

Confucianism: Joy Along the Way

Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Chair Professor of East Asian & Comparative Philosophy & Religion, City University of Hong Kong*

This essay concerns classical Confucian views concerning joy and the good life and presents a description and analysis of this topic in terms of three primary characteristics: how one sees the world, what one is to do, and how being rightly oriented and active in the world produces a special feeling of joy.¹ We will focus primarily on three thinkers from the classical period in China: Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius) (551-479), Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) (372-289), and Xunzi 荀子 (Hsün Tzu) (314-217) and show that all of them: (1) see the self as intricately and ineluctably interconnected with other people, creatures, and things, (2) describe a set of spiritual exercises designed to cultivate this conception of the self, and (3) maintain this gives rise to a greater sense of care for all the world, a recognition of one's proper place and role within the world, and a profound sense of metaphysical comfort and joy. These characteristic aspects of the early Confucian tradition answer the three questions posed above. By way of conclusion, we will sketch how these themes are developed in the later tradition, focusing in particular on the thought of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529).

Kongzi

Kongzi believed the good life is found by following the Way (*dao* 道), a life in accord with Heaven's Mandate (*tianming* 天命), and that those who attain this ideal, experience a special sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. The pursuit of the Way begins by seeing a life in

¹ For studies that explore this set of issues, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Happiness in Early Chinese Thought," in Ilona Boniwell and Susan David, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, (Oxford University Press, 2013): 263-78 and Richard T. Kim, "Early Confucianism and Contemporary Moral Psychology" *Philosophy Compass* and "Well-Being and Confucianism" in *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*, Guy Fletcher, ed., (both forthcoming, 2016).

accord with the Way as the proper end of human life, because it is decreed by Heaven and offers both oneself and others the most fulfilling way to live. This makes striving to achieve the Way intrinsically satisfying and leads one to undertake a life-long process of cultivating the self that culminates in a spiritually advanced and psychologically satisfying state of being. This set of beliefs is seen in Kongzi's spiritual autobiography:

At fifteen, I set my heart on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty, I no longer had doubts; at fifty, I heard the decree of Heaven; at sixty, my ear was attuned; at seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping what is proper.²

How one sees the world

Kongzi denied that a satisfying and happy life can be found in the kinds of personal pleasures or material well-being that, in his time as well as our own, often are thought to define happiness. Wealth, honour, and material comforts of various kinds are good, but only when they come from a life lived in accord with the Way.³ Following the Dao is necessary for fully and reliably enjoying these other goods and to a certain extent, though not completely, it is sufficient for a happy life.

The master said, "Eating coarse rice and drinking water, leaning upon my bent arm for a pillow—there is joy to be found in such things! Wealth and honour acquired in immoral ways are like floating clouds to me!"⁴

Without being grounded in the Dao, no form of satisfaction or joy proves complete, stable, or reliable. "The master said, 'Those who are not virtuous cannot maintain themselves for

² *Analects* 2.4.

³ See *Analects* 12.5.

⁴ *Analects* 7.15. Cf. 6.9.

very long either in a state of want or joy.”⁵ In contrast, those who embrace the Dao find in it a special reservoir of satisfaction and happiness that sustains them in the worst of times and nourishes, fulfils, and delights them when things go well. Kongzi describes various stages of understanding the Dao, but his goal always is a type of understanding that finds joy in following the Way. “The master said, ‘To understand [the Dao] is not as good as to delight in it; to delight in it is not as good as to find joy in it.’”⁶ The joy of following the Confucian Way arises in light of an understanding of what the good life is and a judgment that one has succeeded in attaining this ideal; true joy is fully experienced only when we wholeheartedly give ourselves over to the Way and lose ourselves in its spontaneous play.⁷ This is what Kongzi experienced when after fifty-five years of study and practice he could “follow my heart desires without overstepping what is proper.”⁸

What is one to do?

Following the Way requires one to engage in a protracted and demanding process of self-cultivation (*xiuyang* 修養) aimed at developing a set of virtuous dispositions that bring one into harmonious relationship with all human beings.⁹ Kongzi used the word “humanity” (*ren* 仁), which later came to refer more often to the specific virtue of benevolence or compassion, to describe the highest and most comprehensive virtue. The character itself consist of two elements: “human being” (*ren* 亻) and “two” (*er* 二), and commentators often have noted that it describes

⁵ *Analects* 4.2.

⁶ *Analects* 6.18. Cf. 6.23.

⁷ On the notion of spontaneity, see Joel Kupperman, “Confucius and the Problem of Naturalness” and “Spontaneity and Education of the Emotions in the *Zhuangzi*,” both in *Learning from Asian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26–35, 79–89 and Philip J. Ivanhoe, “The Values of Spontaneity,” in *Taking Confucian Ethics Seriously: Contemporary Theories and Applications*, Yu Kam-por, Julia Tao, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010): 183-207.

⁸ *Analects* 2.4.

⁹ For a study of Confucian self-cultivation, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Revised Second Edition, 2006) and Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the proper relationship *between two human beings*. In general, the proper relationship between people is modelled on the warm and caring relationships commonly found within a good family. Familial relationships are distinguished by love, generosity, trust, and devotion to role-specific duties—as parent, child, mother, father, sister, brother, etc.—they are not conceived in terms of and do not rely upon impartial justice or coercion. Kongzi’s goal was to extend this general stance and attitude throughout the world—to “all under heaven” (*tian xia* 天下). While the amplitude of one’s care was to diminish as one moved farther from the centre of the family, one was to feel an intimate, *familial* connection to all human beings and a sense that one is playing a vital role in the welfare of all. For the virtuous person, “All within the four seas are brothers,”¹⁰ and this warm relationship to all under heaven offers a special sense of security, meaning, and happiness.

In order to achieve this goal, one must develop oneself to fulfil one’s proper role within the family and larger society and a crucial step in this process is to shape oneself through the reflective and critical practice of ritual (*li* 禮). For Kongzi, ritual includes everything from grand religious ceremonies such as sacrifices to ancestors and other spirits¹¹ to the everyday etiquette governing day-to-day interactions between people.¹² In all cases, rituals present shared normative practices that cultivate and express virtuous dispositions regarded as fundamental to humane social life. Whether it is the decorous and congenial act of bowing to another when meeting or taking leave or the deep gravity and reverence that informs making an offering to Heaven, rituals seek to cultivate and express the virtues that underlie and partly constitute humane social life. They achieve this end by, on the one hand, curbing errant tendencies and, on the other,

¹⁰ *Analects* 12.5.

