CONSCIENCE AND ETHOS: THINKING ACROSS THE LIMITS OF NORMATIVITY

A Thesis in Philosophy by
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation intends to develop a new way of ethical thinking through an in-depth inquiry into the meaning and origin of the phenomenon of conscience. I will first focus upon two contemporary interpretations of conscience: the existential interpretation by Heidegger and the psychoanalytic interpretation by Freud. My investigation of the phenomenon of conscience in the context of these two interpretations would reveal the question of ethics, which according to Heidegger is a question of human dwelling, as a question of hermeneutics. By instigating a dialogue between Heidegger’s thinking of the essence of human dwelling and the early Confucian moral teaching, I anticipate to work out a new horizon for the question of ethics.

Traditional interpretations take conscience as the voice of the divine or social authorities that stipulate the norms and principles of our actions. Freud identifies the source of the traditional “moral conscience” in the categorical imperatives of the super-ego or ego ideal, which answers to “everything that is expected of the higher nature of human.” Religion, ethics and social institutions, accordingly, constitute different forms in which the ego ideal, which represses the primitive Oedipus complex, asserts itself. Heidegger, in contrast, developed an existential interpretation that takes conscience as a reticent summons that discloses the authentic situation of human existence in the world. Conscience calls us toward the authenticity of our being in that it calls us to think the tragic situation of human existence and the plight of human dwelling upon the earth.

Through a dialogue between these two incisive interpretations of the phenomenon of conscience and its relation to ethical thinking, I would make manifest the central strife
in the question of ethics as a strife between two fundamental kinds of interpretation of human dwelling, which is in essence a strife between the “powerless superpower” of heart and conscience and the demonic power of the super-ego that speaks in the voice of everyday “moral conscience.” Since both the reticent summons of heart and conscience and the commanding voice of the super-ego can be viewed as different interpretations of the message from the divine, the question of ethics turns out to be a question of hermeneutics.

The clarification of the meaning and origin of conscience and its relation to the question of ethics in the west set the stage for a new possibility of ethical thinking and pave the way for a dialogue with the early Confucian thinkers. In contrast to western normative ethical theories, early Confucian teachings did not understand the essence of human being in terms of an ideal of existence. Nor did they base human moral practice upon a system of norms or principles. Rather, it is by following the reticent summons of one’s heart and conscience that one is capable of appropriating the message of heaven and of bringing forth one’s humane nature to the full. This dialogue between Confucian moral teaching and Heidegger’s thinking of human dwelling would thus open up a new way of ethical thinking without resorting to a metaphysics of normativity. This new way of ethical thinking will have broad and profound significance for rethinking a wide range of ethical and political issues today.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Conscience and the <em>Aporia of Being and Time</em></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Freud's Concept of Conscience</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Dragon and the Oedipus Complex of Early Chinese People</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Conscience and Ethos: Thinking across the Limits of Normativity</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6 On Ge Wu: A Phenomenological Interpreation of the Great Learning</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The following study intends to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics through an inquiry into the meanings and origins of the phenomena of conscience. I will work out this new possibility for the question of ethics concretely in the context of the hermeneutics of one crucial dimension of early Confucian thinking, in which the question of heart and conscience plays a critical role. With the unfolding of my investigation, it will become manifest that the question of ethics, which Heidegger describes as a question of human dwelling, is itself a question of hermeneutics, a question of interpretation. The central strife in the question of ethics, accordingly, is the one between two fundamental kinds of interpretation of human dwelling. It is in essence the strife between the “powerless superpower” of our hearts and consciences and the demonic power of the super-ego that speaks in the voice of the everyday “moral conscience.” Because the articulation of an interpretation is only possible in language, the question of ethics and the question of the essence of language belong together. The way to the question of ethics, therefore, would only open up in the way to language. The way to language, Heidegger says, calls for a speaking from out of its essence, which can only be a dialogue. In this project, I would like to instigate first a dialogue between the existential and psychoanalytical interpretations of the western experiences of conscience and ethos, and then bring the discoveries from this investigation to dialogue with the early Confucian moral teachings. Such an authentic dialogue, hopefully, would not only elicit a
hearing of the summons of heart and conscience but also open up a new possibility for
the question of ethics.

But the necessity to carry out such a project, its basic tasks and my methods of
investigation call for some introductory exposition.

I. The Necessity and Priority of the Question Concerning Conscience
and Its Preliminary Demarcation

The question concerning conscience has been forgotten. Conscience was not a subject
matter in ancient Greek philosophy. The word ‘conscience, conscientia,’ with all its
kinship with the Greek ‘syndresis,’ appeared first in the language of Latin in the middle
ages. From the very beginning, the word ‘conscience’ implied already a strong religious
affiliation. Medieval theologians like Augustine, Aquinas and Butler all touched upon the
Christian experience of conscience. But none of them gave any thematic exposition of the
phenomenon. In modern thought, few philosophers since Descartes have taken the
question concerning conscience more than tangentially. Even Heidegger, whose
interpretation of conscience in Being and Time brought the meanings and structures of
the phenomena to an unprecedented clarity, dropped the issue completely in his later
writings. It is undeniable that the question concerning conscience has been marginalized
in the western philosophical tradition – so marginalized that the question itself has been
forgotten. Only for Freud, conscience, which in his view “answers to everything that is
expected of the higher nature of man,” becomes a recurring topic running through his
whole psychoanalytic project. Nonetheless, in contrast with other dominant subject
matters in Freud’s writing, such as the Unconscious, the Oedipus complex, the
interpretation of dreams, or the theory of sexuality, the question concerning conscience was never treated as an independent theme with the coherence and integrity it deserves. Rather, it remained a hidden thread in Freud’s writing: a thread that has been buried over and mostly forgotten in the contemporary psychoanalytic and philosophical discourse.

Does this neglect prove the triviality of the question or the unworthiness of its investigation? By no means. Or does the marginalization indicate an evasion of the question, which, as that which is continually marginalized and evaded, announces itself nonetheless as something that cannot be completely dropped out? Would this marginalization and evasion bear out all the more the necessity and priority of the question mostly forgotten in a line of thinking dominated by metaphysics? Would it be possible that the question concerning conscience,¹ which points to the question of who, is more original than the question of being,² the guiding question in the western philosophical tradition that is concerned mainly with the question of what?

In Being and Time, Heidegger raises anew the question of being as a question that had been forgotten and a question that must be urgently retrieved in western philosophy. The question of the meaning of being [Sein] is approached through the interrogation of the being [Sein] of a determinate kind of being [Seienden], Dasein. The existential analytic of Da-sein, of situated human existence in the world, is taken as the horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of being in general. Heidegger carries through this investigation of the meaning of being with a phenomenological deconstruction of history of ontology. Only when the concealments of being by the sclerotic metaphysical tradition are dissolved, is it possible for the phenomenon to show itself from itself. Ontology is thus possible only as phenomenology. For the proper meaning of being and the basic
structure of the very being of Dasein will become manifest only through a phenomenology of Da-sein, viz. through an interpretation of Dasein based upon phenomenological description. The phenomenology of Da-sein, Heidegger insists, is hermeneutics in the original signification of the word. It is well known that Heidegger suspends the inquiry into the meaning of being in general in his later writings and becomes more and more concerned with showing a way toward the essence [Wesen] of language, which is “the house of being.” No matter this project of fundamental ontology can be successful or not, however, it is moot whether this question of being belongs to all human experiences or whether it is a question belongs only to peoples from some particular cultural and linguistic heritages, say, to peoples from the Indo-European tradition. What if there is a language in which the word ‘being’ can hardly find any equivalent and in which the ‘phenomenon of copula’ simply does not occur? And what if such a language refuses to be marginalized when it happens to have the longest undisrupted history among all human languages and when it not only is still alive but also constitutes one of the languages with the greatest number of speakers in the world today?

I am speaking of the Chinese language, or more accurately, the ancient Chinese language. We do not need to regard the lack of the proper equivalents for the western concepts of ‘truth’ and ‘being’ as another shortcoming of the language, which is already laden with criticism in modern age. Notably, the question concerning conscience or heart has played a vital role throughout the development of ancient Chinese thinking. At the beginning, I have to leave the complicated connections and differences between “conscience” and “heart” for later clarification. In any case, this emphasis upon the question concerning conscience highlights a unique character of ancient Chinese
thinking. It points to one dimension of ancient Chinese thinking that eludes any metaphysical categorization. Granted, the characteristics of this dimension have not yet been clearly recognized and widely acknowledged, while whether or not such a dimension has existed at all may still be called into question. Indeed, when the origins of traditional Chinese thinking remain for the most part unthought, when a contemporary China blames fiercely her recent oppression by the western powers and her lack of modern technology on her traditional mindset, when she strives to regain her lost power and rank by eagerly submitting herself to a new “world order,” and when she demolishes blindly her own cultural and intellectual heritage with a view of matching up her economic and social frameworks with western paradigms – being completely unaware of their metaphysical foundation and the danger it implicates, for many, whether or not such a dimension of thinking has existed and whether or not it is still alive do not seem to matter. But do they? Does the annihilation of the Chinese cultural and intellectual tradition and the enlistment of the contemporary China into a new world order demonstrate again the monstrous dominance of the western metaphysics that is taking another prey? And wouldn’t this sweeping domination of metaphysics reminds us once more the necessity and priority of the question concerning conscience and the urgency of retrieving a line of thinking in which such a question plays a vital role?

To bring this dimension of thinking to light and to exhibit its characteristics and origins constitute the provisional goal of my investigation. The attainment of this provisional goal entails a preliminary clarification of the meanings and structures of conscience. In order to let the meanings and the structures of conscience become visible, however, we need to clear up some ambiguities and confusions concerning the concept of
conscience and its relation to ethics in the western philosophical tradition in the first place.

§ 1. Preliminary Clarification of the Concept of Conscience

When the question concerning conscience has been marginalized in the western philosophical tradition, the concept of conscience is as misty and obscure as the prejudices about it are manifold. At the beginning of our inquiry, I cannot discuss these prejudices surrounding the concept of conscience in detail. I will only treat these prejudices so that a preliminary clarification of the concept of conscience and a demarcation of the question concerning conscience will be accessible. I therefore pick up the following three prejudices.

1. The voice of conscience is the voice of God, and the phenomenon of conscience manifests itself primarily as a kind of religious experience, upon which all other experiences of conscience are based. Granted, in the west, a distinct conception of the phenomenon of conscience did not occur until in the context of religion, that is, in Christianity, as the etymology of the word “conscience” demonstrates. Augustine, probably the first philosopher who elaborates the meaning of the concept, describes moral conscience as “an expression of …divinely implanted law of goodness.” Nonetheless, experiences of conscience are both wider and older than the Christian conception of the phenomenon. On the one hand, with the influence of Christianity declining in modern thought, the experiences of conscience and its interpretations
continue. A variety of new approaches to interpret the phenomenon, such as the rationalist, behaviorist, psychoanalyst and existential interpretations of conscience have cropped up. On the other hand, as Freud shows in *Totem and Taboo*, the phenomenon of conscience in the form of taboo conscience can be traced to a time when human society first began to form itself. And as such, far from being an exclusively Christian experience, it underlies the initiation of all human civilizations. In effect, that conscience plays an essential role in ancient Chinese thinking without a distinct religious or monotheistic implication spells out the limitation of the Christian conception of conscience pervasively.

2. Conscience is a *rational* faculty of mind that endorses and warns against one’s action or intention to act. Butler first identifies conscience as a faculty of mind and defines conscience as a principle of reflection in man by which “he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions.” Kant too regards conscience as a wonderful faculty [*Vermögen*] that passes sentences on our actions in our inner courts. It is “practical reason holding the human being’s duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation in every case that comes under a law.” Both Butler and Kant approach the concept of conscience within the framework of Christian orthodoxies, though in one way or another, they have replaced the authority of the voice of God with that of the rational faculty of judgment. Whether or not Kant defines conscience as a rational faculty and to what degree practical reason holds an *authority* compared to that of God, I cannot treat in detail here. But it is questionable to reduce the complex phenomena of conscience to one rational faculty of mind, which, though providing a plausible answer for “that by virtue of
which” the voice speaks, did not touch upon at all the question of the “whence” of the voice. If, following the suggestion of the etymology of the word “con-science”, we regard conscience as a kind of knowing, then to define conscience as a rational faculty is to reduce the knowing itself to the faculty by which we possibly know. Not only is it uncertain whether or not the rational faculty of mind is adequate for the kind of knowing we call “conscience,” but the questions concerning “who the knower is,” “what is known” and “whence the knowledge comes” are all answered too hastily in such reduction. This definition of the conscience, therefore, does not clarify the concept of conscience but only produces more ambiguities and confusions when it leaves the origin of the phenomena unthought.

3. Conscience is the conscious sense of guilt, or the consciousness of the internal moral command continually supervising and directing one’s actions. This interpretation of conscience on the basis of consciousness seems to be endorsed by the etymology of the word. In both Latin and French, the word for conscience and consciousness are undistinguished. Kant also defines conscience as “consciousness of an internal court in man,”\textsuperscript{8} it is “a state of consciousness which in itself is duty.”\textsuperscript{9} But here again, over-reliance on the etymology of the word, which reflects merely a western metaphysical understanding of the phenomena of conscience, can be misleading. By contrast to the interpretations of conscience on the basis of consciousness, contemporary psychoanalyses have presented numerous cases in which conscience does not function as a conscious internal command, but rather unconsciously. Does this interpretation of conscience on the basis of consciousness presuppose an understanding of human being in terms of
subjectivity or self-consciousness? Does it reflect again the dominance of the metaphysical thinking that strives to take the phenomenon of conscience under its sway? Would it be possible for an interpretation of conscience without resorting to the concept of consciousness? The necessity of the link between conscience and consciousness breaks up, when we note that in early Chinese thinking, where the question of conscience plays a critical role, there is no equivalent to the concept of “consciousness” at all.

By examining the above three prejudices about the concept of conscience, I have made accessible a preliminary demarcation of the question concerning conscience. The concrete meanings and structures of conscience, however, call for further investigation. Contemporary continental and Anglo-American philosophy analyze the meanings and structures of conscience in the realm of ethics or moral philosophy. The voice of conscience speaks of the inner moral commands. Under such interpretation, conscience is what watches over and directs one’s action in accord with certain moral truth or ethical principles. It is the foundation of one’s moral convictions, the internal supreme command which guarantees one’s moral behavior and which one is compelled to follow even if there are no external forces present. In contrast, I intend to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics by a deeper inquiry into the meanings and origins of the phenomena of conscience. This new relation between conscience and the question of ethics will not come to light without a preliminary de-construction of the traditional interpretations of conscience and the history of ethics based upon metaphysical norms. In the next section, I will prepare for this de-construction by reveling the predicament of the normative ethics and the dilemma of traditional interpretations of conscience.
§ 2. The dilemma of traditional understanding of conscience

My project intends to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics by investigating the meanings and origins of the phenomena of conscience. The guiding question of ethics, as I see it, is the question of justice. In the west, the concept of justice has long been understood in terms of law and moral norms. Following the early Confucian moral thinking, however, I will locate the “origin” of justice not in moral norms and principles but in our hearts and consciences. The development of this new horizon for the question of ethics entails a deconstruction of the history of ethics on the basis of metaphysical norms.

Although the question concerning conscience has been mostly neglected and forgotten throughout the development of western philosophy, the traditional interpretations of conscience have served as a hidden ground of the everyday moral actions and their normative interpretations. In the rest of this section, I will make this hidden ground visible and demonstrate the paradox of normative ethics by revealing the predicaments of two representative normative ethical theories: ethical absolutism and ethical relativism.

