

The Unity of *Yin* and *Yang*: A Philosophical Assessment

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“One *yin* 陰 and one *yang* 陽 constitute what is called *Tao* 道”; “When *yin* and *yang* are united in their virtue, the soft and the hard attain their physical shape.” These famous statements are drawn from the “Appended Remarks” (*Hsi-tz'u* 繫辭) of the *I Ching* 易經. Since they were uttered more than two thousand years ago, they became the metaphysical foundation for the two great philosophical schools of China, namely, Taoism and Confucianism. For both these schools, *yin* and *yang*, two contrasting but mutually compensating components constitute unity in harmony. We shall endeavor to give an historical account of this concept, describe it phenomenologically, and venture a philosophical assessment from cosmological, anthropological, as well as theological points of view.

I. An Historical Account

The origin of *yin-yang* ideas must be sought in very ancient times. In the *Book of Poetry* (*Shih-ching* 詩經) the words “*yin*” and “*yang*” signified the north and south sides of a mountain.¹ In the *Book of Historical Documents* (*Shu-ching* 書經) the two words never appeared together except in the apocryphal “Chou-kuan” 周官. Even in the *Analects* of Confucius there is no mention of *yin-yang*. However, the eight trigrams were probably in use at the beginning of the Chou 周 dynasty (late 12th century B.C.). Since the eight trigrams consist of combinations of broken and

¹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*: Vol. IV, *Book of Poetry* (Taipei, 1972), Ode 19, p. 29; Ode 150, p. 488. Vol. III, *Book of Historical Documents*, *Yü-kung* 禹貢, pp. 130, 134; Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁啟超, *Yin-yang wu-hsing shuo chih lai-li* 陰陽五行說之來歷; Ku Chieh-kang 顧頌剛 (ed.), *Ku-shih pien*, Vol. V (n. 261) (Taipei: Min-lun Press, 1970), pp. 343–347.

unbroken lines denoting contrasting pairs such as male and female, strong and weak, luminous and obscure, we may assure that the general concept of *yin-yang* were known at that time.

The first thinkers to elaborate on *yin-yang* relationships were probably the philosophers of the Yin-Yang School.² But the first philosophical work which spoke explicitly about *Tao* and the harmony between *yin* and *yang* was the *Tao-te-ching* 道德經, most likely written after the Confucian *Analects* during the late Warring States period (480–222 B.C.): “All things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*, and through the blending of the elements (*ch'i* 氣) they achieve harmony.” Commentators disagree on the interpretation of the last sentence of the above cited text. Some believe that *yin* and *yang* must be blended with material forces (*ch'i*), which are produced by the *Tao*.³ Others identify *yin* and *yang* with *ch'i* itself. All agree that in the *Tao-te-ching* the universe (*wan wu* 萬物) emerges when *yin* and *yang* are united. In this sense Chuang-tzu 莊子 understood *yin* and *yang* as two cosmic, creative forces, which are the origin to everything and which accordingly are considered the father and mother of all human beings.⁴

The first known Confucian to adopt Taoist metaphysics was Hsün-tzu 荀子, as he made the unity of *t'ien-ti* 天地 and *yin-yang* the origin of the universe.⁵ Why Hsün-tzu adopted Taoist metaphysics while retaining his Confucian ethos is easily understandable. Confucius and his immediate disciples were above all practical politicians and educators with strong moral principles. The Warring States period witnessed the appearance of the mighty metaphysical system of the *Tao-te-ching*. Since the Confucians did not elaborate their own metaphysics, Taoism gradually won the minds and hearts of most intellectuals, even some Confucians. Hsün-tzu amalgamated the Taoist metaphysics of a supreme and constant rule of *Tao* with his Confucian concern for political action and ethical education.⁶ In making the Taoist metaphysics his own, Hsün-tzu simply followed the trend of the times. Other intellectuals of this period, like the compilers of the *Lü-shih-ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋 of Lü Pu-wei 呂不韋, and

²Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

³Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 161.

