“DESIRE” VIEWED THROUGH ETHICAL OPTICS:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DAI ZHEN AND LEVINAS

by

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Abstract

This research project investigates Confucian thinker Dai Zhen (1724-1777) and Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas’s (1906-1995) philosophical discourses on desire from a comparative perspective. First, I look at Dai Zhen and Levinas individually each in their own philosophical contexts, while framing my readings with parallel structure that pivots on a hermeneutic strategy to examine their ideas of desire within the larger prospect of the human relation with transcendence. Then, my inquiry leads to a critical analysis of several interesting issues yielded in my interpretive readings of the two thinkers as regards transcendence and immanence and the self-other relationship. Methodologically, my study combines careful textual analysis, philosophical reflection, and historical sensitivity.

We might want to say that there is in fact no correlative of the Levinasian desire in Dai Zhen’s philosophy. Dai Zhen’s notion of desire perhaps comes closer to Levinas’s concept of need. However, the disparity of their conceptual formulations does not keep us from discerning their shared ethical concern for the other, the weak, marginalized, and underprivileged group of society, which provides me the very ground for a dialogical comparison between the two thinkers. Henceforth, my writing is hinged on a comprehension of their conception of desire as
an articulation of human striving for what is lying beyond themselves, as a redefinition of the
being or essence of humankind in relation to the transcendent which in both philosophers’
ethical thinking is translated into a sympathetic understanding of and care for the other,
particularly the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the young, the weak and the like. Through the
comparative study of the two thinkers’ ideas of desire, I want to argue that “desire,” which is
most readily directed to human egoism and instinctive propensity in both Confucian and
Western philosophical traditions, can be at once the very driving force to open us to the other
beyond ourselves and an actual moral creativity to produce ethical being out of material
existence.
I dedicate this dissertation to my father

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Bibliography
Key to Abbreviations of Dai Zhen and Levinas’s Works & Other Texts Cited

Dai Zhen’s Works:

*The Shu Zheng*  *The Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏証 (Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the *Mencius*).

*The Shuzha*  *Yu Duan Maotang deng shiyi zha* 與段茂堂等十一札 (Eleven Letters to Duan Maotang and Others).

Other Chinese Texts:

*The Nianpu*  *Duan Yuchai* 段玉裁. *Dai Dongyuan xianshen nianpu* 戴東原先生年譜 (Chronological Biography of Mister Dai Dongyuan).


The WYG e-SKQS  *The wenyange shiku quanshu neilianban* 文淵閣四庫全書內聯網版 (The Electronic *Siku Quanshu* e-Chinese University of Hong Kong & Digital Heritage Publishing Ltd., 1999).


Levinas’s Works:


Glossary

bi 蔽: to conceal/concealed, blinded/concealment, blindness.

bige 蔽隔: being blocked up and concealed in isolation.

biran 必然: what is necessary, what ought to be.

causa sui (Lat.): self-caused

chez soi: at home with oneself.

cogito: I think.

dahua liuxing 大化流行: the formation and transformation of the universe.

Dao 道: the Way.

felix culpa (Lat.): happy fault.

fen 分: 1, distinction; 2, allotment.

gan 感: to be affected; to respond.

gong 公: publicness; impartiality/public; communal; impartial.

guishen 鬼神: ghost and spirit; ghost-like and spiritual.

ipseity: selfhood.

ji 己: the self.

jingshuang 精爽: incipient luminosity.

kuo chong 擴充: advance/advancement, expand, extend/extension.

l’autre: the other.
l'Autru: the Other.

l'Etranger: the Stranger.

le Même: the same.

le tiers: the third party.

li: 1, principle; 2, pattern.

li 禮: rite, ritual; propriety.

liang neng 良能: original, good ability.

liang zhi 良知: original, good knowing.

liyi 理義: order/principle and righteousness.

ming 命: fate; restriction.

pian 偏: partial, biased.

qi 氣: 1. vital force; 2. ethos.

qi 器: 1. vessel; 2. physical things.

qizhi zhi xing 氣質之性: the nature of physical temperament, natural endowment.

qing 情: 1. feelings, dispositions; 2. actual reality.

quan 權: to weigh, assess, judge.

ren 人: 1. people; 2. the other; others; the other people (in the sense of being the counterpart of the self.

ren 仁: humanity, kindness, humanness, compassion, benevolence.

ren, yi, li, zhi 仁義禮智: humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom.
rendao 人道: the way of man.

renlun riyong 人倫日用: human relationships and daily activities.

renqin zhibian 人禽之辨: the distinction between human beings and animals.

renxing 人性: human nature.

renyu 人 欲: human desire.

shan 善: good/goodness.

shengsheng 生生: creative creativity, creation after creation.

shenming 神明: godlike illumination.

si 思: to think/thinking.

si 私: selfish, egoist.

ti 體: 1. the body; 2. to embody/embodiment; 3. To know and understand experientially.

tiandao 天道: the way of heaven.

tiandi zhixing 天地之性: the nature of heaven and earth.

tianli 天理: heavenly principle.

tianren heyi 天人合一: the unity of heaven and the humankind.

tiaoli 條: orderly pattern, pattern and order.

tong 通: 1. be open; connected/to connect; 2. to penetrate; to comprehend.

wulun 五倫: the Confucian five human relationships (between the ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, and friends).

xiv
wuxing 五行: five elements; five phases.

xiao 孝: filial piety, filial obligation.

xin 心: the heart and mind.

xing 性: nature; natural dispositions or endowments.

xing-er-shang 形而上: what is above forms; metaphysical.

xing-er-xia 形而下: what is below forms; physical.

xueqi xinzhi 血氣心知: blood, breath, and the intelligent mind.

xue 學: to learn/learning.

yang xin 養心: nourishing the heart-and-mind.

yide 懿德: virtue; moral excellence.

yili 義理: meaning and principles.

yiqing xieqing 以情絜情: to gauge others’ feeling and situation with my feeling and reality/to put myself in others’ situation

yu 欲: to desire/desire.

ze 則: pattern; norm; principle.

zhi 知: to know/knowledge.

zhi 智: 1. intelligence; 2. wisdom.

zhongshu 忠恕: loyalty and reciprocity.

Ziran 自然: what is natural, what is.
Chapter 1
Historical Background and Methodological Issues

I. Dai Zhen and the Intellectual Ethos of the 18th Century China

1.1 A legendary encyclopedic scholar

Dai Zhen (戴震 1724-1777), alias Shenxiu (慎修) and Dongyuan (東原), was born to a poor cloth merchant family in Xiuning (修寧) county, Anhui (安徽) province, China. He is not only the most important Confucian thinker in the 18th century but also one of the most influential figures in the Confucian tradition. Yet, Dai Zhen is a great scholar too, perhaps, the most learned man in the imperial China. It is said that he could not talk before getting ten but was extremely brilliant. Once he opened his mouth to speak, he shocked people with profound questions. Since young age, Dai Zhen had been an ardent reader and well versed in the Confucian texts. He was believed to be able to memorize the Shi shan jing十三經 (Thirteen Confucian Classics) including their notes and annotations. Apart from the Confucian scriptures, he showed a keen interest in philology and closely studied three core linguistic classics: Shuowen jiezi 說文解字

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1 For the biographical information about Dai Zhen, I have consulted Dai Zhen’s correspondence with his contemporaries, among which are Yu Duan Maotang deng shiyi zha與段茂堂等十一札 (Eleven Letters to Duan Maotang and Others) in Dai Zhen Quanshu戴震全書 (The Complete Works of Dai Zhen), Vol. VI. Hefei: Huangshan Shushe 合肥 黃山書社, 1995, pp. 535-549 and “Yu shi zhongming lunxue shu” 與是仲明論學書 (Letter to Shi Zhongming on Learning) in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 370-372. In addition, I have looked up Duan Yuzhai段玉裁, Dai Dongyuan xianshen nianpu 戴東原先生年譜 (Chronological Biography of Mister Dai Dongyuan) in Dai Zhen ji 戴震集 (Collected Works of Dai Zhen), Taipei: Liren Shuju台北 里仁書局, 1980; Duan Yuzhai段玉裁, Dongyuan nianpu dingbu 东原年谱訂補 (The Chronological Biography of Dongyuan with Corrections and Amendments), ed. by Yang Yingqin 楊應芹 in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol.VI, pp. 647-718; Hong Bang 洪榜, Dai Xianshen xingzhuang戴先生行狀 (Biography of Mister Dai) in Dai Zhen wenji 戴震文集 (The Collected Writings of Dai Zhen), Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju 香港中華書局, 1974, pp. 251-60; and Qi Longwei 祁龍威and HuaQiang 華強, Dai Zhen戴震, Nanjing: Jiangshu Guji Chubanshe 南京: 江蘇古籍出版社, 1984.
(Explanation of Ancient Words/Paleography), *Er ya* 爾雅 (Ancient Gloss), and *Guang yun* 廣韻 (Expanded Collection of Treatises on Rhymes) as well as *Fang Yan* 方言 (On Dialect). Dai Zhen read widely with an in-depth inquiry into many other fields such as mathematics, astronomy (especially calendrical system), geography, cartography, biology, agriculture, irrigation works, mechanics, architecture, music, clothing, statues and systems and so on. In each of these areas particularly in mathematics, astronomy, and geography, Dai Zhen had made stunning achievements and produced many significant scholarly works. However, of course, his accomplishments had gone far beyond the natural sciences. Furthermore, it is worth to point out that Dai Zhen’s academic activities in these disciplines were all tightly tied up to his philological and exegetical enterprise, a central intellectual endeavor that engages Dai Zhen’s whole life. His prestigious imperial appointment in the immense compilation project of the canonical texts *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Completed Collection of Four Treasures) for the Imperial Library should be considered a bright chapter in his academic career. In his lifetime, Dai Zhen gained national fame as a great philologist excelling in phonology, etymology, and semantics, a great commentator and exegete of the classics. However, Dai Zhen whose life seemed to be dazzling with attainments, honor, and fame actually did not lead an easy life. He suffered many a setback including financial difficulties and drifted from place to place. Most of all, despite the illustrious attainments and reputation crowning his name, Dai Zhen felt the pain that he was not really understood by the world. Deep in his heart, he had always aspired for the authentic Confucian way. He said, “Ever since I was seventeen, I have set my mind on hearing *Dao*” (僕自十七嵗時，有志聞道). Rather than a philologist, Dai Zhen identified himself as a philosopher, a Confucian thinker.

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2 In this dissertation, with several indicated exceptions, all the translations of Dai Zhen’s works are my own. Regarding some passages of translations that have assimilated John Ewell’s translation of the *Shu Zheng* or Cheng Chung-ying’s 成宗英 translation of the *Yuan Shan*, I will add a reference note with “See Ewell, 1990, pg. #.” or “See, *Tai Chen’s Yuan Shan*, 1969, page #.”

As for the English translations of other Chinese texts, all those without indicating their sources of translations are my own.

1.2 Philology and philosophy: Evidential studies and the critique of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism

The late Ming and Qing scholarship is characterized with an attempt to restore the authentic teachings of Classical Confucianism through philological studies or evidential studies (kaozheng xue 考證學 or kaoju xue 考據學).³ To quote from Elman, “Qing scholars were determined to piece the thick veil of Song and Ming metaphysical and cosmological systems of thought known popularly as ‘Learning of the Way’ (daoxue 道學). They hoped thereby to recapture the pristine meanings formulated by the sage-kings of antiquity in the original classics”.⁴ Evidential studies as a mode of empirical scholarship came to prominence in the Qianlong 乾隆 and Jiaqing 嘉慶 reigns (1736-1820) in the Qing dynasty. Turning away from abstract and metaphysical implantation of ideas prevalent in the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian learning of principles (lixue 理學), the evidential scholars adopt linguistic approaches to base their studies on verifiable etymological research, textual analysis and exegetical interpretation of the classics so as to trace back the authentic original meanings of the texts that are believed to be obscured or


⁴ Elman, Benjamin A. From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China, second, revised edition, 2001, p. 29.
contaminated in the Song-Ming speculative thinking. With his intimidating scholarship and accomplishments in philology and exegesis on the classics, Dai Zhen became the foremost leader of this evidential studies movement. Throughout his life, Dai Zhen set his mind on seeking after truth. In order to achieve this goal, he proposed a rigorous way of learning and research and put it into an untiring life-long practice.⁵ Here we quote a passage from his correspondence with Shi Zhongming, his contemporary, through which we may get a glimpse of Dai Zhen’s evidential studies. Dai Zhen writes,

Since my childhood, my family had been poor, so I was unable to study with a tutor. I heard that among sages there was a person called Confucius who had set up the Six Classics for the instruction of the latter people. As I found one book and began to read, I felt totally at a loss. After I carefully thought for quite a while, I was suddenly brought to home that the Classics are the route to the Dao. As such, what reveal the Dao are phrases and what make up phrases are words. From words to phrases and then from phrases to the Dao, there is a gradual procedure. In order to understand words, I searched various seal characters and obtained Xu Shen’s *Shuowe Jiezi* (Explanation of Ancient Words/Paleography). After three years, I gradually knew its items and came to see the origin and development of ancient sages’ working of the mind. However, still, since I was afraid Xu’s work might not be exhaustive, I borrowed from friends the Annotated Thirteen Confucian Classics to read. Then I understood that the meaning of one word should be sought in the context of various scriptures and based on the Six Classics. Only then can we decide its meaning.

⁵ See Dai Zhen’s “Yu Shi Zhongming lunxue shu”與是仲明論學書 (Letter to Shi Zhongming on Learning) in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, 1995, p. 370-371. In this letter, Dai Zhen elaborates his intent and approaches of evidential studies, which, embraces in-depth inquiry on the one hand and broad investigation into various subjects on the other. We may want to say that Dai Zhen is the one who really embodies the spirit of “gewu zhizhi” (investigation of things and extension of knowledge) and put it into tireless practice. Also, see Duan Yucai’s *Nianpu Dingbu* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 652-653, where Duan Yucai, Dai Zhen’s disciple, quotes the letter to summarize Dai Zhen’s empirical methods of studies.
(僕自少時家貧，不獲親師，聞聖人之中有孔子者，定六經示後來之人，求其一經，啓而讀之，茫茫然無覺。尋思之久，計於心曰：‘經之至者道也，所以明道者詞也，所以成詞者字也。由字以通其詞，必有漸。’求所謂字，考諸篆書，得許氏說文解字，三年知其節目，漸睹古聖人製作本始。又疑許氏於故訓未能盡，從友人假十三經註疏讀之，則在知一字之意，當貫群經，本六書，然後為定。) 6

Dai Zhen assiduously engaged his whole life in philological and exegetical work on classics, but, for him, philology was just the way towards the Dao. As Yu Yingshi comments, Dai Zhen’s evidential studies only serve his “yi-li xitong” (theoretical system of meanings and principles). 7 Among more than fifty works he had written, Mengzi ziyi shuzheng (Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius) brought Dai Zhen the most intellectual fulfillment. He openly expressed this feeling in his letter to Duan Yucai, both his disciple and friend who had a deep understanding of his master’s undertaking. Dai Zhen wrote, several months before his death in 1777, “Of all my writings throughout my life, the most important one is the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng, which is the key to the rectification of the mind” (僕生平論述最大者，為孟子字義疏証一書，此正人心之要). 8


7 Yu Yingshi 余英時 says, “It is obvious that Dong Yuan is trying to use a system of evidential studies to support his system of ideas and principles” (可見東原是要用一套訓詁系統來支持他的義理系統). See Yu Yingshi 余英時, Lun Dai Zhen yu Zhang Xuecheng: Qingdai zhongqi xueshu sixiangshi yuanjiu (On Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng: A Study of the Mid-Qing Intellectual History), 2005, p. 99.

8 Dai Zhen, the Shuzha # 10 in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, 1995, p. 543; also see Duan Yucai’s Nianpu, where Duan quotes this letter of Dai Zhen.
Like most of his contemporaries, Dai Zhen was highly critical of the Song and Ming learning. In their views, Song-Ming Confucians belittled linguistic efforts in their treatment of the classics. From Dai’s perspective, this was just like “with intent to cross a river yet discarding the ferry; with intent to climb high yet without steps” (欲渡江河而棄舟楫, 欲登高而無階梯也). 9 Nonetheless, on the other hand, we find that Dai Zhen was not very happy with the ethos of his age either. Dai Zhen always took philology seriously. In the meantime, he was always conscious that philology was just the way towards the truth, the route to the Dao, whereas most of his contemporaries had lost their vision of the Dao being drown in the etymological details. After all, Dai Zhen lived in a time when rigid scholarly research took over free philosophical thinking. I think only against this general intellectual milieu of the Qing evidential studies movement can we understand Dai Zhen’s spiritual pain underneath the glittering splendor of his name. Likewise, we understand why he prefaces his first major philosophical work the Yuan Shan (Inquiry into Goodness) with the following words: “I hide it in my family library in the hope that one day some able people may discover it to its further enhancement” (藏之家塾, 以待能者發之). 10

Dai Zhen is not a single voice in the trend of the general revolt of the 17th and 18th century intellectual movement against the lixue (learning of principle) of the Song Neo-Confucianism. As Wing-tsit Chan has pointed out, “The dominant spirit of Chinese thought since the seventeenth century has been strongly in opposition to speculation and in favor of a return to practical living.” 11 However, we may say that in the Confucian tradition there are not any other thinkers comparable to Dai Zhen that combines admirably philosophical sobriety and scholarly profundity to defend human desires. He represents a significant reversal from the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian thought to develop his theory in his polemic against Zhu Xi朱熹

9 Dai Zhen, the Shuzha # 9 in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, 1995, p.541.
With an iconoclastic position against Zhu’s metaphysics in favor of empirical approaches, Dai Zhen tries to overcome the dichotomies of *tiandao* (way of heaven/天道) and *rendao* (way of man/人道), *tianli* (heavenly principle/天理) and *renyu* (human desire/人欲). He advocates the legitimacy of human desire as many of his predecessors and contemporaries did, but in refuting the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians’ assertions, Dai Zhen has distinctively developed a theory of his own on human desires that is well built on his mastery and exegesis of the classics. His ethics is born out of his criticism of the Song-Ming Confucian learning represented by Zhu Xi and reinterpretation of the classics in the Confucian thought.

1.3 Dai Zhen’s spiritual resources and his two major works

Availing himself of his great learning in the classics and scriptures, Dai Zhen takes an exegetical route into the classics. It is quite amazing that he tries to support every point he makes with copious textual evidence. As is claimed in both of his prefaces to the Yuan Shan and the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng, Dai Zhen takes it as his mission to revive the authentic teachings of the Ancient Sages. The Six classics, particularly the *Yijing* 易經 (the Book of Changes), the *Liji* 礼记 (the Book of Rites), the *Shijing* 詩經 (the Book of Odes) and the *Shujing* 書經 (the Book of Documents), and the works of the three great Confucian patriarchal figures: Confucius 孔子 (551-479 BCE), Mencius 孟子 (385-304 BCE), and Xunzi 荀子 (312-? BCE) in particular provide him rich spiritual resources and constant intellectual inspiration. The scriptures have become indispensable sources of moral and spiritual enlightenment. He ably appropriates the key notions and concepts in the Confucian thought, which provide him not only the debating base but necessary theoretical tools as well. As discussed above, in his view, the genuine meanings of the sages’ thought are obscured in the misconceptions and biased opinions of Xunzi, Gaozi, the Song-Ming Confucians, and other Daoist and Buddhist thinkers. For this reason, he takes great effort to explicate and interpret the classical Confucian texts in order to restore their original meanings. Nevertheless, in his exegetical activities he creatively reconstructs the notions and ideas of the classics to develop a distinctive philosophy of his own.
Dai Zhen establishes his position as a great Confucian thinker with his two major philosophical works of the Yuan Shan原善 (Inquiry into Goodness) and the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng 孟子字義疏証 (Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mencius). It is generally held that the latter is the further development of the Yuan Shan. We can easily discern their continuity. Many ideas introduced in the Yuan Shan are fledged out in the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng. From the Yuan Shan to the Shu Zheng, Dai Zhen himself also regards the latter his most important work.

II. Levinas in the 20th Century

2.1 The withdrawal of God

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) was born in a Jewish family in Lithuanian and later moved to France and received the French citizenship. In his early years, he received his Jewish education and was well seasoned in Russian literature. Along with the English playwright

12 According to Qianmu 錢穆, the Yuan Shan was written roughly between 1757 and 1763 and completed before Dai Zhen was forty-one, but Zhang Dainian 張岱年 thinks that the composition time was between 1753 and 1763. See Dai Zhen, the Shuzha #10 in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, 1995, p. 543; Duan Yucai, Chronological Biography of Dai Dongyuan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, 1995, p. 674. The Shu Zheng was written several times until 1777, the year of Dai Zhen’s unexpected death.

13 Apart from these two works, Dai Zhen’s philosophical thoughts are also reflected in some essays and correspondence between Dai Zhen and his contemporaries, among which “Da Pengjinshi Yunchushu” 答彭進士允初書 (Reply to Jinshi Peng Yunchu’s Letter), “Yu Shi Zhongming lunxue shu” 與是仲明論學書 (Letter to Shi Zhongming on Learning), “Yumou shu” 與某書 (A Letter to Someone), and his letters to his disciple Duan Yucai Yu Duan Maotang deng shiyi zhai與段茂堂等十一札, 九, 十 (Eleven Letters to Duan Maotang and Others) #7, #9, and #10 are especially of interest to my studies.

William Shakespeare, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy were all his favorite writers. Levinas began his philosophical studies at Strasbourg University where he started his lifelong friendship with Maurice Blanchot. Later he went to Freiburg University to study phenomenology with Edmund Husserl. There he also met Martin Heidegger. Levinas became an influential figure in France by introducing Husserl and Heidegger to the French intellectuals. After the war, he studied the Talmud with a great Jewish teacher and scholar Mordechai Chouchani and began to give lectures on Talmudic readings.\textsuperscript{15}

Levinas survived the Holocaust. However, while he was spending the war as a prisoner of war at a German hard labor camp, nearly every member of his family in his native Lithuania was murdered in concentration camps. He witnessed firsthand the violation of the Other in the Holocaust. Henceforth, any understanding of Levinas’s thought cannot ignore the facts of his personal history. His philosophy is addressed to the question Carl Jung poses in an essay on the Holocaust titled “After the Catastrophe”: “Where now is the sanction for goodness and justice, which was once anchored in metaphysics? Is it really only brute force that decides everything?\textsuperscript{16} Or, as Levinas himself has put it, after Auschwitz, “where God let the Nazis do what they wanted. … What remains?\textsuperscript{17} We have to look at Levinas philosophy against the background of the Holocaust and the other horrors of the twentieth century, from which emerges the appeal of the Other, which founds ethics: “Thou shall not kill.”

When six millions of people were killed in the genocide, theodicy can no longer offer people a comfort. Levinas rejects theodicy. He says, “The disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with glaring, obvious clarity. Its possibilities put into question


\textsuperscript{17} “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” \textit{The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other}, 1988, p. 175.
the multi-millennial traditional faith.” God is absent from the present. He renders the world into the hands of man. “The absoluteness of God—for Levinas—lies in the humility with which God withdraws, not wishing to intrude on or prove himself to be the one he has created…. This God ‘passed by’ without leaving anything but a sign or a trace (in the sense of an impression), wipes away all traces that could lead back to him, and weaves them into an ‘intrigue’ which cannot be dissolved by speaking his name or calling out to him.”

Suffering challenges the very existence of humans. It is through suffering and the proximity of death that our freedom finds its limit. Yet, there is something else. Suffering introduces death as the Other. We find ourselves brought into a relationship with what cannot be grasped within our finitude. The confrontation with death occasions an opportunity for the departure of the self from its egoism. Death opens on to a different order beyond this world. “The unforeseeable character of death is due to the fact that it does not lie within my horizon” (TI 233). Beyond all the horizons of my existence, then, in the idea of Infinity I get a glimpse of what I cannot grasp: It is the Other. The essential thing for Levinas is not the finitude of existence but the otherness of what confronts my essence, challenges my being here and now. The Nazi was yelling to the Jew: You have no right to live. To Levinas, however, as the survivors of the calamity, he and she must not try to protest their innocence. Instead, he and she must ask himself/herself: Is my life a just life when facing the weak and the oppressed? Do I have the right to be when facing other people’s suffering and death? Before ontology, exclaims Levinas, there is ethics. The primacy of ethics over ontology just arises from this experience of encountering with the Other.

2.2. The felix culpa

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R. Hiyaa b. Abba said in R. Johanan’s name: “All the prophets prophesied only in respect of the messianic era; but as for the world to come, ‘the eye hath not seen’” (DF 60).

R. Joshua b. Levi said: “To the wine that has been kept (maturing) with its grapes since the six days of Creation. A famous vintage! An ancient wine that had not been bottled, or even harvested. A wine not given to the least opportunity to become adulterated. Absolutely unaltered, absolutely pure. The future world is this wine.” (DF 66).

What is that which ‘the eye hath not seen’? The human history unfolds its own scroll as the wine is kept maturing in time. Between the world of creation and the world to come is our human era, a time without wine. This time is what Levinas would call the messianic era, which entails the past, present, and future. It moves towards the world to come while at the same time is ever driven to return—return to the origin yet beyond the very origin when even Adam has not gotten a taste of the wine. However, we need this time and history just in that the revelation of the mystery of the very origin will only take place when “history has already been covered” (DF 67). For it is this very time of history that bears “an unforeseeable fecundity” (DF 67) to allow the wine to get ripen with the grape, to ever recommence, to always bring something new. Nonetheless, the messianic era is an age without wine. In other words, it is the time without joy and the time of and for suffering. As Levinas puts, “the image (of wine) unties the tragic knot of the world’s history” (DF 67) that began with man’s being expelled from the paradise.

Levinas’s “Messianic Texts” sends out a message about the felix culpa—our “being thrown out of paradise and thrown into time are actions that herald a greater perfection than that of the happiness tasted in the garden of paradise” (DF 68). The world to come is reserved for “him that waiteth for him” (Tractate Sanhedrin 99a). With Levinas messianism no longer concerns about the cosmic change or the end of history. Instead, it embarks on returning to the very origin where the wine is preserved after man experiencing the adventure of evil. Yet no one can fix this itinerary in advance. For the past, present, and future are mutually entailing and transforming. The present is the pardoned past and the future is realized in here and now. With Levinas,
however, as the past is pardoned, as it has a redeeming power for the future, time has virtually lost its temporal dimension and is transferred into an ethical relationship. For him the messianic era or world is no longer a location in time and place but an ethical responsibility. It is just as what Rab said: “All the times that have been designated for the arrival of the Messiah have already passed, and now the matter depends only upon repentance and good deeds” (Tractate Sanhedrin 97b). Thus, for Levinas as it is for R. Johanan, “the messianic era consists in fulfilling a promise of a delivered and better humanity” (DF 60).

Indeed, history has witnessed man’s suffering. Nonetheless, as the Lord has fulfilled his promise to Abraham, God will not renounce man his Promise. The world to come is preserved for those who are waiting for him. This “awaiting” entails patience, tolerance, perseverance, and above all, suffering; it is the duration of time, in which the perfect righteous teach the Torah and sinners become righteous through repentance, in which every man is offered the chance to take up his responsibility. When Abraim was called by God, his name was changed too. He was no longer Abraim but Abraham. After he heard the calling from the Lord, Abraham did not belong to his native land any more. As if he were a prophetic witness, Abraham orients the itinerary of a Levinasian man, who has to depart further—not just from his native land and Father’s house but from his selfhood as well. In losing his old identity, he has received his new name: being-for-the-other. Like the chosen people wandering in the wilderness, “the Messiah is the suffering man” (DF 88). He has been afflicted with agony, persecution, and death; he has eaten the manna given by God. Nevertheless, just like the land of Canaan which is flown with honey and milk, the wine that has been kept maturing since the Creation is preserved for the world to come.

2.3. Levinas’s major spiritual resources and his two main philosophical works
Levinas’s philosophy is rooted in, influenced by and develops from many heritages. Apart from the Judea-Christian traditions that give him spiritual nourishments, his writings, *Totality and Infinity* under discussion for instance, discloses his indebtedness to various thinkers and thoughts from the ancient to the present. Here, we simply mention Descartes’s idea of Infinity (*Meditations on First Philosophy*), Plato’s notion of “Good beyond Being” (*Republic* 509 b) and Plotinus’s further development of the idea of beyond being, the Socratic discussions on Eros (*Symposium; Phaedrus*) and on speech as apology and teaching (*Apology*), Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to corporeality, embodiment and temporality (*Phenomenology of Perception*), Heidegger’s ontology of Being and death (*Being and Time*), Franz Rosenzweig’s objection to the idea of totality (*the Star of Redemption*), and the question of relation in Martin Buber (*I and Thou*) and so on and so forth. They provide inspirational resources for the formulation of Levinas’s thought either by providing him theoretical concepts, tools, or frameworks or by challenging his philosophical arguments with their distinct philosophical

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20 See Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen, 1986, pp. 13-34. The dialogue recounts the spiritual and intellectual resources of Levinas’s thought and his connections with the two philosophical and spiritual traditions, namely the Greek intellectual tradition and the Judeo-Christian religious heritage. In response to Kearney’s questions about the major influences on his thought and his indebted to and relationship with other thinkers and thoughts, Levinas lists Plato, Descartes, and Kant, and particularly identifies the first contemporary influence he received in Bergson, especially his theory of time as concrete duration. In this conversation, Levinas discusses both the impact of the German phenomenologist thinkers Husserl and Heidegger upon his thought and his departure from them, as well as his relationship with the French phenomenology, particularly the existential phenomenology of Sartre and their fundamental difference regarding their radically different understandings of “the other.”

Bertigo Bergo in *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1999, pp. 17-18) specifies two sources of Levinas’s thought: one is Existentialism and French Hegelianism; the other is German Jewish “dialogical philosophy” or the “new thinking” represented by Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber.


On Levinas and Plotinus, see John Izzi “Proximity in Distance: Levinas and Plotinus,” *Levinas and the Ancients*, 2008, pp. 196-209.


propositions. But here in my research I will not go in detail to map out the spiritual genealogy of Levinas’s thought. Instead, I want to introduce two basic keys concepts, namely the Same (le Même) and the Other (l’Autrui)\textsuperscript{22} that constitute the subject matter of Levinas’s Totality and Infinity (although they become less prevalent in his second masterpiece Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence).\textsuperscript{23}

This pair of concepts originally appears in Plato’s Sophist and later is adopted by Hegel and hence plays a crucial role in the Hegelian metaphysics. In Plato’s dialogue, the Stranger describes the Other not only distinct from but also irreducible to the Same and Being. Presumably, Levinas borrows from the Sophist these two oppositional concepts, which come into prominence in his works to represent two distinct spheres or reality of human existence. The same becomes the alternative expression for interiority, the I, the self, the moi that is essentially the egoist self “identifying oneself from within” (TI 289) while the other the articulation of exteriority, alterity, infinity, transcendence, and metaphysics. Whereas the same announces hegemony, autonomy and freedom to stand for the being of economic existence in Separation, the other proclaims heteronomy and conscience to point to the being of transcendence and infinity.

\textsuperscript{22} Regarding the English translation of the French “autrui” and “autre,” Alphonso Lingis, a well-known translator of Levinas’s major works, says in a footnote, “With the author’s permission, we are translating ‘autrui’ (the Personal Other, the you) by ‘Other,’ and ‘autre’ by ‘other.’” See Totality and Infinity, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, 1969, p. 24. Richard Cohen, another Levinas’s translator, also provides us with useful notes in both his translations of Ethics and Infinity: Conversation with Philippe Nemo and Time and the Other. He says, “I have followed Lingis’ convention of always translating translated autrui as the ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’ and autre as ‘other’ (with a small ‘o’), regardless of the occasional capitalization of autre in the text. Autrui refers to the personal other, the other person; autre refers to the otherness in general, to alterity.” See Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics and Infinity: Conversation with Philippe Nemo, trans. by Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p. 17; Also, “I have always translated autrui as the ‘Other,’ with an uppercase ‘O,’ and autre as ‘other,’ with a lowercase ‘o’ (except for the title of this book and one section heading in part 3). Whenever “other” (Autre) is capitalized in French, I have supplied the term in brackets. Autrui refers to the personal other, the other person; autre refers to the otherness in general, to alterity.” See Emmanuel Levinas, Time and the Other, trans. by Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987, p. 30.

With a writing career spanning over half a century, Levinas has produced many works, but among which the most important ones are his *Totalité et infini* (1961) (*Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, English translation, 1969) and *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (1974) (*Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, English translation, 1981). While his first masterpiece focuses its discussion on the infinite alterity of the Other, his second magnum opus shifts the focus from ethical alterity to ethical subjectivity—the infinite responsibility of the subject.

### III. Dai Zhen and Levinas

#### 3.1 Moral urgency

With these several pages, I have tried to sketch a picture of the two thinkers, their life and works with respect to the ages they lived in. Between Dai Zhen and Levinas, there seems lying a vast distance stretching into the past. Cultural and historical differences make them seemingly even farther from each other. Nonetheless, beneath all these differences and impossibilities we see one fundamental thing they have in common, that is the moral urgency presiding over their life and philosophical thinking, which makes it possible to lend them to a mutually illuminating conversation across time and space.

Dai Zhen is admirably endowed with great talents and has made astonishing achievements in every field he is engaged. But, as Yu Yingshi remarks, “There can be no doubt that the completion of his magnum opus gave him an intellectual satisfaction of the highest degree.” Indeed, it is in this philosophical work *Mengzì zi yì shuzhen* that Dai Zhen finds his spiritual

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anchorage. Here he brings to the fore the voices of the other, especially those of the weak, the young, the old, the widow, the orphan, and the solitary that request for social justice. There is a saying in the Shijing (詩經) (the Book of Odes): “People’s nature lies in the daily existence of drinking and eating” (民之質矣, 日用飲食). Similarly, the Liji (禮記) (the Book of Rites) says, “In drink, food, and sex reside human basic desires” (飲食男女, 人之大欲存焉). From his perspective, “if there were no such desire, then one would also remain indifferent to the affliction and distress of others in the world” (然使其無此欲, 則於天下之人, 生道窮促, 亦將漠然視之). For Dai Zhen humanity prevails where the cries of the ones who are suffering are heard. Principle or metaphysics resides in our acts to feed those who are hungry.

Like Dai Zhen, Levinas prioritizes ethics above all. Out of a philosophical tradition that is dominated by metaphysics and ontology, Levinas proclaims, “Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy” (TI 304). He describes the state of human existence as enjoyment and happiness. Yet, beyond that he opens us up to an utterly different order above being, that is Goodness. For him, “Goodness does not radiate over the anonymity … It concerns a being which is revealed in a face” (TI 305). Levinas conceives of ethics based on asymmetrical relationship with the Other who approaches me from a dimension of height in the face of the stranger, the poor, the orphan, and the widow. Out of both Humility and Height, they put me in question and claim absolute responsibility upon me. I have to answer to their appeal and be responsible for all their unhappiness and misfortune. To Levinas, “To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give. But it is to the master, to the lord, to whom one approaches as ‘You’ in a dimension of height” (TI 75). Also, “Before the hunger of men responsibility is measured only ‘objectively’” (TI 201). For Dai Zhen the care for others’ material needs is crucial to morality; the same is true with Levinas. Characteristic of

25 The Shijing; See no. 8, no. 10, no. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 158, 161, 205.

26 The Liji—Liyun. See the Yuan Shan and the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 27; 161; no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 167.

27 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 184.
both thinkers’ philosophical thinking is the ethical exigency arising from our facing other people’s needs and sufferings. Dai Zhen and Levinas stand apart in different philosophical and religious traditions, but their deep concern for humanity and their strong sense of responsibility entrusted by the other surpass the geographical, historical, linguistic, and cultural barriers.

3.2 Hermeneutics and ethics

It is held by many scholars that Levinas’s thought represents an interruption of the tradition, the totalization since Plato. But his interruption only leads us back to the origin afresh. Similarly, Dai Zhen utters the strongest voice in the Confucian tradition to call for a rectification of the tradition since Confucius and Mencius (the so-called “zheng ben qing yuan” — to rectify the origin and purify the source) and turns his revolt into an exegetical praxis. Nonetheless, in the like manner, Dai Zhen’s hermeneutical route only takes us back to the classics reinterpreted. The way he follows, to use Chung-ying Cheng’s words, is “methodology of textual critique and hermeneutical understanding.” Both Dai Zhen and Levinas resort to the patriarchal figures, particularly, Mencius and Plato of each their own philosophical traditions for spiritual inspiration but they both approach the classics hermeneutically in light of their own ethical concerns. Of great interest, with both Dai Zhen and Levinas hermeneutics is indispensible to their ethics. In his “On the Jewish Reading of Scriptures” Levinas remarks, “That ethics is not determined in its elevation by the pure height of the starry sky; that all height takes on its transcendent meaning only through ethics and the message incessantly breaking (hermeneutically) the texture of the Book par excellence: these, undoubtedly, will constitute the teaching to be drawn—one of the teachings to be drawn—from the passage we are commenting upon.”


rigidness and an even more traditional exegetical approach to address the ethical issues. In this regard, his preface to the Yuan Shan is rather illustrative. He says, “I originally wrote three chapters of the Inquiry into Goodness. In fear of that they may be obscured by scholars’ different opinions, therefore, I attempt to draw on the classics to expound their meanings through commenting and interpreting the words of the classics” (余始為原善之書三章，懼學者蔽以異趣也，復援據經言疏通證明之). 30 Here Dai Zhen makes it very clear that exegesis and commentary are utilized in the service of expounding his own thought. Without doubt, both Dai Zhen and Levinas’s ethical speculation is closely bound up with a hermeneutical understanding of the texts of the classics. From comparative vantage point, their reconstruction of ethics via reinterpretation of the classics also enhances the affinity between these two thinkers.

IV. Methodological Issues

Levinas in Totality and Infinity says, “Ethics is an optics. But it is a ‘vision’ without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type” (TI 23). 31 A few pages later, he adds, “Already of itself ethics is an ‘optics.’ It is not limited to preparing for the theoretical exercise of thought, which would monopolize transcendence” (TI 29). Further on, he says, “Ethics is the spiritual optics. The subject-object relation does not reflect it; … ‘vision’ here coins with this work of justice” (TI 78). Later in the same book, he brings up with the term again, but with a seemingly opposite

30 The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 7.

31 Also, “Already of itself ethics is an ‘optics’” (TI 29); and “Ethics is the spiritual optics” (TI 78).

In “Key to Special Terminology,” Edith Wyschogrod explains the “optics” as “Unmediated relation with the other” and “Describes the spiritual condition of ethical life” (See Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics, 1974, p. 218). In Edith Wyschogrod’s interpretation, “ethics as an optics” suggests that the ethical relation implies the integration of theory and practice. She says, “What he means, I believe, is this: the ethical relation which is commanded in the epiphany of the other is not preliminary to a theoretical exercise. It is in and of itself a command to action without intervening theoretical structures. It breaks down the distinction between theory and practice. Action no longer rests upon illuminating knowledge, upon preliminary reflection.” (See Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics, 1974, p. 94.)
He says, “Transcendence is not an optics, but the first ethical gesture” (TI 174). In his both affirmation and disavowal of ethics as optics, we are brought to a new understanding of ethics in two respects. First, ethics is not conceived to be a theoretical system applied to knowledge and intellectual comprehension but an optics that proffers us a vision or an inner awareness of our egoist selves in the face of the Other. Second, the vision that signals the awakening of our inner awareness just heralds the beginning of ethics, which must turn into a responsibility for the Other, into an act of generosity. In my opinion, essentially, Dai Zhen reveals a sympathetic understanding of ethics with Levinas. I adopt Levinas’s term for the title of the thesis with intent to look at desire through the ethical optics, whose uniqueness lies in the very fact that it does not give the refraction of the other but the I instead. For Levinas as is for Dai Zhen, “vision” is essential to our moral reasoning in that it enables us to see in the hunger and sufferings of the others the spiritual insufficiency of the self and henceforth brings about a consciousness of responsibility. Most importantly, the spiritual awareness entrusted by the other upon the self has to develop into a material offering. The “optics” turns our metaphysical reflection into a physical act. As Levinas claims, “Transcendence is not a vision of the Other, but a primordial donation” (TI 174).

This dissertation conducts a comparative study of Dai Zhen and Levinas on their conception of desire. Nonetheless, instead of assembling the thinkers’ thoughts arbitrarily around certain concepts or categories for similarities and differences, I try to situate Dai Zhen and Levinas each in their own intellectual and philosophical contexts to explore the issues emerged. As such, rather than a comparison with resource to some ready-made concepts and theoretical frameworks, my study of the two thinkers first takes the form of two structurally separate accounts of Dai Zhen and Levinas’s discourse on desire before I proceed to a comparative analysis of some important issues arising in my interpretive readings. Nevertheless, despite the structural independence of my presentation, the two accounts progress in a parallel trio-structure that hinges on a hermeneutic strategy to look at Dai Zhen and Levinas’s notion of desire within the larger prospect of the human relation with transcendence. The format of such a presentation is mainly out of two considerations. First, unlike other well-known and well-studied thinkers and philosophers like Mencius and Confucius, Dai Zhen is still a less known thinker to the West. Although there is an
increasing academic interest in him, the Dai Zhen scholarship is still far from sufficient. Unlike Dai Zhen, Levinas enjoys a huge amount of scholarship on him built up over the past several decades. But, of course, to the Chinese academia, he is still quite new. Therefore, one objective of my research is trying to present a complete, uninterrupted, and well-examined theory of desire of each thinker. By this means, in Dai Zhen’s case, I aim not just to provide myself with a textual basis for comparison but also to lay a preliminary foundation for our further research and studies on Dai Zhen. As for Levinas, a presentation of his theory of desire maybe is not something very new. However, when cast against another side-by-side running discourse, my reading of Levinas throws a fresh light on the subject under discussion to enable us to see something different or unseen otherwise. In this regard, my research makes its contribution to the scholarship on Levinas as well. Second, to present my comparative study in this manner is out of my understanding of comparative study as a dialogue that invites an exchange between the two thinkers as well an engaged participation from their audience or readers, as a vision with which we may discern and discover what are lying beneath and beyond the texts. Regarding the scope of coverage, the major focus of my study is Dai Zhen’s *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* (Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the *Mencius*) and Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*. But we will also refer to their other writings, especially their other two major works, namely Dai Zhen’s *Yuan Shan* (Inquiry into Goodness) and Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*.

Aside from the subject matter of my study, a strong motivation lying underneath this project is to explore the meaning and possibility of comparative study of religious ethics, which has somehow always remained an irrepressible impulse in me. Yet, strangely enough, for years I have been haunted by one same question: Why shall we compare? Without doubt, in a pluralistic society of globalization it is pointless to doubt the meaning of comparative religious ethic. Yet, it seems that I have never really felt justified to do so. How shall I justify my role as a comparativist? “To compare” may impose too much of the comparativist’s presumptions upon the compared objects? If the comparability derives from the compared objects, then, what is that which may lend the two thinkers of great cultural, historical, and linguistic differences to our comparison? The seemingly same or similar terms or notions may carry entirely different meanings when put
in each its own philosophical and religious context. Since comparison seems so difficult and risky, why shall I bother? What is the incentive behind this intellectual temptation then? To my mind, a great challenge for doing comparative religious studies is to figure out the objective.

I might say that I am not alone having this feeling, especially with respect to the compared objects that have no historical contact or mutual influence. To pick up a comparative work, it is not uncommon to find its author may either assume a naïve reassurance or adopt an apologetic stance. In doing comparative study, why shall we defend ourselves first? Why are the scholars in other disciplines not bothered with such complex? In my view, a teleological question is in effect a methodological issue. A few years ago, Aaron Stalnaker brought the academia a happy surprise with his highly acclaimed work *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine*. One of the significant contributions made to the field is that Stalnaker consciously faces and frustrates the challenges thrown on comparative study of religious ethics by building up a scholarly solid and applicable way of doing the comparative religious ethics.

Deeply founded on “his linguistic expertise” (as commented by Francis X. Glooney) and a nuanced understanding of the two great thinkers Xunzi and Augustine and their respective traditions, and complemented with a great familiarity with the regarded contemporary scholarship and theories, Stalnaker offers a well-elaborated and convincingly argued treatise on comparative ethics. He not only persuasively defends the meaning of comparative ethics from different angles: intellectual, theoretical, cultural, and social, but importantly, as Edward Slingerlands remarks, he has constructively set up “an example of comparison done right: detailed, nuanced, and historically responsible.”

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33 Ibid.
scholarship of his work, we may also feel frustrated by its height built in the austerity of hard labor. To use a key concept of his work, we can say that “spiritual exercise” is not only applied to Xunzi and Augustine but also to all those who intend for a genuine contribution to the field. As Stalnaker himself says, “The holistic approach to ethico-religious vocabularies even helps explain why such transplantation works so frequently in practice: Intercultural borrowing is often successful because bringing practices and theories into ‘reflective equilibrium’ is always a creative production, requiring serious work and rigorous discipline.”

Well versed in contemporary scholarship in ethics and comparative religious thought, Stalnaker skillfully avails himself of the modern “vocabulary” to create a space in which the two great thinkers from different cultures in antiquity are brought on the same plane to address the issues that concern the people of both the ancient and present time. His work henceforth displays a dynamic interaction on multiple levels between Xunzi and Augustine, between the two thinkers and the modern scholars. As James Wetzel comments, “Aaron Stalnaker’s comparative study of two classical figures, Xunzi and Augustine, goes well beyond the mix-and-match quality of much comparative analysis.” With his bridge concepts, Stalnaker tries to bridge two distinct worlds: the East and the West, the Confucian and the Christian, the ancient and the present. He says,

Bridge concepts aim to provoke accounts of widely separated figures in terms of a common set of topics that highlight particular points of similarity and difference. By creating more precise points of contact, the comparatist can provide the basis for an imaginary dialogue between the two positions thus articulated and thereby


pursue more substantive investigations of the bridge concept specifies. Thus a bridge concept like “human nature” can serve to generate what might be called a problématique for inquiry.\(^36\)

It is constructive that Stalnaker brings bridge concepts into comparative religious ethics. For him, bridge concepts not only generate a problématique for inquiry but also serve as “theoretical interlocutors.”\(^37\) As a strategic tool for comparative study, bridge concepts spell out the potential possibility to bring the separate thinkers to the same platform. They not only “determine” what to compare but also enable the compared two great thinkers to address the present from the past and to challenge the notions and ideas in modern consciousness.

Is “bridge concepts” an applicable strategy for my comparative study then? Do I need “bridge concepts” to compare Dai Zhen and Levinas? I might both say yes and no. To do comparative work needs some “points of contact.” With respect to Dai Zhen and Levinas, I chose desire as the subject matter of my comparative study not only because the notion of desire as an essential constitutive part of both thinkers’ philosophy deserves a careful study in its own right, but also because the subject brings about many important and interesting issues that are worth to look at in a comparative context. Dai Zhen is one of the most recognized voices in advocating human desire that is often labeled as the “siyu” 私欲 (selfish desire) or “renyu” 人欲 (human desire) of human bodily needs and instinctive appetites in the Confucian tradition, especially in the Song Ming Neo-Confucianism. Dai Zhen’s open endorsement of the self-interested feelings and desires is astonishing. However, fascinatingly, it is in this self-interested or self-regarding desire for food, drink, and sex that we see the unfolding of the other and the revelation of the heavenly principle. With his reciprocal theory of “yiqing xueqing” 以情絜情 (to gauge qing with qing),


\(^{37}\) Ibid. p. 16.
Dai Zhen proffers a compelling way to do justice to desire that is legitimized not only as \textit{jizhiyu 己之 欲}—the desires of one’s own but also as \textit{renzhiyu 人之 欲}—the desires of the others. As regards Levinas, he innovatively put forth a distinctive notion of desire that from the outset is wittingly cautioned against “a commonly interpreted need” (TI 33), namely the need that is often identified as a want and lack such as the hunger to be satisfied, thirst to be quenched. He defines desire as the Idea of Infinity or the Metaphysical desire that is simply a calling into question my autonomy and spontaneity and hence my knowing, cognition, intentionality, and will as well. The movement of his Metaphysical desire is a campaign launched against egoism or egology. However, it is likewise interesting that parallel to the movement of Desire is the movement of Need running beneath.

Nelson Goodman has an insightful comment about comparison. He says, “Similarity is relative, variable and context-dependent… [and that] every two things have some property in common.”\textsuperscript{38} In other words, since there always exist some similarities among things, basically, any object can lend itself to a comparison with something else. If we agree on Nelson Goodman’s insight, then, possible questions may challenge every comparative attempt would be: What is the goal of my doing so? What are the essential qualities that are crucial to the justification of my comparative project? As for Dai Zhen and Levinas, I find their unconventional conception of desire the fascinating crux where the self and the other, the body and the mind, physicality and spirituality, this worldliness and transcendence, the finite and infinity all these seemingly paradoxical counterparts come into play. Their notion of “desire” affords me at once an access to their ethical worlds and a location where I can engage the two thinkers into an exciting and meaningful conversation. In this sense, methodologically, desire


serves as the site of dialogue beyond the barriers of geographical, historical, philosophical and religious differences.

In Stalnaker’s work, although the bridge concepts are pregnant with rich meanings derived from each their own textual and philosophical contexts, they are fully charged with the input from the modern scholarship. By this means, the bridge concepts open up a broad sphere wherein the thinkers under comparison can both easily locate themselves here and there within the same horizon. But in the context of my study, unfortunately, the concept “desire” in lack of the handy conceptual resources has no totalizing power to put Dai Zhen and Levinas under its common scrutiny. Instead, the two utterly distinct philosophical accounts of desire provide us two distinct conceptions of desire. Henceforth, in my present study, if “desire” can be considered a bridge concept, it only serves as an entering or starting point. In comparison with bridge concepts, I appreciate more the “vagueness” of Robert Neville’s “vague categories” in that the weakness or indeterminacy and freedom left by the vagueness of the comparative or descriptive categories makes it possible to turn the comparative project a journey of exploration and discovery. At the outset maybe we are not very clear what conclusions may come out of our comparative studies. Nevertheless, it becomes a stimulating process as many interesting issues gradually emerge in the course of the “comparative” work.

The comparative study of Dai Zhen and Levinas in light of Stalnaker’s comparative endeavor throws on me some questions to think. How much shall we DO as comparativists in comparing religious ethics? Shall we or can we work like an omniscient God steering the course of

39 See Wesley J. Wildman and Robert Cummings Neville “How Our Approach to Comparison Relates to Others,” 
Ultimate Realities: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project, Edited by Robert Neville with a Forward by Tu Weiming, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 211-274. Neville put forth the idea about “a dialectic between the vague descriptive categories used throughout the study of religions and the detailed descriptions usually found in the phenomenology of religion” (p. 269). He says, “The vague categories would make possible specific comparisons and descriptions and all those specifics would infuse with the vague category with positive content. The adequacy of a comparative category would be determined by the ability of an interpretation of it to make coherent sense of the detailed comparisons and descriptions that the category facilitated” (269).
comparison? To what an extent are the compared objects in the comparativists’ charge? Do the compared objects have their own autonomy? Of course, they do. But, which one matters more, theirs or mine? Do bridge concepts “bridge”? Have to? Can they? How important is it to embrace the compared objects within a synchronic horizon created by the comparativist?
This chapter will examine the philosophical grounding of Dai Zhen’s conception of desire by locating his discourse within two conceptual contexts, viz. “shengsheng” (creative creativity; creation after creation 生生) and “xingshan” (human nature is good 性善). In comparison with Levinas, Dai Zhen applies to different vocabularies and concepts to construct a distinct ethical theory. But somehow underlying their discourse we discern something that renders their speculation interestingly parallel to each other. Dai Zhen and Levinas approach ethics out of each their own religious and philosophical traditions. In my view, Dai Zhen founds his ethics on the continuum of the cosmos and the human world while Levinas looks up to a realm beyond all totalities. For Dai Zhen, there is nothing outside the cosmic whole, an ontological totality embracing heaven, earth, humans, and myriad things that are interdependent of and connected to each other. But, as regards Levinas, greatly inspired by Plato, he conceives of the Good beyond Being an utterly different order that is invisible and transcendent, surpassing all of the ontological realities. As Levinas claims, “The Place of the Good above every essence is the most profound teaching, the definite teaching, not of theology, but of philosophy” (TI 103). The realm of the Good is infinitely beyond our reach yet incessantly charges us with an aspiration for the Good. In search for the proper key expressions for their ethical thoughts, Dai Zhen and Levinas both return to the origin of their own philosophical traditions. Of great interest, nonetheless, they reveal the like problematique: to inquire into the metaphysical or transcendent significance of human desire. With this ethical urge, the I either formulated as the small self or the small body in Confucian tradition and hence Dai Zhen’s thought as well or identified with the self or the same living in separation in Levinas’s philosophical world has to reach out beyond his or her isolated self to be connected with the transcendent, be it Infinity or the cosmic whole.

I. “Creative Creativity” (Shengsheng 生生) — Onto-cosmological Grounding of Human Desire
My inquiry into Dai Zhen will start with the notion of “shengsheng” (生生, creative creativity; creation after creation), which, in my view, both grounds Dai Zhen’s philosophy and imports into his discourse on human desire an onto-cosmological meaning. The Yi—Xici易系辞 (The Great Appendixes of the Yijing) says: “The great virtue of heaven and earth is giving and sustaining life” and “Creation after creation is called change” (天地之大德曰生; 生生之謂易). Greatly inspired by the Yizhuang’s易傳 (The Commentaries on the Yijing) thought, Dai Zhen locates the cosmological value in its creative creativity of shengsheng, which, to him, is not only the attribute of heaven and earth but also characteristic of the human world. Thus, human basic needs and desires are but the cosmic vitality manifested in human beings. Furthermore, influenced by Song Neo-Confucian thought, Dai Zhen relates the cosmic way of shengsheng to the key Confucian concept ren (humanity仁) by claiming: “Shengsheng is ren” (生生者, 仁乎!).

1 There are several different English translations of the term “shengsheng” 生生. For example, both Legge and Wing-tsit Chan translate “shengsheng” as “production and reproduction” (See James Legge, The I Ching: The Book of Changes. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963, p. 356; Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, Princeton University Press, 1st Princeton Paperback Edition, 1969, p. 266); Thomé H. Fang 方東美 adopts Whitehead’s term “creative creativity” for “shengsheng” (See Thomé Fang, Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development. Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1981); Cheng Chung-ying 成宗英 translates “shengsheng” as “creative activity” or “creative productiveness” (See his Tai Chen’s Yuan Shan. Oriental Society, Far East Publishers: South Sky Book Company, 1969, pp. 76-77), and Wm. Theodore de Bary uses “creativity” or “life-renewing” for “shengsheng” (See his Neo-Confucianism and Enlightenment in The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism, 1975, p. 194). In my writing I translate “shengsheng” as “creation after creation” throughout but sometimes I will also use “creative creativity” or “life creative force” when “shengsheng” is used in a more abstract sense especially as regards the attribute of Heaven.


is significant for Dai Zhen to perceive ren in terms of shengsheng in that by making this connection he promotes a notion of human desire that is not only in conformity with the cardinal Confucian virtues but bestowed with a cosmological significance. I will argue that “shengsheng” and “ren” constitute the bedrock of Dai Zhen’s ethical theory of human desire. It is out of this deep awareness of and regard for the cosmic order of producing and sustaining life that Dai Zhen forms his naturalistic-ethical view on human desire. By virtue of shengsheng and ren, Dai Zhen endorses a notion of yu (desire 欲) that advocates the participation of human beings in the creative creativity of the cosmos.

1.1 Shengsheng as Dao

Dai Zhen first identifies shengsheng with Dao that comprises both tiandao 天道 (the way of heaven) and rendao 人道 (the way of man). Dao as a key concept in Chinese philosophy provides people an important conceptual tool to understand the world. But different schools and thinkers perceive Dao differently. Behind Dai Zhen’s naturalistic stance is the long philosophical tradition of the Yijing all the way down to Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) that take the ultimate reality concretely as the material force, as the

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4 Zhang Zai in his two most important treaties “Xi Ming” 西銘 (Western Inscription) and “Tai He” 太和 (The Great Harmony) identifies qi—the vital material force as the ultimate reality and the origin of myriad things. He says, “The Great Harmony is called the Way. It embraces the nature, which underlies all counter process of floating and sinking, rising, and falling, and motion and rest. It is the origin of the process of fusion and intermingling, of overcoming and being overcome, and of expansion and contraction. At the commencement, these processes are incipient, subtle, obscure, easy, and simple, but at the end they are extensive, great, strong, and firm.” The English translations of the passage are from Wing-tsit Chan, 1969, p. 500.

5 As Zhang Zai’s successor, Wang Fuzhi holds that the world consists only of concrete things, viz. qi and Dao is the Way of concrete things. Wang Fuzhi’s influence on Dai Zhen’s naturalistic worldview is obvious. As Henderson points out, “Wang Fu-chih and Tai Chen are both noted for having celebrated the powers of generation and the constancy of change in both man and the cosmos” (John B Henderson, The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology, 1984, p. 232).
incessant interaction and movement of yin and yang that produces and sustains the myriad things.

Dai Zhen says, “Dao is like going or traveling. The vital force transforms and flows and ceaselessly creates and recreates. Therefore, it is called the Way” (道，猶行也; 氣化流行，生生不息，是故謂之道). In Dai Zhen’s writings, the cosmic Dao appears to be amazingly plain and simple without any mystic implication. “Dao” is not something transcendent but a course of the unfolding and evolution of the vital force (qi 氣) as the latter flows and transforms in the same way as people’s steps tread a path. It is apparent that in his conception of Dao Dai Zhen rejects both the mysterious Dao of Laozi’s 老子 philosophy7 and the metaphysical Dao prevalent in the Song Neo-Confucian thought. Laozi’s Dao that points to the very source of myriad things is dim, vague, inexpressible, and ungraspable. As for the Song Neo-Confucianism, under the influence of Zhou Dunyi’s 周敦頤 (1017-1073) Taijitu Shuo 太極圖說 (Explanation on the Diagram of the Great Ultimate) as well as the ensuing discourse of Zhu Xi and the Cheng brothers (Chen Hao 程顥 1032-1085; Chen Yi 程頤 1033-1107), the Song Confucian learning assumes a dualist worldview. In Zhu Xi’s words, “The Great Ultimate is Dao that which is above forms whereas yin and yang is the vessel that which is below forms.” (太極，形而上之道也；陰陽，形而下之器也).8 Also, “Yin and yang is physical force and thereby is below forms; but that which gives rise to yin and yang is principle and hence what is above forms; li is what is meant by Dao” (陰陽，氣也，

6 No.15, the Shu Zhen in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 175.

7 See Laozi, Daodejing 道德經 (The Book of the Way and Virtue), Ch. 1, 21 & 25: “The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao” (道可道，非常道); “The thing is called Tao is eluding and vague. Vague and eluding, there is in it the form. Eluding and vague, in it are things” (道之為物，惟恍惟忽。忽兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮忽兮，其中有物。); “There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth” (有物混成，先天地生). The English translations are from Wing-Tsit Chan, 1963, pp. 139, 150, 152.

From Dai Zhen’s perspective, however, the Daoists reverse the real and the illusory by regarding the formless and traceless as the real but taking those which are visible and have forms to be unreal. Similarly, the Song Confucians (songru宋儒) like Zhu Xi conceive of a Dao that is also formless and invisible. In their division of the world into two domains: what is above forms (xing-er-shang形而上) versus what is below forms (xing-er-xia形而下), they presuppose a metaphysical Dao in opposition to the physical matter. Laozi’s Dao is the primordial source of myriad things and therefore antecedent to the formation of the world while Zhu Xi’s Dao is identical with the abstract principle li理 and henceforth overrides the physical world. In Dai Zhen’s view, they both take Dao as meta-physical substance or reality and consequently deprive Dao of its original meaning. Dai Zhen directs his criticism to both of them, particularly the metaphysics of the Song Confucianism. To him, these Song Confucians’ metaphysical speculations are simply the outcome of their failure in adhering to the original or true meanings of the classics. In lack of scriptural support from the classics, the Song Confucians’ metaphysical discourse is just some “invented language” (chuangyuan創言) that only brings about misunderstanding, confusion and delusion.

Dai Zhen avails himself of his mastery of the classics to give Dao a naturalist reading. In contrast with the static and metaphysical Dao upheld in the Song Neo-Confucians’ assertions Dao in Dai Zhen’s writings is essentially an unfolding process of the dynamic movement of the creative life force of yin yang and wuxing. He maintains that Dao is xing (going, traveling 行) with an ample textual support from the “Hong Fan,” the Shijing, Liji and Zheng Xuan’s (鄭玄

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9 Zhu Xi, Tongshu-cheng 通書·誠上 (Annotated Notes on the Tongshu—Sincerity) Part I in the WYG e-SKQS. See no. 16, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 175.

