parents are all things, which, like intentional objects of Husserl, are all essentially connected with intentions. Like Husserl, Wang also believes that it is not necessary for an intention to be targeted on an actual thing. One example of an unreal object is a dream. Qian Dehong mentions several dreams of Wang in “Chronology.” In one of these dreams, the young Wang accepted bows and arrows from Wang Yue, Count of Weining 威寧伯王越.105 Since Qian can know this dream by no means other than being told by Wang himself, this record can be treated as revealing Wang’s own understanding of dreams as such, even if he might have fabricated it. According to Qian, this dream happened before Wang Yangming passed the civil service exam in 1499, the twelfth year of Hongzhi 弘治十二年. It is not too bold to assume that it happened in the same year, before the exam was held. Since Wang Yue died in 1498,106 Wang was dreaming about something that did not exist. Even if the dream did happen before Wang Yue’s death, it is


106 For information on Wang Yue’s life, see The History of Ming 明史, bk. 171.
still quite impossible that the Wang Yue dreamed by Wang was a presented real object, for Wang Yue spent most of his career in northern China, while the young Wang lived in the southeast of the empire. In another dream, Wang visited a temple, while his real body was lying in his own room. This means that the temple is also an object different from reality, like the book that Descartes sees in his dream.

Besides dreams, Wang also mentions once that one should mourn and cry at the funeral of one’s parent. This indicates that one is sadly missing one’s parent, who does not exist when being missed. It was briefly mentioned above that according to Husserl, a feeling is also an intentional act of the ego, which, as will be shown in greater detail later, is the same as Wang’s understanding of emotion and feeling. Hence, the object of the mourning as an emotional intention is the parent in memory who is not actually existing.

In the first part of this chapter, it was mentioned that according to Wang, liangzhi is not only the original substance of the heart, but is also the capability of clearly seeing this original substance. In “Inquiries,” Wang describes this clear seeing as such:

Now if one truly does what is known by liangzhi to be good through the thing touched by the intention, then nothing is insufficient. If one truly gets rid of what is known by liangzhi to be evil through the thing touched by the intention, then nothing is insufficient.

According to this paragraph, the function of liangzhi is not to do good deeds, but to know good and evil. As is pointed out by many scholars, this knowing is not an understanding of an abstract statement such as the statement “to respect your parents is good,” but the

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innate capacity to see the moral status of any particular intention which is targeted on its own thing. For example, Mou, who treats liangzhi as a “reflective knowing (nijue 逆覺),” claims that “the knowing of this reflective knowing is (the act of) looking at oneself by the clear power of realization (mingjue 明覺) of liangzhi. The foundation for one to know oneself is this clear power of realization itself.” Cai further argues that this reflective realization works in every daily situation. Iso Kern also points out that one function of liangzhi is to “evaluate whether particular intentions are ‘good’ or ‘selfish’ according to the application of the Principle about Order (Ordnungsprinzip) in these intentions.”

Thus, what is judged or observed by liangzhi must be a particular intention, belonging to the life of the same ego. To thoroughly illustrate this reflecting knowing of liangzhi requires a complete chapter, which will be the last one of this dissertation.

According to Wang, since liangzhi is original to everyone, it is unnecessary for one to be moral through theoretically studying Confucian principles. However, he does mention that studying, thinking, and inquiring about ethical ideas and principles are also activities of the heart. Through such activities, one tries to understand Confucian principles, which, as will be shown in Chapter 3, are universal ethical laws, according to Wang. The heart is nothing but the subjective pole of intentions, which indicates that its cognitive activities regarding such laws are also intentions. Intentions towards such universal principles can be treated as similar to eidetic acts within Husserl’s framework,

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109 Mou, From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan, 191.
111 Kern, Das Wichtigste im Leben, 131.
though for Husserl, an eidetic object is an essence, while for Wang, the object of studying is a principle.

§12 Wang’s Understanding of the Relation Between Heart and Intentions

According to the first part of this chapter, the relation between the heart and intentions is like that between a bow and arrows: multiple intentions are all projected by the heart, and the heart is the center from which intentions are radiated. This relation is obviously similar to the relation between the ego and intentional acts according to Husserl discussed above. Here is another important parallel between the theories of Wang and Husserl. The material does not exist in the standard version of Chuanxi Lu, which is included in the first version of Complete Book of Wang Yangming edited by Qian. It also does not appear in the translation of Wing-tsit Chan, though Chan himself collects it from another Ming-Dynasty edition. It is a dialogue between Wang and his student Huang Zhi 黃直, recorded and interpreted by Huang Zhi himself. Here Wang asserts that “The heart of human beings is restless. Even in sleep and dream this heart is also flowing.” According to Huang Zhi, here the “flowing (liudong 流動)” means that “in sleeping there are also senses, that is why (one) can dream and immediately wake up when called.”

Huang Zhi equates dreams with the senses, because the teacher and the student are

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113 For these supplemented materials, see Chan, Detailed Notes and Collected Comments, 389ff. See also Wang, Complete Works, bk. 32, 1286ff. In this dissertation I will refer to page numbers of Complete Works when citing them.


discussing the eleventh-century Confucian philosopher Cheng Yi’s (or Cheng Yinchuan 程顥/程伊川, 1033-1077) statement that even in sitting meditation the heart is also “in motion” for it has sensations.\footnote{116 Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi, \textit{Collected Works of the Cheng Brother} \textit{二程集}, ed. Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2004), 201.} Note that in the context of Cheng’s claim, the term “motion” means that the heart is shooting arrows of intentions. Thus, according to Huang’s interpretation, the statement of Wang means that even in sleep, there are still intentions from the heart.

Huang Zhi’s interpretation can be supported by Wang’s own statements in many cases that the heart without intention is like “dry wood and dead ashes.”\footnote{117 See Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 39; chap. 120; chap. 156; chap. 162; and chap. 203.} This state of being dry and dead is “what the Buddhists call ‘destroying the seed and nature’.”\footnote{118 Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 162, 137/143.} As Deng Aimin 鄧艾民 points out, this quotation from Buddhism is instructing people in the state of Nirvana, which is to escape the circle of life.\footnote{119 See Deng’s notes on \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 162, in \textit{Notes and Explanations}, 137-138.} Though it is not proper here to discuss Wang’s attitude towards Buddhism, it is obvious that for him, this state of being dead and dry is not a proper state of a heart. In other words, for Wang, to say that a heart is living is the same as to say that it is having intentions, which is the same as Husserl’s ego in its waking life.

§13 The Relation Between Heart and Things
The heart, like the ego of Husserl, is always serving in its life as the center and subject of intentions which must be related to things. Since things are targets and intentions are arrows of the heart, it is necessary that the living heart is always aiming at things in every moment of its temporal life. More importantly, for Wang, things are targets for the heart as the shooter. This relation between things and the heart is expressed by him as the famous slogan “there are no principles and things external to the heart.”120 He even maintains that the heart “contains every principle, and all things come from it.”121 Does this “come” language mean that the things are “created” causally by the heart? Or is he only saying that the heart creates the images of things in an Aristotelian sense? In order to consider such problems, the following paragraph which further articulates the statement needs a careful reading:

The Teacher was roaming in Nan-chen. A friend pointed to flowering trees on a cliff and said, “[You say] there is nothing under the heaven which is external to the heart. These flowering trees on the high mountain blossom and drop their blossoms of themselves. What have they to do with my heart?” The Teacher said, “Before you look at these flowers, they and your heart are in the state of silence. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your heart.”122

Chen Shaoming recognizes that this paragraph is difficult to interpret, and treats it as “an event in the history of ideas.”123 A popular way to approach this event is to argue that here Wang is not talking about the objective reality of the flowers. Chen Shaoming believes that the existence of a thing such as a merely physical flower cannot be

120 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 3, 8/7.
121 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 32, 34/33.
122 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 275, 231/222, translation altered.
123 Chen Shaoming, “No Things Are External to the Heart,” 69.
described with the intention-thing schema. According to Deng, the term “silence (ji 寂)” here does not mean the void or “nothing-ness (jimie 寂滅)” in which nothing exists.124 For Deng, Wang is only emphasizing that things are meaningless without being grasped by the heart, for the meaning or significance of a thing is subjectively added. Chen Lai also argues that even if the flower can go through its process of life in the mountain without being disturbed by human beings, the intention upon it is still necessary to make the flower “the flower for the heart.” This reading seems to be well supported by other material:

We know, then, in all that fills heaven and earth there is but this clear intelligence…. My clear intelligence is the master of heaven and earth and spiritual beings. *If heaven is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its height? If earth is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its depth? If spiritual beings are deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to distinguish their good and evil fortune or the calamities and blessings that they will bring? Separated from my clear intelligence, there will be no heaven, earth, spiritual beings, or myriad things, and separated from these, there will not be my clear intelligence…. Consider the dead people. Their spirits have drifted away and dispersed. Where are their heaven and earth and myriad things?*125

Traditionally, Chinese writers use the term “heaven and earth” to refer to the world, which is also equivalent to the term “that which is under the heaven (tianxia 天下).” The term “intelligence” used in the quotation is another way of describing the heart.126 Hence, for Wang, things in the world can “be” only via their relation to the heart. Chen Lai even uses the Husserlian notion life-world to illuminate this doctrine of Wang. According to

124 See Deng, *Notes and Comments*, 231.
125 Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 337, 278/257-258, translation altered, and my emphasis.
Chen Lai, the horizon in which the heaven, the earth and so forth are presented is the life world which “includes the personal, social, sensible and actual experiences. It is the world experienceable for everyone, and is a world with ‘subjectivity’.”127 Chen Shaoming believes that the function of the heart for this world is not a “simple mirror,” but a camera used by an artist. This means that a thing grasped by this heart is not “displayed in a window” as it is, but is always with social, aesthetical, or ethical meanings added by the heart. 128 Chen Shaoming correctly points out that mere physical things are not the focus of Wang, who as a Confucian, is interested more in ethics. However, Chen’s understanding of the way through which things are displayed by the heart may be too radical. That the heart can perceive a flower as a beautiful thing does not mean that the flower as a mere flower cannot be grasped by the heart in the same way. Further, both studies of Chen Lai and Chen Shaoming, which attempt to deal with the relation between heart and thing phenomenologically, do not realize that the constitution of a mere thing is structurally fundamental for the constitution of the thing as beautiful. They adopt their strategy because they believe that it can prevent Wang from being read as a subjective idealist.

However, this strategy that Chen Lai and Chen Shaoming use is not necessary. The adumbration theory mentioned briefly in Section 6 of this chapter can also be used to illuminate the flower example of Wang. By saying that “when you are not looking at the flower, the flower and your heart are both silent,” Wang is not saying that the flower does not exist when not being perceived, but that when it is alone in the mountain, it is

127 Chen Lai, The Spiritual Realms, 68.
128 See Chen Shaoming, “No Things Are External to the Heart,” 74-76.
spatially “hidden” in the outer horizon of the heart. Even when I am not in the mountain and am reading in my room in a city, the flower still exists passively as a co-existence in the world. However, it is through the intention of my heart that I grasp a flower in my sight as a thing that will continue to be after it “leaves” the foreground of my consciousness. Hence, even though an intention within Wang’s framework can also take an actual thing as its object, this phenomenological reading of Wang’s theory will not fall into an idealism, as scholars like Chen Shaoming have suggested.

§14 Conclusion

This chapter serves as an introductive description of the system of Wang, which is based on his understanding of the heart, intention, thing, and knowing. His radical position on moral effort can be illustrated only based on a clear understanding of his whole system. Husserl’s phenomenology can be used as a proper method for this task, for Husserl and Wang share some similar understandings of the structure in which the heart as the subject, intentions as acts, and things as objects in the world are included. For both, objects including real things, illusions, other people, and even intentional consciousness are essentially connected by intentions or acts, which are arrows or rays from an identical subject. Since the heart or ego as the subject in its life cannot be without intentions, it is not a closed lonely jar, but a “being in the world.” Objects appearing in this world are also not “existing for themselves,” but are objects for the subject, for they are all constituted by acts of the subject. In this structure, therefore, the subject of consciousness holds the highest priority, for it is the residuum of the phenomenological reduction. Though Wang himself does not explicitly have this philosophical method, his claim that
there are no things external to the heart can be better illuminated with this method of Husserl.
§1 Introduction: Wang’s Theory of Gewu and an Important Critique Against It

In the last chapter, I argued that Wang’s relation between heart, intentions, and things is parallel with Husserl’s relation between ego, noeses, and noemata. Their theories of intentionality will not lead to a subjective idealism, though things and noemata are both constituted by their correlated intentions and noeses. The constituting act has a hierarchical structure, within which higher noetic layers are built on the layer of mere presentation. Husserl’s theory of the hierarchical structure of constitution sheds a light on Wang’s theory of gewu 格物, which is the topic of this chapter. It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that Wang’s theory radically challenges Zhu Xi’s reading of terms from The Great Learning. According to Zhu Xi, ge 格 in gewu means to investigate, so that gewu is a process of investigating things in the universe, through reading Confucian classics. For Wang, the character ge means to rectify, so that gewu is to rectify an incorrect thing. This process of rectifying is essentially correlated with chengyi, which literally means to make one’s intention sincere. Wang’s general understanding can be seen clearly in the following paragraph:

Former scholars interpreted gewu as investigating all the things in the world…Even if we could succeed in investigating every blade of grass and every tree, how can we return to ourselves and make the intention sincere? I interpret the word ge as rectifying and wu as affairs or events…. In the heart’s operation, it is impossible for it to be entirely free from evil. Therefore, we must make our efforts here (when the heart is evil). This means to make intentions sincere. For instance, when intending to love what is good, love what
is good truly and concretely. When intending to hate what is evil, hate what is evil truly and concretely.¹

Wang reads gewu as “rectifying things” because he wants to “return” gewu to the heart itself. The way of returning is to identify gewu with chengyi, through which the heart deals with its own intentions. As Chen Lai points out, this means that Wang treats the relation between gewu and chengyi as a relation of intentionality, for here the intention (yi) in chengyi is an intentional act, which constitutes the thing (wu) in gewu.² For Confucians, a sincere intention should be an ethically proper intention. Since noesis and noema are essentially correlated, an incorrect thing is nothing but an intentional object correlated with an incorrect act. This implies that an incorrect thing can be rectified by rectifying its correlated intention.

Wang’s understanding of gewu and chengyi is based on his intentional theory of intentions and things. This understanding is attacked by his contemporary Luo Qinshun (or Luo Zhengan 羅欽順/羅整庵, 1465-1547). Luo’s rejection of Wang’s intentional theory, as can be seen from the following letter:

However, (in) the Analects, (Confucius) admires the flowing of the river.³ In The Doctrine of the Mean, (there are) doctrines on flying hawks and jumping fish.⁴ Both are crucial (teachings) on being human, given by sages and the wise. If one cannot understand the profound significances of such doctrines, one should not be treated as knowing how to study. Now if we try to talk about the

¹ See Wang, Chuansi Lu, chap. 318, 263-264/247-248, translation altered, and my emphasis.
² See Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 163-164.
³ See Analects, 9:16.
⁴ The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong 中庸), 12. It is quoting The Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing 詩經), 16.
intentions of the flowing of rivers, the flying of hawks, and the jumping of fish, how can we rectify what is incorrect to what is correct?\(^5\)

Some brief explanations for examples used by Luo are needed here. According to Cheng Yi and his older brother Cheng Hao (or Cheng Mingdao 程顥/程明道, 1032-1085), that which is admired by Confucius and is flowing like the river is the substance of the Confucian way (\(\text{dao} \) 道).\(^6\) Zhu Xi, who treats himself as a follower of the Cheng brothers, also reads flying hawks and jumping fish as symbols of the substance of the way, so that the author of The Doctrine of the Mean is “illustrating the fact that the flowing and regeneration of lives are clear from both above and below, and are all applications of principles.”\(^7\) As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, for most Neo-Confucians including Zhu Xi and Wang, natural phenomena are generally moral, for the universe is following the highest ethical laws to give birth and nourish living beings. Hence, for both Luo and Wang, that the fish is swimming means that its life is nourished and protected by nature, which is an ethically favorable situation. Luo is arguing that if one accepted Wang’s doctrine, one would have to say that to \(\text{gewu} \) is to causally change an ethically unfavorable state into a favorable one, by simply making one’s intention towards this thing sincere. For example, it means that through \(\text{chengyi} \), one would be able to make a dead hawk fly again. Obviously, such idealistic claims are unreasonable.

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\(^7\) 以明化育流行, 上下昭著, 莫非此理之用也. Zhu, Explanations and Collected Notes, 22.
For Wang, the heart cannot magically change the world in a physical way, which has been demonstrated in the last chapter. However, if Luo misunderstands Wang’s reading of the relation between gewu and chengyi, what should be the proper interpretation of this theory? A clue is Wang’s claim that in order to make intentions sincere, one should “truly love what is good and truly hate what is evil.” Intentions that should be made sincere are loving and hating, which involves feelings or emotions. This implies that a correct thing, as a noema, is constituted by a “correct” act which is related to emotions. Chengyi which is correlated with gewu may also be an effort that deals with such noeses related to emotions. A possible interpretation of Wang’s theory of gewu, therefore, requires a closer study of the phenomenon of feeling, which is also a crucial topic of Husserl’s thoughts on ethical problems. In the following sections, I will study his phenomenology of emotions and feelings, and then apply this phenomenological theory as a method to illustrate the emotional intentions as the foundation for Wang’s doctrine of gewu.

§2 Emotional Acts as Acts on a Higher Noetic Layer

The problem of gewu involves emotions and feelings. As an ethical problem, it is also connected with concepts of good and bad, which are ethical values. As has been realized by many scholars, for Husserl, emotions and values are essentially correlated.8 As Husserl asserts in his lecture on ethics given in 1914:

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It is something completely new, that emotional consciousness... has its emotional universality, and that this act of the universal valuing consciousness... has the character of the givenness, and eventually, the evident givenness of a universal value or non-value.9

Emotions and values are connected together by the so-called emotional consciousness, which is a consciousness of intentionality. What is emotional is a valuing act which likes or dislikes its object, and the object can be ethically valued as good or bad by such an emotional act. What is good is a noema which is correlated with an act of liking, and what is bad is correlated with a noesis of disliking. Note that though in the quotation above, Husserl says that universal values or non-values (or more exactly, counter-values) are “given” in an act, he is not saying that essential values or their counterparts are the intentional objects:

We objectify in so far as the presentation, so to speak, appears to us with colors of feelings. The pleasing appears in rosy light, and the displeasing appears in gloomy light, and so forth.10

What is objectified as a noema is not the “rosy light” itself, but is that which is “painted in this color.” That is to say, the value of being pleasant is a property of an object which is emotionally liked. The object with this emotional property is presented. As was shown in Chapter 1, an object with specific properties is constituted by a process of sense-bestowal with a hierarchical structure. For an act with multiple noetic layers, the

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presentation is the most fundamental one, because it is “the class of objectifying acts” which constitutes a “mere object.” Upon the presentation, higher layers can be “added.” Even a presentation is an act, underlying which there is a layer of materials named by Husserl as hyletic flow. These materials themselves are not acts but are only data used by acts, including both presentations and acts with higher layers. This hierarchical structure is the structure of emotional acts. In Logical Investigations, Husserl begins his study on the relation between feelings and presentation by describing Brentano’s thoughts on the same topic:

Brentano thinks we have here two intentions built on one another: the underlying, founding intention gives us the presented (object), (and) the founded (intention gives us) the felt object. The former is separable from the latter, the latter inseparable from the former.12

For Brentano, one can present an object without liking or disliking it, while the object which is liked or disliked must be presented. Husserl’s own understanding of the relation between these two forms of acts is similar to that of his teacher:

Whether we turn with pleasure to something, or whether its unpleasantness repels us, an object is presented. But we do not merely have a presentation, with an added feeling associatively tacked on to it, and not intrinsically related to it, but pleasure or distaste direct themselves to the presented object, and could not exist without such a direction.13

Husserl argues that the presentation is internal to the feelings. Within every emotional act, there must always be a noetic part that presents the object as a mere object. This

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12 Husserl, Logical Investigations, B:389/2:107, translation altered, and Husserl’s emphasis.
implies that the mere presentation is the foundation of the intentional feeling, and the
feeling contains its foundation within itself. Since all intentional feelings as acts are based
on the layer of presentation, the same “mere this” given by the same presentation can be
treated differently by different emotional acts. Without the mere “this,” the liked or
disliked “this” would be impossible. For example, in order to dislike a burning fire, I
must present the fire as a “mere object” with its properties like its dazzling color, its
changing shape, and its heat that is burning, etc. Note that this structural priority of the
presentation is not necessarily a temporal one. The presentation as the foundation for the
emotional act is simultaneously contained by the emotional act, though it is also possible
for me to present an object temporally before I begin to like or dislike it.

The intentional feeling is an act that is founded on the presentation. This
understanding is still held by Husserl in Ideas I. According to this work, in the
“emotional and volitional sphere” where there are valuing acts, there is a “non-self-
sufficient moment… stratified on a concrete process of simply objectivating or, on the
other hand, is removed again.”¹⁴ An emotional act is not self-sufficient because as a
higher layer, it is not independent of its foundation. As was mentioned above, for
Brentano, an emotional act is impossible without the presentation, while the presentation
is possible without the emotional liking or disliking. Using Husserl’s words in Ideas I,
this means that the presentation is sufficient for itself. The non-self-sufficient emotional
act must “contain” the self-sufficient presentation as its foundation. Since the
presentation is self-sufficient, the emotional layer can be added to or removed from it: I
can begin to like something, or stop liking it. In the first moment, an emotional layer is

¹⁴ Husserl, Ideas I, 197/231.
added, which is removed in the second one. The presentation, however, is always a part of my act. When I am liking the object, I am also presenting it to myself at the same time. This again supports my statement above that the presentation need not be temporally prior to the emotional act, even it can be an independent act without any higher layer upon it.

Correlated with this noesis with multiple layers, there is only one object: the emotional act is an individual single act with *multiple noetic layers* but is not the collection of multiple acts. An example to illuminate this fact is given by Husserl in section 121 of *Ideas I*:

> For example, the mother who looks lovingly upon her flock of children embraces each child singly and altogether in one act of love. The unity of the collective act of love is not a loving and, in addition, a collective objectivating, even if it is attached to the loving as its necessary foundation. Loving, instead, is itself collective: it is, similarly, as many-rayed as the objectivating and perhaps the plural judging “underlying” it. We should speak of a plural objectivating, or judging.¹⁵

The mother is looking at multiple children. When she is looking at each child individually, there is a collection of multiple presentations, for every child of hers is individually presented. On the contrary, when she is loving the whole flock of her children, her love is single, and so is the underlying objectivating layer. Her children as a whole are treated as *one object by a single love*, underlying which there is *a single presentation*. Husserl acknowledges that each individual love as one act is also collective,

for it is a collection of multiple noetic layers. That is to say, even if the mother is loving each child individually, each love itself still contains at least two noetic layers.

§3 Valued Objects as Objects Constituted by Emotional Acts

An emotional act includes both the fundamental layer of presentation and a higher, emotional layer, upon the foundation. This structure of emotional acts or intentional feelings is similar to the structure of positing acts which constitute their objects as real or illusionary, as was briefly analyzed in Chapter 1. This similarity is also realized and accepted by Husserl himself. As he says:

In the noema belonging to the higher level the valued as valued is possible, a core of sense surrounded by new posited characteristics. The “valued,” the “likable,” “happy,” etc., function in a way similar to the “possible,” “presumable,” or, again, like “null,” or “indeed.”

The object constituted by an act with a higher layer can become its counterpart, though at the same time it keeps being “the same thing.” For example, an act that treats its object as real is an act with both the presentation and a higher layer of positing. This act of believing can change into its opposite, namely, an act of disbelieving. A centaur can be believed to be true, and then turns out to be a mere illusion. Similarly, a loved painting of mine can be hated by me in the next moment, though I am continually presenting it as the same painting. More importantly, in an act that treats its object as either real or illusionary, the object itself is noematically changed, when the sense bestowed on the

16 Husserl, Ideas I, 240/277, Husserl’s emphasis.
higher noetic layer is changed. It is so because a “whole noesis” must be correlated with a “full noema,” which contains all properties yielded by multiple layers of the same act.\textsuperscript{17} I previously mistreated an illusion of a lady as a real person, and now I recognize my previous mistake. The illusion constituted by me now and the real person grasped previously are different “whole things,” while I am continuously grasping the same appearance as the same “mere object.”

Similarly, an object with value-property is also constituted as a full noema by an emotional act.\textsuperscript{18} It was mentioned above that for Husserl in his 1914 lecture, a pleasant situation is presented with a “rosy light,” and a displeasing scene is with a “gloomy light.”\textsuperscript{19} Here different “emotional colors” are noematic properties of different situations as whole-objects, which can also be presented as mere objects. According to \textit{Ideas I}, what is constituted as a full noema by an emotional act is a “valued” object. Since \textit{Ideas I} was published in 1913, it is reasonable to argue that for Husserl, \textit{emotional colors} mentioned in the 1914 lecture are treated as equivalent to \textit{values} mentioned in \textit{Ideas I}. The liking, as an act with a higher noetic layer, constitutes an object with a property on a higher noematic stratum, which is nothing but a \textit{positive value}. When the liking as an act is changed into a disliking, the positive object is also changed into an object with a negative value. A loved painting and a hated painting are different “whole objects,” though it is the same “mere painting” that is loved or hated. The “same painting” is constituted by the same act of presentation, and the different paintings are constituted by

\textsuperscript{17} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas I}, 268/310.


\textsuperscript{19} See Husserl, \textit{Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre}, 86.
different emotional acts. The function of the mere painting which is neither liked nor
disliked is similar to the function of the “mere lady” mentioned above. The liked painting
can be treated as structurally similar to the lady believed to be real, and the disliked
painting is similar to the illusion of the lady.

The following metaphor might be helpful for my account above. I now have a glass
ball which is painted blue. The “colorless” glass ball can be treated as the presented mere
thing, so that the blue color is a value-property that was added. I can remove the blue
paint, and paint the glass ball red, through which the red ball, as “something new,” is
made. The blue and red balls are different full objects, though they are the same glass
ball. Now that values are also “emotional colors” of an object, when a formerly loved
painting becomes hated, the painting as an object is also objectively changed, for an old
“color” is removed, and a new one is added. The only difference here is that to change
sensible colors, some physical alterations must be made, which are not necessary for
changes of emotional ones. Note that noematic properties are different from noetic
moments, though they are essentially correlated in such a way that a special property is
constituted or added by its correlated noetic layer. To love is on the noetic side while
being loved is a property belonging to the object.

Since the value is a property of an object, the value of being lovable is not the
object, when I am loving a beautiful painting. When I feel displeased when being injured,
I do not intentionally grasp the “unpleasant-ness” as my object. The pain itself is not that
which displeases me as an object. In Logical Investigations, Husserl mentions that the
term “intentional feelings” not only refers to the “feeling act (Gefühlsakt),” but also
means some “non-intentional characters” such as “the sensible pain of a burn.” As Zhang Wei points out, such characters of pain or pleasure function as “factors” for acts of feeling. In other words, non-intentional feelings belong to the hyletic flow, which can “make sense” only when they are “used” by acts of sense-bestowal. Husserl says:

"Every sensory feeling, e.g. the pain of burning oneself or of being burnt, is no doubt after a fashion referred to an object: it is referred, on the one hand, to the ego and its burnt bodily member, and on the other hand, to the object which inflicts the burn."

The so-called “sensory feeling” of pain is the material of an act which constitutes a hurting object. My finger is burnt. The fire is burning. The object is the finger or the fire, which has a property of being hurt or hurting. Such properties are negative, and objects with such properties are constituted by acts of disliking. The disliking as the act utilizes the pain as its hyletic material on the noetic side to constitute the negative object (not value) on the noematic side. This indicates that if the same materials of pleasure or pain are used by a different act, then the object will also be constituted with a different value-property. For example, when I have to be on a diet to save my life, I should dislike fried chicken which tastes good. In this case, I use the hyletic pleasure to constitute an object with a negative value, though I used to use such data to build positive objects.

For Husserl, emotional acts of liking and disliking are different from sensuous feelings such as pain and pleasure, for the latter are hyletic materials, while the former are acts which use their materials. By bestowing an emotional sense on some materials,

the ego constitutes an object with a value-property. This sheds a light on Wang’s claim that to *gewu* is to like what should be good, and dislike what should be bad. There are, however, several remarks to be made. First, not all emotional acts have ethical meanings, for not all values are ethical values. The value of being beautiful is an aesthetic value, so that to love what is beautiful might be an aesthetic love. To study the phenomenological structure of aesthetic acts is a problem that is too complicated for the scope of this dissertation, for the focus of this treatise is to study the ethical thoughts of Wang. Hence, in this treatise, I will only study problems regarding emotional acts which constitute objects with ethical values. Another problem which is more important here is, whether Husserl also believes that there is something that *ought* to be good or bad?

§4 Moral Acts as Emotional Acts in Accordance with Ethical Principles

For Husserl, the most elemental act of ethical life is the emotional act which constitutes an object with a value-property. Such an emotional act can use hyletic materials like pleasure and pain. It is then possible to argue that whether an object is good or bad is based on hyletic pleasure or pain underlying its correlated emotional act. For example, Hobbes believes that what is good in an ethical sense is nothing but something that is physiologically pleasing.\(^\text{23}\) This understanding of the relation between hyletic feeling and the ethical act based on it, however, is rejected by Husserl himself. It is necessary to pay attention to Husserl’s position regarding standards for valuing acts, for the task of this chapter is to study Wang’s understanding of correct and incorrect

intentions. Later in this chapter, it will be demonstrated that Wang treats intentions which follow some highest principles as moral, and those which “disobey” such principles as immoral. Similarly, for Husserl, not every emotional act which constitutes an object with an ethical value is moral, for moral acts should not follow one’s bodily pleasure, but should follow some objective standards.

Husserl argues that the phenomenological ethics should not be founded on bodily, physical elements, for this will inevitably lead to a relativism or subjectivism, according to which “what is true for one person is false for the other, because one person can be blind, (while) the other is not blind.” This relativism is obviously similar to the position of Hobbes mentioned above, for one who is blind cannot be pleased by colors. As Peucker suggests, this means that according to such a relativism, whether something is good or bad is determined by accidental features of one’s body. For example, one may have a disease that makes him or her insensitive to all pains, so that a burning fire will not be grasped as something hurting by this person. This disease, as a biological feature of one’s body, is similar to the blindness which is accidentally determined. One would not dislike what is presented to other people as painful, for he or she can never have any hyletic pain. Thus, within this relativist framework, there are no universal and absolute understandings of ethical values, which should commonly true for all.

24 “Man wird ja auch nicht daraus die Relativität, nämlich verstanden als Subjektivität der Wahrheit ableiten wollen, daß was für eine Person wahr ist, für die andere falsch ist, weil nämlich die eine Person blind, die andere nicht blind sein kann.” Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 89, my translation.

25 See Peucker, “From Logic to the Person,” 312.

26 For a more detailed description of the psychologism and relativism argued against by Husserl, see Peucker, “From Logic to the Person,” 312-313.
Husserl believes that the phenomenological ethics should take a “standpoint of objectivism, which at the same time means idealism.”

27 The objectivistic ethics should also be idealistic, which means that objective standards of good and bad should be conceptual, rather than material. He insists that “[r]ather, the valuing act is essentially founded on the intellective act, as it constitutes the value appearance.”

28 For Husserl, an ethical act should follow rational ethical laws, as will be shown later in this chapter. By saying that a valuing act is based on the intellective act, Husserl is maintaining that, based on rational principles, we should only love something that can be rationally understood as lovable. In order to understand that something is objectively lovable, I have to prove that it should be loved. This process of proving, according to Husserl, should begin with some highest universal laws, from which other rational principles regarding ethics can be derived. He names such highest laws ethical axioms, whose function is similar to Kant’s ethical maxims:

Second, it is to be noticed, that every transmission of whatever pure logical statements to the value-predicates, and firstly to the general predicate (of) “value,” has axiological laws, namely, those which establish that the value can be treated as a predicate, as the presumption. Only axioms of the previously determined essence can make it possible to objectively define something “valuable” as a predicate.

27 “der Standpunkt des Objektivismus, was zugleich Idealismus besagt.” Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 89, my translation.

28 “Vielmehr ist der wertende Akt wesensmäßig gerade insofern, als er die Werterscheinung konstituiert, in dem intellektiven Akt fundiert.” Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 72, my translation and emphasis.

The rational, objective ethical standards are described by Husserl as axioms. Emotional acts which are ethical are founded on the highest ethical principles. The value-property of something (namely, its predicate) is “transferred” from a “purely logical statement,” whose “premise” is an axiom as a more general, and higher principle. Here the “purely logical statement” is not a proposition about pure logic, but is an ethical statement which has a purely logical form. In order to ethically love something, I have to rationally prove that it should be good. This process of proving should be based on rational, \textit{a priori} axioms.\footnote{See Ullrich Melle, “Einleitung des Herausgebers,” in Husserl, \textit{Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre}, xviii-xix.} We can borrow an ethical principle from Kant to serve as an example. In the next chapter, it will be demonstrated that \textit{contents} of ethical axioms within Husserl’s theory are also similar to contents of Kant’s objective principles in the form of categorical imperatives.\footnote{See Immanuel Kant, \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27.} But here the Kantian axiom is only used to illuminate the \textit{formal} function of Husserl’s axioms. One famous Kantian categorical imperative is that one should treat other rational subjects only as ends, but never as means.\footnote{See Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 40.} Based on this, we can say that what is beneficial for this end is good. In a given situation, to save the life of a person is beneficial for this person as a rational subject. Therefore, the action of saving can be proved to be good, based on the axioms. In this argument, the conclusion is about a particular object – the action of saving – which should have a special value-property. As a process of deduction, this argument is based on the Kantian maxim, which is the “beginning” of the process of proving. For Husserl, only emotional acts which follow such rational statements can be treated as ethically proper, namely, as \textit{moral}. On
the other hand, acts which do not follow rational principles, but follow bodily pleasure are immoral and hedonistic, as will be described with in detail in Chapter 3. Husserl believes that based on ethical axioms as the highest ethical laws, one can understand not only which objects should be good, but also which acts are moral. This axiological theory of moral acts will be used to illuminate Wang’s understanding of proper intentions, which should follow the highest Confucian principles.

For Husserl, axioms also enable one to understand the relation between different essential values.33 For example, the value of being an end is higher than the value of being a means to this end, for a means is good only when it is useful for a good end.34 He also suggests that positive values are better than negative ones, and that foundational values are better than founded ones, etc.35 The relation between the value of the end and that of the means implies a stronger relation between Husserl and Kant, for Kant also believes that rational subjects as ends are more important than their means. Hence, the contents of Husserl’s ethical axioms seem to be also similar to Kant’s categorical imperatives, which will be a topic of the next chapter. Based on such hierarchical relations between values, one can understand what the “best choice” is in a given situation: the object with higher value should be loved more than that with lower value, so that to choose that which has higher value should be a “better choice.” As will be shown in the next chapter, for Confucians, the highest ethical principles also require one

33 See Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 91-101. Also see Peucker, “From Logic to the Person,” 314
to treat people as more important than some beasts, for human beings, as subjects with the highest ethical values, should have higher values, according to the Confucian ethical laws. This theory regarding different values of different people can, obviously, be interpreted with Husserl’s theory regarding hierarchical relations between different essential values.

Note that for Husserl, what is proved to be good should also be loved: the logical process of proving itself is only the means which helps one to love properly. However, for Kant, even moral love should be excluded from the theory of ethics, for emotions are only *a posteriori*, but never *a priori*.³⁶ This means that unlike Kant, Husserl believes that emotions can be rational, for what is emotional is nothing but an act of liking or disliking, which can be “rationally motivated.”

One who has the non-existential enjoyment (a beauty-value) of A must be *rationally pleased* in the certain situation that this is beautiful, and he must feel sorry, in the certain situation that it is not. Pleasure and sorrow here are *rationally motivated acts*. In such situations of being pleased or feeling sorry, it seems to demand the rational consequence.³⁷

Though Husserl uses the value of being beautiful as the example in the quotation above, his analysis also works for ethical acts. What is good is rationally proved, and one who realizes that a particular situation is good should be *pleased* by this situation, which means that one should love this situation. One who rationally finds out that the situation is bad should be displeased by the situation. Both the act of liking and that of disliking


³⁷ “Wer an einem A nicht-existenziales Gefallen (ein Schön-Wertern) hat, der muß sich vernünftigerweise freuen im Fall der Gewißheit, daß dieses ‘Schöne’ ist; und er muß trauern im Fall der Gewißheit, daß es nicht ist. Freude und Trauer sind hier vernünftig motivierte Akte. In solchen Fällen sich zu freuen bzw. zu trauern, das fordert gleichsam die vernünftige Konsequenz.” Husserl, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre*, 73, my translation and emphasis.
are rationally motivated, for they both follow what is rationally proved. By arguing that it is rational to love what is beautiful, Husserl seems to imply that the beauty itself is essentially a positive value. He maintains, “Only axioms of the previously determined essence can make it possible to objectively define something ‘valuable’ as a predicate.”

