The Good Is One, Its Manifestations Many

Zhu Xi said,

> The Great Ultimate is nothing other than principle. . . .
> Fundamentally there is only one Great Ultimate, yet each of
> the myriad things has been endowed with it and each in itself
> possesses the Great Ultimate in its entirety. This is similar to the
> fact that there is only one moon in the sky but when its light
> is scattered upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere.
> It cannot be said that the moon has been split.[1]

Plato said,

> This, then, you must understand that I meant by the offspring
> of the good which the good begot to stand in a proportion
> with itself. As the good is in the intelligible region to reason
> and the objects of reason, so is this in the visible world to
> vision and the objects of vision. . . . In like manner, then, you
> are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from
> the presence of the good their being known, but their very
> existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the
> good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity
> and surpassing power.[2]

At the beginning of the Western tradition, Plato pregnantly said that
the ultimate *arche* of things is what he called the good, or the Form of
the Good, that it is the source of all things that are good to the extent
they partake of it, and that the good itself transcends all things that are

structured so as to be good. The good is not itself a good thing. My quote is from the *Republic*; in a later work, the *Philebus*, Plato characterized the good as measure or proportion, that which makes all structured things measured or proportionate. Zhu Xi, a twelfth-century Neo-Confucian, was a great synthesizer of a millennium and a half of Chinese thought and said much the same, that "principle" (*li*) is the source of all coherence and goodness in things, manifest in every manifold, but itself transcending all structured things. I do not want to suggest that Plato was a paleo-Confucian or that Zhu Xi was a medieval Platonist. But I do want to say that I am a Platonist and a Confucian on the point that the metaphysical ultimate is the source of all things and is the source of goodness. The ethical implication of this Platonic-Confucian position is that moral discernment consists in finding the presence of goodness or coherence or harmony in things that are constantly changing. This chapter will reflect on this conjunction of metaphysics and ethics.

First, I want to present a hypothesis about the connection between the ultimate ground of things and the ground of value, a connection asserted vaguely in the quotes from Zhu Xi and Plato. My overall hypothesis will be that although the ultimate ground is the source of coherence or value in form, it is (1) also and on the same level the source of the multiplicity within which value is expressed in many manifestations, and (2) also the source of genuine otherness among things, and (3) also the source of the worth of the actual processive world for good or bad. Second, I want to focus on the ultimate as good and present the hypothesis that to have form is to have value, a point in which Zhu Xi and Plato also share in their different ways. I will not, however, develop equal attention to the ultimacy of plurality, otherness, and cumulative worth or meaning. Third, I will explore some of the implications for moral life of this understanding of value as coherence or harmony in form, developing contrasting emphases from Zhu Xi and Plato. For Zhu Xi, moral education and discernment have mainly to do with developing a purity of perception and action so that a fundamental human aesthetic faculty can operate with critical clarity and effectiveness. Plato shares the aesthetic sensibility but adds the complex dimension of dialectic to moral discernment. I will conclude with some hortatory remarks on character development, arguing that neither Zhu Xi nor Plato is to be regarded as a virtue-ethicist in any robust sense. The reason this frequent claim about them is false comes from their metaphysical conception of the nature of multiplicity.

ULTIMACY AND VALUE

Regarding ultimacy, I hold the uncommon view that there are five ultimates. Philosophers in most traditions have held that only one thing can

be ultimate. Paul Weiss, founder of the Metaphysical Society of America, worked his way up to four ultimate modes of being.[3] Never wanting to miss a good idea, I agree with both views and synthesize them to get five. The root problematic of ultimacy has to do with the problem of the one and the many. The way I would frame that problem is to focus on the most abstract kind of multiplicity, the multiplicity of determinateness as such.[4] To be determinate is to be determinate with respect to something else, which implies something else with respect to which to be determinate. The world consists of determinate things that are determinate with respect to one another in at least some ways; they might also be partially indeterminate with respect to one another as allowed by the ways in which they are determinate. Notice how abstract this level of the discussion is. The world might be as described by Platonic processes and forms, Aristotelian substances, Plotinian emanations, Daoist flows, yin–yang vibrations, dharmas of consciousness, atoms and subatomic particles, fields of consciousness, Cahoonean orders of nature, or $f(x)$s. Whatever you might imagine! The notion of determinateness is vague, in the technical Peircean sense, with respect to what kinds of things can be determinate, and at this level of the argument all kinds of "worlds" are possible instantiations of determinateness.

