

A SOURCE BOOK IN  
CHINESE  
PHILOSOPHY

TRANSLATED AND COMPILED BY  
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## THE NATURALISM OF WANG CH'UNG

CONSIDERABLE INTEREST in Wang Ch'ung (27-100?) has been aroused in the last several decades. In our age of critical spirit, skepticism, scientific method, demand for evidence, and revolt against the past, this is perfectly natural, for Wang Ch'ung represents all these. A thoroughly independent thinker, he was not identified with any school and has often been classified as a member of the Miscellaneous School. In his metaphysics, he is definitely Taoistic, somewhat modified by the idea of the interfusion and intermingling of the yin and yang forces in the *Book of Changes*. But even here he is different, for while Taoism is very much interested in metaphysics but not much in human institutions, Wang took the opposite position. Actually he is neither creative nor significant so far as metaphysics is concerned. His chief contribution to the history of Chinese thought is to clear the atmosphere of superstition and enhance the critical and rational spirit that was already incipient.

When Wang was born, Confucianism had been the supreme doctrine in China for more than a hundred years. Influenced by popular priest-magicians who spread superstitions and performed miracles, the essentially rationalistic Confucian doctrine of the unity of man and Nature had degenerated into one of mutual influence, often of a mysterious kind. Furthermore, in an attempt to make Confucius more than the supreme sage, efforts were made to deify him, and he was considered the "uncrowned king" appointed by Heaven. The beginning of this tendency was already evident in Tung Chung-shu (c.179-c.104 B.C.). During the Western Han period (206 B.C.-A.D. 8) a whole body of apocryphal literature grew up to supplement the basically humanistic and rationalistic Confucian Classics, a literature with fantastic interpretation of the Classics in order to support the belief in portents and prophecies. The influence of this literature was particularly strong between the Western Han and the Eastern Han (25-220). It was very popular during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.), and Wang Mang, ruler of Hsin dynasty (9-23), loved it exceedingly. The intellectual situation at Wang Ch'ung's time was therefore something like this: (1) Confucianism was supreme; (2) it was being debased into a mysterious and superstitious doctrine; (3) the unity of man and Nature was turned into one of mutual influence; (4) these influences were thought to be exerted through strange phenomena and calamities; (5) Heaven, though not anthropomorphic, was purposive, asserting its will through prodigies as warning to men; and (6), on a smaller scale spiritual beings exercised similar influence.

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Wang Ch'ung rose in revolt against all these prevalent beliefs. In clear, critical, and strong terms, he declared that Heaven takes no action, that natural events, including prodigies, occur spontaneously, that there is no such thing as teleology, that fortune and misfortune come by chance, and that man does not become a ghost at death. In addition, he insisted that any theory must be tested by concrete evidence, and he himself argued in a strictly rational manner supporting his theories with one fact after another. For him, the past is no sure guidance, for there is no fact to prove that the past is better than the present. Thus in one stroke he rejected the total body of beliefs and dogma accumulated over several centuries. In doing so, he raised the pitch of skepticism and naturalism to a height never before reached in Chinese history. In this way he prepared for the growth of rationalism and naturalism in the Wei-Chin period (220-420) which probably would not have come about without him. Wang's contribution, then, does not lie in any original thought but in the fostering of a new spirit.

Wang grew up in a very poor family and had to read books in a bookstore. He was a quiet scholar and devoted teacher, and was known as one of three geniuses in his time.<sup>1</sup> The following selections are from his extant work, the *Lun-heng* (Balanced Inquiries).

### THE BALANCED INQUIRIES<sup>2</sup>

#### *A. On Original Nature* (ch. 13)

Man's feelings and nature are the root of government by men and the source of ceremonies and music. Therefore as we investigate the matter, we find that ceremonies are employed to check the excess of the nature and feelings and music is used to regulate them. In man's nature there are the qualities of humbleness, modesty, deference, and compliance. Hence ceremonies have been instituted to adjust them to their proper expression. In men's feelings there are the qualities of like and dislike, pleasure and anger, and sorrow and joy. Hence music has been created to enable their feeling of reverence to be expressed everywhere. Nature and feelings are therefore the reason why systems

<sup>1</sup> An orphan, Wang started school at the age of eight. After studying at the national university in the national capital, he returned home to teach. Later he served successively as a district officer, a prefect officer in charge of educational and ceremonial affairs, and an assistant to an inspecting censor. Eventually he resigned and went home. See *Lun-heng*, ch. 85.

