

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE

BY
CHU HSI

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE, WITH NOTES

BY
J. PERCY BRUCE, M.A. (LOND.)

AUTHOR OF "AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF
CHU HSI AND THE SUNG SCHOOL"

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PREFACE

THE work here translated forms a part of the Imperial Edition of *Chu Hsi's Complete Works* (御纂朱子全書), compiled under the direction of the Manchu Emperor K'ang Hsi, and published in the year A.D. 1713. It is composed of selections from two earlier compilations, entitled *Chu Hsi's Conversations* (朱子語類) and *Chu Hsi's Collected Writings* (朱子文集). The former, as the title indicates, consists of verbatim reports of the Philosopher's lectures, which, like the discussions of the Greek Academy, assumed the form of conversations between the lecturer and his pupils. They were recorded by the more intimate of those pupils, and collated by them in various collections, some during the Philosopher's lifetime, and others soon after his death (A.D. 1230). From these the work entitled *Chu Hsi's Conversations* was later compiled, and published in A.D. 1270. The compilation entitled *Chu Hsi's Collected Writings* does not include Chu Hsi's larger works, such as his *Commentaries*, *Modern Thought*, *The Object of Learning*, etc., but only his miscellaneous writings. It consists mainly of letters to correspondents, most of them pupils, but some of them opponents, of the Philosopher. The edition now extant under this title—based upon a much earlier edition not now obtainable—was published about the year A.D. 1700, in the reign of K'ang Hsi.

The title of the present work, which is complete in itself,

is *Hsing Li* (性理). As has been pointed out elsewhere,¹ the expression has a double application. It is used for philosophy in its broadest sense, including the investigation of all things physical and metaphysical; and it is also used in the narrower and more specialized sense of Mental and Moral Philosophy, or the study of the constitution of man's nature. Here, as is indicated in our translation of the title, it is in the latter sense that it must be understood.

The work is arranged according to subject in seven books—Books xlii to xlviii of the *Complete Works*—and in groups of sections, these groups being chosen alternately from the two compilations above named. Each section, both from the *Conversations* and from the *Collected Writings*, stands by itself and has no connexion with those that follow or precede, except in the similarity of subject.

The companion volume referred to above includes an account of the life and works of Chu Hsi, and it is not necessary to repeat here what is there said, nor to discuss the Philosopher's system of philosophy, which is there treated at considerable length. A few words, however, are needed concerning the nature of the task here attempted, and the object in view.

With regard to the latter, it is a matter for some surprise that, while translations of the Chinese Classics into English have long been before the public, and translations of the works of other Chinese philosophers have appeared from time to time, no serious effort has hitherto been made to present to the English reader the works of Chu Hsi, the philosopher whose teachings have done more than almost any other to

¹ *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Chu Hsi and the Sung School*, by J. P. Bruce.

mould the thought of the Chinese race. The omission is the more noteworthy inasmuch as the Western student, in his efforts to understand the mentality of the Chinese people, finds that the Classics, valuable as they are from the point of view of their high ethical standard, are, nevertheless, somewhat heterogeneous in their contents ; and, while it is obvious that the study of those writings is one indispensable means to the attainment of his end, it must be confessed that not infrequently he sighs for some presentation of Chinese thought more systematized and compendious in its nature. Such a presentation is contained in the work of which this is a translation. On almost every page the reader will find modes of thought and expression which may be observed among all classes of the people, from peasants to literati ; and will have abundant evidence that, however unconsciously to themselves, their mental outlook has been formed in the matrix of this philosophy.

What has just been said has reference more particularly to the student of Oriental thought and the Western resident in China. My aim, however, goes further. In my *Introduction to the Philosophy of Chu Hsi and the Sung School*, I have endeavoured to show that Chu Hsi ranks, not only as one of China's master minds, but also as one of the world's great thinkers. If that be the case, his lectures and writings on such a theme as the Philosophy of Human Nature have a claim to be rendered accessible to students of philosophy and religion in general, if only with a view to comparative study ; and even apart from the subject matter, it may not be without interest to some to examine the workings of the Philosopher's mind and the method of his dialectic as they are revealed in

the numerous arguments and philosophic statements contained in this work.