One ultimate is whatever makes determinate things. Although the multiplicity of determinate things involves mutual conditioning so that they can be determinate with respect to one another, it still is the case that the determinate things are at least partly external to one another so as to be really different from one another. Without that, the multiplicity, and hence determinateness, would collapse. No determinate thing, no matter how great its own causal powers, can cause those elements of external things that are beyond the reach of its own causal powers, and the things would not be genuinely external if they did not have their own essential place beyond being conditioned. So I say the first ultimate is an ontological creative act that creates all the determinate things, whatever they turn out to be, including the temporal unfolding of processes that at any present time might be partly indeterminate regarding the future. There have been many concepts and metaphorical systems of this ontological creative act, and I will not discuss them here save to make one observation. Whatever accounts for the existence of the world of determinate things cannot itself be determinate, because it would then need a deeper ground to connect it with the things it allegedly creates. It is simply an act of making, like Plotinus's One as the source of the emanations, although emanation itself of course is determinate.

When we give a further analysis of determinateness, we find four more ultimate realities, which I call "cosmological" to contrast with the "ontological" because they are conditions of any determinate cosmos. Any determinate thing has both a multitude of components by virtue of which

it is related to the other things with respect to which it is determinate, and at least some essential components by virtue of which it remains external to those others in some respects. Therefore, any determinate thing has a multiplicity of components and a form or pattern according to which they are together in that thing. Form and a multiplicity of components formed are ultimate conditions for any determinate things. I will argue shortly that having form means bearing value.

More than these two ultimates, however, any determinate thing has location in an existential field constituted by the ways it conditions and is conditioned by the other things. The easiest way to imagine this is with causal conditions in a space-time field, although from a properly abstract point of view the nature of the determinate things and their conditions determines what the existential field is like. That any determinate thing has existential location with reference to the things with respect to which it is determinate means that another ultimate condition is to be faced with things external to oneself. Those external things are conditionally related, but also significantly Other. From a human perspective, engaging genuine others is an ultimate condition over and above the ultimate conditions of having form that integrates one's components.

The fourth cosmological ultimate condition is that any determinate thing has the identity of getting its components together with its form in its place relative to other things. Identity here integrates the meaning of formal identity, identity of components, and identity of relations. Because form bears value, the ultimate condition of identity means a value-identity, which is very important on the human scale, however abstract it might seem on the level of the one and the many.

The five ultimates coimply one another. The four cosmological ultimates—form, components formed, existential location relative to others, and value-identity—are necessary together for there to be determinate things. But no determinate things would exist without the ontological creative act that makes them be rather than not be. Moreover, there would be no ontological creative act were there no determinate things created, because it cannot be determinate itself apart from what it creates. In what follows I am going to neglect the ultimates of existential location and value-identity except insofar as they show up in discussions of the ontological ultimate and of the ultimates of form and components formed.[5]

Before turning to the analysis of value, let me point out how Plato and Zhu Xi stand with regard to the ultimates. Plato says the Form of the Good is "beyond essence" and is the cause of all things that have essence. This is his way of saying that what I call the ontological creative act is not itself determinate but is the cause of everything that is. For him, the world is a maelstrom of processes that have form but are constantly moving beyond or out of the particular form they have. Because of the