(a) Conscience and the Predicament of Ethical Absolutism

Under traditional interpretations, conscience has often been described as the inner feelings or voices supervising one’s conduct in accord with certain moral norms or principles. Conscience is the internal sense of guilt or moral command that passes sentences to one’s conduct in the inner court of justice when such conduct violates the
ethical norms one has committed himself. And such is indeed how the phenomenon of conscience is most “commonly” conceived today.

The presence of the voice of conscience distinguishes moral actions from those actions that are merely legal. Within the realm of normative ethics, both moral and legal actions are determined according to certain norms and principles. Except for the cases in which the validity, jurisdiction and execution of laws and norms are themselves deficient or problematic, the crucial difference between legal and moral actions lies in whether or not the subject of an action complies with these normative principles by the coercion of external forces or on the basis of his own inner feeling or rational reflection, that is, his conscience. Thus, conscience can be taken as the hidden ground of all moral actions and their normative interpretation.

It is of little doubt that Christian conscience is the ground of all moral actions stipulated by the edicts of the divine law. In classical Christian ethics, conscience is the voice of God within each of us and stands for the indisputable authority that is the final umpire of our actions. It speaks the voice of an absolute moral command the violation of which would incur a serious sense of guilt. Butler articulates this fundamental role of conscience in Christian ethics most vividly. Butler describes conscience as the “superior principle of reflection… in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions; which passes judgment upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust.”\(^{10}\) For Butler, therefore, conscience stands for the higher nature of man and it is by this faculty that is natural to man that “he is a moral agent, that he is a law to himself.”\(^{11}\)
The faculty of conscience, moreover, is “in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so.” This authority and supremacy of conscience guarantees the absolute truth of the moral law toward which conscience guides us. For the guide of conscience is a natural guide “assigned us by the Author of our nature,” i.e., by God. Further, since this principle of reflection or conscience is to be found in every man, the moral truth it edicts must be universal. Therefore, the Christian conscience, as Butler makes manifest, is the foundation of a kind of ethical absolutism.

Despite the decline of Christianity and the authority of the voice God, the thrust for the universality of moral truth carries on in modern thought. It seems that the authority of the voice of God is passed on to the supremacy of reason. Deontological ethicists, among others, have been seeking new foundation for the universality of moral law in Kant’s ethical writings and this they claim to have found in Kant’s categorical imperative. For Kant, moral goodness must be absolute goodness and this absolute goodness can only be found in good will, which is the only thing that is good without qualification. But the good will of an ethical subject is not sufficient for its moral validity, which requires universalization. This universalization is embodied in the categorical imperative, that you should “act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” In contrast to the Christian conscience that takes the voice of God as the ultimate authority and ground for the universal and absolute command of moral law, Kant’s justification of moral law does not assume the actual existence of God. God and freedom, which is beyond the sensible world and the knowledge of speculative reason, are necessary postulations for the possibility of moral actions in the world. They are the rational faith of the practical
reason. The existence of God as an omnipotent moral being cannot be established objectively, but must nonetheless be postulated by the moral subject as a necessary condition for all moral actions. For Kant, the justification of this postulation, this rational faith on the omnipotent moral being, lies in what he calls the fact of reason: the fact that we are ourselves conscious of the categorical imperative as the internal moral command. And this consciousness of moral law within us is called conscience, which, as the “consciousness of the internal moral court in man”15 is “an unavoidable fact.”16 It is in this sense that conscience “must be thought of as the subjective principle of being accountable to God for all one’s deeds. In fact the latter concept is always contained (even if only in an obscure way) in the moral self-awareness of conscience.” 17

I cannot elaborate Kant’s interpretation of conscience here. Nor am I ready to evaluate whether or not Kant’s moral philosophy is a kind of ethical absolutism. But the thrust for universality and absoluteness of moral truth is as manifest in Kant as in most later normative ethicists. But does the voice of conscience always speak so authoritatively? Are the values and moral principles on the basis of Christian conscience, for example, still universally effective today? Apparently not. Undeniably, with the increasing international and cross-cultural encountering and communications in our time, it has been more and more widely recognized that people from different cultural and historical backgrounds have markedly different consciences. The challenge for the ethical absolutism or objectivism is manifold. On one hand, conscientious actions based upon certain values or normative standards in one culture or one historical period can well be viewed as immoral in another. On the other hand, some actions that are apparently conscienceless in everyday conception may nonetheless carry persuasive moral force.
The wide appreciation and acknowledgement won by Mark Twain’s story in which Huck goes against the command of his conscience to help out a runaway slave Jim provides a shining example of the “conscienceless moral action.” We shall not understand fully the meaning of such actions without first clarifying the original meanings and structures of conscience. In any case, the predicament of the everyday understanding of conscience on the basis of ethical absolutism has never been as plain as it is today. But does this predicament of ethical absolutism entail necessarily an ethical relativism? In what sense can we say it is right or justified for different people to have markedly different consciences?

(b) Conscience and the Predicament of Ethical Relativism

The term “ethical relativism” or “relativism,” which is more and more widely used and abused today, calls for some preparatory elucidation. People from a “metaphysical” standpoint often regard whatever is not or against ethical absolutism or objectivism as a kind of ethical relativism, which is by no means far away from skepticism or cynicism. Under such conception, some take relativism as a slogan against transcendental values and realities for the sake of advancing social and cultural diversities and endorsing the regional identities of people from different communities; others use it as a derogative name for those rebellions who, while holding a pernicious view that puts the very meaning of progress of human society in jeopardy, fail to justify such a viewpoint with coherence and consistence. For the denial of the validity of any absolute and universal truth, when carried through to the last, is to put the validity of the thesis of relativism itself into question. Indeed, confined in the framework of metaphysics and
blind to the possibility of a dimension of thinking other than metaphysical, many philosophers are impelled to even categorize the thinking of Foucault and Derrida as a kind of relativism. Such categorization, of course, is as groundless as it is careless.

I do not contest the common definition of relativism or ethical relativism as the view that moral standards are grounded *only* in social custom, the view that “custom is king, ὁ νόμος βασιλεύς.” I only question its still unthought essence. Let us ask: to what extent different people *can* and *should* have different consciences and to what extent can the moral principles and actions on the basis of such different consciences be *justified*? At the outset, I would like to call attention to some appalling consequences of this relativist understanding of conscience. Almost none of us would regard the execution of the Jewish people in the concentration camp during the Second World War carries or may in anyway carry any moral validity. Yet we are told that for some Nazis, such extermination programme was carried out in the name of conscience or morality. To designate the morality that supports such inhuman actions as “bad morality,” given the irony of this characterization, does not go far enough into the question; because it still confines itself within a metaphysical way of thinking and thus left the essence of relativism and the origin of the phenomenon of conscience unthought.

As I see it, self-enclosure and regional confinement constitute the determinate mark of ethical relativism. In my use of the term, one is and only is a relativist when, in denying the possibility of any transcendental truth that is universally valid, she also committed herself to a set of norms and values that define what she herself culturally and historically belong to. For a relativist, norms and values of a given community are justified by themselves. It is this *embedment* in one’s cultural or historical situations and
the commitment to their norms and values that characterize the formation of different historical, cultural and personal identities. We already see the danger, the danger that an inflating and expanding regional identity may consider it justifiable to impose itself upon other neighboring identities or even destroy those identities, despite the “formal” integrities these neighboring identities maintain. This clash and conflict in the encounter of different social and cultural identities reflect clearly the predicament and dilemma of relativism.

Despite its denial of the supremacy of any transcendent truth that can be universally valid, relativism does not break through the metaphysical framework within which the premises of absolutism are worked out. First, absolutism, relativism, as well as skepticism, are all characterized by their commitments or relations to certain determinate norms and values, no matter these values and norms are taken as universal or regional and no matter they are positively affirmed or cynically denied. While persistently resisting against the domination of the “universal and absolute” norms and values, relativism does not free itself from the command of these norms and values. Rather, by the very act of resisting, it is entangled within the realm in which the authority of these norms and values still holds sway. Thus, while rejecting the universal ground of the absolute norms and values, relativism has to find a substitution of the forgone ground in the norms and values of particular regional identities. Moreover, the thesis of relativism cannot be consistently maintained, unless some transcendental identity is presupposed in the first place. But that, ironically, is exactly what relativism is arguing against. Therefore, the predicament of relativism lies in its very failure to offer a coherent and consistent argument against and a valid alternative to the ethical absolutism. For “it is
impossible even to talk about subjectivism and relativism without presupposing an objective framework. …The very espousal of relativity seems unavoidably to entail transcendence. 20

But isn’t a fact that different people do have markedly different consciences? And if both absolutism and relativism are running inevitably into predicament, what is the way out of this dilemma? The dilemma of ethical absolutism and relativism reflect the predicament of the question of ethics. How and in what sense can the question concerning conscience open up a new horizon for the question of ethics?

§ 3. Conscience as a horizon for the question of ethics

The predicament of the ethical absolutism and relativism reflects the predicament of situated human existence in the world. It reflects human’s plight of dwelling upon the earth, a plight to which we are still giving too little thought. The Greek word ethos, from which the word ethics is derived, carries an old meaning of “place of dwelling.” But just as the question concerning conscience has long been forgotten and its original meanings and structures concealed, the essence of this old meaning of ethos is still left unthought. When we define “ethics” as the study of moral actions and judgments on the basis of metaphysical norms and principles, not only do we lose sight of the origin of the word ethos, but its relation to νόμος (law, custom, norm) remains also in the dark.

In order to understand how the question concerning conscience can open up a new horizon for the question of ethics, we must first catch sight of the original meaning of ethos and its relation to νόμος. As a point of departure, let us take Charles Scott’s
analyses of the relation between ἔθος (ethos), νόμος (law, custom), and νομός (field) in his *Question of Ethics* as our preparatory guide.

While the older sense of *ethos*, as Scott elaborates, refers to the places where animals belong, viz. “the place to which it returns, its dwelling place,” the most familiar sense of the word ἔθος is “custom, habit.” This sense of “custom” belongs also to the word νόμος, which carries further the sense of “law, ordinance, a musical mode or strain, or a very ancient song or ode.” The most proper sense of νόμος, according to the Liddell-Scott Dictionary, is “anything assigned or apportioned, that which one has in use or possession.” Both νόμος and its cognate νομός come from the verb νέμω, which carries not only the meaning of “to divide, to distribute, assign, allot, grant,” but also the sense of “to possess, enjoy; to inhabit,” and further “to control, to manage,” and “to drive to pasture, to graze, to consume.” These multiple senses of the word νέμω can be connected in the following way. For the pastoral, nomadic tribes in ancient Greek, the distribution and division is for the sake of “managing and controlling” the limited pasturing resources so that every tribe would “possess” its own feeding-place to “graze” its cattle and horses. For the nomadic, the field for grazing the animals vital for their livelihood is the land that they “inhabit.” Hence, while νομός (field for grazing) names what one acquires as the result of such distribution and managing, the word νόμος (law, custom) emphasizes upon the rule of justice according to which such distribution and division is made among different tribes. One can only claim something assigned or apportioned to be in his possession, i.e., to be his own, which the proper sense of the word νόμος points to, when such distribution and assignment are made by virtue of the law and ordinance of the tribe or the state.
But there is another aspect of νόμος that is related to the nomadic way of life of the ancient tribes. Precisely because the livelihood of the nomadic depends upon the feeding-place for their animals, when the resources of these field are used up, they have to move on to either seek new fields for grazing or fight and take the fields from other tribes. As Scott points out, in the word νόμος, as well as in ethos, there is a struggle between “habitual practice and nomadic, uncivilized separation.” It is a fatal struggle in which “the limiting principles of order and random movement without limiting principles unsettle each other.” This struggle makes manifest the strife between the thrust for universal order and unity and the resisting power that maintains the differences and distances of the particular identities that always strive to break through the dominance of law and order. Concrete human laws, such as Solon’s law to which the word νόμος refers in particular, do not initiate this strife. The enactment of the strife had happened long before any concrete human laws were formulated. Nor did the establishment of laws and orders put an end to the strife. Rather, this strife is instigated in the very building of the laws and customs. The establishment of law and order cannot do away with the strife but only accomplishes the strife as strife. The thrust and resistance that find their enactment in the strife are the very formative powers of these laws and customs.

The predicaments of ethical absolutism and relativism echo this strife. The strife indicates the plight of human dwelling, the essence of which has not been give enough thought to. In his analysis, Scott picks up a crucial root meaning of the word ethos that is noteworthy. The Indo-European root of ethos (Swedh), Scott shows, “meant ‘one’s own.’ Ethos means how one is properly one’s own or how we are of our own.” In the everyday use of the terms, ethos is the customs and habits through the formation of which
we accustom ourselves to the particular places and regions we inhabit. And once we are accustomed to these places and regions, it becomes hard for us to change our peculiar ways of life determined by our ethos, by our particular places of dwelling. “The power of an ethos is in its peculiarity, its regional characteristics, its quality of belonging, and its resistance to outside influences.” This “recalcitrance” of ethos reflects the resisting power that maintains the differences of an ethos. “The difference of an ethos also means its identity.” The difference of an ethos, the special character of the places of dwelling, which is crystallized in the everyday conception of the word as “customs” or “habits,” are the definitive elements for the identities of the people who inhabit the region. But if the identities of people are determined with something external to them, viz. by what they possess or belong to, then with the changing of the natural and human situations, these regional identities so established are under continual pressure for restructuring and reforming. These regional identities turn out to be insecure and the struggle for their security constitutes a central theme running through the history of the western metaphysical tradition. The thrust for the universal law and order and the resistance against it manifest only two different ways through which people attempted to secure their identities. For the absolutists, only by means of the rule of a universal law can what one is assigned and allotted “truly and justly” become his own possessions. It is through the command of the absolute “justice” that one’s identity can be finally secured. The submission to the universal law and order, however, puts inevitably the individualities of people in jeopardy. Thus, the relativist resistance is characterized by a recalcitrant conservation of the regional identities, of the inhabited place of dwelling of different social and cultural groups. By rejecting the possibility of any universal norms and
principles, it aims to secure the differences of the regional identities and their own
customs and values.

But both ethical absolutism and relativism, in their struggle for the security of
social and cultural identities and for the places of dwelling, do not face up to the plight of
dwelling as such. They do not confront the plight of dwelling as the plight but only pass it
over. Precisely because they do not think the plight of dwelling as the plight, the essence
of ἔθος and νόμος are still covered up. An ethos, a peculiar place of dwelling that people
inhabit and accustom themselves to, can be their own only because it lets the people
dwell upon the earth in the first place. Laws and customs, the Code of Hammurabi on the
beautifully engraved diorite stela, the tablet with the Ten Commandments that Moses
carried down from Mount Sinai, the ordinances ancient Chinese carved upon the
gorgeous sacrificial bronze instruments, like the bridges that connect the banks of rivers
and the houses that provide sheltering for the people, are all buildings by human beings.
Building, Heidegger remarks nicely, “is not a means and a way toward dwelling – to
build is in itself already to dwell.”27 For “only if we are capable of dwelling, only then
can we build.”28 But when these laws and customs are themselves taken to be the
determinative forces of ethos, of human dwellings and identities, the essence of dwelling
that first makes such building possible is left unthought in the background. When people
base their identities upon their customs and the lands they inhabit, viz. upon what they
possess and what they belong to, the question of “who I am” is passed over. Presumably,
the ownness that the oldest sense of the word ethos points to involves primarily not a
question of “what” but a question of “who.” To confront this question of “who” is to
confront the plight of human dwelling as the plight, though it is still a mystery whence
such knowing of “who” come. Would con-science, the common knowing of one’s inner self, provide a clue for the question of ‘who I am?” If so, then not only will the question of conscience open a new horizon for the question of ethics, but the necessity and priority of the question concerning conscience are again substantiated.