10 Dai Zhen says, “In the Six Classics and in the writings of Confucius and Mencius there is no saying about the distinction between li and qi; but the later Confucians invent and formulate one. They ascribe yin and yang to the realm of ‘what is below’ and thus deprive Dao of its original meaning.” (“六經、孔、孟之書不聞理氣之辨，而後儒創言之，遂以陰陽屬形而下，實失道之名義也。”). See no. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 176-7.
127—200) annotation on the *Shijing*. In particular, he takes special note of the two most oft quoted statements of the *Yi Zhuang*—“The rhythmic change of *yin* and *yang* is what is meant by *Dao*” (一陰一陽之謂道) and “What exists above/before physical form is called *Dao*. What exists below/after physical form is called physical things” (形而上者謂之道, 形而下者謂之器). In his view, the later Confucians such as Zhu Xi and the Cheng brothers seem to find in the second statement of the *Xici* of the *Yijing* the theoretical grounding for their dichotomic division of the metaphysical world and the physical realm, i.e. the opposite of the Way and concrete things. For example, the Cheng brothers hold that these words most distinctively state the division of what is above and what is below. In light of this view, *Dao* is primordial, generative, and hence above the physical world whereas the movement of the vital force of *yin yang* is subsequent and derivative.

Yet, Dai Zhen offers a naturalist reading of this famous formulation of the *Yijing*. He resolves the opposition of the *xing-er-shang* and *xing-er-xia* by changing the metaphysical speculation into a philological exercise. With the aid of his admirable linguistic and exegetical skills, Dai

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11 See no. 15, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 172, Dai Zhen widely cites the classics to support his argument that the *Dao* is “*xing*” 行 (travel, pass through).

12 See Chan’s translation, “What exists before physical form (and therefore without it) is called the Way. What exists after physical form (and is therefore with it) is called a concrete thing.” (形而上者謂之道, 形而下者謂之器) (Wing-tsit Chan, 1969, p. 267).

13 See *Chengshi yishu*程氏遺書 (The Remnant Works of the Cheng Brothers), Vol. 11 in the WYG e-SKQS: “These words most distinctively assert the division of what is above and what is below” (惟此語截得上下最分明).

14 Dai Zhen is a great philologist, but he regards his great attainment culminates in his philosophical work *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng*. The following discussion may serve as a good example to show the impact of the evidential studies on philosophical issues. Benjamin A. Elman points out that Dai Zhen reverses the Qing intellectual trend of “From Philosophy to Philology” by his return “from philology to philosophy,” but “the methodology Dai applied to his study of the *Mencius* was essentially a linguistic approach” (See Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, Second and revised edition 2001, p. 21). David S. Nivison also regards Dai a “classical philologist” in distinction from Zhang Xuecheng as a historian in dealing with philosophical issues (See Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bryan Van Norden, 1996, p. 262). In my view, Philip J. Ivanhoe’s remarks particularly pinpoint the core of the issue. He says, “For Dai Zhen there was no genuine philosophy outside of philology and true philology was always philosophical in nature. Philology was the very method of philosophy” (Ivanhoe, Philip J. *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation*, 1993, p.84).
Zhen throws a fresh light on the meaning of Dao. Rather dubious of the presupposed antithetical structure of Dao道 (way) and qi器 (vessels; physical things) that divorces Dao from the natural physical world, Dai Zhen interprets “xing-er-shang” and “xing-er-xia” from an utterly different angle. His focus falls on two pairs of words: “zhi wei” (what is meant by之謂) and “wei zhi” (is called謂之) as well as “shang” (above上) and “xia” (below下). He distinguishes the meanings of “zhi wei” and “wei zhi” with reference to their similar use in the Zhongyong中庸 (The Doctrine of Mean).\(^{15}\) According to Dai Zhen’s explanation, by “zhi wei” what comes before “zhi wei” is meant to define the meaning of what comes afterward, whereas by “wei zhi” what comes after “wei zhi” is to explain the content of the part previous to the phrase.”\(^{16}\) In other words, “zhi wei” is predicative while “wei zhi” descriptive with the former used to introduce a definition and the latter an explanation. Accordingly, the semantic meaning of “zhi wei” determines that “one yin and one yang” are identical with Dao as is claimed in the statement of “The alternation between yin and yang is what is meant by Dao” (一陰一陽之謂道). Dai Zhen is not playing the word game. His exegetical attempt just aims to make one point, viz. yin and yang is Dao; or conversely, Dao is yin and yang per se. As regards the other statement, since xing-er-shang (what is above forms形而上) and xing-er-xia (what is below forms形而下) are introduced by “wei zhi” instead of “zhi wei,” xing-er-shang should not be considered as the definition and hence the defining property of Dao (Way) and xing-er-xia not the definition and hence the defining property of qi (vessels; physical things); rather, they are but their respective description or explanation. By discerning the semantic difference between “zhi wei” and “wei zhi,” Dai Zhen thereby draws his conclusion that xing-er-shang is not Dao and xing-er-xia is not qi; or, conversely, Dao is not xing-er-shang and qi not xing-er-xia. A philosophical issue, interestingly, becomes a linguistic matter with Dai Zhen.

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\(^{15}\) See the Zhongyong 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean), Ch. 1 and Ch. 21: “What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way (Tao). Cultivating the Way is called education” (天命之謂性, 率性之謂道, 修道之謂教); and “It is due to our nature that enlightenment results from sincerity. It is due to education that sincerity results from enlightenment” (自誠明謂之性, 自明誠謂之教). The English translations are from Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, pp. 98, 107.

\(^{16}\) See no. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 176.
In addition to taking vantage of the semantic distinction between “zhi wei” and “wei zhi,” Dai Zhen also tries to bolster his argument by offering a different interpretation of “shang” (above 上) and “xia” (below 下). With the same strategy, he rids “shang” and “xia” of their metaphysical implication to look at them as expressions for the sequence of events. He says, “As the Yijing says that ‘what exists prior to physical forms is called the Way and what exists after physical form is called physical things,’ it is not talking about the Way or things. Rather, the Yijing simply uses Dao and qi to distinguish between what is ‘antecedent to forms’ and what is ‘subsequent to forms’ (易 ‘形而上者謂之道, 形而下者謂之器,’ 本非為道器言之, 以道器區別其形而上形而下耳。形謂已成形質, 形而上猶曰形以前, 形而下猶曰形以後).” Instead of reading “shang” 上 and “xia” 下 as “above” and “below,” Dai Zheng treats them as a temporal sequence and henceforth turns the spatial relationship of “shang” (above) and “xia” (below) into a temporal relationship of “before” and “after.” He supports his interpretation with lines from the Shijing and Zheng Xuan’s 《詩經》 and 《鄭風》 annotation to argue for the temporal meanings of “shang” and “xia.” In Dai Zhen’s view, the Yijing talks about “shang” and “xia” in terms of the procedure of formation and the transformation of the vital force of yin yang and wu xing.

“Xing-er-shang” and “xing-er-xia” are both physical as the former refers to the state before the transformation of the vital force congeals into concrete things and the latter the state after things have taken shape. They are the two phases of the vital force of yin yang and wu xing prior or...
subsequent to the formation of things. As he iterates, “When yin and yang has not taken physical shape to become physical things, this is called ‘antecedent to forms’ (xing-er-shang); and it is clear that this is not ‘subsequent to forms’ (xing-er-xia)” (陰陽之未成形質，是謂形而上者也，非形而下明矣). 20 For Dai Zhen the distinction between xing-er-shang and xing-er-xia is not the opposition of the metaphysical and the physical but the difference between the two stages of the movement. The so-called xing-er-shang and xing-er-xia are actually inseparable. Dao is nothing but the perpetual movement of formation and transformation of yin yang and wu xing that ceaselessly creates and recreates. Moreover, Dai Zhen emphasizes that one should not trace the origins of man and things further than yin yang and wuxing. 21

Cosmologically, Dai Zhen likens this creative creativity of Dao within heaven and earth to “guishen” (ghost-like and spiritual 鬼神) 22 to describe the marvel of the cosmic formation and transformation as if gods and ghosts lent their hands in this marvelous work of wonder. In his writings, “guishen” neither refers to spiritual beings nor are mysterious as in Zhang Zai’s frequent use of “shen” 神 (spirit). Rather, Dai Zhen relates “guishen” to the Zhongyong’s statement that “guishen’ are embodied in things (tiwu 體物) with nothing left” to make the point that Dao is nothing transcendent since “guishen”—a metaphorical expression of the creative creativity of Dao per se—are present in every concrete thing as the result of the movement of yin yang and wuxing. To him, tiandao is nothing but yin yang and wuxing in their continual movement of formation and transformation. Dai Zhen’s interpretation is without doubt a strong critique of Zhu Xi’s theoretical conception of li as a transcendent principle of “xing-er-shang”

20 No. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 176.
21 See no. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 176: “由人物逆而上之，至是止矣。”
22 See no. 15 and no. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 170: “就天地言之，化，其生生也；神，其主宰也，不可歧而分也。故言化則賅神，言神亦賅化；由化以知神，由化與神以知德；德也者，天地之中正也。”; “易言‘一陰一陽’，洪範言‘初一曰五行’，舉陰暢，舉五行，即賅鬼神；中庸言鬼神之‘體物而不可遺’，即物之不離陰陽五行以成形質也。” Also, see Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p 8: “‘形而下’者，成形質以往者也。‘形而上’者，陰陽鬼神者是也，體物者也故曰‘鬼神之為德，其盛矣乎！視之而弗見，聽之而弗聞，體物而不可遺。’”
versus the physical force of “xing-er-xia.” Anthropologically, corresponding to the natural force of “guishen” is “hunpo” (bodily soul and spiritual soul) of human beings, which are also considered to derive from the penetrating vital force. Dai Zhen thus describes,

The power manifested in the transformation of heaven and earth is called ‘gods and ghosts’ guishen; and the different function of the creative creativity manifested in the transformation of heaven and earth is called ‘spiritual soul and bodily soul’ hunpo. … The spiritual soul hun is called spirit ling and the bodily soul bo is called god shen. Spirit in its prime enlightens virtue and god in its prime enhances the sagely wisdom. As such, clarity, brilliance, intelligence, and sagacity, they are what we call godly illumination.

(是故天地之化，呈其能，曰 ‘鬼神’；其生生也，殊其用，曰 ‘魂魄’。…魄之謂靈，魂之謂神。靈之盛也明德，神之盛也睿聖；明聰睿聖，其斯之謂神明歟！) 23

According to Dai Zhen, “po” and “hun” being the fine essence of the vital force yin and yang respectively, they are the primary source of human vitality. With “hun” to follow the virtue of heaven and “po” the virtue of earth, “hun” governs movement and “po” quietude. Accordingly, this determines their different functions regarding human interaction with the world: “Hun” in charge of giving (shi 施) demonstrates the faculty of making judgment while “po” in charge of receiving (shou 受) the faculty of reception. Owing to their ontological connection with the

23 See Chung-ying Cheng, 1969, p. 97; also, see no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156: “Master Zen says, ‘the fine essence of yang is called god and the fine essence of yin is called spirit. God and spirit are the sources of various things’ (曾子言 ‘陽之精氣曰神，陰之精氣曰靈，神靈者，品物之本也).
cosmic force, “hunpo” operates in accord with the way of heaven and earth: giving and receiving, creating and sustaining.24

From Dai Zhen’s point of view, Dao is shengsheng, which constitutes the basic reality of both the cosmos and the human world. The existence of human beings like that of all other living creatures originates from the great transformation of the cosmos, viz. dahua liuxing (大化流行). In the spirit of the Yijing, he regards shengsheng as the primary source of the formation and transformation of the universe. As the most fundamental phenomenon common to both of the natural world and human sphere, shengsheng enables myriad things to come into being, constantly develop and change. “Shengsheng” congeals Dai Zhen’s basic understanding of the dynamics of the world. Both cosmologically and ethically shengsheng brings forth a primordial sense of continuum of the cosmos and human beings spelt out as the parallel between the tiandao (the way of heaven 天道) and rendao (the way of man 人道). Yet, shengsheng is not simply a rampant life force. Rather, in its ceaseless process of creation after creation it demonstrates its “tiaoli” (pattern and order). As Dai Zhen claims at the very beginning of the Yuan Shan, “Creation after creation is humanity (ren) and creation after creation in pattern and order is propriety (li) and righteousness (yi)” (生生者，仁乎；生生而條理者，禮與義乎！).25 Therefore, for Dai Zhen, shengsheng as creative life force is at once productive and orderly. His first major philosophical work Yuan Shan presents quite an elaborate study of the subject under discussion by drawing upon the classics of the Yijing, Liji, Shijing, and the Mencius. He furthers his quest in his Shu Zheng and addresses the issues in a more structured form via three separate chapters: “Tiandao” (天道 (the way of heaven)), “Dao” (the way), and “Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi” (仁義禮智 (humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom). These texts depict a world that is in

24 See the Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.16 and no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.
constant change and renewal as well as the role of human beings in relation to the cosmos. Notably, Dai Zhen develops from the notion *shengsheng* a worldview that is vitalistic, naturalistic, and ethical.

He stresses the intrinsic connection between the human world and the cosmological order. As the creative creativity of *shengsheng* disallows the dichotomy of the metaphysical and the physical, it also rejects the opposition of the way of heaven and the way of humans. *Rendao* is but the continuum of *tiandao* in the human world. He points out, “The human way concerns human relationships and every activity and functioning of human daily life. With regard to heaven and earth, *Dao* is the flowing forth and transformation of the great vital force and the ceaseless creation after creation; with regard to human beings and other living creatures, *Dao* refers to all the activities of living and nurturing, which accompanying the transformation of the vital force are also endless” (人道，人倫日用身之所行皆是也。在天地，則氣化流行，生生不息，是謂道；在人物，則凡生生所有事，亦如氣化之不可已，是謂道). Modeled after the heavenly way, the human way is likewise productive and creative. As he describes, “The natural movement of the vital force is the same regarding birds, fish, animals, and plants. This vitality of life emulates heaven and earth” (氣之自然潛運，飛潛動植皆同，此生生之機肖乎天地者也). With the natural correlation between the *rendao* and the *tiandao* in terms of *shengsheng*, human activities of eating, drinking, and having sex to sustain and promote human life is of an onto-cosmological significance. With the vitality of creation after creation of *shengsheng* human beings participate in the cosmic process of creation and transformation. Humans, to use Thomé Fang’s words, “become the concretive agents of the perpetual continuance of life as a whole” or “a concreator with heaven and earth.” In this sense, we may say that Dai Zhen has inherited the traditions of

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26 No. 32, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 199.

27 No. 21, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 182.

28 This is what Thomé Fang describes as “value-centric ontology,” which avers that in communion with the creative and procreative power of Heaven and the earth, man extends his boundless sympathy to other humans, to all creatures, and to myriad things as well. (See Fang, “The World and the Individual in Chinese Metaphysics” in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 14, No. 2, July, 1964, pp. 107-8)
both the Yijing and Zhongyong’s thought to articulate the role of human beings in the cosmos as “canzan huayu” 參贊化育 (partaking and assisting in transformation and nurturing). 29

Drawing from both the naturalistic cosmology of the Yijing and the moral philosophy of the Zhongyong and the Mencius, Dai Zhen implants his naturalistic reading of rendao with a deep ethical concern. When he explicates rendao in terms of shengsheng, he is not simply talking about a general principle of creation and transformation but speaking about every aspect
regarding life. For him *Dao* refers to “everything regarding producing, sustaining, and flourishing” (凡生生所有事)\(^{30}\); *rendao* is “the name for the substance and actuality” (實體實事之名)\(^{31}\) of human ordinary life. Dai Zhen summarizes all-inclusive *Dao* or *rendao* as “*renlun riyong*” (human relationships and everyday livelihood人倫日用). He says, “There is nothing arising from the self that is not *Dao*. This is why it (the *Zongyong*) says: ‘It cannot be left for an instant; if it could be left, it would not be *Da*.” (無非道也，故曰‘不可須臾離，可離非道’).\(^{32}\) He continues with “Speaking of *Dao*, it is living and dwelling, drinking and eating, speaking and moving; from the self to all that the self holds dear, nothing is not included in *Dao*. This is why it (the *Zongyong*) says ‘To cultivate the self with *Dao*’ and ‘To cultivate *Dao* with humanity’” (道者，居處、飲食、言動，自身而周於身之所親，無不該焉也，故曰‘修身以道’… 故又曰‘修道以仁’).\(^{33}\) Dai Zhen advocates a *Dao* that is deeply rooted in the commonness of human daily life other than a metaphysical principle. Once separated from the ordinary human life, the so-called *Dao* no longer exists. To support his argument, he quotes from the *Mencius* saying “Mencius says, ‘*Dao* is like a wide road; how could it be difficult to know!’ By this he means that everyone is walking his way” (孟子言‘夫道若大路然，豈難知哉’，謂人人由之).\(^{34}\) For Dai Zhen, *Dao* is as ordinary as the ways people walk every day.

Dai Zhen demeans the Song Confucian metaphysical *Dao* to the ordinary human daily affairs. When one does what one is supposed to do in accordance with one’s particular role in the concrete situation, one is walking his or her way. For this reason, to be prince, one carries out affairs as a prince; to be minister, one carries out affairs as a minister. To be husband, one

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\(^{30}\) See no. 31, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p.199.  

\(^{31}\) No.32, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 200.  


\(^{34}\) No. 35, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 204.
carries out affairs as a husband; to be son, one carries out affairs as a son and so forth. Human affairs and activities constitute the content of Dao. Furthermore, since rendao is about riyong (everyday livelihood 日用) as well as renlun (human relationships人倫), rendao is not only regarding how one maintains one’s own life, but also about how to relate his or her personal concerns to the flourishing of the human community via the establishment of proper human relationships, wherein humanity, righteousness and propriety come into play. As Dai Zhen points out, “Human relationships and everyday livelihood are the things and humanity righteousness and propriety their norms” (人倫日用, 其物也; 曰仁, 曰義, 曰禮, 其則也).35 In other words, social norms and principles derive from human activities other than from something beyond to override the human life. For Dai Zhen, therefore, there does not exist a so-called principle imposed from above, be it a transcendent tian (heaven天) or metaphysical li (principle理) to regulate human behaviors from without. Since tiandao is productive and orderly, of the same accord, rendao is also productive and orderly. Order and pattern arise from the process of shengsheng itself. By Dao, Dai Zhen means “shengsheng er tiaoli” 生生而條 (creative creativity/creation after creation in pattern and order). His philosophical effort can be seen as an attempt to explore and defend these two aspects of Dao. To him the full realization of Dao presupposes creation and transformation in pattern and order, which will then lead to the Confucian sage hood.

1.2 Shengsheng as ren

As a matter of fact, in Dai Zhen’s writings, ren is not merely an accompanying feature of Dao arising from the dynamic movement of shengsheng, ren is shengsheng. If he has inherited the idea to identify shengsheng with ren from the Song Confucian thought, then, by “shengsheng er tiaoli” Dai Zhen develops a unique idea of his own. In correspondence with this idea of

35 No. 34, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 203.
shengsheng er tiaoli, with Dai Zhen, ren likewise must comprise these two aspects. As he points out, “Only by virtue of order and pattern is there creation after creation; once order and pattern is lost, the way of creation after creation is cut off too. Therefore, whenever ‘humanity and righteousness’ or ‘wisdom and humanity’ are phrased together, they always refer to these two aspects of ‘creation after creation’ and ‘pattern and order’” (惟條理, 是以生生; 條理苟失, 則生生之道絕。凡仁義對文及智仁對文，皆兼生生、條理而言之者也). From the Yuan Shan to the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng, Dai Zhen is consistently establishing the connection of shengsheng with Dao and with ren. He tries to reclaim the natural dimension of ren that is yielded to morality. The vitalism of ren is an invention of Song Confucianism, but its origin can be traced all the way back to the Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (190-105). Dong states that “ren is the heart of heaven” (仁，天心) and he makes a further comment that “The meaning of heaven is perceived in the boundless ren. Bestowed from heaven, man receives his destiny from heaven and thus possesses ren” (察於天之意，無窮極之仁也。人之受命於天也，取仁於天而仁也). Dong Zhongshu considers ren a cosmic virtue. In analogue to the heart of heaven, ren is transcendent and external to human beings. The Song Confucian thinker Ou-yang Xiu (歐陽修 1007-1072) continues with Dong Zhongshu’s line of thinking but makes it even more explicit that the heart of heaven is that which gives rise to the myriad things and this creativity is the heart of heaven. Consequently, “tian” (heaven 天) has the meaning of producing life. Zhu Xi inherits the thought to put forth that “Ren is the heart of production and creation of heaven

36 No.36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 206.
37 See Dong Zhongshu董仲舒, Chunqiu fanlu-yuxu 春秋繁露·俞序 (Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals) in the WYG e-SKQS.
38 Dong Zhongshu董仲舒, Chunqiu fanlu-wangdao 春秋繁露·王道通 (Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals) in the WYG e-SKQS.
and earth.” 40 Chen Yi (程頤 1033-1107), likewise, compares the heart to seeds and regards the nature of life as ren. 41 Interestingly, here we see how ren has gradually developed a meaning linked to the cosmic creativity of shengsheng via the notion of tian. These Confucian thinkers have all attributed ren to tian wherein the life creative force is located and hereby extended the human ren to the cosmic ren. But Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤) is the first one who explicitly makes the claim that sheng is ren—giving life is humanity. He says, “Giving life is humanity; growing to fruition is righteousness” (生, 仁也；成, 義也). 42 It is significant that ren obtains an onto-biological meaning with the Song Confucian thinkers. As what Wm. Theodore de Bary and many other scholars have observed, “vitalism and a sense of the unfailing creativity (sheng-sheng) of Heaven-and-earth” 43 has gained trend in the Neo-Confucian thought. To be sure, Dai Zhen is highly appreciative of this spirit of vitalism and likewise acclaims the creativity of ren. The following quote well reflects his thought in this regard. He says,

“From the branches and leaves, flowers and fruit of plants and trees, we can observe life; it is the white kernel of fruit that completes the nature of life and reveals the quiescence of heaven and earth. Therefore, creation after creation is called ren, which is primordial; patterns and order are called li, which is the way all the way through.”


41 See Cheng Yi 程頤, Yishu 遺書 (The Remnant Works of Cheng Yi), Vol. 18 in the WYG e-SKQS: “The heart is like the seed. Its nature of bringing about life is ren” (心譬如穀種。生之性，便是仁也).


43 Principle and Practicality : Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning, eds. by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 1979, p. 22; John B. Henderson singles out Wang Fu-zhi and Dai Zhen as the representatives of their ages to celebrate the power of creation in both humans and the cosmos (See his The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology, 1984, p.232).
His remarks may remind us of another Song Confucian thinker Xie Liangzu’s (謝良佐 1050-1103) words: “The nuts of peaches and apricots can be planted and brought to life, so they are called kernels of peaches and apricots. This means they are implying life. By this means, ren can be seen” (桃杏之核，可種而生者，謂之桃仁，杏仁。言有生之意，推此仁可見矣). 45 These two thinkers both vividly describe the exuberance of ren as a life creative force. In the Chinese language, the words for the kernel of fruit and humanity are the same — “仁” (ren). It is rather fascinating that a small white kernel spells out the whole meaning of “shengsheng” and “ren.” By nature, ren contains great vitality of life. Ren is wherein life starts and grows. Dai Zhen adeptly appropriates the double meanings of the homonym ren to illustrate the intrinsic connection between creativity and humanity. It has great implication that Dai Zhen concludes his Yuan Shan with a quote from the Shijing that depicts the liveliness of the grass growing by the road. “The Shijing says: ‘By the wayside there lay grass in thickness. Don’t let cows and sheep walk on them. Very soon they will flower and very soon they will grow up. They will have soft and juicy leaves.’ This is ren” (詩曰：‘敦彼行葦，牛羊勿踐履，方苞方體，維葉泥泥。’ 仁也). 46 What is ren? —That which is growing with soft and juicy leaves. Here the description of the green grass is not just a metaphor about the superior man’s virtue as Chung-ying Cheng suggests in his translation. 47 Ren is life itself. “Ren is the virtue of producing and

44 The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 10.
45 Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐, The Shangcai yulu 上蔡語錄 (Quotations from Xie Liangzuo, the Man from Shang Cai), Vol. 1 in the WYG e-SKQS.
46 The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 31; See Cheng Chung-ying, Tai Chen’s Yuan Shan, 1969, p.137.
47 “This depicts the superior man endowed with the virtue of benevolence” (Cheng Chung-ying, Tai Chen’s Yuan Shan, 1969, p. 137).
sustaining life” (仁者，生生之德也), reaffirms Dai Zhen. Furthermore, because ren is about life, it entails the idea of caring about life without doing it any harm. Originated from the virtue of heaven and earth, namely the creative activities of giving birth and nourishing life, ren reveals the great virtue and power (de德) of the universe. As discussed earlier, this vitality of life that is present in plants, animals, and human beings bears resemblance to the creative creativity of heaven and earth. To be sure, Dai Zhen has replenished ren with much broader meanings than a moral virtue. Like Zhou Dunyi and Zhang Zai, by ren Dai Zhen conjures up a grand cosmological vision. Exuberant with great creative creativity, ren is pregnant with cosmological significance that a moral virtue of benevolence is inadequate to embrace.

Life and its creativity is the very factor that sustains the continuum of heaven and earth and of the human realm, in which human beings become an organic part of the universe. Dai Zhen describes this continuity between human beings and the cosmos as bugè (no separation不隔). He says, “None that has life is separated from the transforming vital force of heaven and earth” (凡有生，即不隔於天地之氣化). This idea of not being separated is incorporated in his interpretation of the Yijing’s saying “The alternation between yin and yang is called the Way. What continues is good.” (“易曰：‘一陰一陽之謂道。繼之者，善也；成之者，性也”) According to Dai Zhen, this continuity without separation well reflects the human function in the cosmic order as carrying on and perpetuating the creative creativity of heaven and earth; for this reason, the human goodness is not separated from the virtue of heaven and earth. Ren attests this continuation between human realm and the cosmos and hence their goodness, viz. their purity and correctness. As he remarks, “Tracing the way of man back to the way of heaven and the virtue of man to the virtue of heaven, (we will see that) the flowing and transformation of the

48 No. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.
49 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 182.
50 See no. 32, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 109-200; p. 201.
vital force, ceaseless creation after creation is humanity” (自人道溯之天道，自人之德性溯之
天德，則氣化流行，生生不息，仁也).\(^51\)

Nonetheless, it is also important to note that Dai Zhen’s notion of ren has woven two distinctive
strands of thought. While in tune with the naturalistic worldview of the Yijing to acclaim the
cosmic virtue of creative creativity, Dai Zhen also adheres to the tradition of the Si-Meng
(Master Zisi 子思 and Mencius 孟子) school to look at ren in light of the Zhongyong and the
Mencius to highlight its social and ethical significance. In Dai Zhen’s writings, ren gains
another meaning which is seemingly discrepant from yet intrinsically connected to the idea of
“shengsheng er tiaoli” 生生而條理 (creation after creation in pattern and order). He derives this
meaning from the Zhongyong and the Mencius: “Ren is humanity” (renzhe renye仁者，人也).\(^52\)
Ren means loving people, of which the love for family is the greatest. It seems to me that these
two different interpretations of ren, either in light of the Yijing or with reference to the
Zhongyong and Mencius, are not at odds with each other in Dai Zhen’s philosophy. As Dai Zhen
speaks of “renzhe renye” (仁者，人也),\(^53\) he is emphatic about the social implication of ren. In
other words, ren does not concern the self alone but the others as well. As a matter of fact, for
Dai Zhen, the defining nature of ren just lies in the fact that it is “busi” (not selfish).\(^54\)
Biologically speaking, by virtue of ren, one aspires not only to satisfy one’s own needs but also
to promote the wellbeing of the others. Socially, ren enables one to expand one’s love for
oneself to the love for those close to us and finally to all that is under heaven. Dai Zhen
explicitly states: “Ren is the virtue of producing and reproducing. ‘The common folks are

\(^{51}\) No. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.

\(^{52}\) See the Zhongyong, Ch. 20: “Humanity (ren) is (distinguishing characteristic of) man, and the greatest
application of it is in being affectionate towards relatives” (仁者，人也，親親為大). The English translation is
from Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, p. 104. Also, see the Mencius VII B16: “Humanity (ren) is man” (仁也者，人也).

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) See no. 39, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 209: “Humanity (ren) means not being selfish” (仁
也者，言乎其不私也).
contented with daily drink and food.’ This means nothing else but the way of man whereby man creates and recreates. When one fulfills his own life, he expands this to all under heaven to fulfill their lives together. This is humanity” (仁者，生生之德也；‘民之質矣，日用飲食’，無非人道所以生生者。一人遂其生，推之而與天下共遂其生，仁也). Elsewhere, he has also made the similar comments. For instance, in the Shu Zheng #10, Dai Zhen says, “If one wants to fulfill one’s own life, one also has others fulfill their life, this is humanity; if one wants to fulfill one’s own life to an extent to damage others’ life recklessly, this is inhuman” (欲遂其生，亦遂人之生，仁也；欲遂其生，至於戕人之生而不顧者，不仁也). In Dai Zhen’s writings, ren opens up a new prospect: the other, both close and distant.

However, as maintained by the Zhongyong and Dai Zhen himself as well, ren merely understood as humanity is incomplete. Only after we complement ren with righteousness and propriety can ren fulfill its full meaning. Put differently, ren must comprise within itself both righteousness and propriety. Therefore, from Dai Zhen’s perspective, as far as human relationships and daily activities are concerned, speaking of their utmost refined state, it is the integration of humanity (ren), righteousness (yi), and propriety (li), with which one can judge the affairs of the world. When Dai Zhen maintains that ren cannot fully realize itself without righteousness and propriety, he is obviously suggesting that we have to discern and follow the patterns and order inherently implied in our renlun riyong. This stance is consistent with his claim about the “shengsheng er tiaoli.” We may say that Dai Zhen has actually applied his natural principle of “shengsheng er tiaoli” to the social realm. The following paragraph quoted from the Shu Zheng is very illustrative in this regard:

55 No.36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.
56 No.10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159.
57 See no. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205: “With respect to the human relationships and everyday livelihood, regarding the most refined parts we call by humanity, righteousness, and rituals” (就人倫日用，究其精微之極致，曰仁，曰義，曰禮).
Because creative creativity demonstrates its natural pattern and order, from this orderly sequence and arrangement of the pattern and order we can observe propriety; from the pattern and order that is definite and not chaotic, we can observe righteousness. In heaven it is the creation after creation of the vital force; in man it is the heart of creation after creation. This is the very virtue of humanity. In heaven it is the pattern and order of the flowing and transformation of the vital force and in man it is the properly comprehending the pattern and order. This is the very virtue of wisdom. Only via order and pattern does creation after creation become possible; if order and pattern is lost, the way of creation after creation is cut off too. Therefore, whenever ‘humanity and righteousness’ or ‘wisdom and humanity’ are phrased together, they always refer to these two aspects of ‘creation after creation’ and ‘pattern and order.’

This passage reveals Dai Zhen’s naturalist stance in his approach to the ethical issues. Just as “shengsheng” is always “shengsheng er tiaoli”—the creation after creation in pattern and order, human act of ren already entails righteousness (yi) and propriety (li), which is simply the application of the natural pattern and order into the human realm. Moreover, “tiaoli” being both noun and verb thus suggests the inherent regulative function of ren to put things in proper order.

58 No. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205-6.
In this light, we have to abide by the “tiaoli” to establish appropriate human relationships. If we fail to do so, we will not be able to realize either righteousness or humanity to the full.\(^{59}\)

Dai Zhen relates shengsheng to Dao, to ren, and finally to human desire—yu. In the last chapter of the Yuan Shan, he says, “Drinking, eating, and having sex are the ways of producing and nourishing life. This is why heaven and earth are creating and recreating” (飲食男女, 生養之道也, 天地之所以生生也).\(^{60}\) Viewed in this way, human desire as the expression of the cosmic life creative force attests the resemblance between the way of heaven and the way of man. Since human desire to create and live embodies the cosmic creativity, ontologically, human beings in their daily activities of drinking, eating, and having sex already partake the dynamic formation and transformation of the universe. It is in this intrinsic connection between the heavenly way and human way that Dai Zhen finds the rational of human desire and its cosmological significance. To conclude, I argue that shengsheng provides Dai Zhen the most important conceptual tool to construe the ultimate reality of the cosmos and the human world. In his argument for an intrinsic relationship between shengsheng and ren, Dai Zhen lays the onto-cosmological foundation of his theory of human desire.

II. “Xueqi xinzhi”—A Holistic View of Human Nature

\(^{59}\) See no. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.

\(^{60}\) The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.27.
It can be said that *xueqi xinzhi* (blood, breath, and the intelligent mind) constitutes the essence of Dai Zhen’s anthropology. He borrows from the *Liji*’s notion of “*xueqi xinzhi*” to formulate his own theory on human nature. He says, “*Yin yang* and the five elements are the substantial embodiment of *Dao*; *xueqi xinzhi* is the substantial embodiment of *xing*” (陰陽五行，道之實體也; 血氣心知，性之實體也). If “*shengsheng*” unfolds the grand prospect of the creative activities of cosmos and the human world, with “*xueqi xinzhi*” Dai Zhen draws our attention to human beings themselves. Yet, without losing its cosmic implication, *xueqi xinzhi* in Dai Zhen’s philosophy prescribes the essential nature of human beings. In accord with *Dao* whose substance is *yin yang* and the five elements *wuxing*, human nature is embodied in *xueqi* and *xinzhi*. Of the same spirit of naturalism, Dai Zhen proceeds from cosmology to the discourse on human nature. To him, both *xueqi* and *xinzhi* are human natural makeup that derives from the transformation of heaven and earth. The materiality of both *xueqi* and *xinzhi* does not prevent human beings from promoting their intelligent mind to reach spiritual illumination; but on the other hand, the pursuit of extending the intelligent mind does not mean the denial of the materiality of their physical and intelligent faculties either. To be sure, Dai Zhen is very insightful in taking heed of the cognitive and emotive aspects of human nature as he overtly endorses human physical and biological needs as a necessary component of human nature. In this section, I will first examine the physical structure of human nature and then explore its defining features against the backdrop of Mencius’s thesis that human nature is good. It is my argument that Dai Zhen develops a new model of *renxinglun* (theory of human nature 人性論)

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61 “*Xueqi xinzhi*”血氣心知 is first seen in the *Liji-Yueji 禮記·樂記* (The Book of Rites—the Record of Music): “All men have the nature of blood, breath, and intelligent mind, but there are no regularities governing their emotions of sorrow, joy, gladness and anger. They are aroused and moved in response to the stimulation of the external objects; as a result, capacities of the mind are formed” (夫民有血氣心知之性，而無哀樂喜怒之常；應感起物而動，然後心術形焉。). Dai Zhen appropriates this term and distinctively incorporates it into his conception of human nature. Quite unanimously, “*xueqi*” is literally translated into “the blood and breath,” but there are several different renderings of “*xinzhi*” in English scholarship such as “mind and intelligence” (Chung-ying Cheng, 1969, p. 84), “heart-mind” (Chung-ying Cheng, 2003, p. 199.  Cheng made a long compound word “the blood-breath-heart-mind” to render Dai’s “*xueqi xinzhi*.”), “the heart’s discernment” (John Ewell, 1990), “the knowing mind” (Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman, 1990), and “the heart that understands” (Kwong-loi Shun, 2002, p. 223). All these translations have taken heed of Dai Zhen’s emphasis on the cognitive aspect of human mind.

62 No. 16, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 172.
that is built on the idea of “fen” (distinction; allotment). His novel approach to the issue of human nature is unquestionably a breakthrough in Confucian discourse on human nature that has been pivoting on the dispute whether human nature is “good” or “evil.”

2.1 The physical structure of human nature

Dai Zhen constructs his theory on human nature within the large scheme of the cosmic transformation and movement of yin yang and the five elements. Needless to say, the Yijing remains to be his major spiritual inspiration. In consistence with his naturalistic worldview, Dai Zhen looks at the formation of human nature from a naturalist stance. “The alternation between yin and one yang is called the Way. That which continues it is goodness and that which completes it is the nature,” cited Dai Zhen (no. 20 & no. 32). This assertion of the Yijing provides him a philosophical basis of argument for the intrinsic connection between human nature and the cosmos in terms of the origination and formation of human xueqi xinzhi, which is considered to undergo three phases of development. The first phase is “the order of heaven and earth” (tiandi zhishun天地之順) which as a successive movement of yin and yang prescribes the way of human beings; the second is “the constancy of heaven and earth” (tiandi zhichang天地之常) which as a perpetual process of creation after creation bestows human beings with the life creative force; and the third is “the power of heaven and earth” (tiandi zhide天地之德) which being the great virtue of creative creativity is the origin of human nature whose goodness is seen in its continuation with the way of heaven. 63 Thus, according to Dai Zhen, by “what completes it is nature” the Yijing means that all human affairs, capacities, and virtues all originate from yin yang and the five elements. Dai Zhen describes the formation of human nature as a process of evolving from the movement of Dao (yin yang and wuxing) to xing (xueqi and xinzhi) and finally to individual nature differentiated by kind. Accordingly, humankind and all other living

63 Also, see Zhang Liwen’s 張立文discussion on Dai Zhen’s three-stage theory on the formation of human nature (See Zhang Liwen. Dai Zhen, 1991, pp. 186-190).
creatures obtain from heaven their respective allotments to form each their own distinct nature.

In Dai Zhen’s view, owing to the creation and transformation of the vital force of yin yang and the constant movement of the five elements, human beings and the myriad things in the world come into being. For this reason, human nature is but the outcome of the vital force and the five elements in their perpetual movement of creation and transformation. Dai Zhen maintains that this is what the Zhongyong means by saying, “What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature” (天命之謂性). The cosmic way of creation after creation engenders the world, human beings and myriad things. Dai Zhen repeatedly expresses the similar idea throughout his Shu Zheng (no. 9; no. 16; no. 20; no. 21; no. 32; no. 38), from which he arrives at two points. First, human nature has its physical origin in the vital force of the yin yang and the five elements; and second, human nature is henceforth an actual substance visible in its xueqi xinzi. As he says, “Yin yang and the five elements are the actual substance of Dao; blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are the actual substance of nature” (陰陽五行，道之實體也；血氣心知，性之

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64 Wing-tsit Chan, trans. Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy, p. 98; See Dai Zhen’s Shu Zheng, no. 20; no. 32.

65 See no. 9, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “人之血氣心知本乎陰陽五行者，性也。”

no. 16, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 172: “古人言性惟本於天道如是。”

no. 20, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 179: “凡分形氣於父母，即為分於陰陽五行，人物以類滋生，皆氣化之自然。”

no. 20, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 179: “性者，分於陰陽五行以為血氣、心知、品物，區以別焉，舉凡既生以後所有之事，所具之能，所全之德，咸以是為其本，故易曰‘成之者性也’”

no. 20, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 180: “天道，陰陽五行而已矣；人物之性，咸分於道，咸其各殊者而已矣。”

no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 181: “天以陰陽五行化生萬物，氣以成形而理亦賦焉，猶命令也，於是人物之生，因各得其所賦之理以為健順五常之德，所謂性也。”

no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 183: “性者，血氣心知本乎陰陽五行，人物莫不區以別焉是也”

no. 32, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 200: “人道本於性，而性原於天道。天地之氣化流行不已，生生不息。”

no. 38, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 208: “血氣心知者，分於陰陽五行而成性者也，故曰‘天命之謂性.’”
Parallel to Dao whose substance is yin yang and the five elements, human nature is embodied in xueqi and xinzhi.

Because of the same cosmic origin, Dai Zhen insists that xueqi and xinzhi have only one root. He says, “Heaven gives things one root in producing them” (天之生物也，使之本) and “Between heaven and earth myriad things come into being and grow; there is nothing that does not ultimately trace its origin back to yin and yang (天地間百物生生，無非推本陰陽).” He iterates, “All under heaven there is only one root and there is nothing outside of it” (天下惟一本，無所外). Apparently, Dai Zhen is trying to argue that the human intelligent mind is by no means different from its counterpart of blood and breath in being a natural endowment of the same material origin of the vital force qi. In making these claims, he intends to break down the dichotomic divide between xueqi and xinzhi as the opposite of the physical stuff and heavenly principle. It is significant that Dai Zhen looks at human nature as a given thing of substance, viz. xueqi xinzhi and attributes both xueqi and xinzhi to the same origin of the physical force of yin yang and wuxing. This sets him in strong opposition to Zhu Xi and other Song Confucian thinkers. In particular, Dai Zhen aims at the two basic positions held by these “songru” (Song Confucian 宋儒). In sharp contrast with Dai Zhen, the Song Confucians uphold a dualistic view on human nature. First, they maintain that human nature is composed of the nature of physical temperament (qizhi zhi xing 氣質之性) and the nature of heaven and earth (tiandi zhixing 天地之性) or the nature of principle that stand in opposition to each other. Second, accordingly, they consider material nature to derive from qi, from the material stuff of human physical body while the nature of heaven and earth from heaven and thereby is external to and independent of the human body human body and any physical stuff. Due to their distinct origins, the nature of temperament is subject to damage and corruption while the heavenly nature is pure, complete,
and self-sufficient. Thus, only the heavenly nature, i.e. the heart of li (principle 理) is the true nature while the natural endowments are just desire. In Dai Zhen’s eyes, the Song Confucians devalue material nature in favor of the heavenly endowments and consequently ascribe to the former human feelings, desires and all other bodily needs but to the latter reason, principle, and rationality. They further develop the opposition into the antitheses between xin (mind 心) and shen (body 身), between tianli (heavenly principle 天理) and renyu (human desire 人欲), each side of which is deemed incompatible with each other.

Dai Zhen targets his criticism on Zhu Xi and other Song Confucians although he also disapproves Xunzi, Laozi and Zhuangzi (no. 15). He refutes the Song Confucians’ claim that “principle is derived from heaven and stored up in the heart” (理得於天而具於心). In his eyes, the Song Confucians have wrongly added to human natural endowments with a nature of principle and righteousness as if there were really such a thing called heavenly nature or heavenly principle, which, in reality, is but something attached to or imposed on human natural endowments from the outside by these “songru” 宋儒 (Song Confucians) or “houru” 後儒 (later Confucians). To Dai Zhen, they simply assign human nature two roots but there is actually only one that is the material force yin and yang. By setting up two roots they easily ascribe principle to heaven tian and hence the mind xin on the one hand and desires to physical nature and hence the body on the other. The separation of heavenly nature from physical nature implies the superiority of the former to the latter. In making these distinctions, the Song Confucians plausibly set up a principle above human beings. To the contrary, in his emphasis on the one root, Dai Zhen not only argues for the physicality of both xueqi and xinzhi but also contends that they are inseparable and equally important. To elevate xinzhi at the expense of xueqi or the other way round, one fails to grasp human nature as a whole. Once separated from the blood and

70 No. 13; no.14; no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp.163, 165.

71 See no.7, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 184: “In the later Confucians’ mind, as if there were really existing something else attached from the outside and thereby is called xing” (而後儒以為別如有物湊泊附著以為性).
breath, there is no intelligence or principle because the intelligent mind per se is also some physical stuff of which the blood and breath have a share. As he points out,

If there is blood and breath, there will be the intelligent mind; once there is the intelligent mind, one can advance to spiritual illumination through learning. This is because there is only one root. Since there is blood, breath, and the intelligent mind, then there is that which is generated from the nature of blood, breath, and the intelligent mind. When illumination is at its utmost, one will not have the slightest slip. Then, there is nothing that does not comply with humanity and righteousness. This is because there is only one root.

(有血氣, 則有心知, 則學, 進於神明, 一本然; 有血氣心知, 則發乎血氣之知自然者, 明之盡, 使無幾微之失, 斯無非仁義, 一本然也。)\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{72} No. 15, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p.174.
Here Dai Zhen treats xueqi and xinzhi as an interdependent entity. \(^{73}\) Xueqi conceives xinzhi and xinzhi is embodied in xueqi. Consequently, it is impossible to separate xueqi from xinzhi as senses detached from intelligence and spiritual awareness. Furthermore, to advance the inborn intelligent mind to the spiritual illumination, we need not resort to something external to our natural endowments either. Blood and breath do not merely give rise to human physical desires and needs, in which already gleams the light of intelligence. On the other hand, the intelligent mind may also comprise feelings and desires. Because the intelligent mind is not something free of physical stuff, the knowing of the mind will not arouse somewhere else outside the very materiality of blood and breath. For this reason Dai Zhen frequently cites the Shijing’s saying: “Where there is a thing, there is its pattern” (youwu youze有物有則), for example, in his Shu

\(^{73}\) Professor Kwong-Loi Shun in discussing Dai Zhen’s notion xueqi xinzhi makes one point that Dai Zhen views xinzhi as having a priority over xueqi because the heart is able to and should regulate the senses that are ascribed to xueqi (See Alan Chan ed. Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, 2002, p. 223). Although I agree with Professor Shun’s observation that Dai Zhen emphasizes the function of xinzhi, I tend not to see Dai Zhen’s treatment of xueqi xinzhi as an issue of setting up priority but rather as an issue of how to have both fully realized. Dai Zhen provides textual support for the claim that desire is rooted in xueqi while understanding in xinzhi because he has explicitly stated that desire is derived from xueqi and understanding from xin and desire is rooted in xueqi and that is why it is called nature. (See “欲生於血氣，知生於心”; “‘欲’根於血氣，故曰性也.” No. 10; No. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 160; 193). Somehow, we may say that Dai Zhen in his writings is inconsistent regarding whether “yu” (desire) or “zhi” (knowing) is to be attributed to xueqi and xinzhi respectively or to both. Maybe this is an issue about how Dai Zhen uses yu (desire), the yu pertaining to the self in its narrow sense or the yu regarding others in its broader sense. It seems to me that once yu is used with other people taken into consideration, yu, for Dai Zhen, cannot simply arise from xueqi. In other words, human basic desire is “cherishing life and being afraid of death; drink, food, and sex” (懷生畏死，飲食男女) (no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 181), but the satisfaction of one’s own desire is not the fulfillment of desire in its full sense. Only when every person has satisfied his/her desire can yu be realized to its full. Since yu contains xin and xin implies yu, the complete realization of yu also means the full attainment of zhi. Conversely, the full attainment of xinzhi must lead to the complete realization of yu. As Professor Shun later suggests in his comparative remarks about xing (nature), “For Mencius, the claim conveys the point that the basic constitution of the heart has an ethical direction that has a priority over other biological tendencies; to nourish xing is to cultivate oneself in order to fully realize this ethical direction. For Dai Zhen, however, the claim conveys the point that being ethical is primarily a matter of satisfying yu and attaining qing (feelings), these being rooted in xueqi, a part of xing; this involves developing the capacity of xinzhi, the other component of xing, to understand how yu can be satisfied and qing attained” (Alan Chan ed. Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, 2002, pp. 238-9). Thus, as regards the relationship between xueqi and xinzhi, we might say it is an issue of how to have them both fully developed. This is a gradual process of advancement from an unbalanced and incomplete attainment towards a well-balanced and complete realization. Maybe this is what Mencius means by saying, “Our body and complexion are given to us by Heaven. Only a sage can give his body complete fulfillment” (The Mencius VII A39). A. C Graham in his seminal article “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature” makes a comment on Mencius’ words: “The very concrete words ‘shape and color’ used for the sage’s bearing and expression suggest that Mencius is thinking of these in quite physical terms (like the clear pupil of the honest man’s eyes). It is only the sage who, as a byproduct of moral perfection, quite grows into the perfect shape of man” (Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi, 2002, p.23). “Moral perfection” brings about “the perfect shape of man”—Graham’s remarks seem to me rather relevant to the issue of xueqi and xinzhi in our discussion.
Zheng no. 3, no. 8, & no. 13. Just as patterns are underlying things, xinzhi is not an external function added to xueqi. Any attempt to divorce patterns from things betrays dualism. What is more, Dai Zhen even maintains that the four Confucian cardinal virtues are also rooted in the substance of xueqi xinzhi. He says, “What the ancient sages and worthies called humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not sought outside what they called desires, and are not separate from blood, breath, and the intelligent mind, but the later Confucians take human nature (of heaven and earth) as some quasi thing else attached from outside to make up nature” (古賢聖所謂仁義禮智，不求於所謂欲之外，不離乎血氣心知，而後儒以為別如有物湊泊附著以為性).\textsuperscript{74}

In opposition to the Song Confucian dichotomic view, Dai Zhen maintains that human nature comprises both xueqi and xinzhi that are physically grounded in the same material force. Xueqi corresponds to the sensory functions of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting and the like, whereas xinzhi to the knowing of the mind. As such, human nature is not only the faculty of knowing but also the appetitive physical desire for favorable flavors, sounds, smells, and other physical comforts. He says,

Man only knows that the ear is disposed to sounds, the eye to colors, the nose to smells, and the mouth to tastes but does not know that the heart is disposed to the patterns and righteousness in the same way as the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth to sounds, colors, smells, and tastes…. Mencius knows well that human heart/mind is receptive to patterns and righteousness is like the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth to sounds, colors, smells, and tastes. They are all rooted in the nature of human beings, not something arising later.

\textsuperscript{74} No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 184.
From a naturalistic point of view, Dai Zhen reinterprets Mencius to argue that the likes and dislikes of the heart/mind like the likes and dislikes of all other bodily organs are but the natural functions of human xueqi and xinzhi. Accordingly, human nature must consist in not only feelings and desires (qingyu情欲) but also order and righteousness (liyi 理義). He buttresses this position with another quote from the Mencius saying, “Mencius says, ‘That order and righteousness delight my heart is like what the meat of grass and grain-fed animals delight my mouth.’ This is not a simile.” (孟子曰，‘理義之悅我心，猶芻豢之悅我口’，非喻言也) In Dai Zhen’s eyes, nevertheless, they despise sensory delights in our human bodily needs and rule them out from human nature to form the opposition of desires and the principle. He laments, “As regards why man is man, if rid of his physical endowments and his physical form, what is that by which we can call him a man?” (人之為人，舍氣稟氣質，將以何者謂之人哉?)

But the problem is: In Dai Zhen’s writings xueqi and xinzhi are not merely regarding human nature, they are applied to other living creatures, too. This means that not only human beings and animals are likewise made up of breath and blood, but they both have intelligence although Dai Zhen uses “the intelligent mind” (xinzhi心知) more with reference to humans while “incipient luminosity” (jingshuang精爽) or “the incipient luminosity of the mind” (xinzhi

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75 No. 7, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 157; See Ewell, 1990, p. 135.
77 No. 27, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 190.
jingshuang (心之精爽) for both human beings and other living creatures. As he states, “Nature is what is allotted from yin yang and the five elements to form blood, breath, the intelligent mind and thereby makes numerous things distinguishable” (性者，分於陰陽五行以為血氣、心知品物，區以別焉). In addition, “All those having breath and blood all have incipient luminosity” (凡血氣之屬，皆有精爽). And, similarly, “All that have blood and breath are able to move… Awareness and movement are what both man and animals are born with” (凡有血氣者，皆形能動者也。… 知覺運動者，人物之生). We might want to ask: If blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are what human beings and animals both have in common, is renxing (human nature 人性) in any way different from the xing (nature 性) in general and in what sense do we say human beings are different from animals? Therefore, to answer these questions, it is not enough just to locate human nature in the substance of xueqi xinzhi. We need to ask further: What has particularly helped shape our human nature that may differ us from other living creature? Simply, what is human nature? Or, what is that which makes human beings human? Mencius says that the distinction between humans and animals is very slight (the Mencius 8:19), but he does not elaborate on what the “slight difference” is except for saying that the ordinary people lose their heart-and-mind while the sage preserves it.

Regarding the issue, Dai Zhen draws our attention to the physicality and substantiality of yin yang wuxing and xueqi xinzhi. From his perspective, it is the materiality and substantiality of yin yang and the five elements and hence blood, breath, and the intelligent mind that both makes human beings resemble other animals and set them apart. He says, “By the allotments from yin and yang humans and things come into being; limited by each their own allotments humans and...
things form their different nature. *Yin yang* and the five elements are the actual substance of *Dao*; blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are the actual substance of nature. Because of the actual substance, allotments are possible; and due to allotments, unevenness occurs” (分於陰陽五行以有人物，而人物各限於所分以成其性。陰陽五行，道之實體也；血氣心知，性之實體也。有實體，故可分； 惟分也，故不齊。). 82 Also, “Since nature is blood, breath, and the intelligent mind that are originated from *yin yang* and the five elements, there is no one and there is nothing that is not undifferentiated and indistinguishable” 性者，血氣心知本乎陰陽五行，人物莫不區以別焉是也). 83 It is quite distinctive of Dai Zhen to bring forth the notion of “fen” 分 (allotment; distinction) via these formulations. By “fen” Dai Zhen first means that *xing* and hence *renxing* is but a physical allotment endowed from heaven or nature as the result of the interaction of the material force *yin yang* and the five elements; and second, because what human beings and animals have received are different, the difference in their allotments determines the difference of their nature. For Dai Zhen, the difference between humans and animals is first the difference between kinds or species. As he says, “Speaking of the nature of humans and hundreds of things, it is the different each to its like” (統人與百物之性以為言，氣類各殊是也). 84 Accordingly, humans and creatures like birds, fish, animals, and plants have received different nature in agreement with their kinds. Dai Zhen tries to argue that humans and animals are different because they are different species, specifically, because of the difference of the intelligence or awareness that they each are endowed with. 85 To attribute the distinction between humans and animals to their natural allotments reveals Dai Zhen’s naturalist stance against the Song Confucians’ transcendent human nature.

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82 No. 16, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 175.
83 No. 21, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 183. Similar ideas are also found in no. 20, no. 21, and no. 38.
84 No. 27, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 191.
Thus, he applies his naturalist stance to his interpretation of the central claim of Mencius, namely, “human nature is good.” He says, “Humans differ from animals by ritual and righteousness. Indeed, this is because human knowing and awareness is far away from that of things. This is what Mencius means by saying nature is good” (人以有禮義，異於禽獸，實人之知覺大遠乎物則然，此孟子所謂性善). To Dai Zhen, human nature is essentially different from that of other living creatures. In particular, he looks at the distinction between human beings and animals from the aspect of their knowing capacities. Set against the broader context of the debate over the distinction between human beings and animals (renqin zhi bian人禽之辨) in the Confucian tradition, we should say, Dai Zhen from the outset as all other Confucians do is treating the subject as an ethical issue. Like Mencius and Xunzi, Dai Zhen is surely aware of the biological differences between human beings and animals. But as Professor Shun points out, “Although ‘jen’ is often used to refer to human beings as a species, early thinkers view what distinguishes human beings as a species in social terms….Thus what distinguishes jen from other animals is not their biological constitution, but their capacity for certain cultural accomplishments.” Humans differ from animals not because human takes coffee or tea while animals drink from rains or humans are sheltered from the elements while animals are exposed to the sun and winds. All their differences in the biological and physiological senses are flattened to zero in the Confucians’ thought. For this reason, Mencius would say that the difference between humans and animals is very slight (the Mencius 4B19; 6A8).

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86 No. 27, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 191. This is a crucial claim of Dai Zhen. However, what does he exactly mean by “實人之知覺大遠乎物則然” (human knowing and awareness is far away from that of things)? AN Zhenghui 安正輝 interprets “遠乎” (yuan hu) as “surpass” (超過); Chin and Freeman freely render it as “far more acute;” and John Ewell literally translates “yuan hu” into “far from.” An’s interpretation remains unclear what it means by “surpass,” in quantity or quality? Chin and Freeman’s translation implies a difference in degree. It seems to me that among the three interpretations Ewell’s better captures Dai Zhen’s idea. This is a difference in quality and nature other than a difference in degree with respect to human nature and the nature of animals. (See note 2, AN 1979: 155-6; Chin and Freeman 1990: 130; & Ewell 1990: 286).

In my opinion, Mencius is not saying that there is not much difference between human beings and animals; rather, he is suggesting that it is quite easy for man to reduce himself to animals if he cannot preserve his heart/mind. Xunzi vividly states that humans are human not because humans are biped and not hairy and hence distinguishable from animals by these external features but because humans know rituals.\textsuperscript{88} For Dai Zhen, to speak about the distinction between human nature and the nature of animals only in terms of those biological features is “like to group humans together with dogs and cattle without noticing their differences” (適同人於犬牛而不察其殊).\textsuperscript{89} Likewise, Dai Zhen also turns to \textit{xin} (heart/mind 心)—or, better, the intelligent mind that is at once physically embedded and spiritually or intellectually bound to ascend itself. Other than the external physical features, it is the intelligent mind “\textit{xinzhi}” that distinguishes humans from animals. Yet, of great interest, Dai Zhen explicitly leaves out two salient features that we might think unique to human beings alone, namely the utilitarian pursuit of profit and avoidance of harm as well as the human kindness towards those who are close. In his view, these two characteristics featuring human beings are also present in the behaviors of animals. He says,

\begin{quote}
All those of blood and breath know loving life and fearing death to seek profit and avoid harm. Although they differ in the degree to which their awareness is light or dark, they are nevertheless the same in not going beyond the cherishing of life and fearing of death. Man’s difference from birds and beasts does not reside here. Birds and beasts know their mothers but not their fathers. This is due to the limitation of their awareness. But their love for the ones who have brought them life and for those whom they have brought forth, as well as their mutual love between the male and female, and the fact that the same species do not bite each other and the creatures of different kinds accustomed one another do not gnaw each other with
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{88} See the \textit{Xunzi}, Chapter V “Fei Xiang” 非相 (Contra physiognomy): “人之所以為人者, 非特以二足而無毛也” (Humans are human not because they are biped and not hairy).

\textsuperscript{89} No. 21, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 182.
teeth. This is also out of love for life and fear about death. Concerned about oneself, one is concerned about those who are close. This is the characteristic of humanity. Concerned about oneself, one is kind to oneself and further extends this kindness to those who are close. The intelligent mind arising from nature is like this. Man’s difference from birds and animals does not reside in here either.

Because of their natural makeup of blood and breath, both humans and animals have love for life and fear about death; but owing to their intelligent mind, both humans and animals can extend the care for themselves to those that are close. This passage well illustrates Dai Zhen’s argument that \textit{xueqi} and \textit{xinzhi} are what is common to both human beings and animals. Therefore, as for the feelings that is generated from \textit{xueqi xinzhi} to love one’s own life and further on to love those who are close, we cannot take them as the defining features of humankind. Since \textit{xueqi xinzhi} are what both humans and animals have, it is misleading to identify their differences on the basis on either \textit{xueqi} or \textit{xinzhi}. We may find his ideas somewhat confusing because Dai Zhen proposes that \textit{xinzhi} be the locale wherein humans differ from animals whereas at the same time he claims that the difference between human beings and birds and animals do not reside there either. However, upon closer examination, we find that Dai Zhen is actually very consistent in his position. “Nature” is the very knot of the question. No matter how great is the incipient luminosity of the human mind, in some sense, the humankind still bear resemblance to animals.

\footnote{No.21, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 181-2. See Ewell, 1990, pp. 240-1.}
of which the desire to preserve life and fear about death is the most prominent shared feature. As long as human incipient luminosity “jingshuang” remains unaltered, then it is merely the intelligent mind in its natural primary state. It is rather fascinating to see how Dai Zhen dialectically negotiates between human natural endowments and their inherent potentiality for good to envision the prospect of human beings to advance from their incipient luminosity to spiritual illumination. As he claims, “The reason that humans differ from animals lies in the fact that despite the incipient luminosity they both possess only the human being can advance it to godlike illumination” (人之異於禽獸者，雖同有精爽，而人能進於神明也). 91 In light of this view, we can say that it is not the natural knowing mind or incipient luminosity but the nurtured knowing mind with expanded knowing capacities that fundamentally demarcates human beings and animals.

On this issue, we might say that Dai Zhen has received influenced from Xunzi (despite the fact that Dai Zhen rejects Xunzi’s claim that human nature is evil). Xunzi holds that the basic raw human nature has to undergo transformation through human conscious efforts to take up a new form. Learning, especially by way of rituals and music, helps man transform his inborn nature into a second nature—the nature of human artifice. Dai Zhen likewise stresses human efforts to advance their natural endowments. But unlike Xunzi who is emphatic about the antithesis of the inborn nature and the acquired second nature, Dai Zhen does not at all undermine human inborn nature. The discrepancy between Dai Zhen and Xunzi is apparent. While Xunzi is completely suspicious of human inherent nature and hence upholds that people have to rely entirely on the external efforts for human perfection, Dai Zhen finds the possibility within human physical stuff of xueqi xinzhi per se. In his own words, “Xueqi xinzhi have their own innate capacities: the mouth can distinguish tastes, the ear sounds, the eye colors, and the heart/mind order and rightness” (血氣心知，有自具之能：口能辨味，耳能辨聲，目能辨色，心能辨夫理義).92

91 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.156.