multiplicity of processes, there is a multiplicity of forms that unify them with proportion or value to some temporary extent. For Zhu Xi in the passage quoted, the Great Ultimate is identified with principle (*li*), or form, as the source of forms in the multiple things; in itself, principle is one and therefore not internally determinate. But for Zhu Xi, principle is not the only ultimate. He like other Neo-Confucians believed that *qi*, usually translated "material force," provides the multiplicity, the waves upon the lake, that principle informs with determinate shapes for each wave. Lying behind Zhu Xi's discussion is the argument of the earlier Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi, who said that the Great Ultimate is not itself the bottommost reality. Rather, the Great Ultimate arises from the Ultimate of Non-being, to use Wing-tsit Chan's translation of *wuji*. This dual-notion of Ultimate of Non-being and Great Ultimate is Zhou's way of saying that the ontological creative act is nothing without creating the world and, as creator, is the genesis of all determinate things, which he analyzes in terms of yin and yang that in tandem have pattern.[6] Zhu Xi drops emphasis on Zhou's Ultimate of Non-being and elides the Great Ultimate with principle, which is the source of pattern. He has great difficulty, then, saying what the source of material force or *qi* is, which is not to be reduced to principle. There is no material force that does not have principle as its form, and no determinate form that is not the form of some region of material force. At one point he says that principle creates material force, but he does not press the point. Scholars have disagreed over what to do with this conundrum in Zhu Xi's thought ever since.[7]

VALUE IN FORM

My hypothesis about form is this. Form is the schematization of pure unity to a structured multiplicity. If there were no multiplicity of determinate things for form to unify or make coherent, form would be pure indeterminate unity, like the Form of the Good or Zhu Xi's conception of principle as merely one. But if form were only pure indeterminate unity, this would not be determinate enough to make any sense; form requires determinate things to be formed. On the other hand, form is not merely a multiplicity of determinate things otherwise unrelated: form makes the multiplicity coherent in some way. Form is the pattern by which the multiple things cohere, their pattern or way of cohering. Some things cannot cohere because there is no form by virtue of which they might fit together.

This hypothesis about form will be expanded and defended in chapter 3. Here it can be made more concrete by reading it across the structure of temporality, which anyway is where it becomes interesting

for ethics. Considering the three modes of time, future, present, and past, I propose to consider the future to be form relative to the actual world of things and decision points actualizing things.[8] Thus the future is possibilities whose essential components have to do with unity and whose conditional components are the things that have to be made coherent in the future. Future possibilities often contain alternative structures that might be actualized, such that selections or decisions in the mode of the present exclude some of the alternatives. The complexity of future possibilities consists in part in the fact that there are different possible structures for every date in the future, and a decision about the immediate future alters the alternatives in the medium run, which alters the possibilities in the long run. Therefore, the structure of possibilities in the future is a great kaleidoscope of shifting forms. When a possibility with its alternatives comes to the point of actualization, and a present decision process eliminates all the alternatives but one, that remaining form becomes the form of what is actualized. The past has the very complex form of all the forms actualized, and it bears the marks of all those possibilities that were excluded from actualization.

Now what does form have to do with value? Plato's name for the form beyond determinate essence is the Good. For Zhu Xi, too, anything that has principle has value. My hypothesis is this. Value is density of being, to use Leibniz's phrase.[9] It comes about in this way. Suppose there are five different things that need to be made coherent. One form for doing so might merely put them side by side in conjunction. But another form might combine certain of them so as to produce a sixth thing, and a seventh, eighth, and so forth. With every new kind of thing resulting from combination, new combinations are possible. So we can imagine a form as a hierarchy of levels of integration. The pattern of the hierarchy has both complexity and simplicity. Complexity refers to the diversity of things within it, whereas simplicity refers to their ways by which the things reinforce one another. I use the term "elegance" to indicate how complexity and simplicity are balanced in the hierarchy of a form, noting that for a given base multiplicity there might be many kinds and degrees of elegance. Whitehead in *Process and Reality* has a familiar analysis of great elegance in form in terms of what he calls contrasts, where elements of the pattern are made sharply determinate and reinforced to fit with and against one another. He parses contrast in terms of narrowness, width, triviality, and vagueness. This analysis of form shows how the same base multiplicity can be made coherent in a variety of ways that differ in richness or density of being. I propose that value is the identity a form has with respect to the density or richness of what it can make of its base multiplicity. Possibilities in the future are ways

by which the base multiplicity can be made coherent, and they contain perhaps alternative kinds of richness as well as different degrees of it.