Based on axioms, one can understand which essences are universally good, so that every particular example of this essence should also be good. The Kantian ethics can be used as an example again: According to Kant, all rational subjects should be respected as “citizens of the kingdom of freedom.” Hence, a Kantian may argue that anything which protects the rational freedom of a subject is good. This means that the essential idea of “being able to protect the freedom” is a universal concept of a positive value, which can be used to determine particular value-properties of particular objects:

It is said, that if an M is something material, then it cannot only be the content of a valuing behavior, a behavior of positive, negative, or indifferent values, but also that which matches the kept-for-value of an objective value-being, one, in a strict sense, of objectively positive or negative value-being, or of an objective valueless-being.

M as material is the content of a valuing behavior, which seems to imply that M is a hyletic datum for an act, on which senses can be bestowed. By saying that materials must match objective values, Husserl is arguing that one can create hyletic data in accordance with some concepts of values. On the contrary, he seems to think that a valuing object

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[39] See Kant, Groundwork, 63-64.

[40] “Es ist gesagt, daß wenn ein M eine beliebige Materie ist, sie nicht bloß überhaupt Inhalt eines wertenden Verhaltens sein kann, eines Verhaltens positiven oder negativen oder gleichgültigen Wertens, sondern daß dem Für-Wert-gehalten-Werden ein objektives Wertsein entspricht, ein im engeren Sinn objektives positives oder negatives Wertsein oder ein objektives Wertlossein.” Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 88, my translation and emphasis.
can only bestow the sense of a universal value to data that match this value. For example, a Kantian may agree that to torture other people is universally immoral, so that the action of torturing should be universally valued as negative. I can constitute a particular action of torturing as an intentional object by bestowing the essential sense of a negative value to some data in my hyletic flow. Only some kinds of data can be used to constitute an action of torturing as its noema, so that only these data match the negative value of being brutal. Since it is based on the axiom that the Kantian proves all torturing to be negative, ethical axioms are also the final reasons for one to treat some data as matching an essential value. Though axioms themselves are pure, they still need to be applied to situations which are particular. Since one cannot magically determine which data will be “available” in hyletic flow, one cannot constitute a valued object only with axioms and essences of values. Hence, Husserl argues that “what is good cannot be formally determined.”\(^{41}\) That is to say, besides axioms and essences, the act which constitutes a good object also needs particular materials.

The last remark of this section: Husserl claims that all emotional acts ought to be in accordance with the universal, objective axioms. This implies that both the liking that constitutes a positive object and the disliking correlated with a negative object can be rational and moral. In other words, an object which has a negative value-property may be properly disliked, from the perspective of ethical axioms. In the next chapter, it will be shown that according to Husserl, both liking and disliking can be improper if they only follow the sensuous materials of pleasure and pain as their standards. He names such acts

as hedonistic acts. Similarly, it will be shown later in this chapter that for Wang, an intention which hates a disaster can also be proper according to the Confucian principles, so that a correct thing need not be an object with a positive value-property.

§5 The Will as a Special Emotional Act

Before we proceed to apply Husserl’s theory of emotional, valuing acts to Wang’s doctrine of gewu, it is also necessary to analyze Husserl’s theory of the will as a special form of emotional act:

> Will without desires should be unthinkable. I cannot will what is not wishable (erwünscht) by me. If it is in itself unpleasant, then it must be wishable for others (that are) willed… It would be irrational to will something which should not be wish-valuable (wünschenswert) in itself or willed for the sake of others.42

As Melle points out, “that something is wished for need not mean that it is presently wished. It can also mean that it is desirable.”43 That is to say, one cannot will something that is not desirable, for what is wishable should also be desirable. Hence, the will is always towards something that should have a positive value. Both wish and will are emotional acts towards objects which are not given in the now-sphere, but are only in the future. However, Husserl also insists that one can wish an enjoyable event which can

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42 “Wollen ohne Begehren sei undenkbar, nichts kann ich wollen, was mir unerwünscht ist; ist es in sich selbst unliebsam, so muß es erwünscht sein um anderes willen… Es wäre unvernünftig, etwas zu wollen, was nicht, sei es in sich selbst oder um eines anderen willen, wünschenswert wäre.” Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 105, my translation.

never happen, while he or she can only will something that “should be” in the future.\textsuperscript{44} He says, “The will, one then says, cannot go to ideals, but only to realities; and not to the past, but to the future.”\textsuperscript{45} In other words, as long as something in the future is desirable, it can be wished, even if it cannot really happen. On the contrary, the object of a will must always be a good reality in the future. Here the reality is not a future event that will certainly happen according to some kind of prediction. The object of the will is something to be “realized,” namely, to be “made real” in the future.\textsuperscript{46} Here what makes the willed object real is nothing but the effort of the ego itself who is willing. Using the example of Husserl himself, to say that to visit Paris is willed by me does not mean that “since it is certain that I will be in Paris tomorrow, therefore I will tour there,” but that “because I want to be in Paris, so a tour there should be real in the future.”\textsuperscript{47} He will attempt to make this tour happen by himself, if he wills this tour. As Melle points out, for Husserl, “willing is itself a constant relation of fulfillment” which is “directed to the further ones until the end of the action.”\textsuperscript{48} What can be fulfilled is an act that is emptily towards something in the future, while what fulfills an empty act is an act whose object is attentively grasped in the now-sphere. Hence, a will, as an emotional act that constitutes a future object with a positive value, also contains a tendency to achieve that future with

\textsuperscript{44} See Husserl, \textit{Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre}, 105.


\textsuperscript{48} Melle, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of Willing,” 181.
the effort of the ego itself. When what is loved is grasped in the now-sphere, the previous empty will is fulfilled.

Husserl’s analysis of the will as an emotional act towards something in the future can also be used to illuminate the following question. It was mentioned above that the structure of the emotional act is similar to the structure of the act which believes or disbelieves something to be real, for both are on a higher noetic layer. The problem is, whether it is necessary for the loved object to be actually existing? Hart suggests that the value of “good” will be changed if the existence of the valued object is modified. 49 However, the tour to Paris, as something which will exist but is not existing now, can also be emotionally intended. This implies that the emotional act is not founded on the belief. Hence, it is also logically possible to emotionally grasp something that only existed in the past or even something that can never exist in this world: for example, one may love a family member who passed away long ago. Husserl himself asserts that he can be “vexed by the popular song haunting me in phantasy,” which means that he dislikes the song in the imagination, and gives it a negative value. 50 Something that does not exist now can also be liked or disliked in an ethical sense. This can help us to clarify an interesting statement made by Wang regarding gewu. As will be discussed later in this chapter, for Wang, one’s attitude towards someone who has passed away can also be rectified in the process of gewu, which indicates that an object which no longer exists can also be liked or disliked.

50 Husserl, Ideas II, 233/234.
The will loves something positive in the future that should be established, and to establish an external being, it is necessary that I should use my body to do so. Even the cooperation with others needs actions of my own body. What is willed by me can be either internal or external to my consciousness. In order to make what is external to my consciousness real, it is necessary for me to have a body. If I have the will that I should have some pure meditations in the future, I can do it as a pure ego, whose body has been “put into the bracket” by the phenomenological reduction. However, if I have the will to read Ideas I, my consciousness itself cannot causally create the book as a physical existence in front of me. Even when the book is actually in front of me, I cannot open it directly with the force of my will. I have to move my hand, grab the book, open it, and fix my eyes on it. A physical and spatio-temporal influence must be put on the external thing if I want to fulfill a will towards a physical event in the external world. In this process, my body is a necessary tool for my will. The phenomenological importance of the body is realized by Husserl in his Ideas II. He treats the body as “the medium of all perception” and “location” of sensations. 51 For him, the term “perception” refers to every kind of external noesis such as seeing or hearing, which “presupposes sensation-contents.”52 That is to say, the body, as the location of sensations, is the medium for all acts which use hyletic materials as the “sensation-contents.” The function of the body is, therefore, the “collection” of senses which are the necessary conditions for the ego to have hyletic data. As Husserl says, “a human being’s total consciousness is in a certain

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52 Husserl, Ideas II, 56/61.
sense, by means of its hyletic substrate, bound to the Body.”  

More importantly, he suggests that valuing acts are also acts that need hyletic materials and the body:

Now, besides this, the Body is involved in all other “conscious functions,” and that has its various sources. Not only the sensations which exercise a constitutive function as regards the constitution of sense-things, appearing spatial Objects … but that is also true of sensations belonging to totally different groups, e.g., the “sensuous” feelings, the sensations of pleasure and pain, the sense of well-being that permeates and fills the whole Body … Thus, here belong groups of sensations which, for the acts of valuing, i.e., for intentional lived experiences in the sphere of feeling, or for the constitution of values as their intentional correlates, play a role, as matter …

Pleasure and pain also belong to the hyletic flow, for they are materials of valuing acts. Hence, the body is also a “tool” for emotional acts which use hyletic pleasure and pain. The body in this sense is not an external object, but a necessary condition for all external acts, including those which emotionally like or dislike external objects. It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that every external object is adumbrated, which means that the ego must approach such an object from a certain angle, a certain direction, and a certain distance. In this spatial system, the body plays a special role:

The Body then has, for its particular Ego, the unique distinction of bearing in itself the zero point of all these orientations. One of its spatial points… is always characterized by the mode of the ultimate central here: that is, a here which has no other here outside of itself, in relation to which it would be a “there.”

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54 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 152-153/160, Husserl’s emphasis.

55 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 159/166, Husserl’s emphasis.
The body is the center of the whole spatial system which is the spatial system “for the ego.” Thus, the body is described as the “here,” which is similar to the center of a coordinate system. Carman notices that when I am looking, I do not see my eyes, nor do I feel my hand when I touch. However, when I want to change my perspective towards things, I do not turn the world physically surrounding me, for my consciousness does not have a causal influence upon the world. Instead, I move my body immediately. Husserl himself states that the body is “involved as freely moved sense organ, as freely moved totality of sense organs.” It is the free moving of the body which enables the ego to change its perspectives towards the world, for “all that is thingly-real in the surrounding world of the Ego has its relation to the Body.” External objects are objects for me, so that their locations are defined by their spatial relations with me. Hence, the move of the body can also change the locations of points without causally influencing them: by turning around, I make what was on the left side of me to be on my right side. Similarly, I can change the distance between me and a building by approaching it, which is a motion of my body, but not of the object.

That this center, this “here” is moved by the ego freely does not mean that motions of the body can break physical laws, for the same body in the system of Husserl “is originally constituted in a double way.” Besides being an immediate tool of the ego, the

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57 Husserl, Ideas II, 56/61, my emphasis. See also Husserl, Ideas II, 159/167.

58 See Husserl, Ideas II, 56/61. See also Zahavi, Husserl’s Phenomenology, 98-100.

59 Husserl, Ideas II, 145/152.
body is also a physical being which is within the nexus of causes and effects. Physical laws rule all adumbrated phenomena and the relation between such phenomena. The relation between the ego and its body, however, is not in this physical sphere, for the ego itself, as will be shown in Chapter 5, is never adumbrated, and is not a part of the external world. Hence, physical laws cannot rule the relation between the ego and its body, for one side of this relation is not in the physical sphere at all. The body, as a side of this relation, is given to the body like a statue of Janus: one side of it is free, while the other face is unfree and physical.

Husserl treats the free body as “an organ of the will,” which means that the will uses the body as a tool. Note that the term “organ” is not used by Husserl here in a biological sense. Using the words of Carman, “Husserl’s account of ‘the body’ is an account of the lived or personal body [\textit{Leib}], not of ‘bodies’ [\textit{Körper}] understood as material objects.” A biological organ is at first a “material object” that is perceived by an act, while the “organ of the will” is only a necessary condition of the act of perception towards external objects. This medium is named a “personal body,” because it enables the ego to live in a “human world,” within which acts with ethical meanings are possible. Note that even immoral acts of human beings belong to this ethical world, for only emotional acts of human beings as subjects can be immoral. In this sense, the body belongs to the ego as its “lived extension,” while the external object is opposed to the

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61 Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 152/159.
In particular, it is the precondition for the fact that it, already taken as Body (namely, as the thing that has a stratum of localized sensations) is an organ of the will, the one and only Object which, for the will of my pure Ego, is moveable immediately and spontaneously and is a means for producing a mediate spontaneous movement in other things, in, e.g., things struck by my immediately spontaneously moved hand, grasped by it, lifted, etc.\textsuperscript{63}

When I want to read Ideas I, my hand is immediately moved by my will, while the book itself is moved by my will through my body as a medium. My will as an empty act, therefore, is fulfilled by both the motion of my body itself, and motions of other things, which are moved by my body.\textsuperscript{64} Note that since the relation between my body and the book is a relation between two physical beings, this relation cannot break physical laws. I cannot lift a one-thousand-pound stone, because my body, as a physical body, does not have the physical power to cause a motion in the stone. It is true that one may fail to move one’s body: one may be ill, may be exhausted, or may be disabled. However, what is ill, what uses up the energy, and what is seriously injured is not the relation between the ego and the body, but the body itself as a material object. Hence, that I cannot move my hand does not mean that I, as an ego, am unfree, but that my arm, as a mechanical being, has a “breakdown.”

The will likes something that should be established in the future, which can be fulfilled by freely moving one’s body. This special form of emotional act deserves

\textsuperscript{63} Husserl, Ideas II, 151-152/159, Husserl’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{64} See Husserl, Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre, 130-133.
attention, for Wang also emphasizes moral actions such as helping other people, which are treated by him as necessary tasks for moral effort. He argues that one who truly loves one’s parents will naturally want to serve them, and this will of serving can naturally lead to actions of serving.\textsuperscript{65} This means that for him, moral intentions must be followed by a moral action. This relation is based on his understanding of the function of the body, which will be treated in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

\section*{§6 Wang Yangming’s Theory of Emotional Intentions}

According to Husserl’s thoughts regarding ethical problems, the most primary element of ethics is the emotional act which constitutes an object with a value-property. Only acts which like or dislike their objects in accordance with ethical axioms as the highest ethical principles can be treated as moral. Husserl’s theory of emotional acts can be used to illustrate Wang’s understanding of gewu. This phenomenological interpretation of Wang can begin from closely reading a crucial and difficult chapter of Wang’s \textit{Chuanxi Lu}. In chapter 101 of this book, Wang and his students discuss how to like or dislike grass. Xue Kan (or Xue Shangqian 薛侃/薛尚謙, ?-1545), the recorder of this dialogue, wants to “pull weeds among the flowers.” Xue Kan treats grass as evil and flowers as good, and wonders why in nature “the good is difficult to be cultivated and the evil is difficult to be removed.” Wang points out that Xue Kan is misguided by himself from the very beginning:

\begin{quote}
The spirit of life of heaven and earth is the same in flowers and grass. Where are distinctions between good and evil (between heaven and earth)? When you
\end{quote}

\footnote{65 See Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 3, 8-9/8.}
Wang argues that the distinction between good and evil made by Xue Kan is improper, for it is unnatural. Note that this does not mean that no such distinctions are natural, but only that Xue Kan’s particular distinction is improper. Wang believes that sometimes it is natural and proper to treat weeds as harmful. Thus, there must be some standards, according to which one can properly distinguish what is good from what is bad. In the next section of this chapter, I will pay more attention to this problem. A more important claim made by Wang in the quotation above is that it is Xue Kan’s liking that makes the flowers good and his disliking that makes the grass evil. On the contrary, the physical properties of flowers and grass as natural phenomena cannot determine their values. He makes this statement because Xue Kan, by simply taking for granted that grass is evil, presumes that its ethically negative because of its objective property of being grass. If this presumption was accepted, then the standard of good and evil would be dependent on physical features of things, which is rejected by Wang. As he says in a letter written in 1513:

> If my heart is purely (coherent) with principles and is not mixed with any human fakes, then it is named good. There are no fixed locations (of good and bad) that can be found in things. When my heart lives with things properly, it is righteous. The righteousness is not something external that can be searched and possessed (externally).  

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67 吾心之處事物，純乎理而無人偽之雜，謂之善，非在事物有定所之可求也。處物為義，是吾心之得其宜者也。義非在外可襲而取也。Wang, “To Wang Dao II,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 4, 175, my translation.
The effort to “find an ultimate goodness in everything” is from the doctrine of Zhu Xi, according to which the standard of good and bad can only be found as knowledge about the external universe. Wang, on the contrary, refuses Zhu Xi’s position by maintaining that good and evil are constituted by human intentions. The givenness of grass as natural a thing is not constituted by the disliking. As was analyzed in the last chapter, a pile of grass as a thing is constituted by an intention of seeing, whose function is similar to the function of the presentation within Husserl’s theory. Xue Kan treats the same pile of grass as good when he wants to use this grass, and treats it as bad when it is troubling the beautiful flowers. This indicates that liking or disliking as intentional acts are different from the intention which presents the same “mere pile of grass.” The emotional intention as the noesis, therefore, will not change the physical properties of the “mere grass.” It is an emotional intention or act that constitutes a thing with a value of being good or bad. As has been mentioned, the flower itself is also constituted by an intention.68 Now that the pile of grass is also a thing like the pile of flowers, the mere perception of the grass is also an intention, based on which the liking or disliking can be built on a higher noetic level. That a flower is loved means that this flower with a loved value is constituted as a whole noema. The flower which is loved and the disliked flower are different “things” as different whole objects, though they are based on the same “mere thing.” Similarly, the same pile of grass is treated as different full things, when they are treated with different emotional attitudes.

68 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 275, 231-232/222.
§7 Wang’s Theory of Heavenly Principles Which Should Be Followed by Emotional Intentions

As was briefly mentioned in the previous section, Wang points out to Xue Kan that it is unnatural for Xue Kan to treat flowers as good and grass as evil in a particular scene, for such a distinction of good and bad is not given by heaven and earth. As Xue Kan realizes immediately, Wang’s statement may lead to a relativism like Buddhism, for “the Buddhists also deny the distinction between good and evil.”69 In other words, if physical properties of external things cannot be used as standards of good and bad, one may think that there are no objective standards at all, for liking and disliking all seem to be subjective acts. Note that the task of this treatise is to phenomenologically interpret Wang’s doctrines, but not to study whether his ethical theories are correct. Hence, it is not necessary to concern ourselves with whether Wang’s position is better or worse than Buddhism. It is helpful to bring Buddhism onto the table, for this simple comparison can enable us to clearly understand the formal foundation of Wang’s doctrine. Wang believes that though Xue Kan treats grass and flowers wrongly in the scene of their dialogue, it does not indicate that these things should be ethically neutral or indifferent in all situations:

Being attached to the non-distinction of good and evil, the Buddhists neglect everything. Therefore, they are incapable of governing the world. The sage, on the other hand, in his non-distinction of good and evil, merely “makes no

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artificial liking,” “makes no artificial disliking,” and is not perturbed in his vital force.\footnote{Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 101, 66/64.}

The Buddhist principle cannot be used to govern the world because governing requires the distinction between what is harmful and what is beneficial, while Buddhism refuses to make this distinction. On the contrary, Confucians, including Wang, all believe that the most important ethical task is to rule the world properly.\footnote{For example, according to \textit{The Great Learning}, to rule a kingdom properly and to bring peace to the world are the two highest achievements for one who is moral.} Hence, Wang insists that “[i]f weeds are harmful, according to principles they should be removed. Then remove them, that is all.”\footnote{Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 101, 67/65.} In order to remove some weeds, it is necessary that they are constituted as harmful, which is obviously an ethical \textit{value}. Wang argues a valued thing should not be “artificially” made but should be correlated with an intention which follows “the tranquility of principles.” That is to say, Confucian sages do distinguish what is good from what is bad, but they do it in a special way by following some principles. Such principles mentioned by Wang are heavenly principles, which play a crucial role in the Neo-Confucian tradition:

(Wang) said, “Not to artificially like or dislike is not to make no liking or disliking at all. A person behaving so would be devoid of consciousness. To say “not to artificially make” merely means that one’s liking and disliking (should) completely follow heavenly principles and that one does not go on to attach to that situation a bit of selfish thought. This amounts to having neither liking nor disliking.”\footnote{Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 101, 66/64, translation altered.}
The “artificial liking and disliking” (zuò hǎowù 作好惡) literally means to make or to produce emotional intentions of liking and disliking. Such an intention artificially made is based on subjective standards, while Wang believes that a moral act should like or dislike its object in accordance with heavenly principles as objective moral laws. It was mentioned in the Introduction that the final end of the Confucian moral effort is to achieve sagehood. Wang believes that a sage is someone whose feelings are always aligned with heavenly principles. That is to say, moral effort is a training through which people can learn how to emotionally act in accordance with such principles. As is well-established in literature, the Confucian heavenly principles function similar to Kant’s a priori moral laws. Heavenly principles are the highest ethical laws, according to which people can understand whether a particular thing should be good or bad. By following such principles, one can avoid artificially liking or disliking one’s objects, for in such cases, his or her emotional intentions are coherent with some objective, universal standards. The formal function of heavenly principles within Wang’s framework is, therefore, also similar to the function of Husserl’s ethical axioms: for both philosophers, the highest ethical principles as universal and objective principles should be used to guide emotional acts in particular situations. Wang, like Husserl, also believes that there are rational emotions whose standards are some rational laws, while Kant rejects the concept of rational feelings.

Heavenly principles as objective standards which can be understood by the heart enable the heart as the ego to correctly constitute an object with a specific value-property in a particular situation. Wang’s understanding of the relation between heavenly

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principles and emotional intentions can defend him from the critique from Luo, which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The problem of Luo’s argument is the same as that of Xue Kan’s original understanding of good and bad: Luo believes that what is correct is what is ethically favorable, namely, what should have a positive value according to the Confucian principles. According to Luo’s reading, Wang is arguing that one can stop a flood by changing one’s emotional attitudes towards the flood. Wang himself, however, suggests that weeds can also be correctly grasped as something with the negative value of being harmful. It was shown in a previous section of this chapter that according to Husserl, both liking and disliking can be proper or improper, according to ethical axioms. Wang also argues that “the righteousness is to live with things, this means my heart can achieve its propriety.”\(^{75}\) What can be righteous or not is not the thing, but the heart which “lives with (chu 處)” the thing. If the heart properly loves what should be loved and dislikes what should be disliked, it achieves the righteousness or the propriety. The heart which is righteous is acting properly, so that an intention of disliking can also be proper and correct, as long as it is coherent with the objective principles.

For Wang, a correct thing is correct not because it has a positive value, but because it is constituted by a proper intention which follows heavenly principles as the highest ethical laws. For him, the same emotional intention may be proper in one place but improper in another. Also, opposed emotional intentions towards some similar objects can both be ethically proper in different contexts. The intention of disliking some weeds when they are harmful to agriculture can be proper, while Xue Kan improperly dislikes the grass among his flowers. A flood of the Yellow River would be hated in ancient

\(^{75}\) 處物為義，是吾心之得其宜也. Wang, “To Wang Dao II,” in Complete Works, bk. 4. 175, my translation.
China, but that of the Nile would be loved in ancient Egypt. Both intentions towards floods are proper, within the Confucian framework. The critique against Wang’s doctrine of gewu as rectifying things from Luo, therefore, arises from the ambiguity of the term “correct,” which refers to a thing correctly constituted according to Wang, but can also refer to an object with a positive value in everyday usage of the Chinese language. For the sake of convenience, we can distinguish acts which value their objects from evaluations of acts themselves: a pile of weeds is valued as harmful by its intention, while Xue Kan’s dislike towards some non-harmful grass is evaluated by Wang as improper or immoral. Note that for Wang, to be harmful is also an essential value opposed to the value of being useful. The value of being useful is not only a pragmatic value, but is also an ethical one. The rice is treated as ethically good in most cases, for it is useful for the living of human beings, which, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, has a higher or even the highest value.

One further remark here: for Wang, social or human objects can also be constituted as good or bad by emotional intentions, for human actions, which he names affairs (shi 事), should also follow heavenly principles. One example is the way of dealing with gifts from other people. He claims:

Some (gifts) should be accepted now but declined on other days. Others should be declined now but accepted on other days. If you are biased toward what you should accept now and go right on to accept everything or if you are biased against what you decline now and go right to decline everything, then this is setting the heart for or against things… How can it be called righteousness?76

76 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 248, 213/211-212, translation altered, and my emphasis.
Wang claims in this quotation that a gift can be righteously accepted. It has been demonstrated above that what is righteous is a heart as the subject of a proper emotional act. That is to say, a gift that should be accepted is a noema correlated with an emotional act, so that this gift has a positive value of “being acceptable.” Note that for Wang, the social norm according to which one should accept or refuse a gift is also a form of heavenly principles. According to a common belief of the Neo-Confucians, social and political norms mentioned in the Confucian classics were composed based on heavenly principles by ancient sages. Hence, these norms are not limited by special historical, social, or ideological contexts. These norms should be used to rule societies in all places and in all historical periods, for they follow the “natural patterns” of heaven and earth, which are embodiments of heavenly principles as universally moral laws. To elaborate this relation between heavenly principles and social norms requires a closer study of contents of these principles and norms, which will be a focus of Chapter 3.

§8 The Function of Body Within the Framework of Wang

In the previous sections, it was mentioned that if weeds are treated as harmful, they should be removed. To dislike some harmful weeds is an emotional act of the consciousness, but to remove them requires actions of the body. Similarly, though the heart can constitute a gift with the value-property according to which it should be rejected, to actually reject it is also an action or even a series of actions of the body. This

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77 See Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 117, 76/74.

78 See *The Doctrine of the Mean*: 31-33; and Zhu Xi’s comments on these chapters in Zhu Xi, *Explanations and Collected Comments*, 38-41.
requires a closer study of Wang’s understanding of the body. It was mentioned in the first chapter that for him, it is the “original substance” of the heart which “gives life to the body.” This does not mean that the heart can pump blood for the body, for Wang explicitly argues that the heart “is not merely the lump of blood and flesh.” In his lecture on *The Great Learning*, he describes the relation between the heart and its body as such:

What is it that is called the body? It is the physical functioning of the heart. What is it that is called the heart? It is the clear and intelligent master of the body. What is meant by cultivating the body? It means to do good and get rid of evil. Can the body by itself do good and get rid of evil? The clear and intelligent master must desire to do good and get rid of evil before the body that functions physically can do so. Therefore, the one who wishes to cultivate one’s own body must first correct one’s heart.

The term *yunyong* 運用 translated by Chan as “function” literally means “to use.” Like Husserl, the body for Wang can function as the tool that can be freely used by the heart, who serves as the ego of all consciousness. The heart needs the body as its tool, for the function of the body is to give the heart sensuous materials:

These activities of seeing, listening, speaking and moving are all of your heart. The sight of your heart emanates *through the channel* of the eyes, the hearing of your heart *through the channel* of the ears, the speech of your heart *through the channel* of the mouth, and the movement of your heart *through the channel* of your four limbs.

81 Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 122, 82/80, translation altered, and my emphasis.
Sense organs are necessary for the heart to sense, because the heart cannot sense directly: it needs body organs to perform as the media between itself and its external objects. This reminds us of Husserl’s claim that the body is the “location” of sensations and the necessary condition for one to have hyletic data. Note that according to some more traditional Chinese philosophical texts, sensations are functions of sense organs but not of the heart. For example, Mencius claims:

The ears and the eyes, as officials (*ermu zhi guan* 耳目之官), cannot think, so that are obscured by things. Things touch the thing and lead the thing (astray).\(^8^2\) The heart as the official (*xin zhi guan* 心之官), on the other hand, can think. (The heart) can achieve (morality) if it thinks, and will lose (morality) if it does not think.\(^8^3\)

I translate the term *guan* 官 literally as “officials.” Sense organs such as eyes and ears are officials who have neither the task nor the capability of thinking, so that they may be “led astray” by physical influences of external things. The heart, on the other hand, can determine what is the proper choice in a particular situation, because of its capability of thinking. It is this capability of thinking that prevents the heart from being misguided by external objects. According to the Qing-Dynasty philologist Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763-1820), Mencius treats the heart as an official but not the king like some other ancient thinkers, for the heart within the framework of Mencius can only think. That is to say, Mencius believes that the heart cannot see, hear or touch, so that it cannot rule the sense organs which have different tasks.\(^8^4\) Wang, on the other hand, does not accept the statement that

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82 The second “thing” that can be led astray refers to the body.
different sensations belong to different organs. He argues that the heart is the only subject which controls all sensations, and it is this subject that rules the work of the sense organs:

The ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs are parts of the body. But how can they see, hear, speak, or act without the heart? On the other hand, without the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose and the four limbs, the heart cannot see, hear, speak, or act, if it wants to. Therefore, there is neither the body without the heart, nor the heart without the body.85

Wang points out that it is the heart, rather than the body, which sees, hears, and touches its objects. Note that phenomenologically speaking, the heart is the subject which intentionally constitutes external objects, for perceiving is an intention or a noesis, but not a mechanical motion of the body as a machine. Wang suggests that to make actions of the body moral is not an independent task of moral effort, but is the same with the effort of making acts of the heart moral.86 This implies that when acting morally, the heart is using its body as its tool immediately, which is a relation similar to the relation between the ego and its body according to Husserl.

Wang acknowledges that the body, as a physical thing, may “disobey” the heart, so that the body may be “led astray” by external things, and may even seek pleasure which will harm its health.87 However, he points out that if the heart keeps its original moral substance, then the body will not disobey wills of the heart. One who knows that an action should be done may not be able to do what is good only when the knowing of the

86 Wang, “Inquiries,” 1069-1070/277.
heart and the actions of the body “are separated by selfish desires.”

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to closely study the relation between selfish desires and the original substance, it is already obvious here that selfish desires are immoral. Unlike Husserl, for Wang, what makes the body the tool to disobey the heart as its user is not a physical “breakdown” of the body, but the “disease” of the heart. In the next two chapters, I will argue that the disease of the heart makes it an “unfree slave” of selfish desires, which “separate” the heart from heavenly principles. That is to say, for Wang, if the heart is not a moral subject, then it will lose its control over the body.

An important example regarding the relation between the heart and the body is that for Wang, one can feel a “real joy” (le 樂) if one cries when one’s family member dies. According to Husserl, an emotional act can be directed towards something in the future, which does not exist now. The crying not only reveals the fact that the funeral is “emotionally colored” as a sad scene, but also signifies one’s love towards the parent who is not actually existing at this moment. Wang argues that after one’s parent has passed away, “the principle of filial love” does not disappear. This indicates that one must still follow the principle to love the parent who no longer exists. Like Husserl, Wang believes that the ethical love need not be based on the intention towards an actual thing. Since the love is independent of the act which constitutes its object to be real, the change of a value-property of a whole object is not necessarily the change of the property

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88 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 5, 10/10.
90 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 135, 100/99.
of being real. This means that gewu is not to causally stop the existence of an ethically negative thing such as a flood, as Luo implies in his critique against Wang.

The one who misses his or her family member wants to cry, which can be phenomenologically understood as a will to cry. Since the crying is also a physical motion of the body, this motion can be treated as an object that does not exist now but should exist in the future. The joy that one experiences when crying can be read as the fulfillment of the will to cry as an act, towards the action of crying as the object willed, which “immediately follows” the will to cry. Similarly, the act which treats the weeds as harmful motivates the will to remove them, and that which constitutes the gift with a value of being acceptable motivates the will of accepting it. For Wang, all such wills can be fulfilled by freely using the body, as long as the body and the heart are not “separated by selfish desires.”

§9 Conclusion

The ethical theories of Husserl and Wang are both based on emotional intentionality. Through an act of feeling based on the presentation, an object with a value-property can be constituted. Though such acts involve hyletic feelings such as pleasure and pain, for both thinkers, hyletic feelings only function as data which are used by emotional acts with ethical meanings. According to Wang, an object with a positive value is constituted by love and a thing with a negative value is correlated with an intention of disliking.

Husserl suggests that an ethical act which likes or dislikes its object should follow the universal ethical axioms, whose formal function is similar to Kant’s a priori
principles in the form of categorical imperatives. Ethical axioms, as objective standards for proper or moral acts, enable people to understand the essences of values. Both acts of liking and disliking ought to bestow proper essences of values in particular circumstances according to the axioms. The phenomenological structure of such proper acts is also that of the correct intentions of Wang, who believes that a correct thing is a thing constituted by a proper emotional attitude of liking or disliking. A proper love is not “artificially made,” which means that it should follow heavenly principles as the highest ethical laws. Hence, for Wang, gewu is not to magically change an object with a negative value into a positive thing, for to dislike a disaster may also be proper, according to heavenly principles. For him, gewu is to change one’s improper emotional attitude into a proper one, so that a thing with an improper value can be changed into a “whole-noema” with a proper value. This phenomenological correlation between a valued object and an emotional intention is also the underlying structure of the identification between gewu as rectifying things and chengyi as making intentions sincere: intentions made sincere through chengyi are nothing but emotional acts.
Chapter 3: Husserl and Wang on the Contents of Ethical Principles

§1 Introduction

According to the last chapter, both Wang and Husserl believe that only emotional acts which follow the highest ethical laws can be considered as moral. Husserl names the highest principles as axioms, and Wang uses the traditional Confucian term “heavenly principles” to refer to such laws. The task of this chapter is to illuminate the contents of ethical principles according to both Husserl and Wang. It is true that Husserl’s description is merely formal in the 1914 lecture, which makes Peucker suggest that according to his formal axiology, it is impossible to determine why some values are essentially positive, and why some are negative.1 Peucker’s assertion is further supported by the fact that in the 1914 lecture, Husserl only repeatedly mentions that beauty is good, and excellence (Vorzüglichkeit) is a priori good, but never explains why. In the first several sections of this chapter, however, it will be demonstrated that the ethics of Kant can be borrowed as a clue to shed light on Husserl’s understanding of the contents of ethical axioms, though there are some crucial differences between the ethical theories of these two philosophers. For both Husserl and Kant, rational subjects should be treated as ends, rather than means, which is also an idea shared by Wang. The second half of this chapter will study the relation between love and heavenly principles according to Wang, with the help of Husserl’s theory of the ethical ends and ethical means.

1 See Peucker, “From Logic to Person,” 317.
§2 Other Subjects as Intentional Objects Constituted by the Ego

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, according to Husserl, to be an ethical end is a higher value than the value of being a means, according to axioms.² He argues that essential values are the standards according to which the “degree of value” of a particular alternative in a circumstance can be “calculated.”³ As Drummond says, “we recognize the thing… as valuable precisely insofar as it possesses these properties.”⁴ In a given situation which offers the materials of the constitution, the axioms on the relation of values command one to treat that which has the highest value in this situation as the best choice.⁵ Such a “command” is an “ought,” which is also named by Husserl a categorical imperative.⁶ Husserl mentions that according to the categorical imperatives, what is grasped as good by one subject should be grasped to be good by all “rational subjects” if the first act of grasping is rationally proper. This, according to Husserl, is “the only valuable content of the Kantian claim of a practical law and of a categorical imperative.”⁷ However, though in this quotation Husserl claims that he only accepts a formal description of the categorical imperatives by Kant, it will be shown in this section that some parts of his understanding regarding the contents of such principles are also similar to Kant’s ethics.

⁴ Drummond, “Aristotelianism and Phenomenology,” 19.
⁵ See also Drummond, “Aristotelianism and Phenomenology,” 25-26.
As was mentioned in the last chapter, according to one of the Kantian categorical imperatives, one should treat all rational subjects only as ends.\textsuperscript{8} Using Husserl’s terms, this means that for Kant, a practical subject should intentionally grasp both itself and other subjects with the valuing of being ethical ends. An ego constitutes itself as a noema with a reflective act, which will be studied more carefully in Chapter 5. What is more important in this chapter is that, for Husserl, other people can also be intentionally grasped by an ego as other egos. To understand this, it is necessary to understand how others are constituted as other subjects, according to Husserl. Since this topic has been thoroughly discussed by many existing studies, it is only necessary to briefly summarize Husserl’s description on the process within which other subjects are constituted.\textsuperscript{9}

For Husserl, others as other subjects are constituted through a process of apperception or empathy: through other bodies which are similar to my own body, I realize that these bodies are not mere physical things, but are “animate organisms” belonging to other egos.\textsuperscript{10} This process of empathy is based on my understanding of my own body: my body not only can see, touch and more generally, sense, but can also be sensed, as a part of the “causal nexus,” in which it can influence or be influenced by other external things.\textsuperscript{11} I can touch my arm and feel that this arm is touched.\textsuperscript{12} The touched arm in which the feeling of being touched is also grasped as a physical object by me. Therefore, the sensing body, can also be a sensed noema, with a noematic property


\textsuperscript{9} For detailed discussions on how others can be generally constituted as other subjects, see Zahavi, \textit{Husserl’s Phenomenology}, 98-125; and David Carr, \textit{Phenomenology and the Problem of History: A Study of Husserl’s Transcendental Philosophy} (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 84-109.


\textsuperscript{11} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 146/153-154, and 159-161/167-169.