With regard to the nature of the translator's task, the first impression made upon the reader of the original text is the simplicity of its style, when compared with that of the Classics, or even with that of the earlier philosophers of the Sung School. This is particularly the case in the sections selected from the *Conversations*, in which we have the *ipsissima verba* of the Master as he taught and conversed with his pupils. But, while the phraseology is thus simple, it by no means follows that the thought is easy to grasp. On the contrary, the work is so full of allusions to, and quotations from, the works of other philosophers, and consists so largely of answers to arguments of which not more than isolated sentences are quoted, and to letters the tenor of which must be inferred from the answers themselves, that to follow the drift of the argument is often extremely difficult. Moreover, the Philosopher in his lectures not unnaturally assumed a knowledge in his hearers which they indeed possessed, but which to readers of a later generation is often inaccessible.

When the effort is made to transfer the thought of the writer or speaker into the English language there emerges a new set of difficulties. In works of history or poetry the translator may with perfect propriety claim a measure of freedom from strict literalness and mechanical consistency; but in an argumentative work such as this is, if he would be faithful to his author's purpose, he must adhere closely to the text, no matter how much his literary sense may be offended; otherwise the very point of the argument will be lost. The difficulty thus created is enhanced by the fact that the

quotations from the works of other philosophers, to which reference has just been made, are in many cases repeated in different connexions, and arguments built upon them which would be confusing and bewildering unless there were exactness of expression and consistency in the rendering. And the difficulty is still further accentuated when, as is frequently the case, one part of a given passage is cited in one instance, and another in another, while in a third instance the two parts overlap, or possibly the quotation ends in the very middle of a sentence. To obtain consistency of rendering in such circumstances is almost the despair of the translator.

What is true of arguments and quotations as a whole is in large part also true of individual words. Needless to say, the content of the Chinese word in many cases does not wholly coincide with that of any one English word, and yet arguments frequently turn upon a single word; arguments which would become unintelligible if the rendering of that word were changed with every change of aspect from which it is regarded. An obvious and easy escape from the difficulty would be to reproduce the original word, and in some exceptional instances this must of necessity be done. For example, in Chu Hsi's controversy with the Taoists the word *Tao* as used by the latter manifestly has a different connotation from that which it has as used by Chu Hsi. In other words the dispute is as to the meaning of the word itself. In such arguments to adopt, say, the rendering "Moral Law" to accord with Chu Hsi's interpretation would be to beg the question for Chu Hsi, while to adopt the rendering "Reason" to accord with the Taoist interpretation would make Chu Hsi's argument meaningless. But, apart from such exceptional

instances, unless an English equivalent is found which will fit all connexions, the English reader will often be very much at a loss to know what the argument is about, and might even plead that algebraic signs would be preferable.

Subject to the limitations and restrictions indicated in the preceding paragraphs, I have allowed myself a large measure of liberty in the mode of expression; and the aim, kept steadily in view, has been, not only to represent the thought of the original truly, but to do so in clear and readable English. In particular I may mention that I have fully availed myself of this liberty in the matter of connecting particles. In the *Conversations* especially, these particles abound with what in English would seem monotonous redundancy. So long, therefore, as the sentence as a whole reproduces the complete thought of the writer or speaker, the particles have been translated freely, or, in some cases, not translated at all.

The reader is further reminded that the construction of the Chinese and English languages is so different that many words not actually occurring in the original need to be supplied in the translation if the thought is to be completely expressed. It has not been considered desirable to disfigure the page and confuse the reader by indicating in all cases words so supplied. Where words or phrases are needed, not merely to complete the sense, but to indicate some fact implied but not expressed in the original, the necessary supplied words are printed in italics, or, in a few instances inserted in square brackets. Words inserted in curved brackets are in all cases interpolations by the Chinese compiler.

It will be noted that for the adjective derived from the noun "ether" the spelling adopted—"etherial"—is that

used by Sir Oliver Lodge in his writings in order to distinguish this word, with its somewhat technical meaning, from the more common word "ethereal".

For my justification for the rendering of certain key-words, such as the names of the five cardinal virtues and the words *tao* (道), *li* (理), *Ch'i* (氣), etc., the reader is again referred to my *Introduction to the Philosophy of Chu Hsi and the Sung School*. The reader is also begged to suspend judgment on any rendering which may appear to be unusual until he has followed the development of the Philosopher's arguments in the body of the work itself.