Why associate density of being in this sense with value? The long-run argument for this would require the analysis of many domains within which we make evaluations, showing that as we imaginatively alter the ways by which things might be made coherent, we see in some aesthetic sense how different patterns have different values. The real tests of imaginative evaluations come in instances where we realize that some previous valuation had been mistaken, perhaps because we misunderstood the base elements involved, or missed what happens when they are combined this way or that way. Although there is an immediacy in valuation, any valuation is always mediated by what we apprehend of the structure of the hierarchy of the forms involved. John Dewey's *Art as Experience* gives masterful accounts of how this aesthetic imagination works in matters of art and morals.

The notion of form plays many roles in Plato's thought. In the early and middle dialogues, it was often used in the sense of ideals, as when Socrates and his friends tried to define or find the forms of courage, friendship, justice, beauty, the immortal life, love, and so forth. These discussions usually had to do with varying the components and the patterns of integration so as to see what coheres or does not, and how certain combinations are of great value. The Neo-Confucian notion of principle also meant both form as structure and form as structure that harmonizes what should be harmonized. Grasping the principle in things is necessary for grasping their worth and responding appropriately.

As human beings regard the future, we know that what is possible is extraordinarily complex. On the one hand, the actual world for which the future is the structure of possibilities is itself complex and our understanding of it is limited. Especially, all the actual things in the world have value-identities because of the form that is in them, the possibilities that they have actualized. On the other hand, the possibilities relevant to any one of us are those that structure the environment in which we act, our actions are nearly always conjoint actions with others, and there are zillions of other decision points in our roughly contemporary world that are affecting what is possible. The possibilities relevant to our choices are implicated in a vastly wider field of possibilities that schematizes all the actual things and acting decision points to unity so that they are coherent. Add to this the complexities that come from contemporary physics of defining just what the present moment is relative to other things, and the nature of form as possibility for actualization, schematizing pure unity to the multiplicity of things to be unified, is mind-boggling. So I am going to change the topic.

ETHICS

The metaphysical construction of the world as value-laden because form has value is obviously important for ethics. I want to remark on four important implications of this. The first is that much of ethics is about how we come to know this value, about deliberation, discernment, taste, judgment, responsibility, guilt, and the like. Nevertheless, the Confucian-Platonic approach I am propounding provides a realistic foundation for ethics in the values that lie in the world. How we know these values-identities of things and respond to them is a different and related matter. But good and bad judgment ultimately comes down to being right or wrong about what is really valuable, including the value of doing something about something else that is valuable. Ethics is neither only a subjective projection of preferences nor a construction of what makes a good-willed subject, although surely much projection is involved in ethical life and the subjectivity of ethical agents needs many kinds of cultivation. I shall return to this shortly.

The second important thing about this theory of form and value is that, although it says that anything with form has a value, the values of things might be in serious conflict, the lesser values might ruin the greater, and from the perspective of human judgment many values are terrible, ugly, and bad. Perhaps we should always say, about this point, that every form bears values and/or disvalues, although this would suggest too simple a binary. Suffice it to say that the fact that everything has a value does not mean it is the right value in the right place at the right time relative to the other things that have value. Both Plato and Zhu Xi characterized value as "harmony," and harmony sometimes suggests too much sweetness and light: perfect storms are bad for genteel living.

The third important thing about this theory of form and value is that, while there are very many kinds of things with radically different kinds of value, in a general sense value is the same in each, namely, the coherence or harmony of the components of the form as previously described so as to have a certain patterned density of being with these components in this place. This is the meaning of the slogan "the good is one and its manifestations are many." So, on the one hand each kind of thing has a structure that must be learned, perhaps in esoteric detail, in order to apprehend its value. A person has to learn a lot of biochemistry to grasp the beauty and accomplishment of a self-regulating cell system; to understand what is at stake in the economy requires knowing a lot about how the economy works; to appreciate Bach deeply it helps to know music theory and to hear through that knowledge. But on the other hand, in all these different kinds of valuable things, the task of discernment is to grasp what makes them coherent, how their patterns have an inscape,

as Gerard Manley Hopkins would say, and how things are conditioned in their own patterns by things surrounding in environing patterns.