\textsuperscript{12} See Carman, “The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty,” 211.
of “having sensations.” As Carman suggests, for me, my body is not a “material body (Körper),” but the body (Leib) which he also names the “animate organism.”13 For me, the animate organism is different from material bodies not only because the organ is the location of my senses, but also because it is “the only Object ‘in’ which I ‘rule and govern’ immediately, governing particular in each of its ‘organs’.”14 It was mentioned in the last chapter that each body has “double meanings” to the ego: it is both the ego’s immediate and free tool, and a material thing within the physical world.15 Objects within the nexus of causes and effects of the physical world are obviously material bodies, while my animate body is an immediate part of my ego, for it is the “free tool” of my will. Note that when saying that the animate body is an immediate tool of the ego, Husserl is not arguing that the ego can be independent from its “tool.” On the contrary, he claims that the animated body and the ego as a “soul” are essentially connected together:

On the other hand, it is easy to see that the psychic has a priority and that is what determines the concept of the Ego essentially. When the soul departs, then what remains is dead matter, a sheer material thing, which no longer possesses in itself anything of the I as man. The body, on the contrary, cannot depart. Even the ghost necessarily has its ghostly Body. To be sure, this Body is not an actual material thing – the appearing materiality is an illusion – but thereby so is the affiliated soul and thus the entire ghost.16

According to this quotation, even a mere illusion can be an animate body of an ego, as long as it is a part of an ego. Also, the ghost cannot be a concrete subject without its illusionary body.

13 See also Carman, “The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty,” 209.
14 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 128/97.
16 Husserl, Ideas II, 94/100, Husserl’s emphasis.
Husserl asserts that “I am not my Body, but I have my Body; I am not a soul, but I have a soul.”\textsuperscript{17} That is to say, my body and my ego are both essential parts of me as a concrete subject, as a unity. Thus, for Husserl, my body is not the sign whose signified is my ego: my body must be a body “with” its ego, for it is a part of me, who must have both the body and the ego. I can grasp my own body also as a physical noema, but I know that I myself am more than this object: more importantly, I am an ego, a subjective pole of all noetic acts.

Since my ego and my animate body are necessary parts of myself, I can understand that other bodies are also not material bodies. I can realize that movements of another body are not mechanical motions of a “sheer material,” but are subjective, meaningful actions or “harmonious ‘behavior’,” for according to my own reflective recollection of my own past life, all past acts of my consciousness must belong to the same mental stream of mine.\textsuperscript{18} Through such bodies whose actions are similar to actions of my own body, I can understand them as animated bodies belonging to other subjects who are egos as a unity of “bodies and souls.” Husserl says:

\begin{quote}
The appresentation which gives that component of the Other which is not accessible originaliter is combined with an original presentation (of “his” body as part of the Nature given as included in my ownness) …. The character of the existent “other” has its basis in this kind of verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible …. Whatever, by virtue thereof, is experienced in that founded manner which characterizes a primordially unfulfillable experience – an experience that does not give something itself originally but that consistently verifies something indicated – is “other.”\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Husserl, Ideas II, 94/99, Husserl’s emphasis.


\textsuperscript{19} Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 144/114-115.
The ego of another person cannot be originally given to me, for I know that my own ego, including my own intentional acts, are only originally accessible to my own reflective consciousness, as will be discussed with more detail in Chapter 5. However, through his or her “harmonious behavior” I know that an ego must be essentially combined with his or her body, for without the ego, the body will only “perform” like a corporeal body, a “sheer material.” It was also mentioned in the last chapter that my body is the “source” of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain can be used as hyletic materials for emotional acts, which can be either moral or immoral. As will be shown later in this chapter, moral and immoral acts are distinguished by their different ways of treating objects which can bring pleasure and pain. Note that this does not mean that such acts must bestow senses to hyletic pleasure or pain. As will be demonstrated soon, for Husserl, it is possible for one who cannot have any materials of pleasure and pain to act morally. However, by constituting other bodies as possible locations for pleasure and pain, one can understand that egos which are necessarily combined with these bodies are also subjects of emotional acts. Note that such emotional acts are not originally accessible to me: I can know other subjects of emotional acts only through “emotional behaviors” of their bodies such as actions of smiling or crying.

It also deserves attention that for Husserl, though I can understand and grasp others as other egos only through empathy, it does not mean that they are subjects in a secondary sense: other people and the inter-subjective world are not causally “made by me.” Even the phenomenological reduction still “in no respect alters the natural world-sense, ‘experienceable by everyone’ ….20 Husserl’s theory regarding empathy only explains how other people in an intersubjective world are intentionally grasped by me as other subjects which are “more than

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20 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 125/93.
only objects,” but does not describe how such a world “comes into being.” He reminds his readers that another person, as an “alter ego,” “is not something psychic of mine, nor anything else in my sphere of ownness.” 21 That is to say, though I can only access other people intentionally, I do not constitute them as things which belong to my consciousness in a derivative sense: on the contrary, I constitute them as other subjects who are “independent of” me.

Other people are constituted as other subjects through their bodies. They are not mere objects. At the same time, it is well known that according to Kant, other subjects which are treated as ends are nothing but other rational subjects as “citizens of the free kingdom.” Husserl accepts this ethical statement of Kant:

> From a moral-practical standpoint, I am treating a human being as a mere thing if I do not take him as a person related to the moral, as a member of a moral association of persons in which the world of morals is constituted…. Further, it is an injustice if we do not acknowledge that… they have, as Ego-subjects, a being properly their own, that, as such, they are required for all matters and research into these matters as the subjective counter-parts, and that they thus, in their intentional life, relate to the world in the form of their surrounding world. 22

The term “mere thing” in this quotation seems to mean “something no more than an object.” Husserl argues that it is ethically improper to intentionally grasp other people only as noema. It is unjust and immoral, if I do not constitute them as egos who also have their intentional life. An ego is a free subject who immediately governs its body. Hence, for Husserl, an ethically proper way of treating others should be the way of treating them also as free egos, or who can freely use their bodies. By acting so, I also grasp their bodies as animate bodies, rather than sheer materials.

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22 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 190-191/200-201, my emphasis.
§3 Husserl’s Theory of the Others as Objects of Ethical Love Different from Hedonistic Desires

Since others are not mere things, they belong to a world as “a moral association of persons in which the world of morals is constituted.” Husserl maintains that people can be connected in this world in a way different from that in which physical things are connected as causes and effects:

There is still another form in which persons influence persons: in their spiritual activity they direct themselves toward one another... they perform acts with the intention of being understood by the other and of determining the other, in his understanding grasp of these acts... to certain personal modes of behavior.23

In the spiritual form of the world, an ego also understands that it is understood by others as an ego. Husserl suggests in the quotation above that there are different forms of this inter-subjective world, among which the highest form is built by an ego “through its axiology and practical experiences.”24 In the higher level of the inter-subjective world, I can grasp other people axiologically, and more importantly, I understand that others can also treat me in accordance with ethical axioms, though it is also possible that we grasp each other immorally. Hart realizes that a universal axiology based on axioms, which he calls “moral categoriality,” already implies not only the shared world but also the sharing of the understanding of what is good and what is bad.25 Husserl names such essences of values “objective values,” and argues that “objective

values are values for everyone.” More importantly, for Husserl, egos who share the same objective values should, if they want to live ethically or morally, attempt to build a world in which objects with common value-properties can be found. It is true that not all philosophers believe that a common, inter-subjective world should be built on common values. However, it is only necessary here to study Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of the common world based on common values, for this analysis can be used to illuminate Wang’s Confucian understanding of the world, which is a world following heavenly principles as the common laws. Husserl describes the common values as such:

The human beings and then the human-ness is in constant motion – in the striving towards a value-world for him, a value-world for all, which could give to all the possibility of happiness at the same time, the face of a value-world for every man, enjoyable for him.27

In the common value-world, people not only share the same essential, objective values but are all also able to be happy. The term “happiness [Glücklichkeit]” implies an Aristotelian position, according to which happiness is the final end of the rational human life. It is worth mentioning that it is based on his metaphysical understanding of nature that Aristotle attempts to prove that happiness is the highest good of human life.28 A happy life, according to the quotation above, is possible in a world that is “enjoyable” for everyone, which, using Hart’s words, is “a world ever more rich in value.”29 In such a world, there are objects with the objective value of being

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28 See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1098b25-1099b10.

enjoyable. Such objects are constituted by emotional acts or acts of feelings, for which, as was discussed in the last chapter, sensuous pleasure and pain may also play a role.

Husserl points out that though an enjoyable object may be pleasing, being instinctively pleasing or painful should not determine the common, “spiritual” value of an object:

In the deduced unitedness is the happiness of a wider sense. That is to say: from the beginning, they are not hedonistic values. Hedonistic values have their origins in pleasure, ultimately in sensuous feelings, and they are made real firstly in pleasure. Every striving to produce them is a striving to make possible a kind of pleasure practically prepared according to the situation.30

According to Husserl, beasts also share the mere sensuous feelings such as hunger in the form of instinct. Such sensuous feelings only drive them towards satisfactions of their bodily appetites.31 Objects with higher values that can make the happiness of people possible, however, are not merely satisfying bodily desires. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, it will be shown that for Husserl, an ego who only follows desires as bodily stimulations is acting passively, while a moral act should be based on a conscious and rational choice. Note that though pleasure is not the reason for an object to have higher value, the pleasure can still be “used” by the higher valuing act as the sensuous material. For example, Husserl believes that an act of love in a sexual sense can be ethically proper, if this act treats the person who is loved with a “higher,” spiritual value. This act of love cannot be fulfilled by lust, for which the desired person is only a “mere readiness of the pleasure [blosse Bereitschaften des Genusses].”32 That is to say, for lust, the pleasure itself is the


31 See Husserl, Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, 405.

object constituted as the end, while the desired person is grasped only as the means to provide the pleasure. It seems that Husserl does not take the following possibility into consideration: two persons can agree that they only offer sexual pleasure to each other, without falling in love. In such a case, the pleasure is intentionally treated by both as the end, though this does not mean that they treat each other only as unfree means. Also, though here the pleasure is only sexual for both, not spiritual, both of them consider the pleasure as inter-subjectively enjoyable.

Let us go back to Husserl’s own analysis. It is true that copulation can also provide pleasure that can satisfy lust, but according to Husserl, love itself must be between two egos, which means that it is a subjective act “behind” a behavior, rather than an animal stimulation. Based on this, it is possible to argue that even when someone is accidentally incapable of having any sexual pleasure, within the framework of Husserl, this person can still love other people. This also reminds us of Kant’s claim that an ethical action should be simply based on reason, for “even this feeling of compassion and tender sympathy… is itself burdensome to right-thinking persons, brings their considered maxims into confusion.”33 That is to say, for Kant, even moral feelings can influence one negatively, though he also acknowledges that to achieve morality, people also need the “help” of such feelings.34 The crucial distinction between Husserl and Kant is that for Husserl, ethical acts which transcend the hedonistic lust are still emotional. Unlike Kant, who excludes all “material sensations” including “higher ones” from the practical realm, Husserl suggests that sensations can perform their function (as hyletic materials) in this realm “under the guidance” of higher rational axioms.

34 See Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 95-100.
For Husserl, a non-hedonistic enjoyment transcends the direct, hedonistic pleasure, and it is also inter-subjectively meaningful. As Kern suggests, when I feel sorry for another person who lost a family member, my feeling “contains a reflective re-presentation of the Other’s feelings and sensations.”³⁵ In other words, through the feeling of pity, he or she is given to me as a subject of emotional acts, and is now feeling sad in an intentional, noetic way. It was mentioned above that I understand that others can also understand me. As a lover, I can also understand that my wife loves me, namely, she also treats me with a spiritual value in the same way that I treat her. The lovers love what is loved by each other, in their love. This fuses both their subjective loves towards things and towards each other together.³⁶ It is possible to apply this description of sexual love to other ethical loves, which should also treat other subjects as valuable, beloved objects. I can respect others, help others, or even hate others by bestowing spiritual values, which may utilize sensuous materials such as psychological satisfaction. As recognized by Peucker, though Husserl himself disagrees with Kant on the issue of emotion or feeling,³⁷ it is not without justification to say that he sets up a phenomenological foundation for us to understand the Kantian doctrine that others should not be treated as means: we should not treat them as mere objects to satisfy our instinctive desires, but should love them as other subjects that can also love us. When loving my wife, I do not treat her as the means to provide sexual pleasure for me. As Hart suggests, for Husserl, “the absolute ought is a universal ethical love… a value-whole which is the idea and telos of the universe of monads.”³⁸ Like Kant, Husserl believes that this act


³⁶ See Husserl, Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, 598-599.

³⁷ See Peucker, “Husserl’s Critique of Kant’s Ethics,” 312-313 and 316-317.

should rationally follow the categorical imperatives according to which others are teloses, but, unlike Kant, he points out that it should always be emotional, though this act of emotion or feeling may be without the sensuous materials of pleasure, accidentally offered by the body.

For Husserl, other people can be constituted as other egos, through their bodies as the media of a process of empathy. The inter-subjective world shared by me and other egos is also an ethical world, for we can have similar practical, ethical acts in this world, based on the same essence of values and ethical axioms that we share. This world is a world in which happiness is possible for people. Enjoyable objects in the higher form that can make people happy are objects ethically loved, whose correlated acts are not stimulated by hedonistic desires such as sexual lust, but by spiritual, rational values. Egos themselves are also objects ethically loved: they are treated as the ends of such love, rather than means for bodily pleasure, which is the instinctive “end” of hedonistic lust shared by both human beings and beasts.

§4 Heavenly Principles as Objective Ethical Laws

Husserl’s analysis of the distinction between ethical love and hedonistic desires can shed a light on a problem regarding Wang’s ethics, which can be illuminated in the following sections by studying Wang’s understanding of heavenly principles. For him, gewu as the basic activity of moral effort is to rectify the object with an improper value into a proper one by changing one’s incorrect emotional attitude towards the thing, which is a process of making the emotional intention sincere. This may lead to a possible misreading of the term “sincerity (cheng 誠),” whose literal meaning is “honest” in Chinese. People may think that as long as she or he is truly having an intention, or is truly “addicted” in the emotion, the intention is sincere. This can lead
to the position according to which, to act morally, one only needs to follow one’s strong emotions as reactions to psychological pleasure and pain. It was pointed out by Wang Fuzhi (or Wang Chuanshan 王夫之/王船山, 1619-1692) in the early Qing Dynasty that the “source” of Wang Yangming’s doctrine on ethical emotions such as filial love is also “made by the seven emotions like (the act of) treating food to be sweet and of being pleased by sex,” which means that a sincere intention of Wang Yangming can be treated as a hedonistic intention towards the satisfaction of a bodily desire like the hunger for food.⁴⁹ Chen Lai suggests that Wang’s theory may be used to support actions which blindly follow people’s sensuous instincts.⁴⁰ For example, Huang Zongxi criticizes the teachings of Wang Ji, one of Wang’s most important students, and the Taizhou school (Taizhou Xuepai 泰州學派), which “truly made the doctrine of Wang Yangming popular in the world,” because they lead people to follow their particular strong emotions or even instincts, which can lead people astray from the true Confucian way.⁴¹ It is also a well-established historical observation that the doctrine of Wang was not only dominant among official-scholars after his death but was also the direct inspiration of the form of Confucianism that became “religious,” and more popular among people who did not have the chance of being educated.⁴²

However, the task of this chapter is not to discuss the influence of Wang, which may be based on misunderstandings of his theory, though it is true that it is Wang’s own pedagogical

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⁴⁰ See Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 51-52.
⁴¹ See Huang, Philosophical Records 238-239, and 703-706.
⁴² See Peng Guoxiang 彭國翔, The Unfolding of the Doctrine of Liangzhi: Wang Longxi and Study on Wang’s Doctrine in the Mid and Late Ming Dynasty 良知學的展開: 王龍溪與中晚明的陽明學 (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2005), 491-510; Wu Zhen 吳震, Researches on the Late Yangming School 陽明後學研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, 2003), 429-444; Wang Fansen, “The Social Role of Scholars of the Xinxue School 明代心學家的社會角色” and “Religionalization of the Confucianism,” Ten Papers on Thoughts of the Late Ming Dynasty and Early Qing Dynasty, 1-28, and 51-88.
style that makes it easier for people to misunderstand him.\textsuperscript{43} It was already demonstrated previously that for him, a sincere intention is not a psychologically strong emotion, but an emotional act which should follow heavenly principles: a liking or a disliking which does not follow the principles is “artificially made,” and is not objectively proper.

The problem of the objective standards of moral acts according to Wang, therefore, can be approached by studying his understanding of heavenly principles, which is a notion that is crucial for the whole Song and Ming Neo-Confucian tradition. Since in most cases Wang is talking to Neo-Confucian scholars, including his students, friends and even opponents, in such cases he simply uses this term without explaining its theoretical background. For Neo-Confucians, ancient sages are moral because their acts and actions are coherent with heavenly principles as universal moral laws. For example, one of the Cheng brothers argues that the ancient sage-kings Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 punished and even executed those who were guilty and evil only because “it is what should naturally be the case, according to heavenly principles.”\textsuperscript{44} Cheng believes that even social norms regarding proper clothes for different people in different situations are all universal rules based on heavenly principles. This means that such norms are not based on specific customs of different historical contexts. This traditional understanding of the relation between social norms and heavenly principles as \textit{a priori} moral laws is also accepted by Wang. He argues that the foundation for the ethical rules of all historical contexts should be the same, as long as these rules are ethically correct:

For all people under heaven, ancient or modern, their emotions are one. When ancient kings composed rites, they all created articles according to human emotions. Therefore, these rites can perform well at all times. If I reflect on it in my heart and feel unsettled,

\textsuperscript{43} See Chen Lai, \textit{Spiritual Realms}, 50-52.
\textsuperscript{44} 此都只是天理自然當如此. Cheng and Cheng, \textit{Collected Works}, 30, my translation. It is not clear whether Cheng Yi or Cheng Hao states this.
then it is either due to mistakes of recording or because what is proper is different according to different customs of different times. In such cases, we can also make something that ancient kings did not have, according to righteousness. That is why the ancient three kings did not inherit rites (from their predecessors).45

The term *li* 禮 translated by Chan as rite literally means social norms regarding how people should perform in political, social, and even family events. These norms in the Confucian sense were composed by ancient kings according to emotions. Note that the ancients mentioned here are ancient rulers like Yao and Shun, who are also considered by Confucians as sages. The term “emotion” in this paragraph does not mean particular emotional acts, but the “ought” of all such acts. One ought to love those which should be loved according to heavenly principles, and ought to hate those which should be hated. That is to say, the Confucian norms are not “productions” of social and historical contexts, but are based on the sages’ understanding of heavenly principles. However, in the quotation above, there seems to be a self-contradiction. Wang first says that norms composed by the ancient sage-kings are good for all times, but then says that some of them might be improper in different historical contexts. This difficulty actually is a result of the ambiguity of the terminology. In a preface for a research on *The Book of Rites*, Wang’s explanation of the universal foundation of rites is clearer:

> For the articles of measure (*jiewen* 節文), rites are like square rulers and compasses for squares and circles. Without squares and circles the productions of rulers and compasses cannot be seen, but (we) should not treat the squares and circles as rulers and compasses…If we abandoned rulers and compasses to make squares and circles, and made rulers and compasses according to squares and circles, then the usage of rulers and compasses would stop.46

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One can draw as many circles with different sides as one wants, with only one compass. The function of heavenly principles is to serve as the compass, while norms fitting different social and historical situations are particular circles drawn in accordance with the compass. Wang asserts that Confucius, who knows all heavenly principles, can use principles to create different norms which fit different historical periods.\footnote{See Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 227, 198-199/201-202.} As was mentioned in Chapter 2, according to heavenly principles, it might be proper to like some grass in some cases but improper in some others. Similarly, it is based on heavenly principles that some actions in the ancient time were due to the special contexts, but are moral now, for the context has changed.

For Confucians, the highest virtue is humanity (\textit{ren 仁}), which is also considered by Wang as the primary content of heavenly principles. He argues that “only when the love is proper can it be its original substance and be called \textit{ren}.”\footnote{須愛是處放是愛之本體,方可謂之仁. Wang, “To Huang Shengzeng 與黃勉之,” in \textit{Complete Works}, bk. 4, 216, my translation.} As was discussed in Chapter 2, for Wang, an act of loving which follows heavenly principles is proper. The love which can be treated as \textit{ren} is, therefore, an emotional intention in accordance with principles. According to Wang, “the one who has the virtue of \textit{ren} regards all things as one body.”\footnote{Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 89, 58/56, translation altered.} That is to say, one who has this highest virtue can love all living beings in the world, for he or she follows heavenly principles.

It will be argued in the next several sections that this understanding of moral laws is based on the Confucian metaphysics, which is similar to Aristotle’s theory of nature. The understanding of nature should be put into brackets by the phenomenological reduction, which means that for Husserl, ethical theories based on metaphysics do not “grow” from a solid,
phenomenological ground. Even if some points of such “natural” ethics can be
phenomenologically defended, it does not mean that such a “natural” system is plausible.
However, since this dissertation is also an interpretation of Wang’s theory, it is helpful to briefly
describe the contents of his ethics. In Section 5 of this chapter, I will study his understanding of
proper love towards other human beings, which is similar to theories of Kant and Husserl, who
believe that other rational subjects should be ends. In Section 6 and Section 7, the metaphysical
foundation of such love will be elaborated, though the Confucian metaphysics may be
problematic.

§5 Other People as Other Rational Subjects Who Should Be Loved

Wang’s theory of universal love is rooted in the Confucian traditions. According to
Confucius himself, “one should not do to others what one does not desire oneself.”50 As Zhu Xi
says, this doctrine means one should “push one’s own (self-understanding) to (understand)
others.”51 This is a process of apperception or empathy, which is also how other subjects appear
to the ego through their bodies. A phenomenological reading of this doctrine is that by
constituting others as subjects that can experience and suffer, I can understand that if they were
me, they would also suffer what is miserable for me. That is to say, for Confucians, other people
should be loved as ends, for they are also subjective poles for emotional acts of liking and
disliking. Iso Kern also suggests a possible phenomenological interpretation of Mencius’ famous
example of feeling fear when seeing a child falling into a well: through a “reflective re-

50 Analects, 12:2 and 16:24, my translation.
51 See Zhu’s note on Analects, 16: 24, see Zhu, Explanations and Collected Notes, 167, my translation.
presentation,” I can understand the child’s feelings towards this situation. This empathy offers
the foundation for me to pity her intentionally, which will also yield the will to save her.\textsuperscript{52} It is
true that according to this theory, I understand others on the basis of myself. However, according
to Confucians, all people share the same human nature, which yields a foundation for proper
understandings of other people. Also, the phenomenology of sympathy plays a crucial role in
phenomenological ethics, according to which we can shed a light on this Confucian theory.
According to Husserl, though I can understand others only through a process of appresentation, I
do not grasp others as subjects in a secondary sense. But since the task of this chapter is to
compare the contents of moral principles according to theories of Husserl and Wang, it is not
necessary to elaborate detailed issues regarding this particular ethical topic. What is more
important here is to explain Wang’s understanding of other people with the help of Husserl’s
theory of empathy, so that a brief summarization of Husserl’s thoughts earlier in this chapter is
sufficient. Wang also mentions that in order to be moral, one has to avoid doing to others what
one hates:

\begin{quote}
What I do not want to be imposed on me, I will not impose on others. This is what I
want, and it comes from what is desired by the heart. It is all natural, which is not
through hardworking. (But if I say) “I should not impose on others,” then (I) achieve
this only after an effort.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} See Kern, “Three Questions from the Chinese Philosophy,” 715-717.

\textsuperscript{53}夫加諸我者，我所不欲也，無加諸人；我所欲也，處於其心之所欲，皆自然而然，非有所強，勿施於人，則勉而後能。Wang, “To Huang Wan 與
黃宗賢,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 167-168, my translation. According to The History of Ming, the courtesy name of Huang Wan
黃綰 is Zongxian, see “Ranked Biographies 85 列傳八十五,” The History of Ming. But according to Huang Zongxi, it is Shuxian 叔賢，see Huang, Philosophical Records, 280. Here I follow History and treat this “Huang Zongxian” as the courtesy name of
Huang Wan.
In this quotation, Wang is explaining a dialogue between Confucius and Duanmu Ci (or Zigong 端木賜/子貢, roughly 520BC-456BC).\(^{54}\) According to Confucius in that chapter of the *Analects*, Zigong has to consciously forbid himself to impose on others what Zigong himself does not want to suffer, which is a necessary step of moral effort even for talented people like Zigong.\(^{55}\) Wang argues that the final achievement of this effort is that one will be able to avoid imposing on others without consciously forbidding oneself to do so. That is to say, according to Wang, one who is always acting morally is one who understands other people as subjects of emotional acts, for other people as subjects will emotionally dislike harms that they suffer. Similarly, Wang believes that one who loves his or her parents will want to make sure that they can enjoy warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer.\(^{56}\) One has the *will* to serve one’s parents in this way because one is considering the cold that the parents suffer in the winter and the heat in the summer. Obviously, the parents are also constituted as other people who like the warmth and hate the cold in the winter. To serve one’s parents is based on one’s love towards them, which emotionally grasps them as ends.

Again, people may argue that it is scientifically possible that some people do not fear cold at all, due to some physical and biological reasons such as genetic mutations. However, for Wang and other Confucian thinkers, bodily features like fearing the cold belong to the common human nature, and human nature is good and proper, for nature itself “makes” it in such a way. The universe for Neo-Confucians is essentially a good universe, for the physical laws of it are the same with the highest ethical laws, which, as was pointed by many modern scholars, is an

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\(^{54}\) He is often mentioned with his courtesy name Zigong 子貢.

\(^{55}\) See *Analects*, 5:12.

understanding similar to Aristotle’s metaphysics.57 Like Aristotle, Neo-Confucians also believe that human beings are rational. For example, the eleventh-century philosopher Zhou Dunyi (or Zhou Lianxi 周敦颐/周濂溪, 1017-1073), who deeply influences the thought of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, claims in his most important work “Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate (太極圖說 Taiji Tushuo)” that “human beings…. are the most intelligent.”58 This assertion is mentioned by Zhu Xi many times, according to whom “the so-called highest intelligence (of human beings) is the pure nature that is the highest good, and is the so-called great ultimate.”59 Zhu Xi believes that human nature is the highest good, because human beings are the highest creations of nature. He even suggests that human beings are rational because the physical structure of their bodies are made by nature in a clear form so that the light of nature can shine through, while the light of the same nature is blocked by the muddy materials of other beasts.60 This position of Zhu Xi is similar to the position of Aristotle, who believes that bodies of human beings are “in harmony” with their rational power, according to the design of nature.61

Also, according to Wang himself, the primary principle of nature is named by The Book of Change as “the principle of shengsheng 生生,” which literally means the principle of birth. Xiang Shiling 向世陵 suggests that for Wang, this principle of giving birth is the foundation of the

61 See Aristotle, Politics, 1256b. Surely, from a phenomenological perspective, this position shared by Zhu Xi and Aristotle is problematic, and their understanding of nature will also be rejected by modern science. But to show this possible parallel between western and eastern traditional thoughts itself is interesting for comparative philosophy. It can also lead us to some interesting questions regarding some common features of pre-modern styles of life, which is another issue beyond the scope of this dissertation.
virtue of ren. As Wang himself maintains, “ren is the principle of unceasing regeneration.” Thus, Wang believes that people with the highest virtue should love all living beings in the world, though they should be loved with different “degrees,” as will be shown in the next section. This understanding of Wang, like Zhu Xi’s theory of different creatures, is also based on the Confucian metaphysics which is more similar to Aristotle’s philosophy.

To elaborate details of this Confucian metaphysics of nature is obviously beyond the scope of this dissertation, for the task of it is to clarify the formal foundation of Wang’s ethics. Also, according to Husserl, the phenomenological reduction should put all “positing” of nature into “brackets.” Especially, Husserl states that “I exclude all sciences relating to this natural world no matter how firmly they stand there for me.” The Confucian understanding of nature, on the other hand, is a positing based on the ancient people’s observations of natural phenomena, which can be easily rejected by more empirical proofs. Even if such observations are correct in a scientific sense, from a phenomenological perspective, they should not be used when describing the structure of the transcendent consciousness as the “residuum” of the epoché. Thus, in this chapter I will not discuss the Confucian metaphysics based on which they understand human beings as rational subjects, but only analyze the form of intentional acts through which other people are loved, within the framework of Wang.

It was mentioned above that according to Zhu Xi, human intelligence (ling 禮) is the highest good, and the human nature is also good, based on his Confucian metaphysics of nature. This implies that human intelligence, which is the same with human nature, is an ethical rationality. In
the next chapter, it will be shown that according to Wang, the function of this original moral rationality of human beings is not to enable them to theoretically understand heavenly principles, but to guide their emotional acts. Using the words of Mou Zongsan, the original knowledge of the heart for Wang is a natural pure capability of one’s heart that fuses both the rationality and “transcendental emotions” together.65 Here the emotions obviously are emotional intentions. Wang also likes to use the term “pure intelligence (xuling 虛靈)” shared by Zhu Xi to describe the heart’s ability to follow principles.66 For Wang, heaven and earth, namely, nature itself is running according to heavenly principles. Since the heart functions as the intentional ego, the human heart, as “the heart of heaven and earth,”67 is nothing but a subject that can rationally follow the ethical principles. It is true that not every act of human beings is moral, which means that people are not always “functioning” properly. However, one who is not using his or her rational power properly does not necessarily “lose” the power. For Wang, even a bandit who is harming and killing other people still retains his or her ethical rationality, though this original moral capability is concealed. Hence, for Wang, people who should be loved as ends according to heavenly principles are also subjects whose emotional acts can be coherent with principles.

It was mentioned previously in this chapter that for Husserl, emotional acts which do not follow ethical principles are hedonistic, which means that such acts seek sensuous pleasure or the stop of sensuous pain as their ends. Similarly, for Neo-Confucians, if one only seeks sensuous pleasure, then it is possible that one act immorally. The ethical meaning of desires is surely an important issue regarding ethical theories, and different philosophers may have different

66 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 32; chap. 134; and chap. 137.
67 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 337, 277/257.
positions regarding this issue. However, the task of this chapter is only to study the ethical theory of Wang, who, like all other Neo-Confucians, holds the same understanding regarding desires. For example, Zhu Xi believes that to preserve heavenly principles in one’s heart requires one to eliminate “human desires (renyu 人慾),”\(^{68}\) which means that these desires with a specific form disable one from acting in accordance with principles. This term is equivalent to the term “selfish desires (siyu 私慾),” which is less ambiguous within the context of this chapter, and will be the term used in this whole dissertation. Wang also accepts this relation between selfish desires and heavenly principles. He argues that “if I want to be a sage, then…. I must want to eliminate selfish desires and preserve heavenly principles.”\(^{69}\) Wang claims to Xue Kan that to follow heavenly principles is to avoid “selfish thoughts” as much as possible. In the same dialogue, Wang also suggests that “It must be broad and impartial. Only thus is it in its original substance.”\(^{70}\) The character si 私 here signifies not only “selfish”, but also “private.” However, when Neo-Confucians use the term siyu, si is not referring to something private like private properties, which Confucians generally believe to be ethically acceptable and necessary. They are using the term to refer to selfish and hedonistic desires. An emotional intention “artificially made” is an act in accordance with one’s subjective standards, rather than heavenly principles as objective moral principles. Wang also points out that Xue Kan’s intention towards grass and flowers is a view “motivated from the body, which is wrong.”\(^{71}\) It has to be mentioned that though it is reasonable for Chan to translate the term quqiao 躯殼 as “personal interest,” the

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\(^{68}\) See Zhu Xi’s comments on Mencius, 1B:5, in Zhu Xi, Explanations and Collected Notes, 320. See also Zhu Xi, “On Book 6 of Analects II 雍也篇二,” in Recorded Conversations, 783.


\(^{70}\) Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 101, 67/65.

\(^{71}\) Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 101, 66/63, translation altered.
The literal meaning of it is the body. The body is material, namely the production of the vital force, and an improper intention arises “when the vital force is stirred.” What stirs the body is sensuous pleasure and pain. According to Wang, what stirs Xue Kan to love flowers and dislike grass is the pleasure that beautiful flowers can bring. It is true that according to some thinkers, an aesthetic love towards something beautiful is not hedonistic and bodily. This issue regarding objects with cultural values will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Note that for Wang, whether a physical object should be liked or disliked is not simply because of its physical and natural existence, but is determined by its relation with human beings, for human beings, as rational subjects, are ends of moral acts. Hence, if a physical being can serve as a positive means for rational beings as the ends, then this physical thing will also have a positive value:

Meng Bosheng said, “You said that if weeds are harmful, according to principle they should be removed. Why should the desire to remove them be motivated by personal interest?” (Wang said,) “You must experience this out through your own heart. What is your state of heart when you want to remove the weeds? And what was the state of heart of Zhou Maoshu when he would not cut down the grass outside his window?”

According to one of the Cheng brothers, he once asked Zhou Dunyi why Zhou did not remove the grass in front of his window, and Zhou’s reply was that “it is the same with one’s own

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72 Chan’s reason for this translation is that he believes the body to be the same as the private interest, see Detailed Notes and Collected Comments, 125.

73 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 101, 66/63.

74 His name is Meng Yuan 孟源, and Bosheng 伯生 is his courtesy name. His name is translated by Chan as Meng Po-sheng.

75 Translated by Chan as Chou Mao-shu. This is the courtesy name of Zhou Dunyi.

76 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 101, 67/65, translation altered.
According to Chan’s interpretation, here the “one’s own thought 自家意思” refers to “the thought of loving lives, just like the spirit of life of heaven and earth.” If Chan’s reading is acceptable, then Zhou is loving grass as living beings. However, since grass is not a rational being, it should serve as the means for human beings. For Wang, the difference between the love towards grass and the love towards human beings is not defended phenomenologically, but is based on his metaphysical understanding of nature, which will be studied more carefully in the next section. The love towards grass as a phenomenon is helpful here, for Wang’s explanation of it can shed a light on the distinction between moral acts and selfish, hedonistic acts. When weeds are harmful to the grain, they are also harmful to the life of human beings, for grains are necessary means for human life as the end. Since a moral intention should always treat the thing with the highest value in a given circumstance as the end, weeds with a lower value should be abandoned for the sake of the human life with a higher value. Xue Kan’s will to remove grass, however, is for the sake of his desire for beautiful flowers, which, according to Wang, is a selfish and hedonistic love. Since the values of flowers and grass are equal according to Wang, it is unnecessary to remove grass for the sake of flowers or to remove flowers for the sake of grass. Hence, Wang’s critique of Xue Kan actually means that Xue Kan is treating both flowers and grass as means for Xue Kan’s own hedonistic pleasure.

Note that to understand selfish desires as selfish and hedonistic does not mean that all desires of individuals that can satisfy needs of their bodies are selfish. As was mentioned in the

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77 Cheng and Cheng, Collected Works, 60, my translation. Deng Aiming believes that it is Cheng Hao who reported this, but as far as I can see, there are no textual proofs to support this, for both of them were students of Zhou. See “Biography of Cheng Yi,” Collected Works, 338.

78 Chan, Detailed Notes and Collected Comments, 126.
first chapter, Wang points out to his student Xiao Hui that seeking “beautiful colors, sounds and tastes” will harm the health and life of one’s body, while one’s heart, as the intentional subject whose nature is the same with heavenly principles, seeks to benefit one’s own body. Note that here colors, sounds and tastes are not aesthetically beautiful, but are objects which can bring strong pleasure. Wang is arguing that if I seek strong pleasure brought by such colors, sounds and tastes as the end, then I may harm myself as a rational being, for, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2, the body is necessary for me as the ego. Wang believes that the heart as the rational subject is one’s “true self,” and if strong pleasure is intentionally constituted as the end, it is negative for this true self. The standards of liking and disliking of this true self are not subjective, but are objective and universal:

Therefore, fame, profit, and desires towards things are liked by the selfish self, while they are hated by (people) under heaven. Those which are liked by liangzhi are liked by my true self, and are liked commonly by (people) under the heaven. Therefore, to follow those which are liked by the selfish self… will make my heart overworked every day, and my whole life sorrowful and painful. This is to be enslaved by (external) things.

In this paragraph, the term “all people under heaven” refers to the universal nature of human beings. Hence, Wang is not claiming that objects liked by the “selfish self” are disliked by other people. He argues that the standards of liking and disliking of the “true self” are universally and objectively valued, while standards of the “selfish self” are not. More interestingly, he argues that the “selfish self” is enslaved by things. Within the context of Chinese tradition, “to be enslaved by things” means that one is passively led by desires aroused by external things. It will

79 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 122, 82/80.
be described more carefully in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 that according to both Husserl and
Wang, to follow desires passively is different from acting freely, which is based on conscious
and rational choice. One who is enslaved is a means, a tool. For Wang, when chasing hedonistic
pleasure, one is even treating oneself as the means for such pleasure.