II. The Tasks and the Double Dimension of the Question Concerning Conscience: the Method of Investigation

§ 4. The double dimension of the question concerning Conscience

The aim of my study is to work out the question concerning conscience concretely and to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics through the clarification of the meanings and origins of the phenomena of conscience. I will demonstrate the possibility of this new horizon for the question of ethics in the context of the hermeneutics of one dimension of early Chinese thinking that has little to do with metaphysics.

The task of opening up a new horizon for the question of ethics entails at the same time the task of de-stroying the dominant sway of the history of normative ethics. The double task in working out the question of ethics originates in the double aspect of the phenomenon of conscience itself. In working out the new horizon for the question of ethics in the context of the hermeneutics of early Chinese thinking, the task is again two fold. The term “hermeneutics” is usually reserved in the west for the scholastic interpretation of the Bible. In proportion to this western practice, annotation and commentary of classics have also long been a tradition among ancient Chinese scholars. Even Confucius claims that he only “interprets but does not write or produce himself.”29
Exactly who and what does Confucius interpret remain uncertain. But it will be no hyperbole in saying that for ancient Chinese thinkers, “hermeneutics” is not just the study of certain classics, but describes the very path through which the ancient Chinese thinking evolves. Thus, the task of hermeneutics we ourselves face is also twofold. For not only are we to bring to light a dimension of early Chinese thinking that is non-metaphysical and that opens up a new possibility for the question of ethics. But the history of hermeneutics in the ancient Chinese tradition needs also to be de-stroyed. In other words, our hermeneutics need to proceed in such a way that the practice of hermeneutics itself becomes a question.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the term “hermeneutics” in a broader and at the same time deeper sense. “Phenomenology of Da-sein”, Heidegger says, “is hermeneutics in the original signification of that word.”30 This broader and deeper meaning of hermeneutics in phenomenology of Da-sein, at the same time, is “the attempt first of all to define the essence [*Wesen*] of interpretation on hermeneutic grounds.”31 The interpretation of biblical texts or academic texts in general is only possible when the essence of interpretation is defined and this definition of the essence of interpretation is to be sought through phenomenology of Da-sein, that is, through the inquiry into the “who” of Da-sein. I will pursue the question of “who” through the question concerning conscience. The clarification of the meaning and structure of the phenomenon of conscience, thus, becomes a pre-requisite for the illumination of the essence of interpretation.

But this task of clarifying the meanings and origins of conscience is further complicated by the double *dimension* of the question concerning conscience. For
convenience sake, let us can designate these two different dimensions as the “horizontal” and the “vertical” dimensions. The horizontal dimension is the dimension within which the phenomenon of conscience is most commonly experienced and conceived. It refers to the experience of conscience in the present everyday world. But beside this horizontal dimension, there is also a vertical dimension. The vertical dimension of the phenomenon of conscience, on the other hand, is concerned with the historical essence [Wesen] of human existence in the world, with the necessity to answer the question of “who we are” historically. Freud is the first one who touches upon this vertical dimension of the question concerning conscience. In Totem and Taboo, Freud makes manifest the origin of the phenomenon of conscience in taboo conscience, which, in the form of the taboo sense of guilty, contains “much of the nature of anxiety,” and “without hesitation … may be described as ‘conscience phobia’.”

This taboo conscience is probably the oldest form of the phenomenon of conscience. It originates from the primal sin of the killing of the father by the band of brothers, from the incest wish for one’s mother and to slay one’s father, which Freud designates as the Oedipus complex. Through a meticulous and in-depth study of the totemism in primitive people, Freud concludes that “the beginning of religion, ethics, society, and art meet in the Oedipus complex.” In other words, religion, ethics, society and art are all different ways through which the Oedipus complex is either repressed or displaced and then find its “legitimate” substitution in everyday social behaviors. This is the case because of the “infantile recurrence of totemism,” because what happened to the primitive people is in a sense replayed in the development of conscience in infancy and early childhood. As Freud puts it, the infantile recurrence of totemism originates from “the sense of guilt for a deed,” – the deed of the primordial
crime of patricide – which survives “for thousand years, remaining effective in
generations which could not have known anything of this deed.”

Freud’s interpretation of totemism and the function of the Oedipus complex in
primitive society are still very controversial among contemporary scholars. I will
examine Freud’s theory of totemism through a case study of the cult of the Chinese
dragon, which expresses a different version of the Oedipus myth in early Chinese society.

The character of ancient Chinese thinking, which differs markedly from the character of
western metaphysical thinking, however, calls for some introductory remarks. So does
my method of investigation in general.

§ 5. The Character of Early Chinese Thinking – Method of Investigation

Recent archaeological findings about writings on oracle bones have provided convincing
evidence that as early as Yin Dynasty (1600 B.C – 1066 B.C), ancient Chinese had
already a very developed writing system. From the time then, the record and preservation
of “historical events” have been one of the most important offices for every dynasty that
came to power in that vast “central land.” The historical literature that has been passed
down is incomparable in both its quantity and quality. The continuity and
comprehensiveness of these historical writings are indeed spectacular. But among all the
historical literature, we can only find a few very scrappy accounts of the myths and early
heroic stories. The age of mythology, that is, the age of gods and heroes, which plays
such an essential and almost universal role in other civilizations, seems to be either
missing or forgotten in ancient Chinese classics. The missing or forgetting of this age
of gods and heroes, which for many western scholars is almost a *natural* development of
the stage of totemism, is as remarkable as its influence is profound for the ancient
Chinese thinking.

The lacking of a “determinate” mythological age reflects a different path through
which ancient Chinese thinking unfolds. The uniqueness of this path lies also in the
dimension of thinking that evolves through this different path, the dimension of thinking
that has little to do with metaphysics. In order to bring this different characteristic of the
early Chinese thinking to light, we need to make manifest how the early totemic culture
in early China took a different path than the path toward the age of mythology. Here
again, the task is two fold. On the one hand, we have to look into totemism in ancient
China and investigate its nature and impact on later Chinese thinking. On the other hand,
we need to see how early Chinese thinking took a different path of development during
the period of Eastern Zhou Dynasty (8 – 3 century). For this is the period in which
Confucius, and presumably Lao Zi, lived their lives and the period in which the
foundation of the “humanist” tradition of later Chinese thinking was laid.

The first task involves manifold complexities due to the scarcity of direct
archeological evidences of totemism in ancient China and the lack of serious scholarly
work focused on totemism in primitive Chinese societies. To provide a systematic
account and historical review of totemism in ancient China, thus, is beyond the scope of
this treatise. Our approach, instead, is to take the study of the totem of dragon as our clue
so as to trace the nature and impacts of the early totemic culture. The icons of dragon
have now been discovered in tombs that can be dated back to the period of at least 4000
B.C. and in a sense the impacts of this spectacular totem is still in effect even in today’s
China. The image of dragon, which is the symbol of auspice and omen at the same time, and which is described in ancient Chinese texts as the “chief of divine worms” that changes its form constantly, also bears profound relation with the *Book of Yi*, a mysterious book that has long been taken as the original source of early Chinese thinking. Not only is the book begins with an interpretation of the hexagram on the basis of the image of dragon, but the title of the book “Yi,” is also said to refer to a kind of chameleon that is believed to be one of the prototypes of dragon.

The difficulty of the second task comes from another direction. The period of Eastern Zhou that I am going to investigate is the golden age for ancient Chinese thinking and the beginning of the “humanist” tradition that prospers throughout the later Chinese history. However, the schools of thinking that came up during this period are as diverse as the texts passed down are confusing and obscure. Contemporary scholars have still not agreed with each other on the authenticity and authorship of most of the texts during that period, let alone the “literal” meaning of many difficult texts. There is also no indication that such controversies may find a satisfactory solution in the near future. Hence, while some basic comprehension of the authenticity and authorship of the texts is necessary for our investigation, we do not want to be entangled in the controversies of textual and editorial examinations. Moreover, this difficulty concerning authenticity and authorship of the texts is complicated by the diversity of thinking of the period and the unsystematic way in which these various schools of thinking are expressed. The traditional method of investigation often distinguishes first some different schools of thinking and then tries to find the commonality and differences among these schools of thinking through focused study of certain works by certain representative thinkers in those schools so that the
general tendency and character of the thinking in that period can be brought to light. This method, which is based up on the attribution of the text to its author and the affiliation the author to a particular school of thinking, though still helpful in some ways, is inadequate for the purpose of our investigation. Not only are such attributions and affiliations hardly applicable when the authorship and lives of the thinkers often remain unknown. But most of the texts are also composed not for the purpose of a systematic exposition of one’s theories but merely a collection of aphorisms or dialogues without a clear central theme and well-established structure. In fact, it seems that many thinkers during that period did not even bother to be authors or writers, but, like Confucius, only intend to be interpreters or commentators. Thus, when the authors themselves were disclaiming the authorship and authority over the texts, the persistent attempt to classify and interpret these texts according to their authorship and school affiliation seems to have missed the point that these texts themselves were pointing to.

Our engagement with early Chinese texts must find its beacon somewhere else. What we are looking for is the path that leads the early Chinese thinking from totemism to a “humanist” tradition, a different path than that is taken by the western tradition in which metaphysical and religious thinking play a dominant role. This “humanist” tradition, it will be shown, contains a dimension of thinking that is non-metaphysical and that illustrates the possibility of a new horizon for the question of ethics. But where and how can this path be discovered? What is our beacon?

The common scholarly opinion takes the difference between Chinese and western tradition to be the fact that Chinese thinking is mainly concerned about “human” and thus has its starting point from “inside,” while the western thinking has its major concern
about “nature”, and thus has its point of departure from “outside.” This distinction between “human” and “nature,” between “inside” and “outside,” is not incorrect. But it is superficial in that it does not even see the question. Nor is the distinction between practical and theoretical as an essential distinction between Chinese and western thinking helpful. The designation of “practical” presupposes already its ground in a theoretical framework, which is absent in ancient Chinese texts. Thus, these distinctions left the essential meanings of “human” and “nature” unthought, let along the unique characteristics of both traditions. Are we justified to say that the question of human life and the question of ethics were not the major concerns for ancient Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle? Of course they were. But the guiding question for western thinking is the question of being and being is understood primarily as beings. Human beings were also regarded as a kind of being, like many other beings. Thus, from the beginning of western metaphysics, human being is understood in term of substance or subject, hypokeimenon. Medieval thinkers understood human beings still in the realm of beings or substances when they designate human beings as animale rationale, as the created beings by God, ens creatum. The concept of subjectivity continues to play the leading role in modern philosophy since Descartes, and the question of “what” determines in the west how the question of “who” is approached and answered. However, as Heidegger points out, when the question of being takes the dominance in western understanding of human, being [Sein] of beings have been left unthought in the background so that the meaning of being [Sein] remains concealed. Under a persistent attachment to the question of “what,” the question of “who” is passed over and its meaning covered up in the western metaphysical thinking.
I take the question of “who” as the guiding question for ancient Chinese thinking. The question of “what,” granted, was not completely dropped out. But as the “phenomenon of copula” is precluded by the grammatical character of ancient Chinese language and as the Chinese word for “being” or “existence” [you, Vorhanden] did not carry any remarkable significance for the ancient Chinese thinkers but was instead overshadowed by the word for “nothing [wu 无],” the question of “what” remains a question of second order. It is a question subordinate to the question of “who.” In contrast with the Greeks who defined human beings as “rational animals,” ancient Chinese understood the essential distinction between humans and animals in the presence of “heart and conscience [xin 心]” The question concerning heart and conscience refers to the question of the common knowing of “who we are.” It is the leading thread through which the question of “who” unfolds in early Chinese thinking. The early Chinese thinking does not confine itself within a meta-physical framework precisely because the guiding question of the early Chinese thinking points neither toward any super-natural reality or divinity, nor to any permanent foundation in nature. The central position of the question concerning heart and conscience reveals the question of “who” as the guiding question of ancient Chinese thinking.

The common knowing of “who we are” only arrives on the hearing of the reticent summons of heart and conscience. But how do we hear the silent call of conscience, if it is continuously covered over under traditional interpretations? Here, we find ourselves moving in some intricate hermeneutical circles. We intend to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics, which we determine as a question of hermeneutics, through a new
interpretation of the early Chinese texts, which were themselves hermeneutical in nature. How can we find the right path into this hermeneutical circle?

Along the path toward the heart of this hermeneutical circle unfolds the way toward the essence of language. The way toward the essence of language, Heidegger says, requires a speaking from language, which “could only be a dialogue.” We can only enter into the hermeneutical circle, thus, when we first enter into an authentic dialogue of language. My method of investigation, thus, is to instigate an authentic dialogue between the existential interpretation of conscience, *ethos* and human dwelling with the early Confucian thinking on heart, humaneness and the way of heaven. Through this authentic dialogue and the engagement in the hermeneutics of early Chinese texts, we may anticipate an enactment of the primordial hermeneutical event so as to invite a hearing of the silent call of heart and conscience and open up a new way into the question of ethics.

§ 6. *Outline of the treatise*

*Chapter One Introduction*

*Part I. Preliminary Exposition of the Meanings and Structures of Conscience*

*Chapter Two Conscience and the Aporia of Being and Time*: I will take Heidegger’s interpretation of conscience in *Being and Time* as a starting point of our investigation. For Heidegger, conscience is the call of care that *attests* to the authenticity of Da-sein. Conscience discloses and “accomplishes” Da-sein as the being it is delivered over to *be*. But since the call of conscience only “reaches him who wants to be brought back,” the attestation of conscience turns out to be moving in a circle. This circularity
brings into question the very validity and possibility of the attestation. Yet, the question concerning conscience, as a summons that calls the mortals to think their homelessness and calls them into their dwelling, continues to announce itself, however reticently, as a question that will guide us to build our way back and forth.

Chapter Three Freud’s Concept of Conscience: The aporia of Being and Time calls us to look more closely into the meanings and structures of the everyday experience of conscience, which I intend to explore by recounting the psychoanalytic structure, function and genesis of the super-ego. Through a dialogue between the existential and psychoanalytical interpretations of conscience, I will demonstrate the everyday experience of conscience as a fear of anxiety, which according to Freud is in essence a fear of castration. I will then trace the genesis of the super-ego by making manifest its relation to totemism and the double identity of the father.

Chapter Four Dragon and the Oedipus Complexes of the Early Chinese People: The genesis of the super-ego requires a closer study of Freud’s theory of totemism. I will carry out a case study of Freud’s theory of totemism by establishing its significance for the myths of the dragon of early Chinese people. My study will demonstrate the worship of the dragon as a different version of the Oedipal myth taking place in early Chinese civilization. The inferences of this case study lend support for Freud’s account of the historical origin of the phenomena of conscience and guilt. They indicate also the need for a more careful examination of the historical moment depicted in the Oedipal myth.
Chapter Five Conscience and Ethos: Thinking Across the Limits of Normativity:

The dialogue between the existential and psychoanalytic interpretations of conscience prepares for a rethinking of the meanings and origins of conscience, law and morality.

I will trace the origin of conscience as morality to the historical moment of the death of the father, which I regard as a moment of the truth of humanity. I will further reveal the central strife in the question of ethics as the strife between the powerless superpower of heart and conscience and the demonic power of the super-ego that speaks the voice of everyday “moral conscience.” The question of ethics, thus, turns out to be a question of hermeneutics. The entrance into this question of hermeneutics is made possible by an authentic dialogue with the early Chinese thinking.