⁴*Chuang-tzu chi-chieh* 莊子集解 (Taipei: World Book Company, 1961), Chapter 6, pp. 42–43.

⁵*Hsün-tzu chi-chieh* 荀子集解 (Taipei: World Book Company, 1961), Chapter 19, p. 243.

⁶Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, “Hsün-tzu: His Key Position in the History of Chinese Philosophy and His Contribution Today” (in Chinese), *Universitas Monthly*, Vol. IX (October–December 1982), pp. 794–797.

the Confucian authors of the *Ten Commentaries* to the *I Ching*, did much the same thing.

In this connection the third volume of *Ku-shih-pien* 古史辨 provides a lengthy discussion on the origin of the *Ten Commentaries*. In substance I agree with the opinion that they were written by Confucians during the Warring States periods. Some minor parts may have been formed at a later period, perhaps during the early Western Han 漢 dynasty. Like Hsün-tzu, these commentaries constitute an amalgamation of Taoist metaphysics and Confucian ethics. A thorough study of how Taoist metaphysics and Confucian ethics were amalgamated remains to be written. My thesis is founded on a textual analysis of Hsün-tzu on the one hand, and on a comparison of Hsün-tzu with early Confucian thinkers, his contemporaries, and with later thinkers on the other hand. While Confucius and his immediate disciples (including Mencius) believed in *T'ien* 天 which was the supreme ruler of the universe and who heard prayers and made decisions upon recommendations by human beings, the *T'ien* of Hsün-tzu was a natural force.⁷ The amalgamation-theory explains why a doctrinal gap appeared between the early Confucians (Confucius himself included) and their followers after Hsün-tzu.

Among the *Ten Commentaries* to the *I Ching* the two sections of "Appended Remarks" occupy the most prominent place because of their doctrinal content. We have already cited these two texts with regard to our topic. The first constitutes a categorical statement of what the *Tao* is and how *yin* and *yang* relate to each other: "One *yin* and one *yang* constitute what is called *Tao*." *Yin* and *yang* are regarded as two aspects of the *Tao*. One text of the second part of the "Appended Remarks" attributes the character of unity to the *yin-yang* relationship: "When *yin* and *yang* are united in their virtue, the soft and the hard attain their physical shape."

We cannot exaggerate the importance of the metaphysics of *yin-yang* unity, since the entire Chinese philosophical tradition, from the beginning of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) until today, is permeated with it.

II. Phenomenological Descriptions

Since the *Tao-te-ching* was the first philosophical work to speculate on the blending of *yin* and *yang*, we must find out what the *Tao-te-ching* actually states.

⁷Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, "Vom himmlischen Mandat zum Fatum Aspekte der chinesischen Religiosität," *Forschungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* (Saarbrücken), 21 (1985), pp. 35–36.

Let us first look at Chapter 42:

Tao produced [*sheng*] the One.
 The One produced the two.
 The two produced the three.
 And the three produced the ten thousand things.
 The ten thousand things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*, and through the blending of the material force (*ch'i*) they achieve harmony.⁸

Since the same chapter speaks about *yin* and *yang*, all commentators agree that they are designated by the number two and their blending by the number three. But why is *Tao* said to have "produced the One"? This probably means that *Tao* itself makes up the One, in which case *sheng* 生 denotes a mental act, as we think of the number one and apply it to *Tao*. The Chinese language is rich in such uses of the word *sheng*, which does not refer to the physical production of objects (for instance, "*wu chung sheng yu*" 無中生有). This is true in the first two propositions cited from Chapter 42.

The above-cited verses assert that (1) everything (the ten thousand things) is produced by the blending of the two real components (*ch'i*), which are *yin* and *yang*; (2) everything carries in itself the same two components; and (3) the blending of the two components constitutes harmony.