Note that for Husserl, a moral act should not be hedonistic, but this does not mean that a
moral noesis should not use pleasure and pain as its hyletic materials. I want to eat some
delicious food to enjoy myself as the end. As long as it is myself who freely makes the decision,
and as long as I know that my decision will harm no one, my act of wanting to eat will be
ethically fine. In such cases, I do not intentionally constitute the pleasure itself as the end, but
grasp the food as a means for myself. This understanding of the ego’s capability of acting freely
will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters. But it is necessary to mention that, as
was mentioned above, when treating the pleasure as an end of a particular action, it is not
necessary that one is using oneself or other people as the means: he or she may be producing an
inter-subjective pleasure for him or her and other people as higher ends. Husserl’s position
regarding the bodily pleasure therefore, seems to be based on the Western tradition from Plato to
Kant, which is not realized by Husserl himself. However, it is also interesting to compare such
more traditional thoughts of Husserl with an interesting chapter of *Mencius*. Since Mencius
deply influences Wang’s theory, this comparison is not meaningless for the project of this
chapter.

*Mencius* once had a dialogue with King Xuan of Qi (Qi Xuanwang 齊宣王, ?-301BC) who
says that he has the “diseases of loving wealth and sex.” The king believes that since he cannot
help but love wealth and sex, he will inevitably exploit his people, and will not be able to
implement policies for the interest of the people. Mencius, however, suggests that based on his
own love for wealth, the king can understand that his people also love it, so that he will want to help them acquire property. Based on his love for sex, the king can also grasp his people as other people who love sex, which will make him want to help his people to get married. Zhu Xi even suggests that if the king’s love enables him to help his people as other subjects who are the same as the king himself, then the king’s love is properly following heavenly principles. That is to say, according to Mencius, if the king understands other people as other subjects, then he will not treat them as means for his own satisfaction. He argues that an ancient king who helped his people and did not exploit them also loved his wife, which means that even when the ancient king feels pleasure when making love with his wife, his love is neither hedonistic nor selfish. Such pleasure of love is even inter-subjective, for it is universally shared by human beings.

According to Zhu Xi, such an act is moral and compatible with heavenly principles. Though Wang does not mention this chapter of Mencius, it is reasonable to argue that the interpretation of the Confucian classics can also be used to make Wang’s theory clearer. That is to say, for Confucians including Mencius and Wang, desires which are coherent with natural patterns can be moral, and such moral desires are different from selfish desires. However, their understanding regarding inter-subjective pleasure is still based on their theory of nature, which will be rejected by modern thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse who also believe that pleasure is meaningful for people as free subjects.

For Wang as a Neo-Confucian, heavenly principles as objective ethical laws require one to love other people. According to the Confucian principles, such people should be understood as

81 See Mencius, 1B:5. The problem regarding the relation between marriage and romantic love within the Chinese tradition is another topic that involves complicated historical studies. Here, Mencius is arguing that the only proper way to fulfill sexual desire and the desire of reproduction in their natural form is through marriage, which is also a universal norm made by ancient sages according to heavenly principles.

82 See Zhu Xi’s notes on Mencius, 1B:5, in Zhu Xi, Explanations and Collected Notes, 220.
other rational subjects who can act emotionally. One should not seek hedonistic pleasure as one’s end, for pleasure as the standard is not objectively valid. When seeking hedonistic pleasure, one will not only treat others, but even oneself as the means for the pleasure, which, according to heavenly principle and the virtue of ren, is improper and immoral. Though this understanding of the contents of moral laws is similar to Husserl’s axiology, in the next section I will argue that the philosophical foundation of the Confucian content of ethical principles is different from the foundation of Husserl’s phenomenology.

§6 The Special Role of Family Love Within the System of Wang’s Ethics

It was briefly mentioned in the last section that according to Wang, people should love all loving beings, for they are all creations of nature. Human beings should be loved more, for one naturally has a closer relationship with other people who belong to the same species. Actually, according to the Confucian tradition, the love towards those who are closer to me should be foundation for my love towards those who are not. This understanding is also based on the Confucian metaphysics of nature, even for Wang. Hence, this section discusses this Neo-Confucian thought of Wang only for the sake of understanding his system better, but does not aim to defend his position. Some modern Confucians may believe that it is possible to phenomenologically support the Neo-Confucian metaphysics of nature, but it is impossible to unfold details regarding this complicated topic here. It is sufficient to offer a brief description of this Neo-Confucian theory. For Neo-Confucians, those who are closest to one should be one’s family members, for they believe that the structure of family is the same with the fundamental natural relation. Since natural patterns are nothing but “embodiments” of heavenly principles, to base one’s love equally on one’s family members and strangers is opposed to principle.
According to the eleventh-century philosopher Zhang Zai (or Zhang Hengqu 張載/張橫渠, 1020-1077) whose influence upon the Neo-Confucian tradition is similar to that of Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers, the love towards one’s family members not only grows from one’s natural origin, but also offers the universal schema for all other forms of love:

All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler is the eldest one of my parents, and the great ministers are his stewards. Respect the aged – this is the way to treat them as elders should be treated. Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak – this is the way to treat them as the young should be treated.83

Though in materials left today, Wang never mentions Zhang Zai, in a note that he writes to some bandits, he borrows the words from Zhang Zai to try to persuade the bandits to surrender. He claims to them that “the people are my brothers and sisters, and you are my infants (chizi 赤子).”84 Here when Wang says that he treats all people including bandits in the same mode of loving his brothers, sisters, and children, he may not be saying so in an academic sense but is only using it as a rhetorical weapon. However, in “Treatise on Pulling up the Root and Stopping up the Source 拔本塞源論,” a part of one of his letters which was separately published as an influential work among scholar-officials, he also gives the following statement:

The heart of a sage regards heaven, earth, and all things as one (body). He looks upon all people of the world, whether inside or outside his family, or whether far or near, but all with blood and breath, as his brothers and children.85

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85 Wang, Chuanxi Lu 演 JULU, chap. 142, 113/118.
Thus, it is not improper to say that for both Wang and Zhang Zai, the form of loving all people and even all living things in the universe is the same with the form of loving one’s family members, especially the parents. One can love other people because they are not only similar to oneself, but also to one’s family members. One can love other animals because though they are not rational, they still share some natural attributes with human beings. This theory of Wang can also be interpreted by a more traditional example in *Mencius*. When King Hui of Wei (or King Hui of Liang 梁惠王, ?-319 BC) sees an ox which is to be sacrificed is trembling, he feels compassion for it. In this case, the ox is constituted with a value of “being pitied” by the king. The ox is pitied because it shows fear, which signifies that it is suffering from an inner fear of death. It is because one is always trying to free one’s parents from a similar fear that one can pity the ox.86 Zhu Xi argues that “for human beings, oxen and sheep belong to different species, but are born by the same (heaven and earth).”87 Using Wang’s words, since oxen and sheep also consist of “blood and breath,” they are all brothers and sisters of human beings in a broader sense. As he says, “Filial piety and brotherly respect are the roots of humanity. This means that the principle of humanity grows within.”88 That is to say, the capability of properly treating one’s own family members is the foundation upon which the ability to treat other people properly in an ethical sense can grow. According to Confucians, this family link between human beings and other animals is also weaker than the relationship between a human being and his or her family members, so that one’s love towards the “remoter” brothers and sisters is an “imitation” of his or her love towards the “closer” family members. It is still worth noting that this Confucian

86 See *Mencius*, 1A:7.
88 Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 93, 60/57.
metaphysics may receive many forms of critique from different positions: Modern psychology may prove that the natural relation between parents and sons or daughters cannot guarantee a moral relation. Some existentialists and post-modernists also argue that a meaningful and moral relation does not have a “natural essence,” but is constituted through people’s lives. However, it is not the task of this treatise to deal with this complicated theme.

For Wang as a Neo-Confucian, different living beings between heaven and earth have different natural relationships. As was emphasized many times above, whether this metaphysical understanding of Wang is valid or not is a topic different from the description of it. The portrait of the Neo-Confucian understanding of different natural relationships can also help us to describe Wang’s theory of different values of natural beings. He says:

> It is because of principles that there necessarily is relative importance. Take for example the body, which is one. If we use the hands and the feet to protect the head, does that mean that we especially treat them as less important? Because of their principles this is what should be done. We love both plants and beasts, and yet we can tolerate feeding beasts with plants. We love both beasts and men, and yet we can tolerate butchering beasts to feed our parents, provide for religious sacrifices, and entertain guests. We love both parents and strangers. But suppose here are a small basket of rice and a platter of soup. With them one will survive and without them one will die. Since not both our parents and the stranger can be saved by this meager food, we will prefer to save our parents instead of the stranger. This we can tolerate.89

According to this quotation, one’s will to save a life is motivated by the love towards the life, whose highest form is the universal love, namely, the virtue of ren. To be alive is also the primary meaning of the Chinese character sheng 生 in the term shengsheng. What is saved is the end of the action of saving, guided by the will of saving. The will of saving, as an emotional act, grasps its object with a value of “ought to be saved.” According to Wang, different living beings

89 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 276, 231/222.
should have *different degrees* of this value. It was mentioned that according to Husserl, some values are higher than others, so that a thing can be “more valuable” than another, even if both are objects with positive values. However, compared with Wang’s claim cited above, Husserl’s statements regarding relations between different values are only formal. Husserl only states that rational subjects should be grasped with the valuing of being the ends, but does not phenomenologically explain why only human beings can have rational and spiritual life. For Wang, in a particular situation, the value of a particular living being is determined by its position in nature. According to him, the love towards a stranger gives the stranger a value that “he should be saved with food.” However, *from a Confucian perspective*, a stranger with the value of being saved will lose this value when a parent is also hungry to death, but there is no sufficient food to save both. In the second case the stranger is still loved, but according to the Confucian understanding of the ethical laws, he or she is constituted with a lower value. In every particular situation one should always seek what is the best, and in the difficult situation under discussion, either one is saved, or no one is saved. This means that according to Wang, to save the parent who should have a higher value is the best and only solution in such a case.

The Confucian position of Wang stated above, obviously, can be doubted from different positions. A Kantian may argue that the relation of blood is only a necessary relation under the control of physical and biological laws, while ethical laws should only come from the rational legislation of rational beings. Even within the Chinese tradition, philosophers of the Mo school (*Mojia* 墨家) believe that one who has the virtue of *ren* should love all people equally, rather than loving one’s family members with a higher degree.90 Mencius has a strong critique against

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followers of Mozi 墨子, for they deny the family relation, which, according to Mencius, is natural for human beings. 91 Wang also argues that the family love is the natural root, while love towards other beings are only branches and leaves, while Moists do not understand this natural pattern.92 However, Moists also believe that they correctly understand liking and disliking of the heaven, which means that for them, their ethical position is more natural than that of the Confucians.93 The problem regarding whether Wang’s concrete understandings of the content of moral laws is correct, therefore, requires not only a phenomenological study of the structure of the heart, but also studies of complex ethical and metaphysical issues.

Before we proceed to the next section, it has to be mentioned that for Wang, the love towards one’s family members may also be improper. Wang once criticizes his student Lu Cheng (or Lu Yuanjing 陸澄/陸元靜) who is having an unbearable sorrow after receiving the message that his son is dying from illness. Wang argues that Lu Cheng’s extreme anxiety about his son is problematic for the following reasons:

Take the case of the death of parents. Is it not true that the son desires to mourn until death before he feels satisfied? Never the less it is said, “The self-suffering should not destroy the nature.”94 The original substance of heavenly principles has its proper limits that should not be exceeded.95

Wang argues that Lu Cheng’s reaction to his son’s disease “exceeds the limit.” This limit is based on heavenly principles, which means that for Wang, Lu Cheng’s strong anxiety is ethically

91 See Mencius, 3B: 9.
92 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 93, 59-60/56-57.
93 See Explanations of Mozi, 193-220.
94 The complete sentence is “The self-suffering should not destroy the nature because life should not be harmed for the sake of death 毀不滅性, 不以死傷生也.” “The Four Principles Underlying the Dress of Mourning 喪服四制,” in Book of Rites, 46, my translation.
95 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 44, 41/39, translation altered.
problematic. According to the Neo-Confucian position shared by Wang and Lu Cheng, the primary heavenly principle is the principle of shengsheng, namely, the principle of birth, according to which one should love living beings. Hence, what is alive is more important than what is dead, which means that even one’s dead parent should not have a value higher than that of oneself who is still alive. Within the historical context of Wang and Lu Cheng, to feel extreme anxiety will harm one’s health and even one’s life. Thus, Wang is arguing that Lu Cheng’s reaction to the bad health of his son is not proper, for Lu Cheng overlooks his own life. This critique, obviously, is still based on the metaphysical understanding of nature itself which may receive doubts from many different positions, as was shown above. Also, Chen Lai interprets improper emotions like Lu Cheng’s anxiety as productions of “stirred vital forces,” which, within the Confucian framework, belong to the physical side of the body.96 According to Chen Lai’s reading, the strong tendency to let oneself be drowned by the feeling of sorrow is also a hedonistic act. The uncontrolled sorrow, according to Wang, is actually grasping oneself and one’s own life as the means to satisfy one’s hedonistic desire of crying: the object of this sorrow is not the family member who has passed away, but the satisfaction of the bodily desire itself. Again, whether Wang’s position interpreted by Chen Lai as such is correct or not is another problem for both the phenomenology of passions and psychology, which cannot be dealt with here.

§7 Values of Cultural Objects According to Husserl and Wang

96 See Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 239-240.
According to the previous two sections, Wang’s concrete ethical theories are based on his metaphysical understanding of nature itself, according to which one should love one’s family members more than other living creatures, though the highest form of love is to love all creatures universally. This Neo-Confucian metaphysics itself needs to be studied both metaphysically and phenomenologically, though such analyses are not the task of this dissertation.

Another important point deserving attention is that Husserl mentions in his notes on inter-subjectivity that an ego can devote his or her life to activities such as fine arts which also give the ego “a growing personal value.”97 In other words, cultural objects such as works of art can be loved in a form higher than instinctive, hedonistic desires. However, whether such cultural love can be properly treated as ethical values is still a problem even within the Western tradition: for example, a Platonist will argue that works of art, as fine forms, are only satisfying one’s bodily desires, which is actually the same as the Neo-Confucian position regarding art. Wang believes that the desire to enjoy beautiful flowers is hedonistic, rather than spiritual. Similarly, Cheng Yi believes that to attempt to compose literary works such as fine essays and poems also “harms the (Confucian) way,”98 which means that such activities are obstacles to moral effort. Wang himself agrees with one of his students who lists textual criticism (xungu 訓詁), as a branch of the traditional Chinese philology, with “the pursuit of success and profit.”99 He even criticizes Zhu Xi’s academic interest in ancient works including the Confucian classics.100 Both claims imply that for Wang, a purely intelligent curiosity is also something selfish and hedonistic. Lu Cheng

98 See Cheng and Cheng, Collected Works, 239.
99 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 49, 44/41.
100 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 100, 65/62-63; and “Replying to Xu Chengzhi II 答徐成之二,” in Complete Works, bk. 21, 890-891.
once asks Wang whether “the effort of concentrating on one (zhuyi 主一)” is to “concentrate on reading when one is reading.”101 Wang’s reply is that structurally, to concentrate on reading is the same as to concentrate on drinking or sex, so that they are all “chasing the things.”102 Since the primary heavenly principle is the principle of loving beings which are alive, cultural objects like works of art and academic knowledge should not be treated as ends of moral acts, for to be attracted by such objects also disturbs one’s attempts to benefit living beings, from the perspective of Wang.

Pure intelligent interests of scholars are selfish thoughts for Wang. Furthermore, reading can be incorrect or immoral, if one loves the reading with a positive value only because it can help one to pass the civil service exam, which can bring wealth and fame.103 This means that for Wang, even an intelligent act of the heart can be the means for some hedonistic ends, while according to Husserl, the act towards knowledge only belongs to the “higher,” spiritual realm. What is interesting is that Wang also suggests that if one prepares for the imperial exam because one has to support one’s family with the salary from the government, then this intentional act of liking the practice of writing essays is proper.104 Hence, while he believes that a purely academic interest towards knowledge is harmful to moral effort, to treat knowledge as a means might be moral, as long as the end of this means can be beneficial to other human beings who are the final ends.

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101 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 15, 24/25, and chap. 117, 76/74.
102 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 15, 24/25.
104 See Wang, “To the Bangying and Bangzheng Brothers II 致聞人邦英邦正二,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 189-190.
Though Wang’s understanding of the value of cultural objects is different from that of Husserl, to discuss which position is more acceptable is another problem beyond the scope of not only this chapter, but also this whole dissertation, for the general project of this work is to analyze Wang’s theory of moral effort by structurally studying his system based on the relation between heart, intentions, and things, with the help of Husserl’s method, rather than his concrete ethical theory.

§8 Conclusion

According to both Husserl and Wang, only emotional intentions following a priori moral laws can be moral. Husserl names such laws ethical axioms, and Wang refers to them with the Neo-Confucian term “heavenly principle,” which also means the ultimate, universal laws determining the natural patterns of this universe. For both thinkers, the universal law requires all ethical subjects to transcend their instinctive and hedonistic desires, and to treat other people as rational subjects for their emotional acts.

As a Neo-Confucian, Wang also argues that one should ethically love all natural things because the primary heavenly principle is “the spirit of life.” He suggests that one’s family members, especially one’s parents should be treated with values higher than strangers, even if all human beings are higher than both beasts and plants. For him, family love is the root and yields the intentional structure for other forms of love. The foundation of such ethical thoughts is the Confucian metaphysics of nature, which should be suspended by the phenomenological reduction, and can be doubted from multiple positions. Though Husserl’s argument that other people should be the ends is based on his phenomenological analyses of the structure of
consciousness which needs no metaphysical presuppositions, he does not seem to doubt many traditional positions regarding ethics.

The problem of whether some people should be more valuable than others does not seem to be a concern to Husserl. Also, for him, cultural objects as objects are not constituted by hedonistic acts, but are loved spiritually. Wang, like many other Neo-Confucian thinkers, claims that the aesthetic love towards works of art is hedonistic, and believes that even academic interests towards the Confucian classics can be ethically problematic. However, such different understandings of concrete ethical problems does not undermine the validity of the statement that Husserl’s theory of the relation between moral acts and ethical laws, as a part of his method, can shed a light on the doctrine of heavenly principles within Wang’s system.
Chapter 4: Wang Yangming’s Theory of the Original Substance of the Heart and
Husserl’s Phenomenology of Personal Egos

§1 Introduction

It was demonstrated in the last two chapters that for Wang, the most elemental
activity of moral effort is gewu, which is to rectify an improper, hedonistic act into a
proper one in accordance with heavenly principles. A difficulty arises: A follower of Zhu
Xi may argue that only through reading and studying Confucian classics can one
understand heavenly principles. Wang’s solution to this difficulty is his doctrine of
liangzhi, which literally means a “good knowing.” This doctrine is the core of Wang’s
later teaching.¹ Liang suggests that according to Wang, liangzhi is that which guides acts
and actions of studying, so that one cannot study and read properly without liangzhi.²
Wang himself also maintains that it is the lack of the effort of extending liangzhi that
separates one’s knowledge of moral principles and one’s ability to act morally.³ That is to
say, one who cannot use liangzhi properly will also not be able to use his or her
knowledge about Confucian classics. As many scholars have pointed out, the term
liangzhi is borrowed from Mencius.⁴ Mencius says:

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¹ See Qian Dehong, “Preface of Selected Works of Wang Yangming” in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 41,
1745 – 1746; “Chronology 2,” in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 35, 1411; and Huang, Philosophical Records, 181-182.
For modern research, see Chen Fu, “Wang Yangming’s Mysticism,” 85-88; Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 181-187; Cai,
Wang Yangming’s Philosophy, 16; Ching, To Acquire Wisdom, 46-47; and Liang, Wang Yangming’s Doctrine of the
Unity of Knowing and Acting, 27-28.
³ See Wang, Chuansi Lu, chap. 321, 267/250.
⁴ See Mou, From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan, 178-183; and Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 187f.
What people can use without learning is the good capacity (liangneng 良能). What they know without reflecting is liangzhi. There are no children who do not know loving their parents. When they grow up, none of them do not know respecting their elder brothers.\(^5\)

Mencius maintains that people originally know that they should morally respect their parents. This statement is similar to Wang’s famous doctrine that “what knows the good and the bad is liangzhi.”\(^6\) The problem is that the statement of Mencius himself is ambiguous. Similarly, Wang’s understanding of the term liangzhi can also be interpreted in several ways:

First, as was mentioned in Chapter 3, one understands whether a particular thing is good or not based on heavenly principles as universal ethical laws. Hence, Mencius’ term liangzhi can be interpreted as these principles themselves in the form of abstract propositions. According to Zhu Xi, one can grasp these propositions through studying everything in the world, which will inductively lead to heavenly principles as the universal truth. One of Wang’s reasons for rejecting the position of Zhu Xi is that Wang realizes that it is impossible for an individual to have knowledge about everything. Also, at the time of Wang, studying Confucian classics is a luxury for most ordinary people, while Wang believes that everyone has access to heavenly principles. Cai points out that what is suggested by Zhu Xi is an empirical process of learning, which is also described by Zhang Zai as “knowing through hearing and seeing.”\(^7\) Wang, on the other hand, asserts that “liangzhi does not come from hearing and seeing,” though “all seeing and

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5 人之所不學而能者，其良能也。所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。*Mencius*, 7A:15, my translation.


hearing are functions of liangzhi.” 8 That is to say, liangzhi is not the result of learning through experiences, but is the guidance of all actions of empirical learning. Hence, heavenly principles in the form of abstract propositions, as “productions” of the learning, are not the same as liangzhi within Wang’s theory.

Another understanding of liangzhi from Wang is that it is “a gold-testing stone and compass.” 9 A gold-testing stone is used to test whether a piece of gold is pure or not. The function of a compass is to point out the direction, for it “knows” the correct direction. This indicates that liangzhi correctly knows whether a particular act of an ego is proper or not. By knowing that an act is on the incorrect path, it can guide the heart to the correct direction. This function of liangzhi has been treated by many scholars as the primary meaning of the term. 10 The structure of the function of liangzhi as a self-observation is similar to the structure of reflective intentionality in Husserl’s phenomenology, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

What is more important for the project of this chapter is that liangzhi can also be understood as the capability of acting properly. Since Mencius lists the original, moral capability (liangneng) together with liangzhi, many commentators such as Zhu Xi read liangzhi as the original capability of loving and respecting. 11 With liangzhi, everyone is able to properly love those who should be loved, and hate those who should be hated. Wang also accepts this understanding of liangzhi. As he says:

8 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 168, 144/150, translation altered.
9 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 208, 188/194.
10 See Kern, Das Wichtigste im Leben, 124, and 241-242; Mou, From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan, 191; Cai, Wang Yangming’s Philosophy, 26-29; and Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 189.
11 See Zhu, Explanations and Collected Notes, 345.
The knowing (zhī 知) is the original substance of the heart. The heart is naturally able to know. It naturally knows to love when seeing parents, naturally knows to respect when seeing elder brothers, and naturally knows to feel compassion when seeing a child falling into a well.12

Note that the example of a child falling into a well is also an example used by Mencius himself, who states, “Now people who see a child falling into a well all have the heart of fearing and compassion.”13 Here “hearts of fearing and compassion” are obviously emotional acts which are coherent with heavenly principles. For Wang, liangzhi means the capability of properly showing compassion to the child, or the capability of having the proper will to save her. Though Wang’s own doctrines of liangzhi change in his later years, many of his close students such as Wang Ji and Zou Shouyi (or Zou Dongkuo 鄒守益/鄒東廓, 1491-1562) interpret his later notion of liangzhi as the original and innate capability of loving properly.14 For example, Wang Ji explains liangzhi and liangneng as “heavenly nature (xing 性).”15 Here the heavenly nature means the human nature, which, according to the Neo-Confucian tradition, is always good, for it is the same with heavenly principles.16 Wang Ji made this claim in 1554, over two decades after Wang Yangming’s death,17 so that he is expressing his understanding of Wang Yangming’s later teaching

12 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 8, 15/15, translation altered.
14 For more information about Wang Ji and Zou, see Huang, Philosophical Records, 225, 239, and 332.
16 See The Doctrine of the Mean, 1; and Zhu Xi’s comments on the first sentence of this classic, in Zhu Xi, Explanations and Collected Comments, 17. For English translation of both the classic and Zhu Xi’s notes, see Chan, Source Book, 98.
17 See Wang Ji, “Words on the Meeting at the Wenjiang Academy,” 1:3B.
here. Zou, who is believed by many modern scholars as the one who correctly grasps Wang’s doctrines, also says:

The doctrine of liangzhi is describing the exact spirit and clear consciousness of (the human) nature as (the embodiment) of the orders of heaven. It is what is called the bright order in The Book of Documents, and is what is called the bright virtue in The Book of Change. Compassion, shame, disliking, modesty, and (the knowing of) correct and incorrect are all uses of liangzhi.

Zou claims that human nature is identified with heavenly principles. Feelings which he describes as uses of liangzhi are proper emotional acts in particular cases. For both Zou and Wang Ji, therefore, liangzhi in Wang Yangming’s later teaching functions as the original good nature of human beings, which is also the capability of acting morally in particular cases. Kern mentions that liangzhi can refer to the original capability of acting properly, and the original substance of the heart, which he treats as two different meanings of the term. Though for Husserl moral capabilities are not original in the heart but are acquired by habits, his analysis of habit can still shed light on the way through which the original substance functions. In this chapter, I will argue that moral capabilities are contained in the heart as its original substance. The heart which has such capabilities is a concrete subject with its “specific style,” which will be analyzed later with the help of Husserl’s theory of personal ego.

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18 See Takehiko Okada, Wang Yangming and the Philosophy of the Late Ming Dynasty, Chinese trans. Wu Guang, Qian Ming, Tu Chengxian (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Publishing, 2000): 150ff; and Mou, From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan, 245.

19 This is also referring to The Doctrine of the Mean, 1.


21 See Kern, Das Wichtigste im Leben, 124, and 241-242.
In the following sections of this chapter, therefore, I will first study Husserl’s analysis of the structure of personal subjects, and then apply Husserl’s method to study Wang’s understanding of the heart which contains both liangzhi as its moral capabilities and selfish desires which “conceal” and “disable” liangzhi.

§2 The Personal Ego as a Concrete Subject with Its Particular Characteristics and as the Center of the Ethical World

This chapter studies the structure of original good capacities of the heart. The heart for Wang plays a similar or even the same role as the ego in the framework of Husserl. A problem that Wang must face is that this ego is the subjective pole for all intentional acts, including both moral and immoral ones. Emotional acts of a heart may be coherent with principles, but may also be immoral. As Zhu Xi points out:

The heart is a thing in motion, so it naturally has good and evil…. The original substance of the heart is good, but we cannot say that evil is completely not (in) the heart. Who, but the heart, can do what is evil?²²

For Zhu Xi, the heart as the ego is capable of both moral and immoral acts. Wang, however, insists that moral effort can simply rely on one’s own heart. This heart as the only foundation of moral effort is another form of the Husserlian ego. Many scholars have pointed out that though the ego for Husserl can be a pure ego as the subjective pole

of all acts, it can also serve as a concrete, particular person. As Husserl himself describes in the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*:

> Since, *by his own active generating*, the Ego constitutes himself as identical substrate of *Ego-properties*, he constitutes himself also as a “fixed and abiding” *personal* Ego... the Ego shows, in such alterations, an abiding style with a unity of identity throughout all of them: a “personal character.”

The personal ego with specific properties is also named by Husserl monad, which, according to Guenther, is the “highest layer” of a concrete ego. The personal properties of this ego are also its “characteristics.” In *Ideas II* written during the same period as *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl portrays such a person as someone with a “fixed style” in the form of “I can” or “I cannot.” In other words, characteristics of a person are also its *special capabilities* of acting with some specific styles. These capacities are not formal functions of the ego, but are tendencies or stimulations which will “push” the ego in specific directions of acting: if I have the capability of shooting a basketball correctly, I will tend to do it on the court. The specific situation of a game, as we can see later in this chapter, is a context that “motivates” me to use my capability of shooting. Note that both the personal ego and the pure ego are forms of the same ego, rather than two egos within a person: the personal ego with its characteristics also has the formal function as the subjective pole of all acts belonging to the same mental process.

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24 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 101/67, Husserl’s emphasis.


The personal ego has its surrounding world, which is the “world for it.” Husserl maintains that the world “existing for the personal ego” is not a mere objective world, but an inter-subjective and spiritual world. This world is “the field … of actual and possible practical work, work which, for its part, can have … ethical … aims.” Since the world is “set by the individual or social subjectivity,” it contains “the ways and means to the ends.” In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that for Husserl, to be an end and to be a means are both value-properties, and in Ideas II Husserl also states that the world of means and ends is the world of evaluation. The person with its special capabilities, therefore, is the center of an ethical world, which is constituted on the basis of the inter-subjective physical world. Such a value can be either a value of an end or a value-property of a means for an end. As Loidolt points out, this concrete ego plays a crucial role in Husserl’s later ethics. It was demonstrated in Chapter 3 that for Husserl, an act with an ethical meaning is an act which constitutes an object with a specific value-property. Within this process of constitution, a valued object is given to the ego of the emotional act. That is to say, it is the personal ego who is concretely valuing its objects, in this inter-subjective, spiritual world.

Husserl describes the personal ego with its characteristics also “as substrate of habitualities,” which “is determined by this abiding habitus or state.” An ego with its

27 Husserl, Ideas II, 197/207, my emphasis.
28 Husserl, Ideas II, 197/207, my emphasis.
31 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 100-101/66-67, Husserl’s emphasis.
habits “has its temporality and … participates in the system of forms that belongs to the all-inclusive temporality.”32 A person’s characteristics are habits of this person, which can also be treated as “personal properties” of the person as a concrete ego. One’s habitus must have a process of being constituted temporally.33 As is more explicitly maintained in Ideas II:

The course of the lived experience of pure consciousness is necessarily a process of development in which the pure Ego must assume the apperceptive form of the personal Ego.34

The personal ego is temporally “developed.” Hence, it is necessary to closely study the inner time consciousness, through which characteristics of a personal ego are habitually built.

§3 Personal Characteristics as the Result of Habits of the Ego’s Temporal Life

According to the phenomenology of inner time consciousness, the “now” is not an abstract point, but an extended sphere which includes both the moment “just passed” and the moment “to come.”35 These parts of the now-sphere are named by Husserl as retention and protention. For example, when I am listening to the word “Plato,” the first

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32 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 108/74-75.
34 Husserl, Ideas II, 251/263.
syllable must be kept in retention as a member of the now-sphere, when the second one is presented in the “primary current.” However, the retention is not the only form of the past for Husserl. The content grasped in the phase of retention does not “stop” there. It continues to flow “further and further away” in the backward direction until it finally “leaves” the now-sphere and enters the realm of the “remote retention.”

The remote past, however, is not “meaningless” for the ego. On the other hand, habits of a personal ego are based on experiences in the remote past. But first it is necessary to look at Husserl’s own description of the remote past itself:

A progressive diminution of affective force is given with this which, when the retention has become a completely empty presentation, ultimately no longer has any of its own hold on what is intuitive…. the retentional modification leads to an empty identity that has lost its particular differentiation, and even that identity cannot last; the retentional synthetic line loses itself in the nil that is common to them all, namely, the lack of differentiation.

In this quotation, Husserl describes acts towards the past as “empty.” The syllable grasped in retention is “emptier” than the second syllable in the “primary intuition,” though what is in retention is still in the “fresh now-sphere.” The former is still in the now-sphere, not only because of its “nearness,” but also because of the fact that it still holds its fresh differentiations. The “Pla” can be clearly distinguished from the “to,” and can hold its identification as an individual syllable. The consciousness goes on, through which not only the syllables, but the word “Plato” as a whole also becomes emptier and emptier, though it can still be identified as one word, and be differentiated from words following it. I may be not paying active attention to the content of the word that was said

37 Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis, 174/223, my emphasis.
a moment ago, but the word as an “empty individual” is still emptily kept in my consciousness. Finally, both syllables of the word and the mere identification of the word itself will fuse together into the “zero,” the “nil.” An experience will fall into the situation in which all past experiences fuse together as nothing but the “past.” Experiences are “pushed further and further” into the past by new experiences, which makes them “paler and paler.” However, even those experiences which have been pushed into this state of lacking differences do not disappear. They are stored and kept in the ego itself:

What does this nil mean? It is the constant reservoir of objects that have achieved living institution in the process of the living present. In it, they are tucked away from the ego, but quite at its disposal…. The constituted object, the identical element, is no longer constitutively vivacious; thus, it is also no longer affectively vivacious, but the sense is still implicitly there in a “dead” shape; it is only without streaming life.38

What is not constituted by the ego now is still “stored” by the ego at its disposal, so that it is always available to be “used” by the ego. Again, here what is “stored” is not actively re-built, but is still a part of the personal ego, rather than being forgotten. Husserl also describes the distant memory as being “sedimented” in the ego as a person.39 According to the quotation above, what remains in the ego in a dead form is the “sense” of the past object. It was shown in the second chapter that this term for Husserl has two meanings: it either refers to sensuous data as materials of sense-bestowal, or to the essence or meaning bestowed. It is obvious that the color and shape of the apple that I saw yesterday are not available for me now. Hence, what can be used by me is not the sensuous data, but the


essence or meaning of an object. In the current moment, I can use the same essence or meaning that I used to constitute an object in the past, and this essence is what is “left to me by the object.” This reading of the term “sense” can be supported by the following paragraph from *Ideas II*:

> Obviously, belief, and any position-taking, is an event in the stream of consciousness and therefore is subject to the first law, that of “habit.” Having once believed M, with this sense and in a certain mode of representation, there then exists the associative tendency to believe M again in a new case.\(^{40}\)

In the paragraph in *Ideas II* before this paragraph, Husserl is talking about “existential positings.”\(^{41}\) This implies that a “position-taking” is an act through which an object is given with a sense of being real, which is also supported by Husserl’s claim several lines later that a past “content of sensation” which was “posited objectively as A” by me will motivate me to treat A’ as “a similar content of sensation.”\(^{42}\) It is the sense of M or A which guides my new experiences. Using Husserl’s term, this sense that “stands out” of the current now-sphere is “awakened” when it is used.\(^{43}\) For example, past experiences of apples which are now in the “dead past” of an ego are sedimented as one sense, namely, the essence of apple. Lampert also points out that according to *Logical Investigations*, universals which “ground” individual acts “are also the results of the backward referring interpretative apprehension of individual objects.”\(^{44}\) These individual experiences which

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\(^{40}\) Husserl, *Ideas II*, 223/235, my emphasis.


“produce” the universals are past experiences that have “fallen” into the zero of differentiations. I will argue later in this chapter that what is stored as a sediment of the personal ego can also be actively “remembered” as an object again, but when it is working as a habit, it is only passively influencing the ego’s “style of living.” This essence belonging to the person-ego can be used to constitute a new object of apple.

Now the problem is, how is the stored sense utilized again by the ego? According to Husserl, the “fundamental condition” for the awakening of a sedimented sense is “the ‘similarity’ of contrasting discrete matters, and everything belonging to it.”⁴⁵ That is to say, a sedimented sense is awakened by similar hyletic materials such as similar colors, similar shapes, similar sounds, etc. In Ideas II, Husserl argues that a sediment is awakened in the form of being “motivated,” and that “the entire realm of associations and habits fits in here.”⁴⁶ At the same time, “motivation is the lawfulness of the life of the spirit.”⁴⁷ In the next section, I will argue that for Husserl, a personal ego can have habits of following ethical laws, which enable it to act morally. But even a motivated act is not moral, it is still not random: that is to say, for Husserl, every noesis with a motivation has a fixed “style,” which is based on the ego’s habits. An ego who has such and such habits will tend to act regularly in some specific ways, when the same habits are motivated:

Once a connection is formed in a stream of consciousness, there then exists in this stream the tendency for a newly emerging connection, similar to a portion

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⁴⁵ Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis, 179/229, my emphasis.


⁴⁷ Husserl, Ideas II, 220/231, Husserl’s emphasis.
of the earlier one, to continue in the direction of the similarity and to strive to complete itself in a total nexus similar to the previous total nexus.48

Based on his or her own habits, a person will tend to treat a new object as something similar to those that he or she experienced in the past. One who perceived apples in the past will tend to treat similar objects in the now-sphere also as apples. It is the similarity between the now and the past that “motivates” the person to use his or her habits sleeping in the distant past.49 This motivation is based on the past connection through being “in the unity of the conscious stream, characterized as time-consciousness (originary consciousness) in act.”50 Both the new circumstance and sediments of past experiences belong to the stream of a united consciousness, so that the former can motivate the latter, according to which the ego will act “in a similar style.” As Mohanty correctly points out, this process of being motivated often contains a protention.51 It means that “I expect the initial part to be followed by a similar part … and I actually find it.”52 When I am looking at the front face of a building, I am expecting the back side of this object to be also a part of a building but not a face of a mountain. Note that the back side of this building in the now-sphere is expected as similar to back sides of buildings in the past, but not as similar to the front side of this current building. I have this expectation because based on my own habits, I have already been motivated to constitute this object as a whole as a building.