<sup>2</sup> This consists of eighty-four chapters in thirty books. Most chapters are devoted to an attack on current beliefs. There are special chapters criticizing Confucius, Mencius, and Han Fei Tzu (d. 233 B.C.). For translation, see Bibliography. Most people, emphasizing Wang's critical spirit, have translated *lun-heng* as "critical essays," but by Wang's own words (ch. 30), his work aimed at a "balanced (or fair) discussion."

of ceremonies and music have been created. Scholars in the past have written essays and treatises to discuss the subjects but none of them was final or correct.

Shih Shih<sup>3</sup> of the Chou (1111–249 B.C.) maintained that in nature some are born good and some are born evil. Take the good nature and cultivate it, and goodness will develop. Take the evil nature and cultivate it, and evil will develop. Thus in nature some belong to yin (passive cosmic force) and some belong to yang (active cosmic force), and some are good and some are evil. It all depends on cultivation. Therefore Master Shih wrote the “Book on Cultivating [Nature].”<sup>4</sup> People like Mi Tzu-chien, Ch’i Tiao-k’ai, and Kung-sun Ni-tzu<sup>5</sup> also discussed the subjects of man’s feelings and nature. They varied from Master Shih somewhat, and all said that in nature some are good and some are evil. Mencius wrote an essay on the goodness of human nature and thought that the nature of all men is originally good and that if they are evil, it is because material circumstances upset them.<sup>6</sup> . . . According to Mencius, all people are good in childhood. . . . When (wicked king) Chou<sup>7</sup> was a child, the viscount of Wei saw the evil nature in him. His evil nature was no worse than that of the ordinary people, but as he grew up, he did violence to it instead of transforming it. . . . What Mencius said about the feelings and nature is not true. . . . Kao Tzu was a contemporary of Mencius. In his discussion on human nature, he said that it is neither good nor evil. . . .<sup>8</sup> When Kao Tzu used the analogy of breaching water [to the east or west as nature can be made good or evil], he was referring to average people but not to those extremely good or extremely evil. Confucius said, “By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart.”<sup>9</sup> . . . And also, “Only the most intelligent and the most stupid do not change.”<sup>10</sup> Nature in some is good and in some is evil, and can no longer be changed by the influence of sages or the teachings of worthies. . . . Therefore I know that what Kao Tzu said is not true.

Hsün Tzu (fl. 298–238 B.C.) opposed Mencius and wrote “The Nature

<sup>3</sup> He was a pupil of a Confucian pupil. His book in twenty-one chapters is no longer extant, though fragments have survived.

<sup>4</sup> The word “nature” is added according to Kao Su-yüan, *Lun-heng*, 1935, p. 17. Huang Hui, however, does not think so. See his *Lun-heng chiao-shih* (*Balanced Inquiries* Collected and Annotated), 1938, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> The first two were Confucius’ pupils and the latter was pupil of a pupil. Their works disappeared long ago, though fragments of Mi’s have survived.

<sup>6</sup> *Mencius*, 6A:1-7.

<sup>7</sup> R. 1175–1112 B.C. Chinese historians have held him responsible for the fall of the Shang dynasty (1751–1112 B.C.).

<sup>8</sup> *Mencius*, 6A:1-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Analects*, 17:2.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 17:3.

of Man Is Evil.”<sup>11</sup> . . . According to his words, men are not good in childhood. But when Chi (worthy minister of sage-emperor Yao,<sup>12</sup> who taught people agriculture) was a boy he played planting trees, and as soon as Confucius could walk, he performed sacrificial rites for fun.<sup>13</sup> A stone is hard as soon as it is produced, and an orchid is fragrant as soon as it comes into being. . . . What Hsün Tzu said is not true. . . .

Tung Chung-shu read the works of Mencius and Hsün Tzu and originated the theory of human nature and feelings saying, “. . . nature is born of yang and feelings are born of yin. The force of yin results in greed and that of yang results in humanity. Those who say that nature is good have insight about yang and those who say that nature is evil have insight about yin.”<sup>14</sup> What Tung Chung-shu means is that Mencius had insight about yang and Hsün Tzu had insight about yin. So far as he asserts that each of them had his own insight, he is correct. But his theory does not settle the matter of the nature and the feelings. It is not true that the nature and the feelings of all men are both good and evil. For both man's nature and his feelings are products of yin and yang. Being products of yin and yang, some are rich and some are poor. Jades are products of stone. Some are pure and some are impure. How can nature and feelings, being [products of] yin and yang, be purely good? What Tung Chung-shu said is not true.