In the foot-notes the source of the quotation or allusion on which any particular argument is based has been indicated wherever possible, so that the reader with a knowledge of Chinese will be in a position to acquaint himself with the statement quoted in its original setting. I have also, within the limits afforded by foot-notes, given such biographical information as is available concerning those correspondents and participators in the dialogue who are mentioned by name. Some there are whose names recur so frequently that they become familiar friends.

In the citations from the Classics I have freely availed myself of the translations of Legge, Soothill, Ku Hung Ming, and others. I have not, however, refrained from adopting my own variations of their renderings in cases where it has seemed desirable, particularly when a more literal rendering than that adopted by them is required in order to make clear the Philosopher's argument.

I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without expressing my sense of obligation to the Rev. Sun P'êng Hsiang and other

Chinese scholars for their help, given always with the utmost readiness, in the elucidation of the text and of literary historical problems related thereto.

I desire also gratefully to acknowledge my deep indebtedness to my former tutor, Professor S. W. Green, M.A., of Regent's Park College, University of London, and to my colleague, the Rev. J. C. Keyte, M.A., of the Shantung Christian University, China, for valuable criticisms and suggestions; and to express my gratitude to the latter for unstinted help in the arduous task of correcting the proofs.

Owing to difficulties entailed by war and post-war conditions there has been considerable delay in the publication of this work. That the delay has not been longer extended is largely due to generous assistance in seeing the work through the press rendered by the Rev. C. E. Wilson, B.A., of the Baptist Missionary Society, and by Mr. W. E. Cule, of the Carey Press, to whom my sincere thanks are here accorded. I take this opportunity also to express my appreciation of the courtesy and patience of the publishers through all the difficulties mentioned above—difficulties greatly enhanced by the fact of the translator's residence in China.