Husserl says:

48 Husserl, Ideas II, 223/234, my emphasis.
49 See also Rodemeyer, Intersubjective Temporality, 93.
50 Husserl, Ideas II, 222/233-234.
51 See Mohanty, Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years, 179; and Rodemeyer, Intersubjective Temporality, 93-94.
52 Husserl, Ideas II, 222/233-234.
If I have once apprehended a content of sensation and have posited it objectively as A, then I may again, on another occasion, apprehend and posit as A’ a similar content of sensation (along with its concomitant similar relations and circumstances). And in that case we again have in the stream forms of processes.53

The “similar contents” that make me constitute an object similar to past ones are also similar to past hyletic materials on which I bestowed the sedimented sense in the past. Shape-data and color-data which are similar to past contents motivate me to constitute an apple similar to past apples. Since every givenness of an external object is adumbrated, the constitution of an object with a sedimented sense does not need all possible data with which I can constitute it. Even when taste-data and smell-data are not available in the hyletic flow, color-data and shape-data are already sufficient to awaken the essence of apple stored as a sedimentation of mine. But since with the color-data and shape-data, I have already constituted a “complete” apple, I also suppose that this object has the taste and smell of an apple, though at this moment I do not have the correlated data to build such noematic properties. This supposition is that which yields me the protention as a part of the process of association: by constituting an apple, I also have the protention that when I eat it, I will taste its sweetness. This protention is motivated, and can be fulfilled by the sweet taste that I can have in the future. If the taste of it turns out to be the taste of a peach, then the original motivated protention is disappointed.

According to Husserl, the circumstance also plays a role in the process of awakening, for the constitution of an object is always accompanied by its background. For example, in the past, I saw many images on silver screens which were surrounded by

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screens themselves and dark environments. Such sediments of the past will be motivated when a building appears on a silver screen surrounded by the darkness. I am motivated to treat this building as an image, even if vision-data of this building are as vivid and strong as those data with which I can constitute a real building. This also sheds a light on Husserl’s statement that “the Object stimulates or motivates the subject,”54 while it was stated in the previous paragraph that the ego is stimulated by hyletic data, rather than objects. Now that the background is taken into consideration, the problem can be clarified: though objects in the background do not receive active attention from the ego, they are co-objects on the noematic side, rather than data on the noetic side. In other words, besides the noetic data, all objects in the horizon can also motivate the ego to constitute an object similar to a past one.

§4 An Awakened Past as Something Different from the Reproduced Past

The distant past which has fallen into a state without differences can be awakened so that the ego can constitute an object similar to a past one. Thus, the sedimented past is “brought back” to the sphere of now in the form of being motivated. Note that this form of bringing back the distant past should not be confused with recollection, which is an active re-constitution of objects in the past.55 Husserl points out in his lecture on inner time consciousness that I can reproduce a piece of melody that I heard in the past. In this process, “I re-present to myself the measure I have just heard and to which my attention

54 Husserl, Ideas II, 219/231, Husserl’s emphasis.
is still directed by inwardly producing it once more.”56 Though Husserl says that the reproduced melody is from the sphere of retention, the retention and the reproducing as acts are radically distinguished from each other. The retention, which is often described as the tail of the now-sphere like the tail of a comet, is still a part of the now-sphere.57 When I am listening to some notes of a melody, notes in the retention are passively presented in my consciousness.

The melody reproduced, however, is the target of the attention. As Husserl asserts, when I am reproducing a theater in the memory, “[i]t is the theater itself that hovers before me, not a mere image.”58 Brough points out that for Husserl, what is remembered is not a signifier referring to the past theater as the signified, but the “theater in the past” itself. Husserl’s theory of recollection is not an “image theory.”59 I can recollect or reproduce a melody that I heard yesterday. This melody which “appears” is given primarily in itself, though I also constitute it with a sense that it is not actually existing in the external world.60 When I recollect a melody, what is presented to me is the melody itself, not its sign, though this “melody itself” does not have its actual “body of sounds.” This melody, as the active object of my attentive power, is in the now-sphere: the first tone imagined appears and then fades away, pertaining to the now-sphere as the tail of a comet.61 The only difference is that yesterday I constituted the melody with a sense of

56 Husserl, On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 46/47-48, my emphasis.
57 See Rodemeyer, Intersubjective Temporality, 82-83.
58 Husserl, On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 184/190.
59 See Brough, “Husserl on Memory,” 47-52.
60 See Husserl, On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 40-42/42-43.
“actually existing now,” while today, I constitute it with the sense of “as if,” correlated with an act of “quasi-hearing.” 62 The reproducing is a noesis on a higher layer, which adds a noematic property that “it is as if it is here but actually it is not” to the “mere theater” or the “mere melody.”

Since the reproducing is essentially different from retention, it is not necessary for the object reproduced to be something in the “near past.” Also, as Rodemeyer correctly points out, what is recollected is not necessarily something in the distant past either. 63 What differentiates retention from the recollection is the “target” of the attentive power of acts, not the “distance” between the object and the now-sphere. If my attention is on contents in the retention, then such contents are re-constituted. However, when I am motivated to constitute an object similar to a past one, what I am constituting is a “new object,” though in this process of sense-bestowal what is bestowed is a sediment of my ego. When being awakened, the past is not actively grasped as a complete object, but only offers a necessary “tool” for me to constitute my object now. Husserl says, “In most cases… the motivation is indeed actually present in consciousness, but it does not stand out; it is unnoticed or unnoticeable.” 64 The motivation need not be noticed, for it is a function of the passive synthesis which is “underlying” every active noesis:

In any case, anything built by activity necessarily presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something beforehand; and, when we trace anything built actively, we run into constitution by passive generation. The “ready-made” object that confronts us in the life as an existent mere physical thing… is

62 See Husserl, On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 36/38. See also Mohanty, Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years, 180-181; and Brough, “Husserl on Memory,” 52-54.

63 See Rodemeyer, Intersubjective Temporality, 95.

64 Husserl, Ideas II, 222-223/234, my emphasis.
given, with the originality of the “it itself,” in the synthesis of a passive experience.65

Examples of “mere physical things” given by Husserl are things such as tables, whose constitutions require associations or motivations of sediments, namely senses like the sense of table. In the process of association, a sediment as the capability of the ego is used passively, without being consciously noticed.66 It is similar to the fact that when shooting a basketball, the object of the player’s attention is on the basket, rather than on the skill of shooting. Similarly, when speaking, grammars are used by me as my capacities. I need not “pay attention to” grammatical principles in such cases: my attentive power is on the contents of my speech.67 I can actively know that I have such and such habits, but this does not mean that in order to use it, I have to perceive my habit in this way.

The personal ego as the concrete form of the ego, therefore, is the collection of its habits which can passively influence its new acts. It is motivated by new objects which are similar to past objects. Husserl points out that this influence upon the ego from its past should not be considered as the cause of the ego’s act, for the nexus between cause and effect is only a relation between external objects, while the personal tendencies only belong to the inner sphere of the person.68 In other words, the causal relation is a noematic relation, while tendencies of an ego only influence its acts noetically. The

65 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 112/78.
66 See also Rodemeyer, Intersubjective Temporality, 86; and 105-107.
possibility that the person can look at the sedimented past is crucial for Husserl, because it enables him to explain how an ego can change its habits or tendencies. Details of this topic will be unfolded in the next chapter. Now, the more urgent task is to look at the ethical role of the person as the collection of habits.

§5 Ethical Tendencies of a Person as Tendencies that Guide Its Emotional Acts

According to the sedimented past, the ego constitutes objects similar to past objects. In *Ideas II*, Husserl argues that “spiritual” acts on the higher noetic layer are all stimulated by motivations as the lawfulness of life:

All life of the spirit is permeated by the “blind” operation of associations, drives, feelings, which are stimuli for drives and determining grounds for drives, tendencies which emerge in obscurity, etc., all of which determine the subsequent course of consciousness according to “blind” rules. To these laws correspond habitual modes of behavior…

Spiritual acts of consciousness which involve protention must be determined by habits as tendencies of the person. Among these acts “there are rational motivations for position-taking as regards feeling and willing.” For Husserl, an act with an ethical meaning is an act of feeling, and the willing is nothing but a feeling towards an object in the future. Such emotional acts constitute objects with value-properties, which means that constitution of valued objects must also follow one’s own tendencies. Husserl says, “I experience the stimulus of the beautiful, and I am motivated to turn to it, to pay attention

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69 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 277/289, Husserl’s emphasis.
70 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 223/235, my emphasis.
to it, to take pleasure in regarding it.”71 The act of liking a beautiful thing is stimulated by
the beautiful object itself, which is based on the presentation of the object. Note that here
Husserl only says that when a person loves a beautiful thing, his or her habits of loving
the beautiful are motivated, but not that beautiful objects are beautiful because of these
habits. Even though there are objectively beautiful things according to aesthetical laws,
Husserl seems to believe that for an individual subject, to be able to love such objective
beauties is still based on one’s habits of loving them. Though a beautiful object is
aesthetically constituted, the structure of its act is the same as the structure of acts which
constitute objects with ethical values. It is the motivated emotional act, but not the
presentation, which values a presented object as beautiful. As Mohanty recognizes, “The
identical object constituted passively may, by itself, arouse a feeling” which “may be
categorized as pleasant or as unpleasant.”72 Note that for Husserl, tendencies that can
influence emotional acts can be either moral or immoral. For him, ethical axioms “are
laws of the validity of the motivation.”73 This implies that moral tendencies can make
emotional acts coherent with axioms.

For Husserl, feeling and willing which constitute objects with values are also based
on motivated habits of the ego.74 Therefore, Husserl believes that there are “moral
habits” and “immoral habits”:

Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive
establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by
such a value-motive (and perhaps by value-motives in general) and to resist

71 Husserl, Ideas II, 217/229, my emphasis.
72 Mohanty, Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years, 195.
73 Husserl, Ideas II, 268/280, Husserl’s emphasis.
74 See also Mohanty, Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years, 196-197.
these drives. Here habit and free motivation intertwine. Now, if I act freely, then I am indeed obeying habit too, but I am free insofar as it is the motive, the reason, that I am obeying in a free decision.\textsuperscript{75}

An act based on the “value-motive” can be free, when the ego freely chooses whether the motive is followed or not. This implies that what is resisted by such a motive, namely the drive, is irrational. In Chapter 3 it was demonstrated that for Husserl, an ethical act should treat other subjects as teloses. He also recognizes that another person as another ego is also “subject to the laws of motivation.”\textsuperscript{76} Since others are constituted as other personal egos through the process of empathy, the ego who constitutes them should also be a personal ego. Thus, ethical principles according to which one treats others as ends also belong to one as a person. As many studies have pointed out, Husserl even argues that based on the empathy of a person, the whole community itself can be constituted as a person.\textsuperscript{77} The community is not only a collection of individual subjects, but is also an individual person itself.\textsuperscript{78} This means that the community itself, be it a family, a state or even the whole human race, should also be ethically treated as an end. How this theory can avoid falling into a dangerous form of nationalism such as Nazism is surely not only crucial for ethics but also important for political philosophy. A close study of this problem, however, is beyond the limited scope of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{75} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 255/267-268, Husserl’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{76} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 229/240. See also Loidolt, “A Phenomenological Ethics of the Absolute Ought,” 22-23.


\textsuperscript{78} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 196/206.
According to Husserl, a personal ego may also have *instinctive* tendencies.\(^{79}\) This reminds us of his description of the hedonistic feelings mentioned in Chapter 3. In *Ideas II*, Husserl also mentions that if one desires to drink because one is thirsty, then one’s desire is also motivated, which “has nothing to do with his person: it is something universally human.”\(^{80}\) Here what is personal should be free, which implies that “something universally human” opposed to what is personal is unfree. Hence, what is universally human seems to be the universal nature of human beings as animals, which is the foundation of hedonistic pleasure and pain, according to Husserl’s ethical position which is more traditional. Husserl argues that in such cases, the ego is passively stimulated, without realizing that he or she has such and such motivations. The tendency which can be hedonistically motivated is also a habit. As Husserl says, “the subject *that is used to being pleased by such and such matters*, that habitually desires this or that, goes to eat when the time comes, etc.”\(^{81}\) One has the hedonistic desire towards water, for one is used to be pleased by it. I love the dish now because it pleased me in the past. This means that the presented dish which can offer bodily pleasure now motivates me so that the sedimented sense of a tasty dish is awakened. Surely the circumstance also works for both hedonistic and ethical feelings, for the same person can be respectable in one place but not in another. Note that this does not mean that to drink water to ease my thirst is always hedonistic, for one’s “attitude” towards the habit of drinking water should also be taken into consideration, as will be shown soon.

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\(^{81}\) Husserl, *Ideas II*, 256/269.
Like hedonistic acts, acts which constitute others as ethical ends are also influenced by habits. Husserl claims that there are “the demands of morality, of custom, of tradition, of the spiritual milieu.”\textsuperscript{82} For example, he mentions that “the servant meets his master, and because he acknowledges him as master, he greets him with deference.”\textsuperscript{83} Obviously, not all masters are respectable, which means that the habit of respecting all masters may not be a truly moral tendency. But Husserl’s servant-master example can still shed a light on the temporal structure of an act which respects someone who is truly respectable.

Suppose that I see one of my professors whom I respect. I respected her in the past because she is respectable for herself, but I can immediately grasp her as respectable now without actively proving to myself that she is a good person. I can do this because when she is presented, my tendency of respecting her as a sediment in me is motivated. Husserl argues that even a lonely person living on Mars should treat lifeless objects appearing in one’s surrounding world as “objects for the associated persons and for higher personal unities… which every ‘companion’ could find in his own.”\textsuperscript{84} If a lonely person is to treat food as a means for herself as the telos, she must be used to treat other subjects in her imagination also as other subjects, so that a moral tendency can be constituted in her, even if she has never met any real others. For Husserl, therefore, the constitution of an ethical person who has personal capabilities for ethical acts is always an inter-subjective process:

The development of a person is determined by the influence of others, by the influence of their thoughts, their feelings … their commandments. This influence determines personal development, whether or not the person himself

\textsuperscript{82} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 269/281, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{83} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 230/241.
\textsuperscript{84} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 196/206, my emphasis.
subsequently realizes it, remembers it, or is capable of determining the degree of the influence and its character.85

In the past, one might act according to influences from other people. In such cases external influences, as Mohanty suggests, are “giving orders” to the individual person, either “loudly” or silently.”86 Donohoe suggests that the community as a higher order may teach individuals to treat the “common good” as their telos.87 However, it seems that inter-subjective influences can be either moral or hedonistic: as Plato suggests, a citizen may be habitually corrupted by a corrupted city, or be raised into a virtuous one by an ideal community. That is to say, other people’s influences can guide my current acts only by being past experiences sedimented in my person.

For Husserl, both moral and immoral tendencies are temporally sedimented in the person. On the contrary, in later sections, it will be argued that for Wang, only immoral characteristics of a heart are habitually built, while moral capabilities of this heart are originally in the heart.

§6 Ethical Feelings as the Free Following of Tendencies

In the last section, it was mentioned that though a hedonistic act can arise from the habit of drinking for the sake of thirst, not all acts based on this habit are hedonistic.

85 Husserl, Ideas II, 269/281, my emphasis.
86 See Mohanty, Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years, 55.
87 See Donohoe, Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity, 137-138.
According to Husserl, an act is unfree, not only because it follows a habit which is based on biological human nature, but also because the ego follows this habit *passively*:

> What comes from others and is “taken over” by me, and is more external or less so, can be characterized as issuing from the other subject, first of all as a tendency proceeding from him and addressed to me, as a *demand*, to which I perhaps yield *passively*, perhaps reluctantly, but by which I am still *overpowered*.88

The life of an ego as the ethical person is always an inter-subjective one, so that habits sedimented in it as its habits may also come from others as other subjects appearing from the inter-subjective world. The ego can be “passively overpowered” by the habits, which means that this ego follows them without actively thinking about whether the habits should be followed or not. One allows oneself to be pushed by these habits, without even realizing that he or she is simply following the habits. On the contrary, Husserl maintains that in order to act morally, one not only should follow these moral demands but should also follow them *freely*:

> They can be followed quite passively, or one can also actively take a position with regard to them and make a free *decision* in favor of them. Therefore the autonomy of reason, the “freedom” of the personal subject, consists in the fact that I do not yield passively to the influence of others but instead *decide* for myself. Or again, it consists in this, that I do not let myself be “drawn” by any other inclinations and drives but instead act freely and do so in the mode of reason.89

For Husserl, a decision is a conscious choice between possibilities that are consciously recognized. That is to say, one who makes a free decision is one who realizes that he or

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88 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 269/281, my emphasis.
89 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 269/282, my emphasis.
she has a specific habitual tendency, and can freely choose whether to follow this habit or not. An active, conscious decision of an ego does not exclude habits from the ego, but deals with them with his or her own free decision. A phenomenological habit is not a Pavlovian fact of the body belonging to the causal nexus which can only work on the level of unconsciousness. Mohanty suggests that when acting freely, I must first realize that I have the habit of drinking.\footnote{See Mohanty, \textit{Edmund Husserl’s Freiburg Years}, 53-57} If I can, as Donohoe describes, think whether I should follow a stimulation of drinking “critically”, then I am free: if I am a soldier who has to hide in order to save a city, then I shall refuse the will of drinking, motivated by the thirst as an object.\footnote{Donohoe, \textit{Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity}, 156.} Husserl says that “it is only between practical possibilities that I can ‘decide’…. I cannot will anything that I do not have consciously in view.”\footnote{Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 258/270.} A decision is founded on the recognition of alternate possibilities, which is different from the “involuntary” action of reaching for the cigar due to the desire of smoking. The tendency of smoking is not consciously recognized but only used unconsciously. If I clearly recognize that I want to smoke because \textit{I can} value the cigar as a desirable object and decide to follow this possibility, then my desire is freely followed. It is true that if there is a pregnant woman in the same room, to smoke is ethically problematic. Hence, if I want my act to be moral, I not only need consciously recognize that I can smoke, but should also freely decide not to smoke, in this case. Note that Husserl does not seem to realize the possibility that someone can freely choose to follow an immoral tendency. For example, Macbeth consciously realizes that his ambition is ethically problematic, but he...
still embraces it. Whether Macbeth’s decision has a phenomenological foundation is obviously an important question. However, for the project of this chapter, it is already sufficient to point out that according to Husserl, a moral act must be free, though he does not explicitly study whether free acts can be immoral or not.

A free act described by Husserl can be treated as what Sokolowski names the chosen. The X as the chosen, according to Sokolowski, must be chosen from X and Y as two possible options. Sokolowski argues that what is chosen must be voluntary, though not all those which are voluntary are chosen: a voluntary act is an act that an ego itself chooses to do. That is to say, when the ego clearly chose to do something, its act is voluntary. Loidolt describes such conscious following as “reacting to the absolute ought as the call.” This reminds us of Heidegger’s description of the conscience which calls Dasein back to its own ontological responsibility. According to Loidolt’s interpretation, Husserl is arguing that when an ego wants to do something consciously, it is making its own choice. Loidolt’s observation is important here, for liangzhi is often used to translate the English word “conscience” and the German word “Gewissen.” Therefore, in the second half of this chapter, Husserl’s theory of the free following of one’s own moral tendencies of the person will shed a light on Wang’s theory of liangzhi.

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97 For example, Chen Jiaying 陳嘉映 and Wang Qingjie 王慶節, in their Chinese translation of Sein und Zeit, translate Heidegger’s “Gewissen” as liangzhi.
Husserl claims that I cannot only value and desire in special ways, but can also “imagine” that I can value and desire as such.\textsuperscript{98} It is through such imagination that the ego realizes that there are such and such tendencies:

By means of phantasizing, presentifications of possible situations, in which I “reflect” on what kind of sensuous or spiritual stimuli would affect me, what power they would have, how I would therefore decide in such a case, in which direction the pull would be greater, which power would prevail, assuming the situation remains the same.\textsuperscript{99}

In the imagination, I can see in special situations, which habitual stimulations are stronger, and which are weaker. I can also see that some tendencies will become stronger or weaker. This imagination through which I can see “powers” of different tendencies is also the way through which I can actively change some of my tendencies. It was demonstrated in Chapter 3 that for Husserl, ethical axioms require the ego to love other subjects as ends. The good personality is, therefore, the collection of tendencies to grasp other free subjects as ends, and the one who can freely follow these tendencies. If my immoral tendencies of treating others as means are made weaker and moral ones become stronger, I myself as the person can also become ethically better. It is, therefore, a theory that can be used to describe the process of moral effort, which will be studied more carefully in the next chapter. Note that both moral and immoral tendencies are temporally sedimented according to Husserl, which, as will be shown shortly, is different from Wang’s understanding of the heart’s moral capabilities.

\textsuperscript{98} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 264/276.

\textsuperscript{99} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 267/279.
§7 The Heart as the “Container” of Personal Tendencies

According to Husserl, in order to freely follow my personal properties, I have to consciously realize my own capabilities, which, according to Husserl, also enables me to change my own personal characteristics. If immoral characteristics can be eliminated and moral ones can be added, then a personal ego will be able to become moral.

Husserl’s study on this problem is based on his analysis of reflective intentionality, which will shed a light on liangzhi as a form of self-observation in the next chapter. The task of this chapter, however, is to study liangzhi as the original substance of the heart, based on Husserl’s theory of the personal ego. At the beginning of this chapter, it was mentioned that according to Zhu Xi, the heart is the subject of both moral and immoral acts. The heart described by Zhu Xi as such, however, is a pure ego. On the other hand, Wang argues that “sources” of emotional acts with different ethical meanings are contents of the heart, rather than the formal function of it:

I said, “The love of sex, wealth, and fame is of course selfish desire. But why are idle and sundry thoughts also regarded as selfish desires?” The Teacher said, “In the final analysis they grow from such roots of the love of sex, wealth, fame, etc. You will see if you get at the root. You surely know in your heart that you have no thought of being a robber. Why? Because at first, you do not have such a heart. If you eliminate the heart of loving sex, wealth, fame, and so forth, just as you have no heart of being a robber, there will be the original substance of the heart. What idle thoughts can there be?”

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100 See Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 100-101/66-67.
101 Wang, Chuanshi Lu, chap. 42, 52/49, translation altered, and my emphasis.
In the contexts of the time of Wang, robbers were bandits who gathered in hills and robbed people, especially farmers. But here what Wang is dealing with is not the action of robbing and killing, but the thought of being a robber, which is the will to do so. I translate the sentence “ru yuan wu shi xin 汝元無是心” literally as “at first you do not have such a heart” rather than following Chan’s choice to translate xin (心 heart) in this sentence as “thought.” This xin is the root of the silü 思慮 of being a robber, correctly translated by Chan as “the thought of being a robber.” Within Wang’s framework, the thought is equivalent to the intention, which is an intentional act. Wang argues that thoughts of being a robber will continually grow from “the heart of being a robber” until the “heart” is eliminated. This implies that the “heart” as the root is not another thought. Different kinds of thoughts grow from different “hearts.” Thoughts of loving sex arise from the heart of loving sex, and thoughts of loving fame arise from the heart of loving fame, etc. Wang also mentions that after all such immoral hearts are eliminated, what is left is the original substance of the heart as the “moral heart.” In this state, no “idle thoughts” as immoral acts will arise. It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that the heart, as the subject of a waking consciousness, must always have intentional acts. Hence, the heart in the form of its original substance can be considered as the root for moral acts. 102

In Chapter 1, it was also demonstrated that for Wang, the heart functions as the subjective pole for all acts of the same person. However, different kinds of acts have different roots, which he also names different “hearts.” Since a person may have both moral and immoral acts, one possible interpretation of this theory is that within this

102 See also Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 84-85.
person, there are two hearts as two different roots. There seems to be an obvious contradiction. Xu Ai also realizes this problem, which he raises to Wang in the following paragraph:

I said, “‘The heart of the way is always the master of the body, and the human heart always obeys the heart of the way.’ When examined in the light of your teaching of refinement and singleness of heart, these words seem to be problematic.” The Teacher said, “Right. There is only one heart. Before it is mixed with selfish human desires, it is called the heart of the way, and after it is mixed with artificial human desires, it is called the human heart. When the human heart gets its correctness, it is the heart of the way, and when the heart of the way loses its correctness, it is the human heart. There were not two hearts to start with.104

According to a later addition to The Book of Documents which was considered to be original by Neo-Confucians, the human heart is always “in danger” and the heart of the way is “subtle.”105 According to Cheng Yi, this means that the human heart is the name of selfish desires and the heart of the way is the name of heavenly principles.106 Wang follows Cheng Yi’s reading of these two terms but argues that desires and principles both belong to the same heart, rather than being two different hearts. The heart of the way and the human heart are descriptions of the same subject, but not names for two different entities. As was mentioned above, for Husserl, a particular ego is both a concrete personal ego and a pure ego. Similarly, since both the heart of selfish desires and the heart of heavenly principles are descriptions of the same heart, different roots of acts must also belong to the same heart as the same ego. The heart of being a robber and the

103 See Zhu, Explanation and Collected Notes, 14.
104 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 10, 17/16-17, translation altered and my emphasis.
heart of helping other ethical subjects are, therefore, contents of this same heart, which make the same heart a concrete personal ego. Different roots of acts are nothing else but characteristics of the heart as a person.

§8 Selfish Desires Are Also Personal Properties of the Heart

Wang insists that “heavenly principles and (selfish) human desires cannot stand together.”107 That is to say, when the heart acts according to principles, there is no room for selfish desires. This relation between the original substance and selfish desires is also explained by Wang with a metaphor through which selfish desires are described as “roots of diseases”:

(I asked,) “… However, before the feelings are aroused, the heart is not yet attached to the love of sex, wealth, fame, and so forth. How can we know that it is unbalanced?” (The Teacher said), “Although there is not yet any attachment, nevertheless in one’s everyday life one’s hearts of loving sex, wealth and fame are at first not absent … take a person sick with intermittent fever. Although at times the illness does not appear, so long as the root of the disease has not been eliminated, the person cannot be said to be free from the disease.”108

The love of sex, wealth and fame, as hedonistic intentions, are symptoms arising from selfish desires as the diseases. Wang emphasizes that when there are no symptoms, the root of the disease may still remain in the heart as the “patient,” based on which new symptoms will continue to arise, even if earlier ones are eliminated.109 If the selfish root

107 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 10, 17/17, translation altered.
109 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 167, 143/149.
of disease is not removed from the heart, selfish acts “grow in the west when being destroyed in the east.”¹¹⁰ One disease can be the origin of multiple symptoms in multiple cases, until the patient is completely cured. Wang claims that “[if] an iota (of selfish desires) remains, many evils will come one leading the other.”¹¹¹ The term “evil” here obviously refers to evil deeds. Hence, even the “smallest amount” of selfish desires will lead to selfish, hedonistic acts of loving sex, wealth and fame.

Selfish desires as roots of diseases in the heart can lie there as the potentiality for immoral acts. These selfish desires in the heart function similarly to immoral tendencies of Husserl, for a tendency is still stored in the ego before it is awakened. In the next section, I will show that selfish desires can be “awakened” because they are “already there” as habits of a person. Such immoral acts can be “given to” a person through influences from other people. According to Husserl, an ego acts according to a tendency when it is motivated by the object or by the circumstances. Likewise, for Wang, the love for sex, wealth, fame, etc., are “aroused” objectively when sex, wealth and fame are presented as things. A patient with diabetes may not feel pain in most cases, but the disease will be aroused when he eats too much sugar. Like the sugar, objects providing hedonistic pleasure also motivate the heart to act according to selfish desires as immoral tendencies:

Meng Yüan has the disease of regarding himself as always right and of loving fame. The Teacher has admonished him many times. One day just after such an admonition, a friend of his told the Teacher of his recent efforts and asked for correction. Standing by the side of the Teacher, Yüan said, “What he has found is my old stuff.” The Teacher said, “Your disease comes up again.” Yüan’s face

¹¹¹ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 60, 47/44.
paled and he was about to argue. The Teacher said, “Your disease comes up again.”

What is crucial in this quotation is that according to Wang, Meng Yüan’s disease comes up when he is confronted with other people’s words. These communications between people, as human affairs, are intentional objects within Wang’s framework as targets of intentions. The disease of Meng Yüan is, therefore, motivated by external things. Wang’s critique, as a noema, arouses Meng Yüan’s disease of loving fame as a personal tendency, so that Meng Yüan emotionally treats this critique as something with a negative value.

For Wang, selfish desires are negative, immoral tendencies or characteristics of the heart. They are “sleeping” when they are not motivated, but always have the potential to push the heart towards immoral acts. Since immoral acts as emotional ones are on a higher noetic layer, the same mere object can motivate different emotional tendencies. For example, Wang says that when reading Confucian classics, “if it does not make sense to the heart… then one will have all kinds of subjective ideas.” Works of ancient sages may motivate the heart to have “subjective ideas” which are hedonistic intentions towards classics as objects. One who passes the imperial exam can join the ruling class, and to pass the exam requires one to be familiar with Confucian classics. Hence, according to Wang, an official-scholar may treat the classics as the bridge to fame and wealth, for these works motivate his “disease of loving fame and wealth.”

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§9 Selfish Desires as Habits

Selfish desires are sources of selfish, hedonistic intentions, which are similar to personal tendencies of Husserl. It was shown previously in this chapter that tendencies of a personal ego, described by Husserl as its habits, are its past experiences sedimented in it. Wang also often uses the term “sedimented habits (jixi 積習)” as equivalent to the term “selfish desires.” He says that “the heart at first does not have any attachments. Desires are its concealments, and habits harm it.”\(^\text{114}\) Since the heart without selfish desires is in the form of its original substance, habits which conceal the original substance can be treated as selfish desires. In other words, one receives selfish “diseases” habitually. As he says:

Since Confucian doctrines were discarded and the tradition of the technique of despoticism had become strongly entrenched, even the virtuous and wise could not help but be habitually dyed by it…. Consequently the teachings of the Sage became more and more distant and obscured, while the fashion of (loving) success and profit ran worse and worse…. People have mutually boasted of their knowledge, crushed one another with power, rivaled each other for profit, mutually striven for superiority through skill, and attempted success through fame.\(^\text{115}\)

The character \(xì\) 習 can be refer to both the customs and the habits, so I translate the term “\(xìràn\) 習染” as “being habitually dyed” and follow Chan who translates “\(gōnglì zhī xì\) 功利之習” as “the fashion of success and profit.” Here Wang is saying that the fashion or

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\(^{114}\) 莊子 "Notes to Huang Wan Returning to Tiantai 別黃宗賢歸天台序," in Complete Works, bk. 4, 164, my translation.

\(^{115}\) Wang, Chuanshi Lu, chap. 143, 115/122-123, translation altered.
contemporary custom of the society is opposed to teachings of sages, and people influenced by this fashion receive its influence habitually. As many studies have pointed out, Wang is criticizing most official-scholars at his time, who study Confucian classics only because they want to pass the imperial examination.\textsuperscript{116} Scholars at that time often began to prepare for the exam from their childhood, which negatively influenced them in a habitual way. Wang believes that it is not good for many of his nephews to take the exam early, for “every young man who has good talent should be nourished in dimness and darkness, and (the talent) should be accumulated to become thick.”\textsuperscript{117} To cultivate one’s moral talent, one needs time to nourish this talent. That is to say, the process of preparing for the exam, as a temporal process, cannot nourish one’s moral talent. In a letter to Huang Wan, Wang has the following complaint:

> Among people who are living here together, there are also three to four from the young generation. However, their sedimented habits are already so deep that even their good talents have almost disappeared completely.\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{Before} these young people met Wang, they had already received habits which prevented them from fulfilling their good talents \textit{after} they had met Wang. It is obvious that they were educated according to the common and popular way at that time. Like Husserl, Wang believes that negative habits of a person are constituted under inter-subjective influences from other people such as their family members and teachers. Wang argues

\textsuperscript{116} Just name a few: Okada, \textit{Wang Yangming and the Philosophy of the Late Ming Dynasty}, 38-39; Chen Lai, \textit{Spiritual Realms}, 119-120; and Tu, \textit{Neo-Confucian Thought in Action}, 7-9.

\textsuperscript{117} 凡後生美質，須令晦養厚積. Wang, “To Zhu Yongming 寄諸用明,” in \textit{Complete Works}, bk. 4, 166, my translation. The word \textit{housheng} 後生 here also literally means “young males.” In Ming Dynasty, only males were allowed to take the exam and join the rank of power.

that “the people have the good talent to love virtues, but … they fall into the custom and fashion, and cannot prevail over their selfish desires.”119 He also often describes selfish desires as “external influences (keqi 客氣).”120 The one who follows selfish desires is like a householder who cannot make his or her own decisions, but only blindly accepts the guidance of some guests. Selfish desires, therefore, are not “original members” of the heart as a house, but come from “outside,” namely, from other people. Note that other people are not the “final origin” of selfish tendencies, for this understanding will lead to an infinite regression. According to the Neo-Confucian tradition, most people will have some immoral characteristics because the bodies of ordinary people are not made perfect, which will “disturb” the function of their original moral tendencies. This theory, obviously, is based on the Neo-Confucian metaphysics which I discussed in Chapter 3.

Negative influences from other people give the heart some negative habits, according to which immoral acts will arise in the now-sphere. As Wang says in another letter:

This doctrine has been forgotten by the world for a long time. No one will not reject, condemn, doubt and discuss my doctrine when they suddenly hear it, for there are old doctrines and old habits hindering, covering and winding (in their hearts). However, if one turns back to one’s heart with my doctrine, no one will not be completely clarified… but if one did not work hard from this, then old doctrines and old habits would again tangle, obstruct and block (the heart). Nowadays many of our friends here have this disease.121

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120 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 163, chap. 165; and “To Yang Shiming 與楊仕鳴,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 207.

121 此學不明於世，久矣，而舊聞舊習障蔽纏繞，一旦驟聞吾說，未有不非詆疑議者.... 然不能即此奮志進步…則舊聞舊習又從而牽滯蔽塞之矣．此近時同志中往往皆有是病…. Wang, “Replying to Lin Dalu 答以乘憲副,” in Complete Works, bk. 6, 265-266, my translation.
According to this quotation, it is difficult for one who has some negative habits to understand Wang’s doctrines. When being taught by Wang, doctrines of Wang are given to them as objects in the now-sphere, and these people, as personal egos with immoral tendencies, treat Wang’s doctrines with improper value-properties. Wang also maintains that if one has been “addicted in the popular fashion for a long time,” then one will be disappointed by the way of sages. In the past, those people chased the fashion of focusing on preparing for the exam. Such experiences are sedimented in their hearts, which are awakened by words of sages as objects. Since such sediments are immoral, acts guided by them will treat the words of sages improperly.

Wang’s concept “selfish desires” is similar to personal tendencies within Husserl’s system in several ways: they are also characteristics of the subject which enable the ego to perform with specific “styles,” in the form of being motivated by objects or circumstances. Like personal tendencies, selfish desires are also habits that one received in his or her temporal life in an inter-subjective world. For Husserl, one is able to freely decide whether a habit should be followed or not. Similarly, Wang also believes that it is not inevitable that one who has immoral habits will act immorally: he or she can still attempt to act in a correct way in such cases. This possibility lies in the function of liangzhi as a form of self-observation, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

§10 The Original Substance of the Heart as the Collection of Moral Tendencies

123 See also Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 100-101/66-67.
Selfish desires which conceal the original substance are tendencies of the heart as a personal ego. The original substance of the heart of a sage, one the other hand, is not concealed, according to Wang as a Neo-Confucian. For him, moral effort, whose highest achievement is sagehood, is a process of eliminating selfish desires. Wang also insists that “liangzhi is the original substance of the heart.” The original substance of the heart, at the same time, “is heavenly principles.” That is to say, the contents of the original substance or liangzhi are nothing but heavenly principles. As Yang Daoyu points out, this is a more exact expression of Wang’s famous slogan that “there are no principles external to the heart.” Cai suggests that heavenly principles in the heart are not “external objects” grasped epistemologically, but are the “sincerity” of the heart. Cai and his teacher Mou treat “sincerity” as the “concrete nature” of the heart such as virtues of being humane and wise. This reading by Cai and Mou can be supported by the following statement of Wang himself:

The heart is the master of the body, and the (human) nature is presented in the heart. The origin of the good is the (human) nature, which is named by Mencius as the good nature…. Those which are in things are the principles. The properness of living with things is the righteousness. What is in the (human) nature is the good. These are different names, while actually, they are all (referring to) the heart.

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128 See Cai, Wang Yangming’s Philosophy, 22.
129 夫心主於身，性具於心，善原於性，孟子之言性善是也……夫在物為理，處物為義，性為善，因所指而異其名，實皆吾之心也. Wang, “To Wang Dao II,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 175, my translation and emphasis.
According to this paragraph, the heart contains principles in the form of human nature. This nature can also be described as good capabilities to love those who should be loved and respect those who should be respected, within Wang’s framework. He argues that “when the true sincerity and commiseration of this liangzhi is extended to serve one’s parents, it is filial love.”  