The fourth important thing to say about this theory is that, regarding ethics, it entails that there is something in human beings that registers, mirrors, or responds to the values in things. This is an important epistemological claim. In the classic Confucian document, the Doctrine of the Mean, roughly contemporaneous with Plato, "Heaven" bequeaths to human nature an innate aesthetic sensitivity that picks up on the values in things and spontaneously responds in some appropriate way. The problem is that this value-responsive "heart/mind" is imagined to be at the inner core of a self that is constituted by many layers of physical, cultural, emotional, and cognitive conditions, including the conditioning of the self as a ritualized member of a society. The value of the things engaged has to be filtered through all these layers, many of which distort and others of which are underdeveloped. Therefore, the aesthetic perception is distorted. The same thing holds with the response, which has to work its way through all those layers into overt action, usually on distant things and people. Mencius likened the aesthetic response itself to the momentary flutter of the heart when a person sees a small child about to topple into a well. Although everyone would have that premature ventricular contraction, bad people will go on to blame the parents or complain that the water will taste bad for months; ill-trained people will rush to help and push the child over inadvertently. Most morally freighted situations are not as simple as this one: for instance, what all is at stake in setting an interest rate for the Federal Reserve Bank? Although the Confucians thought that all people, even small, mean-spirited ones, have this aesthetic responsiveness, that responsiveness needs to be cultivated through the many layers of self and society mediating any response to any thing in the world. Hence the Confucian obsession with education, in contrast to the philosophical Daoists who suggested that it all comes naturally.

Plato, too, believed that a kind of aesthetic sensibility lies at the heart of moral discernment, a matter of imagining and effecting balance, proportion, and due measure. In the *Statesman* he sharply contrasted the standard measure that consists in rules for mixing with the normative measure that consists in being able to judge just how much is enough.

Now let me pull together my claims about values resident in things with the aesthetic responses that need cultivation in order for moral judgment to be adept.

The cosmological theory of determinateness and the theory that values are resident in things as matters of their form add up to a basic general model for viewing possibilities. The many determinate things in the actual situation require that the possibilities for their future be

plural. The plural possibilities are all harmonies, however, not substances that bear their characters as predicates of subjects. Each possibility has essential components that, if actualized, would make the thing definite. Each possibility also has conditional components that relate it to other possibilities. So no possibility would be a thing by itself for a thing by itself. Rather, each possibility would have intrinsic to its nature by virtue of its conditional components environments of other things that are also possibilities. There are environments within environments, environments containing environments, environments overlapping, and most importantly environments changing. Within a given possible harmony, all the components themselves are harmonies with their arrays of environing harmonies.

Consider, for instance, what to do about your younger brother, a grown man who is in physical, economic, and emotional decline and who both wants your help and resents it. Who is he? Obviously, he is the physical person located in and moving through neighborhoods. Dewey would counsel us to think of the person in his "situation," noting the organic functional definition of your brother as defined by interactions with things in the situation. I would press Dewey's point much further to say that the possibilities for your brother lie in nested arrays of harmonies that make up environments for all the determinate structures in your brother's life. Besides his body are his family relations, including his relation to you as a concerned and controversially responsible sibling. His family is determined in large measure not only by the DNA and the interactions of its particular members but also by its social situation constituted by class, professional affiliations, and so forth; by the educational system that has been available; by the health care system available for good or ill; by the local economy and its definition of possible jobs; by the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, its degree of sanitation, and its air quality. Farther in the background but still providing orientation for the things directly determining your brother's conditions are the environmental structures of province and nation, the historical situation regarding relations among nations, the technological and communications environment, and a host of other conditions such as global warming and solar radiation that few people think about, especially when concentrating on the problems of an individual.

An ethically wise person does not limit attention to the brother as such, because there is no such thing. There is only your brother in the array of environments, each of which has some kind of determinate, that is, harmonic structure. It is easy and common to think about your brother in terms of some of the proximate environments, including your family structure and his particular history growing up, working, and now coming to some grief. It may be important also to think about your brother directly in terms of the kind of family you have in a larger

community, the kind of educational system available to him, what makes that educational system possible and has prevented it from being better, what the possibilities are for help improving physical and emotional help, what social conditions make those possible and prevent them from being better, or might improve them. Because people are determinate harmonies with somewhat determinate future possibilities, they are defined in part by what conditions them, and what conditions them is defined by further conditions, and so on. To be a thing at all is to be a harmony in an existential field with others, and that field is structured by the harmonies within it and their coherent connections. The Confucians have long recognized that loving your younger brother often means less face-to-face encounter than it does ministering to the institutions that constitute the relevant environment. There are institutions within institutions within institutions, all of which bear upon the possibilities for your brother. Western moralists have been somewhat surprised since the eighteenth century to learn that justice toward your brother does not mean only treating him a certain way, as in equal treatment before the law, but amending the environments within which he lives. The social structure of injustice was never out of mind for the Confucians. Plato's *Republic* makes the point as well.