J. PERCY BRUCE.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE

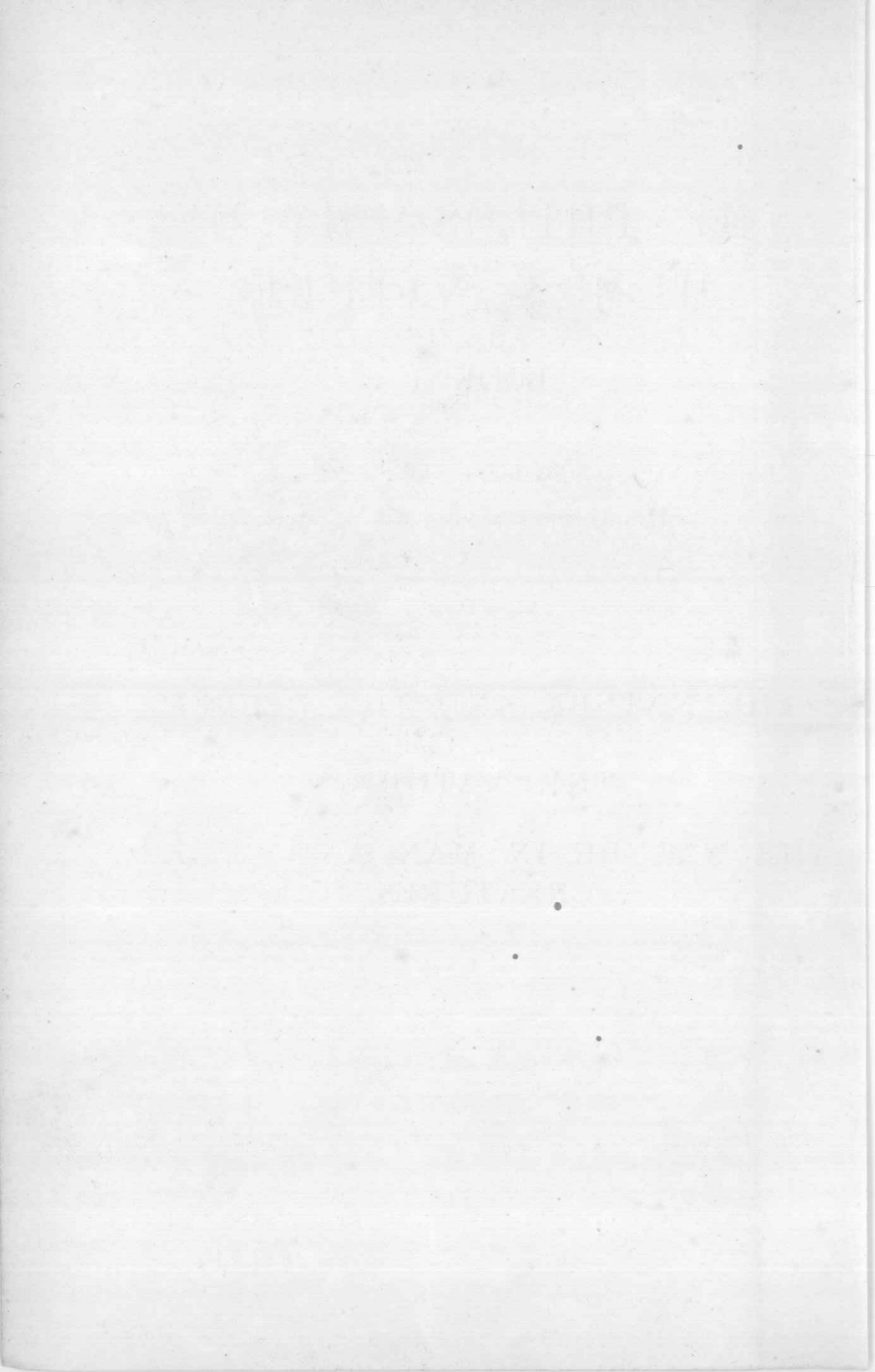
BOOK I

BEING BOOK XLII OF
THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHU HSI

THE NATURE AND THE DECREE

THE NATURE

THE NATURE IN MAN AND OTHER
CREATURES



BOOK I

THE NATURE AND THE DECREE

(ELEVEN SECTIONS FROM THE "CONVERSATIONS".)

1. *Question.* In distinguishing between the four terms HEAVEN and the DECREE, the NATURE and LAW, would it be correct to say that in the term Heaven the reference is to its attribute of self-existence, that in the term Decree the reference is to its all-pervading activity and immanence in the universe, that in the term Nature the reference is to that complete substance by which all things have their life, and that in the term Law the reference is to the fact that every event and thing has each its own rule of existence;¹ but that taking them together, HEAVEN is LAW, the DECREE is the NATURE, and the NATURE is LAW?

Answer. Yes, but in the present day it is maintained that the term Heaven has no reference to the EMPYREAN,² whereas, in my view, this cannot be left out of account.

¹ There is an allusion here to a passage in the Odes; see Legge's *Chinese Classics*, vol. iii, pt. ii, p. 541. See also p. 54 of this volume, where the passage is quoted in full.

² The reference is to the use of this expression in the Classics, where it frequently occurs in the title of the Supreme Ruler. It literally means "azure azure". See *Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School*, chap. xii.

2. Law is Heaven's substance, the Decree is Law in operation, the Nature is what is received by man, and the Feelings are the Nature in operation.

3. The Decree is like letters patent appointing a man to office, the Nature is the duty pertaining to such office, the Feelings¹ are the performance of that duty, and the Mind is the man himself.²

4. The Philosopher remarked to Hou Chih : Yesterday evening it was said that the Nature consists of the processes of creation and transformation. This is not correct; creation and transformation are material processes, while Law, by which creation and transformation proceed, is immaterial.

Fei Ch'ing³ asked : When it is said, "Perfection also is undying,"⁴ is it Law or the Ether that is referred to ?

¹ There are two groups of feelings to which this term is applied ; the one set are known as the 七情 (Seven Feelings), named joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred, and desire (see Giles' Dictionary). The other set are the 四端 (Four Terminals), occurring in Mencius, viz. solicitude, conscientiousness, courtesy (sometimes given as respectfulness), and moral insight. The reference in this paragraph, and generally throughout the work, is to the latter group of Four Terminals, answering to the four cardinal virtues which constitute the Nature. See Legge's *Chinese Classics*, vol. ii, pp. 78-9.

² That is, the Mind corresponds to the man who in the illustration is appointed to office.