Here filial love is an example of moral intentional acts according to Wang’s Neo-Confucian belief. Whether the parent must be one who should be loved is obviously not a self-evident truth from many other positions, but this claim of Wang can still shed a light on the structural function of liangzhi. Liangzhi is described as extended to parents, which indicates that its contents are moral capacities of loving properly. Such capacities are motivated by parents as the objects.

Wang’s understanding of the original substance of the heart can be clarified by analyzing Wang’s understandings of some notions from The Doctrine of the Mean. According to this classic, when there are feelings such as joy and sadness in the heart, the heart “has been aroused (yifa 已發)” and when there are no feelings, the heart “has not been aroused (weifa 未發).”  

Zhu Xi argues, “The state before intentions are aroused is tranquility (jing 靜), and the state after the intentions are aroused is motion. During tranquility, there is an (original) substance within (the heart).”  

As Iso Kern realizes, for Zhu Xi, the state of weifa is a temporal period, during which the heart is not intentionally active. The state of yifa is treated by Zhu Xi as another period when the heart is active.

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130 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 189, 168/176, translation altered.

131 Chan translates these terms as “has been aroused” and “has not been aroused,” but, as was mentioned previously, the term fa 發 originally means “diffusing.” Chan’s translation makes more sense in this chapter.

132 未發時便是那靜，已發時便是那動。方其靜時，便是有箇體在裏了。Zhu Xi, “Teaching the Students Four 訓門人四,” in Recorded Conversations, 2796.

133 See Kern, Das Wichtigste im Leben, 138-139.
Unlike Zhu Xi, Wang insists that the heart cannot be free from intentions, which implies that the tranquility vis-à-vis weifa is not referring to a special temporal phrase in which there are no intentional acts. However, Zhu Xi’s reading of these two notions from The Doctrine of the Mean is based on the fact that the classic itself does use the term “not yet (wei 未).” For Confucians, it is quite impossible to argue against a statement supported by classics. Wang’s strategy is to read the classic itself in a new way:

(When the classic says that) pleasure, anger, sorrow and happiness are not aroused, (it is) talking about the original substance of the heart as the (human) nature …. Pleasure, anger, sorrow, happiness, along with thoughts and senses, are aroused in the heart. The heart combines the (human) nature and the emotions. The (human) nature is the substance of the heart, and the emotions are uses of the heart.135

According to The Doctrine of the Mean, the state of weifa is named “equilibrium (zhong 中),” and the state of yifa in which their emotional acts all “hit the rhythm” is “harmony (he 和).” The author of the classic describes ethically proper acts as hitting the rhythm. These moral acts use the original substance. Thus, weifa as the original substance is the capability that can be used by the heart to yield moral acts in different situations. Wang borrows a metaphor from Buddhism to illuminate this relation. He says, “The original substance of this fire in front of us is the equilibrium, and to light things by the fire is the harmony. The light of the fire must light things if the fire is held.”137 This metaphor is

136 喜怒哀樂之未發, 謂之中. 發而皆中節, 謂之和. The Doctrine of the Mean, 1, my translation.
famously used by the Zen master Huineng 慧能在 the *Platform Sutra (Tanjing 壇經)*. The relation between Wang and Buddhism is another interesting topic discussed in many studies.\(^{138}\) Huineng’s theory itself is helpful here, for it can shed a light on Wang’s theory. Huineng says:

> Where there is the lamp, there is the light. Where there is no lamp, there is no light. The lamp is the substance of the light, and the light is the use of the lamp.\(^{139}\)

In Chinese, the term “use (yong 用)” can be understood as an effect, which is caused by the substance. Huineng argues that the light must be radiated from the fire, which means that the fire necessarily causes the light. The lighting is the function, the “use” of the fire. That is to say, the “use” of the fire, namely the light itself, cannot stop. Wang uses this metaphor to argue that the fire is not only the necessary condition for the light of fire, but is also the sufficient condition of such light:

> Given the substance, there is the use, and given the equilibrium before (the emotions) are aroused, there is the harmony in which (emotional acts) all hit the rhythm. It should be known that people of today do not possess this harmony because they have not completely attained this equilibrium.\(^{140}\)

The substance, as the equilibrium, is sufficient for proper acts, for such acts are naturally radiated from the substance like light from a fire. According to Wang, one who acts


\(^{139}\) 有燈即有光，無燈即無光，燈是光之體，光是燈之用. Huineng, *Edited and Interpreted Platform Sutra* 壇經校釋, ed. Guo Peng 郭朋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), 30, my translation. As is pointed out by many scholars, this is also a common opinion shared by the Neo-Confucians and the Buddhists. See Deng Aimin’s notes in *Notes and Comments*, 131-132.

improperly in some cases does not have the original substance completely, which means the substance is also necessary for proper acts. This also implies that one can partially act in accordance with the substance: one may be able to respect those who should be respected properly, but lack the capability of hating those who should be hated properly. Hence, the original substance of the heart is the collection of all moral tendencies, so that one can have a part of it, while not having other parts. This collection of the moral capacities is a meaning of liangzhi, for “the equilibrium of weifa is liangzhi.”¹⁴¹ Note that here Wang is not arguing that moral characteristics can always unconsciously make one have psychological pleasure towards what should be loved, for, as was mentioned in Chapter 2, pleasure is not an emotional act, but is only materials of such an act.

Since liangzhi vis-à-vis the original substance is the collection of all good tendencies, it is the foundation for all moral acts in all possible situations. According to Wang, the original substance of the heart of a sage like Zengzi (or Zeng Can 曾子/曾參, 505BC- 435BC) is the root of a tree, while acts of Zengzi which are always proper are multiple branches and leaves of the tree.¹⁴² As Wang points out, “Stillness is the original substance of the heart …. The tranquility and motion are (different) times that it meets.”¹⁴³ The term “time (shi 時)” in this quotation means situations, so that it is the same original substance that “meets different situations.” In other words, moral capabilities collected by the original substance are aroused or motivated by different

¹⁴² See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 112, 73/71.
¹⁴³ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 41, 39/36, translation altered.
situations, like personal tendencies in Husserl’s framework. Wang often describes this function of *liangzhi* or original substance by using the metaphor of a mirror:

The substance of *liangzhi* (of the sage) is as clear as a bright mirror without any slight obscuration. Whether a beautiful or an ugly object appears, it reflects it as it comes, without anything being left behind on the bright mirror itself. This is what is meant by saying that the emotions of the sage are in accord with all things and yet of himself he has no emotions …. In the bright mirror’s response to things, what is beautiful appears beautiful and what is ugly appears ugly …. The things pass along without remaining in the mirror.

Things reflected by the mirror mentioned by Wang are beautiful or ugly things, which are objects with values. Since here Wang is talking about moral effort, the beauty and ugliness in this paragraph are not literally referring to aesthetical values, but to ethical ones. For Wang, a “naturally good” thing is an object constituted by an emotional act which is coherent with heavenly principles. The “beautiful thing” mentioned in the quotation, therefore, is an object that ought to be valued as good, according to heavenly principles. When external objects are presented to the heart, the heart with its *liangzhi* can treat such things properly, like the mirror which can show things as they are. On the contrary, the heart of an ordinary person is a mirror covered by rusts that needs cleaning, while that of the sage is completely bright and needs no washing. Wang also describes *liangzhi* as “the great void of the heaven,” which is a “vacuum” of selfish desires.

Though the term “great void (*taixu* 太虛)” is a term borrowed from Daoism, it is used by

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144 See Yang, “The Epistemological Meaning of the Slogan ‘the Heart is the Principle’,” 96-97.
147 See Wang, “Replying to Huang Wan and Ying Liang 答黃宗賢應原忠,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 4, 164.
Wang to portray heaven, which, as was mentioned in Chapter 3, always follows heavenly principles. According to Wang, natural beings like sun, moon, and wind all show themselves with their “natural appearances” in heaven as a void.\textsuperscript{149} These “natural appearances” of things are their value-properties in accordance with moral laws. As Julia Ching realizes, for Wang, the great void can properly “react to” these natural beings.\textsuperscript{150} 

\textit{Liangzhi}, as the embodiment of heavenly principles, functions in the same way as the great void, which means that it can be motivated by objects. When being motivated and “aroused,” \textit{liangzhi} pushes the heart to value its object with a proper value-property. One problem here is that for Wang, what ought to be good is also naturally good, for heavenly principles are also laws of heaven and earth. Neo-Confucians believe that based on heaven and earth as a good nature, the human nature is good, which means that one has such moral capabilities originally without a process of learning. This position is disagreed with by some more traditional Chinese thinkers such as Xunzi (or Xun Kuang 荀子/荀況, ? – 238BC), and will surely be rejected by some Western thinkers like Hobbes. To elaborate details regarding possible debates regarding whether human nature is good or bad, however, is not the task of this chapter.

\textit{Liangzhi} is the capability to act properly in different particular situations.\textsuperscript{151}

According to previous chapters, the same mere thing may have different proper values in different situations. The same flower can be properly loved in some cases but should be

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\textsuperscript{149} See Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 269, 226-227/219-220.
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\textsuperscript{150} See Ching, \textit{To Acquire Wisdom}, 139-141.
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\textsuperscript{151} See Mou, \textit{From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan}, 183; and Liang, \textit{Wang Yangming’s Doctrine of Unity}, 35.
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hated in some other situations. That is to say, the heart which follows its motivated

liangzhi in different situations should not treat things in a “fixed way”:

The Teacher once told the students, “Not a single thought should be allowed to attach to the original substance of the heart, just as not the least dirt should be allowed to stick to the eye. It does not take much dirt for the whole eye to see nothing but complete darkness.” He further said, “This thought need not be a selfish thought. Even if it is nice, it should not be attached to the heart. If you put some gold or jade dust in the eye, just the same it cannot open.”

The eye here is a metaphor for moral capability as the great void. What prevents the original substance from seeing objects correctly is attached thoughts, including “nice thoughts” which are acts of loving, constituting their objects with positive values. Gold or jade dust in an eye can blind it. Likewise, a mirror with golden attachments on it will show an ugly thing with a beautiful golden color. That is to say, even thoughts such as loving other people should not be attached in a fixed way to the heart, for it is possible that someone should be hated, according to heavenly principles. One who has the fixed thought of loving may love those who should be hated.

Since in the original substance of the heart there are no fixed thoughts, Wang insists that “the (original) substance is without good and bad.” Here the term “good (shan 善)” is what is moral, but refers to a positive object. Hence, Wang is arguing that the heart is beyond both acts that positively value their objects, and acts which treat their objects as negative or bad. The original substance is only capable of acting morally, but moral acts can be both liking and disliking. Hence, Chen Lai is correct when he points out that the

152 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 336, 276/256-257, translation altered.
original substance is the same as great void and liangzhi. On the other hand, Ching’s reading is problematic when she says that the heart is beyond the good and bad because it is capable of being both moral and immoral. What Ching describes is the formal function of the heart as a pure ego, while the original substance or liangzhi is the collection of concrete moral capabilities of the heart.

§11 Temporal Structure of the Original Substance

Moral capabilities of the heart, collected by liangzhi as the original substance of the heart, are also personal tendencies of the heart as a personal ego, like selfish desires which can conceal liangzhi. Note that for Husserl, all personal properties are habitually acquired. Liangzhi as the original substance, on the other hand, is not learned in time, according to Mencius and the Confucians following him. In other words, moral capabilities of the heart are not contents “added” through experiences:

The Teacher said, “All people have liangzhi. Only the sage preserves it completely and keeps it free from the least obscuration … Ordinary people possess liangzhi in total from infancy, except that it is much obscured. But the zhi of the original substance cannot be obliterated.

According to Wang, ordinary people who have selfish desires also have liangzhi. Since all people have liangzhi from their infancy, it is not a habit that is acquired in the stream of temporal experiences, but is the original talent. Since all people have the original

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154 Chen Lai, Spiritual Realms, 230-237
155 See Ching, To Acquire Wisdom, 147.
156 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 221, 195/199, translation altered.
substance, they all contain sagehood as at least a part of their personalities “from the very beginning.” Wang once says to his students that every one of them contains a sage within.157 He also once agrees with his student who says that people on the street are all sages.158 Since even one who has not begun to cultivate oneself has an “internal sage,” liangzhi as sagehood does not “grow” in time. This is a crucial difference between the original substance and moral habits described by Husserl.

Liangzhi is the same as human nature as the embodiment of heavenly principles, which is not a “production” of one’s temporal life. However, this does not mean that people with this good talent do not need moral effort as a temporal process. Wang insists that even sages who do not have obscurcation need study, which is a process of effort that “never stops.”159 He describes this process of moral effort as the cultivating of a tree:

If the student has the commitment to have one thought to do good, his commitment will be like the seed of a tree. If only he … keeps on cultivating and nourishing it, it will naturally grow larger every day and night. Its vitality will be increasingly great and its branches and leaves more luxuriant.160

Virtues belong to the personality. Hence, to cultivate virtues is to cultivate the heart as a person. To cultivate virtues is the same as to cultivate a tree, which is a gradual process. Note that here what grows like a tree is not the original substance itself, for it is complete in the very beginning. As Wang suggests:

The substance of the heart is originally both broad and strong …. Without being concealed and burdened, it naturally will not have anything which is not

157 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 207.
158 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 303.
159 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 221, 195/199.
160 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 115, 74-75/73, my emphasis.
broad and strong. To be broad is not to be expanded, and to be strong is not to do things with difficulty. (To be broad and strong) is to do what one ought to do, without adding an inch.161

Virtues of being broad and strong are not added or expanded in time, because the heart originally has them in its substance. What is that which truly grows in moral effort, then? Wang points out that “if virtue is to become eminent, the love of external things must be eliminated when one first begins to study.”162 Here the “love of external things” refers to selfish desires. Wang also mentions that “as evil thoughts are eliminated, the good thought is already there and the original substance of the heart is already restored.”163 This implies that to remove selfish desires is already sufficient for restoring the substance: one need not do anything to the original substance, but only need pay attention to his or her selfish desires. In Chapter 5, I will study controversies within the Yangming school regarding the proper method of eliminating such desires.

That which has selfish desires is not the essence of the heart but is a particular person. As Ching points out, Wang uses the term liangzhi “as both the agent that achieves a certain end and as the end itself.”164 While an end can be common for many, it is particular individuals who are subjects of achieving this common end. Thus, the one who grows in the process of moral effort is also this particular, individual subject: one whose heart is a mixture of both the substance and selfish desires is not as broad and strong as

161 心體本自弘毅...私欲不能蔽累, 則自無不弘毅矣。弘非有所廣而大之也, 毅非有所作而強之也, 蓋本分之內, 不加毫末耳。Wang, “Replying to Wang Yunfeng 答王虎谷,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 167, my translation.

162 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 115, 72/74, translation altered.

163 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 237, 205/206, translation altered.

164 Ching, To Acquire Wisdom, 136.
the sage. By eliminating selfish desires, the heart of an ordinary person is becoming broader and stronger, though the broadness and strong-ness themselves, as virtues or moral tendencies, are not expanded. Wang says:

It is commitment if one preserves heavenly principle in every thought. If one does not neglect this, in due time it will crystallize in one’s heart and become what the Daoists call “the mystical infant.”

The so-called “mystical infant” is the production of the Daoist internal alchemy school, according to which this infant is the form of one’s holy and eternal life, different from the mortal life of one’s body. This infant is a particular content internal to a person, though its essence is universal. This essence is considered by the Daoists as the way (dao 道), whereas Wang treats it as heavenly principles. As Yang Guorong 楊國榮 suggests, for Wang, common and universal principles are “contained” in individual and particular hearts. We can use the metaphor of the mirror again: the nature of copper is bright, so that all copper-made mirrors are originally bright. However, a particular mirror which has rust on it is not as bright as the mirror which is well-maintained. The rust can be cleaned, which is a temporal process that can make this particular mirror brighter, but the nature of copper is always perfectly bright.

167 For the relation between Wang and the Daoism, see Chen Fu, “Yangming’s Mysticism,” 59-75; and Tu, Neo-Confucian Thought in Action, 42-54 and 72-79.
The heart which comes closer to the completeness of its original substance can be described as having more and more moral properties, for when a property is concealed, it cannot function as a tendency of the person. Mou uses the term “expanding” from Mencius to describe this process. It is also often described by Wang as a process of “collecting what is righteous (jiyi 集義),” which is another term from Mencius. Note that here the expanding as the collecting is not to gather virtues from outside, but to “return to the original substance of the heart.” Moral effort for Wang is, therefore, a temporal process through which a particular person can recover more and more moral tendencies which are original. The phenomenological structure of this process will also be a topic of the next chapter.

Like Husserl, Wang also believes that the temporal process of the effort is an inter-subjective one. He emphasizes in many occasions that “polishing and grinding” (qie cuo di li 切磋砥礪) from friends are crucial for one’s moral effort. As he says, “though to be human is the task of oneself and others cannot help, friends are necessary every day for the benefit of mutual observing and grinding.” He believes that “even wise men in the past who lived alone and far away from the mass could not be free from mistakes.” Inter-subjective help is crucial for moral effort because when living alone, one cannot be free from mistakes. In other words, one becomes more “vulnerable” when being

169 See Mou, From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan, 189.
171 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 81, 56/54.
confronted by selfish desires in such cases. Unlike Husserl, for Wang, moral tendencies are not “productions” of the inter-subjective life: what others can do is to help me in “fighting against” selfish desires. For Wang, therefore, the inter-subjective surrounding world has two meanings for moral effort: fashions, as external and inter-subjective influences, add selfish desires to the person, while a responsible, Confucian community helps one to recover the original substance.

It was stated that the contents of the original substance do not “come into being” in time. This does not mean that the structural relation between these transcendental contents with particular acts is not temporal. According to Husserl, a tendency or a personal property is “sleeping” when not being motivated. This implies that the source of acts must be stored in the heart “before” it is awakened. For Husserl, every personal tendency has two directions: it is established by past experiences which are “older” than it, but it also influences the style of acts which are “newer” than this tendency itself. For Wang, moral tendencies collected by the original substance do not have their past. However, since they are talents that one has from the beginning, they are “already there” when they are aroused. From a formal, phenomenological perspective, original capabilities are also temporally prior to particular acts based on it. Temporal “positions” of both moral and immoral tendencies of Wang and Husserl can be portrayed by the following graphic:
Note that though selfish desires are established “after” the original substance, they do not completely conceal the latter. The next chapter will analyze the methodological function of *liangzhi* when it is still concealed by selfish desires in an “incomplete manner.” But first, it is useful to briefly summarize the discussion of this chapter.

§12 Conclusion

This chapter phenomenologically studies a meaning of *liangzhi*, which is the original substance of the heart as the collection of moral capabilities of the heart. For Husserl, the person, as a concrete form of subjectivity, is the collection of habits built in the temporal life of a particular ego. This temporal life is an inter-subjective life in an inter-subjective life world. Characteristics of this personal ego are styles of its past acts, within which the ego receives influences from others. When situations or objective properties which are similar to past ones are presented to the ego, its sedimentations are awakened to constitute new objects similar to past objects. This ego is the center of the life-world, in which it deals with objects with practical, ethical values. Such a valuing act may either freely arise from moral habits, or may passively follow hedonistic, immoral
tendencies without consciously realizing one’s own freedom of choosing, though Husserl does not realize that it is possible for one to freely follow an immoral tendency.

Similar to Husserl, according to Wang, the subject of acts with ethical meanings is the heart as the container of personal characteristics. These characteristics function in a way similar to the way of habitual tendencies in Husserl’s system. Selfish desires are immoral tendencies, and the original substance or liangzhi is the collection of moral tendencies. For Wang, only selfish desires are acquired by the heart habitually. The contents of liangzhi, as something original, do not have a process of formation in the temporal life of the heart. However, the way through which original capabilities of the heart influence the heart’s ethical intentions in a given situation is still similar to the way of Husserl’s personal properties. A person will use his or her original capabilities only when he or she is “aroused” by objects or situations. Moral capabilities as the necessary condition of proper intentions are prior to intentions so that when being motivated, they are still motivated as contents which have already been established, though they did not have processes of being established.

For most people, liangzhi is often covered by selfish desires. It requires moral effort as a temporal process to eliminate these desires. Both the forming of these improper habits and the process of eliminating them happen in an inter-subjective world, in which the heart receives positive or negative influences. The last problem remaining is, how selfish desires as immoral habits of the heart can be temporally eliminated. Philosophers in the Yangming school including Wang himself have different understandings regarding this problem, which will be the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Liangzhi as Reflective Understanding of One’s Acts

§1 Introduction

The problem left for this dissertation is how the original substance of the heart covered by selfish desires can recover its capability of leading a person’s acts. It is also a problem of the methodology of moral effort, which is controversial among many philosophers of the Yangming school. It was briefly mentioned in the last chapter that for Wang, one function of liangzhi is to know whether a particular intention is ethically proper or not. In this chapter, it will be shown that this function of liangzhi plays a crucial role for Wang’s own theory of the method of moral effort. This self-observing of the heart has the same phenomenological structure of reflective acts analyzed by Husserl. For Husserl, an ego can reflectively “look at” not only its acts, but also personal tendencies of the ego itself as a person. Wang suggests that in sitting meditation, characteristics of the heart can be revealed to the heart itself, but the proper method of moral effort is based on our observing of our particular intentions as acts.

In the following sections, I will first study Husserl’s analysis of two forms of reflective noesis, which prepares necessary theoretical tools for the second part on Wang’s later doctrine of liangzhi. When dealing with Wang’s theory, I will first analyze the problem of sitting meditation, which is the observation of one’s original personal properties. In Section 10 of Chapter 4, I also mentioned that though Husserl treats all personal properties as being habitually acquired, Wang believes that moral characteristics are original capabilities of the heart. Wang’s theory regarding the source of moral
characteristics is based on the Confucian metaphysics, which I studied in Chapter 3. However, as I showed in Section 11 of the last chapter, even these characteristics influence one’s acts in a temporal way, for a moral tendency is “already there,” when an act follows it. Wang believes that meditation which observes such moral properties cannot be used as the major method for moral effort, but his understanding is criticized by many of his contemporaries. The theory of *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 is raised by Wang later in his career as a response to such critiques. The last several sections of this chapter, therefore, will argue that *zhi liangzhi* is a process of following *liangzhi*, whose function here is to reflectively observe whether a particular act of the heart itself is moral or not.

### §2 Intentional Acts as Immanent Noemata for Reflective Acts

As has been briefly mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, for Husserl, a noesis itself can also be treated by its ego as a noema. A noesis can be a noema when the ego “turns its regard” to the noesis, which is the part of the ego’s mental process. Since what takes a noesis as a noema is also a noesis, reflective acts themselves can also be objects of other reflective acts.¹ When being treated as objects, acts themselves are immanent, while external objects are transcendent, according to Husserl. The givenness of such an immanent object is “absolute,” which is described with details by Husserl as such:

No mental process, we said, is presented. That means that the perception of a mental process is a simple seeing of something which is (or can become) perceptually given as something absolute, and not as something identical in

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modes of appearance by adumbration …. *A mental process of feeling* is not adumbrated. If I look at it, I have something absolute; it has no sides that could be presented sometimes in one mode and sometimes in another.\(^2\)

In this quotation, a mental process is not the whole temporal flow of consciousness, but a particular act like an act of feeling. Thus, Moran is correct when he argues that what is given absolutely is a “mental act.”\(^3\) Zahavi also suggests that a reflective grasp of an act of perceiving is not perceiving a physical object, for the act “does … not have a hidden-black side.”\(^4\) That is to say, a perceived object is adumbrated, while the perceiving itself, as an object reflectively grasped, “does not contain a dark side.” Note that here Husserl is not arguing that when I try to reflectively find my psychological reason for being depressed by a comedy, I can always find it. He is only saying that when I reflectively grasp my act towards the drama, different *noetic parts* of this *particular act* are given to me “at once,” while different sides of an external object cannot be shown at the same time. Unlike a perceived building, the act of perceiving itself is not a spatial thing, which must be given from a certain angle.

The perceiving, as an immanent noema, is given completely because it belongs to the same mental stream with my reflective grasp of it.\(^5\) Husserl points out that a mental process “is a field of *free effectings* of cogitationes belonging to one and the same pure Ego.”\(^6\) This implies that an immanent object is not “out of my control,” while I can never

\(^2\) Husserl, *Ideas I*, 81/95-96, my emphasis.

\(^3\) Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 130.

\(^4\) Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, 16.


\(^6\) Husserl, *Ideas I*, 150/180, my emphasis.
freely determine transcendent objects, as was analyzed in Chapter 1. It is true that I can “freely determine” my imagination, but an imagined object is still not an immanent object, for it is not a part of my mental stream. Even an imagined centaur is adumbrated, though I can “freely” turn it in my fantasy. Also, to see an adumbrated side of an external object sometimes requires the motion of the ego’s own body, which, besides being a free tool of the ego, is also a transcendent, physical thing which cannot break physical laws. My body can also “fail” me: my arm, like a heavy stone, can “refuse” to let its backside be seen by me when I am sick. My act of perceiving, or even my will of trying to see, however, can never “refuse” me: I can always turn my attention to it as a whole, freely.

Since an intentional act as an immanent object is not adumbrated, it also has “the most perfect clarity” and “unconditioned validity.” Such clarity and validity can be described as such: “Every perception of something immanent necessarily guarantees the existence of its object.” That is to say, when the pure ego reflectively turns its attention to a part of its mental process, its object can never be an illusion. Husserl realizes that when I reflectively grasp my act of disliking a dish, I may be wrong: I actually loved it. But he also argues that “what I see when I look at it is there, with its qualities, its intensity, etc., absolutely,” which is a problematic claim: it is very possible that I cannot remember how strongly did I like a dish in the past. Regarding this problem, Moran’s suggestion is more reasonable: he argues that at least it is certain that there was an act towards the dish. That is to say, I can be certain that if I try to grasp a part of my mental

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7 Husserl, Ideas I, 151/181.
8 Husserl, Ideas I, 85/100.
9 Husserl, Ideas I, 81/96.
10 See Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 130.
stream, it will not disappear, though it is possible that my reflection of it cannot give any of its noetic features. Note that these noetic features of an act that I cannot remember are not adumbrated: they are not covered by any physical obstacles. Also, an adumbrated side of a transcendent object is only passively co-existing. My reflection of an act in the past, on the contrary, grasps the act as a whole activity: I actively treat noetic features of this act as “features that I do not remember,” rather than not directing my attentive power to them. Also, it was mentioned in Chapter 1 that the grasp of an external object can be disappointed: I may find that what is in front of me is not a real building, if my protention towards a backside of a building is disappointed. Since an immanent object is not adumbrated, it has neither the continuous harmony between its different sides, nor the “break” in such a harmony.

For Husserl himself, the grasp of an intentional act is absolute. It is at least clear now that if my act contains multiple layers, then these layers, including its feature as a liking or disliking, are given to me completely without being adumbrated, when I try to grasp the act as a whole. Though Husserl’s theory regarding immanent objects may face some difficulties, it is already sufficient to introduce his own description of such noemata, for the task of this chapter is only to illuminate Wang’s theory of liangzhi with Husserl’s analysis of reflective noeses. Later in this chapter, it will be shown that Wang holds a similar position regarding the reflective grasp of one’s emotional acts: he argues that we cannot cheat our own liangzhi whether we are liking or disliking a particular object. Though there are different ways of interpreting Husserl’s own analysis of this absolute reflection, it will become clear that the structure of the function of liangzhi is the same with the structure of a reflective act of Husserl.
The ego can reflectively turn its regard to its own acts, for both the immanent object and its correlated act belong to the same mental process. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, for Husserl, the capability of reflectively looking at my own acts is the foundation for me understanding other people as other egos: by reflectively looking at my will of moving my body, I can recognize that other bodies similar to mine are not only physical things, but also bodies belonging to other egos. The body is, therefore, a necessary “medium” for this process of empathy. The grasp of the subjectivity of other people is, therefore, mediated by the bodies of other people and my understanding of my own embodied subjectivity. That is to say, intentional acts belonging to others are also beyond my direct grasping: noetic experiences of another person are only intuitively accessible to him or her, for my experiences can only be directly reflected by myself.

Furthermore, immanent phenomena of my own cannot be grasped by others directly: by constituting other people as others, I understand that my mental process is not theirs, so that they can only understand me through their empathy, for which my body works as the medium for them. I am presented to someone over there also through my own body. It was mentioned above that emotional acts with ethical meanings can also be immanent objects. This implies that emotional acts are also something that others can only grasp indirectly. I understand that I cannot directly “see” others’ acts of liking of disliking in an absolute manner, so that they cannot directly see mine. Though Husserl seldom mentions emotional acts as immanent objects, it is obvious that such acts must be able to be reflectively grasped. My own feelings are only absolutely available to me: another person can only indirectly suppose that his or her words offend me. This means that to observe

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whether my acts are moral or not is something that only I can do. Using Kant’s example, whether I am serving others honestly as a merchant can be observed by others, while whether my commercial actions are based on my moral acts of treating others as ends is only knowable to myself. As will be demonstrated later, for Wang, whether particular intentions are moral or not is also only available to oneself. Hence, the self-observation of liangzhi is described by Wang as a “lone-knowing.” With the term “lone (du 獨),” Wang is not expressing a solipsism, but is arguing that intentions of the heart, as its immanent objects, are only available to the heart itself “alone.”

Intentional acts belonging to my mental stream are directly given only to me: for me, they are absolutely presented and cannot “cheat me,” while others can only indirectly grasp my acts through their empathy and my body as the media. These features of reflective acts towards particular acts of mine are also features of liangzhi according to Wang’s later doctrines, as will be shown later in this chapter.

§3 The Temporality of Reflective Consciousness

It is also necessary to study the temporal structure of reflective noeses, because liangzhi, as a “self-observation,” also happens temporally. According to Husserl, every individual immanent object is given absolutely. However, this does not mean that the whole of these objects, namely, the mental process itself, can be grasped completely. He maintains that “[i]t is the case also of a mental process that it is never perceived completely, that it cannot be adequately seized upon in its full unity.”12 The mental

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12 Husserl, Ideas I, 82/97.
process as a whole is an inner time consciousness, in which every phase continuously “fades away” into the past, and can only be grasped in the form of recollection.\textsuperscript{13} That is to say, reflective acts also have their temporal structure. Note that here we are studying the temporality of acts: it is the temporality of neither the mental process itself nor the pure ego, for both are more fundamental than acts belonging to the inner time consciousness.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Husserl, I cannot only reflectively “remember” that “I perceived the moon last night,” but can also anticipate that “I will look at the moon tonight.”\textsuperscript{15} It was mentioned in the last chapter that a remembered thing can be either in retention as a part of the now-sphere, or a reproduced object which is attentively constituted with the sense of “as if it is here.” A past act of mine, as an immanent object, is actively reproduced by me, rather than being grasped by me in retention. By reflectively grasping an immanent object, I have to turn my attentive power to this act, and to constitute it as my object. In the last chapter, it was shown that what is reproduced is not necessarily something in a remote past: I can also reproduce the word that I just said a second ago. Similarly, I can reproduce the \textit{listening} a second ago itself by putting my attentive power on this past act. I can reflectively reproduce my past emotional acts: I can actively remember that I was once motivated by a hedonistic pleasure, or that I once acted in accordance with moral axioms.

\textsuperscript{13} See Zahavi, \textit{Husserl’s Phenomenology}, 89.
\textsuperscript{14} See Rodemeyer, \textit{Intersubjective Temporality}, 28-32; and Zahavi, \textit{Husserl’s Phenomenology}, 86-87.
\textsuperscript{15} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas I}, 148/178.
Previously, I mentioned that an immanent object is not adumbrated. However, this only means that noetic features of an act are all given to me attentively when I grasp the act as a whole. I was not claiming that all acts in my mental stream are always in the foreground of my consciousness. When I am looking at a building, my act of perceiving itself is not an active object. The difference here is that when I want to “turn” my attention to an adumbrated side of an object, I have to move my body or move the object itself, which is spatial and physical, while to put my attention on my own acts does not require a spatial “turning,” for no acts of mine are physically hidden.

According to Husserl, I can also turn my regard to an act that has not yet come. This reflective act takes the form of expectation, rather than protention.16 Such immanent objects in the future are actively constituted by me as “something that will come.” A special form of reflective expectation is called by Husserl the fiat: by freely deciding to “follow the stimulation,” I am “giving its fiat in practice.” The fiat is an “immature” form of a practical, emotional act, and a free act is an “active thesis” of the fiat.17 According to Husserl, when I only vaguely want to love the one who should be loved, the form of my “wanting” is a fiat, which can be fulfilled by an “actual” loving. This means that a fiat can be treated as an expectation towards an emotional act in the future. Thus, if I reflectively perceive a fiat, I also know that there will be an act in the future which either fulfills the fiat, or disappoints it. It is useful to briefly introduce Husserl’s analysis of fiat here, for it will be shown later that for Wang, liangzhi can also reflectively realize immoral acts which are only in a weak and vague form.

16 For the different between protention and expectation, see Rodemeyer, *Intersubjective Temporality*, 12-13.
My immanent objects can be either my past acts, or my acts that will come in the future. The past acts are reproduced by me, and a future act is anticipated by me. Through both recollection and expectation, my own acts are actively constituted by me as my immanent objects. Such analyses of Husserl are crucial for us to understand Wang’s theory of moral effort as a temporal process.

§4 The Ego’s Reflective Grasp of Its Own Personal Properties

In previous sections, we discussed three important features of a reflective act towards an intentional act: 1) Its object is absolutely given to the ego without being adumbrated. 2) Other people, on the other hand, can only access my immanent acts indirectly. 3) The grasp of an immanent object also belongs to the inner time consciousness: it is either given in the now-sphere, or is reproduced, or is anticipated. Husserl points out that I can understand another person not only as a pure ego but also as another personal ego which “has its Body as the central thing.”18 That is to say, other people are given to me indirectly also as other personal egos with their own personal tendencies. Husserl says:

…others are apprehended in analogy with one’s own Ego as subjects of a surrounding world of persons and things to which they comport themselves in their acts. They are “determined” by this surrounding world, or by the spiritual world that surrounds them and encompasses them, and, in turn, they exercise “determination” on it: they are subject to the laws of motivation.19

19 Husserl, Ideas II, 229/240.
Through my empathy, I grasp others as subjects who are also “influenced” by the same inter-subjective, ethical world shared by us. Others receive such influences from the world temporally, which yield habitual tendencies that may be motivated by new circumstances. With these habits, they become persons with their characteristics.\textsuperscript{20} In order to apprehend others as persons, I have to first reflectively grasp myself as a person. This grasp is different from \textit{acting as a person}, for according to Husserl, “self-perception is a reflection… and \textit{presupposes} according to its essence an unreflected consciousness.”\textsuperscript{21} The consciousness without being reflected is a passive process according to the ego’s motivated tendencies, while that which reflectively “looks at” it is an active seizing upon of these tendencies.

As was mentioned in the last chapter, the active observation of myself is also necessary for my ethical, free acts: I have to be aware that I have such and such a habit in order to freely decide whether I should accept or refuse it. Husserl argues that this possibility of free choice is different from the capability of freely moving my body, for he realizes that “I can also have a nervous disorder and lose the mastery of my limbs.”\textsuperscript{22} This possibility, obviously, lies in the fact that the body is also a physical thing. The free choice of a rational person, on the other hand, deals with his or her habits which do not belong to the body and the nexus of cause-effect. Husserl says:

Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by such a value-motive (and perhaps by value-motives in general) and to resist these drives. Here habit and free motivation intertwine. Now, if I act freely,

\textsuperscript{20} See Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 199/209.
\textsuperscript{21} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 248/259, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{22} Husserl, \textit{Ideas II}, 254/266.
then I am indeed obeying habit too, but I am free insofar as it is the motive, the reason, that I am obeying in a free decision.  

A drive is an influence based on one’s habit without being consciously recognized, while the value-motive which requires one to resist the drive is based on one’s conscious recognition of this tendency. Husserl points out that “I know myself from experience, I know what my own character is like: I have an Ego-apperception, an empirical ‘self-consciousness’. “ Here the empirical consciousness of my own character is similar to experiences of the motions of my body: by saying that “I can move my arm,” I am describing an actual event that I see or have seen, but not expressing a purely logical possibility which, using Hume’s words, simply contains no contradictions in itself.  

Based on such experiences, I can have the “confidence” that if I want to move my arm, it will be moved in the next moment, though my anticipation based on this confidence may also be disappointed. My understanding of my habits has a similar procedure, according to Husserl:

If I now phantasize, if I settle myself (as the one I am) into a phantasized actuality or into a world given in the neutrality modification… then I am judging how such and such motives… would affect me, how I, as the one I am, would act and could act, how I could, and how I could not, judge, value, and will. In that way I judge, or I can judge, empirically…. In analogy with the previous modes of comportment… I anticipate subsequent modes of comportment. 