¹¹ See *Analects* 3.11.

¹² See *Analects* 2.8.

engendering more humane attitudes and expectations. These dual functions are evident in the way ritual governs competition, something very much a part of modern life as well,¹³

The master said, “Cultivated individuals never contend. [Perhaps someone will say] they must contend when they compete in ritual archery contests. On such occasions, though, they salute and defer [to the other competitors] when they take up their position and raise a glass to toast them, when they step down. In so contending, they remain cultivated individuals.”¹⁴

Here and in all cases, ritual helps us overcome tendencies toward self-centeredness and cultivate virtuous dispositions, while providing us with a shared social language of behaviours, norms, and expectations that make humane life possible and efficacious. In order to achieve this happy and harmonious state, people have to submit themselves to a prolonged and demanding process in which individual needs and preferences are subordinated, reoriented, and shaped by the demands of ritual. As Kongzi put it, “To overcome the self and comply with ritual is to be humane.”¹⁵

How being rightly oriented and active in the world produces a special feeling of joy

Kongzi’s joy is a distinctive emotional state that arises when we accord with something beyond ourselves; when we fit ourselves into larger patterns and processes and allow ourselves to be carried along and guided by this grander and more meaningful scheme. This sense of joy is a core feature of early Chinese conceptions of spontaneity, which is described in two primary

¹³ For a discussion of this and other examples of ritual, with an eye to how such social behaviours remain an important constituent of modern life, see my *Confucian Reflections: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2013).

¹⁴ *Analects* 3.7.

¹⁵ *Analects* 12.1.

ways in early writings.¹⁶ Chinese Confucians advocate “cultivated spontaneity,” which in general concerns certain activities that arise out of a second, acquired nature. In our contemporary world, the spontaneous play of accomplished athletes, musicians, or dancers offer clear examples of this ideal; in Kongzi’s society, masters of ritual and music served as primary examples.

For Kongzi, satisfaction and joy in life is the natural consequence of living well, a sense that one is properly aligned with the larger patterns and processes of the Way, a normative scheme much grander and more meaningful than anything an individual person could possibly achieve on her or his own. Being in accord with the Dao, moving along in harmony with the Way, redirects one’s attention and reshapes one’s sense of self. One is freed from a broad range of common concerns, fears, and anxieties and instead experiences a unique sense of comfort, ease, security, and peace, the feeling that one is properly oriented, situated, and playing one’s Heavenly decreed role in the world.

Mengzi

Mengzi is famous for arguing that the nature of human beings is good (*xingshan* 性善) by which he meant not that they are born good but that they are born with inclinations for the good and the capacity to develop these inclinations into virtues.¹⁷ Mengzi thought that each and every human being is born with “Four Sprouts” (*siduan* 四端) of virtue: nascent but active dispositions that when developed lead to the virtues of benevolence, propriety, righteousness, and wisdom. He proposed a variety of different arguments to prove the existence of these sprouts including thought experiments, give-away actions, testimonials, and appeals to intuition. While Mengzi believed there was ample evidence to support his claim he also held this conviction as a matter of

¹⁶ On spontaneity, see footnote #7 above.

¹⁷ For an account of these aspects of Mengzi’s philosophy, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Revised Second Edition, 2002) and Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Mencius’ Moral Philosophy*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002).

faith in the grand scheme of a benevolent Heaven (*tian* 天), an active, aware, and intelligent entity that had a plan for the world and for human beings in particular and that from time to time acted in the world to nudge that plan toward its fruition.¹⁸

How one sees the world

Like Kongzi, Mengzi emphasized the crucial role of virtue in the quest for a satisfying and happy life. While acknowledging that more mundane, material goods are part of a good life, Mengzi insisted that one could never fully find satisfaction or joy in such things unless they were experienced as parts of a moral life. Such claims entailed both that the moral life offered the only way to enjoy a deeper and more profound sense of satisfaction and joy but also that such a life is the only way to stable and sustainable satisfaction and joy. Mengzi often made such points in conversation with the rulers of his time; for example, he sought to persuade King Hui of Liang that he would enjoy his park more fully and securely if he shared it with his people,

Mengzi had an audience with King Hui of Liang. The king stood overlooking a pond and surveying the geese and deer below asked,

“Do the morally good also find joy in such things?”

Mengzi replied, “Only those who are morally good find joy in such things. Those who are not good can’t enjoy such things, even if they possess them...Ancient [rulers] shared their joy with their people and thereby were able to find joy.”¹⁹

¹⁸ For the role of Heaven in early Chinese thought, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 6.3 (2007): 211-20, Erin M. Cline, “Religious Thought and Practice in the *Analects*” in *Dao Companion to Chinese Philosophy* ed. Amy Olberding (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 259-291, and Michael Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divination in Early China*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).

¹⁹ *Mengzi* 1A2.

Mengzi emphasized the need to extend and fill out one's moral sprouts in order to understand and complete one's nature. Given that human nature naturally inclines us to care for other human beings, the process he described leads one to care more extensively and fully for all the people of the world. Mengzi understood the character 仁 primarily as the particular virtue of "benevolence" or "compassion" rather than the broader notion of "humanity" and saw human nature as more highly sensitive to the suffering of non-human animals as well. In a famous exchange with King Xuan of Qi, he used the king's spontaneous compassion for an ox being led to slaughter as evidence that the king indeed had the sprout that serves as the basis for the virtue of benevolence and therefore possessed the moral resources needed to become a true king. As one extends and develops one's nature, which at its core consists of the inclinations of one's moral sprouts, one develops a more clear, strong, and lively sense of one's connection to the world and thereby understands the place and role Heaven has destined for humanity.

Those who fully develop their heart-minds understand their nature. Those who understand their nature, understand Heaven.