³ Surnamed Chu (朱).

⁴ See *Doctrine of the Mean*, p. 285. Legge translates this sentence, "Singleness likewise is unceasing"; Ku Hung Ming translates it, "Moral perfection also never dies." Legge, in his note, gives the meaning of 純 as "fine and pure", "unmixed". The latter word "unmixed," represents the particular kind of purity represented by 純, and, as applied to character, may be expressed by such words as "perfection" and

Answer. It is Law that is referred to, as also in the dictum, "The Decree of Heaven is what is termed the Nature."¹ The Decree of Heaven is like the command of a sovereign; the Nature is the receiving of office from the sovereign; and in the Ether lies, as it were, the difference between those who can, and those who cannot, discharge the duties of their office.²

K'o Hsüeh³ asked: Even if you interpret the dictum, "The Decree of Heaven is what is termed the Nature," as referring only to Law, is it not the case that the moment you speak of the Decree the Ether also is implied? For if there were no Ether how could there be men and things? Moreover, what would there be to receive Law?

"integrity". Cf. *The Conduct of Life*, by Ku Hung Ming, p. 49. Note: The word *yi* (一), rightly translated "singleness" or "sincerity", also occurs in the *Doctrine of the Mean*; see D.M., pp. 271, 275.

¹ The first sentence in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. In Legge's translation the significance of 命 is in part lost. It is not simply that the Nature is conferred by Heaven; it is the all-pervading immanent Will of God individuated in Man. See Legge's *Chinese Classics*, vol. i, p. 247; cf. Ku Hung Ming's *Conduct of Life*, p. 14.

² That is: the difference in the good and evil of men is due, not to differences in the Decree, or the Nature, or Law, but to differences in the material element in their constitution.

³ Chêng K'o Hsüeh (鄭可學), style Tzū Shang (子上), was left an orphan while still young. After taking his degree of Chū Jên (M.A.), he made two ineffectual attempts to obtain that of Chin Shih (D.Lit.). He first met Chu Hsi at a place called Wu I, and thenceforth became one of his most devoted disciples. With a deep sense of his own limited abilities K'o Hsüeh applied himself to hard study, and in the end surpassed the majority of his fellow-pupils in his power to assimilate the Master's teaching. While Chu Hsi was at Chang Chou, K'o Hsüeh was tutor in his family, but treated as an honoured guest rather than as a dependant. In later years the Philosopher entrusted to him some of his most important literary work. After his Master's death K'o Hsüeh became a teacher in a college at Chung Chou (忠州). He was the author of a work entitled 春秋博議.

Answer. Just so, just so ; the fact is, Tzū Ssü¹ spoke in a comprehensive sense. The passage is specially worthy of study.

5. Heaven may be likened to the Emperor ;² the Decree is like his handing to me letters patent ; the Nature is the duty attached to the office which I thus receive, just as the duty attached to the office of district police is to arrest robbers, and the duty of the Comptroller of the Archives is the custody of documents ; the Feelings are like the personal attention given to these duties ; and Capacity³ is like the various forms of effort and achievement. Shao K'ang Chieh, in his preface to the *Chi Jang Chi*,⁴ says : "The Nature is the concrete expression of Moral Order ; the Mind is the encephalon of the Nature ; the body is the habitation of the Mind ; and the external world is the vehicle of the body."

6. Liu asked : Mencius says, "These things are the Nature, but there is Heaven's Decree concerning them," and "These things are the Decree, but there is also the Nature",⁵ thus making the Nature and the Decree two

¹ Tzū Ssü, the grandson of Confucius, was the reputed author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* ; cf. Legge's *Chinese Classics*, vol. i, Prolegomena, pp. 36 ff.

² Lit. the Son of Heaven.

³ For a detailed exposition of the word 才 see the concluding section of Book II, pp. 152 ff.

⁴ See *Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School*, chap. ii. For an interpretation of the sentence quoted see p. 48 of this volume.

⁵ See Mencius, p. 365, for the whole passage from which these quotations are taken. Legge's note, with a quotation from Chu Hsi, is specially interesting. Mencius shows that, though the appetites are the offspring of the Nature, they must be regulated in accordance with the Decree ; and though the cardinal virtues are the Decree, the noble man will develop his