92 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. pp. 155-6.
In this light, we have to understand Dai Zhen’s incipient luminosity of the intelligent mind from two respects. On the one hand “jingshuang” indicates the basic feeling or knowing to love life and fear death that is shared by both humans and all those having blood and breath, but on the other, “jingshuang” itself contains the possibility for humans to advance their incipient luminosity so as to go beyond the concern about one’s own life and death alone. To Dai Zhen, physically, human nature, viz. human xueqi xinzhi is fundamentally different from that of animals. At issue is the question of whether the endowed material stuff of qi (氣) is able to be “kaitong”開通 (be opened, connected; comprehend, penetrate). According to him, humans differ from animals in that the human intelligent mind can be opened and hence is capable of understanding while the intelligent mind of animals cannot.93

It is quite apparent that Dai Zhen perceives human nature from a different perspective. For him, human natural endowments are inherently ready for expansion, which is attained through human constant efforts. Henceforth, “advancement to godlike illumination” (zhi shenming致神明) is jointly determined by both what is inherited at birth and later efforts. The innate potentiality of xinzhi augmented by external human conscious efforts brings about moral perfection. In this sense, we may say that Dai Zhen stands closer to Mencius. To both, human beings are disposed with something favorable for its future development. To quote Angus Graham, “Thus [Arthur] Waley says that ‘hsing (nature) meant in ordinary parlance the qualities that a thing has to start

93 See no.14, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 167: “人物以類區分，而人所稟受，其氣清明，異於禽獸之不可開通。”
No. 23, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.186: “…視禽獸之不能開通亦異也。”
o.21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.183: “人之心知，有思輒通，能不惑乎所行也。”
o. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.193 “孔、孟皆指氣稟氣質，而人之氣稟氣質異於禽獸，心能開通，行之不失，即謂之理義。”
no.6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.156: “精爽有蔽隔而不能通之時，及其無蔽隔，無弗通，乃以神明稱之。”
Mencius starts with the “liang neng 良能” (original, good ability) and “liang zhi 良知” (original, good knowing) and Dai Zhen the intelligent mind “xinzhi” that is capable of being opened and comprehending. Despite the common nature pertaining to both human beings and animals in xueqi xinzhi, human nature is distinct in that its xinzhi contains in itself the possibility to be enlarged and thus differentiates human beings from animals. Perhaps this also explains why human beings are morally responsible, and non-human animals are not. As Dai Zhen points out, “Nature is the general term for birds, fish, animals, and plants; that nature is good is about the nature of human beings” (性者，飛潛動植之通名；性善者，論人之性也).

2.2 Human nature is good

It is rather interesting to see that Dai Zhen translates the distinction between humans and animals into the distinction between “xing” 性 (nature) and “xing shan” 性善 (nature is good) with the former pertaining to all forms of life and the latter unique to human beings alone. Thereby, he turns his discussion on human nature into a discourse woven with two motifs: “renqin zhibian” (the distinction between human beings and animals 人禽之辨) and “xing shan” (nature is good


95 See Mencius VIIA15 “人之不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也” (What man is able to do without learning is original ability; what man is able to know without thinking over is original knowing). There is much debate over the meaning of the Mencian terminology and its relevance to the Mencian notion that human nature is good. Here I adopt Irene Bloom’s rendering of the “liang neng 良能” (original, good ability) and “liang zhi 良知” (original, good knowing). See Irene Bloom’s “Biology and Culture in the Mencian View of Human Nature,” in Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations. Ed. Alan Chan, 2002, p. 93) and her other two articles “Mencian Arguments on Human Nature” in Philosophy East and West Vol. 43, no. 4 (1994): pp. 19-53 and "Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius" in Philosophy East and West Vol. 47, no. 1 (1997): pp.421-32.

96 No. 27, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.190.
性善). In my view, the Mencian notion of “xing shan” provides Dai Zhen a crucial register for exploring the issue under discussion. Mencius only speaks twice about “xing shan” (3A1; 6A2) and expounds his idea in 6A2 and 6A6, but in his Shu Zheng Dai Zhen structures the entire sections of “xing” (nature  性) and “cai” (capacity  才) in the form of an exegetical account of this basic notion of Mencius. 97 Nonetheless, I will argue that Dai Zhen’s theory of human nature (renxinglun 人性論) is based on Confucius’ idea of “xing xiangjin” 性相近 (nature is close or similar) 98 rather than the Mencian notion “xing shan” 性善 (nature is good). Dai’s exposition on “xing shan” can be read as a defense for Confucius’s claim by seeking its continuity in Mencius’s thought. Or, to put in another way, we may consider Dai Zhen’s effort an exegetical attempt to expound Mencius’ “xing shan” in light of Confucius’ idea that human nature is close. Out of his naturalistic position, Dai Zhen reads “shan”善 freshly from the particular angle of “fen”分 (allotment; distinction) to call into question any metaphysical take on the issue. It is rather innovative of Dai Zhen to look at human nature based on the idea of “fen.” For a tradition that is preoccupied with the question of the moral goodness or badness of human nature, as is pointed out by A.C. Graham, 99 Dai Zhen’s theory, without doubt, is a breakthrough. However, here it is also worth to add that to dissolve the antagonism of good and evil Dai Zhen does not have to take up Gaozi’s 位置 100 position that nature is neither good nor evil as his alternative.

97 In the Shu Zheng, apart from the “xing” (nature 性) section of nine articles and the “cai” (capacity 才) section of three articles that are quite focused on the subject, no. 6, no. 7, no. 13, and no. 15 of the “li” (principle 理) section have also discussed about Mencius’s “xing shan.” In addition, no. 40 and no. 43 of the last section of “quan” (assessment 權) also touch on the issue. Therefore, this Mencian idea actually runs throughout the whole work of Dai Zhen’s Shu Zheng. Nonetheless, it seem quite surprising that the “ren yi li zhi” (humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom 仁, 義, 禮, 智) section does not even mention “xing shan.”

98 See Confucius, the Analects 17:2 “子曰: 性相近, 習相遠” (The masters says, by nature, close; but by practice, far away).


100 Gaozi roughly lived around the ages of the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C.) and the Warring States (475-221 B.C.).
The campaigns launched among the three camps of Gaozi, Mencius, and Xunzi over whether human nature is good, evil, or neutral have lasted over two millennia. However, what does Mencius mean by “xing shan”? Over ages across China, Asia and the West, scholars have produced profound Mencian scholarship from various perspectives. Here I will only attempt to examine the Mencian “xing shan” from Dai Zhen’s perspective.

First, I want to argue that “xing shan” is a biological definition, a generic term—a concept about the human species. By “xing shan,” Dai Zhen means “the distinction of the kind or species,” specifically, “the distinction between humans and beasts.” In this sense, “xing shan” (性善) is identical with “renxing” (人性). As cited above, “Nature is the general term for birds, fish, animals, and plants; that nature is good is about the nature of human beings.” To make his point, Dai Zhen states, “Mencius did not say ‘There is no nature that does not have goodness’ but, instead, “There are no people that do not have goodness” (“孟子不曰‘性無有不善’，而曰 ‘人

101 Professor Kwong-loi Shun’s Mencius and Early Chinese Thought (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997) not only provides a penetrating and nuanced analysis of this Mencian notion with his scholarly rigor and great familiarity with the larger textual context of the antiquity but also offers an insightful evaluation of various rival views that represent the major scholarship on the subject. Particularly, see pp. 210-231. Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, ed. by Alan K. L Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002 ) is also worth mentioning for its reflection of the current Mencian scholarship. Of particular importance to my present study is Professor Shun’s article “Mencius, Xunzi, and Dai Zhen: A Study of the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng” included in the book (pp. 216-241).

102 An Zhenghui (安正輝) points out that the “xing shan” understood by Dai Zhen refers to the biological characteristics that differentiate humans from animals. I totally agree with his opinion. Also, I find Professor Irene Bloom's "controversial" notion "biological nature in Mencius" strongly resonating with Dai Zhen's reading of human nature in this regard. Bloom says, “The assertion that the ‘four sprouts’ are part of the physiology of the mind in just the same way that the four limbs are part of the anatomy of the body is, in my reading, an encouragement to recognize what can be discovered internally, no less than what is apparent externally, as a part of a universal endowment” (“Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature,” in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi. Ed. by Xuisheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe, Indianapolis /Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2002, p. 79). She highlights the physicality or the physical dimension of human nature. She conceives xing as “the complex of biological and moral propensities that characterize human beings” (Ibid. p. 99). With respect to this, we may say that Dai Zhen has greatly enhanced Mencius’ thought to stress the physical constitution, viz. the materialistic basis, of human nature and hence its component “xinzhi” the intelligent mind. See An Zhenghui. Dai Zhen zhexue zhuzuo xuanzhu 戴震哲學著作選注 (Annotated Selections of Dai Zhen’s Philosophical Works), 1979, p. 155; also, see Irene Bloom’s other two articles "Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius" in Philosophy East and West (1997): pp. 21-32 and "Biology and Culture in the Mencian View of Human Nature" in Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, 2002, pp. 91-102.
It is revealing to speculate about these two assertions: “Shan” is the attribute of human beings. Therefore, although both humans and animals have xueqi xinzhi, “shan” marks them off. “There is no one that is not good” is an absolute claim about the status of human beings. Henceforth, to say “one is good” is equivalent to saying “one is human” and to say “one is not good” is equivalent to saying “one is non-human.” With Dai Zhen, “xing shan” refers to the physical characteristics of the human makeup that distinguish human beings from animals. He considers the human intelligent mind xinzhi the particular part wherein the distinction, viz. the goodness of human nature resides.

As we have discussed earlier, being a component of the physical construct of xueqi xinzhi, the intelligent mind is also a natural product of the vital force qi. Consequently, we can say that “shan” is a description about the peculiarity of this natural composition. In other words, “xing shan” is descriptive rather than prescriptive without implying a quality antithetical to evil. With this view, Dai Zhen would confront Zhu Xi and other Song Confucians who separate the Mencian “goodness” from its physical endowments to ascribe shan to the metaphysical principle li by asking “How can man be man if rid of his physical endowments?” In addition, for the same reason, we can make sense of Dai Zhen’s claim that “Though nature is good, there is no lack of petty persons” (故性雖善，不乏小人). For “good” is not a moral attribute but a natural property. Therefore, as we say “nature is good” (性善), it is only in the sense that man has this physical foundation or material basis to be good, ethically. By the assertion of “There is no one that is not good” (人無不善), Dai Zhen means that every human has the unique material stuff, i.e. physical goodness that has the potentiality to pursue moral goodness—order and righteousness (liyi理義).

103 No. 27, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.190.
104 See no. 21; no.27; no. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 180-1; 190; 192-3.
105 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.184.
Second, however, it should be also pointed out that by “xing shan” human nature does not by virtue of its physical structure and actual substance lack an ethical dimension. As we have discussed earlier, like other Confucian thinkers Dai Zhen does not look at the difference between human beings and animals based on the distinct features of the limbs and other bodily organs but rather by the special characteristics of the mind. It is in this sense that Dai Zhen stands sharply opposed to Gaozi that claims: “Sheng zhi wei xing” (that which gives life and sustains life is human natural attribute).\(^\text{106}\) In Dai Zhen’s eyes, the problem with Gaozi lies in the very fact that the Gaozi only takes notice of “shise” (food and sex 食色) but ignores “liyi” (propriety and righteousness 礼义) to leave out utterly the moral propensity of human nature. Therefore, there is a fundamental difference between the Gaozian “biological nature” and Dai Zhen’s conception of biological nature. With Gaozi, human nature is limited merely to the sensual desires and sexual instincts whereas Dai Zhen conceives of human nature composed of the faculties of both xueqi and xinzhi so that humans not only desire drink, food, and sex but also aspire for order and righteousness. Henceforth, human nature that embraces both xueqi and xinzhi entails the pursuit of both.

As Mencius leaves scholars to surmise whether human physical forms have some kind of ethical dimension,\(^\text{107}\) we find that Dai Zhen explicitly demonstrates that the goodness of human nature “xing shan,” yet in the sense that nature or human nature is prepared with its material or physical goodness for the reception of moral goodness. In Dai Zhen’s philosophy, as far as human nature

\(^{106}\) I agree with Professor Shun’s opinion that Gaozi’s “shengzhi weixing” is very unlikely to refer to the “inborn nature,” but, rather, to “the life process, to what gives life, or to the biological tendencies one has by virtue of being alive” (See Kwong-loi Shun, 1997, p. 93).

\(^{107}\) See Kwong-loi Shun’s discussion in his Mencius and Early Chinese Thought, 1997, pp.161-3, where he presents two sets of interpretations from Mencius’ commentators and translators regarding whether human physical form is ethically neutral or has an ethical dimension. According to him, Dai Zhen, by taking the Mencian “jianxing” (践行) as “fulfilling” one’s physical form, does suggest that Dai regards human physical form having an ethical dimension. Also, I find it very illuminating that A.C. Graham conceives xing as “at once factual and normative” (See A.C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi, 2002, pp.8, 44) and, similarly, Irene Bloom considers nature “both physical and moral” (See Irene Bloom, “Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature,” in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi. 2002, p.91).
is concerned, it always comprises the functions of the four limbs and other bodily organs on the one hand and the faculties of human heart and mind on the other. Consequently, through the organ of the heart and mind wherein the most refined material allotted from heaven stays, humans would tend toward order and rightness. In the same way as the ear, the eye, and the mouth are attracted to pleasant sounds, colors and tastes, the heart and mind are driven towards virtue and goodness. Concerning this, Dai Zhen reveals his remarkable insight in his remarks on the passage of the *Mencius* 7B24. He comments,

We should understand that principle and righteousness are delightful to the heart and mind is just like what tastes are delightful to the mouth, sounds are delightful to the ears, and colors are delightful to the eye. They are all pertaining to nature. Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things but are received by my blood and breath; principle and righteousness reside in affairs but are received by my intelligent mind. Blood, breath and the intelligent mind have their own inherent capacities: the mouth is able to distinguish flavors, the ear to distinguish sounds, the eye to distinguish colors, and the heart and mind to distinguish principle and righteousness. Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things and not in me, but when they are received by my blood and breath, (whose faculties) can distinguish and take delight in them, and what delights me must be what is particularly fine; principle and righteousness reside in the order and patterns of the things and affairs, but when they are received by my intelligent mind, (whose faculties) can distinguish and take delight in them, and what delights me must be what is the utmost upright.

(明理義之悅心, 猶味之悅口, 聲之悅耳, 色之悅目之為性。味也、聲也、色也在物, 而接於我之血氣; 理義在事, 而接於我之心知。血氣心知, 有自具之能: 口能辨味, 耳能辨聲, 目能辨色, 心能辨夫理義。味與聲色, 在物不
From a naturalistic point of view, Dai Zhen ascribes one’s liking for principle and righteousness to the inherent capacities of the intelligent mind that are compared to those of the ear, the eye, and the mouth in their liking for sounds, colors, and tastes. People might take Mencius’ analogy as a figure of speech for moral persuasion, but Dai Zhen says, “When Mencius said ‘The fact that my heart takes delight in principle and righteousness is like the fact that my mouth takes delight in the meat of grass and grain-fed animals,’ this is not a simile” (孟子曰, ‘理義之悅我心, 猶芻豢之悅我口’, 非喻言也). For Dai Zhen, whether the liking comes out of the heart and mind or from the ear, the eye, it is both the natural functions of human xueqi and xinzhi. As he said elsewhere, “Desire is the naturalness of blood and breath; and the delight at virtue is the naturalness of the intelligent mind. This is the reason that Mencius says nature is good” (欲者, 血氣之自然, 其好是懿德也, 心知之自然, 此孟子所以言性善).

In Dai Zhen’s eyes, shan manifests itself in the natural tendency of xinzhi towards principle and righteousness in the same manner as the ear towards the sounds, the eye towards the colors, and the mouth towards the tastes. He sees this naturalness or spontaneity of xinzhi what Mencius means by “xing shan.” It is remarkable that Dai Zhen finds “shan”—the “goodness” of human nature in the natural capacities of the human heart and mind of “xinzhi.” But what is even more remarkable about his insight is: He “discovers” principle and righteousness in things and affairs instead of in me—the one who is capable of taking delight in principle and righteousness. The

108 No.6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.155-6.
109 No.8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.158.
110 No. 15, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.171.
likes and dislikes of other bodily organs are but the spontaneous reaction of the bodily organs to the physical presence of the colors, sounds, and tastes in the things. In the same way, the likes and dislikes of the heart and mind are but the spontaneous reaction of the heart and mind to the physical presence of the order and patterns in things themselves. With Dai Zhen, to perceive the ethical dimension in human nature does not presuppose an ethical quality, more or less, or some elements of moral "goodness" lying within human heart and mind. Rather, closely related to my first argument, “xing shan” only indicates that humans are particularly formed in a certain way to have a mind that is ready for goodness, be it “yide” (virtue; moral excellence 懿德) or “liyi” (principle and righteousness 理義). Of course, there are different levels of readiness: Some are completely ready, some well ready, some just ready, some almost ready and some barely ready. But there is no one that is unable to get ready. As long as we are human, we all have this “goodness” of nature “xing shan” to be ethical. Or, to put it in another way, humans endowed with natural goodness are open to ethical goodness. In my view, this is the very essence of the dialectics of Dai Zhen’s idea on “ziran” 自然 (nature) and “biran” 必然 (necessity). Human beings are constituted by not just what they are but also what they ought to be.

Third, therefore, “human nature is good” is universal, applying to every human being but the “goodness” of human nature is individual, varying from person to person. We have to take “xing shan,” namely “ren xing” in both ways. Human nature “ren xing” is universal because every human being is allotted from the vital force of yin yang and the five elements goodness “shan”—an actual substance appropriate for knowing order and patterns. However, due to the differences of people’s natural allotments, complete or partial, thick or thin, bright or murky, there is not an identical human nature or goodness of nature among human beings. It is out of this special understanding of human nature that Dai Zhen both aligns himself with and departs from Mencius. Their belief in the goodness of human beings holds them together, but the revelation of the goodness tells them apart. While Mencius, as is seen by A. C. Graham and Irene Bloom,
proposes a “renxing” that entails the idea of a universal nature,\(^{111}\) Dai Zhen diverges from this position to consider renxing human nature of distinction with respect to different persons. The disparity of human nature is determined by the very fact that humans are allotted with different natural endowments. As he says, “Blood, breath, and the intelligent mind are the actual substance of nature. Because of the actual substance, allotment is possible; and because of allotments, there is unevenness. The ancient people stress that (human) nature is originated from the way of heaven like this” (血氣心知，性之實體也。有實體，故可分；惟分也，故不齊。古人言性惟本於天道如是).\(^{112}\) As a result, although “xingshan” (nature is good性善) characterizes every human being and for this reason human is human, humans’ “shanxing” (good nature善性) varies from person to person. Unlike Mencius who seems to suggest that every human nature start with the same beginning, namely the “four good beginnings” or “four sprouts” (siduan四端); if people depart from one another, it is not because of what they have inherited at birth but due to their later nourishment (yang養) or lack of nourishment (yang失養) or even self-damage (zizei自賊). Distinctively, Dai Zhen upholds a goodness that is not without graduations and disparity from very beginning. For him, this is what Confucius means by saying that “nature is close” (性相近). Dai Zhen says, “The so-called goodness is not the goodness without original graduations. This is what Confucius means by speaking of ‘being close to one another’” (且其所謂善也，初非無等差之善，即孔子所云‘相近’).\(^{113}\)

While the Mencian “xingshan” somehow implies a universal or even transcendental “goodness” given to every human being, it is evident that Dai Zhen’s “xingshan” is individualistic and naturalistic. The passage cited below is further illustrative of this point. Dai Zhen says,


\(^{112}\) No. 16, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.175; See Ewell, 1990, pp.247-8.

\(^{113}\) No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.184.
“Whenever Mencius speaks of the goodness of human nature, he always talks about Yao and Shun. This does not mean that all men are born to be like Yao and Shun. How great is the difference between ordinary persons and the sage-kings Yao and Shun? However, despite the inequality of their natural endowments, how can it be said that they are of different nature?”

("孟子道性善，言必稱堯、舜’，非謂盡人生而堯、舜也，自堯舜而下，其等差凡幾?).

By “xingshan,” very intriguingly, Dai Zhen calls into question a universal human nature that cancels any differences among people; but on the other hand, he likewise questions any distinctions of human nature that would set the sages apart from the ordinary people. Henceforth, although people all have the goodness of nature, i.e. human nature, not everyone is the sage. But on the other hand, although Yao Shun’s goodness of nature may be perfect without any flaw, despite the unevenness of the goodness of their nature, namely, the disparity of their human nature, there is no considerable difference between the common people and the sages. For Dai Zhen, the distance between the common people and the sage necessitates learning. Therefore, in his writings, the journey towards the sagehood does not start with the good beginnings (shan duan 善端) in its ethical sense as Mencius has proposed but with the distinctions inherited in our human nature.

Fourth, consequently, by “xingshan,” Dai Zhen means that human nature is close or similar. We may say that this is another way to say that human nature is of distinctions. For him the Lunyu’s saying of “nature is close” and Mencius’ claim that “there is no one that is not good” are simply two mutually verifying statements. In establishing the connection between “shan” (goodness 善) and “jin” (similarity 近), Dai Zhen rules out two possible positions in both their negative and positive forms, which either regard human nature as evil or treat human nature as one of a

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114 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.183; See The Mencius 3A1; See Ewell, 1990, p. 253.

115 See no. 21, no. 23, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 184, 185: “Mencius says, ‘There is no one that is not good.’ By good, he means that the intelligent mind of the human beings is different from that of the birds and beasts and thereby is not bewildered by their acts. Moreover, the shan in its origin is not without degradation and difference. That is what Confucius calls by ‘being close’” (孟子言‘人無有不善’，以人之心知異於禽獸，能不惑乎所行之為善。且其所謂善也，初非無等差之善，即孔子所云‘相近’); Also, “The fact that the Analects talks about being close precisely shows that ‘there is no one that is not good’ (論語言相近，正見‘人無有不善’).
unified goodness. The reasoning lying behind Dai Zhen’s premise seems clear: “Not good is the opposition of good, so it is already absolutely far from good, how can be there any similarity” (若不善，與善相反，其遠已縣絕，何近之有!) 116 Also, “The good and evil are the terms of opposites not the terms of the far and the close” (善惡則相反之名，非遠近之名). 117 What Dai Zhen tries to suggest in his statements is that “not good” does not belong to the category applying to human species. For “not good” undercuts the very grounds for humans to be human. Consequently, between “good” and “not good” there is no common ground for either similarity or dissimilarity. To put it plainly, lacking human nature or being not good regards non-human beings or animals while to be different yet close refers to human beings. Henceforth, for Dai Zhen, human nature in terms of xing shan is not an issue of “good” and “evil” (i.e. the opposite of “good”) but rather an issue of “distinction.” To maintain Confucius’s position that human nature is close, Dai Zhen rejects a notion of “shan” that is either opposite to evil or heedless of distinctions.

As far as human nature is concerned, we may say that “distinction” fen (分) characterizes Dai Zhen’s whole discourse. Dai Zhen does not bother with the quarrel between good and evil because to him there is only the division between human beings and animals. Yet, given the materiality of human nature, there is not a general goodness among human beings. Thus, by xing shan, Dai Zhen is exploring distinction of two different kinds: one is the distinction between human beings and animals (“人禽之辨”) and the other the distinction between the sage and the dull (“聖愚之別”). With the former, xing shan is their watershed; as regards the latter, xing shan reveals the variation in the same. To be sure, there is a fundamental difference between these two kinds of distinctions. Despite the big gap between the sage and the dull, owing to human later conscious efforts, the distinctions among human beings can be diminished. Nonetheless, because of the fundamental difference in their allotted nature, the distinction between humans

116 No. 23, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.185.
117 No. 24, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.186.
and animals is irreversible no matter “how slight is the distinction.” In brief, a human being may turn into a beast but animals can never become humans. As Dai Zhen says, “Having no human nature is what is meant by saying that one appears to be a beast, whereas having human nature is being close, namely being good” (無人性即所謂人見其禽獸也，有人性即相近也，善也).

In my view, the discussion on the distinction between the sages and ordinary people or the distinction between humans and animals is essentially an ethical inquiry with the human heart and mind as its focus. With reference to animals, the distinction designates the bottom line one can reach; with respect to the sages, the distinction sets up the height one may attain. The division delineates the sphere of human beings, which we can look at his making distinctions an ethical move to propose both the highest standard and the minimum requirement. Henceforth, when he adopts Mencius’s claim to say, “There is no one that is not good,” Dai Zhen means something not quite the Mencian but his own. According to Dai Zhen, as a living being of blood, breath, and the intelligent mind, one at least should know the limit without breaching the bottom line to be indulged in sensory pleasures like animals; on the other hand, one should look up to the sage to aspire for propriety, righteousness, shame, right and wrong. Thus, whether it is the distinction between humans and animals or the distinction regarding the sage and the dull, we may take it as a rhetorical device for moral exertion. In reference to animals, Dai Zhen’s formulation is negative and presumptive while with regard to the sage his assertion is positive and confirmative. The former serves as a moral admonition: if one does not promote one’s heart and mind, he or she may reduce her/himself to being an animal since the distinction between human beings and animals is so slight; the latter proffers an exhortation: if one extends one’s

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118 See the Mencius VI A8: “If, in spite of the respite a man gets in the day and in the night and of the effect of the morning air on him, scarcely any of his likes and dislikes resemble those of other men” (其日夜之所息，平旦之氣，其好惡與人相近也者幾希). The English translation is from D. C. Lau, 1970, p.165.

119 No. 23, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.185.

120 See no.28; no.21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp.194, 183-4.
xinzhi, even the dull can become a sage to attain godlike illumination. To bring forth these distinctions, Dai Zhen promotes human efforts to enhance the goodness human beings are naturally endowed with. By this means, I shall say that Dai Zhen’s notion of xing shan has gone beyond its primary physical sense to bring out its ethical implications. By birth, we bear the marks of distinction; but by efforts, we push the boundaries we are born within.

Lastly, to proceed from the above discussion we can arrive at the conclusion that by “xing shan” Dai Zhen holds a transformational other than a static view of human nature. Despite the distance between the sages and the common people, the possibility to remove the gap offers people great prospect to improve themselves. Hereby, with the inherent goodness humans are endowed with, human nature is open to a perpetual transforming process. The following paragraph tellingly reveals this dynamism.

The blood and breath rely on drink and food for nourishment, which, after being digested, become my blood and breath and are no longer the things that were eaten and drunk. The same is true with the reliance of the intelligent mind on questioning and learning, from which what is obtained come in the same way. Speaking of the blood and breath, the weak in the past becomes the strong today. This is owing to the nourishment of the blood and breath; speaking of the intelligent mind, what was once narrow and small is now broad and great, and what was once obscure and dark is now clear and discerning. This is due to the

intelligent mind having received nourishment. Therefore, it is said that one will be illuminated even though one is dull. Human blood, breath, and intelligent mind are allotted from heaven unevenly. But nourishment or lacking nourishment makes the big difference.

Like blood and breath, the intelligent mind is also subject to development. Literally, in Dai Zhen’s depiction, this transforming process of the intelligent mind involves the same mechanism operative in the growth of human physical body in its biological sense. In the same manner as human physical body relies on drink and food for nourishment to transform them into part of human body, questioning and learning sustains the heart and mind to makes it grow: What was small and narrow has become big and broad and what was dark and obscure become bright and discerning. To Dai Zhen, human nature is not just some raw material but a process of transformation. In his developmental view of human nature, Dai Zhen reveals great affinity with Xunzi to promote the role of learning. It is quite amazing that with different points of departure they have followed the same ethical route to promote the capacity of intelligence for moral betterment. This is a very interesting issue worth to be further explored and I will leave it for the later chapter. Unlike Xunzi, Dai Zhen is very positive about human inborn nature. Nevertheless, Dai Zhen is not content to see man simply remaining what he is. Although very human being is imparted goodness from birth, more or less, high or low, what matters the most is that we have to help it grow, expand, and finally attain the godlike illumination.

122 No.9, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.159. See Ewell, 1990, pp.143-4.
In conclusion, Dai Zhen considers human nature comprising *xueqi* and *xinzhi* that are both substantiating the material force of *yin yang* and *wuxing*. Yet, rid of any metaphysical implication, human nature does not lack its root for human morality. His naturalistic take on human nature forms a sharp contrast with the Song Confucians’ metaphysical speculations. Zhu Xi, for example, divides human nature into two halves that are antithetical to each other. On the contrary, with Dai Zhen, the so-called physical endowments and heavenly endowments are actually an integral whole. To be sure, Dai Zhen offers a strong critique of the dichotomist view of human nature. If set against the background of the discourse on human nature in classical Confucianism, it can be said that Dai Zhen’s theory of human nature is neither the Mencian nor the Xunzian. We might say that he resembles Mencius as much as he is similar to Xunzi. But as a matter of fact, Dai Zhen, in my view, is a synthesizer who not only draws on Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi but also takes in ideas from Gaozi to form his own theory of human nature, which, nonetheless, distinguishes him from all of these thinkers. Dai Zhen aligns himself with Mencius to claim “*xing shan*” but, unlike Mencius, develops a distinctively naturalistic view. He carries on the Xunzian heritage to promote learning for our self-improvement but discards Xunzi’s suspicion about human capacity to improve ourselves from within. Like Gaozi, Dai Zhen holds life high but rejects Gaozi’s narrow biological human nature that denies human ethical propensity. To Dai Zhen, the problem with Xunzi is like that with Gaozi in that they stand at two extremes: Xunzi underscores propriety and righteousness but undermines human natural needs while Gaozi only focuses on “*sheng*”— the activities of drinking, eating, and having sex involved in producing and preserving life so as to disavow human morality.

Either the bipolar theories represented by Mencius and Xunzi or the neutral position taken by Gaozi all pivot on the dispute over “good” (*shan* 善) or “evil” (*er* 惡). Dai Zhen does not aim to dissolve this old controversy. Instead, he gets around this dilemma by building up a theory of human nature that is based on the idea of “distinction” and “allotments” (*fen* 分). Somehow, we might say that Dai Zhen is under Xunzi’s influence to come up with the idea of distinction. But upon closer examination, “distinction” has quite different meanings with these two thinkers.
From Xunzi’s perspective, that man is man lies in the fact that humans have differences (you bian 有辨), of which division (fen 分) is the biggest, and concerning the division nothing is greater than ritual (li 礼)\(^1\). Xunzi talks about “fen” mainly in terms of the division between tian (heaven 天) and ren (man 人) and the division of social ranks. He furthers on from the class divisions to the importance of rituals for maintaining the social order and hierarchy. But Dai Zhen bases his “distinction” on the material substance that humans were imparted from birth and thereby urges one to break down the boundary imposed by one’s physical allotments. It is fair to say that Dai Zhen has inaugurated a new plane for the discourse on human nature, which opens up the possibility to go across the quandary over a choice between good and evil. By casting a novel look at this enduring issue of Confucian thought, Dai Zhen has provided an alternative model of renxinglun (theory of human nature 人性論) which is founded on natural allotments and distinction fen instead of the opposition of the good and evil that has framed the traditional Confucian discourse on human nature over millennia. Without doubt, this is a major contribution Dai Zhen has made to the Confucian thought.

\(^1\) See Xunzi 荀卿. “Fei xiang” 非相 (Contra Physiognomy) in Xunzi Jijie 荀子集解 (Collected Commentaries of the Xunzi), Ch. 5, ed. Wang Xuanqian 王先謙 in Zhuzi jicheng 諸子集成 (Collected Works of Masters) Vol. II, Zhonghua Shuju, 北京 中華書局, 1986: “What is the reason that man is man? The answer is: Because humans have differences, of which nothing is bigger than division; no division is bigger than rituals and no ritual is bigger than the sagely kings” (人之所以為人者何已也。曰，以其有辨也。辨莫大于分，分莫大於禮，禮莫大于聖王).
Chapter 3
Desire (yu) —the Continuum of Life Force

“Man is tranquil at birth: this is the nature imparted from heaven; he moves upon the stimulation of things: this is the desire of nature” (人生而靜, 天之性也, 感於物而動性之欲也).—From the Liji-yueji 禮記-樂記 (The Book of Rites-the Record of Music)

Like the authors of the Liji, Dai Zhen sees yu 欲 (desire) essentially as the manifestation of nature (xing 性) in response to the affection of things. He says, “When still in tranquility without being affected by things, blood, breath, and intelligent mind are at peace without erring. Thus, people say ‘the nature of heaven.’ Until the time when it is stirred to move, desire arises from nature. What one desires is that which all people under heaven desire. Thus people say ‘the desire of nature’ (蓋方其靜也,未感於物,其血氣心知,湛然無有失,故曰 ‘天之性’; 及其感而動,則欲出於性。一人之欲,天下人之(之)(所)同欲也,故曰 ‘性之欲’). ¹ When nature is stirred in man’s contact with things, desire arises from nature. Dai Zhen not only defines xing (nature 性) the very origin of human desire but goes further to identify yu with xing. He says, “Desire is rooted in blood and breath, therefore it is called nature” (‘欲’根於血氣,故曰性也).² It is a big move to consider nature the root of desire to further on to equate desire with human nature. In light of this passage, we may say that xing assumes two distinct states: one is inactivated and the other activated. Yu is xing in its activated state.³ Dai Zhen expresses

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¹ No.2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.152.
² No. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 193.
³ Professor Kwong-loi Shun points out that making distinction between an inactivated state (jing 靜, literally ‘still’) and an activated state (dong 動, literally ‘moved’) has become common before Dai Zhen’s time and in the case of Dai Zhen the xueqi part of xing is activated upon contact with things so as to bring about yu (desires) (See his article “Mencius, Xunzi, and Dai Zhen: A Study of the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng” in Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations. Ed. by Alan K. L Chan, 2002, p.218).
it as “xing zhi yu” (the desire of nature)\textsuperscript{4} in contrast with “tian zhi xing” (the nature of heaven).\textsuperscript{5} From the perspective of the \textit{Liji}, all humans have blood, breath, and the intelligent mind and all humans may respond to the stimulation of the external objects. Their susceptibility to the external influence accounts for human behaviors of deceit and debauch.\textsuperscript{6} Dai Zhen agrees on the \textit{Liji}’s view that human desires and feelings arise from people’s reaction to the outside world. Yet, different from the \textit{Liji}, he speaks highly of the susceptibility of human nature and adopts a positive attitude towards human desire.

We may look at the relationship between \textit{yu} and \textit{xing} from a different angle to see human desire as the faculty or function of human nature.\textsuperscript{7} In his view, human beings by nature are disposed to seek after basic biological needs as well as principle and righteousness. His holistic view of human nature in terms of “\textit{xueqi xinzhi}” helps him shape a holistic view of \textit{yu} as a dynamic

\textsuperscript{4} Also see no. 11, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 162: “言性之欲之不可無節也”

\textsuperscript{5} But his claim about \textit{xueqi xinzhi} being in utter tranquility without any “\textit{shi}” (error, flaw, defect, or loss) brings us difficulty construing what he exactly means by “\textit{shi}.” If our earlier observation about Dai Zhen’s naturalistic taking of human nature holds, we cannot help asking: What does he think one would lose? The question becomes even more puzzling when reading the line in comparison with another passage from the “\textit{Cai}” (capacity) section, where Dai Zhen says, “\textit{Cai} can begin with being beautiful and end up being not beautiful. This is because capacity has lost its capacity. But we cannot say nature is good at beginning but ends up not being good (no. 30, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 198: “才可以始美而終於不美,由才失其才也,不可謂性始善而終於不善。”). Also, his distinction of “\textit{tian zhi xing}” and “\textit{xing zhi yu}” reads to me somehow suggesting an unchanged or transcendental human nature, which seems to me at odds with his developmental view of human nature. Finally, it is interesting to note that Dai Zhen only mentions the idea of湛然無失 once in the whole \textit{Shuzheng} although he expresses the similar idea in his “\textit{Ta Pengjinshi Yunchu shu}” (Reply to Jinshi Peng Yunchu’s Letter) in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 359.

\textsuperscript{6} See the \textit{Liji—yueji}: “The common people have the nature of the blood, breath, and the intelligent mind but without the constancy of sadness, joy, happiness, and anger. They move upon the stirring of things and then their craft of the mind is formed.” (夫民有血氣心知之性,而無哀樂喜怒之常;應感起物而動,然後心術形焉。) Also, “Since the influence of things is endless, the human likes and dislikes are unstrained as well. As a result, things occur while humans are changed by things” (夫物之感人無窮。而人之好惡無節,則是物至而人化物也).

\textsuperscript{7} From Zhang Liwen’s perspective, Dai Zhen approaches human nature on three different levels. On the first level, Dai explores “\textit{xing zhi shi}” (the things or reality of human nature), on the second level, “\textit{xing zhi neng}” (the function or faculty of human nature), and on the third level, “\textit{xing zhi shi}” (the virtue of human nature), and the third aspect is the unity of the first two. In light of Zhang Liwen’s view, we may consider “\textit{yu}” the function or faculty of human nature. See Zhang Liwen, \textit{Dai Zhen}, 1991, pp. 189-192.
composition of desire, feeling, and intelligence that are intrinsically connected to each other. He says,

Man is born with desires, feelings, and intelligence; the three are all the natural manifestations of his blood, breath, and intelligent mind. What are given to desires are sounds, colors, smells, and tastes, thereby there is love and fear; what are manifested in feelings are pleasure, anger, sadness, and joy; accordingly, there is grief and relaxation; what is distinguished by intelligence is the beautiful and ugly, the right and wrong, therefore there is like and dislike. The desires for sounds, colors, smells, and flavors are what one relies on for producing and nurturing life; the feelings of pleasure, anger, sadness, and joy are stirred in contact with things; and the knowing of the beautiful and ugly, the right and wrong at its utmost can thoroughly get across heaven and earth, ghosts and spirits.

Of the natural composition of xueqi xinzhi, human nature encompasses physical, emotive, and cognitive aspects that give rise to human desires (yu 欲), feelings (qing 情) and knowledge (zhi 知). As xing expresses itself in yu, human nature is manifested as human biological and physical needs; as xing expresses itself in qing, human nature finds its expression in the feelings of joy, anger, sadness and happiness; and as xing expresses itself in zhi, human nature reveals itself in its approval or disapproval of the beautiful and the ugly, the right and the wrong. Consequently, yu, qing, and zhi are all human natural endowments and mutually entailed. Viewed from this

8 No. 30, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.197.
From the perspective, human desires for drink, food, and sex are not insignificant because they strive for the gratification of human basic needs. But, on the other hand, the human pursuit of righteousness and wisdom is not unnatural because the pursuit is intellectual and ethical. For this reason, as Dai Zhen urges people to exert efforts to advance their intelligent mind to become moral beings, he also painstakingly defends human physical needs for drink, food, and sex. This is not only because man is entitled to his basic needs, but also because humanity, righteousness, and wisdom cannot be sought outside what are called desires and be separated from blood, breath, and the intelligent mind. Therefore, *yu* finds its full expression in its attainment of these two aspects. This is the dialectics of “*ziran*” 自然 (what is natural) and “*biran*” 必然 (what is necessary): *Ziran* entails *biran* and *biran* is the complete realization of nature.

I. **Yu 欲** (desire): “In drink, food, and sex reside human basic desires.”

In this section, we will focus our discussion on “*yu*,” that is, what Dai Zhen calls “the desires of blood and breath” 血氣之欲. They are embodied in human basic needs for drink, food, and sex. For Dai Zhen, *yu* means nothing else but the way of human creative creativity. As we have discussed earlier, *shengsheng* as the creative life force constitutes the basic reality of both the cosmos and the human world. With creative creativity, human beings participate in the cosmic process of creation and transformation. In correspondence to the way of heaven, human activities of eating, drinking, and having sex to sustain and promote life has an onto-

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9 See no. 21, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p.184: “With respect to the alleged humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom held by the ancient sages, they are not sought outside the so-called desire nor separated from the blood, breath, and the intelligent mind” (古賢聖所謂仁義禮智，不求於所謂欲之外，不離乎血氣心知).

10 Philip J Ivanhoe vividly describes this process as “passing one’s ‘natural desires’ through the winnowing standard of the Confucian golden rule.” To be sure, for Dai Zhen the Confucian golden rule is the very ethical route one should follow to accomplish this transformation. However, I would rather compare this golden rule to a scale instead of a winnow. For as far as human desires are concerned, in my opinion, Dai Zhen never considers *ziran* opposed to *biran* to be overcome by the latter like the chaff to be shed off the grain. See Philip J Ivanhoe’s “Dai Zhen” in *Confucian Moral Self- Cultivation*. 2nd edition, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000, p. 93.
cosmological meaning in Dai Zhen’s philosophy. To a great extent, it can be said that Dai Zhen’s discourse on \textit{yu} is a defense of the legitimacy of human desire with reference to its cosmological, ontological, and social significance in arguing against the Song Confucian antithesis of desire and principle. In his polemic against the Song Confucian dualism, Dai Zhen reformulates the relationship between desire and principle by breaking down their opposition. Of greater interest, he delivers the overriding \textit{li} to the service of \textit{yu} by transforming \textit{li} (principle) into \textit{qing} (a complex of both affective feelings and actual reality) which both accompanies \textit{yu} (desire) and preconditions its realization to the full.

In Dai Zhen’s writings, the word desire is often used in association with the human body and its sensory organs to reveal the physical nature of desire. He describes desires as “desires of blood and breath” 血氣之欲,\(^\text{11}\) “desires of ears and eyes” 耳目之欲,\(^\text{12}\) “desires of ears, eyes, and other hundred bodily organs” 耳目百體之欲,\(^\text{13}\) and “desires of sounds, colors, smells, and tastes” 聲色臭味之欲.\(^\text{14}\) These expressions are quite different from the phrases of “renyu” (no. 11, no. 15, no. 19, no. 43, the \textit{Shu Zheng}), “wuyu” (no. 19, ibid.), “qingyu” (no. 14, no. 43, ibid.), or “siyu” (no. 42, ibid.) that are often found in the Daoist, Buddhist or Song Confucian thinkers’ writings. The expressions of “renyu” (human desires人欲), “wuyu” (desires of things物欲), “qingyu”
(erotic feelings, physical desires情欲) and “siyu” (selfish desires私欲)\textsuperscript{15} have a strong negative implication. Behind these expressions is a dichotomic assumption about the opposites of “renyu” (human desire人欲) or “qingyu” (the physical desires情欲) and “tianli” (heavenly principle天理), of “wu” (the material物) and “shen” (the spirit神), “qi” (the physical器) and “Dao” (the metaphysical道), “si” (selfish己) and “gong” (communal公) and so forth. However, unlike the Cheng brothers who radically oppose tianli to renyu,\textsuperscript{16} Zhu Xi does not always take on a radical stance. For example, he says, “As regards one’s heart/mind, if heavenly principle prevails, human desires will extinguish; if human desires prevail, principle will extinguish. Never is there a case that heavenly principle will co-exist with and human desires” (人之一心，天理有則人欲亡，人欲勝天理亡，未有天理人欲夾雜者). Similarly, “Heavenly principle and human desire are often opposed to each other” (天理人欲常相對).\textsuperscript{17} However, he has also said, “Human desires are hidden in heavenly principle” (人欲隱于天理中); “When there is a heavenly principle, there is a human desire” (有個天理，便有個人欲); “In human desire there is a heavenly principle” (人欲中有個天理); “In the daily existence nowhere is there no heavenly principle” (日用之間莫不天理); and “Drink and food are heavenly principle. To seek after delicious flavor is human desire” (飲食者，天理也。要求美味，人欲也).\textsuperscript{18} It is obvious that these statements reveal the inconsistency of Zhu Xi in his treatment of human desire and thereby make him the target of Dai Zhen’s criticism. But, in Dai Zhen’s writings, what we see about Zhu is only the one who shows the negative and dualistic attitude toward human desire. This may

\textsuperscript{15} For example, see no. 14, no. 19, no. 42, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 167, 179, 214:” 老、莊、釋氏謂有生皆同，故主於去情欲以勿害之，不必問學以擴充之”；“以理壞於形氣，無人欲之蔽則複其初，如彼以神受形而生，不以物欲累之則複其初也”；“朱子釋之云：己，謂身之私欲。”

\textsuperscript{16} For example, they says, “Man feel confounded with heavenly principle simple because he is disturbed by physical desires” (人于天理昏者，是只为嗜欲乱者) (See The er Cheng yishu 二程遺書 (The Remnant Works of the Cheng Brothers) in the WYG e-SKQS; Also, Cheng Yi says, “If it is not heavenly principle, then it is selfish desire….Without human desire, all is heavenly principle” (不是天理，便是人欲……無人欲，即皆天理。) (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{17} Zhu Xi, the Yulei, 13.

\textsuperscript{18} Zhu Xi, the Yulei, 53, 13, 13, 40, and 13.
explain why some scholars such as Wing-tsit Chan criticize Dai Zhen for his one-sidedness or prejudice against Zhu.\textsuperscript{19}

From Dai Zhen’s standpoint, it is not desire but the principle void of desire that is perilous and disastrous.\textsuperscript{20} He particularly targets his criticism on the Song Confucians’ two claims: “If it does not come out of principle, then it comes from desire; if it does not come out of desire, then it comes from principle” (不出於理則出於欲, 不出於欲則出於理),\textsuperscript{21} and “Principle is received from heaven and completed in the mind” (理得於天而具於心).\textsuperscript{22} In these assertions, \textit{yu} in lack of a spiritual dimension represents the self-enclosure and obscurity of human desires and henceforth ought to be discarded. In Dai Zhen’s eyes, the major problem with the Song Confucians lies in the fact that they have divorced principle from the concrete reality of human daily existence by setting up an abstract principle in opposition to desire that strives for the satisfaction of human physical needs. He says, “Principle and everyday events are divided into two but principle is united with opinions to become one. As a result, it does harms to everyday events.” (理與事分為二而與意見合為一，是以害事)\textsuperscript{23} For Dai Zhen, there is not such a thing called principle except for everyday livelihood and human relationships (“riyong renlun”日用人倫), but the Song Confucians talk about principle as if it were something real以理為如有物.

\textsuperscript{19} See Wing-tsit Chan, \textit{Songming lixue zhi gainian yu lishi} 宋明理學之概念與歷史 (The Concepts of the Song-Ming Learning of Principle and Their History), Taipei: The Preparatory Office of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica (中央研究院中國文哲所籌備處, 民國八十五年二月), 1996, p. 35, 39. Chan further points out that Dai Zhen has mixed up “\textit{yu}” and “\textit{si yu}” in his critique of Zhu Xi, saying Dai Zhen’s claim that that feelings do not err is principle is exactly what Zhu Xi means by heavenly principle. Chan’s hidden argument is that Dai and Zhu are actually quite similar in what they approve and disapprove regarding the issue of desire and principle and that they in essence are not that different from each other as Dai Zhen himself has claimed.


\textsuperscript{21} See no. 10, no. 14, no. 40, the \textit{Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, pp. 159, 165, 211.

\textsuperscript{22} See no. 13, no. 40, the \textit{Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, pp. 163, 211; Ewell, 1990, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{23} No. 10, the \textit{Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 160.
In Dai Zhen’s view, in lack of a factual basis, the alleged principle of the Song Confucians is but some invented language (chuan yuan創言) and biased opinions (yijian 意見). Even worse, li has become their device for killing people (yili sharen以理殺人). By li, the exalted reproaches the lowly; the old reproaches the young; and the privileged reproaches the humble. Without regard for people’s needs, the Song Confucians proposes that people get rid of desires to preserve principle. As a result, li overrides people’s wellbeing to leave them in the woe of suffering and death. Dai Zhen laments, “If man dies by law, there is still someone who will have pity on him; but when he dies by principle, who will pity him?” (“人死於法，猶有憐之者; 死於理，其誰憐之!”) Dai Zhen put forth the idea that principle resides in desire 理者存乎欲. He strongly objects the Song Confucians’ conception of yu as something obstructing principle, as something too worldly to be elevated. The Shijing says, “Where there is a thing, there is its norm.” Of the same spirit, Dai Zhen claims: “Desire is the thing and principle is its pattern” (欲，其物；理，其

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24 See no. 5, no. 41, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 154, 212.

25 See no. 17, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 176-7: “There is no discussion about the distinction between principle and desire in the Six Classics and the works of Confucius and Mencius, but the later Confucians invented it” (“六經、孔、孟之書不聞理氣之辨，而後儒創言之”).

26 See no. 5, no. 43, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 154-5, 216.

27 See no. 43, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 216: “The distinction between principle and desire has just become their instrument of murderous killing. What a disaster like this!” (“此理欲之辨，適成忍而殲殺之具，為禍又如是也。”). Also, See “Yu moushu 與某書 (A Letter to Someone) in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 496: “What they call principle is equal to what the ruthless official call the law. The ruthless official kill people by law and the later Confucians kill people by principle. Gradually they abandon the law to talk about principle. People die! But there is even no way to save them!” (而其所謂理者，同于酷吏之所謂法。酷吏以法殺人，後儒以理殺人，浸浸乎舍法而論理。死矣! 更無可救矣。).


29 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 161; See Ewell, 1990, p. 152.

30 See no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “Now to take that qing does not err as principle is to affirm that principle resides in desire” (“今以情之不爽失為理，是理者存乎欲者也”).
It is not that desire is one thing and principle the other. Rather, desire and principle are accompanying and indispensable to each other. 禺 entails within itself the prerequisite for its proper realization. Simply, desire does not merely apply to me alone; it is pertinent to everyone’s existence and well-being. In this view, the full realization of desire suggests that not only I but others as well have to fulfill their desires. To employ Mencius’ argumentation, desires are the expression of man’s own needs and joys. However, because of principle and righteousness, it is possible for one to share one’s joy with other people in the world and leave no one with his or her needs unsatisfied. However, Dai Zhen explicitly states that this principle is not lying outside but rather contained in desire itself, namely within human daily livelihood and human relationships. Henceforth, for Dai Zhen, to satisfy one’s desires is to follow what is natural —ziran, but to fulfill desire to the full without erring has to comply with what is necessary— biran, namely principle and righteousness, which, however, can never be sought outside people’s seeking after life. He says,

Under heaven, there must be no one that abandons the way of begetting and nurturing life can still be preserved. Everything and every activity arise from desire. Without desire, there is no action; if there is desire, then action will follow. Once people begin to act and act with most appropriateness with nothing to be changed, then principle is there. Without desire and action, how can there be principle?

(天下必無舍生養之道而得存者, 凡事為皆存於 欲, 無 欲則無為矣。有 欲而後有為，有為而歸於至當不可易之謂理；無 欲無為，又焉有理！) 33

31 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 160.

32 See the Mencius 1B1 “與民同樂” (share joy with people) and 1B5 “內無怨女，外無曠夫” (Indoors there is no girl grudging for being without husband and outside there is no man without a wife). See Dai Zhen’s reference to Mencius’ words in no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 161.

33 No.43, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.216.
This is a revolutionary move in Chinese philosophy to take desire as a dynamic impetus for creativity and activity and to lower principle from heaven in service of desire. Furthermore, as we have discussed earlier, for Dai Zhen, since the way of man corresponds with the way of heaven with no opposition between heaven and humans, where is the antagonism of heavenly principle and human desire? By virtue of shengsheng, human desire to produce and sustain life is comparable to the creative creativity of heaven and earth. To locate desire in the flux of the great transformation of the cosmos, ontologically, Dai Zhen undercuts the very basis of the dichotomy of tianli and renyu. The Dao of heaven or heavenly principle is translated into people’s daily activities of producing and preserving life, wherein human natural desires find their justification. Here, we may say that desire is elevated to claim a heavenly nature while principle is lowered down to find its root in this world.

Thus, for Dai Zhen, yu in essence is “the way of producing and nurturing life” 生養之道. Human desires for eating, drinking, and having sex abide by the cosmic way of shengsheng. As long as human life continues, human beings have to take care of their bodily needs to ensure the continuation of human species. These so-called bodily desires are the spontaneity of our human nature. There is a saying in the Shijing: “People’s nature lies in the daily existence of drinking and eating” (民之質矣, 日用飲食). The Book of Liyun makes a similar statement: “In drink, food, and sex reside human basic desires” (飲食男女, 人之大欲存焉). Dai Zhen is fond of these two sayings and frequently cites them in his writings. Their influence on his thought is

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34 See no. 11, no. 15, no. 30, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 160, 162, 171, 197: “凡出於欲, 無非以生以養之事”; “性, 譬則水也; 欲, 譬則水之流也; 節而不過, 則為依乎天理, 為相生養之道。”; “聖人順其血氣之欲, 則為相生養之道”; “聲色臭味之欲, 資以養其生。” Also see the Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 10, 11, 27: “生養之道, 存乎欲者也; 感通之道, 存乎情者也; 二者, 自然之符, 天下之事舉矣。”“人道之有生則有養也, 耳目百體之欲, 求其故, 本天道以成性者也。”; “飲食男女, 養生之道也, 天地之所以生生也。”

35 The Shijing; See no. 8, no. 10, no. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 158, 161, 205.

36 The Liji—Liyun. See the Yuan Shan and the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 27, 161; no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 167.
obvious. For him, human desires are but a natural outcome of our blood and breath. In the words of the Liji, they are “xing zhi yu”—nature’s desires or desires coming from nature. With Dai Zhen, “xing zhi yu” means that human desires which are rooted in human nature originate from the natural movements of yin yang and the five elements; consequently, desires manifested in human daily activities of drinking, eating, and having sex are the very expression of both tiandaо (the way of heaven) and rendao (the way of man). He calls this “the desire of nature, the sign of nature” (性之欲，其自然之符也), which is imparted from heaven and keeps to the virtue of the earth.

Because of the special composition of xueqi and xinzhi, human beings have natural propensity for physical enjoyments as well as spiritual delights. In Mencius’ words, the heart takes delight in principle and righteousness is just the same as my mouth enjoys the meat of grass and grain-fed animals. Dai Zhen does not only justify human desires from their natural necessity but also tries to attest the continuation of his thought with the authentic Confucian tradition of Confucius and Mencius. Mencius’s affirmation of human sensory desires greatly buttresses Dai Zhen’s contention for the naturalness and necessity of the human pursuit for physical satisfaction. Dai Zhen maintains that xueqi be nourished by sounds, colors, smells, and tastes as xinzhi be nurtured by righteousness and propriety. Deeply conscious of the tendency from the antiquity to the Song Confucians to submit human desire to “righteousness” and “principle,” Dai Zhen is particularly emphatic about the equal value of these two types of pursuits. In the format of question and answer that characterizes the whole writing of the Shu Zheng, Dai Zhen brings up

37 The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 11.
38 See the Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 15: “Desire goes with darkness, emulating earth” (欲配幽，法地).
39 See no. 8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 158 “心之於理義，一同乎血氣之於嗜欲，皆性使然耳。”
40 See Mencius 6A7: “Righteousness delights my heart and mind just the same as the meat of the grass and grain-fed animals delights my mouth” (理義之悅我心，猶芻豢之悅我口).
problems in the “Question” sections and then addresses these issues in the “Answer” where he posits his stance, arguments, and criticism. For example, he put forward the following question:

The desires of sounds, colors, smells, and tastes should be also rooted in the heart. Yet, now the delights in principle and righteousness are particularly ascribed to the heart. Although it is the case with the likes for virtue and goodness, can sounds, colors, smells, and tastes be only rooted in the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth? The heart is that which governs the hundreds of organs, so the faculties of the hundreds of organs are also the faculty of the heart. Does only the ear enjoy sounds, the eye colors, the nose smells, and the mouth tastes, are they not the delights of the heart too?

(問：聲色臭味之欲亦宜根於心，今專以理義之好為根於心，於‘好是懿德’固然矣，抑聲色臭味之欲徒根於耳目鼻口歟？心，君乎百體者也，百體之能，皆心之能也，豈耳悅聲，目悅色，鼻悅臭，口悅味，非心悅之乎?)

Then he answered,

`No. The heart can manage the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth, but they each have their own functions, and therefore they cannot substitute for each other…. “People’s nature lies in the daily existence of drinking and eating”—From the ancient times to the present, this has been the basic principle of carrying out the way. Blood and breath rely on nourishing and has apertures in the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth to channel it. Since they are already open, they each perform their own functions.

(曰：否。心能使耳目鼻口，不能代耳目鼻口之能，彼其能者各自具也，故不能相為。……‘民之質矣，日用飲食’，自古及今，以為道之經也。血氣各資以
Here Dai Zhen in his argumentation put forth a crucial set of concepts: the *xin* (heart/mind 心) and *ti* (body 體). Despite his recognition of the governing role of the heart/mind in directing people’s consciousness and activities, Dai Zhen cautions people against subjugating human bodily needs in the name of the heart and mind. Dai Zhen describes the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth as the work of craftsmanship of nature to serve our physical needs. Therefore, the faculty of the heart/mind cannot replace the faculties of other human organs. By nature, human beings are entitled to pursuing physical satisfaction. Without meeting their basic needs, how can we expect people to pursue something nobler? This is why Mencius would question, “If it (people’s livelihood) is not even sufficient to save them from death, how could they have free time to cultivate propriety and righteousness?” (救死而恐不贍, 奚暇治禮義?) 42

Nevertheless, in his defense of the validity of human desires, Dai Zhen also brings home to us its constraints, which are likewise determined by the very reality of human nature per se. Apparently, Mencius has become an illuminating spiritual source for Dai Zhen. Here, we come to an important Mencian thesis of *xing* and *ming*. Mencius says,

The way of the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eye towards colors, the ear towards sounds, the nose towards smells, and the four limbs towards ease is human nature, yet therein also lies the Decree. This is why the gentleman does not describe it as nature. The way benevolence pertains to the relation between father

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41 No. 8, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 157-8.

42 The *Mencius* 1A 7, see D. C. Lau’s translation, 1973, p. 59; see *Dai Zhen Quan Shu*. Vol. VI 216; see Ewell, 1990, p. 421.
and son, duty to the relation between prince and subject, the rites to the relation between guests and host, wisdom to the good and wise man, the sage to the way of Heaven, is the Decree, but therein also resides human nature. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as Decree.

(口之於味也，目之於色也，耳之於聲也，鼻之於臭也，四肢之于安佚也，性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也；仁之于父子也，義之於君臣也，禮之於賓主也，知之於賢者也，聖人之于天道也，命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。)⁴³

As one of the most important passages in the *Mencius*, it brings up two facets of human nature: both its biological and moral dimensions. Human beings are not only naturally inclined for agreeable flavors, colors, sounds, and smells but also well attuned to *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* that are appropriate for human relationships. People might take man's propensity for sounds, colors, smells, and tastes as human natural instincts while their inclinations to humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom cultivated moral capacities. But Mencius reveal great subtlety in dealing with these two aspects of human dispositions in terms of *xing* (nature) and *ming* (decree; destiny; mandate). While *xing* indicates that what is natural and spontaneous comes from within, *ming* may imply necessity and obligation from heaven. But in light of the *Mencius*, *xing* and *ming* are not opposed to each other as the inborn nature converse to the outside power but mutually implicated instead. *Xing* contains the elements of *ming* and *ming* the elements of *xing*.⁴⁴ The dialectics between *xing* and *ming* offers a Confucian formulation of the dynamic

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⁴⁴ Kwong-loi Shun in his *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* presents different scholars’ various understandings of the Mencian *xing* and *ming*. His treatment of “*ming*” as both “descriptive” and “normative” as two plausible ways of interpreting “*ming*” is quite illuminating. pp. 205-7. Also, see Irene Bloom, “Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mencius*, 2002, p. 92; Rogers Ames, “The Mencian Conception of Ren Xing: Does It Mean ‘Human Nature’?” in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts—Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham*, ed. Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago: Open Court, 1991, pp. 147-75), p. 158. In disagreement with Rogers Ames’ observation to take *ming* as “basic conditions” in the sense of “the small part” of human beings and see *ming* as “an irrevocable determinative principle,” Irene Bloom points out, “Acknowledging that *ming* is part of our physical nature and part of our moral nature, and both within and beyond our control, entails no notion of ‘an irrevocable determinative principle,’ but confirms that human is part of a larger reality.”
tension between freedom and limitation, autonomy and dependency, nature and necessity, right
and obligation. In his *Shu Zheng* Dai Zhen twice cites the *Mencius* 7B24 but gives it a somehow
new take. As Prof. Shun has investigated, “ming” for Dai Zhen applies to both human sensory
desires and ethical attributes. In the former case, “ming” functions as “certain normative
constraints” to restrain human desires from going to excess while in the second case, “ming”
indicates the unevenness in human capacities to develop their ethical attributes, which, however,
cannot henceforth become people’s excuse for not developing their moral character.45

In Dai Zhen’s thought, the basic meaning of “ming” is restriction (*xian*). He says, “Ming is the
name for restriction” (命者，限制之名).46 In conformity with his naturalistic view on human
nature, the meaning “*xian*” derives from the idea of “*fen*” (allotments). In this light, Dai Zhen
gives his own reading of the opening line of the *Zhongyong*. He says, “What is imparted from
heaven is called nature.” Because by birth man has restriction from heaven, therefore, we say
tianming” (‘天命之謂性。’以生而限於天，故曰天命).47 The *Da Dai Liji* apparently offers h
is reading with a strong textual support. It says, “What is allotted from *Dao* is ming and what is
formed in one is xing” (分於道謂之命，形於一謂之性).48 Dai Zhen in his *Shu Zheng* three
times resorts to this line to explicate the *Zhongyong*’s tianming.49 He stresses “allotments” as
the origin of the restriction that features the fate of a human being. From his perspective, since
human natural endowments allotted from *Dao* or *yin yang* and *wuxing* are different, some being
lucid, some unclear, some bright, some murky, some complete, some partial, some thick and
some thin, humans are restricted or limited in one way or another by what they have inherited

46 No. 11, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 162.
48 *The Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記本命篇 (The Chapter of “Origin of the Decree” of the Da Dai Liji), vol. 13 in the
49 See no. 16, no. 20, no. 32, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, pp. 175, 180, and 200.
We can say that ming like xing in Dai Zhen’s philosophy has no metaphysical implication. Consequently, he also refutes Zhu Xi’ interpretation of the Zhongyong’s “tianming” as the “decree” or “mandate” of heaven. Thus, rendered in English, “lot” or “destiny” maybe comes closer to what Dai Zhen means by “ming.”