Part II. Hermeneutics of Conscience and Ethos in early Chinese thinking
Notes

1 As we will see, the question of “who” or “who I am?”
2 The question of “what.”
3 Augustine, Exp. On Psalm 57, 1; On Order, II, 8, 25, quoted in The Essential Augustine, p. 150.
5 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:98.
6 Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:400.
7 It is notable that Kant himself characterizes conscience differently in the lectures he gave in his earlier years. In lectures given at Königsberg 1784-5, for example, he defines conscience as an instinct, not a merely faculty: “Conscience is an instinct, to direct oneself according to moral laws. It is not a mere faculty, but an instinct, not to pass judgement on, but to direct oneself…. Conscience, however, has a driving force, to summon us against our will before the judgement-seat, in regard to the lawfulness of our action. It is thus an instinct, and not merely a faculty of judgment.” Lectures on Ethics, 27:351-52. The transformation and continuity of Kant’s view on conscience, however, call for separate study.
8 Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:438.
9 Kant, Religion within the limits of Reason Alone, p. 185, 173, quoted in Howard Caygill, A Kant Dictionary, p. 125.
11 Ibid, p. 38.
12 Ibid, 38.
13 Ibid, p. 46.
14 Kant, Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals, 4:421.
15 The Metaphysics of Moral, 6:438.
16 Ibid, 6:400. I am taking the term for “fact [Tatsache]” here as synonymous with the word fact in the word fact [Faktum]. It seems that Kant’s use of these two technical terms are not always strict and involves some inconsistency and complication. See Howard Caygill’s exposition in A Kant Dictionary, p. 189.
17 Ibid, 6:439.
19 Jonathan, p. 123.
21 Charles Scott, The Question of Ethics, p. 143.
By the term “early Chinese thinking” we refer to the period of thinking before the first unification of China by Qin in 221 B.C. Recent archeological findings of ancient Chinese writings on the oracle bones have not only proved the existence of Yin Dynasty that began around 1600 B.C, but demonstrated the superiority of its level of civilization. The origin of early Chinese thinking, while still waiting to be further explored, can be beyond all question dated way back in the timeline of history. Our study, however, will only cover on a small portion of that long period, that is, the part during the .. And we will base our study on two major school of thinking, Confucianism and Taoism, when such division or distinction is appropriate in the first place.

For a comparison of heroes in ancient China and Greece, see David N. Keightley, How does Chinese People become Chinese People: On Heroes in Ancient Chinese Culture and Art and in Ancient Greek Culture and Art, in Chinese Culture and Chinese Philosophy, Beijing: San-Lian Book Store, 1989. In summary, Keightley concludes that in ancient China, there were no such heroes that were found in ancient Greek mythologies and arts. Ancient Chinese people, in Keightley’s words, do not “need” such kind of heroes.

As D. Howard Smith points out, “Religion in China has differed from religion in Western societies in that institutionalized religion has been relatively weak. ‘There was in China no independent religious heritage comparable to that of Hebrew tradition, and no such solid organization of priests as the Christendom. Therefore, no such religious system is found in China as in the West,’” Chinese Culture, vol. 3, no. 1, Oct. 1960, p. 17, quoted in Smith, Chinese Religions (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) p. x.
Chapter 2

Conscience and the Aporia of Being and Time

*Being and Time* would belong neither to science, nor to philosophy, nor to poetics. Such is perhaps the case for every work worthy of its name: there, what puts thinking into operation exceeds its own borders or what thinking itself intends to present of these borders. The work exceeds itself, it surpasses the limits of the concept of itself that it claims to have properly while presenting itself. But if the event of this work thus exceeds its own borders, the borders that its discourse seems to give to itself... then it would do so precisely at this locus where it experiences the aporia – and perhaps its premature interruption, its very prematurity.

– Derrida, *Finis*¹

The interpretation of the phenomenon of conscience plays a critical role in *Being and Time*. For Heidegger, conscience is the call of care that *attests* to the authenticity of Da-sein. The phenomenological analysis of conscience makes visible the unity of the existential structure of the being of Da-sein. It brings also the meaning and structure of conscience to an unprecedented clarity. Yet, Heidegger’s interpretation of conscience continues to be misunderstood. The persistent misunderstanding of the meaning of conscience reflects the *aporia* of *Being and Time*, which, with a view to revoking the western metaphysical tradition, ultimately *recalls* it. In the phrase “the *aporia* of *Being and Time*,” thus, the genitive is to be understood as both *genitivus subjectivus* and
objectivus. It refers both to the aportia that Being and Time poses in front of us and to the aportia implicated in the project of Being and Time itself. Such aportias are epitomized in the existential interpretation of conscience as a “double attestation.” For the voice of conscience attests not only to resoluteness as the authentic existentiell possibility of Da-sein’s potentiality-for-being-itself but also to the authentic anticipatory being-toward-death as the ontological possibility of Dasein’s potentiality-of-being-a-whole. Conscience discloses and “accomplishes” Da-sein as the being it is delivered over to be. But since the call of conscience only “reaches him who wants to be brought back,”² (SZ 271), the attestation of conscience turns out to be moving in a circle. This circularity brings into question the very validity and possibility of the attestation, if this word is to be understood in its ordinary sense. In Heidegger’s later writings, thus, the language of conscience and attestation has to be put away [aufgehenoben]. Yet, the question concerning conscience, as I will show, refuses to be dropped out. As a summons that calls the mortals to think their homelessness and calls them into their dwelling, it continues to announce itself, however reticently, as a question that will guide us to build our way back and forth.

I. The Double Attestation of the Call of Conscience

Conscience, Heidegger says, is a call. The voice of conscience is the attestation [Bezeugung] of Da-sein’s authentic [eigentilich] potentiality-of-being. (SZ 268) An attestation, in its everyday sense, is a statement made under oath for the declaration of the truth of something. Truth is understood here as the correspondence of a statement with a
thing in reality. What the voice of conscience attests to, however, is not a reality or actuality, but a possibility. “Higher than actuality,” Heidegger claims, “stands possibility.” (SZ 38) The attestation of conscience does not prove the truth of anything in reality, but discloses the truth of Da-sein. For “Da-sein is always its possibility.” (SZ 42) The truth that is attested in the testimony of conscience is not truth in its derivative sense of correctness but the primordial truth of disclosedness. Conscience discloses. The summons [Anruf] of conscience calls Da-sein forth to its own self [eigene selbst] and attests that Da-sein is essentially “in the truth.” (SZ 221)

In contrast to the statement of everyday attestation, the alien voice of conscience, as a mode of discourse [logos], “speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence.” (SZ 273) The call of conscience is a silent saying that brings forth [poiew] the essence [Wesen, to ti en einai] of Da-sein to the fore. “The essence of Da-sein lies in its existence.” (SZ 42) The essence of Da-sein is its having-been, its thrown being there. Thrownness makes manifest being [Sein] as a burden [Last] that Da-sein initially and for the most part avoids carrying. Initially and for the most part, Da-sein evades the burden of being by turning away into the everyday entanglement among the they. In its fleeing and falling [Verfallen], in its being-with [sein bei] with other Da-seins, Da-sein is “at home.” But being “at home” and being absorbed [aufgehen] in the “world,” Da-sein loses its individuality. The Da-sein that is entangled is no longer mine, but it is everybody, or nobody. Da-sein loses itself among the they and in the idle talks of the they. It is the silent call of conscience that disrupts the loud talks of the they and calls Da-sein back from its being-lost in everyday entanglement to “the reticence of its existent potentiality-of-being.” (SZ 277) “Da-sein calls itself in conscience.” (SZ 275) The call reveals itself
as the call of care. It comes from the past of thrownness and calls Da-sein out of its present entanglement forth to its most proper potentiality-of-being in the future. Hearing the call of conscience, Da-sein is individuated and becomes mine again. For “at bottom conscience is essentially always mine, not only in the sense that one’s most proper potentiality-of-being is always summoned, but because the call comes from the being that I myself always am.” (SZ 278) The call of conscience discloses the individuality and the always-being-mine of Da-sein and attests to the authenticity of its being. Heidegger designates this eminent, authentic disclosedness attested in Da-sein itself by its conscience “resoluteness [Entschlossenheit]” – “the reticent projecting oneself upon one’s most proper being-guilty which is ready for Angst.” (SZ 297)

But in the attestation of resoluteness as an authentic potentiality-for-being oneself, conscience attests also to the ontological possibility of Da-sein’s potentiality-of-being-a-whole. Fundamentally, what the voice of conscience attests to is the most proper [eigenst] non-relational possibility of Da-sein not to be bypassed, the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, the ontological possibility of an existentiell, authentic being-toward-death. (SZ 266) Being-toward-death, in Heidegger’s terms, is “the anticipation [Vorlauf] of a potentiality-of-being of that being whose kind of being is anticipation itself.” (SZ 262) Since anticipation, which discloses the possibility of “existing as a whole potentiality of being” (SZ 244), is a possibility ensconced in resoluteness, it is a possibility that is “attested therewith” in the call of conscience [die in der existenziell bezeugten Entschlossenheit verborgene und sonach mitbezeugt Möglichkeit ihrer Eigentlichkeit] (SZ 309). In resoluteness that is attested existentiell in the voice of conscience, “there is attested with it an authentic potentiality-of-being a
whole which belongs to Da-sein […ist in der existenziell bezeuten Entscholossenheit ein eigentliches Ganzseinkönnen des Daseins mitbezeugt] (SZ 309).” Such a double attestation of conscience can only take place because resoluteness, the authentic disclosedness of Da-sein, “reached the certainty authentically belonging to it only in the anticipation of death.” (SZ 302)³ Wanting to have a conscience, I attest to myself in my resolute disclosedness the ontological possibility of an authentic being-toward-death. Anticipating my death, I witness the possibility of the impossibility of my existence as such, i.e., as a possibility that is the “end [telos]” of my being – an “end” that “defines” my potentiality of being a “whole.” Conscience “accomplishes” Da-sein. It calls Da-sein away from the entanglement among the they to be free for its most proper possibility to be.

But hasn’t conscience long been taken as what accomplishes the “essence” of human being in the western metaphysical tradition? Aristotle designates *phronesis*, which Heidegger claims to be “nothing other than conscience set into motion,”⁴ as a state of truth [*exin alethe*].⁵ *Phronesis* is that by virtue of which human beings determine the virtuous state of the mean in their actions and emotions. It differs from *techne* in that the *telos* of *phronesis*, “is the *anthrwpos* himself. *Aute e eupraxia telos* (1140b7), the proper being of man is the *telos.*”⁶ The Medieval reflection upon conscience begins with Augustine, who speaks of “the eternal law of God and of the moral law that is inscribed in the hearts of man” and takes conscience as “an expression of this divinely implanted law of goodness.”⁷ In the wake of the long-lasting and complicated discussions about conscience in the Middle Ages, Butler spells out the Christian understanding of conscience as the “superior principle of reflection… in every man,”⁸ which stands for the
higher nature of man and it is by this faculty that is natural to man that “he is a moral agent, that he is a law to himself.” Conscience is thus “in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so.” The authority and supremacy of conscience guarantee the absolute truth of the moral law toward which conscience guides us. For the guide of conscience is a natural guide “assigned us by the Author of our nature,” i.e., by God. Kant defines conscience as the consciousness of the moral law, the categorical imperative according to which humanity and transcendental freedom are identified as the very essence of man and as “an end in itself.” As the fact of reason, the moral self-awareness of conscience testifies to the reality of the concept of freedom, which constitutes the “keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason.” For the concepts of God and immortality can only be thought on the basis of the concept of freedom and their possibility be “demonstrated by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law.” Freud portrays the origin of the traditional understanding of conscience as the supervision of the ego ideal or super-ego, which “answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man.” The ideal of morality is contained in these higher natures, which we admired and feared when we were little children and which we later “took … into ourselves.” Apparently, under the traditional interpretations, conscience answers to the higher nature of human beings by calling forth what brings human beings to the divine. It accomplishes the essence of human beings by presenting an ideal of existence, whether this ideal is embodied in the authority of the super-ego, in the transcendental freedom of the moral subject, in the paradigm of the divine Creator or in the pure actuality of God as the self-thinking thinking.
For Heidegger, however, the call of conscience “does not dangle an empty ideal of existence before us when it summons us to our potentiality-of-being, but calls forth to the situation.” (SZ 300) Conscience calls Da-sein forth to the there [das Da] disclosed in resoluteness, for “situation is only through and in resoluteness.” (SZ 300) This situation of authentic disclosedness, however, is essentially closed off for the they. Leaving the question of being unthought, the they “knows only the ‘general situation.’” (SZ 300) Accordingly, the everyday experience of conscience, in which the traditional interpretations of conscience implicate themselves for the most part, only gets at the phenomenon of conscience “pre-ontologically.” The traditional interpretations of conscience do not manifest the original meaning of the phenomenon but “cover it over.” (SZ 290, cf. SZ 292) For Heidegger, the call of conscience “accomplishes” Da-sein not by fulfilling an ideal of existence but by attesting to the unity and authenticity of its possibility to be. Conscience “accomplishes” Da-sein by letting it witness authentic being-toward-death as its most proper potentiality-of-being-a-whole. The everyday experience of conscience provides us only an indirect attestation of the unity of Da-sein; just as the existential situation of Angst is attested “only” indirectly in the cowardly fear of the everyday being-toward-death, which, even “in overcoming that fear, only testifies [bekunden] its own cowardice in the face of Angst.” (SZ 266) As a result, an existential interpretation of the phenomenon of conscience is only possible when it is carried out on the basis of the phenomenological analysis of the whole of Da-sein itself. It is this wholeness and unity of Da-sein that pose before us the major aporias of Being and Time.
II. Being-toward-Death: the Unity of Da-sein Attested in Conscience

With the preparatory fundamental analysis of Da-sein that reveals the being of Da-sein as care, the entire project of Being and Time, as Heidegger acknowledges, runs into the danger of getting stranded. (SZ 233) On the one hand, the ontological interpretation of Da-sein, like all other interpretations, has its fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. The primordiality of the ontological interpretation, however, can only be established when the “totality of the being taken as its theme [“Ganz des thematischen Seienden,” i.e. Ganz des Daseins] have been brought to a fore-having.” (SZ 232) What is held in this fore-having and understood in the fore-sight, further, must been seen with respect to “the unity of the possible structural factors belonging to it.” (SZ 232) A primordial, ontological interpretation of Da-sein is thus only possible on the basis of the demonstration of a primordial unity of the structural totality of this being. On the other hand, with the structural totality of Da-sein determined as care, i.e., as facticity, falling [Verfallen] and existence, some serious difficulties arise concerning its possible unity. For the existentiality of Da-sein makes manifest that Da-sein is always ahead of itself. As long as Da-sein exists, as long as it is as a being, there is always a “not yet” belonging to it and it “has never attained its ‘wholeness.’” (SZ 236) As a being whose essence is existence, Da-sein essentially resists “the possibility of being comprehended as a total being.” (SZ 233) It is thus questionable whether the whole being of Da-sein is “attainable at all.” (SZ 233)

In Heidegger’s view, the reason for the “impossibility of experiencing Da-sein ontically as an existing whole and of defining it ontologically in its wholeness” (SZ 236)
goes back to the being of Da-sein. The “argumentation” for the impossibility in grasping
the whole of Da-sein, however, is based upon an understanding of Da-sein as something
objectively present, i.e., as a subject or a reality. But Da-sein, understood properly, is
always its possibilities. The question concerning the whole of Da-sein, accordingly, will
only become accessible when the existentiality of Da-sein, i.e., its not-yet-being and
ahead-of-itself, is grasped “in a genuinely existential sense” (SZ 237) and when the
meaning of its “end” and totality is understood on the basis of its “possibilities.” The end
of Da-sein as being-in-the-world is death. Death, therefore, “limits and defines the
possible totality of Da-sein.” (SZ 234) The ontological interpretation of the whole being
of Da-sein, thus, requires an existential concept of death.