Proper moral education therefore includes the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and habits of thought to see people as having their identity, including their possibilities, defined by layers of harmonic environments. This is the way real possibilities are structured, according to my metaphysical analysis, and human moral vision needs to sort out the important structured variables. A significant part of this is to develop a culture that provides important signs for what to look for. Sometimes we understand these signs to be social values: think of family, or individual freedom, or equality of opportunity, or what makes for personal responsibility, or what makes for this or that form of social decision-making. If we do not have signs that discriminate the layers of harmonic structures in possibilities, we simply cannot discriminate them; cultures ought to be cultivated that do supply signs that show us what to look for.

On the other hand, the cultural availability of the signs is not enough. Individuals need to learn how to use them. If part of helping your brother is to improve the health care system, then you need to know how to vote on taxes and other legislation that is relevant, which means understanding the nature of the health care, the economic situation, and the political possibilities. Part of moral education then is gaining the most sophisticated education in the way these institutions work in their natural environment. What the culture delivers by way of commonsense ways of understanding is not enough if you care about the real possibilities for your brother. Innocent ignorance has a kind of attractive quality to it—the

simple person has good instincts; nevertheless, well–intentioned simplicity can do great damage and simply misses the complexity of the environ- ment defining your brother and cannot intervene in the relevant places.

Even with good relevant education, however, a moral actor needs the emotional purity to be able to accept, correctly assess, and act on what is known that might be helpful. The Confucians have thematized the problem here as selfishness. On the surface this means distorting what we allow ourselves to think about things because of a bias toward our own self-interest or the interest of the people and institutions with which we identify. But deeper down it means unjustified attachment to ways of thought and institutions that prevent coming to terms with what we can know. An ideology of stiff-upper-lip personal responsibility might prevent you from seeing that your brother needs help from a health professional; an ideology of looking to institutions to solve all problems might prevent you from directly helping your brother yourself. In the larger culture, political ideologies at their best are socially constructed values that allow us to discern the natural joints of the array of enviroring conditions for social life. But nearly always they are partial and obscure the values and disvalues of aspects of the environment that are morally relevant. Moral education involves concentrated and lifelong self-examination regarding the biases in our characters, and in our immediate social environment, that prevent discerning what we can otherwise know.

Moral knowledge is not only subjectively cognitive. It is also a mat- ter of active inquiry and exploration, which requires cultivated abilities to act. In actual moral life we do not first study and decide what to do before doing anything. Our moral actions themselves are the arenas in which we discern the different layers of the morally relevant envi- ronments; we become wise through feedback. The acquisition of new elements of knowledge is part and parcel of acting better because of that. So moral education includes learning to become an adept agent, able to engage each relevant harmony in your brother and in the mas- sive array of environments through which you share a world. The klutz who knocks the child into the well while trying to save her should have studied taiji and mastered his or her own body. It might be hard to learn how to talk to your brother. You have to learn how to be politically adept to improve the health system. The Confucian ideal regarding this point is to be a scholar-official. The scholarship is in coming to know, the officiating is virtuosity in acting. What is to be known and practiced is structured by the arrays of harmonies in the multilayered possibility structures of common life. In my remarks here I have concentrated on the development of knowledge or perception of the complex situa- tion on things, especially people and institutions, in layers of enviroring contexts. A similar exploration needs to be undertaken about the com-

plexities of acting where action requires engaging many of the relevant environing arrays, not only the matter at hand. This metaphysical position argues that real-life moral action requires intervening in many places— another meaning of the slogan the good is one and its manifestations are many.