To preserve one's heart-mind and nurture one's nature is the way to serve Heaven."²⁰

Those who reflect upon their own heart-minds will come to understand and appreciate, through their everyday encounters with and responses to other people, creatures, and things, how they are morally interconnected with the world. Since Heaven has created human beings to be oriented and inclined to care for the world, those who recognize and take up the challenge of fully developing their natures will come to see that they "flow in the same stream as Heaven and earth."²¹ Given Mengzi's view of human nature and the role it can play in driving moral

²⁰ *Mengzi* 7A1.

²¹ *Mengzi* 7A13.

cultivation, he at least implied not only that each and every human being had the potential for moral self-improvement but also that they had greater autonomy and responsibility to undertake such efforts. Traditional rituals, norms, and the study of classical texts played a larger and more fundamental role in Kongzi's conception of moral cultivation. While Mengzi did not dispense with these, he clearly taught that those who develop a greater awareness and attentiveness to the movements of their own heart-minds are able to advance along the Way; indeed, it is clear that without such personal watchfulness and self-scrutiny one could not advance. Mengzi also developed a different conception of the role of teachers. Kongzi had instructed his disciples in the practice of ritual and guided them in the course of their personal and professional lives, but Mengzi served more as a spiritual coach to those who sought his advice. His aim was to inspire them through a course of moral-psychological therapy; he sought to "awaken" them and the world to the true nature of their moral heart-minds.

What is one to do?

Like Kongzi, Mengzi advocated the need to take up and pursue a concerted program of self-cultivation, but he described a course of learning that while compatible with Kongzi's earlier teachings was distinctive and new. Kongzi never offered a clear and precise theory of human nature saying only, "By nature [people] are close to one another; by practice they grow far apart from one another."²² Nevertheless, he strongly implied that human nature, while open to cultivation, was also to some degree resistant to taking on fully moral form: as noted earlier, one had to "*overcome* the self and comply with ritual" in order to become humane. Kongzi's spiritual autobiography implies that successful self-cultivation is a protracted and difficult undertaking; it took fifty-five years before he could "follow my heart desires without overstepping what is proper." In contrast, Mengzi explicitly emphasized the goodness of human nature and described

²² *Analects* 17.2.

the human inclination toward goodness as akin to the way “water flows downward.”²³ His central metaphor for self-cultivation is agriculture, which makes clear the need for constant attention and effort but implies that moral development is as natural to human beings as the growth of properly tended plants.

The four sprouts are the most distinctive features of human nature,²⁴ and they play a key role in the development of our character and the realization of Heaven’s Mandate. The first and most vital step in the process of cultivating the self is to become aware of one’s Heavenly endowment and attend to and focus attention on the responses of these nascent moral inclinations. Mengzi thought most people either did not recognize or failed to heed the promptings of their natural sprouts of goodness, because they were distracted or seduced by more powerful and competing desires. One of his greatest concerns was to get people to recognize that under the right conditions people can discover their own pre-reflective inclinations to care for the wellbeing of other people and even other creatures.²⁵

The circumstances of one’s life can either inhibit or encourage the recognition and cultivation of one’s moral sprouts, and Mengzi is particularly concerned with how strained material conditions make it difficult for people to cultivate nascent moral inclinations, “most people will not maintain a constant heart if they lack a constant means of support;”²⁶ he insists that one of the primary duties of a ruler is to provide the people with basic material necessities. Good rulers also ensure that their people are properly educated, and they lead them by example, offering inspiring paradigms for how to live well. Unfortunately, many lack a proper supportive environment—they lack either the material conditions or the right influences to sustain and

²³ *Mengzi* 6A2.

²⁴ *Mengzi* 6A15.

²⁵ *Mengzi* 2A6.

²⁶ *Mengzi* 3A3. Cf. 6A7-9.

nurture their moral sprouts—or suffer from positively bad influences, “even the most easily grown thing in the world will not grow if it is given one day of warmth and ten days of cold.”²⁷ Repeated and prolonged exposure to improper influences and bad practices can lead a person to appear to be wholly devoid of moral inclinations; such people can have their moral sprouts shorn away and beaten down like the denuded and barren slopes of Ox Mountain.²⁸

People who are able to avoid the worst types of environments and receive at least some measure of nourishment and guidance can recognize the workings of their moral sprouts and see that in fact they are at times motivated to undertake moral action. If they reflect upon these moments, they will discover a special feeling of joy in moral action and even experience a mild sense of such joy simply contemplating such action, done by themselves or others. By following our moral sprouts, we begin to follow the Way; we act in accord with our Heavenly endowed nature and gradually realize Heaven’s Mandate. Through such practice, moral action becomes ever more natural and easy to perform and becomes the spontaneous expression of one’s mature, Heavenly endowed nature

The core of benevolence is serving one’s parents. The core of righteousness is obeying one’s elder brother. The core of wisdom is to understand these two and not depart from them. The core of ritual is to regulate and embellish them. The core of music is to take joy in them. When one takes joy [in them, they] begin to grow, and when they begin to grow they cannot be stopped. When they

²⁷ *Mengzi* 6A9.

²⁸ *Mengzi* 6A8.

cannot be stopped, without realizing it, one's feet begin to step in time and one's hands begin to dance them out."²⁹

How being rightly oriented and active in the world produces a special feeling of joy

Satisfaction and joy play a more extensive, integral, and critical role in Mengzi's ethical philosophy than any other figure in the early Confucian pantheon. While Kongzi taught that the entire process of learning was a source of joy and led one to the special satisfaction and happiness of a life in accord with the Way, Mengzi thought that one experiences a special sense of satisfaction and joy whenever one reflects upon a good action done by oneself or undertaken by another. For Mengzi, the joy that arises from reflecting on good action not only marks the moral Way but facilitates self-cultivation by offering positive reinforcement to the effort to follow the moral path. The spontaneous joy of moral action motivates us to undertake efforts to be good. Successfully attaining the Way is a source of profound satisfaction and joy. Those who turn within and find they are sincere in their efforts to fully develop their heart-minds and realize their nature enjoy the greatest satisfaction and joy, "There is no greater joy than to reflect upon oneself and discover that one is sincere..."³⁰

Xunzi

Xunzi disagreed with Mengzi about the character of human nature,³¹ arguing that human nature is originally, though not irrevocably, bad. He did not hold that human beings knowingly act badly or that they enjoy doing what is bad but that they are born ignorant of what the good is

²⁹ *Mengzi* 4A27. Similar ideas are found in other texts of the period. See for example the "Great Preface" (*Daxu* 大序) to the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) or the closing lines of the "Record of Music" (*Yueji* 樂記) chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), which says, "Music is joy. Superior people take joy in attaining the Way; petty people take joy in attaining what they desire. If one regulates desires with the Way there will joy without disorder. If one allows desires to disrupt the Way, there will be confusion without joy."