For centuries, western philosophers have understood the concept of end, telos as
the completion or perfection of a substance or subject. For human beings, the end is also
a purpose, an ou henika, a “for-the-sake-of.” The end or purpose of a human being, as I
have shown above, has long been understood as the fulfillment of an ideal of existence
attested in conscience. With such understanding of the end of human beings in terms of
completion or perfection – whether this perfection is embodied in the fulfillment of a
divine order or the demonstration of transcendental freedom – the “meaning” of life is
believed to have secured a solid ground. Death, accordingly, has to be grasped also as a
phenomenon of life. Death must be defined on the basis of the “meaning” of life. But
death announces itself as a “problem.” It is also an end, undeniably. It refuses, however,
to be taken as a purpose, as a for-the-sake-of. How absurd would it be, were anybody to
claim that the whole life is for the sake of death! Rather, death as an end disrupts. It
disturbs the “normal” order of things moving towards their “completion” and
“perfection.” Death as an end threatens rather than accomplishes the “meaning” of life. In the face of death, the chases after wealth, power, fame, or moral perfection all turn out to be “illusive,” when “the life of this world is nothing but a fleeting vanity.”

Death thus becomes an end that has to be “dealt with.” It has indeed been dealt with in different cultures around the world. Or, “culture itself, culture in general, is essentially, before anything, even a priori, the culture of death.” But initially and for the most part, death as a possibility is pushed away from the “normal” order of life. The possibility of death is dealt with in such a way that it is never thought of as an imminent possibility as such.

For Heidegger, in contrast, “the existential interpretation of death is prior to any biology and ontology of life.” (SZ 247) The priority of the existential interpretation of death stems from the priority of the ontology of Da-sein. Ontologically, death cannot be defined in terms of human biological life. Rather, the meaning of life will only become visible after the clarification of the existential concept of death, which “limits and defines the possible totality of Da-sein.” Death as the end of Da-sein is essentially different from the end of what is alive as a biological organism. Heidegger designates the ending of a biological organism as perishing [Verenden]. An animal, for example, perishes when its body organs cease functioning. But even an animal does not simply disappear when it perishes but is either deformed or transformed into some lower level biological organisms. Nor does Da-sein just disappear on its death. The death of Da-sein, granted, is also accompanied or occasioned by the perishing of its biological body. But qua Da-sein, it never simply perishes. The perishing of a human body only brings about the death of a Da-sein as being-in-the-world. Properly speaking, only Da-sein dies; and Da-sein dies with its world. The death of a Da-sein closes off its world as a site of disclosure. The
existential concept of death, thus, must be thought from the standpoint of the clearing [Lichtung] of the truth of being. The possibility of death declares the mortality of Da-sein and makes manifest the finitude of being itself. Mortality and finitude characterize essentially the fates of Da-sein and being’s eventuation. Being is always the being of a being. The eventuation of being, as the clearing of the truth of being, takes place “only because and as long as Da-sein is.” (Cf. SZ 230) Being needs Da-sein for its clearing because only Da-sein is concerned about its being about its being [es geht ... um] and only a being who is concerned in its being about its being preserves and safeguards the truth of being. Da-sein is appropriated by being for its eventuation; just as man [Mensch] is delivered over to Da-sein and appropriated by it for the disclosure of the truth of being. (SZ 135, margin notes) Man and being need each other and in their need of each other are grounded upon each other. As long as the eventuation of being needs man and is conditioned by it, the corruptibility of the human body presages the concealing-withdraw belonging essentially to being’s eventuation, which determines the mortality of Da-sein and the finitude of being. 

But precisely because Da-sein is mortal, it is concerned in its being about its being. Only that being dies who is concerned about its being in its being. In the possibility of death, in the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, Heidegger says, Da-sein is “concerned about its being-in-the-world absolutely.” (SZ 250) Only because Da-sein is concerned in its being about its being, can there be a world disclosed for it, is it for the sake of itself. Only the being whose being is for the sake of itself, i.e., who cares for its own being, can take care of things in the world to which it belongs, can discover a surrounding world in a circumspect heedful way. A human body as a biological organism
through which Da-sein interacts with the external world can only function when Da-sein let the beings in the world be encountered in a circumspect heedful way. Letting beings be encountered in a circumspect heedful way, Heidegger says, “has the character of being affected or moved. But being affected… is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can matter to it in this way.” (SZ 137) A book on a table and the table itself, for example, indeed interact with each other physically through pressure and resistance. But neither is affected by the other, for neither can matter to the other. The relation between the book and the table is completely apathetic. This apathetic relation results from the fact that both the book and the table are “heartless.” Only for the being who is concerned in its being about its being can what it encounters in the world matter to it. Only the being who is in the existential situation of fearing, for example, can “discover things at hand in the surrounding world as being threatening.” (SZ 137) The disclosure of the there as being-in-the-world in the existential situation is the ontological ground of affects and sense perceptions that is made possible by the human body. Only because “senses” belong ontologically to a being who finds itself as being-in-the-world in an existential situation \( \textit{befindliches In-der-Welt-sein} \), Heidegger says, “can they be ‘touched’ and ‘have a sense’ for something, so that what touches them shows itself in an affect.” (SZ 137) The sense perceptions of the human body do not first make the discovery of the world possible. Sense perceptions can only function when the being of Da-sein as being-in-the-world has already been disclosed “there” in the existential situation in which Da-sein always finds itself.
As long as Da-sein needs the human body and is conditioned by it for the disclosure and discovery of the surrounding world, with the perishing of the human biological organism, Da-sein also dies. The possibility remains, however, that Da-sein can already die before the perishing of its biological body. Ancient Chinese claimed that “no sorrow is greater than the death of the heart; even the death of the human is second to it.” With the death of the heart, presumably, dies the world of Da-sein. Heidegger uses the word “demise [Ableben]” to describe the intermediate phenomenon of Da-sein’s end between authentic dying and perishing. Demise as an intermediate phenomenon of the end of Da-sein reflects the being of Da-sein as a “between,” i.e., as being-in. (SZ 132)

Da-sein is between being [Sein] and a being. It is appropriated by being as it appropriates human for being’s eventuation. As the being of there, as the site of the clearing of the truth of being, Da-sein is the being of this “between.” (SZ 132) Since Da-sein is the being of this “between,” it never simply perishes. “Da-sein can only demise as long as it dies” (SZ 247) In the end of its death, thus, Da-sein is “neither fulfilled nor simply disappear.” (SZ 245) Rather, the death of Da-sein belongs to the event of being’s clearing, which is characterized essentially by a concealing-withdrawal. Being, as Heidegger elaborates later, “appears primordially in the light [Licht] of concealing withdrawal. The name of this clearing [Lichtung] is aletheia.” Da-sein as being-in-the-world, accordingly, is determined equiprimordially by truth and untruth – a fact whose existential and ontological condition “lies in the constitution of being of Da-sein …as thrown project.” (SZ 223) As thrown project, Da-sein takes the end of death as a possibility toward which it is constantly running as long as it is. Da-sein “always already is its end.” (SZ 245) The existential concept of death does not “signify a being-at-the-end of Da-sein, but rather a
being toward the end of this being. Death is a way to be that Da-sein takes over as soon as it is.” (SZ 245) The existential concept of death reveals “dying [Sterben]” as “the way of being in which Da-sein is toward its death.” (SZ 247)

As thrown project, Da-sein is thrown being-toward-death. For Heidegger, this existential clarification of being toward the end “first provides the adequate basis for defining the possible meaning of… a totality of Da-sein.” (SZ 245) The totality of Da-sein refers neither to the completion of its physical body nor to the fulfillment of an ideal of existence. Rather, the totality of Da-sein means nothing but the totality of its possibilities. Since Da-sein is thrown being-toward-its-end and since initially and for the most part Da-sein flees from its most proper possibility as being-toward-death, existence, facticity and falling “characterize being-toward-the-end, and are accordingly constitutive for the existential concept of death.” (SZ 252) The existential concept of death reveals “care” as the ground of the ontological possibility of dying and as the “ontological term for the wholeness of the structural totality of Da-sein.” (SZ 252) Care is thrown being-toward-death. Heidegger designates Da-sein’s way of being toward its possibility of death as “anticipation [Vorlauf].” Being-toward-death, Heidegger says, “is the anticipation of a potentiality-of-being of that being whose kind of being is anticipation itself.” (SZ 262) It is in anticipatory running toward the possibility of the impossibility of its existence that Da-sein as thrown being-toward-death “first makes this possibility possible and sets it free as possibility.” (SZ 262) When Da-sein frees itself for its death, when it understands being-toward-death as its most proper and extreme potentiality-of-being, it also frees itself from its being-lost in the “chance possibilities” of the they for the disclosure of a totality of its finite and authentic possibilities. Because anticipation of
the possibility of the absolute impossibility also disclosed all the possibilities lying before it, “this anticipation includes the possibility of taking the whole of Da-sein in advance in an existentiell way, that is the possibility of existing as a whole potentiality-of-being.”

(SZ 264) This potentiality-of-being-a-whole is to be attested in conscience as the call of care. Since anticipation shows itself as “the possibility of understanding one’s most proper and extreme potentiality-of-being, that is, as the possibility of authentic existence,” what is anticipated in such anticipatory being-toward-the-end, the imminent non-relational possibility of the impossibility of Da-sein’s existence, reveals itself also as a for-the-sake-of. Anticipatory being-toward-death is a primordial for-the-sake-of, which as a being-toward-the-end and as a telos limits and defines the totality of Da-sein as the being who is concerned in its being about its being.

Contrary to Derrida’s assertion, Heidegger’s definition of death – “the most proper possibility as the possibility of an impossibility” – involves no “logical contradiction.” For Heidegger does not say that Da-sein is both possible and impossible to die. Rather, death is an “impossibility” only because it is first of all a possibility, a possibility of impossibility, a possibility that is characterized by impossibility. So far as the “form” of this definition does not attribute “possibility” and “impossibility” to the same “subject” – Da-sein – in the same respect and at the same time, it implicates no logical contradiction. It may indeed be “correct” to say that the proposition that defines the most proper possibility of Da-sein as the “possibility of its impossibility” involves a paradox – a paradox that might be more or less comparable to the so-called “liar’s paradox.” But fundamentally, the paradox concerning the possibility of death is not a “logical” one. Rather, the paradox belongs to the being of Da-sein and must be thought
from the standpoint of the truth of being. The paradox of the possibility of the impossibility that defines Da-sein’s most proper possibility to be and its alleged attestation in conscience constitute the major “difficulty” that the existential concept of death poses before us. It is a junction [Fuge] at which assembles the constellation of the aporias of Being and Time.

III. Wanting to Have a Conscience and the Choice for the Impossible

To think death as such, to think it as the possibility of the impossibility that defines the most proper possibility of Da-sein, constitutes the major aporia of Being and Time. As Derrida elaborates, “Heidegger would thus say that for Dasein impossibility as death – the impossibility of death, the impossibility of the existence whose name is “death” – can appear as such and announce itself; it can make itself awaited or let itself be awaited as possible and as such. Only Dasein would be capable of this aporia, only Dasein has a relation to death as such, … it is only in the act of authentic, resolute, determinate and decided assumption by which Dasein would take upon itself the possibility of this impossibility that the aporia as such would announce itself as such and purely to Dasein as its most proper possibility, hence as the most proper essence of Dasein, its freedom, its ability to question, and its opening to the meaning of being.”22 Only Da-sein is capable of the aporia of the possibility of the impossibility, because only Da-sein dies, only Da-sein is concerned in its being about its being. To be capable of the aporia means to be resolute in choosing its authentic potentiality-for-being-a-self. Understanding the call of conscience, wanting to have a conscience, Da-sein has chosen itself. In choosing the
choice, Da-sein frees itself for the possibility of death and thus frees itself for the fate of its being as mortal temporality. Only when Da-sein frees itself for death as its most proper possibility, only when Da-sein, anticipating, lets death become powerful in itself, would it understand “itself in its own superpower, the power of its finite freedom,” and take over “the powerless of being abandoned to itself in that freedom, which always only is in having chosen the choice.” (SZ 384) Choosing the choice, Da-sein frees itself for “the powerless superpower [die ohnemachtig Übermacht]” (SZ 385) of its fate. By virtue of this powerless superpower, Da-sein is “capable of” the aporia, of the choice for the impossible. So far as the impossibility that defines the possibility of death points back to the possibility of the most proper being of Da-sein, death as the possibility of an impossibility is also the im-possibility of the possibility. As thrown being-toward-death, Da-sein is this impossibility. It is by choosing and freeing itself for this impossibility that Da-sein is capable of entering into and enduring the constellation of the aporias as such – the most proper possibility as the possibility of its impossibility; the whole of its being that is not only “incomplete” but also defined by its very “incompleteness;” primordial being-guilty as its most proper potentiality-of-being disclosed in the call of conscience, which is nonetheless positive;” (SZ 288) care as the ultimate ground of the totality of its being that is at the same time “the null ground of a nullity” (SZ 285) and thus an abyssal ground [Abgrund]; truth of its existence that is essentially limited and thus equiprimordial with and inseparable from untruth; the homelessness of the they-self that is ontically “at-home” and the homecoming of the authentic Da-sein who will only find its place of dwelling when it hears the summons of conscience that calls “out of uncanniness [Unheimlichkeit].” (SZ 280)
Our interpretation needs its own path into this constellation of aporias. Since conscience in its everyday interpretation has long been understood as “guilty conscience,” let us take Da-sein’s primordial being-guilty as an entrance. Everyday common sense, as Heidegger elaborates, takes “being guilty” as a lack. One can be guilty by having a debt, that is, by owing something to the other “which is due to him.” (SZ 281) In a more general case, one can be guilty by “being to blame or being responsible for [schuld sein an]” (SZ 282) a lack, for an absence of something that ought to belong to the other. For example, Mark Twin’s character Huck can feel that he is guilty to Miss Walton by not telling her the whereabouts of her missing slave Jim. He feels that he is responsible for a loss or lack of the property of Miss Walton though he does not owe anything to Miss Walton in any direct way. Both of these ways of “being guilty” can be understood in terms of the behavior of “making oneself responsible [sich schuldig machen].” By having the responsibility for having a debt [das Schuldhaben an einem Schuldenhaben], for example, “one may break a law and make oneself punishable.” (SZ 282) Law, in its everyday sense, can be taken as a rule by means of which the distribution of rights and valuables is enforced by social authorities for the sake of attaining certain “balance” between different social groups and individuals. To break a law is thus to disrupt the balance between different individuals and may either cause a loss of other people’s proprieties or jeopardize their very existence. Consequently, “making oneself responsible” by breaking a law can also at the same time have the character of ‘becoming responsible to others.”’ (SZ 282)

Thus, being guilty in its everyday sense can be summarized as “being the ground for a lack in the Da-sein of another.” (SZ 282) Being guilty in this sense is related to
things that can be taken care of. It is related to the “being-at-home” in the world in which Da-sein absorbs itself in its everyday entanglement. Making oneself responsible for a lack in the Da-sein of another with whom Da-sein is being-with [sein bei – bei: with, in, at the home of] has the character of being guilty of jeopardizing the “being-at-home” with other Da-seins by breaking the “balance” on which the relation with others is based. The “everyday experience” of conscience understands “being guilty” in the sense of being the ground for a lack in the others and thus for a disruption of one’s “being-at-home.” The sense of guilt stems from the fear about [um] one’s “being-at-home,” which can be seen as the origin of conscience in its everyday sense. But being guilty in the everyday sense, Heidegger claims, is “possible only ‘on the basis’ of a primordial being guilty.” (SZ 284)

Primordial being-guilty refers to the fundamental “not” that characterizes the ground of the being of Da-sein. The “not,” as Heidegger clarifies, does not have “the character of a privation, of a lack as compared with an ideal which is set up but is not attained in Da-sein.” (SZ 285) The “not” is not about the lack of something in reality, of something that is not yet objectively present. If so, Da-sein would still be understood as a kind of reality or subjectivity instead of possibility. Rather, the “not” constitutes the very ground of the being of Da-sein as care, i.e., as thrown being-toward-death. Thrownness points to the facticity of Da-sein as being delivered over [Überantwortung]. Da-sein is thrown there as being-in-the-world, though its whence and whither [Woher und Wohin] remained concealed. (Cf. SZ 135) The whence of Da-sein is veiled. It is not known from where Da-sein is thrown, though it is always already there disclosed in the existential situation as “that it is and has to be.” As thrown, Da-sein is brought into its there “not of
its own accord, … it has not given itself to itself.” (SZ 284) It is not through itself that Da-sein is entrusted to be the thrown ground, to bear the burden of being that is revealed in the existential situation – a burden which Da-sein initially and for the most part avoids carrying by fleeing away into the everyday “world” it is taking care of. The whither [Worum] of Da-sein is also veiled. For Da-sein as possibility to be, there is not a definite possibility toward which Da-sein is supposed to throw or project [entwerfen] itself. As a potentiality-of-being, Da-sein “always stands in one possibility or another; it is constantly not other possibilities and has relinquished them in its existentiell project. As thrown, the project is not only determined by the nullity [Nichtigkeit] of being the ground but is itself as project [Entwurf] essentially null [nichtig].” (SZ 285) As thrown being-toward-death, Da-sein is its finite possibilities. The project is essentially null because the most proper possibility of Da-sein as thrown being-toward-death is precisely the possibility of the impossibility of its existence. No definite existentiell possibility constitutes the most proper possibility – the whither of Da-sein upon which it is to project itself. The whither of Da-sein, as the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, is completely indefinite.