But, ming with Dai Zhen not just means physical limitations resulted from the irregularities of human natural allotments but also implies “normative constraints.” In his first reference to the Mencius 7B24 in no. 11, Dai Zhen expressly states, “Ming is the name for restriction. It is just like giving order to turn to the east and there will be no turn to the west, referring to the fact that desires cannot be without restraint” (命者，限制之名，如命之東則不得而西，言性之欲之不可無節也). Later in no. 28, he gives a more elaborate interpretation of the Mencian ming and xing. He says,

‘Desires” are rooted in blood and breath. Therefore, we say ‘nature.’ But because there are some restrictions that cannot be surpassed, this is the meaning of destine. The virtues of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom cannot be found equally among people due to the restrictions they were born with; this is what is called destiny. But everyone can expand (what is inherited at birth); this is the nature of man. Saying “It is nature” is like saying “take (desires) as nature for an excuse.” Gentleman neither indulges himself in desires in the pretext of nature nor does not exert his capacities in the pretext of destiny. The later Confucians did not carefully examine the meaning of the text so to lose Mencius’ purport. “Not calling it nature” is not to consider it nature while “not calling it destiny” is not to consider it destiny. In this regard, what Mencius calls nature is precisely as follows: The

50 See no.20, no. 16, no. 32, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 180, 175, and 200.
51 See no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 181.
52 No. 11, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 162.
way of the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eye towards colors, the ear towards sounds, the nose towards smells, and the four limbs towards ease is human nature. By saying that there is no one that is not good, we mean that that one can know his limit without going beyond it is good, and that that blood, breath, and the intelligent mind can arrive at not erring is good. What is called humanity, rightness, propriety, and wisdom is precisely to designate blood, breath, and the intelligent mind, to mean what is derived from the transformation of heaven and earth can accord to the virtue of heaven and earth.

(‘欲’根於血氣，故曰性也，而有所限而不可踰，則命之謂也。仁義禮智之懿不能盡人如一者，限於生初，所謂命也，而皆可以擴而充之，則人之性也。謂猶云‘藉口於性’耳；君子不藉口於性以逞其欲，不藉口於命之限之而不盡其材。後儒未詳審文義，失孟子立言之指。不謂性非不謂之性，不謂命非不謂之命。由此言之，孟子之所謂性，即口之於味、目之於色、耳之於聲、鼻之於臭、四肢於安佚之為性；所謂人無有不善，即能知其限而不踰之為善，即血氣心知能底於無失之為善；所謂仁義禮智，即以名其血氣心知，所謂原於天地之化者之能協於天地之德也。) 53

*Ming* indicates restraints or limits for both sensory desires and ethical attributes, but it restrains and limits in different ways. With human sensory desires, *ming* is their restraints and henceforth imposes a negative command: Don’t exceed the boundary. But for the ethical attributes, *ming* stands for their limitations and thereby proposes a positive exhortation: Go beyond the limitations. Therefore, *ming* is imperative with respect to sensory desires but descriptive regarding the ethical attributes. But, by *ming* man has to restrain his natural endowments, viz. his natural disposition for physical delights on the one hand, and challenge the limit of their inherited allotments, viz. his natural propensity for *liyi* on the other. Because of the differences in human allotments, people are limited in their capacities to develop their ethical attributes.

However, since their lot of restriction is exactly where their human nature, namely their goodness resides, human beings are inherited with the capacity to expand their intelligent mind. Therefore, people have to go beyond their physical limitations to pursue moral goodness. Then, regarding human disposition to physical delights, we may wonder where the “normative constraints” derive their inhibiting power and how natural restriction becomes a moral prescription? In my view, the answer rests on the fact that by nature human beings are different from animals. The restraints on our sensory desires are precisely where the boundary between humans and animals is. Unnecessary to appeal to either a transcendent heaven 天 or metaphysical principle 里, the “normative constraints” simply come from within, from the physical composition of human nature itself. Because human nature is good, human beings potentially have natural capacities to know not to exceed the boundary, not to err so as to reduce themselves to animals.

As discussed previously, owing to our natural makeup of 学起心志, my heart takes delight in principle and righteousness is just the same as my mouth enjoys the flesh of grass and grain-fed animals. Therefore, by virtue of human nature, humans not only seek for satisfying their sensory desires but also knows to aspire for humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. But when speaking of human sensory desires, Dai Zhen highlights the role of 明 in restraining human nature while concerning human ethical attributes he emphasizes the faculties of human nature to defy human destiny. For Dai Zhen, people are justified to desire for drinking, eating, and having sex. But, because of the limit of 明, we cannot simply give free rein to our desires. On the other hand, although we are limited in one way or another in our capacities to fulfill 仁, 意, 礼, 知, we cannot stress them so much as to neglect human natural tendency and initiative from within to develop them. This is the destiny of man as was born to be human.

To conclude, in drink, food, and sex reside human basic desires. Consequently, it is justified for human beings to seek for the satisfaction of their physical needs. Nevertheless, if we only follow our own sensory desires, we may lose the other dimension of ethical pursuits. In the meantime, since what one desires is what all people under heaven may desire, if we only pursue our needs
without thinking about other people’s needs, then we are “si” 私—self-seeking only. Thus, while we are entitled to drinking, eating, and having sex, we have to keep them under certain measure, i.e. “jie yu” (restrain desires 節 欲) or “bu guo” (not to exceed 不過); while it is justified to satisfy our own desires, we have to consider other people’s desires too. In Dai Zhen’s philosophy, desires are legitimized not only as jizhiyu己之欲—the desires of one’s own but also as renzhiyu人之欲—the desires of the others. When yu is understood as the desires of the others that are larger than one’s own needs, the affective faculty of human beings assumes a pivotal role.

II. Qing 情 (feelings/actual reality): “When he moves in response to things, these are the nature’s desires”

It is justified to strive for the satisfaction of desires, but desires should be moderated and well regulated. It seems that Dai Zhen does not depart from the tradition in maintaining that human desires should not go to excess, but I will argue that what has distinguished him from other Confucian thinkers is that Dai Zhen highlights the dimension of the other in dealing with human desires. In my view, how to properly channel human desires is not what Dai Zhen intends to expound. Rather, he draws our attention on how to cultivate our affective faculty inherent in the human nature to develop our sensitivity to other people’s needs. For Dai Zhen, the rational of human desires lies in the very fact that not just one but everyone is entitled to his basic physical needs. It is out of this deep concern for the others that Dai Zhen distinctively develops his ethical theory of “yiqing xieqing” 以情絜情 (to gauge other people’s feeling and desires with one’s own feelings and desires; to gauge other people’s feeling and situation by situating oneself in other people’s position), “qing bu shuangshi weili” 情不爽失為理 (feelings and desires that do not deviate or err is principle), and “qing de qiping” 情得其平 (feelings and desires obtain

54 See no. 11, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 162: “欲，譬則水之流也；節而不過，則為依乎天理，為相生養之道，譬則水由地中行也。”
their fairness and balance) that greatly enhances the Confucian way of reciprocity. In my opinion, with “yiqing xieqing” Dai Zhen proposes a dual-perspectival judgment. By using my own feelings and desires as the gauge to assess other people’s needs and desires, I can understand what other people need and treat them with fairness. For I have the need for drink, food, and sex, so do they. By putting myself in the positions of the others, I am able to treat other people, especially those marginalized groups of society—the old, the young, the lonely, the weak, the orphaned, and the widowed with sympathy and due respect. This is because I understand and experience what they feel being in their situation. Significantly, it is this very component of qing that characterizes Dai Zhen’s theory on human desires.

In the following pages I will first investigate the meanings of qing in Dai Zhen’s usage and then discuss how qing is related to yu and li in particular with his ethical claims of “yiqing xieqing,” “qing bu shuangshi weili,” and “qing de qiping” as our focus of discussion. To the contemporary mind, we may easily take qing as a psychological state of the mind. But in Dai Zhen’s writings, qing (a complex of both affective feelings and actual reality) does not mean emotive feelings and sentiments alone; it also refers to factual reality. It seems to me that we cannot neglect either side to come to terms with Dai Zhen’s moral thinking.

First, qing refers to human emotions and temperaments that are spontaneity of human nature. Generically, as a composite part of human nature qing manifests itself as the feelings of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy.55 Parallel to yu as the way of producing and nurturing生養之道, qing is seen as the way of feeling and understanding感通之道.56 In this usage, qing is

55 See no. 10, no. 28, no. 30, no. 37, no. 40, no. 43, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 161, 193, 197, 206, 211, 216-7.

56 See the Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 10: “The way of producing and nurturing life resides in desires while the way of affection and understanding in feelings. Both are the signs of nature and all the things under the heaven will be completed” (生養之道，存乎欲者也；感通之道，存乎情者也；二者，自然之符，天下之事举矣。) Also, see the similar idea in the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu # 30, Vol. VI, p. 197.
intimately related to yu in that both are the natural sign of human nature in response to the affection of things to be expressed either as human primal biological instincts or as psychological sentiments. These two aspects constitute the basic mode of human existence. If yu indicates human aspiration for survival and flourishing, qing indicates a dynamic interaction between human beings and their living world. As Dai Zhen says, “When human desires for sounds, colors, smells, and tastes are united with human feelings of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy, the way of man is wholesome there” (合聲、色、臭、味之欲，喜、怒、哀、樂之情，而人道備). Therefore, for him, the virtues of the sages reside in their extraordinary way of understanding people’s feelings and satisfying people’s desires. Importantly, because of this affinity between qing and yu in being the manifestation of human nature, I maintain that in Dai Zhen’s writing qing in many occasions has gone beyond the spectrum of happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate to embrace desires for eating, drinking, and having sex and furthermore all these phenomena regarding human existence. But it is interesting to add that when yu and

57 No. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 193.

58 See no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “Now we take principle as that qing does not err. This means that principle reside in desires” (今以情之不爽失為理，是理者存乎欲者也); no. 2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 152: “When qing attains to its balance and fairness, this is the restraints of likes and dislikes, this is to abide by the heavenly principle” (情得其平，是為好惡之節，是為依乎天理。); and no. 3, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 153: “Qing regards one as well as others; when qing does not go to excess nor in deficiency, this is called principle” (在己與人皆謂之情，無過情無不及情之謂理). In my reading, “qing” that is pertaining to both the self and others, that is fair and in balance, and that does not err actually embraces both “desires” and “feelings” of human life and hence the general reality of human existence its broad sense.

In fact, it is not Dai Zhen’s innovation to relate qing to both feelings and desires. In the writings of the antiquity, especially in many texts of the Pre-Qin and Han periods we can find rich textual evidence to show that qing is employed to refer to both feelings and desires or is used interchangeably with yu to embrace both. Presumably, this indicates that at that time there was not a clear-cut distinction between the notion of feelings qing and that of desires yu. For example, the Liyun of the Liji says, “What are human feelings? Happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, and desire” (何謂人情? 喜怒哀懼愛惡欲七者) (The Liji-Liyun 礼记-禮運). By this “seven feelings” paradigm, “yu” being the desires of “In drink, food, and sex reside the major desires” is also regarded as one of the seven feelings. Also in the Liji we have “Man is tranquil at birth: this is the nature imparted from Heaven; he moves upon the affection of things: this is the desire of nature” (人生而靜，天之性也；感於物而動，性之欲也) (The Liji—yueji 礼记-樂記). This stirred up “yu” definitely does not contain “desires” alone, it also has “feelings” in it. There are ample examples of the similar use in other texts. For instance, Xunzi says, “As regards the qing of men, to eat, they want pastured and grain-fed animals; to dress, they want clothing embroidered with patterns; to travel, they want a horse and carriage.” (人之情，食欲有芻豢，衣欲有文繡，行欲有輿馬) (The Xunzi-Rongru 荀子-榮辱篇). Here, qing actually refers to the desires for physical delights: delicious food, beautiful dress, and physical ease. Also, we have “Qing is human desire” (“情者，人之欲也”) (The Hanshu-the Biography of Dong Zhongshu 漢書-董仲舒傳 in the WYG E-SKQS); “The desire of nature is qing” (性之欲，情也) (Chen Li 陳立, The Baihutong 白虎通).
qing are used together, the compound words “qingyu” 情 欲 (feelings and desires), however, often carries a negative connotation for “selfish desires” or “indulged physical desires” as is seen in Dai Zhen’s writings and many other texts in Chinese thought. Here, I want to make a point that just as the instinctive yu can be transformed from a natural desire into a moral desire, the primal sentiments can likewise elevate themselves to moral feelings.

For Dai Zhen these two states of human feelings are indispensable to human existence. Thus, while he proposes an ethical ideal that everyone can have his desires completely fulfilled and feelings fully expressed, he also discusses how to properly cultivate human feelings through...
rituals. He says, “Rituals are established to regulate all the feelings under heaven, curbing them when they are in excess or urging them if in deficiency so that people know the centrality of heaven and earth….Rituals are to check one’s meager crudeness to make it refined; and mourning is to restrain one’s grief and sorrow to restrain one from unmediated feelings and arbitrary actions” (禮之設所以治天下之情, 或裁其過, 或勉其不及, 俾知天地之中而已矣。……禮以治其儉陋，使化于文；喪以治其哀戚，使遠於直情而徑行). 61 Obviously, as far as human feelings are concerned, like human desires, they are legitimized as the natural manifestation of human nature. On the other hand, they likewise need to be cultivated and under certain restraints. For Dai Zhen, as the full realization of desire means the fulfillment of at once jizhiyu (the desires of one’s own) and renzhiyu (the desires of the others), in the same manner, qing finds its best expression in the “upright and magnanimous sentiment” 正大之情62 whereby one cherishes love for family, holds respect for the old, and takes care of the young in accordance with humanity (ren 仁). Here we may say that qing has developed from natural emotive sentiments into ethical feelings.

Second, without making any reference to human subjective feelings or dispositions, qing may indicate factual reality as is used nowadays in the phrases of “shiqing” 事情 (things, facts, events, or affairs) and “qingkuang” 情況 or “qingxing” 情形 (situation, circumstances). There are many examples of qing in this use in Dai Zhen’s writing to speak about “things,” “facts,” “affairs,” or “situation.” For instance, “The things and affairs of the world are orderly divided and clearly patterned.” (天下事情，條分縷析)63 “Principle resides in things and affairs.” (理在事情)64

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61 No. 37, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 206; see Ewell, 1990, pp. 357-8.

62 See no. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205: “When one fulfills one’s own life and extends this fulfillment to all under heaven to let everyone fulfill his or her life, this is ren. On the other hand, if one cannot let one’s love, respect, and care go in harmony with the upright and magnanimous sentiment, then righteousness is not fulfilled; humanity is not fulfilled either” (一人遂其生, 推之而與天下共遂其生, 仁也。言仁可以賅義, 使親愛長養不協於正大之情, 則義有未盡, 亦即為仁有未至). See Ewell, 1990, p. 351.

63 No. 1, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 151.
“There is not such a thing that one does not need to fulfill his own life but can fulfill that of the others” (己不必遂其生，而遂人之生，無是情也). In addition, “… Man can have desires but has to restrain them so that their desires will not go to excess nor in deficiency” (是故欲不可窮，非不可有). Similarly, “To advance the mind to brilliance, one can assess things without even a slight err, how does he need to know and seek after the ‘one?’” (其心之明，自能權度事情，無幾微差失，又焉用知一求一哉) and so forth. But the most telling example comes from Dai Zhen’s exegetical remarks on Mencius’s statement “乃若其情，則可以為善矣” (As far as one’s qing is concerned, one can become good). In the Mencian context, qing is understood in two senses: first, actual and genuine state of affair; second, feelings of

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64 See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 155: “Now principle resides in things and affairs, in what the human hearts will all affirm. There is nothing to be doubted about this” (今日理在事情，於心之所同然，洵無可疑矣).

65 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 160.

See No. 11, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 162: “Therefore, it is that desires cannot be exhausted not that there should not be any desires. Man can have desires but has to restrain them so that there will be neither the situation of desire going to excess nor the circumstance of desires being in deficiency. Cannot we say it is not heavenly principle then?” (是哉欲不可窮，非不可有；有而節之，使無過情，無不及情，可謂之非天理乎!). Cf. another similar formulation: “Qing resides in oneself and in others, whereas li is a matter of not being excessive or deficient in relation to qing” (在己與人皆謂之情，無過情無不及情之謂理. See no. 3, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 153). Here we have two intriguing examples of the use of qing that seems to lend itself to two possible different interpretations. In light of Professor Shun’s interpretation of both no. 3 and no. 11 of the Shuzheng, it is proper to take the “qing” in “無過情，無不及情” (qing neither excessive nor deficient) in both no. 3 and no. 11 as the way things really are, namely as a state or situation rather than subjective feelings. In both John Ewell and Ann-Ping Chin’s versions, the “qing” is rendered as human feelings, but, according to Ewell, “qing” in Dai Zhen’s usage either rendered as “inherent tendencies of affairs” or “feeling” equivalent formulations. Ewell says, “I believe that in Dai’ eyes they are in fact equivalent: feelings are situational emotional responses that are both mediated by and constitutive of the structures of social reality….Thus, it seems better to translate qing sometimes as ‘feeling’ and sometimes as ‘inherent tendency,’ depending on the immediate context, and to leave it to Dai to make their theoretical identity explicit.” (Ewell, 1990, p. 130. Also, see pp. 111, 158, 161). But whether Ewell translates the “qing” as “feeling” or “inherent tendency,” in both cases the “qing” is taken as human temperaments or dispositions, which have thus missed a very important dimension of “qing,” namely “the way things really are” as pointed out by Professor Kwong-loi Shun in his approach to “qing” (See Kwong-loi Shun’s article “Mencius, Xunzi, and Dai Zhen” in Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, 2002, pp. 218-220).

67 No. 41, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 214.

68 The Mencius 6A6.
commiseration, right and wrong, shame, and deference. But, in Dai Zhen’s interpretation, the qing in this Mencian context does not refer to the human emotive feelings and dispositions. He says,

“What as far as one’s qing is concerned,’ here qing is not the qing of temperaments and feelings. Does not Mencius also say: ‘As people see that he acts like an animal, they think that he has never had the original endowments. But is this the true nature of human beings? Qing like original element is actual substance.”

(首云 ‘乃若其情’，非性情之情也。孟子不又云乎：‘人見其禽獸也，而以為未嘗有才焉，是豈人之情也哉!’ 情，猶素也，實也。)69

For Mencius, qing is used in two senses: first, actual, genuine state of affair and second a feeling of commiseration, of right and wrong, of shame, and of deference. Dai Zhen likens the qing情 in the Mencian text to su (original state, root, element 素), to shi (substance or actuality 實), saying “Qing’ like the original element is actual substance.” (情，猶素也，實也).70 Of

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69 No. 30, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu VI, p. 197). In the Mencian scholarship, the statement “乃若其情...” (As far as its qing is concerned ...) is often quoted to attest to the use of “qing” in the sense of factual reality other than subjective emotions in the Pre-Qin period. But, there are also scholars throughout history to take the Mencian qing as emotive sentiments and temperaments. For example, Zhu Xi holds that the “qing is the movement of nature” (情者，性之動也) See Zhu Xi, the Sishu. Dai Zhen made a special reference to Zhu Xi to propose a different interpretation of qing in terms of factual reality and overtly distinguishes himself from the latter. See no. 30, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu VI, pp 196-7.

Liu Zongzhou also interprets the Mencian qing as feeling. He says, “speaking of nature by referring to qing is not because feeling demonstrates nature (指情言性，非因情見性也)” and “When speaking about qing, we can say it is the feeling of nature but never shall we oppose nature to feeling” (所云情，可云性之情，決不得性與情對). See Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, Xueyan-xia 學言下 (On Learning—Part III) in Liu Zongzhou quanji 劉宗周全集 卷二 (The Complete Works of Liu Zongzhou ), Vol. II. Ed. Dai Nianzhang. Taipei: The Preparatory Office of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica 臺北中央研究院, 1997, p. 549.

70 No. 30, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu VI, p. 197; See Ewell, 1990, p. 311.
course, if upon scrutiny, the “qing” of the Mencian “乃若其情” (as far as what is genuinely so is concerned) and the “qing” as is in “天下事情，條分縷晰” (The things and affairs under heaven are orderly arranged and clearly patterned) are somehow different, both referring to things but in different senses. The former refers to the materialness, the physicality, the substance, the matter, i.e. the very thingness of human nature while the latter broadly to all—everything under heaven. Thus, it seems that we also need to discern qing of things and affairs in both its narrow sense and broad sense.

Although we have made this distinction here, nonetheless, I tend to hold that with Dai Zhen the boundary between “things” and “feelings” is actually not that definite as we might think. We may say that from this affinity between “things” and “feelings” derives the third meaning of qing—“what is genuinely so, feelings” as is defined by Professor Shun. Interestingly, Paolo Santangelo uses Dai Zhen as evidence to support his argument that there is never a clear-cut distinction between the qing in the sense of “phenomenon,” “conditions,” and “situation” (qingkuang 情況, shiqing 事情) and the qing of the emotional meanings. I align with Santangelo to confirm the interconnectedness between the affective state and the actual reality in the use of qing, but I would rather look at this affinity the other way round. Instead of viewing the factual qing as being indistinguishable from the affective qing, I suggest that the affective qing be inseparable from the actual reality. It seems quite evident with Dai Zhen that the affective qing can never be divorced from actual reality or concrete situations and henceforth always assume certain element of thingness or reality. Qing is connected to reality not only in the sense that qing is “reality response,” to use Chad Hans’ words, but also in the sense that it is “reality inputs.” But, qing in either case (as feelings or as things) or in both cases is but one

71 See Kwong-loi Shun’s article “Mencius, Xunzi, and Dai Zhen” in Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations, 2002, p. 219.

72 See Paolo Santangelo, Sentimental Education in Chinese History: An Interdisciplinary Textual Research on Ming and Qing Sources. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), p. 234.

73 His observation that “the range of qing is broader than those emotive states, and includes all reality inputs” may bear relevance to our discussion here. See Chad Hans, “Qing (Emotions) 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought” in
composite part of the things in the world. As cited above, to Dai Zhen, “shi” 事 or “wu” 物 embraces all things under heaven 天下事情. Since there is nothing that is not wu (things 物), feeling and desire are but a different form of “wu” or “thing.” Thus, we should say that things comprise qing yet go beyond qing. In other word, the qing of facts and things may have nothing to do with the affective state of the heart and mind, but the qing of emotions and feelings is certainly related to “things” in one way or another. The two assertions may seem at odds with each other. But the logic seems simple. By analogy, the relationship of qing to things is like apples to fruit. Apples are fruit but fruit is not apples. Therefore, by saying qing is things we mean qing is things in the sense that qing belongs to the sphere of things—internal and external, subjective and objective. To my mind, in Dai Zhen’s writings, qing combing both the affective “feelings, emotions, or sentiments” and the actual “things and affairs” is best exemplified through the qing designated by “qing bu shuangshi weili” (qing that does not err or deviate is principle), “qing de qiping” (qing obtains its fairness and balance), and “yiqing xieqing” (to gauge qing with qing). We should say that here qing is not limited to the way of feeling and understanding 感通之道 alone but extended to the way of production and nourishment 生養之道. In a broad sense, qing regards every aspect of human life—renlun riyong 人倫日用 (daily existence and human relationships).

Of great significance to Dai Zhen’s philosophy, qing gives li an utterly new meaning to creatively transform the relationship between desire and principle. In his philosophical scheme, li is nothing else but qing that obtains its fairness and balance without any err or mistake. Presumably, Dai Zhen’s assertion is based on a simple observation that qing pertains to oneself as well to others. Because qing as the genuine state of human existence is common to

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74 See no. 3, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 153: “What is called qing pertains to oneself as well to others; neither excessive nor in deficiency, then it is principle” (在己與人皆謂之情，無過情無不及情之謂理).
everyone, in my view, the central issue engrossing Dai Zhen has become how to deal with human desires and emotions from a relational perspective. This is to say that the issue of *yu* or *qing* in essence is an issue about human relationships. Once we look at *qing* from a broader prospect beyond our own emotional and physical needs and satisfaction, *li* comes to the scene. Nonetheless, the so-called *li* or principle for Dai Zhen is nothing else but the way in which we examine our desires and emotions with reference to others that are within the same order of human subsistence to ensure their maximum fulfillment on behalves of both the self and others. Thus, in my opinion, how to properly channel one’s desires is not Dai Zhen’s agenda. Instead, the moderation of one’s physical desires and emotional needs leaves its measurement to others that are likewise in need of drinking, eating, having sex, and expressing feelings and emotions. I maintain that this is precisely the novelty of Dai Zhen’s thought.

To him, “*qing* attaining its fairness and balance is the restraint on likes and dislikes, is the compliance with heavenly principle” (情得其平，是為好惡之節，是為依乎天理). In order to achieve the goal that not just one but everyone can fully live up his life and give full expression to his feelings, Dai Zhen proposes his reciprocal way of gauging *qing* with *qing* 以情絜情, which is simply to put oneself in others’ positions. It indicates one’s ability to feel and understand others’ feeling and situation on the one hand, and on the other to respond and act appropriately in accord with the concrete circumstances. To my mind, this is exactly the meaning of Dai Zhen’s assertion that principle resides in desire. *Li* is not a prerequisite for but the very state of *qing* that attains to its full realization in fairness and balance in my sympathetic understanding of and proper response to others’ feelings and situation. In my view, the whole dialectics of *li* and *yu* culminates in *qing* that does not err. Dai Zhen nicely expresses the idea by saying, “Principle is that *qing* does not err. There is not such a thing that one does not have *qing* yet arrives at *li*” (理也者，情之不爽失也；未有情不得而理得者也).
Given a negative definition of *li* as *qing* that does not err, we might want to ask, In Dai Zhen’s eyes, what may go wrong with *qing* then? In the *Shu Zheng* he lists many cases of “*shi*” 失 or “shuangshi” 爽失 (err, miss, deviate from the normal; error, flaw, deviation). “*Yu*” (desires) may err (no. 10, no. 30, the *Shu Zheng*); ”*qing*” (feelings) may err (no. 30, ibid.); and “*zhi*” (knowing, intelligence) may err (no. 10, no. 30, ibid.). Consequently, “*tiaoli*” 條理 (pattern and order) can get lost (no. 36, ibid.); “*liyi*” 禮義 (propriety and righteousness) can get lost (no. 38, ibid.), and the way of five relationships can get lost (no. 35, ibid.). Thus, in its broad sense, when *qing* does err, “*shi*” or “shuangshi” can apply to all these situations. Specifically, Dai Zhen diagnoses the failing of human desires, emotions, and intelligence respectively as “*si*” 私 (selfish, self-centered, self-seeking), as “*pian*” 偏 (partial, biased), and as “*bi*” 蔽 (blinded, concealed, obstructed, stopped up). He says,

The failing of desires is selfishness, after which greed and depravity will follow; the failing of emotions is partiality, after which perversity will follow; and the failing of intelligence is blindness, after which errors and mistakes will follow. If one is not selfish, one’s desires are all humanity, propriety, and righteousness; if one is not partial, one’s emotions must be gentle and fair; if one is not blinded, one’s intelligence must be what is known as the sagely wisdom.

(欲之失為私，私則貪邪隨之矣；情之失為偏，偏則乖戾隨之矣；知之失為蔽，蔽則差謬隨之矣。不私，則其欲皆仁也，皆禮義也；不偏，則其情必和易而平恕也；不蔽，則其知乃所謂聰明聖智也。)

In Dai Zhen’s understanding, there is nothing wrong with human desires and emotions per se, but mishaps and errors occur when the original correct and just *yu* or *qing* goes amiss.

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77 No. 30, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 197.
Therefore, “yiqing xieqing” can be seen as a practical measure offered by Dai Zhen to prevent qing from erring. Specifically, in my view, “yiqing xieqing” is carried out through “fangong” 反躬 (return to oneself and self-examination). Because qing pertains to me as well as to others, human desires and emotions are not merely an individual thing but a contextual or communal matter as well. Henceforth it becomes extremely important for one to check one’s own desires and emotions with reference to those of others. Dai Zhen says, “Whatever I do to others, I should return to myself and think quietly: If other people act to me in this way, could I accept it? Whenever I demand something of others, I should return to myself and think quietly: If other people demand the same thing of me, could I exhaust my efforts? Whenever I can put myself in other people’s position, principle is manifest” (凡有所施於人, 反躬而靜思之: 人以此施於我, 能受之乎? 凡有所責於人, 反躬而靜思之: ‘人以此責於我, 能盡之乎?’以我絜之人, 則理明)? Particularly, “If I put myself in the situations of the weak, the minority, the dull and the timid as well as those of the sick, the old and the young, the orphaned and the childless and then think about how they live and what they feel, would these people in any way be different from me” (誠以弱、寡、愚、怯與夫疾病、老幼、孤獨, 反躬而思其情。人豈異於我)! Also, “Return to oneself is to think what I feel if others would indulge in their desires” ( 反躬者，以人之逞其欲，思身受之之情也). In all these cases, “return to oneself” suggest role taking in the sense of changing perspectives, or making oneself the measure for dealing with other people. In brief, “yiqing xueqing” in the form of “fangong” is proposed to guide moral conduct with a formal procedure, in which one imaginatively puts oneself in the place of the others. We may say that “yiqing xieqing” embodies the spirit of “zhongshu” 忠恕 (the way of loyalty and reciprocity) that crystallizes the essence of Confucian ethics: “If one wishes to establish oneself, one also establishes others; if one wishes to be prominent oneself, one also helps others to be

78 No. 2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.152.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
prominent” (己欲達而達人,己欲立而立人)\textsuperscript{81} and “Don’t do to others what you do not wish others to do upon you” (己所不欲,勿施於人).\textsuperscript{82} These two formulations, often read as the Confucian “golden rule” and “silver rule,” are the very expression of ren 仁 (humanity) in both its positive and negative forms.

To Dai Zhen, what people like or dislike is but human ordinary feelings. Although there is no word about li, principle is fully realized in here\textsuperscript{83}. For this reason, “If I gauge others against myself, principle will be apparent” (以我絜之人,則理明).\textsuperscript{84} But “If one cannot return to oneself, heavenly principle will extinguish” (不能反躬,天理滅矣).\textsuperscript{85} And, “If I gauge others’ feelings and situation with my own feelings and situation, there is no desire and emotion that does not arrive at its fairness and balance” (以我之情絜人之情,而無不得其平是也).\textsuperscript{86} Hence, by “qing that does not err,” Dai Zhen means that one is able to exchange one’s position with others to sympathetically understand others’ feelings and situation to take appropriate action for the interest and benefit of other people. When one is justifiable to satisfy one’s own desires, one must also care about others people’s desires and needs. If one lacks sympathy, his or her desires will become selfish and self-centered and hence go amiss. Once the way of reciprocity comes into play, yu is ren wherein resides the heavenly principle “tianli.”

Here, I want to argue that Dai Zhen’s “yiqing xieqing” prescribes a moral deliberation that is premised on things or actual reality. This can be understood from two respects: First, qing

\textsuperscript{81} The Analects of Confucius 15:24; also see 15:3.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. 6:30.
\textsuperscript{83} See no. 5, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.155.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} No. 2 The Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.152.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
either as the measure to gauge or as the object to be gauged bespeaks the reality of human
existence that is common to everyone; second, *qing* as the feelings and sentiments accompanying
“*yiqing xieqing*” occurs upon one’s encounter with the concrete situations. With an emphasis on
the influence of actual reality on human moral judgment on the one hand and the responsive
feelings of our human heart and mind on the other, “to gauge *qing* with *qing*” presupposes a
dynamic interaction between the self and the other and between one’s inner subjective feelings
and the external situation.

For Dai Zhen, there does not exist a so-called metaphysical principle *li* or *tianli*, which is but the
order and pattern present in the things of the world. With respect to physical things, *li* is their
physical patterning or structure visible as “*fenli*” (division and patterning 分理), “*jili*” (skin
texture 肌理), “*couli*” (skin texture or the natural fiber under skin腠理), “*wenli*” (veins,
structural pattern 文理), and “*tiaoli*” (orderly pattern 條理). When applied to human life, *li*
is expressed as “*renai pingshu*” (humanity, love, fairness, and reciprocity). He says,
“What is called as heavenly principle refers to the natural or spontaneous division and patterning;
and what we mean by the natural or spontaneous division and patterning is to use my feelings
and situations to gauge those of others. Thus, there is nothing that is unfair.” With Dai Zhen,
the physical world and the human world are analogous in that both have within themselves
inherent structures and patterns. If we can discern and follow these patterns, we will be able to
well grasp the reality wherein we are situated and abide the so-called principle. Dai Zhen’s
reading of the story of the Cook Ding of the *Zhuangzi* is very illustrative in this regard. He
writes, “*Tian li*’ is what is meant by the saying that ‘There are spaces between the joints, and the

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87 See no. 2, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 151: “Principles” (*li*), designates the subtle
incipiencies that must be distinguished according to kind when (something) is examined; thus, it is called “pattern”
(*fenli*). With regard to the physical substance of things one speaks “skin texture” (*jili*), of “capillary passages”
(*couli*), of “structural pattern” (*wenli*). (When something is) in its proper place, well-ordered and not confused, it is
called “orderly” (*tiaoli*) (“理者,察之而幾微必區以別之名也,是故謂之分理;在物之質，曰肌理，曰腠理，

88 See no. 1, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 151.

89 No. 2, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 152.
blade of the knife has no thickness….You insert what has no thickness into such spaces.' This is just like the natural patterning” (天理, 即其所謂 “彼節者有間, 而刀刃者無厚, 以無厚入有間”, 適如其天然之分理也). Cook Ding has cut up the ox with such a super skill and ease that he has never touched any smallest ligament wherever his knife goes. This is because he always gone along with the natural makeup and followed things as they are. In light of Dai Zhen, a moral agent who carries out “renai pingshu” 仁愛平恕 (humanity, love, fairness, and reciprocity) is comparable to the Zhuangzian Cook Ding who does not adhere to an abstract principle imposed from outside but rather readily follows the intrinsic natural patterns. As such, it is not tianli but the inherent physical patterning of the concrete reality instead that provides us with the necessary premise for our moral judgment. To illustrate Dai Zhen’s position, I will cite again the following paragraph from Dai Zhen:

Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things but are received by my blood and breath; principle and righteousness reside in affairs but are received by my intelligent mind. Blood, breath and the intelligent mind have their own inherent capacities: the mouth is able to distinguish flavors, the ear to distinguish sounds, the eye to distinguish colors, and the heart to distinguish principle and righteousness. Tastes, sounds, and colors reside in things and not in me, but when they are received by my blood and breath, (whose faculties) can distinguish and take delight in them, and what delights me must be what is particularly fine; principle and righteousness reside in the order and patterns of the things and affairs, but when they are received by my intelligent mind, (whose faculties) can distinguish and take delight in them, and what delights me must be what is the utmost upright.

90 See no. 2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 152.
Since principle lies with things rather than with me, to gauge qing with qing is to follow this inherent order or patterning. Human moral discernment and sympathetic feelings arise from our experiential knowledge and understanding of the reality where we are situated with respect to the others. By this means, it also prevents us from taking our subjective feelings as the measure “to gauge qing with qing.” If deprived of the basis of reality, our subjective feelings can simply become some personal “opinions.” 92 Furthermore, according to Dai Zhen, because of the fact that principle or pattern is inherent in things, it is undisputable that people may affirm alike what they hold and “to gauge qing with qing” thereby becomes possible. 93

Viewed from a different perspective, in relation to our earlier discussion of “shengsheng” 生生 that is always seen as creation and transformation in pattern and order, the reality of human desires and emotions—as the manifestation of the cosmic creativity—should presuppose fairness and balance, which can be seen as the translation of the natural order and pattern in the human sphere. Then, the alleged li is precisely the fairness and balance entailed in human desires and needs. To abide by tianli is to keep to—”ping” (fairness; balance). As far as qing is concerned, we have to be fair to other people, especially to those weak and marginalized groups of society:

91 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.155-6.
92 See Dai Zhen’s discussion on “yijian” 意見 (personal opinions) in no. 3, no. 4, and no. 5, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 153-6. For him, “yijian” is the harm of “bi” 蔽 (blindness) of one’s intelligence.
93 See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 155: “Now we say that principle is inherent in things, in what hearts all affirm alike. There is no doubt about this” (今日理在事情，於心之所同然，洵無可疑矣)
the widow, the orphan, the solitary, the old, and the young. *Li* is what is most apparent and attainable thing accompanying the most basic and essential reality of our daily life of drinking, eating, and having sex. As he claims, “In the writings of the Six Classics, Confucius, and Mencius, is there any case that principle has been taken as a kind of quasi thing external to the manifestation of human nature in feelings and desires and is put under harsh control?” (“六經、孔、孟之書，豈嘗以理為如有物焉，外乎人之性之發為情欲者，而強制之也哉!”)[94] The key to understanding Dai Zhen’s notion of “*li*” is not to take *li* as a static, abstract, and general principle but as something evolving and changing, concurrent with the concrete reality and situation. Principles are inseparable from things. Once removed from the concrete things on which it depends, *li* does not exist anymore. Thus, he claims that “principle lies in things” or “principle and righteousness reside in affairs but are received by my intelligent mind.” He transforms “you wu you ze”—Where there is a thing, there is its pattern— into his own formulation of “yu, qi wu; li, qi ze ye” (Desire is the thing and pattern its norm).[95]

In the process of gauging *qing* with *qing*, our moral deliberation must be accompanied with emotions and sentiments, which, according to Dai Zhen, are rooted in things as the outcome of our contact with the world. In this regard, his interpretive reading of the Mencian “ceyin zhixin” (the heart of commiseration) offers us a revealing example that well illustrates his understanding of human feelings of sympathy as inseparable from both the physical makeup of human nature and the encountered concrete reality. Dai Zhen thus writes,

> The intelligent mind in the concrete situations of human relationships and daily activities knows sympathy, knows shame and dislike, knows respect and yielding,

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94 No. 11, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quan Shu*, Vol. VI p. 161.

95 No. 10, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quan Shu*, Vol. VI p. 160.
knows right and wrong, and is able to pick up these clues. This is what is meant by saying that nature is good….Mencius says, “Now if people suddenly see a kid on the verge of falling into a well, they all will be feeling anxious and distressed. However, the so-called sympathy and humanity is not “as if there were such a thing stored within the heart” apart from the heart’s knowing. Because humans have already known cherishing life and fear about death, they will worry over the kid’s danger and grieve at the kid’s death. If devoid of the heart of cherishing life and fear about death, where is there the heart of commiseration? Extending to shame and dislike, respect and yielding, right and wrong, it is the same.

(然人之心知，於人倫日用，隨在而知惻隱，知羞惡，知恭敬辭讓，知是非，端緒可舉，此之謂性善。……孟子言‘今人乍見孺子將入井，皆有休惕惻隱之心’，然則所謂惻隱、所謂仁者，非心知之外別‘如有物焉藏於心’也，己知懷生而畏死，故休惕於孺子之危，惻隱於孺子之死，使無懷生畏死之心，又焉有休惕惻隱之心？推之羞惡、辭讓、是非亦然).96

Dai Zhen strikingly reads anew this classical parable of “the kid on the verge of falling into the well.”97 For more than two thousand years the heart of pity and compassion that has provoked millions of people to respond and act, with Dai Zhen, turns into the heart cherishing life and fearing death in response to a fatal occasion. As if one at the sight of the kid would envision his/her own fate, sympathy arises in the heart. Thus, in light of Dai Zhen, the reason that a person would suffer at (or worry over or sympathize with) other people’s sufferings and

96 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.183-4 ; See Ewell, 1990, pp. 247-8.

97 Irene Bloom makes an amusing and thoughtful comment on Mencius’s famous parable. She says, “The telling evocation of the child about to fall into a well in Mengzi 2A6 is, of course, the most famous moment in the book, the analogue, in terms of its memorability and power, to Plato’s cave in the Republic. For more than two thousand years, and this child has been hovering on the edge of the well, in danger of a fatal plunge, untold millions of readers have responded, out of their humanity, knowing that Mengzi must be right about the mind characterized by pity and compassion.” (See Irene Bloom, “Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature,” in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi. 2002, p.75.)
misfortunes is not because he has already had the so-called feeling of sympathy or sprout of humanity stored in the heart but simply because man knows cherishing life and fearing death from birth. Against a tradition immersed in the influence of the Mencian commiseration, this is definitely an astonishing claim to play down the sympathy “stored within the heart.” If what characterizes human nature is not “ce yin” 悻隱 (the heart of commiseration) or the “si duan” 四端 (the four good beginnings) but a more instinctive and impulsive feeling of “cherishing life and fearing death” instead, then, we have to re-think about the Mencian notion of sympathy. Rather than an innate feeling by birth, for Dai Zhen, sympathy is but an experiential knowledge obtained upon the interaction of the heart/mind with the encountered situation. As things (seeing the possible death of the kid for instance) fall upon me, my heart and mind (the one cherishing about life and fear about death) is opened up to respond and thereby become susceptible to their influence. We may say that this is what Dai Zhen means by saying that “suizai erzhi” 隨在而知 (knowing upon the circumstances), which draws our attention to the encounter of the intelligent mind with the concrete living situations. The feelings of sympathy and commiseration are the very outcome of the interface between the affection of things and the susceptibility of our heart and mind. In the same way, Dai Zhen talks about 理義接於我之心知 (principle and righteousness gets in touch with my knowing mind). It is the fact that principle and righteousness (liyi) present in things gets in touch with my knowing mind that enables me to know liyi and take delight in it. As if before getting in touch with the world, I was merely some physical stuff without soul (i.e. a human not in full sense, a human yet to become). Nonetheless, at the moment of encountering the world: the ear to the sounds, the eye to the sounds, and the heart/mind to the order and patterns, I come alive as if being infused with life and spirit. Although human beings are potentially driven towards liyi, it is at the moment of my encounter with the others that I receive the knowledge, i.e. the content of liyi. The external order and patterns of things are henceforth transformed into my subjective ethical feelings of sympathy and love.

“When he moves in response to things, these are the nature’s desires” (the Yueji 樂記). In the writings of Confucian thinkers of the antiquity like Xunzi and the authors of the Liji, desire is
viewed negatively as human responsive feelings upon the external stimuli. In their readings, “gan” 感 (being affected, moved, and stimulated) generates people’s response to the external influence. Beautiful colors may stimulate our sense of sight, pleasant sounds our sense of hearing, agreeable aroma our sense of smell, and pleasing flavor our sense of taste. If desires cannot be checked properly, they will corrupt human hearts to bring about deeds of evils. Thus, human susceptibility to external influence is considered a weakness of human nature that may lead people to their self-interest and potentially endanger society. Nonetheless, I want to argue that with Dai Zhen this being subjected to influence is of great ethical value. Just as we know the world by being “affected” by its ‘sensible qualities’ of colors, sounds, shapes, positions, tastes, smells and so forth, desires indicate our awareness of the other. Owing to this being able to be affected, the human being is no longer a closed entity that is immune to the pains and sufferings of the others. Desire is this very driving force to open us up to the others. To satisfy my desires is to satisfy the desires of a human being and thereby makes me sensible to what others may need and want. In this sense desires are no longer the bare facts of eating, drinking and having sex that are indispensable to human existence, they are also an awakening light to reveal to us the needs of others. Without this wakening, we would be numb to the sadness and sorrow of those longing for love and deaf to the cries of the hungry and sick.98 He writes,

If one did not have the heart cherishing life and fearing about death, how could he have the heart of alarm and commiseration? By extension to (the hearts of) shame and dislike, propriety, right and wrong, the same is true. If one were to rid oneself completely of hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and all that pertains to response to physical stimulus, in order to return to tranquility and singleness: how could there be shame and dislike, propriety, and the judgment about right and wrong? From this it may be understood that humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom consists in nothing other than the fact that love of life, fear of death, hunger, thirst,

98 See no. 40, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quan Shu. Vol. VI, p. 211.
sexual desire, and all that pertains to response to physical stimulus cannot be cast away in order to return to tranquility and singleness.

(使無懷生畏死之心，又焉有休愾側隱之心？推之羞恥、辭讓、是非亦然。使飲食男女與夫感於物而動者脫然無之，以歸於靜，歸於一，又焉有羞恥，有辭讓，有是非？此可以明仁義禮智非他，不過懷生畏死，飲食男女，與夫感於物而動者之皆不可脫然無之，以歸於靜，歸於一。)^99

By these words, Dai Zhen does not simply mean that all principles or moral rules are derived from the concrete human existence. But, specifically, without the knowledge of hunger, thirst, sexual attraction and the impetus to fulfill them, there will be no virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom that remain at the core of Confucian ethics. As he says similarly elsewhere,

There can be no greater affliction in a human life than lacking the means to fulfill life. If, desiring to fulfill one’s own life, one also fulfills the life of the others, this is humanity. If, desiring to fulfill one’s own life, one reaches the point even of slaying others and paying no heed, this is inhumanity. The inhumanity actually begins with the desire to fulfill one’s life, and if there were no such desire, necessarily there would be no inhumanity. But if there were no such desire, then one would also see other people’s affliction and distress in the world with indifference. There is not such a thing that one can fulfill the life of others without a need to fulfill one’s own.

(人之生也，莫病於無以遂其生。欲遂其生，亦遂人之生，仁也；欲遂其生，至於戕人之生而不顧者，不仁也。不仁，實始於欲遂其生之心；使其

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^99 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 184; See Ewell. 247.
 Humanity does not arise from the denial of human desires. Rather, they constitute the common reality shared by me and all other human beings as well. When we take other people’s desires into consideration in pursuit of our own, humanity prevails. By “gauging others’ qing with my qing,” one is able to situate oneself in other people’s positions to feel their pains and needs and henceforth promote not just my own wellbeing but their wellbeing as well. Dai Zhen thereby offers us a practical remedy for inhumanity that may be induced by our indulgence in desires.

III.  

知 (knowing): “Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom is nothing else but where the brightness of the mind reaches its farthest, where knowing gets to its utmost measure.”

If we say that “to gauge qing with qing” provides people with an appropriate way to pursue the satisfaction of human desires and needs, then, in my opinion, “zhī” 知 (knowing; knowledge) guarantees its operation. Or, we may say that “to gauge qing with qing” per se is the attainment of zhī. In this section, our discussion will focus on “zhī,” the third composite part of the tripartite “yu” (desire), “qing” (feelings), and “zhī” (knowing) of human nature to investigate Dai Zhen’s proposed agenda to enhance people’s knowing capacity through expanding their intelligent mind. I argue that “xué” 學 (learning) or “xué” and “wen” 問 (questioning) as well as “sī” 思 (thinking), which reveal discernible influence from both Xunzi and Mencius, are the very spiritual exercise program that Dai Zhen has put forth for the advancement of the human intelligent mind.

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100 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 159-160.
As discussed in the first section, by *yu* Dai Zhen particularly refers to the desire of blood and breath, namely human basic biological and appetitive needs. Only in reference to the sages, Dai Zhen adopts the word “*yu*” to describe the sages’ delight in moral excellence.① Dai Zhen considers *yu* the way of sustaining and nurturing life, that is, the “*shengyang zhidao*” 生養之道 (the way of production and nourishment). Speaking of *qing*, it points to human inter-subjectivity wherein the one that is engaged in one’s own survival and enjoyment of living relates oneself to the outside world and other human beings. As such, in Dai Zhen *qing* shows people’s capacity of being affected by and connected to the world and its people. He calls this the *gantong zhidao* 感通之道 (the way of feeling, understanding, and being connected). As regards the third component *zhi*, it indicates the cognitive capacity of the human intelligent mind. In Dai Zhen’s thought, these three dimensions of human nature are intrinsically linked to each other yet in the meantime retain each their respective functions and intended objectives. He says, “The blood, breath, and the intelligent mind each have their own inherent capacities: the mouth is able to distinguish flavors, the ear to distinguish sounds, the eye to distinguish colors, and the heart to distinguish principle and righteousness” (血氣心知, 有自具之能: 口能辨味, 耳能辨聲, 目能辨色, 心能辨夫理義).② The bodily organs take delight in sensual pleasures, while the faculty of the heart and mind in order and righteousness. Thus, analogically, we may say that “*zhi*” (knowing) is precisely the desire of the intelligent mind, which seeks after “*yide*” 懿德 (moral excellence) which is *li* 禮 (propriety), which is *liyi* 理義 (order or principle and righteousness).

However, we cannot emphasize more that for Dai Zhen “*liyi*” does not exist somewhere else beyond but right within our daily livelihood and human relationships (*renlun riyong* 人倫日用). *Liyi* is simply the way in which one can examine one’s own desires and emotions with reference to others so that ultimately no one is left without his or her desire realized and feelings expressed. Just as the cosmic creative force “*shengsheng*” is always creation after creation in pattern and

① See No. 15, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p.171: “As regards the desire of the sages, it is nothing else but moral excellence” (聖人之欲，無非懿德).

② No. 6, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 156. Also, see Ch. II, note 105, p. 71.
order, likewise, as the embodiment of human creativity, desire already implies within itself the
pattern and order to request one to pursue not merely his or her own needs and happiness but also
the wellbeing and flourishing of the human community. This is exactly what Dai Zhen has
advocated: “Desire is the thing and the pattern its norm” (欲，其物; 理，其則也) in following the
Shijing’s formulation: “Where there is a thing, there is its pattern.”\textsuperscript{103} However, except for the
sages who can fully fulfill desire in “timin suiyu”（體驗遂欲）(experientially understanding the
common people’s feelings and desires and helping them fulfill them), it is actually not easy for
the ordinary people to pursue desire that is commensurate with its inherent pattern or principle.
For this very reason, Dai Zhen urges people to advance their intelligent mind from the incipient
luminosity to the godlike illumination. What holds crucial for Dai Zhen’s ethical thought is
precisely this developmental view of human intelligent mind. Everyone has the inherent
tendency or capacity towards goodness, i.e. knowing and striving for order, propriety, and
righteousness, but how to develop and advance the naturally built-in capacities requires
cultivation. For Dai Zhen this becomes an unending progress of constant efforts.

The Mencian ideas of “si” (thinking 思), “yang xin” (nourishing the heart-and-mind 養心) and
“kuo chong” (extending the original nature 擴充)\textsuperscript{104} have undoubtedly made a deep impact on
Dai Zhen’s thinking. But Dai Zhen is also under the influence of Xunzi to promote the role of
learning in expanding one’s heart and mind. For Dai Zhen, once man can extend his incipient
luminosity to the godlike illumination, he will not err with regard to his understanding of human
existence and relationships, i.e. riyou renlun. This knowledge “zhi” is the ultimate state that
“kuo chong” will finally take us to. I want to argue that the acquisition of this knowledge
necessitates “si” (thinking 思) and “xue” (learning 學) or “wenxue” (questioning and learning問
學) which are indispensable to each other and constitute the core program of Dai Zhen’s spiritual

\textsuperscript{103} No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{104} See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156: “This is what the Zhongyong means by saying
that ‘Although one is dull, he can surely be enlightened’ and what Mencius means by saying that ‘The sage is the
one who expands the heart and mind to the full’ (此中庸‘雖愚必明’，孟子‘擴而充之謂聖人).
exercise of “kuo chong.” According to Dai Zhen, every living creature has incipient luminosity, but only human beings can advance to godlike illumination.\footnote{See no. 6, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 156: “What distinguishes human beings from other animals lie in the fact that only human beings can advance to godlike illumination (shenming) although they both have germinal intelligence or incipient luminosity” (人之異於禽獸者, 雖同有精爽, 而人能進於神明也。}).\footnote{See no. 15, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 168-9: “What distinguishes human beings from other animals lie in the fact that man can comprehend what is necessary while the hundred creatures each fulfill their own nature” (夫人之異於物者, 人能明於必然, 百物之生各遂其自然也。). See Ewell, 1990, p.192.} For this reason, human beings do not know cherishing life and fear about death alone as all other animals do, but more significantly, they know humanity, righteousness, and propriety and can thereby advance from what is natural (\textit{ziran} 自然) to what is necessary (\textit{biran} 必然).\footnote{The \textit{Zuozhuan—Zhao Gong Ershi Wu Nian} 左傳—昭公 25年 (The Zuo’s Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn—the 25th Year of Duke Zhao) in the WYG e-SKQS; see Dai Zhen’s citation in \textit{Yuan Shan} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p.16.} We may say that in the process of extending the intelligent mind to the godlike illumination, the humans are transformed from natural beings into moral beings. Our investigation of “\textit{zhi}” will then follow this process of advancement from \textit{jingshuang} to \textit{shenming}.

To begin with, we will first look at these two characteristic vocabularies of “\textit{jingshuang}” 精爽 (the incipient luminosity) and “\textit{shenming}” 神明 (the godlike illumination) in Dai Zhen’s philosophy. The \textit{Zuo zhuan} says, “The quintessence and brightness of the mind is called the spiritual soul and the bodily soul” (心之精爽, 是謂魂魄). According to the definition of the \textit{Zuo zhuan}, “\textit{jingshuang}” 精爽 (quintessence and brightness) is “\textit{hun po}” 魂魄 (spiritual soul and bodily soul). Then, what does “\textit{hun po}” refer to in Dai Zhen’s writings? Dai Zhen does not go on with the \textit{Zuo zhuan}’s explanation. Instead, he offers his own definition. He says, “All that have life are of incipient luminosity (\textit{jingshuang}). Those which participate in the fusion (\textit{rong} 融) of the vital force \textit{qi} and thus are sentient (\textit{ling} 靈) are identified as ‘bodily soul’ (\textit{po} 魄); and those that participate in the continuum (\textit{tong} 通) of the vital force \textit{qi} and thus are divinely intelligent (\textit{shen} 神) are identified as ‘spiritual soul’ (\textit{hun} 魂)” (凡有生則有精爽，從乎氣之融而靈，是以...
In Dai Zhen’s definition, “hun” is characterized with “tong” (open, connected, comprehending 通), namely being marvelously perceptive and intelligent while “po” is characterized with “rong” (in fusion and harmony 融), namely being marvelously receptive. According to Zi Chan (子張 503-? B.C.E), one of Confucius’ favorite disciples, “That which was formed at birth and began to develop is called the bodily soul. Since po is produced, there will be yang which is called spiritual soul” (子產言：‘人生始化曰魄，既生魄，陽曰魂). 108 In Confucius’ disciple, Zeng Can’s (曾參 505- 436 B.C.E) words, “The fine vital force of yang is called numen (shen神) and the fine vital force of yin is called spirit (ling 灵), which are the root of particular things” (子產言：‘人生始化曰魄，既生魄，陽曰魂). 109

Drawing on both Zi Chan and Zeng Can, Dai Zhen holds that hun po is the manifestation of the different functions of the creative creativity of the transformation of heaven and earth in human life. Accordingly, hun and po function differently in accordance with the virtue of heaven and the virtue of the earth respectively. The capacity of the ear to hear, the capacity of the eye to see, the capacity of the nose to smell, and the capacity of the mouth to taste are all the work of po or ling whose function is to receive. As regards the “jingshuang” of the mind whose function is to make judgment, it is the work of hun. Dai Zhen says, “The one that governs giving is to judge and the one that governs receiving is to listen” (主施者斷，主受者聽). 111 In this light, hun is giving (shi 施) so that it judges (shi 斷) and po receiving (shou 受) so that it listens (ting 聽). Henceforth, hun that judges is in the position of administration while po that listens is submissive

108 The Yuan Shan in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.16.
109 The Zuozhuan—Zhao Gong qi nian左傳—昭公七年 (The Zuo’s Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn—the 7th Year of Duke Zhao) in the WYG E-SKQS; See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.
110 Ibid.
111 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.
Here, Dai Zhen ascribes the faculty of “jingshuang” to hun alone and thereby distinguishes the function of the mind from that of blood and breath, namely the ear, the eye, the nose, the mouth in terms of hun and po. Although xueqi xinzhi each has its own functions, due to the different positions and functions of hun and po as ethereal versus the earthly and judging versus listening, jingshuang or xinzhi has the function to judge and direct the functions of xueqi. Dai Zhen’s approach to jingshuang is obviously different from that of the Zuozhuan, which identifies jingshuang with hun po together. But despite this disparity of their views, for Dai Zhen, jingshuang is intimately related to the functions of other bodily organs just as the hun and po are inseparable from each other. This is because xinzhi like xueqi is likewise biologically or physically constituted and henceforth is physically connected with man’s xueqi.

Here it is of interest to note a crucial point Dai Zhen has made about jingshuang. He says, “As regards the quintessence of the mind, once there is thinking, it will be opened and able to understand. This is the work of the spiritual soul, the so-called hun” (心之精爽，有思輒通，魂之為也，所謂神也，陽主施者也。). “Si” 想 (thinking) as the function of hun preconditions the comprehending capability of jingshuang. In other words, without “si,” jingshuang or xinzhi is merely some material stuff or some finest essence of material at most. But “thinking” gives jingshuang soul and thereby infuses it with life. For si is the soul hun. For Dai Zhen, to understand is “tong” (open, understand; opened, connected) which implies “openness” and comprehension without being blocked. Henceforth, understanding presumes a connection, a linkage between the knowing subject and the known object. As he says, “Humans and other living beings receive their bodily form from heaven and earth, and therefore are always

112 See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.

113 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156. Also, see no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 183: (“As regards the intelligent mind, once there is thinking, there will be thorough understanding” (人之心知，有思輒通).

114 For this reason, I find John Ewell’s translation of jingshuang as “incipient luminosity” well captures Dai Zhen’s point to take jingshuang as something still incipient and potential. See Ewell, 1990, Notes to Section 6, notes 13 & 14, p. 132.
The ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth as the apertures of the body are open so that they are perceptible to the world, with which they come into contact. In the same manner, jingshuang or xinzhi must be open so that it can comprehend what is presented to the mind. This is because if the mind is not open, i.e. blocked, there will be “bi” (obstruction and concealment) and once there is obstruction, people’s knowing will err. Because jingshuang is the very state that one’s intelligent mind is still at the stage of “bige” (being blocked up in isolation) without being opened up yet, people have to exert their inherent faculty of “si” (thinking) to make their xinzhi open itself. Once there is no obstruction, nothing will be incomprehensible to the mind; then one can advance from jingshuang to shenming, the godlike illumination. In light of this understanding, we may say that jingshuang is the initial form of shenming. Conversely, shenming can be seen as jingshuang in its full development. “Si” (thinking) plays a key role in this extending process.

John Knoblock makes a comment in light of the Zuozhuan, “Shenming is present from beginning of life itself.” Also, as Edward Machle remarks, “In Zuozhuan (Zao 7) shenming is

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115 No. 8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 158); see Ewell 1990, p. 138.

116 See no. 8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 158: “When what is external and what is internal communicate with each other, there are open apertures of the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth” (外內相通，其開竅也，是為耳目鼻口).

117 See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156: “Jingshuang is the incipient luminosity of the mind being blocked up and unable to comprehend. Until the moment when the mind is no longer concealed, there will be nothing that it cannot understand. We call this godlike illumination” (精爽有蔽隔而不能通之時，及其無蔽隔，無弗通，乃以神明稱之). There are several different English translations of shenming. The examples given here are from the translations of Xunzi and Dai Zhen’s works. “godlike understanding” (Burton Watson 1963, 17-8), “divine clarity of intelligence” or “spirit-like intelligence” (John Knoblock, Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works, Vol. I, Book I, pp. 138, 253), “divine enhancement” (Edward Machle 1993, 159), “supreme intelligence” (Chung-ying Cheng 1969, 146), “spiritual brilliance” (John Ewell 1990, 132), “divine percipience” (Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman, 1990, 77).

118 See John Knoblock, Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works, Volume I, Books 1-6, 1988, p. 254. But Knoblock’s nascent or divine shenming obviously cannot be quite fittingly applied to Dai Zhen’s developmental shenming, namely the shenming to be obtained through one’s later efforts of extension.
considered the final fruition of the human spirit ( Hun), which is added, under the influence of yang, shortly after the beginning of life, to the yin animal soul ( Po) present at conception. These souls make use of material things to grow toward maturity, with shenming as the ultimate goal."  Although Dai Zhen does not really take the Zuozhuan’s explanation on jingshuang and shenming, it seems to me that he has received the Zuozhuan’s idea to maintain the continuity between these two concepts. The notion of shenming is seen in many other early Confucian, Daoist and Mohist texts and has two basic meanings with one religious referring to deity or gods and the other philosophical indicating godlike intelligence and wisdom. Presumably, Dai Zhen has also drawn on these sources to form his idea of shenming, but it is quite evident that Dai Zhen’s thought reveals much of Xunzi’s influence. In Dai Zhen’s speculation, shenming carries no religious implication. By shenming, he means the penetrating power of human intelligent mind that can perceive anything without fallacy. To borrow Knoblock’s words, “It (shenming) suggests a ‘divine’ or ‘magical’ clarity and sharpness of awareness, unmediated by conscious effort, which enable those who possess it to discern subtle and minute distinctions that others miss.” Knoblock’s explanation well captures the characteristics of the notion. However, shenming for Dai Zhen as is for Xunzi can never come “unmediated by conscious effort.” Rather, as Xunzi exhorts in his appealing language of metaphors, shenming is the result of continuous efforts. He says,


128
Pile up earth to make a mountain and wind and rain will rise up from it. Pile up water to make a deep pool and dragons will appear. Pile up good deeds to create virtue and godlike understanding will come of itself; there the mind of the sage will find completion. But unless you pile up little steps, you can never journey a thousand *li*; unless you pile up tiny stream, you can never make a river or a sea. The finest thoroughbred cannot travel ten paces in one leap, but the sorriest nag can go a ten days’ journey. Achievement consists of never giving up. If you start carving and then give up, you cannot even cut through a piece of rotten wood; but if you persist without stopping, you can carve and inlay metal or stone.