³⁰ *Mengzi* 7A4.

³¹ For excellent introductions to Xunzi's philosophy, see T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature and Agency in the Xunzi*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000) and Justin Tiwald and T.C. Kline, III, eds., *Ritual and Religion in the Xunzi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

and do not appreciate all that it can do for themselves and others. Originally, our nature leads us to pursue the low hanging fruit of crude desires, which brings us into conflict with other people, creatures, and things and undermines our prospects for even the most mundane forms of happiness. Unreflectively seeking what we naturally desire leads us farther and farther away from true happiness and into ever greater conflict, frustration, and anxiety. Fortunately, though, we are not stuck in this sad state, because we can avail ourselves of the insights and teachings of a series of gifted sages who saw more clearly than most the advantages and joys of a higher form of life. They saw, initially, how cooperation enables one to avoid harm and get more of what one desires; in time this led them to value cooperation not just instrumentally but for the cascading aggregate good that it brings not only to individuals but communities as well. Living in the more orderly and peaceful societies that such insights enabled, other sages saw farther, recognizing that we can extend and enhance our emotional repertoire; in addition to fulfilling a desire for sex, reproduction, and companionship, we can come to fashion, share, and enjoy deep and committed relationships of love. Culture provides us with new sources of enjoyment, just as high cuisine takes us far beyond the satisfaction of hunger, savouring a brilliant move in chess opens a new sense of appreciation in competition, and enjoying great works of art enhances the conception and experience of our capacity to see and appreciate colour, figure, and form.

How one sees the world

Kongzi sought to locate people securely within a harmonious social order and believed that both the effort to attain one's proper place within this larger, humane and meaningful corporate life and the sense of contributing to and being part of it generates a unique and profound sense of satisfaction and joy. Herbert Fingarette³² insightfully described Kongzi's Way as a vision of "the secular as sacred," and he was right to claim that for Kongzi the social order

³² Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998).

was imbued with a sense of the sacred; the self-cultivation that enables one to take one's proper place within it was a spiritual exercise. Fingarette was also right to focus on the central role of ritual in Kongzi's ethical philosophy. While, as noted earlier, he did not offer an explicit theory about the quality of human nature, Kongzi clearly believed that human beings had to submit to and shape themselves through ritual in order to fit themselves into the grand scheme of the Way, "To overcome the self and comply with ritual is to be humane."

Mengzi added something new and striking to Kongzi's original vision when he argued that human nature is good, and his claim exerted tremendous influence over the course of the Confucian tradition, especially from the latter half of the Tang dynasty (619-907). Mengzi's four sprouts are nascent moral inclinations that help to orient and guide human beings along the moral way; they reveal our connections with and tendency to care for other people, creatures, and things. His theory claims that human beings possess a natural emotional sense of being connected to and responsible for the world; moreover, he contended that acting on this sense or even simply seeing it in action generated a profound sense of satisfaction and joy that both identified such action as moral and reinforced the development of such feelings. We find satisfaction and happiness when we develop our caring nature and take our proper place between Heaven and earth.

Xunzi rejected Mengzi's theory of human nature and with it his claim that innate moral feelings can lead us along the Way and toward a more satisfying and happy life. We are not naturally caring or other-directed; quite the contrary, we are rather self-centred and short-sighted. Xunzi saw himself as defending Kongzi's earlier vision according to which human nature needed to be "chiselled, cut, filed, and polished" in order to attain a full and beautiful form. Uncultivated human nature was a jumble of raw emotions that if left on its own would lead to contention,

strife, poverty, and misery; he quoted Emperor Shun with approval, “People’s inborn dispositions are *most* unlovely!”³³ Nevertheless, Xunzi believed that with enough effort of the right sort anyone could become a sage. The right effort requires a prolonged and arduous course of study, practice, and reflection, but it leads to an even grander and more comprehensive vision of oneness between the self and the world than we saw in either Kongzi or Mengzi. Influenced by Daoist texts like the *Zhuangzi*, Xunzi advocated the idea that the path of learning leads to a unity between human beings and all other people, creatures, and things; it offers us the way to form a “third partner to Heaven and earth.”³⁴

Heaven and Earth are the beginning of life. Rites and social norms are the beginning of order. The gentleman is the beginning of rites and social norms...Heaven and Earth give birth to the gentleman and the gentleman brings order to Heaven and Earth. The gentleman is a third partner to Heaven and Earth, a supervisor for the myriad things, and mother and father to the people. If there were no gentleman, then Heaven and Earth would not be properly ordered, and rites and social norms would be without a unifying guide.³⁵

Xunzi went to great lengths to describe how the Way connects people harmoniously with all people, creatures, and things and thereby produces a happy symmetry between the needs, desires, and most distinctive capacities of human beings and the rest of the natural world.³⁶ His vision stretches far beyond the primarily society-based view of Kongzi and even beyond the

³³ Hutton (2014): 255.

³⁴ Hutton (2014): 75.

³⁵ Hutton (2014): 75. I have modified Hutton’s translation very slightly, adding “social norms” for his transliteration *yi*.

³⁶ I describe this grand vision in “A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi’s Ethical Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 59.2, (1991): 309-22.

sensibility-based view of Mengzi; it includes all the phenomena and processes of the universe. Everything is governed by ritual and integrated into a grand normative order that not only makes perfect sense but elicits profound feelings of awe and reverence.³⁷

By ritual, Heaven and Earth harmoniously combine;
By ritual, the sun and the moon radiantly shine;
By ritual, the four seasons in progression arise;
By ritual, the stars move orderly across the skies;
By ritual, the great rivers through their courses flow;
By ritual, the myriad things all thrive and grow;
By ritual, for love and hate proper measure is made;
By ritual, on joy and anger fit limits are laid;
By ritual, compliant subordinates are created;
By ritual, enlightened leaders are generated;
With ritual, all things can change but none brings chaos;
But deviate from ritual, and you face only loss.³⁸

What is one to do?