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24 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 265/277, my emphasis.
26 Husserl, *Ideas II*, 266/278.
According to this quotation, a person has special capabilities of valuing and willing, which are emotional acts with ethical meanings. To know these tendencies is to be able to anticipate how I will act emotionally in new or possible situations, which is similar to know what I can do with my body in the future. To know my past acts is to reflectively reproduce them as immanent objects. The reflective grasp of my own personality contains two parts: a reproduction of past parts of my mental process, and an imagination of my acts in the future or in possible situations. I may imagine that I am hungry and am looking at a piece of bread in front of me. I know that I will intentionally constitute the bread as desirable because, in the process of imagination, I can remember past cases in which I desired food when I was hungry. Husserl argues that such imagination is a “test” of my own habits, which means that I can imagine not only how I will be motivated by a possible situation, but also how I will “respond to” this motivation. By imagining that I am hungry, I can also imagine that I can resist the motivation to steal the bread from its owner. However, Husserl does not seem to realize the problem of whether I can truly “test” my tendency by imagining a situation which I have never experienced: I can imagine what I will act when faced with a disaster, but it is arguable whether my actual reactions in such situations will be the same as those which I imagined. What is worth noting is that for Wang, one can at least know that one will act immorally in some possible situations, even if he or she has never experienced such situations. This capability of knowing one’s possible reactions to possible circumstances is another function of liangzhi, which will be studied more carefully later in this chapter.

According to Husserl, I can “check” whether I will accept or refuse some motivations through imagination. For him, this reflective imagination is also the condition in which I can change my personal tendencies:

I, as spiritual Ego, can also become stronger in the course of my development; the weak will can gain strength. Upon reflection, I could then say that I, as I used to be, would not have been able to resist this temptation or would not have been able to do something or other. But at present I can act in that way and would do so.²⁸

Here the reflection of how I used to be is obviously a mere reproduction. To know that I now have changed does not need an actual temptation presented to me: in order to know that I have successfully quit drinking, I do not need a bottle of wine to be actually “luring me” now, for I can recollect that in the past several days, I could already resist such attractions. At the same time, hedonistic tendencies can be strengthened habitually through unconscious repetition of experiences: the more I drank, the stronger would the tendency of drinking become. My freedom of refusing temptations, however, can be made stronger in a different way:

I can also strengthen the power of my freedom by making it perfectly clear to myself that if I yield, then I would have to despise myself, the subject of yielding, and this would give such strength and impact to the moment of non-value I was tending toward that I could not do it, could not give in to it. My power of resistance thereby increases.²⁹

In order to increase “my power of resistance,” I have to make “perfectly clear to myself” the consequence of following the temptation, which is a rational argument. According to

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Husserl, moral acts should be coherent with ethical axioms, as was mentioned in previous chapters. Hence, when making it clear to myself that to blindly surrender to a hedonistic pleasure is unfree and immoral, I am *proving* to myself that this act is not coherent with moral laws. Here Husserl’s ethical position is again to some extent Kantian: to strengthen my rational power by a clear proving, I have to have some highest rational laws. For Husserl, a moral tendency can be built only through rational persuading: when imagining possible situations in which I am confronted with such and such motivations, I can directly eliminate some tendencies, for I can rationally persuade myself that to follow some of these motivations is immoral. It is true that a scientist will point out that even if I can prove to myself that to use heroin is bad, I will still not be able to give up the habit of using the drug. Husserl may respond that the addiction to the drug is not rooted in the phenomenological ego, but in one’s body, for according to modern cognitive and medical science, even the strong psychological addiction to it is caused by changes to one’s brain and nerve system. Though this issue is important for both phenomenology and psychology, it is too complicated to be discussed thoroughly in this dissertation. To point out that Husserl’s theory may face such a difficulty is already sufficient here.

§5 Sitting Meditation as a State in Which the Heart is Having Intentions

The previous discussions studied Husserl’s understanding of two forms of reflective acts: one can reflectively grasp both his or her intentional acts as arrows “shot out” by one’s ego as the subjective pole, and his or her personal tendencies, as “features” of a bow which this bow received from its own history. In the following sections, I will argue
that within Wang’s framework, there are also two forms of reflective intentions, and the reflective seeing of particular intentions is more important for moral effort.

Before studying the more important form of reflective intention, it is necessary to deal with the less important one, namely, sitting meditation. During an earlier period of his life when he was in Guizhou 貴州 province,30 Wang treated sitting meditation as the major method of moral effort. However, in a letter that he wrote to his students in Hunan 湖南 province around 1509, shortly after he left Guizhou, he already recognized that sitting meditation may be misunderstood as the “Buddhist sitting in stillness” (zuochan ruding 坐禪入定), which is problematic according to his Neo-Confucian position.31 Five years later, he made a clearer distinction between the Buddhist and Confucian meditations:

To study is to clarify the good and to make the body sincere. If one only guards this dizzy heart which is being disturbed, then one is sitting in the Buddhist stillness, which is different from (Mencius’ teaching that) “there must be affairs.”32

The teaching of Mencius means that one must always be actively dealing with some ethical tasks. Wang believes that in Buddhist meditation, one does not have such affairs. Since affairs are intentional objects, for Wang, the heart must always be an active ego who has intentional acts. Ivanhoe correctly points out that according to Huineng, the Buddhist teaching of getting rid of thoughts means to avoid being fixed in things but not

30 Often referred to as Qian 黔 by himself and his followers.
32 學以明善誠身,只兀兀守此昏昧雜擾之心,卻是坐禪入定,非所謂“必有事焉”者矣. Wang, “To Wang Dao III 與王純甫三,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 176, my translation. For the term “you must always be doing things(bi you shi yan 必有事焉),” see Mencius, 2A:2.
to eliminate intentions. However, many Chinese Buddhists do argue that one should stop all intentions from arising, so that the heart can be freed from the troubles of this world (namely, can enjoy nirvana or moksha). Hence, Wang’s reading of Buddhism is one of the well-accepted versions at his time, though not every scholar agrees with him. Whether Wang’s reading of Buddhism is correct, obviously, is another problem which goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. Wang rejects the method of getting rid of all intentions and treats it as a Buddhist method, because this method is accepted by many Confucian thinkers whom Wang wants to reject. To say that one’s opponent is a Buddhist is a popular strategy for Neo-Confucians in debates. Though this strategy is more ideological than philosophical, philosophical arguments can be found “behind” it.

According to Li Dong (or Li Yanping 李侗/李延平, 1093-1163), the teacher of Zhu Xi, the heart stops intending towards things during meditation, which is disagreed with by some other Neo-Confucian thinkers such as Cheng Yi. Wang’s position is similar to that of Cheng Yi. He emphasizes that “if one wants to be without thoughts, that is, not to know anything, he cannot do so unless he is sound asleep or dead like dry wood or dead ashes.” Here, he is describing the state of the heart during Buddhist meditation. The term “dry wood and dead ashes (gaomu sihui 藁木死灰)” is from Chapter 2 of Zhuangzi.

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33 See Ivanhoe, Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Confucianism, 23.

34 For an introduction to such Buddhist thoughts in the Chinese tradition, see Feng, History of Chinese Philosophy, 2.196-198/2.393-399.

35 See “Answers to Questions from Li Yanping B 延平问答下,” in Collected Works of Li Yanping 李延平 (Fuzhou: Zhengyitang 正誼堂, 1866), vol. 2. See also Zhu Xi, “Biography of Mr. Li 李先生行状,” in Collected Works of Li Yanping, vol. 4; and Cheng and Cheng, Collected Works, bk. 4, 189 and 201.

36 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 120, 80/78.

37 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 39, and chap. 162.
It refers to the state of meditation in which “one forgets oneself.”

Liu Wu suggests that the author of Zhuangzi is describing the heart in complete stillness, which even makes the heart lose its subjectivity. Hence, for Wang, the doctrine of Li Dong is similar to that of Daoism. Like other Neo-Confucians, Wang believes that Daoism is problematic regarding the self-cultivating of human beings, which implies that for him, to sit in the state of being dead and dry is not a proper method. On the other hand, if meditation is taken as a Confucian method, then the heart must have intentions:

I further said, “When in devoting oneself to one’s task one gathers his mind and there are music and women in front of him, if he notices them as usual, I am afraid his mind is not concentrated.” “How can one expect not to hear or see them unless he is dry wood or dead ashes, or deaf and blind….” “Formerly someone was engaged in sitting in meditation. His son was studying in the next room and he did not know whether the boy was diligent or lazy. Master Cheng Yi praised him as being very serious and reverential…. “Yichuan was probably ridiculing him.”

Wang believes that in meditation one can still hear and see, namely, can grasp external objects. For Wang, one who cannot hear one’s son reading is not properly sitting in meditation. This implies that objects that one experiences during meditation should not be treated as more important than one’s son, who, as was discussed in Chapter 3, should be an ethical end according to heavenly principles. This leads us to the question that will

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38 See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, Collected Notes on Zhuangzi 莊子集解, in Collected Notes on Zhuangzi and Corrections of Inner Chapters of Collected Notes on Zhuangzi 莊子集解 莊子集解內篇補正, Wang Xianqian and Liu Wu 劉武 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2008), 9-10. This physical book will be quoted as Zhuangzi.


40 “Yichuan” is the art name of Cheng Yi, which Chan translates as “I-chu’uan.”

41 Wang, Chuansi Lu, chap. 184/191.
be studied in the next section: what is this special object during meditation, that could even make a father forget his son?

§6 Reflective Perception of the Original Substance of the Heart in Meditation

For Wang, there is a special object which can only be presented during the meditation, and is different from external objects such as one’s own son. A detailed description of such special objects can be found in one of Wang Ji’s essays on the life of Wang Yangming. Wang Ji’s record of Wang Yangming’s own understanding of meditation is long, but since the details in this essay are important, it is helpful to quote them:

My late Master… was devoted to studying Daoism and Buddhism. He built a hut in a cave and practiced day and night to have insights into key points (of Daoism and Buddhism) …. He said that he once perceived internally that his own shape and body were like a palace made of crystal, and forgot himself, things, heaven, and earth, and felt he was the same as the void…. This is the true image of the spiritual condition. (After he was exiled to Guizhou,) he cut off all branches and leaves, focused on the original source, treated the silent sitting meditation as the foundation of studying, and built his doctrines on this foundation.42

According to Qian Dehong’s record, Wang practiced Daoist meditation in 1501, when he was thirty-one, and began to teach his students to sit in meditation as a Confucian teacher after he was exiled to Guizhou in 1508.43 Wang Ji points out that Wang Yangming

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43 See Qian, “Chronology 1,” in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 33,1354-1357; and Huang, Philosophical Records, 180.
decided to focus his teaching on meditation because Wang Yangming thought that though the way of Confucius is the highest one, the popular style of living and studying of Confucians at his time “was lower than (the ways of) Daoism and Buddhism.”\(^{44}\) This implies that the techniques of meditation that he taught to his students during this period were to some extent borrowed from Daoism and Buddhism. Wang Ji further claims that when Wang Yangming was in his middle age, he perceived during meditations his own “body and shape” internally. According to this record, “true images” that one can see in meditation are not external events, but are inner phenomena, namely, immanent objects correlated with reflective intentions.

The immanent object that Wang can see is “oneself made of crystal.” It was mentioned in the last chapter that for Wang, the original substance of the heart is like a Daoist mystical infant, whose life is immaterial and immortal. Also, according to Wang Ji, in 1501, what Wang Yangming experienced during meditation was that he is “the same with the void.” As was shown in Chapter 4, the Confucian version of the great void is the universal love through which one feels oneself to be one with the universe. The great void in the heart is nothing but the original substance of the heart, which can be cultivated as a “mystical infant” by moral effort. Both Wang Ji and Huang Zongxi believe that in the following teaching, Wang is emphasizing the importance of meditation:

Generally speaking, the fundamental principle of one’s spirit, moral character, speech, and action should be that of collecting and concentrating. Only under unavoidable circumstances should they be diffused.\textsuperscript{45}

The term \textit{shoulian} 收斂 translated by Chan as “collected and concentrated” originally describes plants in winter days, drying and losing leaves.\textsuperscript{46} The heart during meditation is similar to such plants in winter. In this state, the heart is concentrated in itself, rather than having intentions as leaves growing from the heart as the trunk. Therefore, immanent objects of such reflective intentions are not moral intentions of loving things which are particular intentional acts, but \textit{the original capability of moral loving}, for when the heart is loving external things, it is “diffusing (\textit{fasan} 發散).” The term “diffusing (fa 發)” was also translated as “arouse” in the last chapter. Hence, the state before intentions are aroused (weifa) is also the state “before diffusing,” which is the state of the original substance of the heart as the collection of moral tendencies. Likewise, when acts are aroused in the state of \textit{yifa}, they are “diffused” from the heart. During meditation, one is concentrated on the original substance of his or her heart which is his or her original “moral personality.”\textsuperscript{47} As Chen Lai points out, such experiences in meditations are mystical, which can be understood as reflective acts towards the original substance or the great void.\textsuperscript{48} This reading can be supported by Wang’s claim that meditation is “to gather

\textsuperscript{45} Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 54, 46/43, translation altered. This statement of Wang Yangming can also be found in Wang Ji, “Recorded Words on the Meeting in Chuyang,” 4A; and Huang, \textit{Philosophical Records}, 180.

\textsuperscript{46} See Kong Yingda’s comments on \textit{The Book of Rites}, in Kong, \textit{Corrected Meanings of The Book of Rites 礼記正義}; and ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元, \textit{Notes and Comments of The Thirteen Classics} 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1980), 1372.

\textsuperscript{47} See also Zhang Xinmin, “Looking for a Method of Teaching (the Skill of) Experiencing the Substance of Heart Which Begins from the Basic to Achieve the High: On Value and Significance of the Method of Sitting Meditation in Wang Yangming’s System of Moral Effort 寻找下学上达的心性体认施教法─论静坐方法在王阳明工夫系统中的价值与意义,” \textit{Zhejiang Social Science} 浙江社会科学, no. 2 (2017), 121.

the lost heart as the stage of the lesser learning,” which is a cure for the fact that people are “dragged away by things and affairs in their everyday life.”\(^{49}\) The phrase “gather the lost heart” is borrowed by Wang from Mencius. Mencius says:

> Humanity is the human heart, and righteousness is the way of human beings. People abandon the way and do not follow it. People lost their hearts and do not know how to seek them. This is sad…. The way of studying is nothing else but to look for one’s lost heart.\(^{50}\)

According to Mencius, the heart is humanity or \textit{ren}, which is the highest \textit{virtue} according to Confucians. To look for the lost heart, therefore, is to find the lost virtues. It was demonstrated in the last chapter that for Wang, virtues are nothing but moral capabilities of the heart. This means that to find a lost virtue is the same as finding the lost moral capabilities.\(^{51}\) This highest virtue of Confucianism is the capability of loving people properly. As Zhu Xi points out, the function of gathering the lost heart is then to “know” the original good nature of human beings,\(^{52}\) which is also what Wang teaches his students to learn during meditation, according to Qian.\(^{53}\) When teaching students to sit in meditation in 1510, Wang thought that what can be seen in meditation is “the substance of nature,” which is the original substance. Hence, it turns out to be problematic, when Chen Lai equates the substance of the heart revealed mystically in meditation with the “pure ego” in the Husserlian sense.


\(^{50}\) 仁，人心也；義，人路也。舍其路而弗由，放其心而不知求。哀哉…. 學問之道無他，求其放心而已矣. Mencius, 6A:11, my translation.

\(^{51}\) See also Zhu Xi, “On Studying 6 學六,” in Recorded Conversations, 202.

\(^{52}\) See Zhu Xi, “On Studying 6,” in Recorded Conversations, 203.

\(^{53}\) See Qian, “Chronology 1,” in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 33, 1357.
In meditation, the “lost heart” as the original substance of both the heart and human nature can be revealed reflectively. Earlier in this chapter, we also analyzed Husserl’s theory of reflective acts towards one’s own personal tendencies. However, there is a crucial difference between the structures of experiences in meditation discussed by Wang and reflective acts towards personal tendencies, within Husserl’s framework. For Husserl, one has to imagine what one will do in a possible situation, and imagine one’s possible reactions to possible motivations, in order to see one’s tendencies. To some extent, we can say that a tendency is indirectly grasped within this framework, via possible acts guided by this tendency: I know that I have a free character because I know that I can resist a hedonistic lure in a given situation. For Husserl, this process of knowing the tendency can be treated as a process of proving. According to Wang, however, the original substance is perceived directly. This direct experience is also not a rational process, but a mystical feeling which Husserl does not take into consideration at all.

§7 Sitting Meditation Cannot Eliminate Selfish Desires Acquired Habitually

According to Wang, the function of sitting meditation is to mystically experience the original substance that can be lost and found again. Note that though Mencius says that the heart can be lost like domestic pigs and dogs, the heart cannot actually “wander away” like an animal. The original substance of the heart is only concealed by selfish desires, which means that original moral capabilities collected in the substance lose their power of leading the heart as characteristics of the heart. To find the lost heart, therefore, is to help the substance regain this power of guiding acts of the heart as a person. One who acts only according to one’s original moral tendencies is a sage, and sagehood is the
final purpose of moral effort. Sitting meditation in which people can perceive the substance, therefore, is different from the complete recovering of the substance, for Wang treats it as the stage of “lesser learning,” which literally means education for children or the beginning of effort, rather than the final achievement.

For Wang, sitting meditation is insufficient for one who wants to achieve sagehood for two reasons. First, he recognized that students in Chuzhou 滁州 “gradually developed the disease of fondness for tranquility and disgust with activity and degenerated into withered-ness.”  
54 Since mystical feelings in meditation are attractive, people may love such experiences too much. He says that “the effort in meditation seems to be collecting and concentrating, but is actually scattered and addicted.”  
55 The term “addictive (ni 溺)” implies that the mystical experience in meditation can even motivate selfish desires. According to Wang as a Confucian, the most important task of one’s life is to cultivate one’s moral capabilities. Hence, he believes that to be addicted to the mystical experience is improper, and that only if one is not addicted to such experiences can meditation serve as a useful method for moral effort.  
56 Note that different philosophical schools have different understandings regarding the highest goal of life, but Wang raises his argument only to persuade his Confucian contemporaries who generally agree with the Confucian position regarding the goal of life, so that he does not pay much attention to defending this goal itself. There are, actually, many Neo-Confucians who defend this Confucian position against Buddhism and Daoism, but the focus of this chapter is only on Wang’s

55 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 204, 185/192.
56 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 256, 218/214.
theory regarding the method of achieving this goal, which is disagreed with by other Confucians.57

Besides the reasoning against meditation mentioned above, Wang also points out that though in meditation one can see the original substance, one cannot directly strengthen it in this state. He says:

But the highest good is the original substance of the heart. Is there anything in the original substance of the heart that is not good? Now that we want to rectify the heart, where in this original heart can we direct our effort? The effort must be able to focus on where the heart operates. In the heart’s operation, it is impossible for it to be entirely free from evil. Therefore the force (of the effort) must be directed here, which is to make intentions sincere.58

The original substance is completely good, which means that no matter how hard one looks at it, it cannot be made any better. In a letter to Lu Cheng, Wang emphasizes that “nothing has been added to the state of absolute quietness.”59 Here the “quietness (ji 寂)” is equal to the term “tranquility,” which refers to the original substance of the heart whose contents can never be changed. The original substance is a “void” which does not contain any fixed opinions, but only capabilities to grasp things with values as they should be. Based on this understanding, Wang argues that the sage also cannot add anything to this great void of liangzhi. Unlike this void, activities of the heart are concrete, so that Wang argues that “we can make our effort only in (the case) when the

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57 For an introductory study on the debate between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, see Feng, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 213-214/408-413, and 295-297/566-571.


heart is aroused.”⁶⁰ As a moral mirror, the original substance itself is completely “transparent,” though this transparency is moral but not neutral. To look in a mirror cannot stop it from being dirty, and such obscurations cannot be cleaned by being simply stared at. Similarly, Wang argues that to mystically look at the original substance in meditation cannot actually eliminate selfish desires:

I said, “One’s feelings seem to be all right when one is tranquil. However, when something happens, they become different. Why is it?” The Teacher said, “This is because one only knows to cultivate oneself in tranquility but does not exert effort to overcome oneself. Consequently, when something happens one turns topsy-turvy.”⁶¹

In this quotation, the term “tranquil” refers to sitting meditation. By saying that one may “turn topsy-turvy” when things happen, Wang argues that one will act improperly when confronted with emergent situations which require immediate reactions. Difficult situations as objects can motivate selfish desires in the heart of the one who only practices during meditation, which implies that he or she still has immoral characteristics, despite the effort of meditation he or she has taken. As a successful military leader, Wang often takes campaigns as examples of such difficult situations. The most challenging and serious military task that he dealt with in his career is the revolt of Prince Ning 宁王 Zhu Chenhao 朱宸濠 in 1519.⁶² As Wang Ji records, Wang Yangming describes his experiences of leading campaigns against the prince as follows:

For example, people were suspecting that I was on the side of Prince Ning. If I had an iota of the heart of being stirred up when my plan was a little bit

⁶¹ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 23, 28/28, translation altered.
⁶² See Qing, To Acquire Wisdom, 32; and Chan, “Introduction,” in Instructions for Practical Living, xxvi-xxvii.
disclosed, my body would have been smashed. How could I wait for today then! If I had an iota of the heart of obfuscating when my actions were slightly careless, everything would have been broken…. Only when liangzhi is extended in such situations can it be the true knowing, and only when things are rectified in such situations are they truly corrected.63

The “heart of being stirred (jizuo zhi xin 激作之心)” and the “heart of obfuscating (jiajie zhi xin 假借之心)” refer to improper acts that Wang may have in difficult situations like military campaigns. For Wang, only people who can resist immoral attractions when they have to make quick and fatal decisions have true achievements of moral effort. He believes that people who “turn topsy-turvy” will still be misguided by their selfish desires in such cases. This means that moral capabilities in the original substance can be used unconsciously, when there is no space for rational thinking. Meditation is not a proper method of moral effort, for it is only a looking at such capabilities. Wang seems to be saying that moral capabilities are like the skill of shooting: one cannot master the art of shooting only through thinking about the essence of the art. Thus, Wang believes that one also need practice one’s moral capabilities in a way similar to that through which one practices one’s skill of shooting. The method of such ethical practicing will be the topic of the next section. Wang’s argument regarding reactions in the difficult situations of people who do not have moral characteristics is a universal statement regarding human consciousness, but this universal theory is based on his own personal experiences.

Namely, Wang believes that all people need moral tendencies in order to act properly in emergent cases, for he himself experienced such relations between his own moral

63 只知疑與悔王同謀，機少不密，若有一毫激作之心，此身已成齏粉，何待今日！動少不慎，若有一毫假借之心，萬事已如瓦裂 .... 此處致得，方是真知；此處格得，方是真物. Wang Ji, “Notes of Reading the Late Teacher’s Letter to Hairi Weng on Dispatching Troops in Jian 頭先師再報海日翁吉安起兵書序,” Collected Works, 13:6B, my translation. Hairi Weng 海日翁 is Wang Yangming’s father. This letter can also be found in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 41, 1775.
tendencies and his moral acts in emergent situations. His universalization of his own personal experiences obviously needs more justification. The task of this chapter is only to clarify his position regarding the method of moral effort, rather than defending it. Hence, a description of his theory regarding meditation is sufficient here.

§8 Wang’s Method of Eliminating Selfish Desires: To Polish Oneself in Particular Affairs

To perceive the original substance of the heart mystically in meditation cannot help it get rid of selfish desires which prevent the heart from acting calmly and properly in emergent situations. As was discussed in the last chapter, selfish desires are acquired by the heart habitually. A bad habit comes into being through repeated wrong deeds. Hence, Wang believes that the only way to eliminate selfish desires as immoral habits is to act properly in a repeated manner. This method is expressed by him as “training and polishing oneself in affairs (shi shang molian 事上磨练).” When discussing meditation with Lu Cheng, he claims that only through such polishing “can one stand firm and remain calm whether in activity or in tranquility.”64 In a dialogue on the same topic with Chen Jiuchuan (or Chen Mingshui 陳九川/陳明水, 1494-1562), another important student of his, Wang also maintains that only through the effort of polishing in affairs can one have progress in effort, otherwise the heart will be panicked or confused when difficult situations arise.65 This method of polishing in particular situations is also described by

64 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 23, 28/28.
65 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 204, 185/192.
Wang as “making an effort in harmony (he 何).”\(^{66}\) As was mentioned in Chapter 4, in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, harmony is the state in which every emotion of the heart “hits the rhythm,” which implies that for Wang, the effort is to deal with particular emotional acts, rather than the equilibrium (*zhong 中*) as the original capability of proper acts. Such acts happen not only in military situations but also in all possible circumstances that one can meet. In the existing body of Wang’s work, he mentions that one can polish oneself when he or she is sick, when his or her children are ill, and when one is preparing for the imperial exam.\(^{67}\) A more detailed description of this method is given by Wang in the following paragraph:

> Since you have your official duties, you should pursue learning right in those official duties. *Only then will you have true gewu.* For instance, when you interrogate a litigant, do not become angry because his replies are impolite or become glad because his words are smooth…. To do any of these is selfish…. You must carefully examine yourself and control yourself. (You should) avoid any (thought) of being unfair which will destroy the truth of who is correct and who is incorrect. This is *gewu* and extending *liangzhi*. Among the duties of keeping records and presiding over litigations, there is none that is not concrete learning.\(^{68}\)

According to this quotation, to make sure that one will not act selfishly in dealing with official tasks is to *gewu*, which is a process of rectifying an improper emotional act to a proper one in a particular situation. Using Wang’s own example, words of a litigant should be constituted with a neutral value, so that if one feels angry with these words, one is incorrectly giving them a negative value, which should be rectified. That is to say, to

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\(^{67}\) See Wang, “To Huang Zongming II 與黃誠甫二,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 4, 181, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 41/38; and “To the Bangying and Bangzheng Brothers II,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 4, 189-190.

\(^{68}\) Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 218, 193/197-198, translation altered, and my emphasis.
polish oneself in particular affairs is not only to avoid improper acts in the future, but also to change such acts that have already happened in a given circumstance.

Wang even believes that such processes of *gewu* can also happen during sitting meditation. This indicates that during meditation, objects other than the original substance may be presented to the heart.\(^{69}\) He maintains that “[t]ranquility and motion make no difference for *gewu*…. There are affairs both in tranquility and in motion.”\(^{70}\) Affairs in tranquility are objects of *gewu*, which means that they can be improperly constituted first and then be corrected. The original substance mystically revealed, however, is something properly perceived. He also says that “[p]reserving and nourishing are self-examination when one is not engaged in activity.”\(^{71}\) When not being engaged in activities, one is meditating. If there were no objects incorrectly seen in such cases, then it would be unnecessary to examine oneself. However, the function of *gewu* during meditation is also to deal with thoughts as results of selfish desires:

When there are no affairs, each and every selfish desire for sex, wealth, and fame must be discovered. *The root of the trouble must be pulled up and thrown away so that it will never sprout again.* Only then can we feel delighted. At all times be like a cat trying to catch a rat, with eyes single-mindedly watching and ears single-mindedly listening. *As soon as an evil thought begins to arise, overcome it and cast it away.*\(^{72}\)

When I am sitting in meditation, selfish thoughts as immoral intentions may still occur, though wealth or attracting bodies are not actually in front of me. I may imagine wealth

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\(^{69}\) See also Zhang, “Looking for a Method,” 123-124.

\(^{70}\) Wang, *Chuansi Lu*, chap. 87, 58/55, translation altered.

\(^{71}\) Wang, *Chuansi Lu*, chap. 36, 35/34, translation altered.

\(^{72}\) Wang, *Chuansi Lu*, chap. 39, 37/35, my emphasis.
that I may accumulate in the future, may recollect an improper sexual relation that I once had, or may be angry because I feel that I am despised unjustly. Such imaginations, anticipations, and recollections are also immoral from the perspective of Confucians, because they all arise from selfish desires as their roots. Meditation for Wang also has a function similar to the imagination of possible acts in possible situations described by Husserl. Husserl’s rational imagination grasps both an imagined act as the sign, and a personal tendency behind this act as its “signified.” For Wang, not only imagined acts that may never happen, but also actual acts in the past, present or future can serve as signs for one’s selfish properties.

For Husserl, one who recognizes that he or she has an unfree tendency should “rationally persuade” oneself that such and such reactions in such imagined situations are improper. Wang, on the other hand, states that to simply recognize that a possible intention is immoral is insufficient for moral effort: when I realize that I have an improper lust towards an imagined person in meditation, I should also attempt to rectify my attitude during the same practice of meditation, rather than simply “looking at” this possible immoral act. Meditations during which one can repeatedly rectify such acts can also be treated as particular affairs in which one polishes oneself. The distinction between Husserl’s imagination of possible acts and Wang’s method of polishing in affairs can be treated as similar to the distinction between two attitudes towards mathematical principles. In order to theoretically accept a mathematical principle, a universal proof is sufficient for me. However, if I want to use this principle as a tool to solve particular mathematical problems, I will have to practice repeatedly. I should try to use this principle well in every case. Similarly, one has to attempt to deal with daily tasks in a
proper emotional way. Here even mistakes are useful: by pointing out what is wrong and rectifying it *repeatedly*, my mathematical skills are also *habitually* polished. Since within the framework of Wang, principles themselves are already in the heart, the only problem is to practice the heart’s ability to use them practically, rather than proving them theoretically.

§9 Nie Bao’s Emphasis on Meditation Based on a Difficulty in Wang’s Doctrine of Polishing Oneself in Affairs

In the previous section, it was shown that Wang believes that the power of the original substance to guide people to act morally in particular circumstances can be recovered only through habitually eliminating selfish desires. This process of polishing in affairs is to try to act morally and to rectify immoral acts. Since *gewu* can also happen during meditation, the more important function of meditation is also to eliminate immoral habits for the sake of future moral acts, rather than mystically looking at the original substance itself.\(^{73}\) This doctrine of Wang is accepted by many of his important students, including Qian Dehong, Wang Ji, Zou Shouyi, and Ouyang De (or Ouyang Nanye 歐陽德/歐陽南野, 1495-1554). One of those who do not accept it is Nie Bao (or Nie Shuangjiang 聶豹/聶雙江, 1487-1563).\(^{74}\) Scholars have different opinions regarding whether Nie Bao can be treated as a philosophical heir of Wang and whether he correctly understands

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74 See Kern, *Das Wichtigste im Leben*, 521-536; and Huang, *Philosophical Records*, 617.
Wang. But what is relevant here is whether Nie Bao’s critique is philosophically reasonable. In order to answer this question, a simple summarization of Nie Bao’s position might be helpful.

Generally, Nie Bao believes that the only proper method of moral effort is sitting meditation. Like Wang, Nie Bao does not treat meditation as a state in which the heart is not acting, but a process in which the original substance of the heart is revealed as an object. He agrees with Zou Shouyi and acknowledges that tranquility and motion are not two different moments, for the first notion refers to the stable original substance of the heart, while all acts of the heart are in motion. Since the heart is always in motion, for Nie Bao, there are also intentions during meditation. Huang reports:

The Master was free from business for a long time in prison and was in extreme tranquility. (In this state) he suddenly saw the true substance of his heart, which is bright and crystal clear, and everything is ready for it. He was happy and said, “This is the equilibrium before intentions are aroused. If it is guarded and is not lost, every principle under heaven will grow from it.”

Chen Lai correctly suggests that this experience of Nie Bao is similar to Wang’s experiences during meditation, which is a mystical grasp of the original substance. According to Nie Bao, such mystical experiences have a methodological priority. He argues in his letter to Zou that “to focus on tranquility is the effort of studying” and that

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75 For more information on Nie Bao’s relation with Wang, see Huang, Philosophical Records, 373; and Mou Zongsan, Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy 中国哲学十九講, Complete Works of Mou Zongsan 29 (Taipei: Linking Publish, 2003), 412-413.

76 夫無時不寂, 有時不感者, 心之體也; 感惟其時……故謂寂感有二時者, 非也…… See Nie Bao, “Four Letters Replying to Zou Shouyi 答鄒東廓司成四首,” in Collected Works of Nie Bao 聶豹集, 261.

77 先生之學, 獨中間久燄煾, 忽見此心真體, 光明湛徹, 萬物皆備。乃喜曰: “此未發之中也, 守是不失, 天下之理皆從此出矣。” See Huang, Philosophical Records, 372, my translation.

one should “return to tranquility to master (intentions) in motion.” Meditation as the method is the “preparation (yu 豫)” for future moral acts. According to Nie Bao, since the original substance is the necessary condition for moral acts in particular situations, one should “prepare” this necessary condition before one begins to face such situations, for meditation is the only method that directly deals with the substance.

As has been discussed above, Wang believes that the original substance cannot be directly dealt with and strengthened, for it is already complete and perfect. According to Nie Bao, however, the original substance can be nourished during meditation and “gain more power.” He treats meditation as taking care of the cannon, and moral acts as firing the cannon: an exact fire indicates that the cannon is in a good condition, while in order to guarantee exact fire, one should at first focus not on shooting, but on protecting the cannon itself. For Nie Bao, meditation is not to merely look at the mirror, but to wipe and clean it. Interestingly, according to him, to focus on gewu is only looking at clear or blurred images on the mirror, which is how Wang describes sitting meditation. Here is another important metaphor used by Nie Bao:

The word nourishing means so many experiences, so much gathering, so many collections, and so much quiet endurance. It is like the thunder under the mountain, collecting its sound under the shadow of the earth, and is like dragons and snakes who hide their bodies in places that are too deep to be measured. Then (the thunder) flies from earth and (dragons and snakes) fly to

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80 See Nie Bao, “Replying to Wang Ji (Discussing the Extending of Liangzhi) 答王龍溪 (致知辯議),” in *Collected Works*, 376.

heaven. The changes of dragons and snakes are spiritual, and the sound of the thunder (reaches) far.\footnote{養之一字, 是多少體驗, 多少汲蓄, 多少積累, 多少耐心。譬之山下有雷, 收聲於地勢重陰之下, 龍蛇之蛰, 存身於深昧不測之所, 然後地奮天飛, 其化神, 其聲遠也。Nie Bao, “Three Letters Replying Ouyang De 答歐陽南野太史三首,” in \textit{Collected Works}, 240, my translation.}

By using the image “thunder under a mountain,” Nie Bao is obviously referring to the hexagram Yi頤 in \textit{The Book of Changes}, which originally means chewing. It has the trigram Zhen震 as the symbol of thunder under the trigram Gen艮 as the symbol of mountain. Generally speaking, this hexagram discusses the phenomenon of eating and nourishing of the body.\footnote{See \textit{The Book of Changes}, bk. 3.} Nie Bao is arguing that in order for thunder to be loud, it has to be kept under the mountain for a long time before it is released. When it is under the mountain, it is resting, which is a process of collecting energy like eating. This process of being kept strengthens the power of the thunder, like snakes and dragons which rest under the earth to gather their power. Within Nie Bao’s framework, the original substance of the heart is like a body which does not have any disability: this body already has all the natural capabilities of a body, and no further functions can be added to it. At the same time, however, its power can be increased through resting and eating, which enable the functions of this body to work better.

\textbf{§10 Nie Bao’s Rejection of the Method of Polishing Oneself in Affairs}

Nie Bao emphasizes the methodological importance of sitting meditation because it, as the rest and nourishment of the original substance, can prepare the original substance
with more power to resist selfish desires. This reason, however, is not strong enough for him to reject the doctrine of polishing oneself in affairs, for there can be more than one efficient method for the same goal. Hence, he has to argue not only that sitting meditation is useful but also that to polish oneself in affairs as a method is problematic. He recognizes this necessity, and argues as following:

To treat sensing as liangzhi is to confuse the state after intentions are aroused with the state before intentions are aroused, to confuse the use of liangzhi with the extending of it, and to confuse the action of helping seedlings grow with the action of nourishing them. There would be no distinction between the way of kings and the way of hegemons, nor the distinction between the collecting (of righteousness) and incidental deeds (of righteousness).84

The term “helping seedlings grow” is borrowed from Mencius, who mentions that a farmer mistakenly pulls up seedlings in the field to “help them grow,” which actually ruins their roots.85 According to Zhu Xi’s interpretation, this tale means that the farmer only wants the achievement (namely, grain), but does not realize that the effort of farming is the foundation of the grain. Thus, the farmer pulls up the seedlings, which harms both the effort of farming and the final harvest.86 In order to polish oneself, one has to attempt to act well in every case, which is treated by Nie Bao as the grain, rather than the effort of farming. This means that for Nie Bao, people who tend to polish themselves are pulling up their own hearts as the seedlings in order to see moral acts as the grain.