积土成山，风雨兴焉；积水成渊，蛟龙生焉；积善成德，而神明自得，圣心备焉。故不积跬步，无以致千里；不积小流，无以成江海。骐骥一跃，不能十步；驽马十驾，功在不舍。锲而舍之，朽木不折；锲而不舍，金石可镂。

For both Xunzi and Dai Zhen, *shenming* that aims at the godlike illumination of the sages is the outcome of the accumulative efforts and constant transformation. With Dai Zhen the way towards *shenming* becomes a continuous process of extension “kuo chong” (擴充) which, in my view, takes on the functions of both “si” (thinking 思) and “xue” (learning 學) or “wenxue” (questioning and learning 問學). While in Xunzi human good deeds and beautiful virtues come from a continuous and conscious effort of learning the sages’ rituals and music (*liyue* 礼樂), with Dai Zhen people obtain humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom (*ren yi li zhi* 仁義禮智) via modeling after the sages’ words and acts. To be sure, Xunzi’s idea of *shenming* has left an indelible mark on Dai Zhen’s thinking, but different from Xunzi, Dai Zhen makes it very clear that *shenming* is the ultimate goal of the moral project of extending the mind.

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In Dai Zhen’s view, all living creatures have *jingshuang* but only humans can reach *shenming*. This means that human knowledge or knowing obtained from their *jingshuang* or *xinzhi* is actually shared by animals as well. *Jingshuang* as the germinal mental faculty offers people no other knowledge than an awareness of cherishing life and fear about life, seeking after benefits and avoiding harms.\(^\text{124}\) If human beings stop at this phase, then they do not differ much from other animals. However, owing to the fact that the human *jingshuang* or *xinzhi* is actually different from that of animals’ in that the human *jingshuang* can be “opened” and “connected” to the outside world (*tong* or *kaitong* 通, 開通) while the *jingshuang* of animals cannot. As a result, once the human intelligent mind is open, human knowing and understanding will reach a new phase. Revealingly, Dai Zhen defines this knowing (*zhi*) as “*tong*” (open, connected, comprehending 通). He says, “What the mind is open to or connected with is knowing” (心之所通曰知).\(^\text{125}\) Then, what is the mind supposed to be open to or connected with?

From our earlier discussion on Dai Zhen’s notion of human nature, we seem to get the answer already. According to him, just as the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth are disposed towards sounds, colors, smells, and tastes, the mind is disposed towards principle and righteousness (*liyi* 礼义). In this light, we can say that to know is to open one’s mind towards order and righteousness and knowing is the knowledge of principle or order and righteousness per se. However, even though the human mind is open towards principle and righteousness and henceforth distinguishes humans from animals, if one fails to nourish one’s mind, to cultivate it, and to extend it, one’s capacity or potentiality to know principle and righteousness may get lost too. Thus, humans differ from animals not because of their incipient luminosity *jingshuang* or *xinzhi* but significantly owing to the fact that only humans can reach godlike illumination *shenming*. On this Dai Zhen makes a remarkable comment. He writes,

\(^\text{124}\) See no. 21; no. 22, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, pp. 181, 185.

\(^\text{125}\) No. 21, the *Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 183.
As to the birds that feed their aged mothers in return, the water pigeons that keep
conjugal distinction, the bees and ants that know being ruler and subject, and the
wolves and the otters that offer up their preys, their behaviors match what humans
call humanity and righteousness, but they each in fact follow their own animal’s
nature. Humans, however, are able to extend their learning so as to get to godlike
illumination; and humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are thus all
complete. Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom is nothing else but
where the brightness of the mind reaches its farthest, where knowing reach its
utmost measure.

(若夫鳥之反哺，雎鴦之有別，蜂蠣之知君臣，豺之祭獸，獺之祭魚，合於人
之所謂仁義者矣，而各由性成。人則能擴充其知至於神明，仁義禮智無不全
也。仁義禮智非他，心之明之所止也，知之極其量也。知覺運動者，人物之
生；知覺運動之所以異者，人物之殊其性。) 126

Even in terms of ren, yi, li, zhi, animals may resemble human beings in their behavioral patterns.
What really distinguishes human beings from animal resides in the fact that human beings alone
can extend their nature to the full. Thus, to be human demands a human being to advance his or
her knowing of jingshuang to shenming and hereby fundamentally sets him/herself off from
animals. When human xinzhi attains the godlike illumination, human knowing capacity will
arrive at an utterly new level. Henceforth, as far as “zhì” is concerned, it is not simply a
cognitive function in its ordinary sense but a moral illumination. We may say that the process of
extending one’s jingshuang or xinzhi to shenming is a process of becoming a true human being.

126 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 183; See Ewell, 1990, p. 245.
Viewed from a different angle, the unevenness among human beings with respect to their natural endowments also makes “kuo chong” a necessary ethical project. The distance between the dull and the sages necessitates human conscious efforts to extend their intelligent mind to reach godlike illumination. Dai Zhen adopts Mencius’s claim that human nature is good but stresses that human natural dispositions are not without graduations from the very beginning. To Dai Zhen, humans are endowed with the natural capacity towards goodness, but their inherent capacity varies from person to person. Some people are endowed with higher capacity and some are lower. Except for the sages who can apprehend first what hearts affirm alike—principle and righteousness, common people are rarely not obscured.  

Nonetheless, the limitation of our given natural capacity can never prevent us from attaining the godlike illumination because learning can assist one to make up our inborn deficiencies to obtain the great clarity of the mind.  

To Dai Zhen, the distinction between the dull and sages in their capacity of knowing good is less determined by their natural endowments than by the later nourishments. One can compensate one’s inborn deficiency with learning so as so to extend one’s mind. As he also says, “People may be wise or dull, but rarely is there the case that the wise is far distant from the dull” (人雖有智有愚，大致相近，而智愚之甚遠者蓋鮮。) 

To support his view, he cites the Zhongyong saying: “Though one is dull, one will surely be...

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127 See no. 4, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 153: “Since people are not sages, they can hardly be without obstruction and concealment, of which some may be deep and some may be shallow” (自非聖人，鮮能無蔽；有蔽之深，有蔽之淺者).

128 See no. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156: “The loss of order is due to the concealment of the mind. This is so-called being dull. Only through learning can one add goodness to what is in lack and thereby advance one’s intelligence. To increase ceaselessly to the ultimate state is like the sun and the moon shining bright. When one’s countenance is shining with brightness, then, one is the sage. This is precisely what the Zhongyong says that ‘Though one is dull, one will be enlightened’ and Mencius’s ‘extending the mind to the full is the sage’” (失理者，限於質之昧，所謂愚也。惟學可以增益其不足而進於智，益之不已，至乎其極，如日月有明，容光必照，則聖人矣。此中庸‘雖愚必明’，孟子‘擴而充之之謂聖人’).

129 No. 24, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 186.
illuminated” (雖愚必明). 130 Moreover, as discussed earlier, yu (desires) may err so as to become “si” (selfish), qing (feelings) may err so as to become “pian” (partial), and zhi (knowing) may err so as to become “bi” (obstructed, concealed). These possible failures also make it a practical necessity for people to constantly make conscious efforts to extend their mind to attain godlike illumination.

Undoubtedly, Dai Zhen’s ethical project of kuo chong featured by si (thinking 思) and xue (learning 學) which are intrinsically connected with each other yet each works in its own way to make shenming attainable. As for si, its major function is “tong” or “kai tong” (to open; to comprehend 通, 開通); regarding xue or wenxue, its major role is “zeng yi” (to enhance 增益) or “kuo chong” (extend 擴充). From my perspective, we have to look at these two aspects of the moral exercise of the advancement from jingshuang to shenming against two different backgrounds. That is, Dai Zhen proposes si with reference to animals and promotes xue with respect to the humankind. He remarks,

Humans and things are differentiated by kinds. Owing to what humans are endowed from birth, their vital energy is clear and bright and is thereby different from that of animals, which cannot be opened. But when compared with each other, how much difference do people have in talents and capacities? However, since the ancient sages knew that there were differences in talents and capacities among people, they emphasized inquiry and learning (wenxue) and valued extension.

130 See no. 9, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “Speaking of the intelligent mind, what was once narrow and small is now broad and great, and what was once concealed and dark is now clear and discerning. This is due to the intelligent mind having received nourishment. Therefore, there is the saying: Although one is dull, one will be enlightened” (以心知言, 昔者狹小而今也廣大, 昔者閶昧, 而今也明察, 是心知之得其養也, 故曰‘雖愚必明’).
In light of Dai Zhen’s philosophical thought, therefore, human beings have to first “think” (si) and second to “learn” (xue). Thinking is necessary because human intelligent mind needs to be “opened up” (tong, kaitong). According to Dai Zhen, both humans and animals have jingshuang, but only human intelligent mind can be “opened.” Consequently, humans distinguish themselves from animals exactly by their capacity to be opened up with regard to their intelligent mind.

Here si (thinking) holds the key. In Dai Zhen’s words, “As regards the incipient luminosity (jingshuang) of the mind, once there is thinking, there will be opening and hence understanding” (心之精爽, 有思輒通). Therefore, we can say that si is the faculty of jingshuang or xinzhi that is unique to human beings alone. In addition to “si,” people also need to “learn” (xue) or better “question and learn” (wenxue) because inquiry and learning will help people broaden their vision and sharpen their mind so as to enhance their knowing and advance their intelligent mind.

By analogy, Dai Zhen compares the human intelligent mind xinzhi to the light of fire, of which the original luminosity may be big or small, strong or weak. However, learning makes it shine bright, comparable to the light of the sun and the light of the moon. He says, “Only learning can add to it (jingshuang) what it lacks and henceforth advance its intelligence. To enhance it persistently up to the ultimate without stop, the brightness of the mind will be like that of the sun, of the moon with no little crevice of space left that the light does not shine upon. If it is so, the person will be a sage then” (惟學可以增益其不足而進於智, 益之不已, 至乎其極, 如日月有明, 容光必照, 則聖人矣。).

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131 No. 14, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 167.

132 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.

Similarly, see no. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 183: “As regards the intelligent mind, once there is thinking, there will be through understanding and no confusion about one’s doing” (人之心知，有思輒通，能不惑乎所行也。).

133 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.
To appropriate Mencius, Dai Zhen says, “Thinking is the faculty of the mind” (是思者，心之能也。).  
Mencius claims that the organ of the mind can think while the one hundred organs cannot. Similarly, Dai Zhen put forward, “Although the hundred organs are capable of sensing, only the sense of knowing of the mind is the greatest” (百體皆能覺，而心之知覺為大).

For the hundred organs, i.e. the bodily organs have senses for sounds, colors, smells, and tastes, but the organ of the mind perceives righteousness and propriety. In this sense, it may be said that thinking “si” is an awareness of righteousness and propriety. As Dai Zhen points out, hun is in charge of making judgment and po in subordinate position to listen or receive the judgment. Accordingly, as the main capacity of “hun,” “jingshuang,” or “xinzhi,” “si” has its major function in judging and guiding the functions of “po” or “xueqi.” Thus, “to think” is to judge the right or wrong of our bodily faculties of the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth. In other words, submitted to the governance of the mind, human bodily desires for sounds, colors, smells, and tastes must be under the scrutiny of order and righteousness. As Dai Zhen claims, “The organs of the ear, the nose and the mouth are the way of the subject and the organ of the mind the way of the sovereign. The subject exert their functions and the sovereign judge their being right or wrong” (耳鼻口之官，臣道也；心之官，君道也；臣效其能而君正其可否).

Seen from this point of view, si or thinking in Dai Zhen’s philosophy is essentially a moral discretion, which presupposes self-reflection and self-examination with reference to others. Whenever one takes others into consideration, si is at work. To use Dai Zhen’s formulations, it

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134 No. 6, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 156.
135 See Mencius VI A: 15: “The organs of hearing and sight are unable to think and can be misled by external things. When one thing acts on another, all it does is to attract it. The organ of the heart can think. But it will find the answer only if it does think” (耳目之官不思，而蔽於物。物交物，則引之而已矣。心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得也。—D.C. Lau trans. 1973, p. 168).
136 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI. p. 182; see Ewell, 1990, p. 244.
137 No. 8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 158.
is “yiqing xieqing” 以情絜情 (to gauge qing with qing) or “fangong er jing si” 反躬而靜思 (to return to oneself and think quietly). Whatever I do onto others, I should return to myself and think if other people do the same thing to me, could I accept it? Alternatively, if I were in the other’s position, how would I feel? Mencius made it very clear that as regards the nourishment of the heart, nothing is better than reducing one’s desires. But it seems to me that the Mencian self-examination is more appealing to Dai Zhen. For him, the nourishment of the heart does not necessarily mean to reduce one’s desires; rather, it rests on the cultivation of one’s heart-and-mind to make it more sensitive to and sympathetic for other people’s needs and feelings. Thinking enables people to withdraw to themselves to check and judge their own feelings and desires in relation to others to see if they comply with righteousness and propriety. In this light, si stands for not only a way of thinking but also a mode of living, a conscious self-examined life that entails an experiential understanding and consideration of the others. Paradoxically, the more one can return to one’s inner self, the more one is opened to the others and to the world.

Furthermore, si turns a retrospective mental activity into a reflective ethical act towards others on both individual and communal levels. From the individual’s perspective, si makes one think of others in one’s seeking for satisfaction of one’s own needs. From a communal perspective, si has a broader political implication of “ticha mingqing” 體察民情—to understand the common people’s everyday reality and ordinary feelings and desires to sustain their livelihood. Si obliges the ruler to attend to people’s wellbeing to conduct benevolent governances, under which there is no one whose feelings are not understood and whose desires are not satisfied. As described by Mencius, a benevolent government “will surely have people when looking above have sufficient wherewith to serve their parents and when looking below have sufficient wherewith to support their wives and children” and “indoors there is no girl grudging for being without husband and outside there is no man without a wife” (必使仰足以事父母, 俯足以畜妻子”; “內無怨女, 外

138 See the Mencius 7B35: “To nourish the heart and mind, nothing is better than reduce one’s desires” (養心莫善於寡欲); also see Dai Zhen’s explication in no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.159-160.

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In the Mencian benevolent government Dai Zhen finds the best embodiment of his political ideal. He says, “In governing the world under heaven, as the sage experientially understood the people’s feelings and helped them fulfill their desires, and the kingly way was completed” (聖人治天下，體民之情，遂民之欲，而王道備。). However, while Mencius emphasizes that the ruler or the princes share joy with his subject, Dai Zhen focuses on a sympathetic understanding of people’s pains and sufferings to help them fulfill their life. It is crucial with Dai Zhen that si not only involves making judgment and giving guidance but must turn into practice and action. From self-reflection and self-examination to conducting benevolent government, si accomplishes its process of opening the inner self to reach out the world.

As si breaks up the isolated and blocked self to leave it open and connected with others and the world, xue augments this capacity. Dai Zhen develops a way of nourishing the mind via inquiry and learning. He compares the process of enhancement and advancement via learning to the growth of the body through the nourishment of food. Learning helps the mind extend just as food makes the body grow. Human inborn capacity both enhances learning and is enhanced by learning. Just as the body needs to digest what is taken in, Dai Zhen thinks it very important to transform what is received from without. In the same way as nourishment enables the body to grow, learning makes the mind to expand so that what was formerly obscure becomes illuminating. He says, “Human xueqi xinzhi allotted from heaven is often uneven. Whether it can receive nourishment or not will definitely make big difference” (人之血氣心知，其天定者往往不齊，得養不得養，遂至於大異). Learning is such a process of growing and advancement accompanied with self-inquiry and self-reflection.

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139 The Mencius IA7; IB5; see Dai Zhen’s citations in no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 161.

140 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 161.

141 See no. 9, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “The intelligent mind relies on questioning and learning for nourishment” (心知之資於問學).

142 No. 9, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159.
Following Mencius, Dai Zhen adopts a way of learning by which what exists within is nourished by what is from without. With an emphasis on the importance of extending what is lying within, Dai Zhen openly distinguishes his way of learning from several other schools that are represented respectively by Xunzi, Cheng Zhu, Lu Wang, Laozi Zhuangzi, and the Buddhists. Xunzi maintains that human nature is evil and stresses that only the sages have the *li yi* (propriety and righteousness) within their heart/mind and the common people have to obtain *li yi* through learning. In Dai Zhen’s view, this shows Xunzi’s ignorance of the fact that by human natural makeup humans are all disposed to goodness or *li yi* (order and righteousness). The difference between the sages and the common people does not lie in the fact that the sages have *li yi* while the common people do not. Rather, their distinction resides in their natural capacity for *li yi*. Learning just enhances this mind capacity for comprehending *li yi* that is inherited from the birth. Thus, he says,

> Therefore, although what we rely on is from the outside, the external nourishment can be transformed into part of blood and breath. There has never been a case that one without the originally endowed material force inside can be solely nourished by what it receives from the outside. The same is true with our moral nature in terms of its the relationship with inquiry and learning.

(故所資雖在外，能化為血氣以益其內，未有內無本受之氣，與外相得而徒資焉者也。問學之於德性亦然。)

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143 See no. 26, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 188: “Xun Zi emphasizes on learning that relies on the external means due to the lack of internal resources while Mencius stresses learning that depends on the inner resources while in the meantime drawing on the external resources” (荀子之重學也，無於內而取於外；孟子之重學也，有於內而資於外).

144 See no. 14, no. 25, no. 26, no. 27, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, pp. 166, 187, 188, and 191.

145 No. 26, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 188); see Ewell, 1990, p. 274
In the same line of Xunzi, Masters Chen Yi and Zhu Xi set principle against human natural endowments to encourage people to learn to restore the lost or corrupted principle.\(^{146}\) Dai Zhen thinks that the Song Confucians regard principle as a kind of thing, received from heaven and complete in the mind. To him, if they treat principle as something complete and sufficient—and this being so, there should be no need for learning. He strongly objects Cheng Zhu in his revolt against their transcendent principle that is detached from people’s natural endowments of xueqi. As for Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yang-ming, they maintain either that people lack nothing from within because everything is complete in them or that human innate knowledge (lianzhi 良知) is lustrous like a bright mirror.\(^{147}\) In this way, they leave no room for learning and improvement. In Dai Zhen’s eyes, this alleged shining brightness is but an illusion. To Dai Zhen, because of uneven endowments by birth, not just common people need learning but even the sages themselves still need to learn in order to augment their wisdom. As regards Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the Chan Buddhists, they likewise disappoint Dai Zhen because they advocate getting rid of feelings and desire instead of promoting learning.

Despite his strong criticism of Xunzi, however, it is apparent that Dai Zhen shows great affinity with the thinker in urging on learning. His disapproval of Xunzi’s philosophical stance about human nature does not keep him from looking on the thinker with great respect. He says,

\[\text{Xunzi’s views place great emphasis on learning, but he does not know the whole reality of human nature. His formulations come from honoring the sages, from emphasizing learning, and from exalting propriety and righteousness. His introductory chapter is an ‘Exhortation to Learning,’ in which it is said: ‘Repeatedly recite (the classical texts) to penetrate (their Way), reflect and inquire understand it, embody the conduct of its men to preserve it, shun what harms it to uphold and}\]

\(^{146}\) See no. 14, no. 27, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, pp. 166, 191.

\(^{147}\) See no. 14, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 166.
nourish it.’ In addition, ‘Pile up good deeds to create virtue and godlike understanding will come of itself; there the mind of the sage will find completion.’ Such is the excellence of Xunzi’s advocating learning! Moreover, when he says, ‘Penetrate to godlike understanding and be a third with heaven and earth,’ he also knows that the farthest reach of propriety and righteousness. The sages combine their virtue with heaven and earth to such a perfect state! If there are sages arising again, how can they ever change his words?

(蓋荀子之見，歸重於學，而不知性之全體。其言出於尊聖人，出於重學崇禮義。首之以勸學篇，有曰：‘誦數以貫之，思索以通之，為其人以處之，除其害者以持養之。’ 又曰：‘積善成德，神明自得，聖心循焉。’ 荀子之善言學如是。且所謂通於神明，參於天地者，又知禮義之極致，聖人與天地合其德在是，聖人復起，豈能易其言哉!) 148

Without doubt, learning occupies a crucial position in Dai Zhen’s ethical project of self-cultivation. What are people supposed to learn and what shall people inquire of then? People may learn from books, historical records, from teachers at school, from nature, from society, and from every aspect of human daily existence and human relationships of renlun riyong. Dai Zhen himself is a great scholar in natural science such as astronomy and geography as well as in mathematics, philology, and classics. However, most important of all, to Dai Zhen, people should enhance their learning by learning from the words and acts of the sages of the past (前言往行).149 Mencius says, “The compass and carpenter’s square are the perfection of circles and square; the sage is the perfection of human relations.” Dai Zhen quotes Mencius to make the

149 See no. 8, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p.9.
point that the sages are the exemplary models people should emulate. \(^{150}\) Nevertheless, in Dai Zhen’s view, the sagely way is nothing else but the common human way of daily existence and human relationships. As he cites from the *Yijing*, “From simplicity the principles of the world are attained” (易簡而天下之理得). \(^{151}\) In his opinion, “There is nothing that comes out of the self is not the way” (出於身者，無非道也). \(^{152}\) He remarks, “The sages are also humans. Just because they fully comprehend the human order and pattern, people hold then in high reverence as the sages of great wisdom. The thorough comprehension of the human order and pattern is nothing else but the complete realization of the necessity of the human relationships and daily livelihood” (聖人亦人也, 以盡乎人之理，群共推為聖智。盡乎人之理非他, 人倫日用盡乎其必然而已矣). \(^{153}\) Dai Zhen iterates this idea throughout his writing. \(^{154}\)

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\(^{150}\) See the *Mencius* 4A2: “The compasses and the carpenter’s square are the culmination of squares and circles; the sage is the culmination of humanity” (規矩, 方圓之至也；聖人, 人倫之至也——D.C. Lau trans., 1973, p. 118). See no. 13, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 163.

\(^{151}\) No. 1, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 151.


\(^{153}\) No. 13, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 164.


no. 33, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p.202: “道者，居處、飲食、言動，自身而周於身之所親，無不該焉也，故曰‘修身以道’”

no. 34, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 203 “就人倫日用，舉凡出於身者求其不易之則，斯仁至義盡而合於天。人倫日用，其物也；曰仁，曰義，曰禮，其則也。”

no. 36, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 205: “就人倫日用，究其精微之極致，曰仁，曰義，曰禮，合三者以斷天下之事，如權衡之於輕重，於仁無憾，於義不愆，斯仁至矣。若夫德性之存乎其人，則曰智，曰仁，曰勇，三者，才質之美也，因才質而進之以學，皆可至於聖人。”

no. 38, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 208: “質言之，曰人倫日用；精言之，曰仁，曰義，曰禮。所謂‘明善’，明此者也；所謂‘誠身’，誠此也者。質言之，曰血氣心知；精言之，曰智，曰仁，曰勇。”

no. 40, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 211: “人倫日用，聖人以通天下之情，遂天下之欲，權之而分理不爽，是謂理。”
Henceforth, from Dai Zhen’s perspective, what distinguishes the sages from the common people is nothing other than the realization of the human way to its full. It is in the very daily functioning of human existence that the sages comprehend people’s feelings and satisfy their needs. He thus writes,

How can we talk about the wise and the dull, the worthy and the unworthy beyond the daily existence and human relationships? Therefore, there is a saying that there is no one who does not eat or drink, but people are rarely able to know the taste. Drinking and eating are metaphorical expression for human relationships and daily existence; and knowing the taste are metaphorical expression for the act that is flawless. If to forsake human relationships and daily existence to take something else as Dao, this is like seeking to know the taste outside drinking and eating. As far as human relationships and daily existence are concerned, try to apply all that come from the self to the unchangeable principle, then, humanity and righteousness can be exhausted and the harmony with heaven will be attained. Human relationships and daily existence are the things and humanity, righteousness, and propriety are their norm.

(然智愚賢不肖, 豈能越人倫日用之外者哉? 故曰: ‘人莫不飲食也，鮮能知味也。’飲食，喻人倫日用；知味，喻行之無失；使舍人倫日用以為道，是求知味於飲食之外矣。就人倫日用，舉凡出於身者求其不易之則，斯仁至義盡而合於天。人倫日用，其物也；曰仁，曰義，曰禮，其則也。) 155

To Dai Zhen, no matter whether they are the ordinary people or the sages, they all share a fundamental commonality of having need for drink, food, and sex. But where there is a thing,

155 No. 34, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 203.
there is its pattern. Therefore, Dai Zhen holds that drinking, eating, and having sex is the thing
and humanity, righteousness, propriety its norm. The sages are the ones who grasp the norms in
the things. He says,

The sages follow the desires of blood and breath and regard them the way of
begotting and nourishment. Thus, if one regards others as oneself, it is loyalty; if
one extends oneself to others is reciprocity. If one is concerned about and rejoices
with others is humanity. Whatever comes from the correct instead of the deviant, it
is righteousness. If one is respectful, reverent and not disrespectful and negligent, it
is propriety. If one is free from the flaws of mistakes and error, it is wisdom. What
else can we say about loyalty and reciprocity, or humanity, righteousness, propriety,
and wisdom?

(聖人順其血氣之欲，則為相生養之道，於是視人猶己，則忠；以己推之，
則恕；憂樂於人，則仁；出於正，不出於邪，則義；恭敬不侮慢，則禮；無
差謬之失，則智；曰忠恕，曰仁義禮智，豈有他哉?) 156

Here, Dai Zhen made it very clear that what people should learn from the sages is but the way of
“zhongshu”: “loyalty” and “reciprocity.” For the sages who embody the ultimate of virtues and
wisdom are the ones that can thoroughly comprehend and carry out humanity, righteousness, and
propriety in human relationships and daily existence and. Therefore, in Dai Zhen’s philosophy,
“zhizhe” 知者 (a person who “knows”) is not “zhizhe” 智者 (a person of knowledge or wisdom)
but a “sheng ren” 聖人 (the sage) whose heart and mind is not concealed (wubi 無蔽) and
thereby can fully grasp the pattern and order (li 理) without anything going amiss in the living

156 No. 15, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 171.
situation. This *zhi* 智 is what Dai Zhen calls “*shengzhi*” (sagely wisdom 聖 智). Nevertheless, nothing is mysterious about this sagely knowing or wisdom, which people may obtain from the most common and simplest things at hand. As he says, “Through human relationships and daily existence the sages comprehend (*tong* 通) the feelings of the people under heaven and help them fulfill their desires. He weighs (*quan* 權) their feelings and desires properly without anything going amiss. This is called principle (*li* 理)” (人倫日用，聖人以通天下之情，遂天下之欲，權之而分理不爽，是謂理。).

In conclusion, once our mind is open without obstruction and concealment, we will be able to attain the godlike illumination, by which we will fully grasp the reality without fallacy and have feelings and emotions neither in excess nor in deficiency. Closely related to Dai Zhen’s understanding of *li* as *qing* that does not err, *zhi* presupposes an ability to “distinguish” (*fen* 分) between what is right and what is wrong, an ability to “make judgment” (*duan* 斷), and an ability to “be responsive” (*ying* 應) or “be affected” (*gan* 感) to the people and the world encountered. With these abilities, we can thereby evaluate our own desires and needs against the desires and needs of others to see if those of our own conform to righteousness and propriety and if those of others have been taken into my consideration. It is in this sense that Dai Zhen would say that “knowing is identical with humanity and love, fairness and reciprocity.” “*Zhi*” as a moral deliberation comprises both the affective and cognitive faculties of the human mind.

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157 See no. 13, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 164: “The sages are also humans. Just because they fully comprehend the human order and pattern, people hold then in high reverence as the sages of great wisdom. The thorough comprehension of the human order and pattern is nothing else but the complete realization of the necessity of the human relationships and daily livelihood” (聖人亦人也，以盡乎人之理，群共推為聖智。盡乎人之理非他，人倫日用盡乎其必然而已矣).

158 No. 40, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 211.

159 See no. 5, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 154: “With the luminosity of the mind, there will be no error regarding things and affairs; there will be no feelings either in excess or in deficiency” (是心之明，能於事情不爽失，使無過情無不及情之謂理).
Furthermore, to him, there is not only a knowing of the unchangeable,\textsuperscript{160} but there is also a
knowing of the changeable. Nonetheless, only when our knowing gets to its full, can we have
the capacity to manage the scale *quan* (weigh, assess, judge; scale權) so as to make sound
judgment in the changing context and fully grasp both the changeable and unchangeable. In its
highest form of *quan*, *zhi* is complete with both wisdom and practical prudence. As Dai Zhen
remarks,

Scale (*quan*) is for assessing what is light and what is heavy. All those, of which
this is heavy and that is light, have remained unchanged for thousands of years are
constancy. Because of constancy, that which is heavy or that which is light has
remained unchanged for ages becomes discernable. However, when what is heavy
becomes light and what is light becomes heavy, this is change. Then, as far as
change is concerned, without attaining knowing to its full to discriminate and
discern things, one can hardly know it.

(權，所以別輕重也。凡此重彼輕，千古不易者，常也，常則顯然共見其千古
不易之重輕；而重者於是乎輕，輕者於是乎重，變也，變則非智之盡，能
辨察事情而準，不足以知之。) \textsuperscript{161}

Thus, “*zhi*” is not simply to know some unchanged principles or norms of *ren, yi, li, zhi*. Rather,
in its highest state, “*zhi*” must know what is changing with circumstances regarding *ren, yi, li, zhi*

\textsuperscript{160} See no. 8, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p.158: “The godlike illumination of the mind can
comprehend the unchangeable principle with regard to things and affairs. Just like light of various kinds can shine,
but what is up to righteousness will shine brightly without fail” (心之神明，於事物咸足以知其不易之則，譬有
光皆能照，而中理者，乃其光盛，其照不謬也。) Also, see no. 24, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol.
VI, 186: “As regards heaven, earth, man, living beings and things, wisdom enables man to know the unchangeable
principle. If humanity cannot be realized to its full, propriety and righteousness will not be fully realized either.
Then, how can it be called the unchangeable principle?” (智於天地、人物、事為咸足以知其不易之則，仁有不
至，禮義有不盡，可謂不易之則哉？).

by situating ourselves in the concrete living situation of human relationships and our daily existence. A. S. Cua in his explication of the concept of “quan” vividly describes the exercise of *quan* as a holistic ideal enforced by the Confucian *Dao*. He says, “The exercise of *quan*, moral discretion, is also necessary in the light of the Confucian Dao as a holistic ideal.…. However, this ideal is a topic of communal discourse somewhat analogous to a theme in literary or musical composition, not only always recurring, in ever-different ways, but even permeating the piece in its palpable absence, amenable to varying imagination.” 162 Without doubt, Cua’s metaphor offers a revealing interpretation of *quan*, which throws light on our understanding of Dai Zhen’s moral judgment. Obviously, for Dai Zhen, *dao, li, or ren, yi, li, zhi* can never be taken as some abstract moral principle. Instead, they come from the concrete reality of our daily existence and human relationships and then have to be applied in the concrete and changing circumstances. To fully grasp them, we have to have the sagely wisdom to conduct *quan*—to make right judgment in accord with the actual situations. As Dai Zhen points out, “Although it is remarkable to keep to *Dao*, if people only know constancy without knowing change, they cannot really go deeper to the essence. This is because they have not sufficiently enhanced the clarity of their intelligent mind to fully attain to the sagely wisdom. For this reason, ‘it is not desirable to weigh a concrete situation together with him’” (雖然道卓然，知常而不知變，由精義未深，所以增益其心知之明使全乎聖智者，未之盡也，故‘未可與權。’). 163 The act of *quan* requests one to extend one’s intelligent mind to the utmost so that one can make sound judgment to a concrete situation (like the Aristotelian Phronesis to weigh and judge a concrete situation or St. Thomas’s conversion ad phantasmata of returning to the concrete image). Once learning helps people extend their *xinzhi* or *jingshuang* to *shenming*, they will not only know humanity, righteousness, and propriety but, marvelously, know humanity, righteousness, and propriety in concrete changing situations. Here I will end my discussion on “*zhi*” with a quote from Dai Zhen. He says,

Nature and necessity are not two different things. As far as nature is concerned, if one can fully understand it to its utmost without any errors, then, this will be its necessity. If it is so, one will not have any regret, will feel at ease; this is then the ultimate of nature. If one simply follows his nature to the loss, one will lose one’s nature too; then, this will no longer be nature either. Therefore, what is ascribed to necessity must be that which is entirely natural.

(自然之與必然，非二事也。就其自然，明之盡而無幾微之失焉，是其必然也。如是而後無憾，如是而後安，是乃自然之極則。若任其自然而流於失，轉喪其自然，而非自然也；故歸於必然，適完其自然。)\textsuperscript{164}

When people completely comprehend humanity, righteousness, and propriety beyond their knowing about cherishing life and fear about death, they will advance from the state of \textit{ziran}—what is natural to the state of \textit{biran}—what is necessary. If it is so, the transformation of the natural being into an ethical being is taking place.

\textsuperscript{164} No. 15, the \textit{Shu Zheng} in \textit{Dai Zhen Quanshu}, Vol. VI, p. 171.
Chapter 4
The Idea of Infinity and Goodness beyond Being

The Cartesian idea of infinity and the Platonic “Goodness beyond being” undoubtedly constitute the cornerstone of Levinas’s conception of desire. As Dai Zhen tries to found his discourse on human desire in the cosmic creativity of “shengsheng” (creative creativity) to invest desire with a metaphysical significance, Levinas relates desire to Infinity to open up the realm of transcendence. In both contexts, desire as the forceful expression of the human subjectivity is intrinsically linked to the transcendent, which is expressed either as the creative force of the cosmos or the infinite other. In his preface to Totality and Infinity, Levinas openly states that the work is a defense of subjectivity, but not the subjectivity of the egoists but rather the one as founded on the Idea of infinity.1 Desire is metaphysical because it pushes the boundary of human existence to what is lying beyond, be it Infinity or the cosmic Whole. Nonetheless, for Levinas as for Dai Zhen, the metaphysical or transcendent meaning of desire is finally directed to the inquiry into the nature or essence of our human existence as an ethical being. In this regard, whereas Dai Zhen offers a novel interpretation of the Mencian claim that human nature is good, Levinas resorts to the Platonic notion of “Goodness beyond being” to discover the ethical anchorage of being. For both thinkers, in the depth of human desire resides human aspiration for goodness, which incessantly lifts us up to a higher level above our natural existence.

I. The Cartesian Idea of Infinity

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1 Levinas says, “The book then does present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity.” Also, “This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in the idea of infinity is consummated.” See Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 26, p. 27.
In his third Meditation: the Existence of God, Descartes put forward that God placed in our minds an idea of infinity, viz. an idea about God as “the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work.”2 Descartes defines God as “a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, which created both myself and everything else.”3 For Descartes “the fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists.”4 Owing to the idea of the most perfect being, namely God within me that is nonetheless beyond my full grasp, I comprehend my incompleteness and defect and thus aspire without limit to ever greater and better things of which God possesses all.5 The Cartesian idea of infinity provides Levinas with an important theoretical framework to formulate his conception of desire. In Totality and Infinity Levinas more than once overtly accredits his idea of infinity to Descartes. Particularly, section 1, A, 5 “Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity” addresses how the Cartesian idea of infinity constitutes the very foundation of his metaphysics—the relationship with the other (TI 48-52). Levinas is obviously little interested in the proof of God per se and does not align himself with Descartes either to conceive Infinity a possible object of our speculation. Rather, he is fascinated with the idea that the idea of God reaches our thought yet is infinitely beyond our full grasp and henceforth incessantly draws us towards him. He says, “The Cartesian notion of the idea of the Infinite designates a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it. It designates the contact with the intangible, a contact that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched” (TI 50). Levinas pinpoints the like structure of Descartes's idea of the infinite in the itinerary of the same moving towards the Other. He retains the formal structure of the Cartesian idea of infinity but tactfully substitutes the other for God to insert into

3 Ibid. p. 31.
4 Ibid. p. 35.
5 Ibid. p. 35.
the Cartesian structure a moral primacy. In his own words, “I simply followed the admirable rhythm of Cartesian thinking” (BHW 22).6

Levinas says, “Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole ideatum of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite” (TI 49). By identifying the Other with the infinite Levinas endorses the absolute alterity of the Other. Here we see Levinas’s attempt to define transcendence through setting up a new model of the self-other human relationship. Rather than an intimate Thou of a Buberian human relationship, the other always remains exterior and transcendent to me. But Levinas discovers in the Cartesian idea of infinity the prospect of establishing a relationship with the other that is intangible, invisible, and infinite. Just as Descartes conceives of the relationship of the finite with the infinite by referring to the innate idea of God placed within our mind, Levinas formulates the relationship between the same and the other in terms of an idea of Infinity, which is uniquely articulated as Desire or metaphysical Desire in his philosophy. It is worthy of our note that for Levinas transcendence or metaphysics does not lie in a world beyond but rather resides in this very idea of infinity implanted within us. It is here—the idea of infinity, namely Desire that Levinas ascertains the relationship between the same and the other wherein transcendence arises. He says,

Infinity is not the ‘object’ of a cognition (which would be to reduce it to the measure of the gaze that contemplates) but the desirable, that which arouses Desire, that is, that which is approachable by a thought that at each instant thinks more than it thinks. The infinite is not thereby an immense object, exceeding the horizons of the look. It is Desire that measures the infinity of the infinite, for it is a measure through the very impossibility of measure. The inordinateness

6 Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” in Basic Philosophical Writings, 1996, p. 25.
(démesure) measured by Desire is the face. Thus we again meet with the
distinction between Desire and need: desire is an aspiration that the Desirable
animates; it originates from its ‘object’; it is revelation—whereas need is a void of
the Soul; it proceeds from the subject (TI 62).

This paragraph attempts an exposition of somehow enigmatic Infinity which is unidentifiable
with any particular object judged by its vastness or unlimited immensity. We may say that
Infinity is essentially not to be seen as a spatial concept and thus lacks all those tangible, visible,
intelligible attributes characteristic of a physical presence. For this reason Infinity does not
present itself under the gaze of our look but is “approachable” only in thought, viz. Desire in
Levinas’s term. Levinas simply refers to Infinity as the Desirable because for him the meaning
of Infinity just lies in the fact that it generates Desire in the I for the infinite. This implies that
Infinity stands only with respect to the I or the same. Infinity is but an articulation of relation—
the relationship between the same and the other. Since the Desirable is infinite, always more
than what desire can desire and henceforth continuously arousing more desire, the Desire
animated by the Desirable is infinite as well. Although Levinas adopts the formal structure of
the Cartesian idea of infinity, I think it show Levinas’s originality to locate transcendence not
only in Infinity that generates the idea of infinity but also in the idea of infinity generated,
namely Desire, thus conferring on the relation between the same and the other a transcendent
meaning. In fact, from Levinas’s perspective, if there does not exist a relationship between the
same and the other in terms of the idea of Infinity, there will not be the so-called
“transcendence.” Transcendence or Infinity is indispensable from the idea of Infinity. From very
beginning, in his preface to Totality and Infinity, Levinas has made it clear: “The production of
the infinite entity is inseparable from the idea of infinity….Infinity does not first exist, and then
reveals itself. Its infinition is produced as revelation, as a posting of its ideas in me” (TI 26).

The fact that desire is animated by the Other or the Desirable determines that desire cannot
exhaust what is desired. The Other initiates the relationship or instills within me the desire is
ever exterior to me and thus fundamentally stays out of my reach. The overflowing of the idea
of Infinity in the I breaks down the Husserlian structure of noema-noesis regarding the human intentionality. Since the absolute alterity of infinity requests that distance be maintained between Infinity and the idea of infinity, Infinity cannot be absorbed into part of my entity but always stays beyond the knowledge and intelligibility of the I who desires. Thus, the relationship between the same and the other leads to the relation of transcendence that turns into a perpetual aspiration, an incessant Desire for the other. It is in this sense that Levinas claims that the relationship with the Other is metaphysics and the desire for the Other “metaphysical desire” (TI 42). Desire becomes the very operative factor that links the empirical to the transcendent or the finite to the infinite.

Of great significance, the Levinasian reading of the idea of infinity brings forth a novel conception of desire that is cast in contrast with need. For Levinas desire and need stand on different planes. As he claims, “Desire does not coincide with an unsatisfied need; it is situated beyond satisfaction and nonsatisfaction. The relationship with the Other, or the idea of infinity, accomplishes it” (TI 179). Unlike need that wants exactly what one lacks from within, as in the case of being thirsty, desire is the idea of infinity conceived from the infinite. Because, paradoxically, the object of desire is what gives rise to desire, what desire desires for is exactly that which will never fulfill its desire. The more one is driven to the desired, the greater is his desire produced. As Desire is “nourished” (TI 34) and “deepened” (TI 34) by the Desired, insatiability becomes its defining feature. We may liken Desire to an infinite hunger with no food to meet its need. Desire is simply beyond satisfaction or non-satisfaction. Or, essentially, desire is not an appeal for food, or anything visible, graspable, and predictable. This is “because metaphysical desire is above life, and with regard to it one cannot speak of satiety. This food is the food of life” (TI 114). Obviously, Levinas is not talking about the insatiable desire with respect to our finitude (TI 63). Unlike needs, desire can never gauge itself from within. The insatiability of Desire arises not only from the perpetual inadequacies of desire with respect to the plenitude of the desired but also from the invisible and ungraspable nature of the desired. He

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7 See Plato’s discussion on the human appetitive desires, of which thirst and hunger is most illustrative (the Republic of Plato 437-9).
says, “A desire without satisfaction precisely, understands (extend) the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other” (TI 34). To Levinas, “Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with the relations within the same; this relation does not become an implantation in the other and a confusion with him, does not affect the very identity of the same, its ipseity, does not silence the apology, does not become apostasy and ecstasy. We have called this relation metaphysical” (TI 42). The idea of infinity anticipates an infinite being on the one hand and maintains the being in separation on the other. Between the same and the other there always exists an unmovable distance, but owing to desire the being in separation stands in relation with Infinity. Quite eccentrically Levinas identifies Infinity with the face which becomes the unique Levinasian expression of the infinite—the revelation of the other. In Levinas’s philosophy along with Infinity are the categories of transcendence, exteriority, alterity, the other and the like. Infinity is embodied in the face of the stranger, the poor, the widow, and the orphan, in the caress of the love, in the fecundity of the parental Eros. To Levinas, “Descartes shatters immanence thanks to the idea of infinite.”

Although Levinas explicitly detaches himself from engaging a talk on God, nonetheless, the notion of Infinity is revealingly rooted in a long-standing theological tradition. Consequently, the Levinasian notion of Infinity and his appropriation of the Cartesian idea of infinity cannot really dispense with a hidden God. In my view, for Levinas, infinity is not just a philosophical concept but a religious belief or expectation. The Cartesian itinerary sheds a messianic light on the Levinasian movement of the self towards the other.

II. The Platonic “Goodness beyond Being”

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While we accredit Descartes with his contribution of the idea of Infinity to framing the structure of the Levinasian same and other relationship, admittedly, another most significant inspiration on Levinas’s thought comes from Plato. Throughout *Totality and Infinity* Levinas refers to Plato in various places on various points. But here the focus of our discussion will be directed to the Platonic notion “Good beyond being” which in my view constitutes the basic problematique of Levinas’s philosophy. If we say that the Cartesian idea of infinity provides Levinas’s Infinity with a structural frame, then the Platonic “Good beyond being” undoubtedly invests this structure with content.⁹ Or, we may say, metaphorically, the Cartesian idea of Infinity and Plato’s “Good beyond being” provide Levinas two respective passages towards transcendence: one is horizontal and the other vertical. The former is temporal while the latter envisions a dimension of height. But, of course, here form or content does not really apply to a division between structure and matter. Horizontal and vertical are merely a figure of speech too. In fact, in Levinas’s writings, the Cartesian idea of infinity and the Platonic notion of Good beyond being are often juxtaposed to bring up together the metaphysics Levinas argues for in his *Totality and Infinity*. As he states, “the idea of infinity designates a height and a nobility, a transcendence.” (TI 41) This designated height in the idea of infinity is the Goodness that Plato opens us to.

You would say, would you not, that the sun is not only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation?

Certainly.

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⁹ Since the present study does not aim to trace the evolution of the idea as a study of the history of idea, it will not search for the connections between Levinas’s taking of the idea and other thinkers’ appropriation, particularly the Neo-Platonism of the Plotinus (For research on this subject, see Jean-Marc Narbonne’s “Levinas and the Greek Heritage,” which offers a marvelous investigation), Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, trans. by R. M. Wallace, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 208).
In like manner the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power. (Plato, the Republic 509 b)\textsuperscript{10}

The Republic 509 b poses one of the most significant themes in the Western philosophy. Here Plato compares the Good to the sun—the source of light and the creator and provider of life. Parallel to the sun that brings about being and development of visible things and brings them to light, the Good brings forth being yet remains beyond being and essence. Just like the sun is spatially higher above, by analogy, “the Good has a place of honor yet higher” (the Republic 509 a).\textsuperscript{11} As the sun is related to sight and vision by generating light, the Good is concerning the mind and knowing by imparting truth and knowledge. For Plato, metaphorically, the Good is another light to illuminate the soul. When the sun spreads its light upon the world, things are shining up; as the Good enlightens the mind, the mind radiates with intelligence. Plato in the Rep. 509 b presents us two distinct yet parallel spheres: one is visible and the other is invisible or intellectual. The knowledge of these two spheres is represented by these two types of light: the sun and the Good. But, in Plato’s presentation, since the sun is but the offspring of the Good (Rep. 508 b), the image of the Good to its greatest likeness, these two respective worlds of the sun and the Good as a matter of fact do not stand parallel to each other on the same levels. The Good surpasses the sun and hence the being, the visible world in association with the sun. In reference to the Rep. 508 b, the Good exceeds being not simply by degree “in dignity and power” but in an ontological sense. Plato presents the Good with respect to the intellectual world that assumes a different order other than that of the sensible and visible things. With reference to another passage from the Rep. 517 b where Plato locates his discussion on the Good in the allegory of the cave, the Good comes to be not only the cause of the being for the invisible things but universally the ultimate source of all things beautiful and right, of light, and of truth and


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
reason. As for the sun, it is referred to the fire of the light in the underground den—an allegory of the visible world. It seems to me that with Plato the reintroduction of the Good here is intended for a conversion or ascent of the human soul from the obscurity of the sensible, visible, and temporary world to the brightness of the domain of idea that is transcendent, invisible, and eternal. In this light, we can say that the Good is at once the primordial source of and perfect model for being, both visible and invisible.

However, it appears that Plato in the Republic actually does not offer us a unanimous and definite account of “the Good beyond being.” In the Rep 518 the division between the visible and invisible spheres argued in earlier passages is articulated as the contrast between the world of becoming and the world of being. It is somehow confusing that the Good here is described as “the brightest and best of being” (Rep. 518 c)\(^\text{12}\), which seems to suggest that the Good is within the domain of being and henceforth contradict his earlier statement about “the Good beyond being.” But several pages later in Rep. 534 c Plato again emphasizes the separation of the idea of the good from all other things. We may say that Plato conceives of being on different levels: the being of the visible things and the being of the invisible. The Good stands both above all visible things and at the highest in the hierarchy of the intelligence and knowledge.

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\(^{12}\) See Jowett, “Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degree to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best being, or in other words, of the good” (The Dialogue of Plato). Cf. another two versions of translations: Allan Bloom, “But the present argument, on the other hand, indicates that this power is in the soul of each—just as an eye is not able to turn around from that which is coming into being together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which is and the brightest part of that which is. And we affirm that this is good, don’t we? (The Republic of Plato, Trans. with Notes and an Interpretive Essay by Allan Bloom, New York, London: Basic Book Inc.,1968); G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, “…This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. Isn’t that right? (Plato: Complete Works, Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor, D. S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
Closely related to the thesis of the Good beyond being is the question of whether the Good is accessible or not. In other words, is the Good absolutely transcendent? Can we actually see the Good in the visible world? In light of the allegorical speech on the analogy of the Good to the sun, it seems obvious with Plato that in the visible world we cannot see the Good except for its image of the sun. As Socrates informs Glaucon, many beautiful things are visible but not intelligible while beauty itself and good itself are intelligible but not visible (the *Rep.* 507 b). However, our reading of the *Rep.* 517 c and the *Rep.* 540 seems to suggest that the Good is actually reachable despite difficulty. Thus, in order to get a glimpse of the Good, we have to take “considerable effort” (the *Rep.* 517 c), to undergo great difficulty that can withstand the test of time (the *Rep.* 540 a), to demonstrate our excellence in both deed and knowledge (the *Rep.* 540 a). Nevertheless, in my view, we are not seeing the Good with either great efforts or best performance in both practical and intelligent matter. They are but an indispensible discipline for our mind, the necessary condition for getting us ready for seeing the Good. To Plato, the real encounter with the Good must take place in a sphere other than where we have habitually been dwelling. Only after we are lifted up or ascend from the prison of our cave home to the domain of intelligence can we see the beauty of the Good. Plato iterates this idea at the end of Chapter VII of the *Republic* (the *Rep.* 540 a). We see the Good, or better, we perceive the Good in preoccupying ourselves with philosophical thinking and speculation. “Seeing” is a metaphor for the sight of the soul. Nonetheless, who are these survivors who stand the test of time to reach the final stage of the ascent? Furthermore, Plato conveys an important message that once people see the Good, they have to transform their knowledge of and speculation on the Good into praxis, to turn their personal awakening to the Good into a service for the public good. He says, “The time has now arrived at which they must raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things, and behold the absolute good; for that is the pattern according to which they are to order the State and the lives of individuals, and the remainder of their own lives also; making philosophy their chief pursuit, but, when their turn comes, toiling also at politics and

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13 Cf. Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*, where the good as the only object of human love is identified with the beautiful; similar idea is also found in the *Phaedrus*. On this Tanja Staehler makes an argument for the transcendence of the Good beyond Being saying “This is one of the instances where the Good ‘takes refuge’ in or behind beauty (as Socrates will express it in the *Philebus*)” and “The *Symposium* thus does not, and even less so than the *Republic*, present the Good beyond Being as something accessible to human beings” (Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics*, New York, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 119).
ruling for the public good, not as though they were performing some heroic action, but simply as a matter of duty” (the Rep. 540 a-b). It is noticeable that the discourse on the Good takes on an ethical implication. The Good does not merely signify “beyond being” in ontological sense but ethically bears a moral purport concerning all human beings, an imperative for responsibility to build up a perfect State that consists of just and worthy citizens.

The Platonic “Good beyond being” leaves the Platonic scholarship and commentary a long-lasting debate over whether the Good is beyond or in being. Plato himself does not really dwell much on what the Good or “beyond being” is. The idea of the Good woven out of the lines of the Republic 505 a-509 d, 517 c-521a, 532 b, (534b-534c), and 540 a does not reveal a clear picture of what the Good is and whether the Good is residing in being or beyond being. But, “beyond being,” as it were, already announces its refutation to “be.” From the very beginning on Glaucon’s earnest request for a discussion on the Good, Socrates has made it clear that he would leave aside what the good itself is but tell instead what looks like a child of the Good and most similar to it (See the Rep. 506 e). The Good beyond being escapes language. Plato or Socrates intently gets around the topic to leave the Good to allegory. Similarly, in the Symposium, with respect to the attainment of the ultimate beauty, Diotima warns Socrates that it may remain the highest mystery. The ambiguity of the Socratic dialogue reveals the evasion of the Good at any attempt to grasp it. To Levinas, the true meaning of the Good beyond being lies in the very fact that it opens up a transcendent order that stands above the totality of being. Regardless of the controversies surrounding this famous thesis, from which Levinas develops a radical direction of the absolute alterity of the Other, further, a distinctive Levinasian treatise of “otherwise than being.”

14 Jowett, The Dialogue of Plato. Also see the Rep. 517 c, where Plato expresses the similar idea.
16 See the Symposium 210 a.
To Levinas’s mind, what is beyond essence has always been a question ever since the *Republic*. From his earlier works *Existence and Existents* (1947) and *Time and the Other* (1947) to his two masterpieces of *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* (1974), the Platonic Good beyond being has undoubtedly occupied a central position in Levinas’s ethical thinking. Levinas prefaces his *Existence and Existents* with an explicit claim that the study concerns “the problem of the Good” (EE xxvii). He says, “The Platonic formula that situates the Good beyond Being serves as the general guideline for this research—but does not make up its content” (EE xxvii). In his new preface to the republication of *Time and the Other* in 1979, of the same spirit, Levinas says, “*Time and the Other* presents time not as the ontological horizon of the *being of a being* [l’ “être de l’ étant”] but as a mode of the *beyond being* [l’ “au delà de l’ être”], as the relationship of ‘thought’ to the Other [Autre].”

As for *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explicitly refers to the Platonic idea in many places (TI 34-35, 63, 80, 102-103, 104, 218, 298, 301-302, 305). The impact of the Platonic Good beyond being is no less discernible in Levinas’s second magnum opus. Or, we may say that the work itself, as suggested by the title, is a philosophical exposition directly in response to this famous thesis Plato has posed, only pushing it to a new height. *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* opens its pages by directing us back to this Platonic theme. There, Levinas asks, “what is Being’s other?” (OB 2) and “what is beyond essence?” (OB 2) “The Metaphysical Desire” wrung out of his speculations on the Good beyond being in *Totality and Infinity* gives way to an in-depth query into “otherwise than being” or “beyond essence” by reshaping the argument from a different angle. “Goodness beyond being” addressed in *Totality and Infinity* evolves into “goodness despite itself” (OB 57) in *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*. By “goodness despite itself,” Levinas seems to want to underscore the absoluteness of goodness. No matter what, goodness is goodness even regardless of goodness per se. Goodness is prior or exterior to any conception and idea about what Good is. We may say that the transcendence of goodness lies in this absoluteness. In Levinas’s philosophy, goodness that stands for a different order other than being thus assumes an absolute claim upon being. Humans are predestined to be good, to be the unique one. As he

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As it were, the motif of Plato’s formula persistently runs through Levinas’s writings of various stages. With respect to Totality and Infinity in particular, we find the Platonic goodness beyond being finds its way into Levinas’s discourse on Desire. In this work we come across “above being” in two different senses: one regarding the animal-like existence and the other concerning transcendence, viz. Goodness. Totality and Infinity devotes a whole section to discussing the mode of the human life in terms of Separation. There, Levinas depicts the human existence in the world as living from (“‘good soup,’ air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc….” TI 110), which, in his view, is mainly featured as enjoyment and happiness and thus essentially differs from that of animals. The joy and pleasure arising from people’s dwelling and labor soars above being to lead human beings to depart from a bare existence or survival that is characteristic of the animal life. Nevertheless, of greater significance, Levinas presents another type of “above being,” that is the Good beyond being. The Good signifies a different order that inspires us to transcend both the crudity and enjoyment of life. He says,

But Greek metaphysics conceived the Good as separate from the totality of essences, and in this way (without any contribution from an alleged Oriental thought) it caught sight of a structure such that the totality could admit of a beyond. The Good is Good in itself and not by relation to the need to which it is wanting; it is a luxury with respect to needs. It is precisely in this that it is beyond being.…
(TI 102-103)

Needless to say, there is a fundamental difference between these two types of “above being.” The first “above being” appears higher but actually still remains within the totalities of various spheres of our life: physical, economic, aesthetical, intellectual and so forth. Though human beings retain a higher state in comparison with animals, ontologically, they are still embedded in
the realm of being. By labor and dwelling that give rise to enjoyment and happiness, man is elevated above the crude being associated with animals. Nevertheless, we are still confined to the domain of being which Levinas classifies by Need. This somehow may remind us of our earlier pondering over the possible different layers of being seen in Plato’s Republic. It is possible that Plato may conceive of being of different levels. Nevertheless, above being or various stairs of being, Plato poses one that is beyond all, viz. Goodness. Like Plato, Levinas also proposes the Good that is “separate from the totality of essences” (TI 102), “above every essence” (TI 103). Only the Good points to a realm completely beyond being, in which, Levinas says, “we recognize the pattern of Desire: the need of him who lacks nothing, the aspiration of him who possesses his being entirely, who goes beyond his plentitude, who has the idea of Infinity” (TI 103). Levinas’s words here resonate with his opening remark in Totality and Infinity: “The very dimension of height is opened up by metaphysical Desire” (TI 34-5) and he alludes it to Plato’s Republic 529 b with a footnote. This dimension of height opened up to us is Goodness. Totality and Infinity relates its inquiry into the Platonic thesis to a philosophical discourse on Desire, on Eros that inspires us to the Good. Levinas’s central argument is that the Good inaugurates a different order that is transcendent, that is beyond the domain of Being, namely “the transcendence of the Good” (TI 80).

Without doubt, the Platonic idea of the Good has exerted a profound influence upon Levinas’s thought. Nonetheless, of course, Levinas brings forth the idea in his own way. As he says, “We thus encounter, in our own way, the Platonic idea of the Good beyond Being” (TI 293). In my view, Levinas is not so much interested in the contrasting division between the intelligible world and the sensible world as in the idea about a realm that is absolutely above all totalities of being. He draws our special attention to its “breach of totality” (TI 40), to its “break with system” (TI 104). Caught between the visible, sensible, and temporary sphere of our physical world and the invisible, intelligible, and eternal realm represented by the Good, the Platonic cave men are urged to move from the sensible realm towards the Ideas or Forms of the Good via tiring theoretical or intellectual practice. Yet, it seems to me that Levinas does not concern himself about this Platonic project either. In the same way as he is appealed to the Cartesian idea of Infinity, Levinas is fascinated with Plato’s argument in that in the Platonic notion Levinas
perceives the ethical significance of a “beyond” or “otherwise than” that surpasses the ontological realities of human existence, that excesses the limit of our comprehension and grasp.

Nonetheless, although we are restrained within the phenomenal world, for Plato as for Levinas, there is an access to the transcendent. With Plato, it is through the speculative intellectual activities; with Levinas, it is via desire or the Metaphysical Desire. As such, in Plato people get in touch with the transcendent by “seeing” its light; in Levinas, in the like manner, a Levinasian man enters into the relationship with the transcendent in the idea of Infinity. Furthermore, as seeing receives its capacity of seeing from the very source of light, in the same way, the idea of Infinity is instigated by Infinity. Apparently, as regards the relationship between the “beyond” and “within” being concerning our human existence, there is a structural affinity of the Platonic “seeing” the Good with a Levinasian idea of Infinity or desire. The Platonic “seeing” or the Cartesian idea of Infinity or the Levinasian desire all borders on the edge of the visible and the invisible, the intelligible and sensible, the finite and infinite, the physical and the transcendent. Owing to the seeing or desire or the idea of Infinity, we may say that the Good is at once beyond being and opened up to human beings that are rooted in being. Levinas says, “Above being. Desire marks a sort of inversion with regard to the classical notion of substance. In it being becomes goodness” (TI 63). If we say intellectualization is the Platonic way towards Goodness, Desire is the unique access Levinas provides us to move towards the Good.
Levinas’s discourse on desire constitutes an essential part of his philosophical thought. His first major work *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority* explores this subject in great depth. Though in his second magnum opus *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* the theme of desire gives way to other subjects, we can trace the continuation and intensification of his thought on the subject in his augmented investigation of human subjectivity. However, desire is such a common phenomenon in people’s psychological and emotional life that Levinas is very cautious about the possible misunderstanding people might have. Thus, he makes it very clear from the outset that desire is fundamentally different from what is customarily conceived. He says,

> No journey, no change of climate or of scenery could satisfy the desire bent toward it. The other metaphysically desired is not ‘other’ like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like sometimes, myself for myself, this ‘I,’ that ‘other.’ I can ‘feed’ on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessoir. The metaphysical desires tends towards *something else entirely*, towards the *absolutely other*. (TI 33)

Bread, dwelling places, landscapes, etc. are the common objects present in our daily life to serve people’s different needs. When we are hungry, our desire is manifested as hunger; when we are thirsty, our desire is thirst. Therefore, our desire is always the desire for something and the desired object is always something that can meet our certain need, physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual. We desire because either we do not have or have not experienced something or we have missed or lost what we used to have. For Levinas, they are all but need,
yet, people “speak lightly of desires” (TI 34) as if desire were hunger, thirst, and sexual need. Here, Levinas wants to argue for a different kind of desire, which he calls metaphysical Desire.