Given that people originally begin life in a state of moral oblivion, unlike and in explicit opposition to Mengzi, Xunzi did not encourage us to identify and encourage any of our innate inclinations. We are not to draw out and develop inner moral sensibilities and tendencies,

³⁷ Xunzi insists that coming to understand and appreciate the majesty of the Way requires one to pass through a prolonged and difficult process of learning in which intellect takes the leads. In stark contrast to Mengzi, who urges us to be guided by our *feelings* of concern, Xunzi denies that our untutored emotions provide *any* reliable guide to the Way. We are first and foremost *to understand* and such understanding generates the proper feelings of awe and concern for the world. Here we can see the earliest expression of a difference that would work itself out in very different ways in the two major schools of neo-Confucianism: the Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang schools. For a study that explores these alternative visions of the Way, see my *Three Streams: Confucian Reflections on Learning and the Moral Heart-Mind in China, Korea, and Japan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, October 2016).

³⁸ Hutton (2014): 204-5.

for we do not have such things; rather, we are to take in and internalize principles, norms, and ideals from outside the self and reorient and reshape our original, uncultivated nature in order to accord with these.³⁹ Rather than following our nature, the aim is to take on a second, better nature. For Xunzi, self-cultivation is largely a humanly designed, explicitly artificial regimen of shaping, sharpening, and refinement.⁴⁰ We chisel, cut, file, and polish our characters out of a rough and unruly original nature, which Xunzi likened to an unshaped hunk of metal, a lump of clay, or crooked timber. He invoked lines from the *Book of Odes*, (*Shijing* 詩經), which Kongzi himself had quoted earlier, as an illustration of the process of self-cultivation,⁴¹ “As we cut and chisel, as we file and polish.” Along with a rich assortment of related craft metaphors and analogies, these lines clearly capture and express Xunzi’s general views about human nature and the process of self-cultivation.⁴² The contrived nature of morality is evident in passages such as the following:

In every case, ritual and social norms are produced from the deliberate effort of the sage; they are not produced from people’s nature. Thus, when the potter mixes up clay and makes vessels, the vessels are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people’s nature. Thus,

³⁹ In other work, I have described Mengzi’s approach as a “developmental model” for self-cultivation and Xunzi’s as a “reformation model.” For an explanation of these models and their applicability to early Confucian thought, see my *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*.

⁴⁰ While not as highly regarded within the later Confucian orthodoxy as Mengzi, Xunzi is the most philosophically sophisticated Confucian of the classical period and had tremendous influence on later Chinese and East Asian philosophy. For introductions to his thought, see, Paul Goldin, *Rituals of the Way*, (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Press, 1999), Eric L. Hutton, *Virtue and Reason in Xunzi*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), and T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature and Agency in the Xunzi*. For an excellent comparison of their views and those of two important Western philosophers, see Eric Schwitzgebel, “Human Nature and Moral Development in Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 24, (2007): 147-168.

⁴¹ See chapter 27, the “Great Compendium” (*Dalu* 大略), of the *Xunzi*. For the quotation in the *Analects* see *Analects* 1.15.

⁴² For a more thorough and detailed discussion of these different expressions of the Confucian vision, see *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*.

when the craftsman carves wood and makes utensils, the utensils are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature. The sage accumulates reflections and thoughts and practices deliberate efforts and reasoned activities in order to produce ritual and social norms and in order to establish proper models and measures. So, ritual and social norms and proper models and measures are produced from the deliberate efforts of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature.⁴³

Given Xunzi's very different views about human nature, the origin of morality, and the process of self-cultivation, he emphasized the importance of learning—which for him included both study of the classics and ritual practice—much more than Mengzi. This is another manifestation of his broadly “outside-in” approach, aimed at reshaping the self. As a result, perseverance is the most important trait a student must bring to the task of self-cultivation.

The earthworm does not have sharp teeth and claws, nor does it have strong bones and muscles. Yet, it eats of the earth above, and it drinks from the Yellow Springs below, because it acts with single-mindedness. In contrast, the crab has six legs and two pincers. Yet were it not for the abandoned holes of water snakes and eels, it would have no place to lodge, because it is frenetic-minded.⁴⁴

⁴³ Eric L. Hutton, tr., *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014): 250. I have modified Hutton's translation very slightly, adding “social norms” for his transliteration *yi* in this passage.

⁴⁴ Hutton (2014): 4.

Moreover, since students cannot rely upon any innate moral sense to guide them along the Way or help them interpret and understand the teachings of former sages, the right kind of teacher, who serves as a model as well as a source of explicit instruction, is absolutely essential.

Rituals and music provide proper models but give no precepts. The *Odes* and *Documents* contain ancient stories but no explanation of their present application. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is terse and cannot be quickly understood. However, if you imitate the right person in his practice of the precepts of the gentleman, then you will come to honor these things for their comprehensiveness, and see them as encompassing the whole world. Thus, in learning, nothing is more expedient than to draw near to the right person.⁴⁵

How being rightly oriented and active in the world produces a special feeling of joy

Since Xunzi believes that we are bad by nature, he describes self-cultivation as a process of *reformation* and not—as Mengzi had—as one of *development*. Reliable and substantial moral tendencies are not part of human nature. We must craft our self-centred and short-sighted original nature into a finer second nature, and we do this through a long and difficult process of learning, practice, and habituation. While Mengzi urges us to be good and patient farmers and to protect and nurture our moral sprouts, Xunzi counsels us to become master craftsmen of character; we need to exercise deliberate effort to reorient and reform our natural tendencies, to enlist and recruit them into the service of a moral life, and to refine and enhance our original nature, transforming it from something base into something elevated and beautiful.

⁴⁵ Hutton (2014): 6.