Another aspect of this conception of addressing a multilayered array of possibilities is its dynamic character. I have spoken as if the paradigm is a decision maker in the present, operating in an actual environment formed by past decisions and faced with a complex array of possibilities defining the matters at hand. This is an oversimplification. Nearly every decision involves finding possibilities that would harmonize many ongoing processes at a sequence of moments in time, each of which has its own dynamic with myriad decisions or selective points. Moreover, nearly every decision itself takes time, sometimes a long time. Some decisions might seem to come at a specific moment, say a vote, after a period of deliberation. But most decisions are determinations of direction that then continue to be modified by feedback, perhaps significantly. A better way to think of moral action is to see it in a dynamic process of continually corrected perception of the complications of the possibilities and continually refocused action with regard to the changing arrays of possibilities. Deciding how to help your brother is likely to be a process of many parts, with some corrections of course, over the whole period of your interaction.

Implicit throughout these latter remarks on the ethics conditioned by this metaphysical vision is the assumption that the human mind, or heart/mind to use the Confucian phrase, has the capacity to grasp how things harmonize together, in various levels and shifting relationships. This is a kind of aesthetic capacity, to use the Western term. As I mentioned earlier, it is prominent in Plato and many others, including Leibniz, Whitehead, and Dewey, as well as being a standard motif from the very beginning of Confucianism, especially in those strands influenced by Mencius. The point of my metaphysical considerations, however, is to emphasize the complexity of harmonies within harmonies occasioned by the fact that any harmony has conditioning components from other harmonies that therefore constitute elements in its environment. The environment itself is a shifting nest of environments, many of which might be relevant for moral intervention. The aesthetic perception of a moral agent is not a single, one-time vision but a cultivated vision that grows with flexible inquiry and increased virtuosity in finding the potential harmonies within and behind the moral focus at hand.

In conclusion let me stress the fact that this metaphysical theory of the ultimate condition for determinateness, with its claim that anything determinate has form and therefore value, is a strong claim for moral

realism. The fundamental moral metaphor is morally adept perception and response. We need to learn to perceive the world in the structures of its value-dimension and to respond by acting back through the complexities of those harmonic, or disharmonic, layers. Many people have thought it helpful to treat Confucian ethics as if it were an interesting analogue to virtue ethics. But virtue ethics is one of the attempts within Western philosophy to handle ethics primarily from the side of the subject, emphasizing the subject's character and how it is acquired through tradition and experience; this tradition suppresses analyses of what is good or bad objectively. I believe it is fundamentally misguided to see the Confucian traditions as building up virtues in the individual out of which actions flow. The Confucian traditions, at least insofar as they take seriously the metaphysical considerations of Zhu Xi, his ancestors, and descendants, rather treat virtues as learned capacities for discernment of the real. They are habits of perceiving this or that more acutely and responding adeptly. The habits themselves are not productive of actions but rather are elements in the complex perceptions that result in actions. It's always the real situation with its real multiple structuring of value-laden factors that is engaged. The strong emphasis on personal and social cultivation in the Confucian tradition is aimed to enhance engagement with the value-laden realities of nature, society, and human affairs. Where Aristotle indeed emphasized virtue ethics, Plato emphasized cultivation through his elaborate curriculum described in the *Republic*, including practical experience of governing the colonies so as to gain a sense of timing for how to intervene, all dominated by the ineluctable need for constant, imaginative dialectic. For Plato, ethical life is like statesmanship, dealing with realities that are difficult to comprehend and tease apart so that interventions can be effective. The failures of Confucianism have occurred when the emphasis on constant learning and sensitivity decays into acting on the basis of preformed ritualized habit.

That the good is one and its manifestations are many is a metaphysical characterization of reality that sponsors a seriously realistic approach to the moral life. The creation of the human moral subject is the evolution and cultivation of human beings to be elements within nature with the capacities to perceive something of the many manifestations, to grasp the kinds of value and disvalue displayed, and to act appropriately throughout the manifestations to enhance their value. Without a strong metaphysical hypothesis, our hypotheses about the moral life are likely to focus perversely on the moral subject and not on the value-laden realities subjects should be cultivated to address.