In contrast with need, “the metaphysical desire has another intention; it desires beyond everything than can simply complete it. It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it” (TI 34). In this formulation, desire is that which cannot be fulfilled by the desired. Rather, desire is “deepened” and “nourished” by what it desires. Yet, what desire desires is beyond our grasp and anticipation. Levinas defines it as the desire for the absolute, the perfect, the invisible, and the infinite. He says,

Desire is desire for the absolutely other. Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the senses one allays, metaphysics desire the other beyond satisfactions, where no gesture by the body to diminish the aspiration is possible, where it is not possible to sketch out any known caress nor invent any new caress. A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands (entend) the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. (TI 34).

The insatiability of desire arises from the futural and ungraspable quality of the desired on the one hand and the driving force from the desired on the other. “The infinite in finite, the more in less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire—not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but a Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies” (TI 50). To Levinas, what characterizes desire is this very insatiability. Desire is the “inadequation” (TI 35) of desire itself. Need is always a longing for an object, be it a sensible thing, a person, or a mental construction; but there is no correlative between desire and the desired. While need or desire in its conventional sense is identified as “a consciousness of what has been lost,” “a nostalgia,” “a longing for return” (TI 33), the Levinasian desire aspires for an absolute alterity. Levinas makes a distinction between need that is featured as lack or want and desire that lacks nothing yet is ever driven to the desirable. The desired always goes
beyond or “overflows” what desire intends in the same way as “ideatum overflows the capacity of thought” (TI 49) or “But the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its ideatum surpasses its ideas, whereas for the things the total coincidence of their ‘objective’ and ‘formal’ realities is not precluded” (TI 49). What we desire or conceive is not commensurate with the desired or the desirable. To Levinas, it is this unique interaction between desire and the desired that substantiates the relationship between the self and the other. The Desired produces and nourishes generosity and hence a relationship that is neither the disappearance of distance nor a bringing together (TI 34).

Nevertheless, without being in opposition to each other, need and desire orient humans towards their respective realms: the world of the same and the world of the Other. We can say that the Levinasian discourse on need and desire is an articulation of these two distinctive modes of movement or human existence, which stand in relation to each other yet remain self-sufficient and mutually independent. The dynamics of need and desire reflects the status of human beings being both confined to this world and driven to transcendence or alterity. Need draws us back to ourselves but desire compels us towards the Other. While need expresses here, the present, the familiar, and certainty, desire points to there, the future, the unknown, and mystery. Nonetheless, desire is not the negation of need but a breaking-in force from the outside to instigate a centrifugal movement of the I or the same towards the Other from being “at home” (“chez soi”) to a yonder, from the finite to infinity. It indicates the commencement of a moral being out of its economic, material and animal existence. As Levinas claims, “The very dimension of height is opened up by the metaphysical Desire. This height is no longer the starry heaven but the absolute alterity of the Other that is infinite, transcendent, and invisible. Levinas says, “To die for the invisible—this is metaphysics” (TI 35).

I. Need—“The Primary Movement of the Same”

1.1 A “living from” in separation: labor and dwelling
Need is a sign of being in lack of something, but it is more than an indication of physical or psychological insufficiency of our life. Plato’s *Symposium* vividly presents a hilarious drinking party at which Socrates delivered his famous speech on Eros in the disguise of his claimed teacher Diotima’s instruction and brought the ongoing discussion on love to a climactic point. There Socrates describes need as one defining attribute of Eros that stands side by side with the other defining feature of love, i.e. resourcefulness. According to Socrates, love being the son of both Poverty and Contrivance is thus by nature both insufficient and resourceful. On the one hand, he is skillful, cunning, strenuous, and inquisitive, on the other he is always “poor,” “hard and weather-beaten,” “shoeless,” “homeless,” “sleeping out for want of a bed, on the ground, on doorsteps, and in the street,” “always lives in want” (the *Symposium* 203b). In a Socratic account of love, need is equivalent to privation and deficiency. Levinas is surely indebted to Plato’s influence. As far as need is concerned, as Socrates does, Levinas mainly associates need with the material or the earthly side of human existence. But, he reshapes the Platonic or Socratic notion of need by revising or reversing these negative characteristics ascribed to need by Plato to greatly broaden its meaning. Rather than an indication of indigence of being poor, homeless, hard and weather-beaten, need reveals the economy of human life as “dwelling,” “enjoyment,” and “nourishment.” Instead of being deficient, on the contrary, need is essentially marked by plenitude and abundance. For Levinas, need on an ontological level represents a modality of the human life: the “terrestrial existence” or “economic existence” (TI 52) of human beings. As such, he makes a claim: “Need is the primary movement of the same” (TI 116).

Levinas explicitly refutes a narrow understanding of need in terms of a simple “poverty” as is described in the *Symposium*. He says, “In denouncing as illusory the pleasures that accompany the satisfaction of needs Plato has fixed the negative notion of need: it would be a less, a lack that satisfaction would make good. The essence of need would be visible in the need to scratch oneself in scabies, in sickness” (TI 116). He agrees with Plato that need in essence points to seeking satisfaction. But it is apparent that Levinas objects a simplistic take on need that is

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delivered to an instant, direct, unaided remedy. For him the immediacy and directness in seeking satisfaction implies an animal condition just like easing itches by scratching the spots. Levinas proffers a notion of need that rises above the directness and immediacy. In the throb of being in want and satisfaction, need is more than a simple physical sensation of discomfort and ease or a psychology of void and fulfillment. In *Totality and Infinity*, we encounter a rich array of phenomena concerning the human life: solitude, nourishment, dwelling, labor and so forth, which are all lodged in the wide spectrum of need. For Levinas need stands for a way of life which he defines as being in Separation.

We may be wondering: To be separated from what? It is quite evident that with Levinas separation is not a spatial concept. He has made it clear in several places that separation cannot be empirically understood as a spatial interval (TI 175). Instead, separation is endowed with temporal significance. Levinas says, “Separation designates the possibility of an *existent* being set up and having its own destiny to itself, that is, being born and dying without the place of this birth and this death in the time of universal history being the measure of its reality” (55). In this light, we may look at separation as a temporal interlude between birth and death, a resistance to a universal time that encompasses all. The two punctual moments of birth and death bring about a time unique to the existent being, which is cut off from the flow of the general history. In other words, the interval marked by birth and death does not constitute the chain of the universal time constructed by historians but functions as its rupture, a break away from its logical sequential order. Here it is of interest to note that in Levinas’s writings death neither signals the immersion of the individual’s time into the anonymous history nor reduce the being in separation into absolute nothingness by announcing the end of his or her life. In fact, in Levinas’s view, death can never bring about an end nor integrate the separated self into an eternal whole. It does not rejoin the being in separation to totality with a common fate awaits all. Rather, because death lies beyond my horizon, it is not open to my grasp (TI 233). By its very mystery and unpredictability of doing violence on being, death in effect introduces something alien, exterior, and invisible to our being. In this way, death preludes transcendence. As Levinas says, “In death I am exposed to absolute violence, to murder in the night. But in fact already in struggle I contend with the invisible” (TI 233).
Because of the temporal nature of separation, it also suggests that separation is terrestrial, worldly, and material. Distinctively, Levinas expresses separation as “living from” in enjoyment, which becomes the very destiny designated by separation to an extent being. Animals get access to the world via their bodies; except for that, they have no other means. The image of “the serpent grasping itself by biting onto its tail” (TI 37) is quite revealing in this regard. But, time reshapes human relationship with the world since time is also the time of labor. My body is not only a way for the subject to be reduced to slavery, to depend on what is not itself, but is also a way of possessing and of working, of having time, of overcoming the very alterity of what I have to live from (TI 117). At the lowest level needs are instinctive. The basic instinct to sustain life is shared by both human beings and animals. But, as Levinas points out, “The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs” (TI 114). Both human beings and animals have needs for being cold, hungry, and thirsty. Nevertheless, while animals seek after instantaneous satisfaction and directly rely on nature for their supplies and nourishments, humans turn their reliance into labor, which turns indigence into happiness and enjoyment of dwelling at home with oneself (“chez soi”). The distance provides human beings space to give play to his crafts and skills, to wield his power and resources to tame nature for their services. Levinas says, “The distance intercalated between man and the world on which he depends constitutes the essence of need” (TI 116). In my view, with Levinas need is precisely an articulation of the relationship between human beings and the world. In this light, Separation means the separation of the human beings from their natural state to inaugurate the human relationship with the world.

Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* presents a twofold human-world relationship, namely human relations with the element and with the world. One possible misunderstanding of Levinas may arise from our confusion about the distinction between these two-layered relationships. Needless to say, the relation with the element comes more primordial than that with the world. However, human beings convert their relation with the element into a relation with the world. While the former gives expression to bathing which implies no distance, human beings both creates and diminishes the distance in their connection with the world wherein humans detach themselves from the element on the one hand and absorb the element on the other. But, the bare
fact of living is never bare with human beings. “The life that I earn is not a bare existence; it is a life of labor and nourishment” (TI 111). Labor liberates human beings from their natural state. Levinas relates need to appropriation, occupation, and enjoyment that regards every aspect of human existence as labor and economy in this world.

Need on the one hand indicates lack but on the other hand designates the means to overcome the indigence. To Levinas human need assumes a structure of appropriation and empowerment. In Levinas’ eyes, unlike other animals, humans are at once detached from and steeped in the world, or better the element. He points out, “The adequate relation with the element is precisely bathing” and “I am always within the element” (TI 132). Totality and Infinity without doubt depicts a very compelling picture of the element and its relationship with human beings. He says,

The element has no forms containing it; it is content without form. Or rather it has but a side: the surface of the sea and of the field, the edge of the wind; the medium upon which this side takes form is not composed of things. I unfolds in its own dimension: depth, which is inconvertible into the breadth and length in which the side of the element extends….The depth of the element prolongs it till it is lost in the earth and in the heavens. (TI 131)

And he continues in the next page,

A thing offers itself to us by its side. Hence we can say that the element comes to us from nowhere; the side it presents to us does not determine an object, remains entirely anonymous. It is wind, earth, sea, sky, air. Indetermination here is not equivalent to the infinite surpassing limits; it precedes the distinction between the finite and the infinite….The element has no side at all. One does not approach it. The relation
adequate to its essence discovers it precisely as a medium: one is steeped in it; I am always within the element. (TI 132)

Here in Levinas’s description, nature or the element offers people enjoyment but does not render itself to our possession. Levinas’s description of bathing in the element may remind us of his famous thesis of “il y a” which presumes a middle state between being and non-being (Also see TI 142). We are bathed in the element but unable to take it into our possession. The element is essentially ungraspable. To Levinas, the element is different from things in that the former is non-possessable while the latter can be carried away and is therefore connected to possession (TI 131).

Since the element offers itself to the satisfaction of humans as well animals, it seems that the human relationship with the element is not different from the relationship of animals with the element, which is direct, straightforward, without intermediacy. However, to be cold, hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, all these dependencies with regard to the world, have become needs and compelled humans to transform an instinctive being susceptible to anonymous menaces into a being independent of the world, a veritable subject capable of ensuring the satisfaction of its needs. Needs are in my power and thus constitute me as the same and not as dependent on the other. Thus, my dependence on nature is dependence across time: labor. While animals seek after instantaneous satisfaction, human beings prolong their consumption of “terrestrial and celestial nourishments” (TI 114) in time.

Humans rely on the world because of need, but need delivers the world into the hands of humankind. As Levinas vividly describes: “He gets a foothold in the elemental by a side already appropriated: a field cultivated by me, the sea in which I fish and moor my boats, the forest in which I cut wood; and all these acts, all this labor, refer to the domicile. Man plunges into the elemental from the domicile, the primary appropriation” (TI 131-2). The element is non-possessable, but humans in their labor change their dependence on nature into a mastery of it.
Regarding this, Levinas makes a sharp comment, “To live is a sort of transitive verb, and the contents of life are its direct objects” (TI 111). By a “transitive verb,” Levinas revealingly zeros to the point the nature of the economy of the human life: Human beings have turned the world into an object of labor and enjoyment. The element is non-possessable, but human beings have overcome the element through labor, domicile (TI 131) for their own purpose.

Furthermore, in Levinas’s eyes, even by immersion the human relationship with the element appears to be something as lissom as touching the edge or the side of the element. By immersion Levinas does not mean an unidentified unity with nature. However, even in the bathing of the wind, the air, and the sunlight, something alien is already looming about: some unforeseeable threats, some potential disasters. He sees them the otherness in the order of the same. An animal’s need is inseparable from struggle and fear because the exterior world always remains a threat. Labor guarantees the maximum satisfaction of human needs against any possible risk and danger. While animals can do nothing but abandon themselves to the possible risks and dangers, human beings keep themselves at a distance from nature by developing devices to secure the natural resources and protect themselves from being harmed. Humans dwell in the world. In Levinas’s words, “Labor will henceforth draw things from the elements and thus discover the world. This primordial grasp, this emprise of labor, which arouses things and transforms nature into a world” (TI 157). Fundamentally, the human “detachment” and “distance” forms a sharp contrast with the animal “bathing” or “immersion.”

As Levinas remarks, “With the dwelling the separated being breaks with natural existence, steeped in a medium where its enjoyment, without security, on edge, was being inverted into care” (TI 156). This detachment completely changes the nature of human needs. Unlike other animals which are directly attached to and reliable on nature, humans depend on the world as a site both exterior and interior to themselves. Owing to labor, human beings not only gain the means of subsistence but also transform their reliance on things into nourishment and enjoyment of life. Thus, it can be said that nature for human beings is no longer the simple element but a produced world via labor. Dwelling best embodies this human-world relationship.
In this way humans complete the “coiling” moves of the three-phase human-world relationships: immersion, detachment, and absorption. By “coiling” movement, humans move towards themselves in enjoyment. As nature lends itself to both human beings and animals, humans establish their initial relationship with the world by being immersed in the element or nature. Yet, labor provides them with a different mode of abode in the world which Levinas calls dwelling and thereby removes people away from the element. As the basic form of the human economy, labor also renders nature at human beings’ disposal for absorption and usurpation. When humans enter into this new relationship with the world, they are free whereas the world is on their rein. As Levinas says: “The body is not only what is steeped in the element, but what dwells, that is, inhabits and possesses” (TI 137). For this reason, dwelling that signifies human economy and civilization replaces the primitive mode of bathing in the elements. Of a deeper philosophical implication, dwelling announces the birth of a created human world.

Home founds possession. The I “finds in the world a site (lieu) and a home (mansion). Dwelling is the very modality of maintaining oneself (se tient), not as the famous serpent grasping itself by biting onto its tail, but as the body that, on the earth exterior to it, holds itself up and can” (TI 37). Humans are separated from the world while bathed in its nourishment. Dwelling makes the mode of the human life entirely different from that of the natural existence of animals. “The element is fixed between the four walls of the home, is called in possession….This grasp operated on the elemental is labor” (TI 158). Dwelling in holding up humans within their own domain at once separates them from the world and provides them a private space to nourish their energy and wedge their power, namely “can,” which shows the human possession and mastery of the world. As such, the site or the world is not just a natural living environment, it also affords means. This is because “everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehended. The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same” (TI 38). As humans deepen their needs, they also expand and transform the domain of their living world via labor. It is in this sense that we may say that need is both dependence and independence. Or, as Levinas puts, “Need therefore can be characterized neither as freedom, since it is dependence, nor as passivity, since it lives from
what, already familiar and without secret, does not subjugate it but gladdens it” (TI 145). To be sure, in the satisfaction of my needs, the world into which I sank my teeth is assimilated and converted into a part of me. The intentionality of the I seems to be pointing to the external world, but in effect it has drawn the world back to the I. In this sense, as need constitutes part of my nourishment, the world that founds me has lost its alterity. “Possession is accomplished in taking-possession or labor, the destiny of the hand” (TI 159), remarks Levinas.

Nonetheless, separation does not simply mean a break with the animal and vegetable condition, more importantly, for Levinas, separation also means non-relational with respect to the Other. Separation signifies the separation of the I from the other, a mode of existence in lack of relationship with the infinite. Other than a spatial or physical distance one might relate separation to, separation represents an intermediate state in which humans are not only separated from animals but also separated from the Other. Notably, separation characterizes humans as an economic existence that is distinct from a moral existence as the infinite being. Throughout Totality and Infinity, Levinas repeatedly describes separation as egoism, as an inner life. In Levinas’ view, egoism, enjoyment, sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority are all the articulation of separation (TI 148). “The separation of the Same is produced in the form of an inner life, a psychism” (TI 54). Also, “In separation— which is produced in the psychism of enjoyment, in egoism, in happiness, where the I identifies itself—the I is ignorant of the Other” (TI 62). “Separation as inner life, or as psychism….This interiority will appear as a presence at home with oneself, which means inhabitation and economy” (TI 110). “To be separated is to be at home with oneself. But to be at home with oneself…is to live from…, to enjoy the elemental” (TI 147). By making these claims, Levinas tries to argue that separation separates the finite (being) from the infinite (being) and the being in need from the being in Desire. They depend on the world in a manner of being in isolation or solitude. There is no genuine relation in the realm of the same because every relation has turned out to be the relation with oneself. In this sense, we may say that separation does not simply constitute the context of need; it is need per se. Need in essence is egoist. Nonetheless, paradoxically, separation both prevents and maintains the possibility of relating oneself to the other. As Levinas points out, “The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation.
The idea of Infinity requires this separation” (TI 102). Thus, according to Levinas, humans are not defined by their destiny of finitude but by their status of separation. Need that regards the I or the same belongs to the domain of Separation.

1.2 An enjoyment in ignorance of the other

The truth is that enjoyment in fact always prevails over needs with respect to human beings. Levinas says, “We live from our labor which ensures our subsistence; but we also live from our labor because it fills (delights or saddens) life” (TI 112). Moreover, “The limited case in which need prevails over enjoyment, the proletarian condition condemning to accursed labor in which the indigence of corporeal existence finds neither refuge nor leisure at home with itself, is the absurd world of *Geworfenheit*” (TI 146-7). People might criticize Levinas for his bourgeois ignorance of poverty in the world, but it seems quite apparent that need in Levinas argument is not identical with a lack. As he says, “Physiology, form the exterior, teaches us that need is a lack. That man could be happy for his needs indicates that in human need the physiological plane is transcended” (TI 115). For Levinas, need in its simple sense of want is inadequate to embrace the rich meanings the word implies. Need is more than a lack or want. It is quite a novel idea of Levinas to present need as happiness, the very pulsation of the I in enjoyment (TI 114). Need constitutes the necessary basis of human thriving and nourishment. For Levinas, “Life’s relation with its own dependence on the things is enjoyment—which, as happiness, is independence” (TI 112). Because of this, the pain we feel in our need does not come from the dissatisfaction of our need but rather in its satisfaction. This is simply because “man is happy to have needs. A being without needs would not be happier than a needy being, but outside of happiness and unhappiness” (TI 143). “*Live from*” offers a mode of encounter with the world. However, in the psychism of enjoyment, egoism and happiness, the I is ignorant of the Other (TI 62).
Totality and Infinity presents us two types of relationship: the relationship with the world in the form of enjoyment and self-affirmation and the relationship with transcendence (TI 41) which is expressed as desire, as welcoming, and as hospitality. The first relationship indicates human existence engrossed in egoism whereas the second designates the self-enclosed being opened to the Other. Therefore, in Levinas’s writings, the I encounters the other in two different senses: the other in the world of the same and the Other of transcendence. But the I in enjoyment may risk its relationship with both. As for the relation with the other—the other of nutriments, as discussed above, all relations in separation may eventually lead to the relation with the self. For “nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transformation of the other into the same, which is the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, as we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me” (TI 111). With respect to the Other—the one in the dimension of height, the I in its self-sufficiency of “chez soi” can shut the Other outside of his or her home. Levinas compares the being that is entirely isolated at home to an imprisoned being as if enclosed within a shell. He says, “The imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison, is at home with itself. It is power for illusion—if illusion there was—constitutes its separation” (TI 55). Quite idiosyncratically, in many places in Totality and Infinity, Levinas uses the term “psychism” to describe this modality of human existence. He says, for instance, “The separation of the Same is produced in the form of an inner life, a psychism. The psychism constitutes an event in being….The original role of the psychism does not, in fact, consist in only reflecting being; it is already a way of being (une manière d’être), resistance to the totality” (TI 54). 2

We may ask why Levinas uses a psychological term to describe the being in separation. Apparently, he is not talking about the human mental activity by psychism, which, instead, signifies a way of living that encompasses the whole range of human activities in this world with no reference to the Other. We may say that Levinas uses this term in a metaphorical sense to highlight the self-enclosure or interiority of the being in separation that is utterly absorbed in its

2 Also see TI 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 110, 148.
own world with no relationship with the Other beyond his or her own self. Ironically, Levinas calls psychism the “feat of radical separation” (TI 54). In his writings, along with “psychism” we see another expression “psychic.” In my eyes, they represent two distinct modes of the human existence. “Psyche” reveals a complete exposure to the other, an animation of the other in me, a passivity of being-for-the-other as my identity. In contrast, psychism indicates a being at home with oneself in neglect of the other. Psychism and psyche, as need and desire, give expression to two different types of human subjectivity with the former a “coiling” up to oneself and the latter being torn up from inside, entirely occupied by the Other, being the hostage and substitution for the Other. Although Levinas is never against the self’s being in separation, he is not uncritical of the self that is entirely absorbed in his or herself in ignorance of the Other. He says, “The self-sufficiency of enjoying measures the egoism or the ipseity of the Ego and the same. Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution. The I is not the support of enjoyment. The ‘intentional’ structure is here wholly different; the I is the very contraction of sentiment, the pole of a spiral whose coiling and involution is drawn by enjoyment: the focus of the curve is a part of the curve. It is precisely as a ‘coiling,’ as a movement toward oneself, that enjoyment comes into play” (TI 118). The move of “coiling” vividly uncovers the centripetal or self-enveloping nature of human enjoyment.

1.3 A window opened to the outside

“In the separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed.” (TI 148)

“Interiority must be at the same time closed and opened. The possibility of rising from the animal condition is assuredly thus described.” (TI 149)

3 In *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* Levinas devotes a section to discussing “psyche” (see OB 68-72).
In reality, it is very unlikely that the one who is at home with oneself (chez soi) can be totally cut off the outside world. This is not simply because the place of dwelling itself is already situated in the outside as a building belonging to the world of objects. Consequently, both from without and from within, people step out into the world from an inwardness (See TI 152). Here, the outside world wherein home is situated does not stand as the counterpart of home: the outside versus the inside. Rather, both home and the world, in Levinas’s view, are already totalized in the system of the Same. Furthermore, the economy of labor and dwelling changes the human relationship with the world into a relationship of possession and therefore deprives the world of its otherness. For this reason, Levinas says, “Correctly speaking the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated by relation to my dwelling” (TI 153).

Because of this dependency on the outside world for dwelling and nutrition, the separated being “is not strictly speaking separate” (TI 102).

As a matter of fact, even within the domain of the Same, something alien is already gleaming. The one being at home with oneself (“chez soi”) may have caught a glimpse of the other. Love may befall at the most unexpected moment and the unpredictable arrival of death can violate the interiority of the separated being. In addition, “The happiness of enjoyment, a satisfaction of needs which is not compromised by the need-satisfaction rhythm, can be tarnished by the concern for the morrow involved in the fathomless depth of the element in which enjoyment is steeped” (TI 144). In their enjoyment of the element people may feel the limit of their freedom. The element that provides me nourishment may turn out a threatening force against me too. “Limitation is not due to the fact that the I has not chosen its birth and thus is already and henceforth in the situation, but to the fact that the plenitude of its instant of enjoyment is not ensured against the unknown that lurks in the very element it enjoys, the fact that joy remains a chance and stroke of luck” (TI 144).

Nonetheless, most important, for Levinas, the separated being is not only characterized with psychism but also defined by the idea of Infinity. Maybe we can say that this is the “double vie” of the separated being. Separation means that the I in enjoyment lives on different plane with
regard to the Other. Yet, this does not mean an opposition to each other. Rather, to use Levinas’ term, they live within an “asymmetrical space” (TI 216) or the space of curvature (TI 88). For this reason, the I does not go to the Other via the reversion of the direction (see TI 61) by moving away from the I to the other but through elevation accomplished in being given the idea of Infinity, namely Desire. According to Levinas, “What is essential to created existence is its separation with regard to the Infinite. This separation is not simply a negation. Accomplished as psychism, it precisely opens upon the idea of Infinity” (TI 105).

In this regard, we should say that Levinas’ atheist being best represents the status of human beings—steeped in his sensible existence as enjoyment, labor, and dwelling on the one hand and perpetually driven to Infinity on the other. As Levinas comments,

> Only an atheist being can relate himself to the other and already absolve himself from this relation. Transcendence is to be distinguished from a union with the transcendent by participation…. The idea of infinity, the metaphysical relation, is the dawn of a humanity with our myths. But faith purged of myths, the monotheist faith, itself implies metaphysical atheism….Atheism conditions a veritable relationship with true God. But this relationship is as distinct from objectification as from participation. To hear the divine word does not amount to knowing an object; it is to be in relation with a substance overflowing its own idea in me, overflowing its own idea in me, overflowing what Descartes calls its ‘objective existence.’” (TI 77)

4 See TI 88: “The dimension of height in which the Other is placed is as it were the primary curvature of being from which the privilege of the Other results, the gradient (denivlement) of transcendence.”
According to Levinas, Infinity is not the opposite of the finite. People do not undo separation to attest transcendence. Rather, the idea of infinity or Desire, namely the relationship with the Other verifies that transcendence is the very expression of this aspiration. As Levinas says, “Neither the separated being nor the infinite being is produced as an antithetical term” (TI 148) and “Separation is not only dialectically correlative with transcendence, as its reverse; it is accomplished as a positive event. The relation with infinity remains as another possibility of the being recollected in its dwelling. The possibility for the home to open to the Other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and window” (TI 173). While Plato claims that the satisfaction of the bodily and physical needs is illusory, Levinas sanctions its value and worth. Nevertheless, we may say that both Plato and Levinas see the insufficiency of need in that for both of them need is in need of a spiritual dimension. Diotima asked Socrates, “The lover of beautiful things has a desire; what does he desire?” “That they become his own” (the *Symposium* 204 d). Then, she furthered on, “Tell me, Socrates, a lover of good things has a desire; what does he desire?” (the *Symposium* 204 e) What would be Levinas’s question or answer then? He calls the ones in separation to raise their heads upward to appeal to the Height where the good and beautiful dwells.

II. Desire—the Metaphysics of the Relation with the Other

2.1 Face: the Desirable for Desire

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5 Also see TI 149: “In separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed. The closedness of the separated being must be ambiguous enough for, on the one hand, the interiority necessary to the idea of infinity to remain real and not apparent only, for the destiny of the interior being to be pursued in an egoist atheism refuted by nothing exterior…. But on the other hand within the very interiority hollowed out by enjoyment thee must be produced a heteronomy that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself.”

6 Plato, the *Symposium* in *Complete Works*, Edited, with Introduction and Notes by John M. Cooper, 1997, p. 205.

7 Idid.
In Levinas’s philosophy, desire is the relationship of the same with the other. Three crucial factors contribute to a Levinasian notion of desire. First, desire does not originate from the desiring subject but is animated by the desired object or the Desirable instead. Second, since the object of desire is always exceeding what desire can desire, desire by nature is the idea of infinity implanted in the I by the Desirable. Third, the face is the epiphany of the other, the very expression or revelation of the infinite infinity—the Desirable for Desire. Levinas uniquely defines desire as the face-to-face encounter with the other.

Unlike need that is characterized with a lack within like our being thirsty and hungry, desire is the idea of Infinity conceived from the infinite. The fact that Infinity cannot be absorbed into part of my entity henceforth remains beyond the knowledge and intelligibility of the I who desires. As such, the manifestation of the face is the way of an exceeding. The other manifests himself as a given which the I cannot overpower and appropriate in his totality. “The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed.” (TI 194). For Levinas, the face is not a presence, but a trace, a trace which marks the escape of the Other who cannot be contained, who has escaped being reduced to Being. The face appears as “totally other,” as an absolute or metaphysical exteriority, so that qualitatively an infinite distance exists in this face to face encounter. “The mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming as image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic images it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum—the adequate idea,…It expresses itself” (TI 51). In contrast with objects, the I does not assign the face its meaning. It is in no way constituted by me as my “alter ego,” and even less as my mirror image. The Other is resistant to all characterization and classification. The face surpasses every historical, psychological, sociological, and cultural origin of meaning. It affirms itself as the autonomous giver of meaning: it produces on its own the meaning of its appearance. It therefore appears to me as something ever new. It informs me directly about the Other’s existence and essential quality, i.e. its radical otherness.
Henceforth, the face is not a medium though which something behind or beyond the face is revealed, or a bearer that contains truth, the goodness within. Face is the very expression of the goodness itself. Disengaged from any form, it has meaning by itself. Its “expression: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its ‘form’ the totality of its ‘content,’ finally abolishing the distinction between form and content” (TI 51). The face is both its form and content. The straightforwardness of the face absolves the face from resorting to the aid of any medium. Disclosure and nudity features the face. As he says, “Such a nudity is the face. The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my power, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me—and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system” (TI 75). The nakedness of the face has a great significance in Levinas’ thought. It is not the I that discloses the face as if the latter were an object or a form containing some truth behind or underneath it but rather the face that reveals itself to me as truth per se. The face itself is precisely the revelation of truth without any reference beyond itself. The face is by definition always on the move: it “divests itself of its form” (Alphonso Lingis, 1987: 352), “breaks through its own plastic image” (TI 155).

Since the face is self-revealing, the relation with the face is not the relation of object-cognition (TI 75). The face manifests itself on its own, independent of my perspective. Levinas says, “Absolute expression is not disclosure; to disclose, on the basis of a subjective horizon, is already to miss the noumenon. The interlocutor alone is the term of pure experience … where he expresses himself without our having to disclose him from a ‘point of view,’ in a borrowed light” (TI 67). The face is not an object, so it has light of its own (TI 74). Or, rather, the face is its own source of light and the light itself. Actually, not only does the face need no “borrowed light,” but the very epiphany of the face is teaching—”the coinciding of the teaching and the teacher” (TI 70). The face is not illuminated but illuminating in a position of height. As he says, “One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behavior. but then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face, which is accomplished in being situated in height with respect to us—in teaching” (TI 67). Therefore, Levinas objects any theoretical relation that reduces the Other to the object of knowledge. Once
theory enters the relation, it will renounce metaphysical Desire and the marvel of exteriority from which that Desire lives (TI 42). In facing the face of the Other, the I is in the position of being taught, questioned, and commanded.

The interruption of the self arises in the encounter with the face of the Other. Owing to its nudity, the face is provocative in nature. As Levinas says, “The nudity of the body felt in modesty, appearing to the other in repulsion and desire. But this nudity always refers in one way or other to the nakedness of the face. Only a being absolutely naked by his face can denude himself immodestly” (TI 75). The nakedness of the face may arouse two conflicting feelings. The I may be tempted to do the face harm, to reduce the Other to submit to my striving after happiness and power because of modesty, humility, vulnerability, and passivity revealed in the nudity of the face. Being destitute and unprotected, the face dares me to do it violence. The aggressive I is always tempted by the face to attack and murder. Nevertheless, there is something very tender yet powerful about this attraction. “The expression of the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power” (TI 198). At the very moment when the I is enticed to do harm to the Other in its unprotectedness and defenselessness, the face shocks me with both its vulnerability and resistance and brings home to me that this is absolutely forbidden. The face does not only reveal weakness but also strength that lies in its very feebleness. The face manifests itself as an irreducible objection to any oppression and coercion from the I. It reveals to me an irresistible command in its nudity and defenselessness: You shall not kill.

Along with its defenselessness and unprotectedness, the nakedness of his face bears resemblance to the nakedness of the body that is cold and ashamed of its being naked. The nakedness of the face is thus destituteness, which is concretely revealed in the face of the widow, the stranger, the orphan, and the poor (TI 251). For this very reson, the relation between me and the Other is beyond rhetoric. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger, a deficiency. To recognize the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as ‘You’ in a dimension of height (TI 75). Because the nakedness of the face is an epiphany of the
Other, a visitation, a coming, I am obliged to be responsible for it and I cannot approach the Other empty-handed. In Levinas’s philosophy, an encounter with the face means the start of an asymmetrical inter-human relationship, in which my world is ruptured, my contentment interrupted. The auto-signification of the face awaits no dialogue or reciprocity. The face is a disturbance between my world and the world that exceeds mine. Here is an appeal from which there is no escape, a responsibility. The Other is primarily experienced as the one who addresses me as face, who looks at me and speaks to me. The revelation is prior to any communication and exchange of signs. I am concerned not with myself but first with the Other who summons me in the face. As expressed in Levinas’s favorite quote of Alyosha from *The Brothers Karamazov*, “We are all responsible for everyone else—but I am more responsible than all the others.” The needs of the Other as the poor, the orphan, and the widow disrupt my being at home with myself and put me into question. It is looking into the face of the Other that reveals the call to responsibility before any beginning, decision or initiative on my part. I am demanded, disposed, obsessed, and inspired.

Apart from the face that is challenging and questioning, it is of great interest to note that in Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* we encounter another countenance: the face of the feminine alterity (TI 155), which stands out is sharp contrast with the face of the master and interlocutor. Levinas writes,

> The welcoming of the face is peaceable from the first, for it answers to the unquenchable Desire for Infinity. The peaceable welcome is produced primordially in the gentleness of the feminine face, in which the separated being can recollect itself, because of which it inhabits, and in its dwelling accomplishes separation. Inhabitation and the intimacy of the dwelling which make the separation of the human being possible this imply a first revelation of the Other. (TI 155)
This face is utterly different from that of an interlocutor. The gentleness of the feminine face is closely associated with the intimacy of home. The serene feminine face expressed in the hospitality of Welcome forms a sharp contrast with the face of an interlocutor that is questioning, challenging and commanding. We may feel puzzled at these two distinct visages of the Other as they both “answer to the unquenchable Desire for Infinity.” Even Levinas himself asks: “But how can the separation of solitude, how can intimacy be produced in the face of the Other?” (TI 155) But in the light of another statement of Levinas, we are brought home that this intimate Woman face actually reveals itself as the face of things, namely, a phenomenon, an object accessible to the being in separation in the world of the same. He says,

…familiarity and intimacy are produced as a gentleness that spreads over the face of things. This gentleness is not only a conformity of nature with the needs of the separated being, which from the first enjoys and constitutes itself as separate, as I, in that enjoyment, but is a gentleness coming from an affection (amité) for I. The intimacy which familiarity already presupposes is an intimacy with someone. The interiority of recollection is a solitude in a world already human. Recollection refers to a welcome. (TI 155)

Here Levinas makes it clear that the gentleness embodying familiarity and intimacy corresponds to the needs of the separated being. In his enjoyment of the agreeable accommodation offered by the woman the I turns the intimate familiarity into his life immersed. The opposition between the feminine face and the face of the interlocutor reflects the distinction between “the relative alterity” (TI 194) and the radical alterity. The woman showing her hospitality in her feminine face necessitates the dwelling in this world. Accordingly, the feminine other distinguishes itself from the absolute Other that is incommensurate with any enjoyment and knowledge (TI 198). Nonetheless, as discussed earlier in our examination of “need,” since the I not only lives in separation but also stands in a relationship with transcendence, the I has both need and desire viz. the idea of infinity. Thus, it can be said that the I is destined to encounter the two countenances of the face which come to me on two different planes. The feminine face is out of “the common
Levinas insists that the encounter of the I with the feminine face is not only necessary but also unavoidable. However, he also maintains that the face of the woman welcomes but does not teach. He says, “The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not the you (vous) of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the thou (tu) of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret” (TI 155). To Levinas, the relation with the feminine alterity belongs to the category of the Buberian “I-Thou” interhuman relationships (TI 155). In Buber’s philosophy, human beings form threefold relationship in the world: with nature as I-it relation; with other human beings as I-Thou relation; and with the divine as I and the You relation. As far as the inter-human relationship is concerned, it is the relation of intimacy and reciprocity, “neighborless and
seamless.”8 However, from Levinas’s perspective, the face of the interlocutor, which is challenging, doubting, anything except for gentle, soft, intimate, and feminine is not the face of the Buberian “Thou.” For this reason, it is necessary of the I to cut across the gentleness of the feminine face to meet the challenge and command of the interlocutor. The authority of the interlocutor will not do violence unto the I, but it calls the latter to take up responsibility. “The plurality of the same and the other” (TI 203) is thus maintained in the presence of the face of woman and the face of the master.

As the I transcends his need in Desire, namely the idea of Infinity, the I in being taught by both his master and interlocutor is undergoing an elevation from a separated being into an infinite being. Unlike the Buberian face, the Levinasian face guides the I to move beyond the confine of the enjoyment of the Home to open himself to the other that “is situated in a dimension of height and abasement—glorious abasement” (TI 251). Levinas writes,

I must have been in relation with something I do not live from. This event is the relation with the Other who welcome me in the Home, the discreet presence of the Feminine. But in order that I be able to free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the Home establishes, in order that I be able see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to give what I possess. Only thus could I situate myself absolutely above my engagement in the non-I. But for this I must encounter the indiscreet face of the Other that calls me into question. The Other—the absolutely other—paralyses possession, which he contests by his epiphany in the face. He can contest my possession only because he approaches me not from

We may wonder who after all provides whom the Home. Is the Other who offers the I his/her Home or is the I who opens my Home to welcome the Other? Obviously, the answer is both. Yet, it is certain that the Other that welcomes me in the Home is the one of the feminine face, whose softness and gentleness hence warms up my dwelling. Conversely, the Other that I receive in my home is the absolute Other of the master who approaches me from the above to shatter my enjoyment of being “at home” by myself. Here we see an interesting yet significant Levinasian twist: When I am in the world of the Same, the Other as the Woman of the Home welcomes me. But as the idea of Infinity or desire takes over me, I go beyond the confines of the world of the Same to take the position of the Woman to be the hostess of the Home with gentleness of hospitality to receive the Other—the Master, the interlocutor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor. Here the relationship between the Woman the hostess and the I who receives her hospitality differs fundamentally from the relationship between the I who receives the Other and the Other who demands my hospitality. The former indicates the geniality of world of the Same where the I feels ease at home while the latter bespeaks the generosity and utter submissiveness of the I with respect to the Other. In front of the Other, “I must know how to give what I possess” (TI 171). I extend my hospitality to such an extent that the other may take my abode and I can become a homeless.  

9 Cf. Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, where Levinas addresses how the appeal of the Other disconcerts me to such an extent that I am “turned inside out,” “cored out,” “denucleared,” “disposed,” “uprooted.” While in Totality and Infinity the site of the I is Home, in Levinas’s second major work, the I lodges himself at a “null-site (non-lieu)” (OB 8). In one place Levinas even says, “The persecuted one is expelled from his place and has only himself to himself, has nothing in the world on which to rest his head” (OB 121). This may remind us of Jesus’s words to a man who wanted to follow him: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). Under the appeal of the Other, the I turns into a pour autrui (OB 64) and ceases to be pour soi (OB 52), to become a hostage of the Other; I am “turned inside out,” “cored out,” “denucleared,” “disposed,” “uprooted.”
The hospitality of the I gives a full expression to Desire—the idea of Infinity—which develops into an act of welcome, an opening oneself to receive the other. For this reason, Levinas compares the “vision” of the face to a mode of sojourning in a home, a form of economic life. He writes,

The ‘vision’ of the face as face is a certain mode of sojourning in a home, or—to speak in a less singular fashion—a certain form of economic life. No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. Recollection in a home open to the Other—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent. The chosen home is the very opposite for a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering (errance) which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics. (TI 172)

Above we have tried to distinguish the two visages of the face: the face of the Woman and the face of the Master. But speaking of the ambiguity of the face, there is another issue even trickier: Is the Levinasian face merely metaphysical as Levinas himself often insists and many scholars uphold or empirical as well? Somehow the Levinasian face is puzzling. Many scholars insist on the solely metaphysical or transcendent face. To be sure, Levinas’s own treatment of the face is rather complex and intriguing, pregnant with ambiguity or even contradictions. On the one hand, he insists on the absolute transcendence of the face, on the other he admits “the sensible appearance of the face” (TI 198) and maintains that the transcendence cannot be enacted outside the world. As quoted earlier, he says, “But the transcendence of the face is not enacted outside of the world, as though the economy by which economy is produced remained beneath a sort of beatific contemplation of the Other (which would thereby turn into the idolatry that brews in all contemplation)” (TI 172). Somewhere else in his article “Transcendence and Height” in addressing Jean Wahl’s question, Levinas says, “The situation of the I in the face of the Other is significant. It is a structure that illuminates, and consequently its analysis is not the description
of an empirical fact” (BPW 22). He continues, “But this is an illuminating experience, metaempirical” (BPW 23). The issue seems to become more and more difficult to grasp as we go through the pages of his conversations with Philippe Nemo. There, Levinas says, “I do not know if one can speak of a ‘phenomenology’ of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears. So, too, I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is ethical….The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes!” (EI 85) Also, “The face is signification, and signification without context. I mean that the Other, in the rectitude of the face, is not a character within a context” (EI 86).

But, in my reading, the Levinasian face actually embraces two dimensions: One is transcendent and the other empirical. Among these quotes, the first two refer to its empirical aspect and draw attention to the empirical implication of the transcendence of the face and the rest by contrast emphasize the transcendent or metaphysical significance of the face. Naturally, these two directions implied in Levinas’s presentation of the face would give rise to different interpretations among scholars. For example, Colin Davis remarks that Philip Nemo in his interview with Levinas has mistakenly taken the Levinasian face as an empirical human face by asking Levinas if it is hard for the murderer to kill if the victim looks at the murderer directly.10 Theodore De Boer comments on the nakedness of the face, saying “When the face is called ‘naked’, the reference is to an evidence which cuts across all historical allusion. Nakedness means an ab-solute which transcends historical relativity, like the Idea in Plato.”11 From De Boer’s point of view, the fact that in *Totality and Infinity* the Other usually appears in capitalized

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form (l’Autre or l’Autrui) already suggests that “the face of the other cannot be identified with the visible image which is an object of empirical knowledge.”

From my perspective, Levinas never denies the empirical face as he brings to light its metaphysical or transcendent significance. If the face is entirely metaphysical, as Collin Davis suggests, my questions would be: Why does Levinas bother introducing “the face” instead of simply expounding the signification of infinity; why does not he simply stay with “the Other” instead of highlighting “the face”? Infinity is abstract while the face is concrete; the Other is conceptual while the face is sensible. This is true. Empirically, the face is the most expressive part of the human body and the eyes the most telling organs of the face. However, I maintain that in Levinas’s philosophy “the face” is neither rhetoric nor a metaphor to make his obscure thought accessible. Rather, the Levinasian face is both experiential and transcendent. By this I do not mean that the face of the same, namely the Woman face is empirical while the face of the Other, namely the face of the master and interlocutor is metaphysical. To me the core of the issue is how we understand transcendence. I think that our confusion or misunderstanding arises from the fact that we tend to dichotomize the transcendent and empirical to look at them as opposed to each other rather than mutually entailed.

By transcendence or metaphysical, Levinas refers to the ethical signification of the face. In this ethical light, the face is endowed with a like structure of Infinity that is infinitely beyond my grasp and knowledge and thereby free from my control and coercion, that is infinitely resistant to and thwarting the possibility of violence and murdering befallen on the face. But on the other hand, the face is neither a vague or invisible image conceived by the mind nor a substitute for God. Rather, literally, the face is the face we encounter every day, especially that of the poor, the proletariat, the stranger, the destitute, the widow, who do not come from a fictional land but physically live along with us in this world. Just as Infinity or transcendence for Levinas is never

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12 Ibid. p. 47.
a transcendent or a transcendent entity, the Levinasian face never exists as a transcendent entity outside this world. The transcendence of the face lies in the fact that the face itself is precisely its revealed meaning and significance that is questioning, demanding, and commanding rather than that there is a different face—an invisible face from a different order other than ours. If it is so, we are still thinking about the face ontologically. Nevertheless, in my view, the whole purport of Levinas’s speculation on the face rests on one point: To look at the face ethically. Or, rather, in his words, “The epiphany of the face is ethical” (TI 199). If we try to understand the transcendence of the face in terms of an empirical invisibility and inaccessibility, we are taking the face for God. Then, to use Levinas’s word, this is “idolatry” (TI 172). As he himself has stated, “The face in which the other—the absolute other—presents himself does not negate the same. … It remains commensurate with the him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial” (TI 203). When Levinas applies to the Other or the face all those attributes about God: “invisible,” “transcendent,” “infinite” and so forth, he is not creating a secular substitute for God. Rather, he is underscoring the absolute alterity and height of the Other, the absolute authority and sanctity of the Other in relation to the self, which is comparable to that of God with respect to us human beings. With Levinas “Invisibility does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea” (TI 34).

By transcendence, the face being its very expression and revelation in its nudity and destituteness utters two “first words”: First, “You shall not commit murder” (TI 199);13 second, “obligation” (TI 201).14 Accordingly, the transcendence of the face brings about two meanings: One is prohibition against killing and the other a command to give. They both are the primordial teaching of the face. Why does Levinas claim “you shall not kill!” the first word from the face? As long as human brutality and assassination exists such as the evil of the Holocaust, any talk on either being or ethics is meaningless. Nevertheless, the transcendent meaning of the face just lies

13 “This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: ‘You shall not commit murder’” (TI 199).
14 “The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation” (TI 201).
in its resistance to murder, “the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance” (TI 199). “You shall not commit murder!” is issued out of its very authority and divinity of the transcendence of the face. In its first word we hear God’s commandment: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13) to the Israelites. To Levinas the epiphany of the face reveals the impossibility of killing (see TI 199), which is precisely a transcendent or ethical signification rather than an empirical event regarding the face. For in reality the human history is full of blood-shed and murders, among which Cain’s slaughter of his brother Abel was the first crime of humankind. Nonetheless, the interdiction arises from the depth of the eyes that looks at me as Abel’s eyes shall look at Cain from the tomb (TI 233), from Abel’s blood crying out to God from the ground for revenge and justice and God’s punishment befell on the one who murdered: “You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth” (Gen. 4: 8-12).

Furthermore, as Theodore De Boer has pointed out, “For Levinas the great commandment besides ‘You shall not kill’ is: ‘You shall not leave your neighbor at the hour of his death.’”\(^{15}\) In this reading, the first word is at once a prohibition against murdering and a commandment on companionship and sensitivity in face of other people’s death. Here, Levinas equates the lack of caring sensibility for the dying to murdering. Moreover, in our vision of the face, we are not merely prohibited from murdering that may be possibly incurred by the temptation of its unprotectedness but also are commanded to give for the destitution uncovered by its nudity. The transcendence of the face is laid bared in poverty of the face. Because of this, we simply cannot approach the other empty-handed. Levinas says, “Transcendence is not a vision of the Other, but a primordial donation” (TI 174). For him, “The nakedness of the face is destituteness. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give” (TI 75). The Other is not God. The face does not because of its received Godlike qualities become His


Also, see Emmanuel and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, p. 23: “The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*) but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: ‘You shall not kill.’”
epiphany or secular replacement. Nonetheless, in an ethical sense, we can say: As we welcome the Other with hospitality, we are receiving God actually. Levinas in his writings does send us such a message, which, however, is nothing new but an instruction imparted across millennia. The Jewish Holy Scripture abounds in such stories. For example, the Book of Genesis vividly records how Abraham encounters God. It reads,

The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he says, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bath your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.”

Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and says, “Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!” Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and waited on them under the tree they ate. (Gen. 18:1-8)\(^{16}\)

God appeared to Abraham; we do not know for sure whether the coming of the three men was God’s visitation or they were only God’s three angels or messengers heralding His arrival. Let us leave the answer to the *Midrash*, rabbi’s Talmudic commentaries, and other Jewish thinkers and scholars’ speculations. But what is of particular interest to my argument is: It seemed that Abraham did not actually know whom he was receiving and the Lord identified himself only

\(^{16}\) The quote of the Scripture is from *The Jewish Bible TANAKH The Holy Scripture* the New JPS Translation according to the traditional Hebrew texts, Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985
afterwards. Or, to put it in a different way but in essence the same, we can say that for Abraham there was never any other answer except for one: “Here I am.” He always kept the door of his house open to be ready for service as if every visit of the sojourners or strangers were the visitation of God. Abraham the patriarch of the Hebrew serves as the archetype of Jewish hospitality. Literally, these three men were strangers to Abraham, travelers passing his tent. But at the first sight of them, even before the men uttered a word, Abraham greeted them with great kindness, submitted himself to them in awe and humbleness like a servant to the master, and offered to them his abundant hospitality. Without a tint of curiosity, hesitation, caution or doubt, Abraham welcomed the men to his home, to prepare for them the best well-chosen food, to serve them in his ample generosity and humility. The promise “let me fetch a morsel of bread” ended up with a feast of cakes made of choice flour, calf, tender and choice, curds and milk. Abraham’s modesty and humbleness forms a sharp contrast with his overflowing generosity and kindness. Yet, we are not only deeply impressed by Abraham’s immense hospitality towards the guests but greatly struck by the tempo of the fast movements of Abraham and his household as if there were an urgency to serve the guests. Abraham “ran” to greet the three men; he “hastened” to his wife Sarah to ask her to be “Quick” to make cakes; he “ran” to the herd to get a calf and his servant-boy “hastened” to prepare. This biblical narrative of Abraham’s hospitality is marked with a quality of eagerness and haste, which is strongly echoed in the Levinasian relationship with the other that arouses the I to an ethical exigency. As Levinas writes, “The Other imposes himself as an exigency that dominates this freedom, and hence as more primordial than everything that takes place in me” (TI 87).

In Abraham we see the exemplary model of the Levinasian generosity and hospitality. Just like Abraham looked up and saw the three men, the Levinasian Other always comes from “a dimension of height” (TI 215) to demand me, command me not in words but by his very face that speaks. The I has to keep his/her house wide open to welcome, to serve as a servant does the service to the master, to give with a deep-seated feeling of kindness. I want to point out that

17 It is somehow quite puzzling why milk is served with veal, which should be contradicting the Jewish dietary law. But since the issue is not relevant to my discussion, I simply leave it aside.
hospitality henceforth also entails obligations and responsibilities entrusted on the I by the other, for whom I am therefore accountable for his and her well-being. In the meanwhile, hospitality also implies vulnerability, unprotectedness, an exposure to danger and risk that may possibly be incurred on the I by my very act of hospitality to leave my house open to whomever coming along. Nonetheless, the practice of hospitality overrides all. Lot’s story is well illustrative of this biblical precept, in its extreme form.18 Without doubt, Levinas’s ethical philosophy carries on this Jewish tradition to develop out of it his theory on the self’s responsibility for the other. In his second major work Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, Levinas further expounds the implications of responsibility and furthers the idea of responsibility into the idea of passivity and vulnerability entailed in an ethical relationship with the other. Thereby, he formulates a sophisticated and eccentric ethics on the subjectivity of the self in relation to the Other, where responsibility is identified with sensibility, vulnerability, passivity, persecution, trauma, accusation and the like. There the responsible one is sensible, vulnerable, passive, persecuted, traumatized, accused, and so on. However, despite all, doing the Other kindness is an ethical commandment prescribed by the Torah. The self is destined to hold responsibility for the Other. In this sense, the welcome of the Other is an absolute commandment “despite oneself,”19 my will, my intentionality, my power, and even my kindness. The breach of hospitality is a transgression of the law.

Be kind to the Other, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger because God “upholds the cause of the fatherless and widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing.”

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18 See the Book of Genesis 19: 1-8. Two angels visited. Lot did not know, of course. But, like Abraham, he warmly welcomed them in and prepared them a feast. But during the night when the two guests laid down to rest, the evil townspeople of Sodom tried to break in to sleep with the men. Lot stepped out and shut the door behind, begging the townspeople not to do his guests any harm and in return he was willing to offer them his own two daughters instead. Maybe we would say that Lot’s hospitality has far breached the bottom line we can accept. But, the reasoning of Lot’s supplication is simply this: “but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof” (Gen. 19: 8).

19 This term is from Levinas’s Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, in which he says, “The despite oneself marks this life in its very living” (OB 51). Also, “The for-onself of identity is now no longer for itself…. The subject is for another; its own being turns into for another, its being dies away turning into signification” (OB 52).
(Deut. 10: 18) \(^{20}\) “—You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10: 19).\(^ {21}\) The teaching of the Jewish Scripture is resonating in the appeal of the Levinasian Other. In the same manner as how Abraham encountered God, in our act of hospitality towards the Other, especially the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, we see God’s countenance. In this sense, every manifestation of the face is the epiphany of God. Even though Levinas identifies himself as a philosopher to consciously distinguish himself from a Jewish thinker, it is beyond doubt that Levinas’s ethical thinking is closely bound up with his Jewish heritage. The ethical Height posited in his writings is not just derived from a Platonic notion of Goodness above being or essence but is deeply rooted in the Jewish theological and ethical tradition. Levinas proclaims “Atheism,”\(^ {22}\) but in the face of the widow, the orphan, the stranger that the Other manifests herself or himself before us, we recognize the widow, the orphan, and the stranger whom God watches over. However, I cannot emphasize more that in Levinas the epiphany of God is only a metaphor, a figure of speech. Levinas’s application of theology or religion is very subtle, or, simply metaphorical. Neither has he attempted to bring in God in the disguise of the Other. In a fundamental sense, I would say that Levinas does not resort to his religious tradition for his ethical ideas; instead, the religion comes to his aid by offering him the vocabularies about transcendence and a structure of its articulation. The face is transcendent in that the face is of absolute authority and sanctity to challenge me, demand me, and command me yet resistant to my knowledge and violence. The face directly addresses the physical or economic needs of the Other to put in doubt my physical power and wealth. Transcendence means the offering of my Home and even myself to the Other. With this gesture of welcoming, a new being is produced in Desire or the idea of Infinity. Levinas writes,

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\(^{20}\) The translation is from *The Jewish Bible TANAKH The Holy Scripture* the New JPS Translation, 1985.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) “Atheism” plays a key role in *Totality and Infinity* to embrace rich meanings. But, in my opinion, by one strand of its plentiful ideas, Atheism indicates Levinas’s explicit intent to distance his philosophical enterprise from the traditional Jewish mode of thinking and spirituality embodied in the rabbinic exegetical activities.
The face I welcome makes me pass from phenomenon to being in another sense: in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response—acuteness of the present—engenders me for responsibility; as responsibility I am brought to my final reality. This extreme attention does not actualize what was in potency, for it is not conceivable without the other. Being attentive signifies a surplus of consciousness, and presupposes the call of the other. To be attentive is to recognize the mastery of the other, to receive his command, or, more exactly, to receive from him the command to command. When I seek my final reality, I find that my existence as a ‘thing in itself’ begins with the presence in me of the idea of Infinity. But this relation already consists in serving the Other. (TI 179)

It is striking that before I take up my responsibility, I am present only as an apparition, a phenomenon. “As long as the existence of man remains interiority it remains phenomenal” (TI 182). It is Desire—the act of welcoming the Other that substantiates the I and turns the I into a genuine human being. Levinas claims, “The surpassing of phenomenon or inward existence does not consist in receiving the recognition of the Other, but in offering him one’s being. To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other. The ground of expression is goodness. To be is to be good” (TI 183).

2.2 Desire: the language of the I to reach the other

“The eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks” (TI66).

With Levinas the face of the Other reveals the very dimension of infinity or height that is infinitely distant and above from me. Then, how is it possible to establish a relationship with the
Other that is transcendent and refutes any representation and rational thought of him? Levinas maintains that the relation with the Other commences and is accomplished in the idea of Infinity; or, the Other presents himself in conversation. In Levinas’s vocabulary, Desire, language (discourse, speech, and conversation), face-to-face encounter, welcoming, donating and hence truth, justice, metaphysics and transcendence and the like are all synonymies in the spectrum of the idea of Infinity. As he says,

Metaphysics or transcendence is recognized in the work of the intellect that aspires after exteriority, that is Desire. But the Desire for exteriority has appeared to us to move not in objective cognition but in Discourse, which in turn has presented itself as justice, in the uprightness of the welcome made to the face. Is not the vocation to truth to which traditionally the intellect answers belied by this analysis? What is the relation between justice and truth? (TI 82)

This brief paragraph assembles all these superb notions of metaphysics, transcendence, justice, and truth around one single word, namely Desire. In Levinas’ philosophy, metaphysics or transcendence is no longer regarding an abstract principle or Idea that exists beyond this living world. Rather, it evolves concretely into the relation of the self with the Other that is realized in the idea of Infinity or the desire for exteriority. Actually, it is quite uncommon that Levinas would refer to desire as the work of intellect. Since he maintains that the aspiration for exteriority is not an object-cognition activity, then, in what sense is it an intellect work? If the Other in Levinas’s philosophy has never been an object available for our intellectual recognition and grasp, shall we look at the “intellect work” differently?

To my mind, “intellect” takes on a new meaning in the same way as “knowing” becomes a non-cognitive act. Levinas holds that truth is inseparable from intelligibility and knowing is always to comprehend, to intervene, and to justify. But intelligibility is fundamentally different from an attitude that engenders an action without regard for the known “object,” i.e. an obstacle that
obstructs my freedom and spontaneity (TI 82). Levinas is attempting a new way to reformulate the relationship with the Other not in terms of the relationship between the subject and the object as the knowing agent and the known object but rather based on a new mode of discourse: teaching and questioning, which thereby denounces the modality of “knowing” and being “known.” When the Other is no longer an object rendered to my inquiry and cognition, knowing by itself becomes an act of self-knowledge, self-reflection, and self-criticism. As Levinas says, “Knowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin—in an unnatural movement to seek higher than one’s own origin, a movement which evinces or describes a created freedom” (TI 82-3). Knowing puts my spontaneity of freedom into question. Specifically, the critique of spontaneity questions “the central place the I occupies the world” and uproots “the I torn up from itself and living in the universe” (TI 83); the critique of spontaneity challenges my moral worthiness in my discovery of my weakness or my unworthiness (TI 83); and the critique of spontaneity brings about my consciousness of shame for myself that “I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer” (TI 84). The nature of knowing consists in this “being able to put itself in question, in penetrating beneath its own condition” (TI 85). Accordingly, the “intellect work” must be such an effort of self-reflection and self-critique, through which the self is opened up to the Other. As he says, “the knowing whose essence is critique cannot be reduced to objective cognition; it leads to the Other. To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom” (85).

Therefore, with Levinas knowing is essentially different from objective knowledge. The shame for oneself, the presence of and desire for the Other is the very articulation of knowing (TI 88). “The truth of this knowing leads back to the relation with the Other, that is, to justice” (TI 89). He emphasizes, “We call justice this face to face approach, in conversation. If truth arises in the absolute experience in which being gleams with its own light, then truth is produced only in veritable conversation or in justice” (TI 71). Truth is not an essence or principle for people to discover or know, but rather an experience—a face to face encounter. From welcoming the Other, I posit myself in conversation: to receive teaching from the Master. As desire, the Metaphysical Desire, “The essence of language is the relation with the Other” (TI 207). Thus, In Levinas’ writings, language unfold its two distinct phases.
With respect to the self, language is an attitude, a language without its materiality of sound and tonality. In other words, language is not a system of signs rendered to conceptualization and rational thought. Rather, it is a “body language,” a gesture, a stance, a language of silence which finds its full expression in welcoming the Other, in listening to the teaching from the Master. “To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the revelation of the other” (TI 73). Discourse beyond object-cognition suspends the participation of the I as if in a dialogue. For language here is characterized with heteronomy and passivity. In facing the Other one has to submerge the voice of words with speeches of silence. This is because the genuine language comes from the Other rather than arising from within me as a part of my consciousness and thought. Levinas writes,

Language conditions thought—not language in its physical materiality, but language as an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to a consciousness of…, since relating to what no consciousness can contain, relating to the infinity of the Other. Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question.