Heidegger defines the “formal existential idea of ‘guilty’ as being-the-ground for a being which is determined by a not, – that is, being-the-ground of a nullity.” (SZ 283) Da-sein is the thrown ground, and being the ground, “it itself is a nullity of itself.” (SZ 284) Ground [Grund], in its everyday sense, is the reason or foundation of something. It refers to some kind of reality that is either the origin or the end of something else in reality. But the thrown ground that Da-sein is, with its whence and whither concealed, is not a reality. It is a nullity of itself. The ground is abyssal [Abgrund]. It provides no foundation for the “being-at-home” of Da-sein in its absorption in the world but is the
very ground for its being-guilty in its everyday entanglement among the they. The abyssal ground reveals the fundamental uncanniness [Unheimlichkeit] of Da-sein’s being. And yet, as abyss, the ground discloses. The being whose ground of being is abyssal is concerned in its being about its being. “Being its own thrown ground is the potentiality-of-being about which care is concerned [darum es der Sorge geht].” (SZ 284) Only the being that is concerned about its being is for the sake of itself. The “for-the-sake-of-which [um…wollen] always concerns the being of Da-sein which is essentially concerned about [um] this being itself in its being.” (SZ 84) The for-the-sake-of-which, as the primary “what-for” [wo-zu] and thus the ground of the significance of the innerworldly beings, of the worldliness of the world, is always for the sake of possibilities of the being of Da-sein. Da-sein is the thrown ground only by “projecting itself upon the possibilities into which it is thrown.” (SZ 284) The ground first arises from the project of Da-sein itself, which means, existing, Da-sein is the ground of its potentiality-of-being and the ground of the world that is disclosed in the project. And yet, the project is itself essentially null. There is not a definite possibility as such upon which Da-sein is supposed to project itself. For the most proper possibility of Da-sein, the primordial for-the-sake-of, is precisely the possibility of the impossibility of its existence. Care, the being of Da-sein, thus, “is in its essence thoroughly permeated with nullity.” It means, as thrown project: “being the (null) ground of a nullity.” (SZ 285)

Da-sein, whose being is care, is guilty in the ground of its being. This being-guilty first “gives the ontological condition for the fact that Da-sein can become guilty while factically existing.” (SZ 286) Factically, Heidegger asserts surprisingly, “every action is necessarily ‘without conscience,’ not only because it does not avoid factual moral
indebtedness, but because on the basis of the null ground of its null project it has always already become guilty toward the others in being-with with them.” (SZ 288) That Da-sein has always already become guilty toward the others in being-with them makes manifest the “being-at-home” of Da-sein in its everyday entanglement as an illusion. Essentially, Da-sein can never be truly “at home” in its everyday entanglement, for “the uncanniness constantly pursues Da-sein and threatens its everyday being-lost in the they.” (SZ 189) Uncanniness brings Da-sein “face to face with its undisguised nullity, which belongs to the possibility of its most proper potentiality-of-being.” (SZ 287) Being the null ground of a nullity, Da-sein is its finite possibilities. Being finite in its being, Da-sein has always already been guilty in its everyday entanglement, though this primordial being-guilty “initially and for the most part remains undisclosed.” (SZ 286) Primordial being-guilty reveals the ideal of existence, the completion and perfection of the “essence” of human Da-sein attested in the everyday experience of conscience as an illusion. Ultimately and from the ground up, moral dilemmas in everyday life are inevitable and the “peace of conscience” Da-sein wishes to attain in its everyday taking care of things by calculating claims and balancing them off is impossible. (Cf. SZ 283)

Many critics have complained that Heidegger’s interpretation of conscience and guilt does not offer any concrete example of a positive moral decision.24 Granted, the silent call of conscience does not call Da-sein toward any definite existentiell possibilities. “It does not give any information about factual occurrences.” (SZ 280) Neither does the authentic disclosedness of resoluteness refer to any definite decision for the choice of one particular existentiell possibility over another. It does not decide upon a standard or principle according to which a choice can be made in taking up possibilities
presented and suggested. It remains completely indefinite as regards “to what” Da-sein is
to resolve itself in resoluteness and “on what” it is to resolve. As regards such questions,
Heidegger says, “only the resolution itself can answer this.’(SZ 298) Only a Da-sein in
resolution itself would be capable of discovering and determining authentically about its
existentiell possibilities, though it remains completely uncertain what these possibilities
are and upon which of them Da-sein is supposed to decide. The existentiell indefiniteness
“belongs necessarily to resoluteness,” which “nevertheless has its existential
definiteness.” (SZ 299) For existentially, the call of conscience calls Da-sein into
resoluteness to be definite about its most proper potentiality-of-being as primordial
being-guilty.

Since the call of conscience, though it “does not give us any information”
concerning factual occurrences, discloses the existential definiteness of Da-sein, it is “not
merely critical, but positive.” (SZ 288, cf. 294) The call is positive because it calls Da-
sein away from the entanglement among the they to choose the choice for the impossible.
The resolute choice for the impossible would open up the authenticity of the being of Da-
sein as a possibility. Only when Da-sein takes over being-guilty and thrownness as the
ground of the nullity of its being, only when Da-sein faces up to the uncanniness of its
being, is an authentic being-toward-death, an authentic relation to its impossibility,
possible. Death as an impossibility does not mean the annihilation or disappearance of
Da-sein that is objectively present. Rather, the impossibility is always, as far as it is, a
possibility. It refers to the impossibility of the possibility and at the same time the
possibility of the impossibility. Precisely because Da-sein in its everyday entanglement
dares not face up to the possibility of this impossibility and thus its primordial being-
guilty, it has lost itself in the they. It dose not hear the silent call of conscience in its listening away [Hinhören, SZ 271] to the idle talks of the they. It wishes for the “peace of conscience” by following the commands and prohibitions of the social and parental authorities so as to be certain of its “innocence.” But Da-sein in its being-with is not itself. It has lost its individuality and authenticity. Only when Da-sein finds this “being-at-home” as groundless, only when it decides to take over the null ground of its being as being-guilty, will it hear the silent and alien voice of conscience that “calls from afar to afar” (SZ 271) and will the whole of its possibility that is covered up in the everyday entanglement be opened up. Hearing the call, Da-sein finally decides to face up to its own uncanniness and to be ready for Angst. “Angst individualizes and thus discloses Da-sein as ‘solus ipse.’” (SZ 188) Wanting to have a conscience, choosing the choice for the impossible, Da-sein has witnessed its authenticity. It has resolved to take over the powerless superpower of its fate to endure the aporia of its being as such.

IV. The Question concerning Conscience and the Aporia of Being and Time

For Heidegger, Da-sein’s capability of the aporia of its being as such and its potentiality of being-a-whole need attestation. It must be demonstrated that “the authenticity of Da-sein is neither an empty term nor a fabricated idea.” (SZ 301) We have shown that the ontological possibility of Da-sein’s potentiality-of-being-a-whole in anticipatory being-toward-death is attested by conscience as the call of care. Since resoluteness “becomes a primordial being toward the most proper potentiality-of-being of Da-sein only as anticipatory,” (SZ 306) it harbors authentic anticipatory being-toward-death in itself as
“the possible existentiell modality of its own authenticity.” (SZ 305) In resoluteness that is existentielly attested in the call of conscience, thus, anticipation as the potentiality-of-being-a-whole of Da-sein is also attested. Conscience as the call of care attests to and reveals “anticipatory resoluteness” as the primordial and authentic potentiality-for-being-a-whole of Da-sein. Conscience calls forth the powerless superpower of Da-sein by virtue of which it is capable of the *aporia* of its being.

But it is unsettled how the existential interpretation of the phenomenon of conscience and Da-sein’s authenticity can be “justified.” If the traditional interpretations of conscience do not manifest the original meaning of the phenomenon but “cover it over”(SZ 290) and if the call of conscience only “reaches him who wants to be brought back,”(SZ 271) then what is the proof that such authentic experience of conscience ever exists? Does not the existential interpretation of conscience, which attests to Da-sein’s potentiality-of-being-a-whole, “presuppose” already the idea of existence in general? If, as Heidegger acknowledges, even the formal idea of existence already “contains a definite though unpretentious ontological ‘content’ that ‘presupposes’ an idea of being in general,” (SZ 314) then the existential interpretation of the whole being of Da-sein attested in conscience presupposes already the idea of being in general. But as Heidegger claims, the ontologically clarified idea of being in general is first to be “attained by developing the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein.” (SZ 314) Isn’t it evident that the project of fundamental ontology that *Being and Time* sets forth is moving in a circle?

For Heidegger, however, this circularity of the hermeneutical situation does not constitute a logical fallacy, but “belongs to the essence and distinctiveness of
understanding itself.” (SZ 314) It belongs to the being of Da-sein. In the presupposition of the idea of existence, as Heidegger argues, no “theoretical” proposition concerning the existence of Da-sein is posited, from which “further propositions about the being of Da-sein” are deduced. (SZ 314) The presupposition of the idea of existence posits no definite ideal of existence. It also posits no definite possibility upon which Da-sein is supposed to project itself. What the idea of existence posits is the completely indefinite possibility of the impossibility of Da-sein, the ontological possibility of thrown being-toward-death, that is, the basic structure of Da-sein’s being as care. For Heidegger, care does not constitute a theoretical exposition of the structure of Da-sein. Rather, it “includes the being of Da-sein so primordially and completely that it must be already presupposed as a whole when we distinguish between theoretical and practical behavior.” (SZ 300) Accordingly, the existential analytic of Da-sein in Being and Time must not be read as a theoretical account of the being of Da-sein and is thus “not proving anything according to the rules of logic of consistency at all.” (SZ 315) The project of fundamental ontology lies in the phenomenological description of the being of Da-sein: to let the being of Da-sein show itself from itself in language. The presupposition of the idea of existence, thus, has the character of “an understanding project in such a way that the interpretation developing this understanding lets what is to be interpreted be put in words for the very first time.” (SZ 314) Since circularity belongs to the being of Da-sein itself, the existential analytic cannot avoid the hermeneutical circle. Rather, it is by “leaping into the circle primordially and completely” (SZ 315) that Da-sein’s authentic potentiality-of-being-a-whole would come to light under the phenomenological description.
But what is the proof that Da-sein is “capable” of leaping into the circle “primordially and completely?” How after all does conscience attest to Da-sein’s capability of entering into and enduring the *aporia* of its being *as such*, if the everyday experience of conscience, which only gets at the phenomenon of conscience “pre-ontologically,” constitutes at best an indirect evidence of Da-sein’s possible authenticity? Or, would the attestation always be indirect? If no authentic experience of the conscience can be shown to be present, how can it be said that Da-sein is capable of enduring the *aporia* of its being as such? Would it be inevitable that the *aporia* of Da-sein’s being can be experienced only in its deferment?

The claim that the idea of existence can be presupposed *as such*, that Da-sein is capable of enduring the paradox of its being, i.e., the possibility of the impossibility of its existence *as such*, that being in general can be thought and posited *as such*, and that there is a phenomenon of conscience *as such* that attests to Da-sein’s authentic being-toward-death constitute the major *aporias* implicated in the project of *Being and Time*. Since the existential analytic of Da-sein presupposes and posits the idea of being as *transendens pure and simple* (SZ 38) and since the task of fundamental ontology includes not only the existential clarification of the structural constituents of Da-sein but also the demonstration and confirmation of the priority and primordiality of such existential analytic, it is questionable whether the project of *Being and Time* has unavoidably implicated itself in the traditional metaphysical framework that it aims to overcome.

In a way, all the difficulties inherent to the major task of fundamental ontology boil down to the following question: has the existential interpretation of conscience as *the* attestation of Da-sein’s authentic potentiality-of-being-a-whole, while making the
meaning and structure of the phenomenon visible, also let the silent call of conscience be heard? Yes and no. For the call only “reaches him who wants to be brought back.” (SZ 271) The summons of conscience can only be heard by those who want to have a conscience, by those who have chosen the choice for the impossible. For those who do not hear the summons, thus, the whole project of Being and Time may turn out to be nothing but an ontological project based upon metaphysical presuppositions. The continuous misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Being and Time as “metaphysical” evidence the aporias implicated in the project of Being and Time. Presumably, as a call of silence, the voice of conscience may never be made heard as such by the philosophical analysis of its meaning and structure; just as the technical analysis of the rhythm, structure, rhyme, diction, or background of a poem would never let “the poetic” that belongs to the poem come forth as such. Ancient Chinese critics often suggest that the poetic in a poem lies somewhere outside or beyond the poem or the body of the poem itself. Likewise, the reticent call of conscience may only be overheard when it is understood as something exceeding the meaning and structure revealed by the existential interpretation. Consequently, Being and Time is, and must be read as, a work that means to exceed itself. (So is our interpretation itself.) In Being and Time, as Derrida points out, “what puts thinking into operation exceeds its own borders or what thinking itself intends to present of these borders. The work exceeds itself, it surpasses the limits of the concept of itself that it claims to have properly while presenting itself. But if the event of this work thus exceeds its own borders, the borders that its discourse seems to give to itself… then it would do so precisely at this locus where it experiences the aporia – and perhaps its premature interruption, its very prematurity.”

25 The existential “concept” of death,
which as being-toward-the-end limits and defines the possible totality of Da-sein, constitutes such a border. It is also the juncture at which the constellation of the *aporias* of *Being and Time* assembles. We take the major *aporia* implicated in the project of *Being and Time* as the incapability of the existential interpretation to let the call of conscience be heard *as such*, distinctly and indisputably, and thus its failure to accomplish the task it has set forth for itself – to demonstrate and confirm that Da-sein is capable of enduring the possibility of the impossibility of its existence as such. This *aporia* shows the very prematurity of *Being and Time*. As a result, the existential interpretation of conscience as an attestation has to be put away [*aufgehoben*] in Heidegger’s later writings.

Nonetheless, the *question* concerning conscience continues to announce itself, however reticently, as a question that cannot be simply dropped out. For it remains suspicious whether the thinking of being, which according to Heidegger is the engagement by and for the truth of being and in which being comes to language, “falls prey to arbitrariness”\(^{26}\) and whether such thinking that is bound to the advent of being is merely a capricious whim. Granted, in his later writings, Heidegger resorts to *the poetic* in the works of art, and above all, in poetry, as the evidence of the possibility of such thinking. The works of art created and preserved by artists, which according to common opinion reflect human’s engagement in artistic creation and appreciation, become the evidence of human being’s capability of the thinking of being. As Heidegger asserts, Aristotle’s words are still valid “that poetizing is truer than the exploration of beings.”\(^{27}\) For art is “the creative preserving of truth in the work.” It is “*the becoming and happening of truth*”\(^{28}\) that is set into work in the work of art. All art, Heidegger claims,
“as the letting happen of the advent of truth of beings, is as such, in essence, poetry.”