85 See Mencius: 2A:2.
86 See Zhu Xi, Explanations and Collected Notes, 233-234.
Another reason why Nie Bao rejects the method of polishing oneself in affairs is that people may confuse moral acts with moral actions. That is to say, one may think that as long as one is performing some moral actions with his or her body, he or she is polishing his or her own heart, which, according to Wang, requires moral acts as inner intentions of the heart. According to the Confucian belief, the lords of the Spring and Autumn period may also had actions in accordance with principles in most cases, but they did so only for the sake of their interests. They did not have inner moral love towards the proper goals of their actions. One who thinks that he or she is acting morally may only be having moral actions arising from selfish desires. Hence, Nie Bao argues that “to seek what is correct in things… may inevitably have the heart (of loving) success and profit.”87 The heart of loving success and profit means either the act of loving hedonistic pleasure or selfish desires as the roots of hedonistic acts. Nie Bao believes that one who attempts to perform moral acts in particular situations will fail, because this requires one to act morally in a repeated manner in all these situations, while one who still needs moral effort will inevitably act immorally sometimes, due to his or her selfish desires. The end of moral effort, at the same time, is to eliminate such desires which make it impossible for one to act correctly in all cases. If a method of treating a disease is prevented from working by the disease itself, then the method can in no way be an effective one.

One immediate doubt concerning Nie Bao’s argument discussed above is that according to Wang, to gewu, namely, to correct one’s own acts which are not moral, is also a process of polishing oneself in affairs. For Wang, to avoid acting immorally is like

physical practice, while *gewu* is like the medical treatment: though one cannot work out when one is sick, he or she can still be medically treated in most of such cases. Though Nie Bao does not pay much attention to this possibility, he does argue that one who has selfish diseases in one’s heart may not be able to recognize his or her immoral acts. He once criticizes the popular teaching in the Yangming school which emphasizes that everyone can be a sage. He argues that if one emphasizes too much that the original substance of the heart of an ordinary man is the same with the void of the sage, then “it is encouraging pride and insulting the sage.”88 One who is incorrectly proud of oneself is one who mistakenly thinks oneself to be a sage and blindly thinks that all his or her intentions are proper. Kern also suggests that Nie Bao does not believe the method of *gewu*, for he does not have a high evaluation of the *liangzhi* of ordinary people.89 The philosopher who also recognizes this difficulty of the theory of Wang and expresses it more explicitly is Wang’s close friend, Zhan Ruoshui (or Zhan Ganquan 湛若水/湛甘泉, 1466-1560):

> My elder brother you read *gewu* as rectifying one’s thoughts (*niantou* 念頭), but whether the thought is correct or not cannot be relied on. For example, the void and nothingness of Buddhism and Daoism claim that one should stay at nothing and raise the heart, and should get rid of all appearances or dust on the root. They believe themselves to be correct. Yang Zhu 楊朱90 and Mozi were believed to be sages in their time. How could they be at ease when considering themselves to be incorrect? Because they do not have the effort of learning and questioning, they do not know that what they believe to be correct is evil. Those so-called sages actually fall to the level of beasts.91


89 See Kern, *Das Wichtigste im Leben*, 598-600.

90 Yang Zhu is a Daoist philosopher living in the pre-Qin period who claims that one should only concern one’s own personal interests.

91 兄之格物訓之正念頭也. 則念頭之正否亦未可據. 如釋老之虛無, 則曰應無所住而生其心, 無諸相無根塵, 亦自以為正矣. 楊墨之時皆以為聖矣, 豈自以為不正而安之. 以其無學問之功而不知其所謂正者乃邪而不自知也, 其所謂聖, 乃流於禽獸也. Zhan,
Zhan points out that according to the Confucian perspective, even some ancient wise men such as Mozi, Yang Zhu, Laozi, and Buddha may mistakenly treat their incorrect thoughts as correct. Thoughts mentioned by Zhan are referring to intentions within Wang’s framework, which are intentional acts. Zhan argues that though these non-Confucian philosophers are wise regarding many issues, they still have selfish desires. According to Zhan, selfish desires influence not only these philosophers’ capacities to act well, but also their abilities to realize that their own deeds or intentions are immoral. One who cannot perceive one’s immoral acts will not want to rectify them, which makes gewu in every possible affair impossible. This argument of Zhan can be used to support Nie Bao’s position, though Zhan himself may not agree with Nie Bao’s attitudes towards sitting meditation.

In this section, I studied Nie Bao’s three accounts against Wang’s method of polishing oneself in affairs. First, he argues that to polish in affairs is to have moral acts in particular situations, which is the grain of moral effort, but not the effort itself as farming. He also believes that people may confuse moral actions with moral acts, which means that people who do not truly love what should be loved may also believe that they are making moral effort. Finally, according to Nie Bao and Zhan, one who has selfish desires may not realize that his or her acts are immoral, which prevents him or her from attempting to rectify these acts. The process of rectifying as gewu, however, is an essential part of Wang’s method of polishing in affairs.

§11 *Liangzhi* as the Clear Perception of Moral and Immoral Acts

Nie Bao’s challenge against Wang’s theory of polishing oneself in affairs is based on his emphasis on sitting meditation, which is also the position strongly held by many other of Wang’s students.\(^{92}\) This challenge pushes Wang towards the core of his later doctrine, namely, the doctrine of extending *liangzhi* (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知). He mentions many times that this doctrine is a cure to “the defect of fondness of tranquility and disgust with activity.”\(^{93}\) It is unclear when these materials were recorded, but Qian maintains that Wang began to raise the teaching of *zhi liangzhi* in 1521, which was inspired by his experiences during the campaign against Prince Ning.\(^ {94}\) In a letter to Zou written in 1525, Wang also says that he began to use the doctrine of *liangzhi* to educate people “recently” and that his student Nan Daji (or Nan Yuanshan 南大吉/南元善, 1487-1541) who had already accepted this teaching was making some progress.\(^ {95}\) This indicates that this teaching began to be popular in the Yangming school around this period. It is necessary to treat details of Wang’s doctrine itself first, which can be described in the following ways.

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\(^{92}\) For example, many students whom he taught in the early period of his career when he was in Chuzhou strongly believe in the method of meditation. See Zhang, “Looking for a Method,” 122. Another important figure who agrees with Nie Bao is Luo Hongxian (or Luo Nianan 羅洪先/羅念庵, 1504-1564), who did not meet Wang personally, but was considered as a student of Wang by other students of him. For more information, see Huang, *Philosophical Records*, 371 and 386-429; Okada, *Wang Yangming and the Philosophy of the Late Ming Dynasty*, 117-142; Wu, *Studies of the Later Yangming School*, 208-254; and Kern, *Das Wichtigste im Leben*, 621-750.


\(^{94}\) See Qian, “Chronology 2,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 34, 1411.

\(^{95}\) See Wang, “To Zou Shouyi II,” in *Complete Works*, bk. 5, 200.
First, according to Wang, “liangzhi is nothing but a heart of right and wrong.”\textsuperscript{96} The term “the heart of right and wrong” is also translated by Chan as “the sense of right and wrong,” which refers to a special kind of knowing. What is known here is not the universal standards of right and wrong, but ethical properties of particular deeds or intentions in particular temporal moments:

Your letter says “I have tested my own heart and found that as pleasure, anger, worry, and fear are felt and aroused, although I am much perturbed, nevertheless as soon as the liangzhi of my heart realizes it, then without any resolution on my part the feelings disappear or are stopped. They may be checked at the beginning, or controlled while they are in progress, or changed at the end.”\textsuperscript{97}

Though this paragraph is quoted from the letter from Lu Cheng to Wang, Wang himself agrees with most parts of it, so that it can be used as a description of liangzhi according to Wang’s own thoughts. One’s liangzhi can recognize one’s selfish intentions in different temporal spheres. This reminds us of temporal features of reflective noesis which we discussed previously in this chapter. According to Husserl, the ego can recollect acts both in the distant past and in the sphere of retention. Also, in the sphere of protention, possible future acts may be anticipated. Since the sphere of retention, as the tail of the comet is still a part of the now-sphere, a reconstitution of a retential act is also a reflective grasp of a part of the now-sphere. It is obvious then that Lu Cheng’s statement listed above which Wang agrees with is an ethical version of this form of reflective noesis. Though Lu Cheng only mentions reflective grasps of immoral intentions, it is logical that moral ones can also be recognized, for an immoral intention cannot be located without

\textsuperscript{96} Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 288, 239/228, translation altered.
\textsuperscript{97} Wang, \textit{Chuanxi Lu}, chap. 158, 134/138-139, translation altered, and my emphasis.
being distinguished from a moral one. Liangzhi in this sense is, therefore, the reflective knowing of both right and wrong intentions in the temporal stream of the heart as an ego. These intentions can be in the future, in the past, or in the now-sphere.

My reading might be too hasty: though Lu Cheng only mentions internal feelings such as anger and worry, it is not strong enough to prove that for Wang himself, liangzhi only ethically grasps internal phenomena. This question leads to another important feature of liangzhi according to Wang:

However, the root of making intentions sincere lies in zhi liangzhi. What has been described as “what people do not know but I alone know” is exactly liangzhi in our hearts. If one knows what good is but does not do it right then and there according to liangzhi, or knows what evil is but does not get rid of it according to liangzhi, liangzhi will be obscured.98

The notion “what people do not know but I alone know” is a term borrowed from Zhu Xi’s comments to The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean, which is often quoted by Neo-Confucians as “lone knowing (duzhi 獨知).” This notion is used by Wang to describe liangzhi in many cases. He says that “liangzhi is the moment of the lone knowing” and when “one knows the pain and itch oneself” in two poems on liangzhi.99 In another series of poems to his students, he also claims that “the moment without sounds or smells, as the moment of the lone knowing, is the foundation of all things growing from heaven and earth.”100 Qian arranges these poems between a poem written in 1524

98 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 318, 263/248, translation altered, and my emphasis.


and another one in 1527, which indicates that Qian believes them to be written after 1524. Hence, it is reasonable to treat them as expressions of Wang’s later understanding of liangzhi. According to The Doctrine of the Mean, “There is nothing more visible than what is hidden and nothing more manifest than what is subtle,”\textsuperscript{101} which is interpreted by Zhu Xi with the term “lone knowing”:

“What is hidden” means the dark place. “What is subtle” is tiny things. The term “lone” means what other people do not know but one knows only by oneself. It is saying that though indications of tiny things in the darkness have not formed, one knows them alone…. Therefore, superior men … are especially careful when alone. In order to stop human desires from sprouting, (superior men) will not let them grow in the darkness, far away from the way (dao).\textsuperscript{102}

In this comment of Zhu Xi, what other people do not know but I know alone is whether my selfish desires grow stronger or not. Such phenomena belong to the inner sphere of consciousness, and are analyzed by Husserl as immanent objects of reflective acts. Zhu Xi also treats such immanent objects as “beginning (ji幾)” in two senses. As an immoral act towards pleasure, such an object is both logically and temporally prior to the action which physically grabs the pleasing thing. Thus, a selfish intention that can only be known by oneself alone is the beginning of the action visible to all people. Also, a selfish love sprouting may grow into an intention which is even more immoral, so that the first weaker intention is the beginning of the second stronger one. The weaker selfish intention is, therefore, similar to the fiat of Husserl, which is a vague form of a certain valuing act.

\textsuperscript{101} The Doctrine of the Mean: 1. See Chan, Source Book, 98.

\textsuperscript{102} 隱,暗處也. 微,細事也. 獨者,人所不知而已所獨知之地也. 言幽暗之中,細微之事,跡雖未形而已獨知之…. 足以君子… 於此尤加謹焉,所以遏人欲於將萌,而不使其滋長於隱微之中,以至離道之遠也. Zhu, Explanations and Collected Notes, 17-18, my translation.
Kern also uses the term “order [drive]” to translate ji when he studies different positions regarding it from Wang Ji and Nie Bao, which is the “medium” between the original substance as the tranquil capability and active intentions “using” the capability.103 When the sprouting selfish intention, namely, an immoral fiat is grasped reflectively, the more serious selfish act as its consequence is anticipated.

I spent some time in discussing Zhu Xi’s analysis of lone knowing, for when Wang describes liangzhi as lone knowing, he is treating Zhu’s theory as the background that he and his audiences share. Since he only uses this notion without making more comments, it is reasonable to suppose that his understanding of lone knowing is similar to that of Zhu Xi. For example, Wang once instructs Nan to recognize his own faults in dealing with political affairs with the help of liangzhi. What is important is one of Nan’s questions to Wang. Nan asks, “It is possible to work hard (to deal with) faults of the body. How about faults of the heart?”104 Wang replies, “In the past, the mirror had not been made bright and could contain dirt. Now that the mirror is clear, the dust naturally cannot hold when it falls.”105 Here the function of a clear mirror is not to correctly reflect beautiful or ugly things, but to make dust on it easier to be seen. The dust obviously means “the fault of the heart” mentioned by Nan, namely, an improper act of the heart. In another case, Wang clearly points out that “faults of the heart” are nothing but improper emotions:

103 See Kern, Das Wichtigste im Leben, 612.
When there is such an attachment to the seven emotions, they become selfish desires and obscurations to liangzhi. Nevertheless, as soon as there is any attachment, liangzhi is naturally aware of it. As it is aware of it, the obscurcation will be gone and its substance will be restored.¹⁰⁶

Attachments of emotions are selfish desires which are the same as “faults of the heart” mentioned by Nan. Hence, emotions with attachments are emotional intentions which treat hedonistic pleasure as the end and treat living beings or even human beings as means. Since in the series of dialogues between Nan and Wang, Wang is always emphasizing liangzhi, the capability to clearly recognize dust as inner faults is a description of the function of liangzhi.

Here is another crucial proof. In his famous letter to Gu Lin (or Gu Dongqiao 顧璘/顧東橋, 1476 –1545), Wang argues that after the fall of the Xia Dynasty, Shang Dynasty and Zhou Dynasty, people abandoned the way of ancient kings but followed that of despots such as Duke Wen of Jin (Jin Wengong 晉文公, 697 – 628 BC) and Duke Huan of Qi (Qi Huangong 齊桓公, ? – 643 BC), who “stole and appropriated what seemed to be the teaching of ancient kings, and outwardly made a pretense of following it in order inwardly to satisfy their selfish desires.”¹⁰⁷ By successfully pretending to perform like ancient kings, despots have actions whose “external appearances” are similar to ancient kings. The only difference between these despots and the ancient sage-kings is that actions of the former are guided by selfish inner intentions, while actions of the latter are motivated by inter-subjective, moral acts. For Wang, all people at his time are chasing the

¹⁰⁶ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 290, 240/229, translation altered, and my emphasis.
¹⁰⁷ Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 143, 115/121, my emphasis.
way of despots as “a theater where a hundred plays were being presented, as it were.”108 In the first book of *Chuanxi Lu*, he also mentions drama once. He maintains that actors who are performing as filial sons perfectly on the stage do not achieve the ultimate good, for when playing, their hearts are not internally following heavenly principles.109 The problem of the time of Wang and Gu Lin is that most people are only pretending to be moral like actors on the stage. Wang points out to Gu Lin that the doctrine of *liangzhi* is the only solution to this problem.

As objects of lone knowing which is a reflective act, intentions cannot be hidden from the sight of the heart, according to Wang. He argues that “when you direct your thought your *liangzhi* knows that it is right if it is right and wrong if it is wrong. *You cannot keep anything from it.*”110 As is pointed out by Husserl, an immanent object is always given absolutely: it has no “backside” which I cannot see directly, when I look at it in a reflection. Similarly, Wang is arguing that one cannot hide any noetic layers of an act from one’s own self-observation, for the act is completely given to *liangzhi*. Acts belonging to other people’s mental streams, on the contrary, are not intuitively accessible to me, which makes it possible that they “hide their true intentions” from me. Since I am another person to others, I can also hide my inner acts from them, while I cannot cheat myself through hiding my own intentions, according to both Husserl and Wang. It was already mentioned above that Husserl’s theory of the absolute givenness of immanent objects needs more careful study if it is to be justified completely, but it is sufficient here.

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110 Wang, *Chuanxi Lu*, chap. 206, 186/193, translation altered, and my emphasis.
to point out that Wang’s understanding of liangzhi as a self-observation which cannot be cheated is also based on the fact that for him, this self-observation is a reflective act.

§12 The Temporal Structure of Liangzhi as Lone Knowing and Zhi Liangzhi as Correction of the Intention Known Alone by Oneself

As lone knowing, liangzhi is not an external observation of one’s own actions, but a reflective perception of the immanent intentions of one’s heart. As immanent objects, intentions belonging to the mental stream of a person are given completely without being adumbrated. Since particular intentions are all temporal, reflective grasps of them also have the structure of inner time consciousness: they may recollect intentions from the past, seize upon an act that is still in the now-sphere, or anticipate an act in the future.

Wang believes that the recollection of immoral acts in a distant past is not too useful for moral effort. He points out:

To have regrets and to realize one’s mistake (in the past) is the medicine to get rid of the disease. But it is better to correct one’s mistake. If the mistake is allowed to remain, you have a condition in which disease arises because of the medicine.111

Though Wang does not mention liangzhi in this quotation (maybe because this dialogue happened before the development of the doctrine of zhi liangzhi), the regret reflectively realizes a past mistake. Wang argues that if one only sees the mistake but does not

111 Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 106, 70/60, translation altered.
attempt to change it, then the disease of the heart will not be cured. It is more proper to
correct mistakes *immediately*:

I said, “Reading is indispensable to the recuperation and refreshment of the
heart. However, while I read, certain ideas associated with questions in civil
service examinations keep on coming up. How can I avoid it?” The Teacher
said, “So long as your liangzhi is genuine and earnest… it will be easy to
realize and overcome it. Take this matter of reading. Liangzhi knows that it is
wrong to try to force oneself to memorize, and when there is such an intention
it *immediately* overcomes it and gets rid of it. It knows that impatience is
wrong, and if there is such an intention it *immediately* overcomes it and gets rid
of it. It knows that to strive for plenty and to boast about excess is wrong, and if
there is such an intention it *immediately* overcomes it and gets rid of it.”

One can get rid of ideas and thoughts (which are all intentions) that improperly treat
Confucian texts according to *liangzhi* only *immediately*. Phenomenologically speaking, to
deal with an act immediately is to deal with it when it is in the sphere of retention. When
an act is “in” the primary current, the attentive power of the ego is targeted on the book,
while when realizing and correcting a selfish thought, the attention is to the reading.
There must be a change of directions of the regard, which “takes time,” so that even an
“immediate” grasp of a feeling will happen “after” the feeling itself. Note that this
relation of “before and after” is not in the form of a spatial line, which is the form of the
objective time. When my improper feeling towards the book is seen actively, it is still
pertaining passively in the sphere of retention as the “temporal background” of my
consciousness.

The correction of the improper feeling “follows” the seeing of the feeling, but is still
in the same now-sphere. This rectifying, however, is not a recollection but an anticipation

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that should be fulfilled, which Wang treats as zhi liangzhi. He maintains in a letter written in 1525 that “Only this clear self-knowing is liangzhi, and to extend this liangzhi by seeking self-satisfaction is zhi liangzhi.”113 Zhi liangzhi is not the clear self-perceiving of liangzhi, but the correction of the incorrect intention seen by liangzhi. Wu Zhen 吳震 realizes that to follow liangzhi is a crucial part of the doctrine of liangzhi.114 Only through being followed by the heart can liangzhi be satisfied. In 1518, Wang was already aware of the distinction between the realization of a mistake in the heart and the correction of it.115 But only in later years did he treat the rectifying of an immoral act as the satisfaction of liangzhi. The notion “satisfaction itself” implies a sense of future. As Wang says:

Just don’t try to deceive it but sincerely and truly follow it in whatever you do.
Preserve the good and remove the evil. How secure and joyful liangzhi is! This is the true secret of gewu and real effort of zhi liangzhi.116

If a person follows his or her liangzhi, he or she will be satisfied, and so will feel joy. This person is satisfied when he or she perceives a moral act, which implies that by following one’s liangzhi, one has a will to act morally. This will can be fulfilled by an active moral love towards what should be loved. It was also mentioned above that for Husserl, a will towards an emotional act can be treated as a fiat, namely, a “weaker version” of the emotional act willed. If a fiat, as a sprouting intention of liking or

114 See Wu Zhen, Researches on the Late Yangming School 陽明後學研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, 2003), 293-295.
115 See Wang, “To Young Brothers 寄諸弟,” in Complete Works, bk. 4, 192-193.
116 Wang, Chuansi Lu, chap. 206, 186/193, translation altered, and my emphasis.
disliking its object properly, is good, then it should grow “stronger.” The grown, clear
emotional act must be something temporally “following” the fiat based on liangzhi. If the
person who follows liangzhi perceives an improper intention, he or she also wants to be
satisfied by rectifying the improper act with a proper one in the future. Wang also argues
that “when good is done, evil is corrected.” That is to say, when one realizes that an act
of his or her is immoral, he or she will tend to rectify it by acting properly in the
following moments. With my liangzhi, I recognize in the primary now that a second ago,
I read only because I wanted to pass the civil service exam and earn salary from the
government. This yields a fiat towards a proper intention towards the reading. For
example, I will have a fiat of being guided by the words of ancient sages, if I am a
Confucian. From the perspective of Wang, if I love reading in the next instant in this
proper way, then I will be satisfied, whose phenomenological essence is a fulfillment of
an anticipation. Wang argues that if one does not follow liangzhi in such ways, then one
does not zhi liangzhi. It becomes clear then, that zhi liangzhi is the fulfilling of the will
of acting better in the future, which is guided by liangzhi.

§13 Zhi Liangzhi as the Guidance of Polishing Oneself in Affairs Which is Based on
Its First Function as the Original Substance

The process of zhi liangzhi portrayed in the previous section leads us back to the
topic of the method of polishing oneself in affairs. According to Wang, this method is to

118 See Wang, Chuanxi Lu, chap. 318, 263/248.
either try to do what is right or to *gewu* in every situation. The difficulty of this method, as is maintained by Nie Bao and Zhan, lies in the fact that the heart which needs moral effort, as the heart with selfish desires, cannot even know that its intention is improper. Through the theory of *zhi liangzhi*, Wang argues that at least *liangzhi* as lone knowing can reflectively anticipate that a correct act should be done in the future, or an improper one in a “nearby past” should be corrected in the near future. To follow these “directions” pointed out by the clear *liangzhi is zhi liangzhi*. Both *zhi liangzhi* and polishing oneself in affairs are describing one’s effort of attempting to act properly in particular situations. Wang himself also argues that “*liangzhi* deals with (human experience with things such as) music, sex, wealth, and profit.”119 The only distinction between these two notions is that *zhi liangzhi* points out the guiding influences of such effort, namely, *liangzhi* itself.

*Liangzhi* is not a simple seeing, but an ethical seeing that can correctly know whether a particular intention is correct or not. This requires more than the clarity of givenness: one who has no sense of what an apple is can never correctly grasp an apple, no matter how clear its colors, shapes, smells, and even tastes are. Similarly, even if I cannot hide from myself that I want to torture someone else, I would not want to correct it if I did not have the sense that it is bad. Wang also recognizes this problem, and argues that the clear knowing of *liangzhi* is also based on heavenly principles:

*Liangzhi* is what Mencius meant when he said, “The sense of right and wrong is common to all people”…. It is my nature endowed with the order of heaven, and is the original substance of my heart… Whenever an intention or an idea arises, *liangzhi* of my heart is always aware of it. Whether it is good or not is only known by *liangzhi* of my heart.120

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Wang claims that the sense of right and wrong arises from the original substance of the heart.121 Even when this original substance is concealed and loses its “habitual” power of unconsciously motivating a person, it still keeps this moral intelligence. For example, Wang once claims, “No matter what man does, liangzhi in him cannot be destroyed. Even a robber realizes in himself that he should not be a robber. If you call him a robber, he will blush.”122 Robbers whom Wang defeated many times in his military career were mostly bank-broken lower-class farmers who could not receive an education. Hence, their capability of knowing that to rob is bad does not come from the knowledge of the Confucian classics, but from their innate talent. The original substance of the heart of a robber is, therefore, similar to an eye with floaters: at first, this eye can clearly and properly see external things, like the heart which can originally like or dislike properly. With floaters, external objects will be blurred or covered, but one can still see with this eye which is not completely clear. One can recognize an unclear perception because floaters are different from complete blindness. Hence, one can compare covered seeing with uncovered clear seeing. Similarly, since hearts of people who are not sages only have more attachments but are not completely concealed, they can compare their correct intentions with incorrect ones.

The original substance of the heart discussed in the last chapter is the content of liangzhi as ethical self-observation and self-guiding. Its power of clearly knowing whether one’s intention is moral cannot be disabled, while the power of motivating the

121 See Wang, “Replying to Shu Bai 答舒國用,” in Complete Works, bk. 5, 211-212; and “Supplements to Chuanxi Lu 48,” in Complete Works, bk. 32, 1302.
person can be overwhelmed by the power of selfish desires. Wang believes that this power of knowing of liangzhi will become more reliable in hard times. He insists that even in the most dangerous campaign of his life, liangzhi was guiding him firmly:

To zhi liangzhi is to gewu. It is to face situations and react to senses, which is where the actual effort should fall…. When I was in the troop, and when life, death, and the security of the country were all dependent on the whole of my spirit, I only illuminated and examined myself from the subtle place of intentions… without forgetting and self-deceiving. This is the wonderful function of liangzhi.

In this claim recorded by Wang Ji, Wang Yangming explicitly links the task of dealing with situations with the self-knowing of liangzhi. He can avoid “heart of being stirred” and the “heart of making use of the situation” because his liangzhi can either guide his heart to act properly or to recognize such improper intentions when they are still in the form of fiat. This connection can be seen also in a dialogue between Wang Ji and Tang Shunzhi (or Tang Jinchuan 唐順之/唐荊川, 1507-1560), another student of Wang Yangming. Wang Ji points out to Tang, who is an official, that Tang internally changes his improper thoughts on the court as the judge because he is following his liangzhi, and Tang accepts this. The case that Wang Ji and Tang discuss is extremely similar to Wang Yangming’s own example of dealing with official duties mentioned in chapter 218 of Chuanxi Lu, which I quoted in Section 8 of this chapter. This indicates

123 See Wang, “To Zou Shouyi,” in Complete Works, bk. 6, 224.

124 致知在於格物。正是對境應感，實用力處… 及其軍旅酬酢，呼吸存亡。宗社安危，所繫全體精神，只從一念入微處，自照自查… 勿欺勿忘，乃是良知妙用… Wang Ji, “Notes of Reading the Late Teacher’s Letter to Hairi Weng,” Collected Works 13:6A, my translation. This material can also be found in Wang, Complete Works, bk. 41, 1775.

125 For more information of Tang, see Huang, Philosophical Records, 597-603.

126 See Wang Ji, “Notes on the Meeting in Weiyang 維揚晤語,” in Collected Works 1:9A-10B.
that many students of Wang Yangming also understand the moral reflection of one’s own intentions by *liangzhi* as the guarantee of polishing in affairs.

Actually, Nie Bao also realizes that lone knowing is a strong response to his critique against the method of *zhi liangzhi* and polishing in affairs. Hence, he argues that lone knowing is not a theory of the authors of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, but only appears in Zhu Xi’s comments.\textsuperscript{127} Nie Bao’s rejection of the theory of lone knowing is certainly another important issue, but controversies on this topic are mostly between Nie Bao and other students of Wang, rather than between Nie Bao and Wang himself. Since the task of this dissertation is to study Wang’s own theory, it is not necessary to unfold details of the different positions of his students. Nie Bao’s position regarding lone knowing is worth mentioning because it demonstrates that the structural relation between the method of polishing oneself in affairs and *liangzhi* as a self-observing is even *theoretically* understood by Nie Bao who does not accept the *contents* of the doctrine of *zhi liangzhi ethically*.

According to Wang, to polish oneself habitually is the only way through which one can eliminate selfish desires, for the original substance itself cannot be directly dealt with. To habitually deal with and eliminate selfish desires requires one to try to act properly or rectify improper acts in a repeated manner, which is possible only through *zhi liangzhi* in particular affairs: the heart should follow *liangzhi* as lone knowing which has recognized reflectively a mistake of the heart, and satisfy *liangzhi* through actually acting properly in the future.

\textsuperscript{127} See Nie Bao, “Four Letters Replying to Ouyang De,” in *Collected Works*, 246.
§14 Conclusion

This chapter studied theories of reflective acts towards immanent objects of both Husserl and Wang. For both of them, there are two forms of immanent objects: the personal characteristics of a personal ego, and intentional acts of the ego itself. What is different is that for Husserl, one can grasp one’s own personal tendencies through imagining acts arising from such tendencies. Possible acts imagined, past acts recollected, and acts anticipated can all help one to grasp his or her personal characteristics. Wang, on the other hand, believes that in meditation, one can directly perceive one’s own characteristic in a mystical way.

The two philosophers also have different understandings regarding how personal tendencies can be changed. Husserl believes that to increase one’s moral capability, one should rationally persuade oneself that such and such possible acts are immoral. Wang, on the contrary, argues that selfish habits can only be eliminated habitually, which means that one should try to act properly when dealing with particular affairs such as social, political, and military tasks. Even people whose original hearts are concealed by selfish desires can perform this form of moral effort, for the power of knowing whether acts of themselves are moral or not cannot be disabled. These intentions or emotional acts in the temporal stream of consciousness, as immanent objects, are presented to the ego absolutely, according to both Husserl and Wang. Hence, Wang argues that one can always know whether a particular act of oneself is moral or not, which guides him or her to practice his or her heart as a personal ego in particular egos.
Conclusion to the Dissertation

Through this dissertation, I propose that Husserl’s phenomenological method can be applied to interpret doctrines of Wang Yangming, for both philosophers build their systems on the intentionality of consciousness. As was demonstrated in Chapter 1, the function of the heart for Wang is the same with that of the ego in Husserl’s theory, which is nothing but the subjective pole of all its intentions. Intentions, as arrows shot by the heart as the bow, must be targeted on things. This indicates that intentions for Wang can be treated as intentional acts or noeses of Husserl, which should always be correlated by intentional objects or noemata. Wang argues that as long as the heart is “alive,” it must be actively intending towards things, which is also similar to the feature of the ego of a waking consciousness, according to Husserl. All noema are objects only “for the ego,” for all objects are constituted by the ego, through their correlated acts. Wang also mentions that the whole universe is only the universe “for the heart,” which “sheds lights” on things in the universe. Though Wang does not offer a theoretical explanation of how things are illuminated by intentions of the heart, I argued in Chapter 1 that this process is also a process of constitution, which, according to Husserl, is a process of sense-bestowing. The “sense,” as the essence or meaning of things, is bestowed by the ego sensuous materials on the noetic side, in order to yield an object with its properties on the noematic side, which are “parallel” to sensuous data on the side of noesis.

Husserl’s theory of intentionality as constitution is crucial for this treatise on Wang’s ethical theory, because the foundation of Husserl’s own ethics, which is also structurally fundamental for Wang’s ethics, is a special form of intentionality. According to Husserl, every constituting act has a hierarchical structure, whose most fundamental
noetic layer is the hyletic flow, based on which multiple layers of sense-bestowing can be
possible. The hyletic flow itself, for Husserl, is a pre-act layer, and the lowest layer of act
is presentation, which builds the “mere object,” the “mere this.” On layers higher than the
presentation, the ego can bestow essences of being actual, of being beautiful, and of
being good, etc. Such essences can be treated as senses of epistemological, aesthetical,
and ethical values, which, as we saw in Chapter 2, are constituted by emotional acts as
acts on the higher layer, according to Husserl. That is to say, for Husserl, an act with a
positive value is constituted by an act of loving, and one with a negative value is built by
the act of disliking. Similarly, Wang argues that things such as grass and flowers are not
naturally good or bad, for when the same grass is loved, it is treated by a heart with the
value of being good, and is treated as bad when it is disliked. This implies that for Wang,
ethical values can be “added to” or “removed from” a thing constituted as a mere thing,
which supports my argument that the intention for Wang is nothing but an intentional act
that can constitute its object.

Though values of objects are given by emotional acts such as liking and disliking
according to Husserl and Wang, neither philosopher supportethical relativism. They both
believe that in order for an act or intention to be moral, it should not randomly like or
dislike its object, but should do this in accordance with some ethical principles, which are
a priori. In both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I proposed that for the two thinkers, both acts
correlated with “positive” objects and those disliking their objects can be moral, as long
as they properly like or dislike their particular objects, in accordance with ethical
principles as the transcendental, universal standards. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the
highest ethical principles are called by Husserl ethical axioms or categorical imperatives,
according to which a moral act should not like a hedonistic, instinctive pleasure, nor should it simply dislike instinctive pain. Such an act should treat an object with values that can be universally shared by all human beings as rational subjects. More importantly, other egos themselves, as rational subjects, should not be treated as means, which implies that they should always be constituted with the value of being the ethical ends.

Such quasi-Kantian understandings of the ethical principles also helped me to elaborate Wang’s theory of universal love. For Wang as a Neo-Confucian, the highest ethical principles are heavenly principles, which are not only transcendental and prior to the material universe, but also determine all natural patterns of this universe which is running in accordance with such principles. According to the Neo-Confucian tradition, the primary heavenly principle is the principle of the spirit of life. The universe which follows this principle gives birth and nourishes all living things between heaven and earth, which requires people to love all living beings with different degrees. Wang insists that human beings should be loved with higher values, for only their hearts have “pure intelligence,” which can be treated as ethical rationality.

Since for Wang, what is moral is an intention that properly likes or dislikes its object in accordance with heavenly principles, the final end of his Confucian moral effort can be clearly described: sagehood is the state of a heart who can always act morally in every particular situation. In Chapter 4, I treated the heart in this state as a personal ego, studied by Husserl in his later works. Husserl points out that an ego can not only serve as the pure ego as the subjective pole for multiple acts, but can also be a person which has its history in its temporal life. Its experiences in the distant past that have lost all their differentiations can be sedimented in the ego as “profiles” of this ego. Such sediments
can be awakened, when objects or contexts which are similar to past ones are presented by the ego. When being awakened, past experiences are not actively recollected as objects again, but are only “used” as senses or essences to be bestowed. Such senses can be awakened by new objects or circumstances similar to past ones.

In his *Cartesian Meditations* and *Ideas II* written in the late 1920s, Husserl maintains that the personal ego, or the monad, is the center of the ethical world, which means that it is the subject of emotional acts as the basic elements of ethical life. Hence, in Chapter 4 I also argued that for Husserl, past emotional acts can be sedimented in the person. One who has such sediments with ethical meanings has the tendency to like or dislike objects similar to past ones in similar emotional “styles.” One who loved other people in the past can have the tendency to love people in the current sphere, who are constituted as similar to whom one met in the past. Such past experiences must happen in an inter-subjective world, in which other people can also influence an ego and “give” it some specific tendencies. Wang insists that moral tendencies are originally talents of the heart, because all motions of the materials of heaven and earth also follow heavenly principles. The human heart, as the highest ethical rational being between heaven and earth, is given the purely moral nature by materials which follow principles. This original form of the heart is named by Wang the original substance, which includes all moral tendencies originally. This means that the heart does not acquire these properties through its temporal life. They are “in the heart from the very beginning.” However, in Chapter 4 I also pointed out that though the contents of the original substance of the heart did not “come into being as habits” of the heart in the past, they are still connected with emotional intentions of the same heart in temporal ways.
One whose heart does not contain any selfish desires will only tend to do what is proper according to heavenly principles. According to Wang, such a person is a sage. Therefore, the process of moral effort according to Wang is to eliminate selfish desires as immoral habits that cover the original substance, but is not to add anything new to the heart. Chapter 5 is focused on the last important question regarding this process of effort, namely, how selfish desires can be eliminated. I showed in this last chapter that for Wang, though one’s original substance can lose the power to motivate the heart to act properly, its power of clearly realizing whether one’s particular intentions are moral or not, named liangzhi, can never be disabled. The phenomenological structure of liangzhi is the same as the structure of reflective acts towards one’s particular noesis. According to Husserl, one’s own noesis, as another form of immanent object, is given absolutely. Such immanent objects are only directly available to me, while other people can only indirectly grasp my acts through their empathy. Likewise, liangzhi of my heart, as lone knowing, can never be cheated, which means that I can never hide an immoral intention of mine from the “seeing” of my own liangzhi. By describing liangzhi as lone knowing, Wang also insists that whether my intentions are moral or not can only be known by me, for my intentions are immanent to my heart, to which other people never have direct access. Since liangzhi is rooted in the original substance, it not only has the capability to clearly see my intentions, but also has the knowledge according to which I can always correctly see the “moral value” of my intentions.

Based on the exploration of this dissertation summarized above, a process of moral effort for Wang can be briefly portrayed as follows: it consists of the repeated attempts to follow liangzhi, which can reflectively and absolutely see intentions of the heart. By
following the direction of liangzhi, one can always try to love other living beings as objects with different degrees of values, or to rectify intentions which improperly love hedonistic pleasures as ends. The final achievement of this series of attempts is a heart which is completely free from immoral characteristics, which are eliminated habitually in time. This heart which successfully achieves sagehood can always intentionally constitute things with proper values in accordance with heavenly principles, whose form is similar to Husserl’s ethical axioms, though with some different content.
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