(TI 204)

Henceforth, language is not a medium for thought operative in my consciousness. Rather, it comes to me from the Other and turns my thought into desire for the Other. As Levinas states, “To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught” (TI 51). Language for the same becomes the idea of Infinity, the desire for the Other; it is the I in the position of receiving the Master. Ultimately, language turns into an act of giving, a donation with full hands, a welcome in hospitality, which founds the very foundation of society. Again, “To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize
the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as ‘You’ in a dimension of height” (75). Also,

To recognize the Other is therefore to come to him across the world of possessed things, but at the same time to establish, by gift, community and universality…To speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces. Language does not refer to the generality of concepts, but lays the foundations for a possession in common. It abolishes the inalienable property of enjoyment. The world in discourse is no longer what it is in separation, in the being at home with oneself where everything is given to me; it is what I give: the communicable, the thought, the universal. (TI 76)

Here speech not only discards concepts and representations that are the constitutive interiority of the same but also abolishes “the inalienable property of enjoyment” that provides exterior sustenance to the I in separation. Speech signifies the turn from linguistics to ethics. “The essence of discourse is ethical” (TI 216). Furthermore, when language no longer concerns the I and the other alone, individuals will ultimately give way to the communal. “To speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces.” By speech Levinas makes a further “turn” to turn ethics into a political enterprise of establishing a communal world. As long as language is ethical, it cannot just address two parties in conversation. When the third party enters language, language is no longer just the articulation of the relation between the same and the other but regards the whole humanity. “By essence the prophetic word responds to the epiphany of the face, doubles all discourse not as a discourse about moral themes, but as an irreducible movement of a discourse which by essence is aroused by the epiphany of the face inasmuch as it attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me.” (TI 213)
With respect to the Other, nonetheless, language demonstrates its other side: “Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words take place already within the primordial face to face of language” (TI 208). The other addresses me in the face of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the interlocutor and the master. The language of the other is appealing: “The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal” (TI 200). The language of the other is teaching and command: “It brings what the written word is already deprived of: mastery. Speech, better than a simple sign, is essentially magisterial” (TI 69). Also, “The claim to know and to reach the other is realized in the relationship with the Other is cast in the relation of language, where the essential is the interpellation, the vocative” (TI 69). Being superior, authoritative, and coercive, the language produces nothing but the mastery of the Other over the same, which consequently puts the spontaneity of my freedom into question and imposes responsibility upon me. Levinas says, “Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of a genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within relationship. Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or history” (TI 195). Language initiates the relation with the same yet remains outside of this relationship—the relationship of common genus. In other words, the other is not my companion or comrade but my interlocutor. It is in this sense that Levinas claims that discourse is not love. He writes,

Discourse is not love. The transcendence of the Other, which is his eminence, his height, his lordship, in his concrete meaning includes his destitution, his exile (dépaysement), and his rights as a stranger. I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or in refusing; I am free to give or to refuse, but my recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things. The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and it the things figure nor as what one builds but as what one gives. (TI 77)
By this inequality language institutes an asymmetrical relationship between the I and the Other. Here Levinas on the one hand discards the Buberian intimate I-Thou relation of reciprocity by stressing the absolute dominance of the other over me and on the other distinguishes himself from Heidegger by insisting that things are for giving rather than for building sites for oneself. It is of great interest to note the juxtaposition of the contrasted notions and images here and elsewhere that characterizes Levinas’ writing: height with humility, plenitude and plenum with hunger and destitution, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan with the master and the interlocutor and so forth. Language poignantly reveals the paradoxical nature of the Other. The other that is the weak, the poor, and the humble becomes the master of height with regard to me. He appeals to me for help and requests me to give, but his language befalls me in the form of command and judgment of the lordship.

It seems to me that this paradoxical language reveals a dilemma which Levinas is struggling with. As he is very cautious against reducing the Other to an object, he is likewise concerned about taking the I as an autonomous agent. Whether it is to recognize or to give, the act has assumed an object. But Levinas maintains that the other is beyond grasp and recognition. On the other hand, as the I offers his gift, the act already presupposes an active subject. But he insists that giving or desire cannot originate from the subject. Thereby, by resorting to the spatial term “height” that implies the submissiveness of the I in the lower position and the authoritativeness of the other in the higher, Levinas seems trying his way out of this quandary. He says, “In Desire are conjoined the movements unto the Height and unto the Humility of the Other” (TI 200).

This dilemma may make us wonder why Levinas defines relationship with the Other in terms of language. In discussing Levinas I somehow feel myself struggling with verbs. How shall we articulate the relationship between the I and the other, namely how to describe the way in which the self is related to the other? Intransitive verbs concern nothing/nobody else outside the subject while transitive verbs always presuppose an object. Then, how can we describe the way in which the self is related to the other without risking turning the later into an object? Levinas
describes desire as “the relation between the same and the other,” “the idea of Infinity,” or “the quest for truth” etc. Despite his emphasis on the other to be the origination of desire, desire must have an object to desire, namely the Other. The idea of Infinity cannot contain Infinity or the desire cannot exhaust the Desirable, but it still presumes the Other as the object to desire. By reversing the driving force of desire from the I who desires to the other that is desired, we actually do not change the transitive nature of the verb. It seems to me that Levinas tries to get out of this dilemma in three ways.

First, he resorts to a repetitive use of “surplus,” “exceeding,” and “surpass” to stress the Other’s refusal to be contained and objectified. Maybe we can say that he concerns the alterity of the Other to such an extent that he has to find a new expression for the subjectivity of the I with respect to the other. For this reason, in his later work Otherwise than Being Or Beyond Essence, “desire” gives way to other notions of “passivity,” “vulnerability,” “psyche,” “hostage,” and “substitution” that explicitly express the passivity of the subject or the same. With these expressions, there is no longer a linguistic struggle with verbs: transitive or intransitive, active or passive but a straightforward statement about the passivity of the I in facing with the Other.

Second, he often changes the voice of the verbs regarding the I from the active into passive. The most telling example is “being taught.” And third, despite his repetitive insistence on the non-reversal movement of the same-other relationship, he often reverses the order of relationships. For instance, he says, “The relation with the other does not consist in repeating the movement apart in a reverse direction, but in going toward the other in Desire” (TI 61). The reversal of order turns out to be the most effective and unique way characteristic of Levinas’s writing to describe the passivity of the I. By this means, the hostess turns into the homeless and the stranger becomes the master. Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence carries on the same line of thinking to the extreme. For example, “non-lieu” (null-site) and “despite oneself” of Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence replace “chez soi” (at home with oneself) of Totality and Infinity. In my eyes, the shift from desire, being towards the other, the being-for-the-other in Totality and Infinity to hostage and substitution of Otherwise than Being announces the
completion of the transforming process from activity to passivity, which ultimately releases Levinas from his struggle. While desire is still remnant of an autonomous subject in its directional movement towards the other, hostage and substitution show the absolute passivity of the subject. The following two quotes from the *Totality and Infinity* are very interesting examples that well illustrate Levinas’ caution and struggle. He writes,

“Language, which does not touch the other, even tangentially, reaches the other by calling upon him or by commanding him or by obeying him, with all the straightforwardness of these relations. Separation and interiority, truth and language constitute the categories of the idea of infinity or metaphysics (TI 62).

Similarly, he says elsewhere,

Language does not belong among the relations that could appear through the structures of formal logic; it is contact across a distance, relation with the non-touchable, across a void. It was taken place in the dimension of absolute desire by which the same is in relation with an other that was not simply lost by the same (TI 172).

Maybe Levinas is so cautious about any possible violence that a physical contact may incur upon the Other that he insists upon the physical distance to be retained between the same and the Other. He goes so far to be mechanical. It is interesting to note that he uses the word “touch” almost in its literal sense. No wonder Levinas finds the best expression of the relation between the Same and the Other in language. Language may not be able to touch a person physically, but cannot the sound of high pitch pierce our ears? Actually, sometimes words can touch our hearts and language may do violence.
2.3 Desire: the quest for goodness

Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* presents two states of human existence: the being of happiness and the being of goodness. The first is an advance from a purely bare animal existence to a being in enjoyment and the second signifies the elevation of the being in enjoyment from egoism to the being preoccupied with alterity that can sacrifice his happiness for goodness. Need and Desire make it possible for humans to realize these two transformations. However, the being in Desire stands higher than the being in need just in that desire leads humankind to goodness. To desire is therefore to desire for the goodness. Desire opens a new horizon, where “the plane of the needy being, avid for its complements, vanishes, and the possibility of a sabbatical existence, where existence suspends the necessities of existence, is inaugurated” (TI 104). The I as an economical or animal existence is being changed into an ethical being. Henceforth, to quest for the goodness, desire does not simply mean that man is filled up with the idea of goodness, more important, desire must be involved in this transformation or “inversion.” The similar thought is also present in his earlier work *Existence and Existents*, where he holds that “the Good necessarily have a foothold in being” (EE xvii). Similarly, he says, “It is necessary to have the idea of infinity, the idea of the perfect, as Descartes would say, in order to know one’s own imperfection. The idea of the perfect is not an idea but desire; it is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in my freedom” (TI 84). It is not that there is something called goodness for us to seek. To desire, or, to have the idea of Infinity or the idea of the perfect is to be good. The welcoming of the Other or the teaching of the other brings about our moral consciousness. In Desire, being becomes goodness.

People might have a false impression that Levinas promotes the pursuit of goodness at the expense of seeking after enjoyment and happiness. But as a matter of fact, in Levinas’ writings these two aspects never stand opposed to each other. The idea of a two-dimensional human existence is recurrent throughout the *Totality and Infinity*. The following two paragraphs best epitomize Levinas’s thought in this regard. He says,
Egoism, enjoyment, sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority—the articulations of separation—are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other which opens forth from the separated and finite being. Metaphysical Desire, which can be produced only in a separated, that is, enjoying, egoist, and satisfied being, is then not derived from enjoyment. But if the separated, that is, sentient being is necessary for the production of infinity and exteriority in metaphysics, its constitution as thesis or as antithesis, within a dialectical play, would destroy this exteriority. The infinite does not raise up the finite by opposition. Just as the interiority of enjoyment is not deducible from the transcendental relation, the transcendental relation is not deducible from the separated being as a dialectical antithesis forming a counterpart to the subjectivity, as union forms the counterpart of distinction among two terms of any relation. The movement of separation is not on the same plane as the movement of transcendence. We are outside of the dialectical conciliation of the I and the non-I, in the eternal sphere proper to representation (or in the identity of the I). (TI 148)

He continues,

Neither the separated being nor the infinite being is produced as an antithetical term. The interiority that ensures separation must produce a being absolutely closed over upon itself, not deriving its isolation dialectically from its opposition to the Other. And this closedness must not prevent egress from interiority, so that exteriority could speak to it, reveal itself to it, in an unforeseeable movement which the isolation of the separated being could not provoke by simple contrast. (TI 148)

With Levinas, interiority and exteriority, the finite and the infinite, the visible and the invisible, separation and transcendence, separated being and infinite being, need and desire, they are not counterparts of each other in the dialectical antithesis. Rather, they set apart two distinct worlds that are not at opposite poles but posited on two different planes with one lower and the other higher. To use Levinas’ vivid expression, we may say that one is the terrestrial and the other
celestial. They are situated in “‘space’ essentially asymmetrical” (TI 216), “a sort of non-homogeneity of space” (TI 220). Need features the world of the I or the Same and desire defines the world of the Other. The former is interior, separated, finite and the latter exterior, transcendent, and infinite. The reality of human beings just lies in the fact that they are situated in the terrestrial plane yet incessantly driven towards the plane higher. These two aspects are both essential to our existence as a human being. Deprived of the former, humans will lose the foundation of their existence; without the latter, they lack the nobility of being human. Desire lays bare the human condition of being at once imbedded in this sensible world of enjoyment and is perpetually driven for the good.

Consequently, people need to stay interior, closed, and separated on the one hand and be open to the exterior and transcendent on the other. Thus, Levinas claims: “In the separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed” (TI 148) and “The possibility for the home to open to the Other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and window” (TI 173). For him, “The atheistic separation is required by the idea of Infinity, but is not dialectically brought about by it. The idea of Infinity, the relation between the same and the other, does not undo the separation attested in transcendence” (TI 60). Levinas not only regards the separation necessary but calls it “a great glory.” He says, “It is certainly a great glory for the creator to have set up a being capable of atheism, a being which, without having been causa sui, has an independent view and word and is at home with itself” (TI 58-59). To be sure, humankind has to depart from the purely territorial status to ascent to the celestial, but the rise from the low to the higher level is not accomplished via the way of negation but via elevation. Interiority and exteriority, the I and the Other, separation and transcendence, they each retain their own independent territories. In fact, Levinas often describes the state of separation as a state of happiness and self-sufficiency. He says,

In separation—which is produced in the psychism of enjoyment, in egoism, in happiness, where the I identifies itself—the I is ignorant of the Other. But the Desire for the other, above happiness, requires this happiness, this autonomy of the
sensible in the world, even though this separation is deducible neither analytically nor dialectically from the other. The I endowed with personal life, the atheist I whose atheism is without wants and is integrated in no destiny, surpasses itself in the Desire that comes to it from the presence of the other. This Desire is a desire in a being already happy: desire is the misfortune of the happy, a luxurious need. (TI 62)

Importantly, even though the I is ignorant of the Other in his complacency, the desire for the Other requires this happiness and enjoyment. We may say that Levinas is depicting a rosy picture of human life where enjoyment overrides needs and wants. But a hidden message seems lying beneath: Only the one that is happy and self-sufficient, enjoying the plenitude of life is ready for desire because the happy one is absolved from worries about any shortage of supplies so that he or she can direct his/her full attention—“an inexhaustible surplus of attention” (TI 97) to the Desirable. In this way, being complacent and self-sufficient becomes the prerequisite for desire. In Levinas’s point of view, life is not comprehensible simply as a diminution, a fall, or an embryo or virtuality of being. He says, “Signification does not arise because the same has needs, because he lacks something, and hence all that is susceptible of filling this lack takes on meaning. Signification is in the absolute surplus of the other with respect to the same who desires him, who desires what he does not lack, who welcomes the other across themes which the other proposes to him or receives from him, without absenting himself from the signs thus given” (TI 97). Similarly, “Truth is sought in the other, but by him who lacks nothing. The distance is untraversable, and at the same time traversed. The separated being is satisfied, autonomous, and nonetheless searches after the other with a search that is not incited by the lack proper to need nor by the memory of a lost food” (TI 62).

Maybe, we can see Levinas’s rosy picture of Separation as his rhetoric to keep people from associating desire with needs. Therefore, he constructs an ideal state of self-complacency and sufficiency of the I in which desire is unequivocally ascribed to the Other. As he says, “Alongside of needs whose satisfaction amounts to filling a void, Plato catches sight also of
aspirations that are not preceded by suffering and lack, and in which we recognize the pattern of Desire: the need of him who lacks nothing, the aspiration of him who possesses his being entirely, who goes beyond his plentitude, who has the idea of Identity” (103). But as a matter of fact, since no one is really self-sufficient as revealed in his later work *Otherwise than Being Or beyond Essence*, then, does it mean that the one in need is actually unable to aspire for the Good? In my opinion, by wittingly stressing the complacency of the I, Levinas intends to simply make one point: We desire not because we need or want something physical and material. Desire originated from the Other has nothing to do with the fulfillment of the needs of the I in whatever sense. Need indicates a void and lack in the needy ones and hence their dependence on the exterior. One needs just because one does not entirely possess one’s being. Therefore, the needy one is not strictly separate. Need may be gratified or frustrated, but desire stays above either satisfaction or frustration to hold on to its absolute alterity.

Levinas describes Desire as a “luxurious need,” (TI 62) “the misfortune of the happy” (TI 62). In his view, the Desirable or the Good is a “luxury” (TI 103) with respect to needs. These ideas are well welded into the key notion of “surplus” that distinctively features his *Totality and Infinity*. Here it is worth to point out that in Levinas’ writings the Other relates itself to the Same just by this very token of the “surplus,” which is not negation but surpassing and overflowing. Desire is precisely this overflowing that overflows the one that is already happy and self-sufficient. However, at the very moment of encountering the Other, the desiring I sees his own apparition and realizes his own insufficiency. Levinas writes,

> The totality of contentment betrays its own phenomenality when an exteriority that does not slip into the void of needs gratified or frustrated supervenes. The totality of contentment betrays its own phenomenality when this exteriority, incommensurable with needs, breaks interiority by this very incommensurability. Interiority then discovers itself to be insufficient….the broken interiority is not mended in the horizons outlined by needs his insufficiency Desire does not coincide with need and it stands above need. Such an exteriority reveals an
insufficiency of the separated being that is without possible satisfaction or unsatisfaction. The exteriority foreign to needs would then reveal an insufficiency full of this very insufficiency and not of hopes, a distance more precious than contact, a non-possession more precious possession, a hunger that nourishes itself not with bread but with hunger itself as Desire. Desire does not coincide with an unsatisfied need; it is situated beyond satisfaction and nonsatisfaction. The relationship with the Other, or the idea of infinity, accomplishes it (TI 179).

The Other brings home to me my essential insufficiency and indigence with respect to the alterity. My destitution and deficiency is not the outcome of an act of denying happiness and enjoyment of the being in separation but the realization of my lack with respect to the surplus of Infinity, Goodness, or the Desirable. The material or economic sufficiency of mine cannot compromise my incompleteness as a human being. Nevertheless, owing to desire—the idea of Infinity, “man does not permit himself to be deceived by his glorious triumph as a living being, and unlike the animal can know the difference between being and phenomenon, can recognize his phenomenality, the penury of his plenitude, a penury inconvertible into needs which, being beyond plenitude and void, cannot be gratified” (TI 179). Interestingly, it seems that Levinas is subtly reversing the order: On the one hand the I who lives in plenitude and plenum finds himself or herself indigent and destitute, on the other the Other who comes to me with absolute overflowing of abundance is the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. The breaking in of the Other challenges my very complacency and freedom. Nevertheless, in my answer to their appeal, by Welcoming and offering myself to them, I depart from myself as a phenomenon to obtain my identity as a true human being. Levinas says, “The surpassing of phenomenon or inward existence does not consist in receiving the recognition of the Other, but in offering him one’s being. To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other. The ground of expression is goodness. To be is to be good” (TI 183). Desire or the Welcoming of the Other turns the substance into goodness which becomes the very definition of being.
However, this is a never fulfilled process. “It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it” (TI 34). Just as what Levinas makes it very clear at the very beginning of *Totality and Infinity* that desire is insatiable, humans are in the process of ever desiring for good. Somehow in Levinas’s thought we discern the Platonic “insatiable character of the Good” (the *Rep.* 555 b).\(^{23}\) We may say that when Levinas says that desire is the quest for goodness, it means desire or the quest itself is goodness. As desire turns the human substance into goodness, it redefines the essence of human being as a becoming process towards the Good. In light of this, it is not hard for us to understand why Levinas would say “The better I accomplish my duty the fewer rights I have; the more I am just the more guilty I am” (TI 244). Desire—the quest for Goodness turns into a never fulfilled responsibility. He says, “The marvel of creation does not only consist in being a creation *ex nihilo*, but in that it results in a being capable of receiving a revelation, learning that it is created, and putting itself in question. The miracle of creation lies in creating a moral being” (TI 89).

In Plato the solar light of the Good not only shines upon people from the above but brings about life and nurtures it. Likewise, Levinas draws special attention to the creativity of goodness whose glorious radiance not only inspires humankind towards a plane beyond essence but transforms them into moral beings. In Levinas’s philosophy, desire is not need but the Metaphysical Desire because desire shares the attributes of the Good: illuminating and productive. He says, “To posit metaphysics as Desire is to interpret the production of being—desire engendering Desire—as goodness and as beyond happiness; it is to interpret the production of being as being for the Other” (TI 304). For him, “The marvel of creation does not only consist in being a creation *ex nihilo*….The miracle of creation lies in creating a moral being” (TI 89). In his conception of Desire as metaphysics and as goodness, Levinas does not just look at desire as the seed of the Good that is implanted in our human mind, he celebrates the engendering of its offspring—being-for-the-other as well.

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\(^{23}\) Allan Bloom’s translation *The Republic of Plato*, 1968. Cf. Jowett’s translation: “—The good at which such a State aims is to become as rich as possible, a desire which is insatiable.”

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Eros opens up a new horizon where the chasm between need and desire is closed, where the
Same and the Other come into contact. “The simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence
and of transcendence” (TI 255) divulges the nature of love that is ambivalence or “equivocation”
(TI 271). For Levinas the philosophical charm of love just lies in this ambiguity. Love brings
in the closest human relationship where the distance between the self and the other diminishes to
the minimal or naught. As in need—the domain of the same, dwelling, and enjoyment, love
shows the complacence and self-indulgence of the “clandestine” (TI 257) union that completely
excludes others from the world of the two. However, even in this most intimate form of human
relationship, Levinas discovers the alterity of love and draws our attention to the irreducibility of
the other, the beloved one. He says, “In voluptuosity the other is me and separate from me” (TI
265). Most important of all, the conjuncture of the self and the other presages the child.

Caress features the Levinasian voluptuosity of love. His description of the feminine as
withdrawal, mystery, and absence shows that the resistance of the other to being absorbed into a
part of the I. In his most beautiful and sensuous language caress is clandestine and mysterious,
situated in the night of the hidden and dark, rejected to being exposed to light and hence one’s
knowing. Despite the intimacy, the feminine escapes my groping and search. With Levinas the
very essence of the caress is “constituted by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks”
(Time and Other 89) and “The caress consist in seizing upon nothing” (TI 257). Caress is for
caress’ sake, without aiming at anything. It is non-intentional, purposeless, and insatiable.
Though compared to hunger, caress is not fed by the touched object of the skin but rather
deepened by the hunger for touching itself. The beloved in the caress is not an object since she
refuses to be objectified. It is an “escape” (TI 257); it is “inexpressible” (TI 260). Caress thus
takes on the feature of desire in one’s move towards the Desirable as “a movement unto the invisible” (TI 258).

Levinas illuminates the affinity between caress with desire. Like desire, the metaphysical Desire that refutes to be satisfied and grasped, caress reveals the transcendence of the Other that constantly pulls me towards her yet ever remains beyond my horizon. In this sense, caress is essentially futural. As Tina Chanter remarks, “In Eros, the I is drawn to the other, given over to her, rather than the reverse…In effect, the caress is a relationship to the other in which the relationship does not diminish the distance does not prevent the possibility of a relationship. As such, it seems to offer a perfect model of transcendence” (Tina Chanter 2001: 42). But Levinas’s approach to the other in terms of the feminine arouses controversies among scholars. In their opinion, the Levinasian “feminine alterity” (TI, 165/155) subordinates the feminine other to an elevated ethical transcendence that only results in the self-effacement of the feminine. Irigaray represents a strong voice against Levinas’s ethical appropriation of the feminine. She says, “For Levinas, the feminine merely represents that which sustains desire, that which rekindles pleasure. The caress, that ‘fundamental disorder’ (TA 82; TO 89) does not touch the other. To caress, for Levinas, consists, therefore, not in approaching the other in its most vital dimension, the touch, but in the reduction of that vital dimension of the other’s body to the elaboration of a future for himself. To caress could thus constitute the hidden intention of philosophical temporality.” In addition, “The feminine appears as the underside or reverse side of man’s aspiration toward the light, as its negative.” In line with Irigaray, Cathryn Vasseleu comments, “The feminine is not an ethical other but the passive un-doing of a virile

24 Diane Perpich, “From the Caress to the Word” in Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas, ed. by Tina Chanter, 2001, p. 42.
aspiration to light.” 27 Collin Davis even challenges whether it is necessary to keep the term by saying, “Levinas suggests that what he means by the feminine is neither an empirical nor a gendered presence (TI, 169/158, 286/256)…But it does not explain why the term should be retained at all.”28

The criticism of Levinas from these scholars is undoubtedly sharp. Yet, from my perspective, rather than stereotyping women with all these qualities of being gentle, soft, weak, self-effacing, mysterious, elusive, etc., Levinas presents the feminine as a mode of human existence that applies to both man and woman. In this regard, I think Diane Erich’s reading does Levinas more justice. She says,

As an ontological category or mode of being, ‘the feminine’ must be understood apart from every empirical typology. Consistent with the view that the feminine is not defined relative to the masculine….In fact, the feminine is nowhere identified by Levinas with concrete, really existing being. It is not a set of characteristics or qualities attributed to a certain class of beings (namely, women); it is not a type, of which individual women would be tokens.29

To my mind, weakness, tenderness, frailty, secrecy, voluptuousness, ambiguity, mystery, and virginity these qualities as listed by Collin Davis30 regard neither “woman” nor “man” but rather

29 Diane Perpich, “From the Caress to the Word” in Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas, ed. by Tina Chanter, 2001, p. 47.
characterize human existence that entails both materiality and divinity. The feminine is just a metaphorical expression for our internal life or our life in Separation, namely our love of life and enjoyment with the world on the one hand and on the other, our aspiration to go beyond this self-seclusion and self-indulgence to move towards the Other that always remains exterior and mysterious to us. Henceforth, we should look at the Levinasian “femininity” via both its interior and exterior sides. As regards interiority, femininity characterized with gentleness, softness, and playfulness and so forth symbolizes our internal life as self-complacency and enjoyment of “chez soi”; speaking of exteriority, femininity epitomizing ambiguity and mystery points to that which is untouchable, inviolable, and futural. Because of the dual sides of our human life, Levinas uncovers the uniqueness of love through the image of the feminine, that is, “the simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and of transcendence” (TI 255). Collin Davis makes a good observation of the two facets implied by the femininity. He says, “The explicit equation of the feminine with the Other (‘The feminine is the Other’; TI, 297/265) contrasts with the admission that the feminine is treated in Totality and Infinity as part of the drama of the self, part of my own internal world.” Nonetheless, he considers the two aspects of femininity a reconciliation of interiority with exteriority, which reduces the Other to the Same.

3.2 Fecundity: paternal Eros

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31 At one place in Totality and Infinity Levinas even directly compares the beloved to an ignorant and irresponsible infant, to a young animal. He says, “The beloved is opposed to me not as a will struggling with my own or subject to my own, but on the contrary as an irresponsible animality which does not speak true words. The beloved, returned to the stage of infancy without responsibility—this coquettish head, this youth, this pure life ‘a bit silly’—has quit her status as a person. The face fades, and in its impersonal and inexpressive neutrality is prolonged, in ambiguity, into animality. The relations with the Other are enacted in play; one plays with the Other as with a young animal” (TI 263). In my view, here the beloved—the woman symbolizes humans prior to their adulthood. This means that an irresponsible person without moral obligation still cannot be considered a human being in the real sense. He or she, in Levinas’s own term, is but a “not-yet-being” (TI 259).


33 Ibid.
Love displays its most paradoxical nature of both returning to oneself and going beyond oneself in producing a son—the conception of the child. Desire that initiates an interminable movement ceaselessly driven towards the Other is broken and satisfied in love (TI 254). However, the final encounter of the self and the other does not terminate the moment towards the Other. Rather, love leads to the other—the engendering of the son, which, for Levinas, contains the very ethical meanings of love. The son transforms the erotic relation into a “paternal Eros” (TI 278, 279) that forms the father-son relation across fecundity. Levinas describes this relationship in terms of paternity and filiality. By “paternity” he refers to “the way of being other while being oneself” (TI 282).

The son demonstrates or prescribes the mode of the existence of the I as both a continuation and revolt against one’s own being. To be father means to be his son, to live “substantially” (TI 279) in his son. Levinas calls this the “alteration of the very substance of him” (TI 269) or “trans-substantiatation” (TI 269). As father, the I is no longer its former self but takes on his new existence as his own son. He renews himself in this very paternity. In this sense, paternity and filiality are identically interchangeable. But, on the other hand, the son is neither the incarnation of the father nor the extension or continuation of his life. Levinas rejects to describe their connection in terms of continuity, which, for him, implies the repetition of the past, of the history, and of the tradition. According to him, the son only captures but does not resume the past of the father. Filiality “designates a relation of rupture and a recourse at the same time” (TI 278). The peculiar status of the son rests on the fact that he is me, retaining the uniqueness of the father on the one hand, but on the other, he remains himself exterior to me. I am my son, but in the meantime, “he is me a stranger to myself” (TI 267). Paternity or filiality constitutes this “dialectical conjuncture” (TI 279) of “the two contradictory movements” (TI 279). The Levinasian father-son relation is well illustrative of his persistent idea about alterity within the same. The same represented by the father is in fact always open to the Other.

If there is continuity between the father and the son, Levinas sees the uniqueness of the son their connection. By uniqueness, Levinas means that every son is unique to his father in the sense that
the son is selected by the father. He says, “Each son of the father is the unique son, the chosen son....The paternal Eros first invests the unicity of the son; his I qua filiality commences not in enjoyment but in election” (TI 279). “Selection” gives filiality an ethical-theological significance and thereby goes beyond the pure biological sense of genetic inheritance. It suggests that the son does not come to the world by accident as an outcome of the parental fecundity and physical enjoyment. Rather, the arrival of the son is an event of a divinely ethical purpose meant to bear the burden and responsibility entrusted by the father. As Levinas says, “Biological fecundity is but one of the forms of paternity” (TI 247). The uniqueness of the son, namely the identification of the father with the son is attested by their commonly held responsibilities instead of by their biological commonalities. Henceforth, the father is not bound to the son by the ties of the blood but by the act of selecting and being selected for the shared goal or mission. The continuation of the father in the son means the continuous fulfillment of human responsibilities. If the son of the I and the sons of the son are just the continuation of human species, paternity or filiality only leads to biological beings. Of course, biological fecundity is necessary for the continuation of human life and thereby provides the basic condition for the carrying out of the responsibilities across generations. But in Levinas’ philosophy, the engendering of the son is essentially an “essential production” (TI 279), which transcends biological limitation, and which turns fecundity into relations with the absolute Other irreducible to the relations of genus and species. For this reason, Levinas proclaims that the son is “a philosophical concept” (TI 268). Or, as John Llewelyn points out, “The concept of paternity itself is a metaphor.”

If responsibility bounds the father and the son together as an identical being—“the paternal I is his own son” (TI ) or “I am my child” (TI 277), then, in what sense does the son remain exterior to me as a stranger and why does the son have to break with his father? Biologically speaking, whereas a sonless father only moves towards senescence and death, the son being the heir to the father’s life means the disruption of decrepitude and fatality. Contrary to old age and death that

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defines the father, youth and life is the sign of the son. In this sense, the father in his son is exactly a different life renewed. As Levinas says, “A being capable of another fate than its own is a fecund being” (TI 282). The son and the sons of the son and the sons of the sons overcome the fate of the father to open up an infinitely continual possibility towards future. The human destiny is not being-towards-death as proclaimed by Heidegger’s philosophy but in the human fecundity. It can be said that the Levinasian son is the very negation of the Heideggerian historicity of human finitude. The alterity of the son lies in its futurality. To break with the father is to sustain life and to retain the movement into the future. As he says, “Paternity, as a primordial effectuation of time, can, among men, be borne by the biological life, but be lived beyond that life” (TI 247). Due to this futurality, the son always remains exterior to the domain of the father. Accordingly, every entrusted responsibility is never the same one imposed by the father but perpetually recommences with every birth of the son. It is in this very biological sense of generating that the I or the father’s responsibility is never completed but inexhaustibly open to the future. Both archaic and infinite, responsibility does not start with the father nor end with the son.

Of the same structure of Desire, the son does not stop the movement of Desire. As Desire incessantly engenders Desire, sons engender sons ceaselessly. Henceforth, we can say that the father-son relationship bears much resemblance to the idea of infinity (TI 267). He says, “The other that Desire desires is again Desire; transcendence transcends toward him who transcends—that is the true adventure of paternity, of the transubstantiation which permits going beyond the simple renewal of the possible in the inevitable senescence of the subject” (TI 269). Paternity demonstrates its productivity in two respects: multiplicity and futurality. Paternity retains the insatiability of Desire in its infinitely recommencing to be his son across time. Being is a constant process of becoming and self-transcending.

At a deeper level, however, we might still ask, “Why does Levinas need the son?” If the absolute alterity of the other and the never enough fulfilled responsibility find their best expression in the relationship with the widowed, the orphaned, the old, and the weak, etc., why is
the son still necessary? If Desire distinguishes the infinite movement of the Same towards the Other, isn’t the paternal Eros of paternity and filiality but a redundancy of the same theme? It is certain that the son is not simply another other added to the list. I maintain that this issue is not a biological one as Iregaray has challenged Levinas. For Levinas the son not only biologically but both socially and philosophically stands on his own. Socially, the child evinces a unity that brings about multiplicity. Levinas says, “The relation with the face in fraternity, where in his turn the Other appears in solidarity with all the others, constitutes the social order, the reference of every dialogue to the third party by which the We—or the party—encompasses the face to face opposition, opens the erotic upon a social life, all signifyingness and decency, which encompasses the structure of the family self” (TI 28). The son introduces the third party le tiers to lead human beings into fraternity. The relationship between the father and the son constitutes the very basis of fraternity.

Henceforth, the engendering of the son means to transcend the natural bond of blood and family ties. As R. Burggraeve has observed, “The relationship with the third party means a continuous correction of the ethical asymmetry between the Other and myself. I am also an Other for the Other and a third one. The original inequality of my infinite responsibility for the Other is corrected by the fact that I too fall under Other’s responsibility. Through the presence of the third party, I and the Other becomes like the Others, i.e. their ‘equal’. Or rather: we become each others ‘like-neighbours.’” 35 “Biological fecundity” (TI 247) is replaced by an ethical fecundity. Thus, the son as an inexhaustible youth opens us up to the infinite future. According to Diotima, “love is a philosopher” (the Symposium). For Levinas the son is a philosophical concept. If the whole Western history or human history is seen to be full of evils, for Levinas the son stands for a messianic hope to redeem the hammered or lost humanity. The meaning of filiality is messianic. The relation with the son is the relation with the future. As he says, “The relationship with the child establishes the relationship with the absolute future, or infinite time” (TI 268). But the messianic time is not a certain point of time to come in the future, not the end

35 Burggraeve, R. From Self-Development to Solidarity: An Ethical Reading of Human Desire in Its Social-Political Relevance according to Emmanuel Levinas, 1985, p. 110.
of time or death. Rather, “it comes to me across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other absolutely other—though he be my son” (TI 283); it is the perpetual (renewal) converted into eternity (TI 285). In this sense, Messiah is moi and everyone is a Messiah as long as one partakes the constantly recommencement of fecundity. The son opens up the social dimension of human relationship and thereby points to the future. “It is society, and hence it is time. We thus leave the philosophy of Parmenidean being. Philosophy itself constitutes a moment of this temporal accomplishment, a discourse always addressed to another” (TI 269).

Of profound theological implication, Levinas invests in the son his messianic expectation, which is hinged on his deep awareness of “the failure of the goodness of today” (TI 284). The son points to a messianic time in its social, political, and religious sense. Levinas looks forward to a time or “another time freely resumed and pardoned” (TI 284). The son orient toward the future, while the father represents history and tradition. The breaking away from the father can be understood from different angles. Levinas makes it clear that metaphorically the father represents tradition and history that abounds in evils and injustice whereas the son provides the possibility and hope to correct and repair the past. But, he also remarks that the unique son, as selected one, is both unique and non-unique (TI 279). The selected son is but one of the many and henceforth forms the brotherhood. Henceforth, the engendering of the son bears social, political, and religious and meaning. As Levinas claims,

Transcendence is time and goes unto the Other. But the Other is not a term: he does not stop the movement of Desire. The other that Desire desires is again Desire; transcendence transcends towards him who transcends—this is the true adventure of paternity, of the trans-substantiation which permits going beyond the simple renewal of the possible in the inevitable senescence of the subject. Transcendence, the for the Other, the goodness correlative of the face, founds a more profound relation: the goodness of goodness. Fecundity engendering fecundity accomplishes goodness: above and beyond the sacrifice that imposes a gift, the gift of the power of giving, the conception of the child. Here the Desire
that is not a lack, the Desire that is the independence of the separate being and its transcendence, is accomplished—not in being satisfied and in thus acknowledging that it was a need, but in transcending itself, in engendering Desire (TI 269).

Also, “In paternity desire maintained as insatiate desire, that is, as goodness, is accomplished. It cannot be accomplished by being satisfied. For Desire to be accomplished is equivalent to engendering good being, to being goodness of goodness” (TI 272). In this unending endeavor towards goodness, fecundity opens us up to an infinite sense of time.
Chapter 6
Dialogue across Time and Space

The previous chapters present close readings of two philosophers’ discourse on desire. While Dai Zhen’s conception of desire is composed of three parts of “yu” (desire), “qing” (affective feelings/actual reality), and “zhi” (knowing), Levinas approaches the subject via three movements of “need,” “desire,” and “Eros.” Like two pieces of three-movement concerto, their presentation of human desire assumes somewhat a parallel structure. In its procession from “desire,” “feeling,” to “knowing,” Dai Zhen’s writing expounds the extension or advancement of the intelligent mind from its incipient luminosity to the godlike illumination that both ontologically and ethically penetrates the continuation of the humankind and the cosmos. The three movements chart the Confucian ethical trajectory of self-cultivation that is incessantly expanding one’s small self “ji”己 to become an organic part of the cosmic whole that embraces heaven, earth, and humanity. With Dai Zhen the achievement of the unity is conditioned on the “tong”通 (getting through, penetrating, thorough comprehension, connection) and “buge”不隔 (not being blocked, being connected) of the heart and mind. Therefore, commensurate with the extension of the intelligent mind, the further we reach, the greater our humanity will expand. To use Huston Smith’s phrase, this is an expansion “in concentric circles”¹ that starts with the self, then extends to the other, to all humanity, to the whole universe ultimately. With Levinas, on the other hand, in the course of the development to bring the theme of desire into full play, “need,” “desire,” and “Eros” activate a centrifugal movement of the departure of the I from his or her own self towards the Other. The dynamism of human subjectivity is marked by an interruption of a self-consciousness absorbed in enjoyment at home at the awakening of the Other, which unlocks the self from seclusion and self-indulgence to turn into a Welcome and hospitality. The three-fold movement heralds an unending aspiration for Infinity, which is constantly pulling me

¹See Huston Smith, The World’s Religions, 1991, p. 182: “expands in concentric circles that begin with oneself and spread from there to include successively one’s family, one’s face-to-community, one’s nation, and finally all humanity.”
towards it yet ever overflowing me, which merges into the time of infinite fecundity that is continuously commencing and recreating. Of different styles and dynamics, nonetheless, the two compositions of Dai Zhen and Levinas take on a like motif of “caring for the other.”

Dai Zhen’s notion of desire does not depart from a traditional conception about human biological and instinctive needs for food, drink, and sex. However, in his steadfast defense of human desire he distinguishes himself from other Confucian thinkers. The originality of his thought comes from his very insight into the universality of human desire and his deep ethical concern for humanity that finds its full expression in the fulfillment of desire of all human beings under heaven. To him, the legitimacy of human desire resides in the fact that desire is not only about my needs and wants but also about the wants and needs of other people. As far as desire is concerned, what really matters is henceforth whether I can help others fulfill their desire in the pursuit of my own. In this sense, we may say that desire is relational. Rather than driving us to self-indulgence, desire opens us to the other. Rather different from Dai Zhen, Levinas uniquely defines desire as the idea of Infinity, as the relationship between the self and the other. He intently distinguishes desire from need to separate the former from a conventional concept about human biological and appetitive needs. However, interestingly, in Levinas’s writings we find “desire” wind its way back to its original meaning concerning human basic physical needs, of which Levinas often singles out “hunger” for their expression. Repeatedly, Levinas emphasizes that the relationship with the Other is nothing else but my recognition of others’ hunger. In my face-to-face encounter with the Other, Desire—the relationship between the self and the Other turns into the relationship of economics that demands me to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Dai Zhen and Levinas may have different conceptual formulations of human desire, but in their shared vision of caring for the physical needs of others, they both find in desire the very impetus that leads the self towards the Other. Despite the different patterns of human relationships presented in their writings, one thing remains essential to both of them. That is, it is the care and concern for others that both initiates and sustains the relationship between the self and the other. Nevertheless, whereas Dai Zhen finds the locomotive of our moral acts from within in the self, Levinas locates our moral drive from without in the Other. Consequently, the self is Dai Zhen’s referential point of moral reasoning; by contrast, the Other justifies the Levinasian kindness and hospitality. Here we see the fundamental difference between Dai Zhen and Levinas. In Dai
Zhen the self is a composite part of the organic whole that embraces heaven, earth, humans, and myriad things; with Levinas, the Other is the absolute alterity irreducible to part of the self or the Same. In their philosophical discourse, I find their notion of desire the most intriguing conjunction where two great minds from different ages and religious and philosophical backgrounds encounter each other.

I. Desire: the Unfolding of the Other

1. Transcendence and the locus of the self

1.1.1 Unity and Totality

Dai Zhen’s philosophy is evolved in the general ethos of the Confucian anthrop-cosmic view of the unity of Heaven and Humanity (tianren heryi 天人合一) or of humankind forming one body with heaven, earth, and myriad things (yu tiandi waiwu wei yiti 與天地萬物為一體). Yet, of the same spirit of the Yijing, Dai Zhen adopts a rather dynamic approach to this Confucian wholeness by stressing the continuum of the cosmos and the human world in the human participation in the ceaseless creation and transformation of the universe. “Shengsheng” 生生 as the creative creativity of the cosmic vital force provides the metaphysical foundation for this primordial continuum which is spelt out as the correlation between the tiandao (the way of heaven 天道), namely a ceaseless creation and transformation of the universe and rendao (the way of humans 人道), namely human relationships and daily livelihood that are considered an integral part of this cosmic creation and transformation. Since we are all composed of the same fundamental stuff—qi or vital energy and get involved in the cosmic creative activities, we find ourselves related to all other human beings as a constituent part of the organic whole. Thus, not only do my needs and desires constitute the way of humans, but every other human’s needs and desires are also constituent of the way of humans. In this sense, we are equal in front of each
other as the participants of the cosmic creative activities. We may say that the self-other relationship is analogical in that I and other people are alike the co-creators of the universe in its ceaseless process of creation and transformation. As such, we may also say that the self in Dai Zhen’s writing is actually independent and individualist rather than relational (The self’s identity depends on the contextual other as suggested by the Chinese character “仁” ren, which hieroglyphically means two persons standing side by side, so that the self by nature defines itself by being the counterpart of its correlative other) or communal (the self is considered to be the centre of the web of human relationships that expands from the individual level to the communal, national, and finally universal) as in Tu Weiming’s reading of the Confucian self. Nonetheless, in his reconstruction of the Confucian self, Dai Zhen transforms this natural analogical relationship into an ethical one. As applied to many Confucian thinkers, the notion of the great unity of heaven, earth, and human provides Dai Zhen with an ontological framework to structure his ethical world. In my opinion, the problem of desire for Dai Zhen is intrinsically an issue of how to posit the human position in this unity. On the one hand people are within this integrated entirety, on the other they are individual entity with their own desires, feelings, and intelligence. Once we realize the commonality among all human beings and our like role in relation to the cosmos, we will be able to sympathetically understand other people’s feelings and desires. For Dai Zhen the continuation of the cosmos and the human world is not just an ontological reality but an ethical necessity as well. His ethical theory of “以情絜情” (to gauge qing with qing) and “情得其平” (feelings and desires obtain their fairness and balance) is precisely based on this ontological commonality shared by every human being. The holistic vision of interdependence and interconnection of the cosmos and the human realm prescribes an ethics of care and responsibility for other people’s welfare and hence the wellbeing and flourishing of the whole community.

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It makes an interesting case to compare this Confucian wholeness with Levinas’s notion of totality. Dai Zhen constructs an organic universe that is all-inclusive, ceaselessly self-creating and self-transforming, at once transcendent and immanent, but Levinas, as suggested by his book title *Totality and Infinity*, presents two distinct orders: the order of Totality and the order of Infinity. Unlike Dai Zhen’s organismic whole, totality in Levinas’s writing stands for the domain of the human history that represents an anonymous totalizing force reducing the Other into the same. In Dai Zhen’s cosmology, there is not another transcendent order outside and above this organic whole, but the Levinasian totality calls for a transcendent order exterior to its entirety. Accordingly, Dai Zhen in line with the general Confucian thinking locates transcendence within this world since this world is intrinsically connected to heaven and earth, Levinas’s philosophy, on the other hand, reveals close affinity with the general Western religious and philosophical metaphysical tradition that tends to set apart a transcendent order outside or above the human realm. In his writings, Levinas resorts to both theological and philosophical traditions for an articulation of transcendence. Theologically speaking, first, the notion of creation *ex nihilo* introduces an idea about the presence of a completely transcendent order that always stands above its creation and “expresses a multiplicity not united into a totality” (TI 104). Second, the prophetic eschatology (TI 22) foretells the end of being and the current world to initiate an utterly new order. Levinas says, “Eschatology institutes relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present” (TI 22). For him, God’s judgment at the end of history is pronounced upon me in face of the stranger, widow, and orphan. But it seems that the philosophical speculations on transcendence are even more appealing to Levinas. He discovers in the Cartesian idea of Infinity and the Platonic notion of the Good beyond being his two most important spiritual resources and inspirations outside theology. They give rise to Levinas’s own formulation of transcendence—the human relationship with the Other.

However, what is interesting about Levinas’s presentation is that totality does not in fact constitute a correlation with infinity as the title of the book seems to suggest nor does totality exist as the dichotomist counterpart of infinity as this world opposed to the world beyond. To my mind, totality in Levinas’s writing only emerges as both a bleak background against which
the self stands out as a separated being. Particularly, Levinas associates totality with war by claiming the coincidence of the experience of war and the experience of totality wherein the Other loses its alterity and the same is deprived of its identity. For him totality is closely bound up with ontology to express itself as power, as tyranny. Levinas presents or precludes “totality” as a possible alternative to Infinity that we might mistakenly take to be the orientation of the self. Henceforth, it is worth to point out that in Levinas’s writing it is Separation in which the individual human being unfolds his or her life rather than Totality that stands in relationship with Infinity.

While Dai Zhen finds the locale of the self, both the natural and the ethical one, in the continuum of the cosmos and humankind, which he describes as buge (no separation, being unblocked 不隔), the Levinasian self is lodged in Separation with respect to infinity. However, as “continuum” holds the key to transcendence in Dai Zhen’s writing, Levinas conceives of “separation” a necessary condition of transcendence. These two sharply contrasting ideas reveal the fundamental difference between Dai Zhen and Levinas in their worldviews and hence their conception of the transcendent. In Dai Zhen’s philosophy transcendence is nothing else but the ceaseless creation and transformation of the vital force qi that infuses the entire universe of both the natural world and the human world. But Levinas’s transcendence points to the other that remains in a different plane other than mine. He employs several different terms to describe this spatial heterogeneity, for example, “non-homogeneity of space” (TI 220) that admits “a radical multiplicity” (TI 220), the “curvature of space” or “curvature of intersubjective space” (TI 291) that “inflects distance into elevation” (TI 291), that expresses the superiority of the other, that “is, perhaps, the very presence of God” (TI 291). Consequently, while Dai Zhen introduces the transcendent dimension of the self by enforcing the idea of the continuity of humanity with the

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3 See “Preface” of Totality and Infinity, pp. 21-25.

4 See No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 182: “All that has life is not separated from the transforming vital force of heaven and earth” (凡有生，即不隔於天地之氣化).
cosmos, Levinas maintains that transcendence prescribes this distance in such a way that the transcendent signification of the self rests on his or her orientation of moving towards Infinity rather than being immersed in totality. In this light, with Dai Zhen the metaphysical or transcendent signification of the human life is understood in terms of its partaking in the transcendent. By contrast, Levinas holds that “Transcendence is to be distinguished from a union with the transcendent by participation” (TI 77). The transcendent meaning of the human life lies in the very fact the Other teaches me, demands me, and commands me from a dimension of Height. Transcendence is contained in this asymmetrical relationship.

1.1.2 Yu (desire) and li (principle) / Separation and Infinity

Nonetheless, despite the fundamental differences in how they conceive of transcendence and how they articulate their ideas about transcendence and its relationship with human beings, I find one fascinating fact, namely both Dai Zhen and Levinas alike have actually located transcendence within this world in which our human life is physically embedded. For both thinkers, transcendence is manifest “within the unfolding of our terrestrial existence, of economic existence” (TI 52), or, in Dai Zhen’s words, within “human relationships and our daily livelihood” (renlun riyong 人伦日用) of “drinking, eating, and having sex” (yinshi nannu 飲食男女). Behind the grand cosmological and metaphysical constructs that set Dai Zhen and Levinas apart in two distinct philosophical traditions, it turns out that the two thinkers actually stay so close to each other, only they express the similar ethical concern in each their own languages.

Levinas draws heavily on both theological and philosophical resources to formulate his metaphysics— the Metaphysical Desire or the relationship with the Other. Yet, what is unique about his thought is that by transcendence he does not propose a realm beyond in opposition to this world below. Rather, he resorts to both theology and philosophy for an expression about
transcendence, for terms about a beyond. Thereby, the theological concepts such as creation ex nihilo and eschatology serve to articulate his ethical thought about the absolute alterity, that which cannot be integrated into a part of the same; and the philosophical notion of Goodness beyond being saves him from a religious talk about transcendence. At the dismissal of the divine transcendence, Levinas reads transcendence in the light of ethics. While he retains the formal structure of transcendence in relation to humankind in terms of Height and the idea of Infinity, Levinas transforms the theological ideas into an ethical articulation of the absolute alterity and sanctity of the Other. By transcendence he reasserts the absolute dominion of the Other over the self. In Levinas’s writings, we may say that the Other is the philosophized God. Or, conversely, God is the sanctified Other. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Levinas transcendence does not point to a transcendent entity but signifies a transcendent, i.e. ethical signification of the Other. In this sense, we may say that transcendence is a metaphorical rather than metaphysical expression whose meaning is like-God: invisible, transcendent, and infinite.

Unlike Levinas, it is not difficult for us to see this-worldliness of Dai Zhen’s philosophy. Yet, if we find it a challenge to locate Levinas’s ethics within this world, then, I will say that our challenge with Dai Zhen would be how to discern the transcendent meaning of his defense for “drinking, eating, and having sex.” In my view, therefore, it is the same crucial for us to investigate Dai Zhen’s thought within the anthrop-cosmological framework as to look at Levinas’s ethics beyond its theological and metaphysical structure. As Dai Zhen grounds his ethics on the belief in an organismic universe that is ceaselessly creating and transforming, he sees human physical needs and desires as the cosmic vitality manifested in the human world. Thereby, human needs for food and sex finds its justification in the continuum of the way of heaven and the way of humans. The Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism advocates the opposition of heavenly principle li to human desires yu to promote the former in suppression of the latter. As a result, a heavenly principle that is held to be derived from heaven by Neo-Confucians and hence transcendent is set apart to regulate human desire that is considered coming from humans and hence bodily. For Dai Zhen, however, since there is no opposite of heaven and the human world, there is no antithesis of desire and principle either. Consequently, there does not exist an alleged principle from above, be it a transcendent tian (heaven天) or a metaphysical li (principle理) to
preside over the so-called selfish desire (siyu 私欲). Because the way of heaven is creation after creation in pattern and order (shengsheng er tiaoli 生生而條理), of the same accord, the way of humans is also creative and orderly. Order and pattern arise from the creative creativity of the vital force itself and accompany its process of creation and transformation. For this very reason, to Dai Zhen, we do not need to look up to a universal and impersonal heavenly principle for meaning and direction. Rather, as the Book of Odes says, “Where there is a thing, there is its pattern” (you wu you ze 有物有則). Dai Zhen goes further to explain, “Desire is the thing and principle its pattern” (欲, 其物; 理, 其則也). This means that desire itself already entails its own principle for its own fulfillment, which, for Dai Zhen, is expressed as the necessity of attending to other’s desires in pursuit of my own. Principle does not lie in heaven but resides right in the human need for food, drink, and sex, which is not just my desire but also the desire of others. By this means, whenever we can take other people’s needs into our consideration, principle will manifest itself. As Dai Zhen states, “When one fulfills one’s own life, one extends this to all under heaven to fulfill their lives together. This is humanity.” (一人遂其生, 推之而與天下共遂其生, 仁也)6

In Dai Zhen, “principle residing in desire” (li yu yu yu 理寓於欲)7 attests the continuation of heaven and humanity. Thereby, there is not the so-called heavenly principle that is divorced from the concrete human daily existence; on the other hand, human physical desires bearing the heavenly character are authentic and inviolable. When Dai Zhen pinpoints principle by bringing to light the dimension of the other in our satisfaction of desires, as it were, attending to other people’s needs already implies a heavenly decree. In this way we may say that Dai Zhen bears

5 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quan Shu. Vol. VI, p. 160.
6 No .36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.
7 See No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 159: “Now we say that qing does not go erring is principle. This means that principle resides in feelings and actual reality. However, if there is no desire, where is the principle?” (今以情之不爽失為理, 是理者存乎欲者也, 然則無欲亦非嬾?).
resemblance to Levinas that proclaims the material needs of the other an absolute command upon
the self and desire my act to meet them. Interestingly, at this conjuncture of desire wherein
principle resides, I find that the meanings of two utterly distinct concepts “desire” as understood
by Dai Zhen and Levinas come across. With Dai Zhen, desire, a psychological and physical
need for food, drink, and sex via the fulfillment of the needs of the others is transformed into the
self’s caring and being responsible for others. In Levinas, on the contrary, desire, the
Metaphysical Desire, an idea of Infinity, an ethical relationship with the Other, turns into an
“objective” giving, material donation, feeding the hungry and the like.

From the vantage point of Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, the relationship between desire and
principle is well mirrored in the relationship between Separation and Infinity. In Dai Zhen’s
ethical thought, desire and principle or order bespeak the two most important aspects of human
existence: its natural state and its transcendent dimension that are interdependent of each other.
To a great extent, we may say that the relationship between separation and infinity is precisely
the expression of these two aspects of human being. To use Levinas’s terms, it is the relationship
between “terrestrial existence” (TI 52) or “economic existence” (TI 52, 60) and the “sabbatical
existence” (TI 104) or “created existence” (TI 105). The former is characterized by need—the
economy of labor, dwelling, and enjoyment and the latter by desire—the idea of Infinity, the
relationship with the other, the drive towards Goodness. With Dai Zhen principle is neither
antithetical to desire nor is it its counterpart. Rather than a denial of desire as advocated by the
Song-Ming Confucianism, the metaphysical principle arises in desire when I take into
consideration the desires of the others. As discussed in earlier chapters, likewise, in Levinas’s
writing Infinity and Separation do not constitute a correlative or antithetical relationship which
would simply cut across both “the logic of contradiction” (TI 150) that indicates mutual negation
and the “dialectical logic” (TI 150) that entails mutual participation and reconciliation within a
totalized whole. Instead of a refutation of separation, Infinity necessitates this distance. Levinas
says, “The idea of Infinity, the relation between the same and the other, does not undo the
separation attested in transcendence” (TI 60). He not only sees separation a necessity but calls
the being in separation “a great glory” (TI 58) of the creator.
In my opinion, the necessity of separation can be understood in two respects. First, metaphysically, just as the cosmic wholeness stipulates the continuum of heaven and humanity in Dai Zhen’s philosophy, the transcendent structure of Infinity prescribes separation a necessary condition to maintain the human relationship with the transcendent. Henceforth, desire is the idea of Infinity that is ever overflowing me and beyond my reach; and the Desirable of what desire desires for posits the Good above being. As such, for Levinas separation is crucial to upholding the metaphysical structure of Infinity as continuation is vital for Dai Zhen to the maintenance of the organismic whole of the universe. As Dai Zhen’s man partakes in transcendence via the continuity of the cosmos and the human world, separation is the way in which the Levinasian self is related to the transcendent. Second, empirically, as a general expression of human relationships and daily livelihood desire constitutes the basis of and the departure point of human morality in Dai Zhen’s philosophy. Likewise, with Levinas, “the Desire for the other, above happiness, requires this happiness, this autonomy of the sensible in the world” (TI 62). To him, “The Desire is a desire in a being already happy” (TI 62).

Transcendence or infinity is implied in the intimacy, gentleness, and warmth of dwelling in enjoyment of the separated being. Like Dai Zhen, Levinas sanctions the value and worth of the economical life of the separated being that is imbedded in this sensible life world on the one hand and perpetually driven for the good on the other. Yet, to my mind, Dai Zhen considers our desires and needs an experiential knowledge of other people’s needs and desires, which henceforth leads us to a sympathetic understanding of and caring for others’ well-being. As he writes, “If there was no such desire, then one would see other people’s affliction and distress under heaven with indifference. There is not such a thing that one can fulfill others’ life yet with no need to fulfill one’s own” (然使其無此欲，則於天下之人，生道窮促，亦將漠然視之。己不必遂其生，而遂人之生，無是情也).8 Elsewhere in the Shu Zheng he also writes, “If without the heart of cherishing life and fear of death, how can one have the heart of fright and compassion?” (使無懷生畏死之心，又焉有休惕側隱之心)9 With Levinas, differently, my life in separation provides me with the material foundation for my donation and offering. In this

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8 No. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 159-160.
9 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 184.
sense, we may say that economy characteristic of Separation founds ethics that brings home to us a plain truth: I simply cannot approach the other empty-handed. For Levinas, “To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give” (TI 75). Thus, my dwelling in the world makes it possible for me to open the door to welcome the other to my house. Besides, since my home provides me with a site of habitation, a shelter, in the like manner, with the heart of gratitude, I know how to return the generosity of the land with my hospitality to the other. As we look at Levinas’s Metaphysical Desire within this empirical context, we understand his claim that “The idea of infinity, the metaphysical relation, is the dawn of a humanity without myth” (TI 77). To support my argument, here I quote a passage from Professor Robert Gibbs’s work *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* as follows:

This ethics takes place in the world of material needs and is not a flight from or repression of those needs in the name of some higher needs. Levinas quotes Israel Salanter: “My neighbour’s material needs are my spiritual needs.” The very corporeality of Jewish observance is an affirmation of the reality of the reality of others’ material needs…. Social ethics is not a renunciation of materiality for some higher form of reality, but is a social and human relation to each other’s material needs.10

With Dai Zhen, the cosmic creative force of “shengsheng” 生生 unfolds a broad vision of the ceaseless creation and transformation of the universe in which human beings partake as a co-creator. Desire manifests human creative creativity involved in the cosmic creating activities. This joint creative creativity of the cosmos and humankind sustains the continuum of heaven, earth, and humans and confers on desire a transcendent meaning. As for Levinas, he simply claims that desire itself is metaphysical and places it within the structure of the relationship with

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10 See Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 1992, p. 257. He identifies materialism as one of seven rubrics for contemporary Jewish philosophy.
Infinity. Accordingly, instead of an all-embracing cosmic whole, he contends, “the idea of Infinity requires this separation” (TI 102). Desire being the idea of Infinity implanted in the human minds is henceforth the very factor that makes humankind to be related to that, which is infinite, invisible, and ungraspable. In both Dai Zhen and Levinas’s philosophy, human beings thereby participate in transcendence via desire and have a connection to what is lying beyond. Henceforth, for Dai Zhen principle resides in desire while for Levinas transcendence is precisely Desire—an idea of Infinity, the relation with the other. Nonetheless, in both Dai Zhen and Levinas’s writings desire operates an important turn of metaphysics towards empiricism that is closely bound up with the physicality and materialism of our life world, where others’ material needs constitute the backdrop of transcendence. To both Dai Zhen and Levinas, transcendence is nothing transcendent but something deeply anchored in this world. Where the hungry is fed, the naked is clothed, and the homeless is sheltered, where the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan meet their needs, transcendence will be there, which derives its meaning from a moral responsibility for the other.

1.2 The metaphor of animality

Dai Zhen and Levinas not only position human beings with reference to the transcendent but also look at humankind in contrast with animals. Peculiar to both thinkers’ ethical discourse is the recurrent motif of animals or animality. Noticeably, they both take special interest in the demarcation of animals and human beings as an important referential point to judge human existence. To both Dai Zhen and Levinas, biologically, human existence is inseparable from animality; nonetheless, human beings can stand above animality and distinguish themselves from animals. As such, the separation from the animal state indicates the departure of human beings from their natural state into a moral being.

In Confucian tradition, the discourse on “renqin zhibian” 人禽之辨 (the distinction between humans and animals) constitutes a major ethical enquiry of Confucianism. Ever since Mencius
put forward his famous claim that the distinction between humans and beasts is slight (the *Mencius* 8:19), Confucian thinkers and scholars have kept pondering over the slight difference and unanimously directed their attention to the heart/mind. According to Mencius, the faculty of the mind is thinking （心之官則思）while the other organs of the ear and the eye do not (the *Mencius* VIA 11:15). To some Confucians such as Zhu Xi, the distinction between the mind and the sensory organs of the eye, the ear, the mouth, and the nose thus sets apart the mind from the body with the former representing intelligence, rationality, and principle and the latter the sensuous desires in association with the sensible world. Henceforth, the division between the mind and the body also signifies the division between humanity and animality. In this light, to be human is to be intelligent, rational, and abiding by principle while to be animals is to be confined within desires. Thus, Zhu Xi remarks, “Once the mind is enslaved by the body, one becomes beasts and birds” （心為形役, 乃獸乃禽）. It may be said that throughout the history of Confucian thought, the crux of the issue falls on the opposition of the rational realm to the sensible world in which the physical desires and needs are identified as something separated from the mind to be connected with animals. In line with the mainstream Confucianism, Dai Zhen also calls attention to the mind wherein he discerns the distinction between humans and animals. Nevertheless, in his objection to the dichotomy of the intelligent and the sensible, the transcendent and the physical, principle and desire, he looks at the issue innovatively as the distinction between the obscurity and brightness of the mind other than the opposition of the mind and the body.

Thereby, the animality that is under the rein of Confucian morality, on the leash of the Learning of Principle of Neo-Confucianism in particular is set free in Dai Zhen’s philosophy and endorsed as a part of human nature. As Confucians have been in debate over whether human nature is made up of instinctive desires or inborn goodness, Dai Zhen makes it clear that humanity comprises of animality. The eye takes delight in colors, the ear in sounds, the nose in smells, and the mouth in tastes in the same way as the mind takes delight in principle and righteousness.

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11 Zhu Xi, the *Sisu--Mengzi gaozhi pian shan* 孟子告子篇上 (The *Four Books*--The *Mencius* VI A 11:15).
For him human sensual pleasure is as wholesome to the body as moral pursuit to the mind. Thus, “drinking, eating, and having sex” these instinctive and appetitive needs that are characteristic of an animal existence or shared by humans and animals alike find their justification with Dai Zhen. He says, “All those of blood and breath know loving life and fearing death” (凡血氣之屬皆知懷生畏死). The so-called animal needs are nothing else but that which regards the sustenance and preservation of human life.

Like Dai Zhen, Levinas is conscious of the animality of human needs. In *Totality and Infinity* he at times compares the human life in Separation to “animal existence” (TI 175) and describes one’s enjoyment at home with oneself (chez soi) as “animal complacency in oneself” (TI 149). However, as discussed earlier, Levinas does not thereby refute one’s material existence in the name of the Other. On the opposite, he considers human economic existence, which he likens to animal existence, indispensable to human beings actually. In this regard, we may say that Levinas resembles Dai Zhen in his confirmation of the ontic experience of dwelling, labor, and enjoyment that feature human economic existence. Nevertheless, when Levinas describes this mode of living in terms of animal existence, I should say, he employs “animal” more in a metaphorical or ethical sense. For in his writing, animal existence does depart largely from human existence of which he has made a rather sensuous analysis. By contrast, Dai Zhen does not really go in detail to distinguish the actual animal existence from the human physical existence which he simply categories as “eating, drinking, and having sex” that in essence are not unique to humankind alone but common to all animals as well. Needless to say, “eating, drinking, and having sex” appears more primordial than Levinas’s “dwelling,” “labor,” and “enjoyment.” Professor Paul.W. Gooch in discussing Plato’s conception of human appetites makes a distinction between hunger and appetite suggesting hunger is purely a physiological reaction while appetite implies human eating habit in association with the culture and material

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12 No.21, the *Shu Zheng* in *Dai Zhen Quanshu*, Vol. VI, p. 181.
plentitude of a society.\textsuperscript{13} In this light, if we say that “eating, drinking, and having sex” are physiological necessity shared by both humans and animals, then, delight in colors, sounds, aromas, and flavors should be more human. Hence, it is not that Dai Zhen is not aware of the huge gap between animals and humans even with respect to food, drink, and sex. Rather, as we have discussed in chapter two on Dai Zhen’s conception of human nature, for Dai Zhen as is for all other Confucians, the distinction between animals and the human species has always been an ethical issue. Consequently, all other biological and physiological differences embodied in their living habits or modes of life are simply out of the philosopher’s consideration. For this reason, I hold that animality for Dai Zhen only functions as a metaphor. Behind his inquiry about the distinction between animals and humans is his ethical agenda to extend and advance the human mind. His quest accords with the general Confucian sanguine belief in humankind as the most sentient being in the universe. In comparison with Dai Zhen, Levinas distinguishes human beings from animals in both literal and metaphorical sense. Henceforth, “animals” in his writing are not just an allegory but creatures standing on their own in contrast with humankind. Literally, animals are the living things dependent on nature for living without any external resources to resort to except for their bodies. Human beings differ from animals by labor, by application of tools. Levinas’s demarcation of humankind from animals implies his critique of human civilization that turns human reliance on the world into enjoyment, possession, appropriation, and domination. On a different level, metaphorically, by drawing the line between humankind and animals, Levinas urges people to pass from a biological, empirical, economic, and separated existence into an ethical, religious, created, and infinite being.

Leaving aside all the external biological and physical features, Dai Zhen calls attention to the mind. From a naturalist stance, he looks at the distinction between humankind and animals in terms of their physical make up of the mind. According to him, both humans and animals derive their nature from the movement of the vital force of \textit{yin yang} and the five elements. Because their received allotments are fundamentally different, the difference of their allotments

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\textsuperscript{13} The idea is from Professor Gooch’s unpublished class reading material “Taming the Beast Within: Plato on Human Appetites” for his course “Plato” offered in Spring, 2006 at Victoria University, the University of Toronto.
\end{flushleft}
determines the difference of their nature. As he says, “The Book of Change, Confucius’s Analects, and the work of Mencius talk about nature all in terms of their formation via the allotments received from yin yang and the five elements. Upon completion, there are humankind and hundreds of things. Being partial or complete, thick or thin, clear or murky, obscure or bright, they are limited each by their own different allotments. To speak of their nature by life only is like to group humans together with dogs and cattle without noticing their differences” (易、論語、孟子之書，其言性也，咸就其分於陰陽五行以成性為言；成，則人與百物，偏全、厚薄、清濁、昏明限於所分者各殊，徒曰生而已矣，適同人於犬牛而不察其殊。).14 Due to the limit of their natural allotments, the mental awareness of animals is limited. Henceforth, according to Dai Zhen, the essential distinction between humankind and animals lies in the fact that the mind of birds and beasts cannot be opened and enlightened (kai tong 開通) whereas the mind of human beings can and be opened and extended to godly illumination. Dai Zhen’s inquiry starts with the investigation of the physical formation of their nature from which he launches his ethical enterprise to compel people to advance their mind to become true human beings. “Tong”通 indicates openness, connectedness, communication, and continuity as well as understanding and thorough comprehension. Ontologically, human beings are not isolated beings but situated within the continuum of heaven, earth, humans, and myriad things. Thus, by extending their mind through learning and thinking, people epistemologically will be able to attain an understanding of their intrinsic interconnection with other human beings, with all other creatures, and myriad things under heaven to finally fully realize their endowed nature pragmatically. With his innate capacity of understanding, the human mind is susceptible to righteousness and humanity.

We may say that with Dai Zhen animals are a philosophical construct. In Levinas’s writing, however, animals come on the scene in the natural world to form a contrast with human beings that dwell in abode through their labor. Animals live in hunger, disquietude, fear, struggle,

14 No. 21, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 182.
insecurity, and dangers under the dominion of things whereas human beings liberate themselves
from the animal and vegetable condition by fabricating tools and thereby fixing the uncertainty
of the future. Levinas says, “The happiness of enjoyment is stronger than every disquietude,
but disquietude can trouble it; here lies the gap between the animal and the human” (TI 149).
Our earlier discussion on need has examined the issue under discussion. To distinguish
humankind from animals in terms of economy and technology as is done by Levinas is absent in
Dai Zhen’s writing. This is not merely due to the foci of their attention but more importantly
because of their distinct philosophical backgrounds as well as the different social and cultural
ethos of the ages they live in. Although the imperial China is proud of its Four Great Inventions
of compass, printing, paper, and fire powder, technology has never taken precedence over
humanism. Owing to the ontological- ethical ideal of “tianren heyi” (unity of heaven and
humankind 天人合一), instead of appropriation and domination, human beings have retained a
harmonious and dynamic relationship with nature. In this regard, Professor Vincent Shen’s
speculation on nature, technology, and humanism in his work Contrast, Strangitification and
Dialogue throws light on the issue under discussion. Drawing on the Mengzi and the
Zhongyong, he provides a novel perspective into the role of technology in relation to nature and
humanism in terms of “zhixing jinxing” (to know and fulfill nature to the full). He says,

Chinese philosophy advocates knowing nature and fulfilling nature to its full. This
means that human beings should try to understand the nature of myriad thing, to
bring it to light, and assist it to be fully developed with the aid of techniques. …In
modern language, the goal of science lies in bringing the nature of things to full
realization; the goals of humanism, society, and natural science are to know the
nature of the self, human community, and myriad things respectively. As for
technology, its goal is to assist the self, the other, and the myriad things in a most
solid way to give free rein to their nature instead of domination and exploitation.

(中國哲學主張應知性盡性,也就是人因認知並開顯萬物的本性,並以技術善盡萬物之性......科學的目的在於盡物之性,人文,社會與自然科學的目的,分別是在認知自我,人群與萬物之本性,至於技術的目的則是在以最充實的方式發揮自我,他人與萬物之本性，而不在於宰制或剝削) 16

As such, in Shen’s view, technology exerts its function as “participative construction” (參贊式建構) rather than “dominative construction” (宰制性建構).17 Professor Shen’s observation is without doubt well applicable to the situation of the eighteenth century China where Dai Zhen lived. Since people live in harmony with nature and myriad things as part of the creative whole of the cosmos, Dai Zhen does not need to deal with the issue of human domination over and exploitation of things as Levinas has to.

On the contrary, to Levinas’s mind, humankind is the special animal that “fabricates tools and fixes the powers of its future action in transmissible and receivable things. Thus a political and technical existence ensures the will its truth, renders it objective, without opening upon goodness, without emptying it of its egoist weight” (TI 241-2). Instruments change human relationship with nature into the relationship of power and control. Here we see the different function of technique in two distinct cultural contexts: One is constructive to and assisting in the maintenance of the harmony and mutual flourishing of the human community and the world and the other renders the world at the service of human self-interest. The former relates human beings to the wholeness of the cosmos and the latter turns humankind into an egoist being, a

16 Vincent Shen, Duibi, waitui yu jiaotan對比, 外推與交談 (Contrast, Strangitification and Dialogue), Tai Pei, Tai Wan: Wunan Tushu Chubang Gongshi 臺灣 五南圖書出版公司, 2002, p. 185. In the second part of the book “Zian, keji yu renwen自然,科技與人文 (Nature, Science and Technology, and Humanism) (pp. 157-294), Professor Shen devotes several chapters to discussing the issue from a comparative philosophical perspective of the Chinese and West. Also see his Keji, renwen jiazhi yu houxiandai科技,人文價值與后現代 (Technology, Humanistic Values, and Postmodernism).

needy existence. Ironically, to make a distinction between human beings and animals turns out
to lay bare the inhumanity or “a residue or aftereffect of animality” (TI 245) implied in human
economic existence that is closely bound up with human dominion over and misuse of nature.
Largely, for Levinas, the animality or inhumanity of the human species just lies in human self-
indulgence in material pursuits and occupation. Accordingly, in light of Levinas, we may say
that ontically human beings have broken away from animal status but ethically they may remain
animals yet.

Dai Zhen does not draw the line between animals and humankind as Levinas does to illustrate
the human domination over and usurpation of nature. Nevertheless, on a different level, both
thinkers show great similitude in their metaphorical use of animal or animality to reveal the
animal feature accompanying human material or economic existence. At the outset, we have
argued that in both Dai Zhen and Levinas’s thinking animality is indispensible to human
existence. Nonetheless, they likewise share the same ethical vision of a moral being produced in
advance or break away from its animal existence. In this sense, the demarcation of humankind
from animals suggests both thinkers’ ethical ideal about human orientation towards the moral
being. With respect to Dai Zhen, his critique of the animality of human existence is
demonstrated in his refutation of Gaozi’s biological naturalism that regards eating and having
sex the defining nature of human beings. As regards Levinas, interestingly, he adopts a similar
position in his critique of the Freudian sexuality that reduces human desire to simple search for
pleasure and consequently loses the ethical and religious signification inherent in “the pathos of
voluptuosity” (TI 276) of the erotic relation. For Levinas the son generated in human fecundity
initiates a new mode of the self-other relationship, a relationship with future that “goes beyond
the biologically empirical” (TI 277) and thereby launches an infinite ethical responsibility across
time. According to Levinas, “the biological structure of fecundity is not limited to the biological
fate” (TI 306); or, “biology does not represent a purely contingent being, unrelated to its
essential production” (TI 279). By essential production, Levinas means that human beings are
essentially structured or “created” as an ethical being for the Other. He said, “The human I is
posited in fraternity: that all men are brothers is not added to man as a moral conquest, but
constitutes his ipseity” (TI 279-280). Therefore, it can be concluded that for both Levinas and
Dai Zhen the fundamental difference between humankind and animals rests on the very fact that humans are ethical beings, which is our ethical nature or basic condition of being human. By nature, human beings are ethical.

II. The Self-Other Relationship Revisited

2.1 The paradigmatic model of the self-other relationship

In this section, we will first look at the Confucian Five Relationships via the lenses of Dai Zhen’s writings with our focus on the father-son relation. Then, we will revisit the three modes of human relationships Levinas presents in conjunction with his discussion on Desire, Eros, and filiality and fraternity. In the famous Confucian formulation of the five human relationships, the father-son relation unquestionably occupies the most important position. Though of less popularity, the subject of the father-son relationship constitutes an indispensable part of Levinas’s ethics. I argue that with both Dai Zhen and Levinas the father-son relation is not simply a social relationship on its own but paradigmatically orientates the self-other relationship. A comparative look at of this particular dimension of human relationship sheds great light on the two thinkers’ thought on the ethical self as a responsible being in relation to the other.

As the most crucial human relationship for Confucianism, the father-son relation can be seen as the central expression of Confucian ethics. Dai Zhen does not particularly address the father-son relationship alone, but as most Confucians do, he upholds the five relations wulun (father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife, brother and brother, friend and friend)¹⁸ highly and

¹⁸ See No. 32, the Mengzi ziyi shuzheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu Vol. VI, p. 200: “The Zhongyong also says: “The ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, and friends, these five relations are the universal attainable way” (中庸又曰: ‘君臣也，父子也，夫婦也，昆弟也，朋友之交也，五者，天下之達道也).
considers renlun riyong (human relationships and daily livelihood 人倫日用) Dao and the embodiment of principle. As is generally held in Confucian tradition, the five relationships are respectively characterized with humanity (ren仁), righteousness (yi義), distinction (bie别), order (xu序), and trust (xin信). In other words, the father-son relationship is built on humanity or kindness, the relationship between brothers on proper order (of the senior and junior), the husband-wife relationship on distinction (of their social roles and functions), the relationship between the ruler and the subject on righteousness, and the relationship between friends on trust. In one place of the Yuan Shan, Dai Zhen specifies the way in which how each pair of the five human relationships is to be maintained. He says,

Be a son with filial piety xiao, be a younger brother with brotherly love and respect ti, be a minister with loyalty zhong, be a friend with trust xin. If one does not act in this manner, he is against the way. Be a father with kindness ci, be an elder brother with affection ai, be a ruler with benevolence ren. If one does not act in this manner, he is also against the way. The father-son relation is kindness and love en at its utmost; the relation between brothers is harmony qia at its utmost. The relation between the ruler and the minister is reverence jing at its utmost although its feeling of kindness and love is comparable to that between the father and the son. The relation between friends is friendship yi at its utmost although its harmonious feeling is comparable to that between brothers. The relation between the husband and the wife is distinction

The early Confucian texts actually present different sets of human relationships, among which some are four, some are three, and some seven. But the Zhongyong and the Mencius’s formulation of the Five Human Relations wulun becomes the most famous. See Keith Knapp’s entry “Ren lun 人倫 (Human relationships)” in Routledgecurzon Encyclopedia Of Confucianism, Ed. Xinzhong Yao. London: Routledge Curzon Press, 2003, pp. 501-503.

19 Dai Zhen quotes the Mencius to describe the nature of the Five Human Relationships. See No. 32, the Mengzi Zizi Shuzheng: “Mencius says, ‘Xie was appointed to be minister of instruction to teach people human relationships: love is pertinent to father and son, righteousness to ruler and minister, distinction to husband and wife, proper order to senior and junior, and trust to friends.’ This is what the Zhongyong means by saying that ‘teaching is to cultivate the way’ (孟子稱‘契為司徒，教以人倫: 父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有序，朋友有信’，此即中庸所言‘修道之謂教’也).
at its utmost although its feeling of kindness and love is comparable to that between the father and the son, its feeling of harmony comparable to that between the elder brother and the younger brother, and its feeling of friendship to that between friends. Filial piety, brotherly love, kindness, affection, loyalty, and trust are what humanity aims at attain; gratitude, harmony, reverence, and friendship are the natural sign of distinction.

(為子以孝，為弟以悌，為臣以忠，為友以信，違之，悖也；為父以慈，為兄以愛，為君以仁，違之，亦悖也。父子之倫，恩之盡也；兄弟之倫，洽之盡也；君臣之倫，恩比於父子，然而敬之盡也；朋友之倫，洽比於昆弟，然而誼之盡也；夫婦之倫，恩若父子，洽若昆弟，敬若君臣，誼若朋友，然而辨之盡也。孝悌慈愛忠信，仁所務致者也；恩洽敬誼，辨其自然之符也) 20

As regards the Confucian five human relations, many scholars deem them hierarchical and authoritarian with the son, younger brother, ministers, and wife inferior and submissive to the father, elder brother, ruler, and husband, with only one exception, that is, the relationship between friends. To be sure, these scholars’ criticism is well reasoned especially given the fact the wulun is often espoused with sangang (three bonds三綱) 21 in the ideological programming of the Confucian imperil China since the Han Confucian thinker Dong Zhongshu’s (c. 179-c. 104 B.C.董仲舒) proposal. However, contemporary Confucian thinker and scholar Tu Wei-ming tries to argue against this commonly held view about the authoritarianism and inequality of the five human relations by drawing attention to the mutual obligations and responsibilities

20 From the Yuan Shan Part III in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, pp. 27-28.

21 See Wing-tsit Chan’s note: “The ‘three bonds’ are those bonding the minister with the ruler, the son with the father, and the wife with the husband” in his A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, 1963, p. 277. It is generally held that the Three Bonds emphasizes the dependencies of the ministers, the son, and the wife upon the ruler, the father, and the husband and henceforth assumes unequal and asymmetrical relations.
entailed in the *wulun*. In this regard, we may say that Dai Zhen’s articulation of the five relations just well buttresses Tu’s argument. Distinctively, Dai Zhen asserts the reciprocal nature of the Confucian five human relations that prescribes mutual obligations on the two counterparts in each pair of relationship. Furthermore, he underscores the cardinal virtue of love and kindness, which in his writing is not only essential to the father-son relation but also indispensable to all other dyads to hold intact the five human relations.

Despite different formulations of human relationships presented in various early Confucian texts, it is indisputably that the father and son relation has always held the pivotal position ever since. With respect to the father’s feeling toward the son, it is expressed as “*ren*” (benevolence, humanity) or “*xiao*” (filial piety); concerning the son’s feeling for the father, it is expressed as “*ren*” (benevolence, humanity) or “*xiao*” (filial piety). Although the father-son relation presupposes both “*ren*” and “*xiao*,” it is of interest to note that in both Confucian thought and practice what has dominated people’s inquiry is the issue of *xiao* (filial piety). Not only do the *Lunyu* (the Analects) and the *Xiaojing* (the Classic of Filial Piety) proclaim “*xiao*” (filial piety and brotherly love) the root of humanity or “*xiao*” the foundation of virtue,

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22 Tu says, “Another common mistake in analyzing the five relations is to exaggerate the importance of asymmetry in all the dyads….however, the value that underlies the five relations is not dependency but *reciprocity* (*pao*). The filiality is reciprocated by the compassion of the father, the obedience of the ministers is reciprocated by the fair-mindedness of the rule and so forth.” See Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*, 1985, p. 139.

23 Keith Knapp researches the Confucian classics of the *Analects*, the *Zuo Zhuan*, the *Liji*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Mencius* to conclude that “among early Confucians, no uniform conception of what the most important human relationships were existed. Nevertheless, the father–son and lord–retainer are clearly the most cited and significant.” See *Routledgecurzon Encyclopedia Of Confucianism*. Ed. Xinzhong Yao, 2003, pp. 501-503.

24 The *Lunyu* 1.2: “孝弟也者，其为仁之本与” (Filial piety and brotherly love are the roots of humanity). The *Xiaojing*, chapter 1: “子曰：‘夫孝， 德之本也，教之所由生也’” (Confucius said, “Filial piety is the foundation of virtue and the origin of education.”)
but the history of Confucian China also bears witnesses to how the celebrated filial children fulfill their filial piety through “reverent caring” for the living parents on the one hand and mourning rites for the deceased ones on the other. 25 Xiao, without doubt, remains the most pronounced register of the Confucian father-son relationship. However, in my opinion, Dai Zhen does not really follow the traditional way to approach the father and son relationship by taking special heed of xiao. Rather, he promotes the general feeling of humanity ren that essentially defines the relation. In Confucian thought, ren is intrinsically related to other Confucian virtues of yi (righteousness), zhi (wisdom), xiao (filial piety), zhong (loyalty), and yong (courage). In the Mencius, ren is treated as the first among the four cardinal virtues of ren (humanity), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), and zhi (wisdom). Dai Zhen cites the Zhongyong saying, “Ren zhe, ren ye, qinqin wei da” (Humanity means being human; love for the kinsman is the greatest). 26 If the love for the kinsman is the greatest, the love between the father and the son undeniably should be the greatest of the greatest.

Needless to say, “ren” as the overriding virtue presiding over the father-son relation is crucial to Dai Zhen’s philosophy. For him, the father-son relation that is established on the basis of love and kindness affords people the very model for establishing human relationships. As he remarks, According to Alan K. L. Chan, whether “xiao” or “ren” comes first remains an unanswered question in the classics until the issue finds its lasting resolution with Zhu Xi. Chan said, “In everyday life, according to Zhu Xi, xiao always comes before ren and is the root of ren understood as love. As one penetrates the reason why this is the case, however, one realizes that ren in a ‘higher’ metaphysical sense is the very principle of love and of life itself and as such constitutes the source of xiao. Zhu Xi’s approach to ren-xiao relationship reflects a deep concern for the integrity of the entire philosophical architecture.” See Alan K. L. Chan, “Does xiao come before ren?” in Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History, ed. by Alan K. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan, 2004, p. 172.

25 See Keith Knapp, Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China, 2005, particularly chapter V “Reverent Caring,” which provides a penetrating analysis of the filial piety tales and their cultural and social implications.

26 See Dai Zhen’s quote of the Zhongyong in the Yuan Shan, Part I in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 12: “To cultivate the self with Dao, to cultivate Dao with ren. Humanity means being human; the love for the kinsman is the greatest” (修身以道，修道以仁。人也，亲亲为大。).
“Owing to the intelligent mind, we know the relationships of the father and son, brother and brother, and husband and wife. But since love does not stop within the family, we then know the relationship between the ruler and ministers and that between friend and friend” (有心知，則知有父子，有昆弟，有夫婦，而不止於一家之親也，於是又知有君臣，有朋友).

From Dai Zhen’s perspective, the other dimensions of human relationships are the further extension of the father-son relationship. Owing to the intelligent mind (心知) of the humankind, people can extend their love or humanity for the ones who are close to the ones who are far and thereby go beyond the ties of blood. From the relationships of father-son, brother-brother, and husband-wife, to the relationship between the ruler and ministers, and then to that between friends, ren becomes the very fountainhead of humanity to enable us to be connected with other human beings. In Dai Zhen’s words, “Ren is the foundation of virtues, embodied in myriad things and thus dear to all under heaven” (仁者，德行之本，體萬物而與天下共親).

Henceforth, I want to argue that with Dai Zhen the human relationship does not stay with the five relationships. Owing to the extension of humanity that is originated in the father-son relation, the relationship between friends opens up the possibility to establish relationship with people beyond the family based on care, sympathy, and mutual aid. In Dai Zhen’s view, the familial relationships (father and son, husband and wife, brothers and brothers) are natural or initiated by nature but the relationship between the ruler and the minister and that between friends are formed for other reasons, political, social, or ethical.

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27 No. 28, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 193.
29 He said, “Within one family, the relationships of the father-son and elder brother-younger brother are established by nature; the relationship between the husband and wife is the union of the male and female. Under heaven, there are countries. Because of the fact that people’s different wills give rise to disorder, the rulers and ministers arise. For those who understand the way of being the ruler and ministers, nothing will turn at odds with their governance. Whenever one acts upon one’s virtues at the time of being weak and lone and whenever one is in the predicament of distress and having little assistance, friends emerge. What we call friends are the ones who come to help. Whenever one acts upon one’s virtues at the time of being weak and lone and whenever one is in the predicament of distress and having little assistance, friends emerge. Friends are those who come to aid. Those who understand the way of friendship will help each other out of hardships. These five relationships are established since there is the self.
friends that is traditionally judged by “xin” 信 (trust) goes in the direction of “zhu” 助 (assistance). According to the definition of the Rites of Zhou (周禮), “Those with the same teacher are called peng朋 and those with the same intention or mind are you友” (同師曰朋，同志曰友). We see the similar use of “peng” and “you” in the Analects and other Confucian texts. But, Dai Zhen thus describes about friends: “Whenever one acts upon one’s virtues at the time of being weak and lone and whenever one is in the predicament of distress and having little assistance, friends emerge. Friends are those who come to aid. Those who understand the way of friendship will help each other out of hardships” (凡勢孤則德行行事，窮而寡助，於是又有朋友；友也者，助也，明乎朋友之道者，交相助而後濟). In light of Dai Zhen, the start of friendship is first a caring and active response to someone in difficulties. For this reason, the relationship between friends does not simply arise from the subjective feeling of mutual trust but, more importantly, stems from the concrete act of helping the ones who are undergoing adversity. As such, friendship formed out of sympathy and care has a broader ethical implication for how to establish relationship with the weak, the poor, the solitary, with the people who are suffering and in need of help. It therefore opens up a new dimension of human relationship that goes beyond the Confucian Five Relationships.

They account for the creative creativity of heaven and earth in pattern and order.” (一家之內, 父子昆弟, 天屬也; 夫婦, 舉合也; 天下國家, 志紛則亂, 於是有君臣, 明乎君臣之道者, 無往弗治也; 凡勢孤則德行行事, 窮而寡助, 於是有朋友; 友也者, 助也, 明乎朋友之道者, 交相助而後濟; 五者, 自有身而定也, 天地之生生而條理也). See the Yuan Shan Part III in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI p. 27.

30 For instance, the Analects says, “Isn’t it a great delight that friends come from afar?” (有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎?) The Analects 1.1) and “Do not make friend with the one that is unlike yourself” (無有不如己者) The Analects 1.8). Here, “peng” refers to the students or disciples of the same teacher and “you” the persons of the same mind.

31 See note 29 of the current chapter. Presumably, Dai Zhen’s interpretation of friendship may have received influence from Mencius’s thought on the ways of being neighbors as seen in the Mencius III B:3, where Mencius says, “Those who dwell within the same distributed area of nine squares should be friendly to one another both in and out, aid one another in keeping watch and guard, and sustain each other in sickness; then, the folks will live in affection and harmony” (鄉田同井, 出入相友, 守望相助, 疾病相扶持, 則百姓親睦 the Mencius 5:3). The English translation has adapted James Legge’s version with some slight modification (See James Legge, The Works of Mencius: Translated, with Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copies Indexes, 1970, p. 245).
Dai Zhen’s philosophy is in fact characterized with its special ethical concern about the weak, underprivileged, and marginalized group of society: the poor, the weak, the widowed, the dull, the timid, the sick, the old, the young, the orphaned, the lone, and the inferior. Whether one can take the wellbeing of these people into consideration becomes the yardstick of being an ethical human being. To attain this state, Dai Zhen proposes “yiqing xueqing” (to gauge qing with qing) as the moral guideline for retaining proper human relationships. He says, “Whenever I can put myself in other people’s position, principle is manifest” (以我絜之人，則理明).32 Particularly, “If I put myself in the positions of the weak, the widowed, the dull and the timid, the sick, the old and the young, the orphaned and the childless and then return to myself to think about how they live and what they feel, would these people in any way be different from me!” (誠以弱、寡、愚、怯與夫疾病、老幼、孤獨，反躬而思其情，人豈異於我)33 The otherness is treated as a part of the organic whole like me, in this sense they are equal, can be the referential point for each other. In this sense, the I can serve as the yardstick to measure the other people’s needs. Since by the cosmic force of “shengsheng,” human beings participated in its transformation and creation via “renlun riyong,” my “renlun riyong” is also his or her “renlun riyong.” People might challenge why Dai Zhen takes oneself as the measure to “yiqing xueqing,” which, in their eyes, implies subjectively imposing one’s feeling and will upon others, as Hu Shi has criticized.34 However, in my view, this formulation presupposes a moral coercion upon oneself instead of on the other. Instead of asking the other to take consideration of my feeling and need as the basis of his/her acts, Dai Zhen suggests the I as the starting point. In addition, the ontological reality of the continuum between humankind and the cosmic order provides the metaphysical foundation his ethical proposition of “yiqing xueqing.” Analogical approach be being aware of the resemblance between me and the other people thus takes me as the departure point of ethical acts/as the referential point of our moral reasoning. To Dai Zhen,

32 No. 2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 152.
33 Ibid.
34 According to Hu Shi, it is unreliable to base “yiqing xueqing” on a personal assumption that my desire is the same as the desire of all people under heaven. Thus, Hu holds that Dai’s theory is but a personal opinion that Dai Zhen himself has refuted. See Hu Shi 胡适, Dai Dongyuan de zhexue 戴东原的哲学(The Philosophy of Tai Chen), 1927, p. 62.
no matter whether they are the ordinary people or the sages, they all share a fundamental commonality of having need for drink, food, and sex. However, where there is a thing, there is its pattern.

Without doubt, Dai Zhen’s proposal embodies the Confucian thought of loyalty and reciprocity (zhongshu 忠恕) that is well articulated via both its positive and negative formulations: “If one wishes to establish oneself, one also establishes others; if one wishes to be prominent oneself, one also helps others to be prominent” (己欲達而達人, 己欲立而立人)\(^{35}\) and “Don’t do to others what you do not wish others to do upon you” (己所不欲, 勿施於人).\(^{36}\) In the like manner, Dai Zhen promotes an ethical way of reciprocity that presupposes self-examination and self-reflection in dealing with human relationships. However, as far as “ren” 人 (others) is concerned, Dai Zhen calls special attention to the weak and the marginalized group of society, whose sufferings and needs are the very concerns of one’s ethical pursuits. From the relationship between the father and son to the relationship with the weak, the widowed, the orphaned …, human beings advance from natural state of what is to the moral state of what ought to be. This is the dialectics of ziran 自然 (what is natural) and biran 必然 (what is necessary), to use Dai Zhen’s term. To Dai Zhen, the full realization of “ren” 仁 (humanity) lies in the very fact that all under heaven can satisfy their desires and fully realize their life. He says, “When one fulfills one’s own life and extends this fulfillment to all under heaven to let everyone fulfill his or her life, this is ren. On the other hand, if one cannot let one’s love, respect, and care go in harmony with the upright and magnanimous sentiment, then righteousness is not fulfilled; humanity is not fulfilled either.” (一人遂其生, 推之而與天下共遂其生, 仁也。言仁可以賅義, 使親愛長養不協於正大之情, 則義有未盡, 亦即為仁有未至).\(^{37}\) Owing to the extension of our “intelligent mind” (xinzhi 心知), humanity arising from the father-son relation can extend to

\(^{35}\) The Analects of Confucius 15:24; also see 15:3.

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 6:30.

\(^{37}\) No. 36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.
others, to all under heaven. Consequently, the familial love and affection among family members is commensurate with the “upright and magnanimous sentiment.”

In his *Totality and Infinity* Levinas presents three modes of human relationships, namely (1) the relationship of the I with the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, (2) the relationship between the I and the other as lovers, and finally (3) the father-son relationship. Corresponding to these three relational patterns are three moments of human subjectivity, i.e. (1) Desire, (2) Eros, and (3) filiality and fraternity. An infinite move of the self towards the other characterizes all of the three modes of human relationships.

The relation between the woman and the Master exemplifies the first type of relationship. Levinas describes it through the image of the woman at home receiving the Master, who, nonetheless, has the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. With the arrival of the master, the woman’s enjoyment and autonomy in self-seclusion is interrupted. Because of the nakedness and defenselessness of the face, I am obliged to be responsible for it. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger, a deficiency. To recognize the Other is to give. Nevertheless, it is to give to the master, to the lord as the Woman opens her door to receive ‘You’ in a dimension of height (TI 75). Levinas’s notion of Desire is precisely a philosophical articulation of this relationship that is uniquely experienced as an encounter with the face, which looks at me and speaks to me. The peculiar structure of desire, i.e. the insatiability of desire on the one hand and the overabundance of the Desirable on the other that determines the self-other relationship is fundamentally asymmetrical. Rather than a Buberian I-Thou human relationship of intimacy and reciprocity, the Other remains exterior and transcendent to me in that the desired always goes beyond or “overflows” what I desire in the same way as “ideatum overflows the capacity of thought” (TI 49). The more responsibility I take, the more responsible I am. Levinas pinpoints the like structure of Descartes's idea of the infinite in the itinerary of the same moving towards the other.
“Asymmetrical” constitutes the most pronounced feature of the most celebrated Levinasian self-other relationship. However, “Eros goes beyond the face” (TI 264). Eros starts a new mode of relation, the relationship between lovers, which overcomes the dichotomy of need and desire and changes the inequality between the submissive woman and the arrogating master and interlocutor into the reciprocity of mutual love between the one who loves and the Beloved. Desire finds its new expression in caress and fecundity. In sharp contrast with the master, the Other as the beloved is the warm, soft, and tender feminine. While the nudity of the face puts me into question by challenging my ease, enjoyment, and freedom, the nudity of femininity lays bare all her tenderness, frailty, and vulnerability to entice me to turn her into part of me. In its extreme sense, as Levinas remarks, love can become desire in its most egoist and cruelest form (TI 254). In other words, love can be the crudest need. However, even in this most intimate form of human relationship, Levinas discovers the alterity of love and draws our attention to the irreducibility of the beloved or the Other. He says, “In voluptuosity the other is me and separate from me” (TI 265). Furthermore, if love only ends with the union of two individuals, it is but another even more fierce expression of need. But the final encounter of the self and the other does not bring to an end the moment towards the Other. Rather, love leads to the Other—the engendering of the son, which, for Levinas, contains the very ethical meanings of Eros.

Here Levinas introduces us into another phase of human relationship: the father and son relation. The son is hope, a messianic light coming from the future to redeem the world of asymmetry and inequality. In Plato’s Symposium Aristophanes recounts the myth of love, which describes love as a reunification of two halves, as a return to one’s former unseparated self. Levinas rejects Aristophanes’ myth just in that the Aristophanic model of love is essentially a desire for becoming a whole in search for what is in lack or lost, for the other missing half. In Levinas’ view, however, not only does love imply that the beloved always remain his or her alterity irreducible to part of me, more importantly, rather than a return to oneself, love unveils its myth in the very act of conceiving the son. Because of the futural event of engendering the son, the I overcomes the pure enjoyment of the fusion of the other—the beloved with my own. Owing to the coming of the son, love transcends the closed solitude of the duality of the lovers to signal the emergence of the third party. In this way, the Levinasian love also differs from Buber’s
intimacy of the I-Thou relation that excludes the presence of the third person. For Levinas, the self-other relationship even in its most intense form as exemplified by the erotic relation rejects the integration of the Same and the Other. The son issued from the erotic love both witnesses and betrays their union. The child comes not only as a rupture of the simultaneity of the fusion of the lovers but also as a break from the continuity with the father or me. As human subjectivity accompanies different modes of human relationships, sojourning from enjoyment in solitude to hospitality towards the Other, to love with the Beloved, and finally to the parental Eros, the self of egoism is stepping into future across fecundity and ever open to the Other.

If the rupture of the son, namely the idea of discontinuity in continuity forms the basic problematique of the Levinasian father-son relation, filial piety for the father that entails the great respect for the origin of life and the continuity of history constitutes the core of the Confucian father and son relationship. For Levinas, the father is renewed in relation to the future while to Confucians the father is kept alive in ancestral worship. In this way, as Levinas puts his messianic expectation in the son, by contrast, Confucians finds in the father the very “locale” of origin and esteem the father-son relationship the primal model of humanity. Henceforth, for Dai Zhen, the father-son relationship as the primordial human relation generates love that can transcend the familial bond to extend to the ruler and minister, to friends, to the weak, the widowed, the old and the young, the sick, the solitary, the dull and the timid, ultimately, to all under heaven. Likewise, the respect for the father as life and caregiver is transformed into the respect for life, for every living being. The striking difference underlying the Levinasian and Confucian father-son relationship not only points to distinct ethical paths but also opens up two distinct temporal dimensions of the future versus the past as our spiritual resources.

Through the lens of the father-son relationship, we see an interesting counter shift of the human relational modes in Dai Zhen and Levinas’s writings. With Levinas, the ethical self-other relationship starts with my relation with those who are far (the stranger, the widow, the orphan, etc) and then moves towards those who are close (father and son). On the contrary, with Dai Zhen human relationships begin with the close (father and son, husband and wife, brother and
brother) and then extend to the far (the widow, the solitary, the old and young, and the weak). I maintain that behind this opposite movement of the self-other relationship are different assumptions and understanding of the self and the other. For Levinas the shift reflects the tension between the individualized self and the other and an anxiety to retain the alterity in the self-other relationship. The father-son relation exemplifies “the way of being other while being oneself” (TI 282). The same represented by the father is in fact always open to the Other. Henceforth, the father is not bound to the son by the blood ties but by the act of the continuous fulfillment of human responsibilities. With Dai Zhen, nevertheless, the self-other relationship in essence is an issue about the relationship between the small self and the big self that forms unity with heaven, earth, and human. The father-son relation thus shows the possibility to extend our relationship beyond the familial bond to reach every human being and finally attain the great harmony of the world by promoting our inherent virtue of humanity ren. Noticeably, in Dai Zhen’s philosophy, the extension of human relationships is accompanied with the extension of the heart/mind, particularly the intelligent mind. With the extension of our intelligent minds, we can extend our natural love and compassion for the ones who are close to those who are far and ultimately to all under heaven. However, either as the point of departure or return for human ethical itineraries, the father-son relationship is charged with great religious-ethical significance to point people to a great prospect of attaining to fraternity or brother-hood among all human beings. Beyond the similarities and dissimilarities exhibited in the Levinasian and Confucian presentations of the father-son relationship, we are brought to home a shared philosophical insight that the self demonstrates itself in its relation with others as an incessant process of self-transformation and renewal that is unfolded in time. For Levinas, the messianic time points to the hope of the redemption of humanity. With Dai Zhen, the realization of humanity lies in our incessant effort to expand our heart and mind, in the continuum of the human realm and the cosmos.

2.2. Family versus Stranger

Among the human relational patterns presented in Dai Zhen’s Shu Zheng and Yuan Shan and Levinas’s Totality and Infinity, I argue that the father-son relation has the paradigmatic function
to orientate human relationships. With Dai Zhen ethical relationship starts with the relationship between the father and the son; to the contrary, with Levinas ethical relationship eventually arrives at the father-son relation. Yet, whether the ethical relationship as depicted in Levinas’s writing begins with those who are far and move towards those who are close or the other way round as in Dao Zhen, the relationship with the weak, the poor, the widow, the orphan and the like unquestionably is crucial to both thinkers’ moral reasoning. However, as we shift our attention from the familial ties of the father and the son to the outer rim of human relationships, we find two pronounced symbols. One is the “family” and the other the “stranger” that is sometimes paired with the “neighbor.” I maintain that the “family” and the “stranger” represent two distinct cultural, religious or philosophical, and conceptual contexts in which emerge Dai Zhen and Levinas’s different ideas of and approaches to the other.

In both Dai Zhen and Levinas’s philosophy, the ethical self locates its relational or referential other in this marginalized and underprivileged group of people. As Dai Zhen proposes that one gauge other people’s feeling and life reality with one’s own, his “ren” 人 (others; other people) that is correlative to the “ji” 己 (the self) or “wo” 我 (I; me) particularly points to those poor and unfortunate folks of society. As cited earlier, “If I put myself in the positions of the weak, the widowed, the dull and the timid, the sick, the old and the young, the orphaned and the childless and reflect upon myself about how they live and what they feel, would these people in any way be different from me!” (誠以弱、寡、愚、怯與夫疾病、老幼、孤獨, 反躬而思其情, 人豈異於我).38 In his remark on the Levinasian Other, Theodore De Boer points out, “The Other is a qualified other. The Other is not every empirical fellow man as an instance of the genus humanum; the Other is the poor, the stranger, the widow, the orphan.”39 Dai Zhen and Levinas present us quite a similar list of the others that the I as an ethical being has to face. Particularly, the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned have come into both thinkers’ view. In addition to the above-mentioned people whom Dai Zhen urges one to take into our consideration, he also

38 No. 2, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 151.

addresses the poor, the juniors, the humble ones, and the people in lower positions that call for justice in their suffering from the domination and discrimination of the wealthy, the seniors, the eminent, and the ones in high positions. However, interestingly, we notice that the “stranger” is completely absent in Dai Zhen’s writings. In contrast, the notion of the “stranger” that is deeply imbedded in the Jewish experience has left an ineffaceable print in Levinas’s ethical thinking, to such an extent that the “stranger” turns out to be an archetypical concept of the Other in Levinas’s philosophy. From our empirical experience, we may not really think that there is no stranger in a society. For it is a plain fact that we are living among strangers, for example, the people we pass by everyday in the streets. However, as the Stranger befalls us as an absolute ethical commandment as Levinas has postulated, I cannot help posing this question: Why is there no textual and conceptual stranger in Dai Zhen’s writings? Furthermore, is there Stranger in the Confucian tradition?

For Levinas the relationship between the I and the Stranger is the relationship between the same and the Other. The Stranger stalks through the pages of Levinas’s writings with an uppercase “S” (TI 39, 63, 78). At times the Stranger comes out alone, but more often he or she comes in a group with the widow and the orphan (TI 77, 78, 215, 244, 245, 250); sometimes he identifies himself as my “neighbor” (TI 78) and sometimes he becomes stranger to me as my own son (TI 267). The Stranger approaches me with his head held up high. Free is his character, but he is also “destitute” or “proletarian” (TI 75, 77, 213), which recalls his exile. He is the poor one (TI 213) and therefore he comes along with the poor (TI 245, 250). In Levinas’s philosophy, the Stranger is “the absolutely other” (TI 39) that is the Other with a capitalized “O”. Consequently, first, the Stranger always remains his irreducible alterity in relation to me; and second, the Stranger is free as much as he is destitute and poor. His arrival announces the end of my self-enjoyment and self-complacency as he disturbs my staying home with myself to demand me of social justice. Nonetheless, the Stranger is “not wholly in my site” (TI 39) because he and I can

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40 See no. 10, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 161.
Also, no. 14, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 166.
never enter a homogenous space of community. The relation with the Stranger is thus enacted and retained in desire—the Metaphysical Desire or the idea of Infinity the Other implants in me, in language that is his very questioning of and demand on me as a Master and as an interlocutor.

Looked within a broader social and religious context, Levinas’s notion of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan is in fact deep-seated in his Jewish Biblical sources. Be nice to the stranger because it is a biblical commandment. *Deuteronomy* set up a postulation: “but upholds the cause of the fatherless and widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing” (Deut. 10: 18). 41 “—You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10: 19). 42 The prophet Jeremiah instructs: ‘Thus says the Lord: Do what is just and right; rescue from the defrauder him who is robbed; do no wrong the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Jeremiah 22: 3). 43 *Leviticus* 25: 23 states, “…the land is Mine; you are but the strangers resident with Me.” 44 In light of the Biblical verses, with Levinas the Stranger is not simply someone unknown to me. Rather, the Stranger is an existential status, an ethical term, a theological relation between the divine and the human, permeated with the dense historical memory of exile and Diaspora.

In the like manner, Dai Zhen’s special ethical concern for this particular group of people has its deep root in the classical Confucian moral tradition of the *Analects*, the *Mencius* and the *Liji* as well as in Neo-Confucian cosmological-ethical thought of Zhang Zai and the like. For example,

41 The translation is from *The Jewish Bible TANAKH The Holy Scripture* the New JPS Translation, 1985.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
Also, see Psalms 119:19: “I am only a sojourner in the land.”
the *Mencius* says, “Old Man without wives, old women without husbands, old people without children, young children without fathers—these four types of people are the most destitute and have no one to turn to for help. Whenever King Wen put benevolent measures into effect, he always gave them the first consideration. The *Book of Odes* says, ‘Happy are the rich; But have pity on the helpless’” (鰥寡孤獨，此四者，天下之窮民無告者。文王發政施仁，必先斯四者。哿矣富人，哀啟煢獨.  The *Mencius* 2.5). Similarly, the *Liji* says, “In this month, keep both the young buds and sprouts from being disturbed; nourish both the infants and those not fully grown, and especially watch over the orphans” (是月也，安萌芽，養幼少，存諸孤.  The *Liji*—*Yueling* 禮記—月令). In the Confucian tradition, to treat the old, the young and the weak with affection and special material care has been a very important indication of a benevolent government. Many Confucian texts provide rich textual resources regarding the maintenance of the social welfare of the orphans, widows, solitaries, the young, and the aged that come to represent the weak and the destitute of a society. Needless to say, Dai Zhen’s ethical thought carries on this Confucian moral tradition, of which the ethical concern for this particular community of the society finds its poignant expression in his writings. Furthermore, I want to point out that for Dai Zhen to care for these people is not just an issue of social welfare relevant to the politics and rulership of the kings and princes, but also an ethical issue addressing the conscience of every individual human being in facing the other that is poor, weak, young and so forth. I think this is an important ethical insight Dai Zhen has contributed to the Confucian moral reasoning.

While in Levinas these people come into sight as the Stranger to summon me to take up responsibility for the helpless and the destitute, how do Dai Zhen’s individuals enter relationship

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We can also find the similar idea in the books of “Wangzhi,” “Jiaotesheng,” “Jiyi” and others in the *Liji*. Also, see Legge’s translation, Vol. I, 1967, p. 259.
with these helpless ones that are neither my family members nor my friends? Levinas says, “The absolutely other is the Other. He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say ‘you’ or ‘we’ is not a plural of the ‘I.’ I, you—these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger [l’Etranger], the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself” (TI 39). Against Levinas’s reading of the Other or Stranger, the absence of the Stranger in Dai Zhen’s discourse is brought to light. Unlike the Levinasian Stranger who addresses me from the dimension of Height and can never be placed within a homogeneous space with me, in the Confucian context, the poor ones, the widows and the orphans, ontologically, already belong to the harmonized unity of heaven, earth, and man. Thus, every stranger, namely every person that I do not know experientially is already my potential or actual family member in the common human community with “jia” 家 (home, family) to be its foundation. As two Chinese terms vividly suggest, the home is “jia” 家 (home, family) and a country is also “jia,” a home larger, i.e. “guojia” 国家 (country), that is, a country made of many families. As such, in this big household, logically, every other person is my fellow citizen. Furthermore, beyond the boundary of the country, “within the four seas, all are brothers” (四海之内，皆兄弟也 The Analects 12.5), thus Confucius proclaims. This communal idea gets fully developed with the Neo-Confucian thinkers, particularly Zhang Zai 張載, and receives a cosmological significance. Zhang Zai’s “Xi Ming” 西銘 (Western Inscription) appealingly affords a cosmological vision of the one body of heaven, earth, humans, and myriad things. He says, “Heaven is the father and earth the mother. … People are my fellowmen and things my companions.” (乾称父，坤称母。…。民吾同胞，物吾与也). Just because of this ontological unity, he states, “All those under heaven who are sick and old, handicapped and lonely, the old men without wives and old women without husbands are my brothers who are in destitution and hardships with no one to turn for help” (凡天下疲癃残疾茕独鳏寡，皆吾兄弟之颠连而无告者也). For the same reason, we have to “respect the elderly because they are old, to love the young and orphans affectionately


48 Ibid.
because they are young” (尊高年，所以长其长；慈孤弱，所以幼其幼). 49 Henceforth, as discussed in the first section, the familial relations provide us moral model for establishing relationships with the ones in need of help.

Adriaan Peperzak makes a comment on Levinas’s “other”, which reads, “Because the other would not be the fully other if he/she were my parent, husband or wife, sister or brother, or friend, the other is a stranger. But because of her/his infinity, my life does not belong to me any more: the claim of the other is absolute.”50 Viewed this way, in Levinas’s ethical world, the familial bond would not extend in any way to include the stranger as Confucians hold. In other words, the relationship with the Stranger is by no means the extension of the familial relation of husbands and wife, brothers and sisters, etc.51 Rather, the self enters the ethical relationship under the summons of the Stranger. As such, whereas in the Confucian context my care for the weak and the poor stems from the original feeling of ren that characterizes the familial relationships, for Levinas the act of humanity or responsibility for the other has its initiative in the other rather in me. Just because of this absolute alterity, the demand from the Other is absolute. Responsibility is a relationship with the Other in his very alterity. If we take the Levinasian Other or Stranger as our referential point, we can make the claim that there is no stranger in the Confucian conception of the other. What is more, we can even say that there is in fact neither the stranger nor the other, i.e. the wholly other or the radical other in the Confucian conceptualization scheme. For every other is a potential one that I can extend to based on ren or humanity. Under heaven, all are brothers and sisters. Although the self-other relationship is crucial to both Levinas and Dai Zhen’s ethics, the self and the other do not stand in opposition to each other in the Confucian system of human relationships. Rather, they find themselves

49 Ibid.
51 As regards the father-son relationship, Levinas approaches it rather distinctively as an issue of the sociality and equality of the self-other relation in terms of the origination of the third party as well as an issue of futurality of the ethical relationship in reference to its messianic dimension.
situated in an analogical relationship in a common realm of “under heaven.” The issue of the self-other relation essentially is a question about the human relationship in reference to the cosmic whole. For the other and I always have something in common because of the same identity we have as the member of this shared human community of family and brother-hood. From this standpoint, we can say that the correlation of the self and the other in Dai Zhen’s textual context is relative and temporary. First, ontologically, the empirical difference can be dissolved in the ontological sameness. Second, empirically speaking, the physical distance between the stranger and me can be covered in time with the extension of ren. Although many and many a people remain strangers to me, the possibility always remains open to me to reach out to be connected with him and her through extending my love for the ones who are close to the one who are far. As Dai Zhen states, “When one fulfills one’s own life, one extends this to all under heaven to fulfill their lives together. This is humanity” (一人遂其生，推之而与天下共遂其生，仁也). 52

Completely distinct from the Confucian genial model of the self and other relationship that is maintained through the commonality and generality that hold the self and the other together in a common space of “under heaven,” the Levinasian mode of the self-other relationship is presented through the relationship with the Stranger that always stays exterior to me and refutes to be reduced to an “alter ego.” Retaining his/her absolute alterity, the Other can never be present within my consciousness, my discourse, my theory, my thought, and my ontology. Not until I am interrupted, challenged, commanded, and instructed by the face of the Other, I am not related to the Other at all. Yet, the other and the I do not thereby enter a homogeneous space and conjoin with each other due to the breaking in of the other. Rather, the other always stands in a higher position above me. Henceforth the Levinasian self-other relation is neither antithetical nor interdependent. Rather, it is expressed as a perpetual desire of the self towards the Other. This relationship by nature is asymmetrical: I am ever driven towards the Other. The more responsibility I hold for the other, the more responsible I am. My relationship with the other

52 No.36, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 205.
turns into a responsibility that can never be fully fulfilled. Thus, not only will the Other and I ever stay in “a sort of non-homogeneity of space” (TI 220), but temporally, the absolute alterity of the Other prescribes the self-other relationship a formal structure of the Idea of Infinity. For Dai Zhen, nevertheless, there is no stranger with respect to the self-other relation. Rather, what is pivotal to Confucian human relationship is the issue of “qingshu” 親疏 (close and distant), namely the relationships with the people who are close (as father or son, husband or wife, brothers and friends) or distant. As far as the self-other relation is concerned, it is not an issue about the stranger but an issue regarding how to treat people with distinct or graded love, namely “you chadeng de ai” 有差等的愛 (love with distinction or graduation), about “tuiji jiren” 推己及人 (extend oneself to reach out to others). To be sure, the love between the familial members is the greatest. However, this love is just the beginning of humanity. What matters, importantly, is that we can extend ren that is generated in the familial relations to the people that are afar, to the ones that have no connection with me via either blood ties or social structure. In this sense, ren is at once the virtue of love and a power to extend oneself to communicate with others. To quote from Professor Vincent Shen, “‘Ren’ is affective connectedness, that is, when in encounter with a person, an event or something, one is able to feel, to have the power to communicate and be mutually connected” (“仁’就是感通, 是人見到他人他物, 就會有感覺, 能溝通的一種力量). As such, ren empowers the self to feel, to be connected with others and henceforth affords one an access to the other. To Dai Zhen, the sages are the ones that best embody the way of “gan tong” 感通 (feeling, understanding, and being connected). For they “thoroughly understand people’s feeling under heaven and help them fully fulfill their desires” (通天下之情, 遂天下之欲).54


54 No. 40, the Shu Zheng in Dai Zhen Quanshu, Vol. VI, p. 211.
Needless to say, the self takes quite a different route to reach the others in Dai Zhen and
Levinas’s philosophical worlds. I am wondering if Levinas and Dai Zhen could really speak to
each other face-to-face rather than conversing via a mediated dialogue, how they would react to
each other’s position. In her speculation on whether the total alterity of the other is necessary for
the founding of the ethical relation, Edith Wyschogrod asks, “What are the characteristics of a
self which seeks alterity through a route other than empiricism or the ego of idealistic
metaphysics? How is this self, the primary phenomenon of identity from which all other
relations of identity are derived, first given?” 55 Here, Wyschogrod is bringing up Levinas’s
position with the two questions. She continues,

The existence of the self unfolds as an identity-making process, as the unification
of what is diverse….The self’s mode of remaining the same is not characterized
by an invulnerability to change but rather by its mode of weaving together
different events into a narrative. …We gain access to the other through that which
both is and not itself, a principle of mediation between self and other. The
singularity of the other no longer stands over against us. His alterity disappears in
the generality of the concept or in the network of relations in which it is
enmeshed. It loses its uniqueness in the a priori categories through which it is
given. Levinas sees the alterity of the other victimized in this mode of
apprehension. 56

To be sure, Levinas’s critique of the totality as understood by Wyschogrod is set against a total
different philosophical background other than the Confucian one. However, if putting Dai
Zhen’s or the Confucian wholeness against Wyschogrod or Levinas’s inquiry, it seems that
Levinas’s critique of the totality may also point to the Confucian unity. Dai Zhen does not need

to import into his philosophical scheme a wholly Other or a radical Other. Nonetheless, within the ontological whole under heaven, does not the route towards the other in its emphasis on the shared commonality between the self and the others somehow already imply a neglect of the otherness of our relational others? Professor Vincent Shen introduces into religious dialogue a notion “Verfremdung, strangification.” He says, “Strangification is an act of going outside of oneself and going to the stranger, to the other” (‘外推’ 是一走出自己，走向他者，走向別異的行動)57. He further elaborates, “In other words, strangification presupposes that one does not confine oneself within one’s always-familiar territory. Rather, one has to depart from what is familiar, constantly to open up oneself to the others and constantly relocate oneself in the new contexts” (換言之, 外推要求不限於自己一向的範圍, 而要不斷走出熟悉性, 不斷向他者開放, 不斷重新脈絡化).58 To serve as a communication strategy for both religious dialogue and the establishment of human relationships, “strangification” on the one hand highlights the otherness and distinction of the dialogical or relational others, and on the other inherits the traditional Confucian idea of “kuo chong” of extending oneself. In this regard, “strangification” with its focal attention on our dialogical or relational others may provide a meaningful amendment to the ethical route of “extension” that takes the self as both its departure and referential point.

Whether it is the Levinasian “Stranger” or the Confucian “family,” they both conceptualize different understanding of the other in reference to the self in two distinct religious and philosophical contexts. Whereas the Levinasian Stranger addresses me from a dimension of Height to demand me of my hospitality, Dai Zhen’s others like the self are but constitutive components of the cosmic whole and therefore both ontologically and empirically both my brothers and friends. Because of the distinct modes of the self-other relationship, the Levinasian ethical self derives its moral impetus from without as heteronomy versus autonomy. The responsibility for the Other, which flows forth from the appeal of the face, has its origin not in

58 Ibid.
my initiative but essentially begins as absolute heteronomy and thus precedes my freedom. The responsibility for the Other is consequently a response to the imperative command of the Other. I am no longer the law, rather, the Other is. However, for Dai Zhen, human moral competence to be good is potentially stored up within our heart and mind as part of our natural endowments. The philosophical groundwork of this belief and practice is the *Yijing*’s tradition about the dynamic continuum of human beings and the cosmos as well as the *Si-Meng*’s School’s思孟學派 (Master Zisi and Mencius’s School) moral philosophy that promotes human moral autonomy. By contrast, for Levinas, the absolute Goodness lies in an entirely different order above our being that is expressed through the absolute alterity of the Other. For this reason, the self has to resort to alterity to find its justification of moral coercion in the Other. Along the itinerary of the movement of the self towards the other, Desire either takes the self towards Infinity or unites both the self and the other with the cosmic Whole. In either situation, this is an unending process unfolded in time. In Levinas, the alterity of the other displays its temporality in relation to the self. He says, “Time means that the other is forever beyond me, irreducible to the synchrony of the same. The temporality of the inter-human opens up the meaning of otherness and the otherness of meaning.”59 With Dai Zhen, however, temporality is implied in the cosmic whole, namely the continuum of the cosmos and the human world: Human beings as the co-creator of the universe participate in the continuous creative activity of the cosmos by constantly extending their intelligent mind to the godly illumination. As such, we find two distinct ethical structures of time in their vision of a better humanity, that is, the transformative temporality of Dai Zhen and the Levinasian Messianic time.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

This dissertation is a comparative study of two great philosophers. Over the past two or three decades, we have witnessed several fruitful encounters of philosophers and theologians in the field of comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy and religions. The encounters of Mencius and Aquinas (Lee Yearley, 1990), Martin Heidegger and Laozi (Zhang Xianglong, 1996), Martin Buber and Zhuangzi (Jonathan R. Herman, 1996), and, most recently, St. Augustine and the Confucian Master Xun Zi (Aaron Stalnaker, 2006) have convinced me that a dialogical exchange between different philosophical and religious traditions is both possible and necessary. Yet, obviously, more efforts are still in need. For this reason, the present comparative study of Dai Zhen and Levinas intends to make a contribution to the scholarship in the field, particularly, comparative religious ethics, with Confucianism and Jewish thought as its dialogical reference.

During the process of completing my dissertation, I often come across two questions from my friends and colleagues: Why comparative and why Dai Zhen and Levinas? In fact, every research project, comparative or not, can solicit a question “why?” but it seems that a comparative study is more subject to the inquiry. Apart from curiosity, I believe that the question “why” implies people’s general concern about the “comparability” of the compared objects and perhaps the competence of the person to compare as well. But the present study of Dai Zhen and Levinas is more guided by the moral urgency overriding the two thinkers’ life and philosophical thinking than concerned with some comparable qualities present in their writings. Characteristic of both thinkers’ philosophical thinking is the ethical exigency arising from our facing other people’s needs and sufferings. For both of them taking care of the material needs of others plays a pivotal role in human morality. Dai Zhen and Levinas stand apart in different philosophical and religious traditions, but their deep concern for the other especially the weak, the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned and their strong sense of responsibility entrusted by
these poor and disadvantaged people surpass the geographical, historical, linguistic, and cultural barriers to lend the two thinkers to a mutually illuminating dialogue.

Despite a requested rationale for this comparative research project, I have tried to leave the raison d'être of my writing to a careful and assiduous reading of the philosophical texts offered by the two thinkers. Thus, this dissertation is essentially a presentation of my close readings of two philosophical accounts of the subject “desire,” aiming not simply to provide a textual foundation for comparison but, more importantly, to avoid an arbitrary appropriation of certain “similar” or “dissimilar” concepts or themes for the sake of comparison. Yet, fascinatingly, many interesting issues are gradually emerging in the course of reading. They arise in two distinct textual and conceptual contexts yet shed light upon each other to illuminate the issues which otherwise would be overlooked without this borrowed light. For example, Dai Zhen’s or the Confucian this-worldliness helps me discern or construe the empirical dimension of the mysterious and elusive Levinasian transcendent Other. On the other hand, the Levinasian Stranger has brought home to me for the first time the actual absence of the stranger in the Confucian conceptualization system and thereby provoked me to think deeper about the philosophical assumptions and ethical significance behind this textual and conceptual absence of the stranger.

It seems to me that to undertake a comparative work often entails a common assumption about the mastery of the researched subject, which means that everything is ready at my disposal. Nonetheless, the autonomy of the Other, which Levinas has tried to teach us, casts a fresh light on my understanding of comparison in a different way. Rather than taking comparison methodologically as a way to sort out materials in contrasting A with B, I look at comparison as something perspectival or optical, namely something through which or with which we can see things better or see something which would remain invisible otherwise. In this very sense, I resort to comparison for a vision, a view rather than a method. With this vision, the comparative study of Dai Zhen and Levinas turns out a journey of discoveries.
Between the moments of joy and frustrations, I have many times envisioned the day when I can finally put an end to my dissertation. Now as my writing is drawing to its end, I suddenly feel it has actually taken me to another beginning. I am closing a chapter on Dai Zhen and Levinas, who nonetheless open me up to a new horizon. There are still many interesting issues worth of my further inquiry, for example, hermeneutics and ethics, transformative temporality and the messianic time. Then, beyond Dai Zhen and Levinas, there are other themes and topics open for our exploration. Our intellectual pursuits are thus destined to be a never-ending process. Like a response to Dai Zhen’s call, we have to constantly expand our mind and untiringly renew ourselves. As if there came an invitation from the Other, we are unceasingly driven to something new, something beyond ourselves to approximate the Perfect, the Good.
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