Language, the house of being in which humans find their home of dwelling, is “poetry in the essential sense.”

Notably, Heidegger passes over the need for an attestation of human capability to create and understand the works of art. The role of the human is even “purposely” left out in his later account of being’s eventuation. But it remains doubtful whether the question of conscience can be simply dismissed. For it seems that even in the works of art, the eventuation of the truth of being needs human beings; it needs those who have hearts and consciences. Can the essence of art, for example, be thought independent of human beings and can human beings’ capability of art be taken for granted? Would it also call for an attestation? The existence of a large collection of works of art that are familiar may indeed be an evidence of such capability, but only an indirect one. Initially and for the most part, the purpose of works of art has been taken as a means for recreation. Their purpose is nothing but to supply beautiful things to people who want them and enjoy them. Even if we grant that a work of art intends something more than just a means for recreation, there still lacks a “standard” definition of what a work of art is. The determination of a work of art and the distinction between a “work” of art and a beautiful, nice, or interesting “thing” seems for the most time so arbitrary and even ironic. For example, I can be fascinated by a poem written by myself that nobody else in the world would regard as a work of art. I can also be completely apathetic to a painting that is generally regarded as a work of art in the first class, as long as the painting makes no appeal [Anruf] to me. We heard stories that great pianists could be deeply disturbed in their consciences when they simply did not “get it” in performances that were
nonetheless “warmly received” by the audience. It is well known that many works of the
great artists, like those of Van Gogh, had not been highly valued, or had not even been
treated as works of art at all, before these artists gained world-wide fame. Presumably,
there is no less truth in a painting of Van Gogh before he became famous than there is
thereafter. But it might indeed be right to say that, since then, more truth has been
“discovered.” For the truth of the work of art, the truth that is preserved in the work of
art, is only set into work when it is properly understood. But how after all can it be said
that one understands a work of art properly? Can it be attested to at all? Presumably, I do
not understand a painting by recognizing the objects that are painted or by analyzing the
techniques the artist applies in the painting. I understand a painting as a work of art only
when the work makes an appeal [Anruf] to me, when I am moved by the work and opens
my heart for the world of truth disclosed in the work. Such understanding can only be
attested to when I let the work make a claim [Anspruch] to my heart, so that the creator of
the work and I myself may see eye to eye with each other in the heart of our hearts.33 By
understanding the work, by letting it make an appeal to my heart, not only do I discover
the truth preserved in the work, but I also preserve the truth by letting it be lived through
my own being. In the work, as Heidegger says, “truth is cast toward the coming
preservers, that is to say, a historical humanity. What is cast forth, however, is never an
arbitrary demand. The truly poeticizing projection is the opening up of that in which
human existence [Da-sein], as historical, is already thrown [geworfen].”34

The possibility of human engagement by and for the truth of being, for Heidegger,
is evidenced in the works of art, which according to the common opinion reflect human
engagement in artistic creation and appreciation. The attestation of human capability of
the truth of being in the works of art, should such an attestation be possible, would be an attestation of the heart and conscience. Presumably, the question concerning heart lies in the heart of the question concerning conscience. Originally, the word conscience, Gewissen does not refer solely or even primarily to moral conscience or consciousness – an equation that “is in any case not to be proved from the etymology of the word.” There is also an aesthetic dimension of conscience – the “creative conscience [das schöpferische Gewissen]” – that plays a critical role in the origination of the work of art. When we note that beside “moral conscience,” people also talk about “artistic,” “political” and “scientific” consciences, it becomes evident that the original meaning of con-science [Ge-wissen], as the etymology of the word demonstrates, is not moral consciousness but has much to do with a kind of knowing [Wissen]. Conscience, as Heidegger understands it, is a call. (SZ 275) The call of conscience “comes from me, and yet over me,” (SZ 275) because “Da-sein calls itself in conscience” (SZ 275) and “the self is brought to itself by the call.” (SZ 273) The word conscience refers not only to the call of silence but also to the kind of knowing by virtue of which I hear and understand the call. Conscience is the kind of knowing through which Da-sein frees itself for the powerless superpower of its fate as mortal temporality. Because “fateful Da-sein essentially exists as being-in-the-world in being-with others,” and because “its occurrences is an occurrence-with and is determined as destiny [Geschick] – the occurrence of the community of a people,” (SZ 385) the knowing of con-science [Ge-wissen] is also a knowing-with [Mit-Wissen]. Since the knowing of conscience originates from the common destiny of a community of historical people as thrown project, it also ensconces within itself the possibility of a common knowing of “who we are.” In
conscience that individuates Da-sein as solus ipse, the possibility of sensus commonus and thus of the commonality of the community of a historical people has nonetheless been disclosed.

Insofar as the eventuation of being needs the human, insofar as Da-sein is the site of the clearing of the truth of being, it is questionable how Da-sein is capable of the thinking that lets being come to language and be preserved in language, the house of being. In the home of language, human beings find their place of dwelling. The aporia of the being of Da-sein makes manifest the plight of dwelling. To be capable of thinking the truth of being, thus, means to be capable of dwelling, that is, of thinking the plight of dwelling. The plight of dwelling lies in the homelessness of Da-sein in its everyday entanglement and “being-at-home.” The plight of dwelling lies in the aporia that the homecoming of Da-sein will only take place when it hears the summons of conscience that calls “out of uncanniness [Unheimlichkeit].” (SZ 280) The call out of the uncanniness calls Da-sein nonetheless into its place of dwelling because it calls Da-sein back from its being-lost in everyday entanglement to “the reticence of its existent potentiality-of-being.” (SZ 277) The summons of conscience calls Da-sein forth for the powerless superpower by virtue of which it is capable of enduring the aporia of its being and of thinking the plight of its dwelling. But how can the summons of conscience be heard and how can our capability of dwelling be attested? Presumably, the path toward the thinking of the plight of dwelling would only open up in the question concerning conscience – for it is the sole question from the heart that will guide us to build our way back and forth.
Notes


2 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2001). Following the common practice in citing this work of Heidegger, I will use the page numbers in German version hereafter by a note within the text immediately following the citation. For example, “SZ 271” means page 271 of *Sein und Zeit*.

3 Cf. SZ 305: “Resoluteness becomes authentically what is can be as being-toward-the-end-that-understands, that is, as anticipation of death.”

4 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 39. The Latin ‘conscientia,’ as Potts pointed out, is an exact transliteration of ‘syneidesis.’ (See Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 2ff.) Christopher Long demonstrates an intimate connection between *phronesis* and “*synesis*” (Christopher P. Long, The Ontological Reappropriation of Phronesis, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 35: 35-60, Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), which refers to a kind of intelligence that is characterized by a joining together with others and which has an etymological relation to “*syneidesis*,” the very precursor of the medieval concept of *conscientia*. For Heidegger’s appropriation of *phronesis* in general, see for example Robert Bernasconi, Heidegger’s Destruction of *Phronesis*, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1989) Vol. XXVIII, Supplement, p. 127-147. See esp. p. 130: “… there are no less than four candidates between which to choose as Heidegger’s equivalent for Aristotle’s *phronesis*, which is usually translated as prudence or practical wisdom. They are *Umsicht* or circumspection, *Verstehen* or understanding, *Entschlossenheit* or resoluteness and *Gewissen* or conscience. Even if it could be established that Heidegger had at one time or another used all of these words to translate from Greek to German, this nevertheless would not mean that the translation could be reversed and that each of these German words should on every occurrence be understood as reinscribing the same Greek word.”


6 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, p. 35.


70


17 Derrida, Awaiting the Arrival, in *Aporias*, p. 43.


20 Cf. SZ 384: „Nur das Freisein für den Tod gibt dem Da-sein das Ziel schlechtihin und stößt die Existnez in ihre Endlichkeit.“

21 Derrida, Awaiting (at) the Arrival, in *Aporias*, p. 69-70: “He (Heidegger) does so according to a different linkage, indeed, but without ever lending the least attention or the least thematic interest to the logical form of the conclusion or to what goes against meaning or common sense. In the persistence of this apparently logical contradiction (the most proper possibility as the possibility of an impossibility), he even seems to see a condition of the truth, its very unveiling, where truth is no longer measured in terms of the logical form of judgment.”


23 Cf. SZ 283, “… the ‘guilty’ is again forced aside into the area of taking care of things in the sense of calculating claims and balancing them off.”

traditional concepts of good and bad. While complaining about the lack of an example of a positive ethical decision, King also claims that Heidegger is in fact “making a concrete ethical distinction between owned and disowned existence.” (Ibid., p. 190)

27 Ibid., p. 275.
29 Ibid., p. 44.
30 Ibid., p. 46
32 Cf. E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th ed. (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 475: “The purpose of painting or sculpture remained in general the same, and no one seriously questioned it. This purpose was to supply beautiful things to people who wanted them and enjoyed them.”
33 In a sense, it can be said that the creators of the works are heroes, only because of their great hearts. Cf. Romain Rolland, *Vie de Beethoven* (Paris: Librairie Hachette ET Cie 1907), p. vi-vii: “J’appelle héros, seuls ceux qui furent grands par le Cœur…”
35 It is the central argument of this article that the attestation of authentic being-in-the-world as being-toward-death can only be the attestation of conscience. Even the attestation of one’s authentic being-toward-death in the work of art, such as the literary attestation that Robert Bernasconi attempts to establish, is not feasible without the attestation of conscience. (See Robert Bernasconi, Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger’s Footnote on Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” in *Heidegger in Question* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), p. 76-98.) Bernasconi argues that Heidegger’s chapter on being-toward-death “leaves authentic Being-toward-death without ontic attestation….It explored the existential conditions of the existentiell possibility of authentic Being-toward-death, but without offering a sketch of the existentiell possibility itself.” (Bernasconi, p. 77). Bernasconi then tries to show that “Heidegger’s brief reference to Tolstoy’s story plays a more intimate role” in his ontological interpretation by critically examining several possible ways of establishing a correlation between Heidegger’s existential account of being-toward-death and Tolstoy’s story of the death of Ivan. While the existentiell confirmation Tolstoy’s story may provide remains at best ambiguous, Bernasconi concludes that “Heidegger cannot avoid existentiell commitments…. Heidegger’s reticence about the ideals governing his analysis … left the way open for another ideal – … the existentialist ideal – to serve in its place and dominate the reading of his text….it is impossible to maintain the formalization of the existential without concretization .” (Bernasconi, p. 97) Now the attempts to establish such a correlation presuppose a metaphysical structure of being-toward-death that serves as the foundation of both the existential analysis of death and the determinate ontic experience of being-toward-death illustrated in Tolstoy’s story. This presupposition,
however, seems to have missed the subtle implications of *Being and Time* that intends to overcome the metaphysical theories of death as it means to exceed its own project. First, authentic being-toward-death does not require a “definite” existentiell ideal as its attestation or confirmation. Resolution of Da-sein attested in conscience, as Heidegger says, “is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of the actual factual possibility. The indefiniteness that characterizes every factically projected potentiality-of-being of Da-sein belongs necessarily to resoluteness.” (SZ 298) The authentic being-toward-death, to be sure, must have its ontic concretization. But to what Da-sein resolve itself in resoluteness cannot be grasped as predetermined existentiell ideals. Rather, “only the resolution itself can answer this.” (SZ 298) The ontic confirmation of authentic being-toward-death can only be concretized under the genuine situations disclosed in resoluteness. What is in full play for the disclosure and determination of such existentiell possibilities is the very “creativity” of conscience. Second, so far as the Heidegger’s note is concerned („L.N. Tolstoi hat in seiner Erzählung ‘Der Tod des Iwan Iljitsch’ das Phänomen der Erschütterung und des Zusammenbruchs dieses ‚man stirbt’ dargestellt.“ SZ 254), Stambaugh’s and Macquarrie and Robinson’s translations both take Tolstoy’s story as an example of social disruption and inconvenience of death in the everyday world. Such an interpretation seems to fit best into the context where Heidegger elaborates the everyday attitude to death. Bernasconi’s translation, granted, is interesting and significant in its own ways: “L.N. Tolstoy, in his story ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyitch,’ has presented phenomenon of the shattering and the collapse of this ‘one dies.’” (Bernasconi, p. 80) According to Bernasconi, Tolstoy’s story can also be “called upon to show the shattering of the everyday attitude.” (Ibid., p. 80) It may indeed be the case that “Tolstoy’s story was cited in preparation for the analysis of authentic Being-toward-death,” (Ibid., p 80-1) though we need to guard against the danger of “forcing” some naïve correlations between Ivan’s experience of death in Tolstoy’s story and Heidegger’s accounts of authentic being-toward-death. Bernasconi is well aware of such a danger. But in their entanglement in straightening out “some form of unity which would join Tolstoy and Heidegger,” (Ibid., p. 83) Bernasconi and other commentators seem to have lost sight of another possible reading of Tolstoy’s story that would shatter the everyday attitude without imposing a correlation between Tolstoy and Heidegger. As I see it, Ivan’s journey toward death corresponds mostly with what Heidegger designates as the everyday experience of death. (Arguably, it might also reflect some features of authentic being-toward-death, though only insofar as everyday experience of death, as the modification of authentic being-toward-death, cannot be utterly separated from the later.) And yet, the story “as a whole” can be read in such a way that in the very description of the everyday experience of death, such experience has been shattered and disrupted. This is so, if only one catches the profound irony in Tolstoy’s narrative of the life and the death of Ivan, whose life “had conformed to all the laws, rules, and proprieties” and yet who cannot understand his agony for death – the agony that can only be explained if “he had not lived as he should have” – a “bizarre idea” that Ivan dismissed immediately. (Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, trans. Lynn Solotaroff (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 124, 120) Under such a reading, Tolstoy certainly
has not offered any definite answer to how one “should” die, nor to how one “should” live. For both Tolstoy and Heidegger, who approach the question of death in their own ways, death remains the fundamental question of life whose answer cannot be determined with ontic certainty and whose proper engagement is only possible with the shattering of the everyday attitude to death. Third, given the diversity of interpretations a literary work may have, it seems that the ultimate attestation of the authenticity of human existence cannot lie in a work of art or its “content” by itself. The meaning of a work of art, such as that of Tolstoy’s story, cannot be confined within the concretization of certain existentiell ideals the work happens to portray. Rather, the work always says more than what is determined by its form and structure. It means to exceed itself. The “proper” understanding of a work, therefore, will only arrive when we see beyond its form and structure, i.e., when we open ours hearts and consciences to what the work says. This confirms again that the central question of attestation does not lie in any definite ontic attestation of existentiell possibilities but in the question of heart and conscience.

36 Conscience and heart are often used interchangeably in English, as in phrases like “search one’s conscience/heart” or “my conscience/heart smote me.” Cf. 1 Samuel, 24:5-6, Job 27:5-6, Romans, 10: 1-9. King James Version.

37 See Wilhelm Perpeet, *Das Sein Der Kunst und Die Kunstphilosophische Methode*, s. 301-2, Writer’s Translation.

Chapter 3

Freud’s Concept of Conscience

The question of ethics, as Heidegger says, is a question of human dwelling. It involves the question of the meaning of Da-sein’s being-in-the-world. The authenticity of Da-sein is attested to in the reticent summons of conscience. But since the call of conscience only “reaches him who wants to be brought back,” (SZ 271), the attestation of conscience turns out to be moving in a circle. The *aporia* of *Being and Time* boils down to the question of *how* we can enter into the hermeneutical circle in the interpretation of the meaning of being and *how* we can hear the reticent summons of conscience. Precisely because the primordial phenomenon of conscience is covered over, the way toward the hearing of the summons of conscience may only open up through an inquiry into the phenomenon of the “everyday experience of conscience,” which is nearest and most familiar.