Liu Tzu-cheng (77–6 B.C.) said, “Man's nature is inborn. It is in man and is not expressed. His feelings, on the other hand, are what come into contact with things. They are revealed externally. What is revealed externally is called yang and what is not expressed is called yin.”<sup>15</sup> . . . According to his words, nature is yin (evil) and feelings are yang (good). But don't man's endowed feelings, after all, have both good and evil elements? . . .

The truth is that in nature, some people are born good and some born evil. It is just as some people's capacity is high and some people's is low. High capacity cannot be made low and low capacity cannot be made high. To say that human nature is neither good nor evil is like saying that man's capacity is neither high nor low. . . . At bottom I consider Mencius' doctrine of the goodness of human nature as referring to people above the average, Hsün Tzu's doctrine of evil nature of man

<sup>11</sup> *Hsün Tzu*, ch. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Legendary emperor (3rd millennium B.C.).

<sup>13</sup> These stories are found in the *Shih chi* (Records of the Historian), PNP, 4:1b and 47:2a. For Chi, see Chavannes, *Les mémoires historiques*, vol. 1, 210.

<sup>14</sup> These words are not found in Tung's extant works; cf. above, ch. 14, A.

<sup>15</sup> His name was Hsiang. He was a high governmental official and the author of many works, including the *Hsin-hsü* (New Narrations) and *Shuo-yüan* (Collection of Discourses). But the quotation is not found in his extant works.

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as referring to people below the average, and Yang Hsiung's (53 B.C.—A.D. 18) doctrine that human nature is a mixture of good and evil<sup>16</sup> as referring to average people. Insofar as their doctrines return to moral principles and accord with truth, they may be used to teach people. As to principles of nature, however, they have not been able to investigate them to the utmost. (SPPY, 3:12a-16a)

*Comment.* Wang Chung sums up practically all previous theories on human nature: (1) that some people are born good and some are born evil (Shih Shih);<sup>17</sup> (2) that man is born good (Mencius); (3) that man is originally neither good nor evil (Kao Tzu); (4) that man is born evil (Hsün Tzu); (5) that man has the beginning of goodness and his nature is good but his feelings are evil (Tung Chung-shu); (6) that man's nature is evil but his feelings are good (Liu Hsiang); and (7) that man's nature is a mixture of good and evil (Yang Hsiung). He also criticized Lu Chia (216-176 B.C.), but Lu merely repeated Mencius except that instead of fully developing one's nature as Mencius had urged, he advocated "examining one's nature." Actually he did not represent any new theory.

Wang's own theory is new but it is not a real advance, for the presence of either good or evil is not explained. In accepting Yang Hsiung's theory of mixture as referring to average people, he seems to believe in three grades of human nature. This would have anticipated Hsün Yüeh (148-209).<sup>18</sup> However, his main thesis is dualism. Inasmuch as the entire Western Han period is characterized by a dualistic approach to human nature, in terms of good nature and evil feelings, Wang's own dualism, in terms of good and evil natures, shows little progress.

### *B. On Spontaneity (ch. 54)*

When the material forces (*ch'i*)<sup>19</sup> of Heaven and Earth come together, all things are spontaneously produced, just as when the vital forces (*ch'i*) of husband and wife unite, children are naturally born. Among the things thus produced, blood creatures are conscious of hunger and cold. Seeing that the five grains are edible, they obtain and eat them. And seeing that silk and hemp can be worn, they obtain and wear them. Some say that Heaven produces the five grains in order to feed man and produces silk

<sup>16</sup> See above, ch. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps he was the one whom Kao Tzu referred to. See *Mencius*, 6A:6.

<sup>18</sup> See comment on Han Yü's theory, ch. 27, sec. 1.

<sup>19</sup> This word means variously material force or energy, vital force, power, breath, and so forth and has to be translated variously. For a discussion on it, see Appendix.

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and hemp in order to clothe man. This is to say that Heaven becomes a farmer or a mulberry girl for the sake of man. This is contrary to spontaneity. Therefore their ideas are suspect and should not be followed.

Let us discuss these concepts according to Taoism. Heaven (*T'ien*, Nature) gives forth and distributes material force universally into all things. Grains overcome hunger and silk and hemp save people from cold. Consequently people eat grains and wear clothing of silk and hemp. Now, that Heaven does not purposely produce the five grains and silk and hemp in order to feed and clothe man is very much like the fact that there are calamities and strange transformations but not for the purpose of reprimanding man. Things are spontaneously produced and man eats them and wears them, and material forces spontaneously change [in strange ways] and people are afraid of them. To talk otherwise may be agreeable to the minds of people. But if lucky influences from Heaven are intentional, where would spontaneity be, and where would non-action (*wu-wei*) be found?

How do we [know] that Heaven is spontaneous? Because it has neither mouth nor eyes. Those who engage in [purposive] action are something like those with mouth and eyes. The mouth desires to eat and the eyes desire to see. When something is desired inside, that desire is expressed outside, and the mouth and eyes seek for that thing, considering it an advantage to have it. This is the activity of desire. Now that there is no desire in the mouth or the eyes, there is no demand for things. What is any [intentional] act for?

How do we know that Heaven has neither mouth nor eyes? We know it from Earth. The body of Earth is made up of dirt, and dirt of course has neither mouth nor eyes. Heaven and Earth are like husband and wife. Since the body of the Earth has neither mouth nor eyes, we know that Heaven also has neither mouth nor eyes. If Heaven consists of a body, it should be similar to that of the Earth. If Heaven consists of vital force, it would be clouds and fog. How can things like clouds and fog have a mouth or an eye?

Someone says: Everything that moves is from the beginning engaged in action.<sup>20</sup> It moves because it has desires. Since it moves, it is engaged in action. Now, the activities of Heaven are similar to those of man. How can we say that it takes no action?

I reply: The activities of Heaven consist in the giving forth and distributing of the material force. As the body moves, the material force issues forth, and things are then produced. It is like the fact that as one's vital force is moved, his body moves, the vital force issues forth, and a

<sup>20</sup> The text has the word "no" before "action." As Sun Jen-ho suggested, it is superfluous. See his *Lun-heng chü-cheng* (*Balanced Inquiries Corrected*), 1924, p. 156.



child is produced. When man gives forth and distributes his vital force, it is not for the purpose of producing a child. As the vital force is distributed, a child is born spontaneously. Heaven moves without the desire to produce things and yet things are produced of themselves. That is spontaneity. When material force is given forth and distributed without the purpose of producing things and yet things are produced of themselves, that is non-action. What do we mean when we say that Heaven is spontaneous and takes no action? It is material force. It is tranquil, without desire, and is engaged in neither action nor business. . . .

When the Taoists talk about spontaneity, they do not know how to recite facts to prove their theory or practice. That is why their doctrine of spontaneity has not yet found credence. However, in spite of spontaneity, there must also be activity to help. Ploughing, tilling, weeding, and sowing in the spring are human activities. After the grains have entered the soil, they grow by day and night. It is not something man can do. If someone tries to do it, that would be a way to spoil them. A man of Sung was sorry that his corn was not growing. He went and pulled them up. The next day it dried up and died.<sup>21</sup> Those who take action to be spontaneous are like the man of Sung.

Someone asks: Man is born from Heaven and Earth. Since Heaven and Earth take no action and since man is endowed with the nature of Heaven [and Earth], he should take no action either. And yet he does take action. Why?

I reply: A person who is rich and pure in perfect virtue is endowed with a large quantity of vital force and is therefore able to approximate Heaven in being spontaneous and taking no action. Those who are endowed with little vital force do not follow moral principles and do not resemble Heaven and Earth. They are therefore called unworthy. By that is meant that they are not similar to Heaven and Earth. Since they do not resemble Heaven and Earth, they do not belong to the same class as sages and worthies and therefore take action.

Heaven and Earth are like a furnace. Their work is creation. Since the endowment of the vital force is not the same in all cases, how can all be worthy? . . .

The Way of Heaven is to take no action. Therefore in the spring it does not act to start life, in summer it does not act to help grow, in autumn it does not act to bring maturity, and in winter it does not act to store up. When the material force of yang comes forth itself, things naturally come to life and grow. When the material force of yin arises of itself, things naturally mature and are stored up. When we draw water from wells or breach water over a dam in order to irrigate fields and

<sup>21</sup> Referring to the story in *Mencius*, 2A:2.

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gardens, things will also grow. But if rain falls like torrents, soaking through all stalks, leaves, and roots, in an amount equivalent to that in a pond, who would prefer drawing water from wells or breaching water over a dam? Therefore to act without acting is great. Originally no result is sought, and yet results are achieved. Originally no fame is sought, and yet fame is attained. Great indeed is the achievement and fame of abundant rain. Yet Heaven and Earth do not act for them. When the material forces are united in harmony, the rain gathers of itself. . . .

Since Heaven takes no action, it does not speak. When the time comes for calamities and strange transformations, the material force produces them spontaneously. Heaven and Earth cannot do it and cannot know it. When there is a cold in the stomach, it aches. It is not that man causes it. Rather, the vital force does it spontaneously. The space between heaven and earth is comparable to that between the back and the stomach. If we say that it is Heaven that causes all calamities and strange transformations, shall we say that all prodigies, big or small, substantial or light, are all made by Heaven? Suppose a cow gives birth to a horse or a peach tree produces a plum. Does it mean, according to their theory, that the spirit of Heaven enters the belly of the cow to create a horse or takes the seed of the plum and places it on the peach tree? . . . (SPPY, 18:1a-6b)

*Comment.* The net effect of Wang Ch'ung's naturalism is to de-personalize Heaven and to deny the existence of design in any form. One would expect that his rationalism and naturalism would promote the development of natural science in China. Joseph Needham, however, has suggested that instead of fostering the development of science, Wang actually deterred it, for according to Needham, there must be a lawgiver before there can be natural laws. If Wang Ch'ung were alive, the first question he would ask would be, "What is your evidence to prove it?"<sup>22</sup>

### C. *A Treatise on Death* (ch. 62)

People today say that when men die they become spiritual beings (*kuei*, ghosts), are conscious, and can hurt people. Let us try to prove by means of the species of creatures that the dead do not become spiritual beings, do not possess consciousness, and cannot hurt people. How shall we prove this? We do so by means of other creatures. Man and other creatures are all creatures. When other creatures die, they do not become spiritual beings. Why should man alone become a spiritual being

<sup>22</sup> See Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2: *History of Scientific Thought*, pp. 371, 528.

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when he dies? If people can make a distinction between man and other creatures as to which cannot become a spiritual being, they will still find it difficult to make clear why [man] becomes a spiritual being but [other creatures] do not. If they cannot make a distinction, then how do they know that men become spiritual beings [inasmuch as other creatures do not]?

Man can live because of his vital forces. At death his vital forces are extinct. What makes the vital forces possible is the blood. When a person dies, his blood becomes exhausted. With this his vital forces are extinct, and his body decays and becomes ashes and dust. What is there to become a spiritual being?

If a man has neither ears nor eyes (senses), he will have no consciousness. Hence men who are dumb and blind are like plants and trees. When the vital forces have left man, is it simply like a man without ears or eyes? [The whole body] decays and disappears. It becomes diffused and invisible, and is therefore called a spiritual being (*kuei-shen*, earthly and heavenly spirits). When people see the shape of spiritual beings, they of course do not see the vital forces of the dead. Why? Because the very name "spiritual being" means what is diffused and invisible. When a man dies, his spirit ascends to heaven and his flesh and bones return (*kuei*) to earth, and that is why an earthly spiritual being (*kuei*) [and a heavenly spiritual being (*shen*)]<sup>23</sup> are so-called. To be an earthly spiritual being (*kuei*) means to return (*kuei*). . . . To be a heavenly spiritual being (*shen*) means to expand (*shen*). When the expansion reaches its limit, it ends and begins again. Man is born of spiritual forces. At death he returns to them. Yin and yang are called *kuei-shen*. After people die, they are also called *kuei-shen*.

The vital forces produce man just as water becomes ice. As water freezes into ice, so the vital forces coagulate to form a man. When ice melts, it becomes water. When a man dies, he becomes spirit again. He is called spirit just as melted ice changes its name to water. As people see that its name has changed, they say that it has consciousness, can assume physical form, and can hurt people. But they have no basis for saying so.

People see ghosts with the form of living men. From the fact that they appear in the form of living men, we know that they are not spirits of the dead. How can we show that to be true? When a sack is filled with rice or a bag with millet the rice will stay in the sack or the millet in the bag. It will be full and firm, standing up and visible. When people look at it, they know that it is a sack of rice or a bag of millet. How? Because the

<sup>23</sup> Additions according to Huang Hui, *Lun-heng chiao-shih*, p. 869. For a discussion of *kuei-shen*, see Appendix.

contents of the sack or bag can be clearly discerned from the shape. If the sack has a hole and the rice runs out, or if the bag is torn and the millet is lost, the sack or bag will either be thrown away or folded up. When people look at it, it can no longer be seen. The spirit of man is stored up inside the body in the same way as the millet is in the bag or rice in the sack. At death the body decays and the vital forces disintegrate like the sack having a hole or the bag having been torn and the rice running out or the millet being lost. When the rice has run out or the millet is lost, the sack or bag no longer keeps its shape. How can the vital forces of man still possess a body and be seen by men when they have disintegrated and become extinct? . . .

Since the beginning of the universe and rulers of high antiquity, people who died according to their allotted time or died at middle age or prematurely have numbered in the hundreds of millions. The number of men living today is not as great as that of the dead. If everyone who dies becomes an earthly spirit, there should be an earthly spirit at every pace on the road. If men see spirits when they are about to die, they should see millions and millions filling the hall and crowding the road instead of only one or two. . . .

Now, people say that a spiritual being is the spirit of a dead man. If the earthly spirit is really the spirit of a dead man, then when people see it, they ought to see the form of a nude, for there is no reason why they should see any garments. Why? Because garments have no spirit. When a man dies, they decay along with his body. How can they be worn by a spirit? . . .

Man is intelligent and wise because he possesses the forces of the Five Constant Virtues (of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness). The five forces are in him because there are the five internal organs in his body (namely, heart, liver, stomach, lungs, and kidneys, which correspond to the five virtues). If the five organs are unimpaired, he is wise. If they become diseased, he becomes hazy and confused. Being hazy and confused, he becomes stupid and foolish. When a man dies, the five organs rot and decay. As they rot and decay, the Five Constant Virtues will have nothing to attach to. What embodies wisdom will be destroyed, and what exercises wisdom will be gone. The body needs the vital forces in order to be complete, and the vital forces need the body in order to have consciousness. There is in the world no fire burning from itself. How can there be a spirit in the world that has consciousness from itself but is without a body? . . .

Before a person dies, his wisdom and spirit are calm. When he is sick, he is dull and confused, because his spirit is disturbed. Now, death is sickness much intensified. Since in sickness, which is but a mild form

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of death, one is already dull and confused, how much more would he be when it is intensified? When the spirit is disturbed, one loses consciousness. How much more when the spirit disintegrates? Man's death is like the extinction of fire. When a fire is extinguished, its light shines no longer, and when a man dies, his consciousness has no more understanding.<sup>24</sup> The two cases are the same in reality and properly so.<sup>25</sup> If people still maintain that the dead has consciousness, they are all deluded. What is the difference between a sick man about to die and the fire about to be extinguished? After the fire is extinguished and the light disappears, only the candle remains. After a man dies, his vital forces become extinct but only his body remains. To say that a man has consciousness after death is to say that a fire still has light after the fire is extinguished. . . .

After a man dies he does not become a spiritual being, has no consciousness, and cannot speak. He therefore cannot hurt people. How can we prove it? When a man gets angry, he utilizes his vital forces. When he hurts people, he has to apply strength. In order to apply strength, his sinews and bones must be strong. If they are strong, he can hurt people. . . . After a man dies, his hands and arms decay and can no longer hold a blade. His teeth have all fallen and he can no longer bite. How can he hurt people? . . . (SPPY, 20:9a-14a)

*Comment.* In arguing against the existence of ghosts, Wang Ch'ung has offered more reasons than has any other Chinese thinker. For almost two thousand years now no one has been able to refute him, although some of his arguments sound very naïve.

### *D. Additional Selections*

#### *1. Accidents vs. Necessity*

In their conduct, some men are worthy and some men are stupid. In encountering calamity or blessing, some are fortunate and some are unfortunate. In their action, some are right and some are wrong. When they meet with reward or punishment, some are lucky and some are unlucky. Many people may encounter war together, but those who hide themselves do not get hit. Several plants may be affected by frost on the same day, but the one that is covered does not get injured. Those that get hit or injured are not necessarily evil, and those that hide or are covered

<sup>24</sup> *Hui*, ordinarily meaning wisdom, here means understanding.

<sup>25</sup> Leslie, in his "Contribution to a New Translation of the *Lun Heng*," *T'oung Pao*, 44 (1956), p. 128, says *tung-i-shih* means "the same kind" and thinks Forke is wrong in translating it as "the nature of both is the same." Actually Forke's "nature" is closer to the meaning of *shih* (reality) whereas Leslie's "kind" is not.

are not necessarily good. Those that hide or are covered are lucky and those that get hit or are injured are unlucky. Many people may want to offer loyalty. But some are rewarded and some punished. Many people may want to do some good. But some are trusted and some doubted. Those rewarded and trusted are not necessarily genuine and those punished and doubted are not necessarily insincere. The rewarded and trusted ones are lucky and the punished and doubted ones are unlucky. . . .

Crickets and ants creep on the ground. A man lifts his foot and walks across it. Those crickets and ants he steps on are pressed to death, whereas those he does not step on remain completely alive and unhurt. When fires sweep through wild grass, that which has been pressed down<sup>26</sup> by wheels does not burn. Some ordinary folks are delighted and call it lucky grass. Now, what the feet do not step on and what the fire does not reach are not necessarily good, for the lifting of the foot and the spread of the fire are accidental. (ch. 5, SPPY, 2:1a-b)

### 2. *Strange Phenomena*

Those who talk about calamities and strange phenomena have themselves already doubted the theory that Heaven uses calamities and prodigies as a means of reprimanding people. So they alter their argument to say that calamities and prodigies come because the ruler, through his governmental measures, moves Heaven to do so. Heaven activates the material force to respond to him. It is like beating a drum with something or striking a bell with a hammer. The drum is like Heaven, the hammer like the governmental measures, and the sound of the drum or bell like Heaven's response. As the ruler acts below, the material force of Heaven comes after man accordingly. But I say: This is also doubtful. For Heaven can activate things, but how can things activate Heaven? Why? Because man and things are bound by Heaven and Heaven is the master of man and things. . . . Therefore man living in the universe is like a flea or louse being inside a garment or a cricket or an ant inside a hole or a crack. Can the flea, louse, cricket, or ant, by being obedient or disobedient, cause the material force inside the garment or the hole to move or to change? Since the flea, louse, cricket, and ant cannot do so, to say that man alone can is to fail to understand the principle of the material force of things. As the wind comes, trees' branches swing. But tree branches cannot cause the wind. (ch. 43, SPPY, 15:1a-b)

### 3. *Fate*

With respect to man's appointment of fate, when his parents give forth their vital forces, he already gets his fortunes and misfortunes. Man's

<sup>26</sup> Liu P'an-sui is correct in this understanding. See Liu's *Lun-heng chi-chieh* (Collected Explanations of the *Balanced Inquiries*), 1932, p. 19.

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nature is different from his fate. There are people whose nature is good but whose fate is unlucky, and there are others whose nature is evil but whose fate is lucky. Whether one is good or evil in his conduct is due to his nature, but calamities and blessings, and fortunes and misfortunes, are due to fate. Some people do good but get calamities. This is a case of good nature but unlucky fate. Some people do evil but get blessings. This is a case of evil nature but lucky fate. Nature may be good or evil, and fate may be lucky or unlucky. A person with lucky fate does not necessarily miss blessings even if he does no good, and a person with unlucky fate does not necessarily escape calamity even if he makes good efforts in his conduct. (ch. 6, SPPY, 2:5a-b)

### *4. The Equality of Past and Present*

The world was well governed in earlier ages because of sages. It was well governed in later ages because of sages. The virtue of sages earlier or later was not different, and therefore good government in earlier ages and today is not different. The Heaven of earlier ages was the same as the Heaven of later ages. Heaven does not change, and its material forces do not alter. The people of earlier ages were the same as those of later ages. All were endowed with the original material forces, which are pure and harmonious and are not different in earlier or later ages. . . . In ancient times there were unrighteous people, and today there are gentlemen of established integrity. Good and evil intermingle. What age is devoid of them? (ch. 56, SPPY, 18:13b, 16a)