Since "the ten thousand things" make up the entirety of cosmic reality, the word *sheng* in the fourth proposition necessarily means physical production. The fifth proposition states that the "ten thousand things" contain the two components of *yin-yang*. Consequently, the harmonic blending of *yin-yang* is both *causa efficiens* and *causa materialis* of all cosmic reality.

Prof. Chan renders the word *ch'i* as "material force." This will be discussed later, but here it will be rendered as "real components," because *yin* and *yang* designate actual entities: happenings, existing things or relationships. As said above, *yin* and *yang* once designated the north and the south sides of a mountain. They are never logically contradictory or contrary "antitheses." In the strict sense, they bear no relationship to Hegelian dialectics, but rather represent mutually compatible and dependent yet contrasting components of any event, object or relationship.⁹

⁸Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁹Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, *Bipolarität als Ganzheit im Chinesischen Denken und Leben*, *Zeitschrift für Ganzheitsforschung*, 27. Jahrgang. Wien-IV/1983, S. 147-158.

The *Tao-te-ching* deals with the blending of *yin-yang*, but it does not specify how the blending takes place. The *Commentaries* of the *I Ching* describe two forms of blending: (1) the alternation of two contrasting phases, and (2) the union of two contrasting components. A proposition like “One *yin* and one *yang* constitute what is called *Tao*” could naturally be taken to mean both. But the second part of the “Appended Remarks” is certainly speaking of alternating forms of blending when it says: “After the sun goes, the moon comes. After the moon goes, the sun comes. The sun and the moon push each other in their course and thus light appears. After the winter goes, the summer comes. After the summer goes, the winter comes. The winter and the summer push each other and thus the year is completed.”¹⁰ There are plenty of examples where the “Appended Remarks” discuss the union of two contrasting components. For instance, “The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is to produce” and “When *yin* and *yang* are united in their virtue. . . .”

III. Philosophical Assessments of *Yin-Yang* Unity from Cosmological, Anthropological and Theological Points of View

1. *The Cosmological, Anthropological and Theological Character of the Yin-Yang Unity*

This long subtitle may be somewhat puzzling. It is generally assumed that the traditional Chinese concept of *yin-yang* unity deals with cosmology and anthropology, because the relationship between cosmos and human beings (天地人) is often mentioned in this connection. But what does this have to do with theology? To clarify this point we shall refer to the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. In his sixth and eleventh books, Aristotle identifies three kinds of speculative science: mathematics, physics and theology (μαθηματική, φυσική, θεολογική), and that the greatest of these is the last named, because it deals with the most important facet of reality. We know that Aristotle was talking about what he calls “the first philosophy,” which deals with the principles and causes of being *qua* being and the properties inherent in it by virtue of its own nature.¹¹ In searching after principles and causes of being *qua* being, Aristotle comes to speak of absolutely imperishable and actual things which are eternal and

¹⁰Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

¹¹Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. Hugh Tredennick (London: W. Heinemann, 1958), Book VI, i.10, pp. 296–297; pp. 86–89; Book IV, i, pp. 146–147.

necessary, for "if they did not exist, nothing would exist."¹² Here Aristotle is touching upon the ultimate ground of existing reality. There is no need to specify what kind of necessary and eternal being Aristotle meant. What concerns us here is the fact that he calls such questions theological. For the same reason, the *yin-yang* unity has a theological import, since it too is considered a final explanation of all existing realities (*wan wu*, ten thousand things), even if at first glance there is only talk about cosmic happenings. This is the case for almost every Chinese thinker since the Han dynasty: whenever Heaven and Earth are considered the ultimate sources of cosmic reality, there is evidently a theological import. We can find examples of this in the works of Thomé Fang. When he speaks of a "comprehensive harmony" of the universe, of "essentials of cosmology," and "perpetual creativity,"¹³ there are theological implications in the sense explained above.

Following this Chinese tradition, we shall discuss the cosmological, anthropological and theological aspects together. At the center there is always a concern for human existence. To explain and guide human existence, there was a theistic way of thinking at the beginning. But as this could not solve important problems, it was replaced by the doctrine of *Tao* and *yin-yang* unity: the unity of the primal *yin*, Earth, and of the primal *yang*, Heaven, is seen as the ultimate source of cosmic reality, in which human beings play an essential and special role.

2. Ancient Chinese Beliefs and Early Confucianism

The *Book of Poetry* and *Book of Historical Documents* give us some idea of the beliefs current in ancient China. The God (*ti* 帝 or *shang-ti* 上帝)¹⁴ of the ancient Chinese is not the God of Genesis, who "in the beginning created the heavens and the earth," nor the God of the Prophet Jeremiah: "By his power he made the earth, by his wisdom set the world firm, by his discernment spread out the heavens."¹⁵ Neither is the God of the ancient Chinese a sky-god like the Greek Zeus or Roman Jupiter.¹⁶ The God of the ancient Chinese controls the whole world,

¹² *Ibid.*, Book IX, viii.17, pp. 462-463.

¹³ Thomé Fang, *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co., 1980), Ch. 2; *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co., 1981), p. 516.

¹⁴ Hu Hou-hsüan 胡厚宣, *Chia-ku-hsüeh Shang-shih lun-ts'ung ch'u-chi* 甲骨學商史論叢初集 (Ch'eng-tu 成都, 1944), Vol. I, pp. 2-11.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:1; Jer. 10:12.

¹⁶ Richard Comstock (ed.), *Religion and Man: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 95, 103.

possesses and exercises absolute control over the fate of both society and individuals. "Great is God, beholding this lower world in majesty. He surveyed the four quarters seeking for some one to care for the people."¹⁷ Since he dwells in heaven, he is not to be identified with heaven itself, because King Wen 文 is also believed to be in heaven, "on the left and on the right of God."¹⁸ We can say that the God of the ancient Chinese rules supreme over the human and natural world and is a knowing, willing and living God who transcends heaven and earth.

The theistic beliefs of the ancient Chinese may seem irrelevant to the topic of this paper, because they did not concern themselves with *yin-yang* unity. However, as will be explained later, the original theistic beliefs were the antecedents of Taoistic metaphysics, as the ancient Chinese naïvely explained all human and natural phenomena as manifestations of the will of God without reference to natural law. Since in ancient China God was seen as a strong-willed and sometimes wilful dominator of the human world, and since even natural phenomena were explained by divine will (*ti-ling* 帝命 or later *t'ien-ming* 天命),¹⁹ I venture to describe such beliefs as theistic voluntarism.

Confucius, the founder of original Confucianism, respectfully followed the ancient philosophical and religious heritage to which he was heir. Confucius said he was "a transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients."²⁰ In fact, Confucius believed in spirits and in the ordinances of Heaven to which he prayed. He accepted the decrees of Heaven with equanimity and behaved obsequiously in regard to what he saw as the ordinance of Heaven. He judged those who did not recognize the ordinances (of Heaven) to be unworthy of the title *chün-tzu* 君子 (superior man).²¹ Neither he nor his immediate disciples said anything about *yin-yang*. He spoke of *Tao*, but his was a human *Tao*, a moral and rational way of conduct, and never a cosmic *Tao*.

The ancient Chinese, including Confucius, believed in a God who gave ordinances to the world for moral reasons, much the same way Kant saw the existence of God as a postulate of practical reason. Since the ancient

¹⁷ Legge, *Book of Historical Documents*, pp. 173, 323, 362-374, 385 etc. Legge's translation has been altered slightly to conform with the original Chinese.

¹⁸ Legge, *Book of Poetry*, pp. 427-428; Hu Hou-hsüan, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Ch'en Meng-chia 陳夢家, *Yin-hsü pu-tz'u tsung-shu* 殷墟卜辭綜述 (Peking: Science Press, 1956), pp. 562-567; Legge, *Book of Historical Documents*, pp. 359-360.

²⁰ Legge, *Confucian Analects*, VII.1, p. 195.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XX.3, p. 354.

Chinese felt they had to act according to moral duty and were responsible for their own good and bad deeds, they also believed that there must be a God who would reward good deeds and punish bad deeds. This God was at the same time thought of as in control of good and bad weather and the entire natural order. While in the *Book of Poetry* God sometimes seems wilful, in the case of Confucius his ordinances were invested with rational and human characteristics. But this form of theistic voluntarism failed to sustain itself, particularly in the turbulent period of Chinese history which began immediately after the age of Confucius.

3. *The Original Conception of Tao and of Yin-Yang Unity*

During the Warring States period there was so much injustice and chaos that many people thought the state of the world was incompatible with the existence of a good and just God. As Hu Shih 胡適 noted, in place of a knowing and willing God came the conception of an universally ruling and working *Tao*.²² Hu's opinion is consistent with Pan Ku's 班固 *Treatise on Art and Literature (Yi-wen chih 藝文志)*, in which the Taoist doctrine is credited to the work of historians who carefully recorded "the ancient and modern ways (*Tao*) of success and failure, of remaining alive and perishing, of good and bad fortune."²³ Since all these things were believed to originate in an almighty *Tao*, God became useless.

But the *Tao* of the *Tao-te-ching* not only rules the human world, but the natural world as well. As *yin-yang* unity, *Tao* is the supreme and constant ruler and prime producer-mover of all things in the human and natural world: "*Tao* produces them (the ten thousand things; the entire cosmos) and virtue fosters them. . . . Therefore the ten thousand things appreciate *Tao* and honor virtue. *Tao* is appreciated and virtue is honored without anyone's order, and spontaneously."²⁴

Given such a premise it is understandable that Chuang-tzu would explicitly counsel his fellow human beings to enjoy nature and not undertake to "adulterate" nature or change its "virtue" in any way. For human beings are nothing but the gathering of *ch'i*: they live whenever the *ch'i* concentrates, they die when the *ch'i* disperses. Nothing is more abominable to Chuang-tzu than "governing the world,"²⁵ since *Tao* in the form of *yin-yang* unity is the origin of everything and exercises

²²Hu Shih, *History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy* (in Chinese) (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1958), pp. 50-52, 63.

²³Pan Ku, *Han-shu 漢書* (History of the Han Dynasty) (Taipei, 1975), p. 1732.

²⁴Cf. Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 163. With slight changes.

²⁵*Chuang-tzu chi-chieh*, Chapter 22, p. 138.

supreme dominion over the human and cosmic worlds. Such is the cosmological, anthropological and, in the sense explained above, theological outlook of original Taoism. Viewed theologically, *Tao* is the supreme source, ruler and manipulator of everything. A philosopher like Spinoza would call it by the name of God. Only this is an immanent and impersonal rather than theistic and personal God.

One question we might ask is: what are *yin* and *yang* when identified with *ch'i*? Is the *ch'i* necessarily matter? Prof. Wing-tsit Chan translates the word *ch'i* as "material force." Lieh-tzu 列子 speaks of upper, middle and lower *ch'i*, which suggests something material. But this is not the only possible solution. Taken in a material sense, the concepts of *yin* and *yang* risk being too narrow, and are reduced to a materialistic conception of reality, which is unacceptable today. As Heisenberg wrote, modern physics shows that the smallest subatomic unities of "matter" are not physical objects in the usual sense, but rather mathematical formulas, laws, or Platonic ideas.²⁶ Even if we do not take this literally, we must at least admit that ideas play an essential role in the inner structure of matter.

I suggest that *yin* and *yang* be dealt with on different levels: physical, biological, noetic and social.²⁷ Strictly speaking, *yin* and *yang* are not general concepts which can logically include less general concepts, but vaguely general concepts, under which pairs of mutually dependent but contrasting components can be loosely subsumed. In this context such Western concepts as potentiality and actuality, or passivity and activity could be viewed as *yin* and *yang*.

Another important question regards the so-called self-consistency of *Tao*, as discussed in Chapter 25 of the *Tao-te-ching*:

Man models himself after Earth.
 Earth models itself after Heaven.
 Heaven models itself after *Tao*.
 And *Tao* models itself after Nature.²⁸

Joseph Needham observed in this connection: "The harmonious cooperation of beings arose, not from the orders of a superior authority external to themselves, but from the fact that they were parts in a hierarchy of a whole forming a cosmic pattern, and what they obeyed were the

²⁶ Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, "Toward a More Comprehensive Concept of Life," in A-T. Tymieniecka (ed.), *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XVII (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), pp. 21-30.

²⁷ Werner Heisenberg, *Schritte über Grenzen* (München: Piper, 1971), p. 236.

²⁸ Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 153. With slight changes.

internal dictates of their own natures.” According to Needham, *Tao* is precisely this cosmic pattern.²⁹ The laws followed by the cosmic Way (*Tao*) were not laid down by any divine lawgiver, but were inherent and self-consistent.³⁰

As Heisenberg said, even the laws governing the subatomic world are very complicated and symmetrical mathematical formulas: they are ideas dressed in Platonic terminology.³¹ It is a perennial question whether ideas or thoughts would exist without someone to think them. If they are not “thought up” by someone’s mind, where do they come from? One possible answer: chance. But chance is a poor answer because it means precisely that there is no explanation whatsoever. Another answer is provided by the *Tao-te-ching*: Ideas or *Tao* are self-consistent. In both the East and the West men have sought an ultimate ground of laws representing the conscious thinking of a God. Philo, Augustine and the author of the *Hung-fan* 洪範 (The Great Norm) all asked the same question. It is generally accepted that the *Hung-fan* was written during the Warring States period. It deals with nine norms or laws governing nature and human conduct (both moral and political), but the norms or laws are attributed to a knowing and willing God.³² Heisenberg would agree with the *Hung-fan* at least in regard to the laws of nature: he would say that God is a mathematician.³³ There are self-consistent or intrinsic ideas. But such ideas or ways (*Tao*) or logos (*li* 理) must be thought by a thinking mind. These two statements are complementary rather than contradictory. Such a synthesis is performed by Thomas Aquinas who on the one hand agrees with Augustine that “ideas are first or original forms . . . for they are not themselves formed,” and on the other hand affirms that these ideas are “participated likenesses” of God’s own essence which he knows perfectly.³⁴

In admitting the existence of original forms which are not formed, Aquinas acknowledges that there are intrinsic, self-consistent ideas; whereas in affirming a God who understands these ideas as likenesses of his own divine essence, he makes the complementary assertion. In this

²⁹ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Bungay: Fontana/Collins, 1979), p. 306.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 305–307.

³¹ Werner Heisenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 230–237.

³² Legge, *Book of Historical Documents*, pp. 320–344.

³³ Werner Heisenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 230; “Scientific Truth and Religious Truth,” *Universitas Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1974), pp. 1–3.

³⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Latin text with English translation), Vol. 4, *Knowledge in God* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) Qu. 15, art. 2, pp. 64–69.

way the *Tao-te-ching* and the *Hung-fan* can be reconciled, since here self-consistent ideas or cosmic ways are not imposed from the outside, but are participating likenesses of the divine essence.

The third question concerns the effectiveness of *yin-yang* unity. It is certainly a powerful insight that the unity of *yin* and *yang* result in harmony, and that through this unity things are produced. A comparable insight is to be found in Heraclitus: "Harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and lyre."³⁵

There are four points to consider in this connection:

1. It is empirically true that through a union of contrasting components at the right conjuncture harmony results, while an untimely union will cause disorder and strife. It is certainly untrue that harmony results automatically from every union of contrasting components.
2. The unity of two successive or simultaneous contrasting components is possible only because they are found in the same event, thing or relationship, which constitutes something whole. Consequently, to assert the *yin-yang* unity as a valid principle for any single entity implies that this entity constitutes something whole (for example, a mountain, man, family, day, year); to assert the *yin-yang* unity as a universal principle implies that the entire cosmic reality is one.
3. Some suggestions regarding evolutionary self-organization are to be found in Prof. Apel's chapter: "Harmony through Strife as a Problem of Natural and Cultural Evolution." In terms of the *yin-yang* unity I see evolution in the following way: Simultaneous and successive *yin-yang* unity suggests a certain provisional harmony. But if evolution toward a higher level is to take place, there must be a break in this provisional harmony in the form of a new impetus, something resembling "élan vital" in biological evolution: a new individual or social understanding in noetic, moral and social evolution. Then the "élan vital" or the new understanding, must be considered a *yang*-component in contrast with and complementary to the yet existing *yin-yang* unity, which itself must be globally viewed as a *yin*-component. Nevertheless, the goal of evolution is a broader or higher level of harmony. Only unresolved differences lead to strife. With respect to Prof. Neville, to be is to be in harmony or to strive for harmony on a broader or higher level.

³⁵ Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 28.

4. More problematic is the unreserved statement that every *yin-yang* unity produces things. This is empirically true to some extent, but not to be taken as a universal truth. There are no philosophical grounds for seeing in the *yin-yang* unity the ultimate source of cosmic reality. Rather, *yin-yang* unity is an apt designation for the universal relationship of the universe, as I have tried to show.³⁶

4. Yin-Yang Unity in Later Confucianism

"Later Confucianism" in this chapter denotes Confucianism after its acceptance of the metaphysics of *Tao* and *yin-yang* unity, which is the Confucianism of Hsün-tzu, the *Commentaries* to the *I Ching*, and Sung and Ming Neo-Confucianism.

Though later Confucianism incorporated Taoist metaphysics, it did so with important changes. First of all, in the Taoist world, the *Tao* with its *yin-yang* unity, constitutes a natural order where human beings play a mostly passive role. By incorporating *Tao* and its *yin-yang* unity into Confucianism, the *Commentaries* to the *I Ching* consider Heaven and Earth—the greatest *yang* and the greatest *yin*—as being endowed with the intention (*hsin* 心) of renewing the universe. Human beings are regarded as having a special place between Heaven and Earth, and thus playing an active role in the cosmos.³⁷

Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.) was even more explicit on this point. His Heaven and Earth were naturalistic forces like the four seasons. But Heaven was also the God on high (*Shang-ti*, *Shang-t'ien*). Though identified at the same time with the sky, Heaven and Earth were believed to be the origin of the universe, and the most sacred sacrifice was due to them. Moreover, Heaven, Earth, *Yin*, *Yang*, Wood, Fire, Soil, Metal, Water and Man were grouped together as ten "noble" elements, besides where there were the ten thousand things. Man is located at the center of the ten noble elements and ten thousand things, and his actions influence the entire cosmos.³⁸

During the two millennia after Tung Chung-shu, Confucianism experienced many vicissitudes. But despite all the subtle differences between the generations, all Confucian thinkers agree that the *Tao*

³⁶Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, "Toward a More Comprehensive Concept of Life," p. 29.

³⁷Z. D. Shung, *The Text of Yi King* (Shanghai: China Modern Education Co., 1935), Hexagrams I, II and XXIV, pp. 3, 12, 15, 107–108.

³⁸Su Yü 蘇輿, *Ch'un-ch'iu-fan-lu yi-cheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Taipei, 1974), Chapters 33, 44, 70, 81.

(sometimes called *T'ai-chi* 太極) with its *yin-yang* unity is the supreme origin of the cosmos and of mankind. Moreover, following the *Commentaries* to the *I Ching* and Tung Chung-shu, all Confucian thinkers ascribe Heaven and Earth with the benevolent will to produce "ten thousand things." In addition, they draw from this doctrine the notion of the moral duty of interpersonal kindness.

We now come to a philosophical assessment of later Confucianism. The *yin-yang* unity may well characterize the relationship of all cosmic realities. But this universal relationship must be viewed on different levels. Properly speaking, human beings are related to the *yin-yang* unity on different levels: with physical things in the physical level, with living beings on the biological level, with objects of knowledge on the noetic level, and with other persons on the social level.³⁹ Only with such a broad outlook can a realistic cosmology, anthropology and theology be construed. Since later Confucianism failed to recognize these essentially different levels, several difficulties are left unresolved.

First, since this type of Confucianism often understands *yin* and *yang* in a materialistic sense, it finds itself with a paradox: on the one hand, it considers human beings as concentrations or dispersions of a material entity called *ch'i*, while on the other hand it exalts human beings as morally and cosmically responsible. Both seem insufficiently justifiable within their own contexts.

Secondly, how is it possible to draw moral duty from cosmology, as later Confucianism seems to do? In fact the first part of the "Appended Remarks" to the *I Ching* puts forth the following argument: "One *yin* and one *yang* constitute what is called *Tao*. That which issues from it is good. That which is completed by it is the individual nature."⁴⁰ The text itself concerns itself with both physical and ethical goodness, and Confucians of later generations certainly understood it as having an ethical meaning. But an ethical "oughtness" is only possible when a person senses on obligation in his relationship with others. *Tao* as a constant way of nature can never be a source of such interpersonal relationships. This is also the case even if the *Tao* is believed to have the benevolent will to produce the "ten thousand things" through *yin-yang* unity, because this cosmic *Tao* does not know its own workings, as Hsün-tzu and, fourteen centuries later, Chu Hsi 朱熹 admitted.⁴¹

³⁹ Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, "Toward a More Comprehensive Concept of Life," p. 29.

⁴⁰ The translation is taken from different authors.

⁴¹ *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, Chapter 19, p. 243; Chu Hsi, *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 朱子語類 (Taipei: Cheng-chung Book Company, 1962), Vol. I, Part I, p. 3.

Confucian ethics are based on *jen* 仁, reciprocal kindness, which is believed to be essential and intrinsic to human nature, and which is thought of as a sacred life-long responsibility. Since it is intrinsic in human nature, it is understandable why few Confucians are willing to accept an "heteronomical" divine lawgiver as the source of moral obligation. A similar rationale was at work in early Taoism, when it denied the existence of an "external" divine lawgiver in the cosmos. But the issue is quite a different one when God is understood as a partner in a mutual *jen*-relationship. Such view seems more consistent with Confucian interpersonal ethics.⁴²

IV. Epilogue

For many people *yin-yang* unity may seem to have an historical meaning only. Certainly the conception of Heaven as the greatest *yang* and Earth as the greatest *yin* is no longer sustainable in the traditional sense of considering Heaven as a universal cover and earth as a universal support (天覆地載) of the universe. We know today that such a cover does not exist and that the earth is far too small to support the universe. Thus the concept of Heaven and Earth must be understood as referring to the entire cosmic reality. If we understand heaven and earth in this way, then we must answer the question posed by the early Taoists and later Confucians: what is the ultimate ground of cosmic reality, and how is human existence related to it? To answer this question, we can take refuge in neither a foreign nor a Chinese philosophical tradition. Even Confucianism hardly provides a unanimous answer. But at the same time we need to draw on all philosophical traditions to deal with this question honestly.

The unity of *yin* and *yang* as the universal interrelatedness of any individual thing versus all other things (though on essentially different levels of relationship) is certainly relevant today in understanding and creating harmony, so vital in the world today.

⁴²Thaddeus T'ui-chieh Hang, "Jen Experience and Jen Philosophy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. XLII, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 65.