A person who successfully cultivates his nature will delight in fulfilling his desires but the connection between his original desires and his enculturated delight will be convoluted and often difficult to discern for his natural desires have been reshaped, redirected, and refined, integrated with other needs, connected with newly formed tastes and aims, and joined to a much more complex and grand project: becoming a “third partner to Heaven and Earth.” Human fulfilment and happiness is not found in the direct and maximal satisfaction of basic human desires but in a process of transformation that connects the self and its wellbeing with other people, creatures, and things. This more expansive view of the self and the happy symmetry that the self can attain with the rest of the world is the key to understanding both Xunzi’s conception of the good life and the distinctive sense of joy that is experienced by those who, in the earlier words of Kongzi “overcome the self and comply with propriety.”⁴⁶ For Mengzi, this goal is realized by developing and extending the innate moral dispositions of the Four Sprouts until they reach to and morally inform all within the four seas, but for Xunzi it is attained by reforming and embellishing a crude and recalcitrant first nature into a broadly expansive and cultured second nature that forms a happy harmony with all people, creatures, and things –with all of Heaven and Earth. This is the source of the highest forms of satisfaction and joy; as Xunzi declares, “To be in accordance with what is proper for one’s kind is called happiness.”⁴⁷

The Later Confucian Tradition

We have explored how the founding figures of the Confucian tradition—Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi—each saw the self as in different ways intricately and ineluctably interconnected with other people, creatures, and things, described a set of spiritual exercises designed to reinforce such a conception of the self, and taught that this view of self and world gives rise to greater care

⁴⁶ *Analects* 12.1.

⁴⁷ Hutton (2014): 176.

for all things, a recognition of one's proper place and role within the world, and a profound sense of metaphysical comfort and joy. These aspects of early Confucian philosophy offer the Confucian answer to the three questions with which we began: how does one see the world, what is one to do, and how does being rightly oriented and active in the world produce a special feeling of joy? The general perspective and scheme we find in early Confucianism continued to define the core features of the tradition throughout its long and variegated history. In the concluding section of this chapter, we focus on how these ideas and themes were developed in neo-Confucianism: roughly, the Confucian tradition from the late Tang dynasty (618-907) through the end of the Qing (1644-1912). We will begin with neo-Confucian views about the self and the world, move on to their views on self-cultivation, and conclude with their claims about the source and nature of joy, drawing upon the writings of several seminal neo-Confucians but focusing primarily on those of Wang Yangming.

How one sees the world

Over time and under the influence of Daoist and Buddhist philosophy the classical vision that we have endeavoured to describe and analyse above took on dramatically new forms. Influenced and inspired by as well as reacting to Daoist and Buddhist metaphysical beliefs and practices, neo-Confucians embraced more robust and dramatic metaphysical theories about our connection with other people, creatures, and things, a view of oneness or a kind of identity between self and world.⁴⁸ Rather than seeing the world as interconnected through a complex web of relationships, they believed each and every thing in the world contained within itself all the patterns and principles (*li* 理) in the universe. This idea, which we will refer to as “all in each,”

⁴⁸ For these ideas, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Senses and Values of Oneness,” in Brian Bruya, ed., *The Philosophical Challenge from China*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015): 231-51, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Owen Flanagan, Victoria Harrison, Eric Schwitzgebel, and Hagop Sarkissian, eds., *Oneness in Philosophy, Religion, and Psychology*, (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming, 2017), and Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Oneness: Eastern Conceptions of Virtue, Happiness, and How We Are All Connected*, (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2017).

came most directly from certain teachings within Huayan 華嚴 Buddhism. In neo-Confucian terms, each thing contains within a shared original nature (*ben xing* 本性), which consists in all the patterns and principles of the world. Individual things and types of things are what they are not because of a difference in their original natures or stock of patterns and principles but because their endowment of physical *qi* only allows certain patterns and principles to manifest themselves. Humans are unique among creatures because the patterns and principles of their heart-minds provide them with access to all the patterns and principles in the universe. All they need to do is to refine the *qi* that blocks the *li* within to the point where the patterns and principles of their heart-minds can shine forth and illuminate the things they encounter or contemplate, resulting in proper understanding, appreciation, and response.

Given this general picture, neo-Confucians have not only a metaphysically robust sense of oneness but also a new and strong justification for universal care: our shared patterns and principles supply a deep connection with other people, creatures, and things.⁴⁹ Along with this came an explanation for *why* people are emotionally affected not only by the suffering of other people, but by the suffering of non-human animals, the harming of plants, and even the wanton destruction of inanimate objects. Such phenomena are familiar to all human beings, though the explanation for *why* people tend to feel this way is not at all obvious or straightforward. Neo-Confucians had a ready explanation. For example, Zhou Dunyi (1017-73) famously refused to cut the grass growing in front of his window saying, “I regard it in the same way as I regard myself.” Zhang Zai (1020-77) expressed the same sentiment when he heard the braying of a

⁴⁹ Neo-Confucian thinkers described a lack of feeling for the welfare of people, creatures, and things as being “numb” (*buren* 不仁) to the world. This allowed them to play on the term *buren* which, in their age, had the ethical sense of “lacking benevolence” and the medical sense of “paralysis.” One who was “unfeeling” toward the things of the world was like a person with a paralyzed limb. In both cases, they failed to see or feel an underlying connection between themselves and something else. For a thorough discussion of this idea, see Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, pp. 27-9 and “Virtue Ethics and the Confucian Tradition,” in Stephen C. Angle and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013): 28-46.

donkey.⁵⁰ Like other neo-Confucians, these men felt a profound sense of oneness not only with other human beings but with the entire universe. The self was in some deep sense not only connected or intermingled with other people, creatures, and things but coextensive with the universe.⁵¹

Wang Yangming took up this set of beliefs and general point of view giving special emphasis to the metaphor of “being one body with heaven, earth, and the myriad creatures” (*tian di wan wu wei yi ti* 天地萬物為一體). Though this image was not original with Wang, he deployed it in new and powerful ways, urging us to feel the connection between ourselves and the rest of the world in the way we feel the connection among the various parts of our bodies.⁵²

Great people regard Heaven, earth, and the myriad creatures as their own bodies. They look upon the world as one family and China as one person within it. Those who, because of the space between their own bodies and other physical forms, regard themselves as separate from [Heaven, earth, and the myriad creatures] are petty persons. The ability great people have to form one body with Heaven, earth, and the myriad creatures is not something they intentionally strive to do; the benevolence of their heart-minds is originally like this. How could it be that only the heart-minds of great people are one with Heaven,

⁵⁰ Both of these stories are recorded in the same passage in chapter three of *Extant Works of the Cheng [Brothers] from Henan* (*Henan Cheng shi yi shu* 河南程氏遺書), (Taipei Shi: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan 1978).

⁵¹ One of the most influential and moving expressions of this ideal is Zhang Zai’s “Western Inscription” (*Ximing* 西銘). See the *Complete Works of Master Zhang* (*Zhangzi quan shu* 張子全書) in *Si ku quan shu* 四庫全書, Volume 697, (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1987): 79-82 (1.1b-7a).

⁵² The somatic aspects of many forms of empathy, both cognitive and affective, offers a way one might reinterpret Wang’s claims about being “one body,” at least with other sentient creatures. For this idea, see Jeanne C. Watson and Leslie S. Greenberg, “Empathic Resonance” in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* edited by Jean Decety and William Ickes, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press): 129.

earth, and the myriad creatures? Even the heart-minds of petty people are like this. It is only the way in which such people look at things that makes them petty. This is why, when they see a child [about to] fall into a well, they cannot avoid having a sense of alarm and concern for the child.⁵³ This is because their benevolence forms one body with the child. Someone might object that this response is because the child belongs to the same species. But when they hear the anguished cries or see the frightened appearance of birds or beasts, they cannot avoid a sense of being unable to bear it.⁵⁴ This is because their benevolence forms one body with birds and beasts. Someone might object that this response is because birds and beasts are sentient creatures. But when they see grass or trees uprooted and torn apart, they cannot avoid feeling a sense of sympathy and distress. This is because their benevolence forms one body with grass and trees. Someone might object that this response is because grass and trees have life and vitality. But when they see tiles and stones broken and destroyed, they cannot avoid feeling a sense of concern and regret. This is because their benevolence forms one body with tiles and stones.⁵⁵

⁵³ Wang here is paraphrasing the example of the child and well from *Mengzi* 2A6.

⁵⁴ *Mengzi* 1A7 offers the example of King Xuan being “unable to bear” the anguished cries and frightened appearance of an ox being led to slaughter and goes on to infer a general aversion to seeing any animal suffer.

⁵⁵ See Philip J. Ivanhoe, tr., *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2009): 160-2.

The metaphor of forming one body with Heaven and Earth shows that neo-Confucians don't lose themselves in or wholly merge the self with the world; they maintain the hierarchy of concern characteristic of Confucians in every age. While we are one with every aspect of the universe, there is a hierarchy of concern, a core and periphery to the universal self, modelled on the natural hierarchy among the parts of our physical bodies.⁵⁶ From the perspective of principles, our oneness with the world is complete and universal; from the perspective of our physical embodiment, this unity gets manifested in terms of being “one body” with the world.

What is one to do?

Because human beings are embodied creatures, the various types of *qi* that constitute our physical forms interfere with the principles of our heart-minds and lead us to mistakenly see ourselves as separated and cut off from the myriad principles that inform, structure, and give meaning to the rest of the world. Our physical bodies—composed of *qi*—incline us to be self-centred, which generates selfish desires; these mislead us into acting badly, thereby reinforcing and intensifying our sense of isolation and alienation. In order to overcome these pernicious tendencies, we must learn to “rectify our heart-minds” by “extending pure knowing”—the patterns and principles with which we are endowed—as we interact with and act in the world each day.

Knowing is the original state of the heart- mind. The heart-mind naturally is able to know. When it sees one's parents, it naturally knows to be filial. When it sees one's elder brother, it naturally

⁵⁶ In comments on an earlier draft, David W. Tien pointed out to me that the hierarchy described here, which is typical among neo-Confucians, is more subjective in nature: positions in the hierarchy are relative to their relationship to the subject. One also finds within traditional Chinese thought a more objective hierarchy in which the sage-king occupies a more prominent position than the commoner. Both of these are distinct from a Christian hierarchy, laid out in 1 Corinthians 12:12-28, which also is illustrated by using the metaphor of the body and its various parts. In the biblical example, the positions are relative to an objective hierarchy set by God. These constitute three different senses of “hierarchy within oneness.”

knows to be respectful. When it sees a child [about to] fall into a well, it naturally knows the feeling of compassion.⁵⁷ This is none other than pure knowing. There is no need to seek for such [knowledge] outside [the heart-mind].⁵⁸

Rather than thinking about ethics, we are to think ethically about everything we do. Mengzi described an agriculturally-inspired *development model* of self-cultivation, Kongzi and Xunzi advocated a *reformation model*, but Wang relied upon a *discovery model*.⁵⁹ One was to cultivate a state of heightened awareness and constant vigilance in which one surveys and assesses each and every thought that arises within one's heart-mind, as a direct or indirect response to the world as one encounters it, in order to discover the patterns and principles that are one's original nature. Wang's model relies upon a variety of distinctive metaphors such as the mind as a clean mirror hidden beneath dust, as the sun obscured but ever shining behind clouds, or, as in the passage above, the mind is described in terms of its innate ability to see; its "pure knowing" presented as a type of moral sapience akin to vision. Mengzi counselled a gradual, steady, course of care, nurture, and attention, Kongzi and Xunzi taught we must follow a protracted and difficult path of refocusing, reshaping, and refining our raw nature, but Wang sought to inspire his students to maintain an intense attentiveness—a Confucian form of Buddhist mindfulness—to the movements and responses of their own heart-minds. The goal was to be ever-alert and vigilant, to search out and eradicate any taint of self-centeredness in order to purify one's *qi* and allow the myriad principles of the original heart-mind to shine forth and illuminate the Way.

⁵⁷ Referring to *Mengzi* 2A6.

⁵⁸ *Readings from the Lu-Wang School*, 147.

⁵⁹ For these models, see footnote #40 above. We could say that Kongzi had a formation rather than a reformation model since he tended to think human nature was largely unformed and not particularly resistant to shaping.