Heidegger gives only a brief analysis of the “everyday” interpretation of conscience in *Being and Time* and designates such interpretation as “vulgar,” because “in characterizing this phenomenon and describing its ‘function’ it keeps to what *they* know as conscience, how they follow it or fail to follow it.” (SZ 289) The basic and common forms of the everyday experience of conscience are bad and good conscience, viz., conscience that reproves and that warns. But such a vulgar interpretation of conscience, for Heidegger, does not “get at the primordial phenomenon.” (SZ 291) For bad conscience, which as opposed to good conscience is the primary form of conscience, is an
interpretation that “got stuck halfway.” The everyday experience of bad conscience turns up after one’s deed or intention transgresses the law or moral norms of one’s internal court of justice. The voices of bad conscience “points back to the event through which Da-sein has burdened itself with guilt.” (SZ 290) The everyday common sense of guilt manifested in bad conscience has the character of making oneself responsible [sich schuldig machen], e.g., for a lack or an absence of something that ought to belong to others. The sense of guilt arises when the proper rule or the ratio determined by law for the distribution of rights and valuables is violated so that the “balance” of one’s relation to the others is disrupted. Thus, “making oneself responsible by breaking a law can also have the character of ‘becoming responsible to others.’” (SZ 282) The everyday experience of guilt stems from an indebtedness to the others, viz. from being responsible for a lack in the Da-sein of another by breaking the “balanced relation” with others. For it is in the attainment of such “balance” that Da-sein has the “peace” of conscience and is at home in its everyday entanglement.

According to the existential interpretation, in contrast, the summons of conscience comes from the past of thrownness and calls Da-sein out of its present entanglement forth to its most proper potentiality-of-being in the future. It discloses the primordial being-guilty of Da-sein’s thrown being-in-the-world and brings about an authentic understanding of its most proper being-guilty. The everyday sense of guilt, accordingly, “is possible only ‘on the basis’ of a primordial being-guilty.” (SZ 284) The everyday interpretation of bad conscience “got stuck halfway” because it does not call back “beyond the past deed into thrown being-guilty, which is ‘earlier’ than any indebtedness.” (SZ 291) It does not catch sight of the primordial being-guilty of one’s being-in-the-
world but dangles the guilt of certain wrong deeds or intentions, which presents itself as a warning of future transgressions. Bad conscience does not lead Da-sein toward an authentic understanding of its most proper being-guilty but ensconces the unexpressed motive of tranquilizing the pang of conscience and settling the guilt of its past deed. Factically, as Heidegger points out, “the idea of ‘bad’ conscience is oriented toward that of the ‘good’ conscience.” (SZ 292) And what good conscience is all about is to make certain that “a deed attributed to Da-sein was not committed by it and that Da-sein is therefore innocent.” (SZ 291) The everyday interpretation of conscience, hence, “keeps to the dimension of calculating and taking care of things and balancing out ‘guilt’ and ‘innocence.’ It is in this horizon that the voice of conscience is ‘experienced.’” (SZ 292)

The everyday experience of conscience, which is oriented toward a “peace” of conscience that actually means a “forgetting of conscience,” does not get at the phenomenon at all. But Heidegger’s analysis of the everyday interpretation of conscience in Being and Time remains remarkably insufficient. Is the existential analysis of the vulgar experience of conscience based upon a presupposition of the primordial phenomenon of conscience as such? How could we grant the validity of such presupposition if the reticence summons of conscience were not heard in the first place? What if the primordial phenomenon and the everyday experience of conscience were so interwoven with each other that the summons of heart and conscience were never heard as such but always ensconced itself within the everyday voices of conscience? And what if the primordial phenomenon of conscience always announced itself within its unity and conflict with the semblance [Schein] of everyday interpretation? Would the simple
dismissal of the everyday experience of conscience rule out precisely the site at which a possible way toward the primordial phenomenon opens up?

The way into the hermeneutical circle and the primordial phenomenon must start with what is nearest and most familiar. The aporia of Being and Time calls for a closer examination of the meaning and origin of conscience under traditional interpretations that implicate themselves for the most part in the everyday experience of conscience. In this chapter, I will explore the meaning and origin of the everyday experience of conscience by bringing the existential interpretation of conscience into dialogue with the psychoanalytical interpretation of the phenomenon by Freud. Before we enter into Freud’s account of conscience, however, let us take a brief review of how this phenomenon has been traditionally interpreted in the west.

I. A Preliminary Analysis of the Everyday Experience of Conscience

In general, traditional interpretations take conscience as an internal court [Instanz] of justice, an inner tribunal that passes judgment upon our past or intended actions in accord with the law or moral norms stipulated by the internalized authority. When people attribute such internal authority to a variety of sources, viz., to the divine, parental, social authorities or the authority of reason, the existence of different interpretations of the meaning and origin of conscience seems inevitable. Indeed, while the phenomenon of conscience has seldom been the focus of any thematic study in the western philosophical tradition, the interpretations of conscience turn out to be extremely diverse and complicated.
Traditionally, a wide range of characters and experiences has been strung together under the name of “conscience.” Apart from its function as an internal court of justice, people have often associated conscience with a feeling of fear or anxiety, which is identified as a sense of guilt. The pang of conscience \([\text{Gewissenangst}]\) or the conscience phobia arises on the transgression of our actual as well as intended actions. The sense of guilt emerges whether such transgression takes place in the actions of myself or in those of the others. This is so, especially when those who are involved in the guilt or crime are in one way or another related to myself. The Holocaust in the second World War, for example, generated widespread senses of guilt not only in the later generations of Germans who had nothing to do with the commitment of the actual crime, but also in the world community in general, especially among the Europeans or Caucasians, whose cultural and religious tradition was often charged with anti-Semitic inclinations. Such conscience anxiety is often alleviated or resolved when certain punishment is determined and enforced against the violators and appropriate remedies or compensation are measured for the victims. When the criminals of an atrocity are sentenced and punished, people usually feel a relief in their conscience anxiety. The peace of mind or conscience seems to arrive when the proper order of things is restored and when “justice” is maintained and promulgated. The punishment of the violators or evildoers, therefore, has the meaning of reinstating an established “balance” between different individuals in accord with the rule of justice. And so decrees the Scripture: “Life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”

It seems thus that the pang of conscience stems less from the specific consequences of the guilty actions than from the violation and transgression of certain
law and moral norms themselves. The sense of guilt arises with the disruption of the
balance determined and maintained by the law and moral norms, which are either
stipulated or affirmed by the authority of our internal court of justice. Indeed, conscience
has long been described as an inner voice, as the edicts of the internal moral authority.
The classical Christian tradition, for example, views conscience as the voice of God
within each of us. Conscience, as Augustine asserts, is “an expression of …divinely
implanted law of goodness.”¹ As a summons from the divine, thus, conscience becomes
also our guidance to moral conduct. This aspect of conscience is highlighted in a line
from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, when God says: “And I will place within them as a
guide/My umpire Conscience.”² As different people rely upon different kinds of
authorities as their guides and when the edicts of these authorities often disagree with
each other, however, it is no surprise that different people can have marked different
consciences. Be that as it may, we never stop hearing the claim that there is a universal or
objective conscience that holds imperative power over mankind in general. The
universality of conscience, to be sure, is already indicated by the root meaning of the
word, which signifies a kind of “common knowing.”

Con-science as a kind of “common knowing” refers to our deepest moral
convictions, to the moral truths that have taken root in our hearts. At the same time,
people also use the word “conscience” to indicate the *faculty* by which we arrive at such
knowing of moral truths. Accordingly, conscience is often identified as a *rational* faculty
of mind that discovers and determines the moral righteousness of our actions. This
ambiguity of the word conscience is further complicated when we hear people using the
word to indicate the internal impetus that drives us toward right and just actions. Kant,
among others, identifies conscience as an instinctive drive that “direct oneself according to moral laws. It is not a mere faculty, but an instinctual drive [ein Instinkt], not to pass judgment on, but to direct oneself…. Conscience … has a driving force [treibende Gewalt], to summon us against our will before the judgment-seat, in regard to the lawfulness of our actions.”

Neither the knowing of moral truths nor the driving force of conscience, however, has in reality prevented us from those actions judged as wrong and unjust. Rather, the commands of conscience have been continuously challenged and actually violated throughout the human history, the evolution of which have never been immune from all kinds of guilt and crime, including such primal sins as patricide and incest. When the violation and transgression of certain law and moral norms persist, moreover, the voices of conscience lose gradually their effectiveness. It appears that a hardened criminal has little conscience anxiety about such offenses as murder and rape as compared to those who commit these crimes for the first time. And few Americans nowadays have reported any distinctive sense of guilt about premarital sex, which was surely a serious transgression and would cause a severe conscience phobia among many “violators” a hundred years ago. But it may well be argued that there are certain fundamental moral laws, the infringement of which would never stop inflicting upon all of us a grinding pang of conscience.

The traditional interpretations of conscience, as we have shown, turn out to be extremely complex. Heidegger’s existential analysis of everyday experience of conscience under the rubrics of “bad” and “good” conscience, apparently, falls far short of making the everyday experience and interpretations intelligible. How can this phenomenon with such a great variety of characteristics and aspects be united? Is it
merely a coincidence that all these descriptions and interpretations associate themselves with the name ‘conscience?’” Do these interpretations presuppose already something in common in the meaning and origin of the phenomenon? In this chapter, we will attempt to clarify the meaning and origin of the everyday experience of conscience through a dialogue between the existential interpretation of conscience and the psychoanalytical interpretation of the phenomenon.

The discussions of conscience in the twentieth century, as Douglas Langston points out, “although relatively few, have been deeply influenced by Freud’s view.”4 Freud identifies the source of the traditional “moral conscience” in the categorical imperative of the super-ego or ego ideal, which answers to “everything that is expected of the higher nature of human.”5 Social feelings “rest on identification with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal. Religion, morality, and social sense – the chief elements in the higher side of man – were originally one and the same thing.”6 Religion, ethics and social institutions, in Freud’s view, constitute different forms in which the ego ideal, which represses the primitive Oedipus complex into the unconscious, asserts itself. Law and moral norms, thus, embody the commands of the super-ego toward which we have ambivalent feelings. The violation of such commands would cause a severe pang of conscience or sense of guilt. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud makes manifest the origin of the phenomenon of conscience in taboo conscience, which, in the form of the taboo sense of guilt, contains “much of the nature of anxiety,” and “without hesitation … may be described as ‘conscience phobia’”7 The continuity of tradition and the inherence of social and moral customs from generation to generation, therefore, rely upon an infantile
recurrence of totemism and the revival of the conscience anxiety for the primal sins depicted in the Oedipal myth.

While many scholars have contributed to the study of the origin, structure and function of the super-ego and the development of conscience from psychological and clinical perspectives, academic exploration of the philosophical meanings of Freud’s interpretation of conscience and its implications for the question of ethics remains few and far between. So far, most of the investigations in this area have been conducted from the standpoint of the western normative ethical tradition. Some scholars strive to find a way to reconcile Freud’s interpretation of conscience and the traditional moral values. Heinz Hartmann, among others, asserts that “Freud’s system of moral values, though of course marked by his strong individuality, is not in radical opposition to the partly Greco-Roman, partly Jewish-Christian, moral traditions of Western civilization.” Others defend traditional normative ethics by arguing that Freud’s interpretations of conscience and morality do not correspond to such phenomena “in reality.” David H. Jones, for example, claims that “Freud’s theory of super-ego is not a correct account of the phenomenon of conscience.”

I regard Freud’s interpretation of conscience and morality as a radical critique of the moral tradition of Western civilization. It breaks through the metaphysics of normativity upon which the traditional interpretations of conscience and morality base themselves. By revealing the traditional beliefs in the sanctity of religious decrees and social customs as illusions, Freud’s theory of super-ego means to free us from the coercive power of the western civilization and bring us back to the reality of the external world. Psychoanalysis, Freud says, “is an instrument to enable the ego to achieve a
progressive conquest of the id.” It aims to release us from the demonic power of the ego ideal that imposes upon us the authoritative commands of religion and ethics so that our ego may ultimately become the master of itself. For “Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflict between the ego and the ideal will...ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical, between the external world and the internal world.”

It must be noted however that Freud’s theory of super-ego is not a skeptical dismissal of the overall validity of conscience and morality, nor does it aim to establish a new system of moral values or a new Weltanschauung. Rather, it intends simply to face up to the reality of the external world and to discover the truth of the phenomena that is covered over in the traditional interpretations. Psychoanalysis, Freud concludes, “is incapable of creating a Weltanschauung of its own. It does not need one; it is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific Weltanschauung...A Weltanschauung erected upon science, has apart from its emphasis on the real external world, mainly negative traits, such as submission to the truth and rejection of illusions.” The underlying guideline of the psychoanalytical research, thus, seems not too far away from the maxim of phenomenology: “to the things themselves.”

The objection that Freud’s theory of super-ego is not a “correct” account of the phenomenon of conscience on the basis of a different “definition” of conscience or a distinction between the sense of guilt and the feeling of fear and anxiety, therefore, seems unfair and unfounded. For the question has everything to do with the meaning and origin of the phenomenon of conscience itself. To start the inquiry and discourse with a
“definition” of what conscience is, thus, runs the danger of either begging the question or reducing the whole discourse to a matter of nomenclature. For such practice precisely blocks the way to the complicacy of the phenomena of conscience and guilt themselves, which are so frequently associated with such indeterminable incidents as dreams, myths, fantasies, ambivalence, hysterical outbreaks, neurotic obsessions as they are deeply interwoven with their own interpretations. It is doubtful, thus, whether any strict and correct “definitions” can be imposed upon this wide range of experiences that are traditionally stung together under the rubrics of “conscience” and “guilt” and whether any clear-cut distinctions between such feelings as guilt, shame, fear and anxiety are feasible at all. Apparently, the account of such complex phenomena as conscience and guilt should have little in common with the accurate fixation of a physical location with a sophisticated GPS system. Rather, the phenomena of conscience and guilt seem to have more resemblance with the elusive behavior of a stock market, whose interpretations (and thus predictions), when taken seriously, are frequently translated back into reality.

The psychological concepts and ideas such as instinct, anxiety, fear, guilt, libido, id, ego, etc, therefore, are not the cornerstone of a speculative theory but rather heuristic instruments that lead us into the mystery of the human psyche. As a science, Freud argues, psychoanalysis does not “require [as] its base a sharply defined concept,” but rests upon “constructions arrived at empirically,” viz. upon “observation alone.” Ideas and concepts, therefore, are “not the foundation-stone, but the coping of the whole structure, and they can be replaced and discarded without damaging it.”¹³ The concepts of the super-ego and ego ideal, along with the other postulated psychic structures like ego and id, as Shengold points out, “are part of psychoanalytic theoretical metaphor, a way of
thinking about certain functions of the mind rather than structural entities that have a real existence… they do not concern fixed scientific fact inexorably determined by external reality.” The question, accordingly, is not whether Freud’s theory of the super-ego offers a “correct” account of the phenomenon of conscience. Rather, the question lies in how the psychoanalytic theoretical metaphors can bring the manifold characteristics and aspects of the everyday experience of conscience to a possible unity. For it is only through the synthesis of the psychoanalytic narrative that the meaning and origin of the everyday experience of conscience and guilt may come to light.

**II. Conscience and the Fear of Anxiety**

We intend to explore the meanings and origins of conscience and guilt by recounting the psychoanalytic structure, function and genesis of the super-ego. Our narrative emphasizes two important aspects of the super-ego that have not caught enough attention among contemporary scholars. First, as we said above, the concept of the super-ego does not correspond to a determinate entity that is physically present. Rather, it constitutes a metaphorical or even mythological account of some distinctive functions of the human psyche. