Moral Psychology As “Political” Psychology

IDEAS, NETWORKS, PLACES:
Rethinking Chinese History of the Middle Period
• Wang Yangming (王陽明 1472-1529) and Zhan Ruoshui (湛若水 1466-1560)

• King Wu 武’s military expedition and Bo Yi 伯夷 (Shu Qi’s 叔齊) the objection to it.
• the standard (jing 經) and the discretionary (quan 權)
• I [Wang Yangming’s student and interlocutor] asked about Mencius’ saying, “Holding the mean without allowing for special circumstances is like holding on to one particular thing.”

• The Teacher [Wang] said, “The mean is nothing but the Principle of Nature; it is the Change. It changes according to the time. How can one hold it fast? One must act according to the circumstance. It is difficult to fix a pattern of action in advance.
I said, “Confucius said that King Wu was not perfectly good. It seems that Confucius was not satisfied with him.” The Teacher said, “Under the circumstances, King Wu could not have done otherwise.”
Yangming’s view of the mind is different from mine. What I call the mind embodies the myriad things without leaving anything out. Therefore, there is no inner and outer. What Yangming calls the mind refers to that which is within the body[or “self”].
• I said, “Some writing is perhaps indispensable. For example, in the case of the Spring and Autumn Annals, if there were not the writing, the Zuozhuan 左傳 (Zuo’s Commentary), I am afraid it would be difficult to understand.”

• The Teacher said, “To say that the Spring and Autumn Annals can only be illuminated with a commentary is to regard it as a puzzle with the last part left out. Why should Confucius write in such difficult and abstruse terms? Much of the Zuozhuan is from the original text of the history of Lu 魯. If the Spring and Autumn Annals depends on it to be understood, then why should Confucius have abridged it?”

• I said, “Cheng Yi said, ‘The commentary (zhuan 傳) contains cases (an 案). The Classic (jing 經) contains judgments (duan 斷).’ For example, in the Spring and Autumn Annals it is recorded that so-and-so murdered his ruler or such-and-such a feudal lord invaded such-and-such a state. It would be difficult to judge (duan 斷) unless the facts (shi 事) supplied by the commentary are known.”

• The Teacher said, “Yichuan 伊川 probably repeated what famous but mediocre scholars had said; he did not appreciate Confucius’ purpose in writing the Spring and Autumn Annals. When he recorded that so-and-so murdered his ruler, the murder in itself was a crime. What is the need of inquiring into its details? Military expeditions against the feudal state should proceed from the king. When he recorded that such-and-such a feudal lord invaded a state, the invasion in itself was a crime. What is the need of inquiring into its details? The primary purpose of Confucius’ transmitting the Six Classics was purely to rectify people’s minds, to preserve the Principle of Nature [‘Heavenly principle’], and to eliminate selfish human desires.
• The Correct Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals (chunqiu zheng zhuan 春秋正傳).