This effort must be carried out continuously. Like eradicating robbers and thieves, one must resolve to wipe them out completely. In idle moments, one must search out and discover each and every selfish thought for sex, wealth, fame and the rest. One must resolve to pluck out and cast away the root of the sickness, so that it can never arise again. Only then may one begin to feel at ease. One must, at all times, be like a cat catching mice—with eyes intently watching and ears intently listening. As soon as a single [selfish] thought begins to stir, one must conquer it and cast it out. Act as if you were cutting a nail in two or slicing through iron. Do not indulge or accommodate it in any way. Do not harbour it, and do not allow it to escape.⁶⁰

Once we begin to cultivate the required awareness and attentiveness, our pure knowing will start to inform and guide us. Pure knowing has the power to melt away and loosen the grip of selfish desires and light our path along the Way. Throughout this process, the underlying unity between the self and all things in the world both guides and motivates us to continue the process of self-cultivation. As we succeed in freeing pure knowing from the grip of self-centeredness and interfering *qi*, we feel a more extensive and profound sense of oneness with all things.⁶¹ For Wang, empathic concern is not simply a feature of human psychology; it is the practical result of appreciating the true nature of the self and its relationship to the world. Wang's conception of empathic concern was not the source of or justification for regard for other people, creatures, and

⁶⁰ See *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, p. 102.

⁶¹ For this idea, see the first part of the long passage quoted above. In another passage Wang makes clear that pure knowing is not just a *response to* things in the world but the morally consciousness aspect or mode of the principles shared by things and the heart-mind. See *Readings from the Lu-Wang School*, pp.114-5.

things or an expression of altruism; both the causal and justificatory relationship were very much the other way around: it is *because* and as a function of our sense of oneness that we experience empathic concern and act in the interests of other people, creatures, and things.⁶²

How being rightly oriented and active in the world produces a special feeling of joy

Like the early Confucians whose thought we have explored earlier, Wang taught that true joy is found in living a life of effortless ease in complete harmony with the Way. In such a state, the pattern and principle of one's original heart-mind is not in any way "opposed" to other people, creatures, or things and one's innate faculty of moral sapience—pure knowing—spontaneously responds to each and every situation one might encounter. In such a state, one is joyfully carried along the Way, living a life of spontaneous moral action.

The Master said, "Pure knowing is the spirit of creation and transformation. This spirit gave birth to heaven and earth; it completed ghosts and the Lord [on High]. All of these came forth from it; truly it is 'not opposed to any thing.'⁶³ If one can return to the state where one fully and completely possesses this spirit with nothing missing or deficient, then without realizing it 'one's hands will begin to dance along and one's feet will begin to step in time.'⁶⁴ I know of no joy within heaven and earth better than this!"⁶⁵

These and other passages make clear how neo-Confucians embedded earlier Confucian ideas in a much more complex and powerful metaphysical system derived largely from Daoist and Buddhist sources. According to this later scheme, all of the principles or patterns of the

⁶² I discuss this more fully in "Virtue Ethics and the Confucian Tradition."

⁶³ Citing Cheng Hao; Tiwald and Van Norden 2014: 141. Cf. the quote of this passage in Chapter Five.

⁶⁴ *Mengzi* 4A27, cited previously.

⁶⁵ The *Complete Works of Wang Yangming* (*Wang Wenchengong quanshu* 王文成公全書), Reprint, (Shanghai: *Shangwu yinshuguan* 商務印書館, 1933): 3.141a.

universe exist inherently in the heart-minds of human beings. Any shortcomings in their understanding or conduct are the result of a separation between and alienation from the principles or patterns within them and those found manifested throughout the world. The state of a person who is not fully cultivated is more like someone who is self-deceived than one who lacks knowledge or ability. As we have seen, the proper remedy for their sad condition are forms of self-cultivation that remove impediments blocking the natural operation of principles or patterns and that restore them to an original, enlightened, joyful state of unity with the world. These ideas are all found in Wang's response to a question by the scholar Lu Yuanjing 陸原靜.

Joy is the original state of the heart-mind; though it is not identical to the joy that can be had from the seven emotions, it is not found apart from them either. Though sages and worthies have a special kind of true joy, this joy also is possessed by ordinary people; it is only that ordinary people are unaware of this joy. Instead, they seek out all sorts of sorrow and hardship and heap upon themselves self-deception and self-delusion. This true joy is present even in the midst of such sorrow, hardship, self-deception, and self-delusion. If they would just have a single enlightened thought, turn and reflect upon themselves and find integrity within, they would experience this joy. I have presented this very idea in all of our discussions and still you ask me how one can attain such joy. This is case of riding a donkey to go knowing is the spirit of creation.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, 2.112a.

For neo-Confucians, a life in accord with the Way brings a wide range of goods and opens many sources of happiness. Like early Confucians, they thought that a moral life often brought with it a variety of more mundane goods; these, though, were never guaranteed, should not be expected, and were never the foundation or core of a cultivated person's happiness. True happiness is found in following the Dao, which, as we have seen, meant to be one with the world. Cultivated individuals are "one body" with all people, creatures, and things. They feel a deep identity between themselves and the world, avoid the vice of self-centeredness, and thereby develop and express the central neo-Confucian virtue of benevolence toward all things. Such a state leads them to respond with greater spontaneity to the various contingencies of human life and to lose a sense of themselves as creatures standing apart from the world and pursuing their own private interests. By giving themselves to the Dao, they experience a greatly expanded sense of themselves and their purpose in life, which enables them to find joy even in the midst of profound personal loss. Within such a life, a special kind of metaphysical comfort trumps every other concern and opens up a higher kind of happiness: "sages and worthies have a special kind of true joy."

Suggested further readings:

1. Edward G. Slingerland, III, tr., *Confucius Analects, With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003).
2. Bryan W. Van Norden, tr., *Mengzi, With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008).
3. Eric L. Hutton, tr., *Xunzi, The Complete Text*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
4. Philip J. Ivanhoe, tr., *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2009).
5. Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Happiness in Early Chinese Thought," in Ilona Boniwell and Susan David, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, (Oxford University Press, 2013).

6. Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Revised Second Edition, 2006).

Word Count: 10,168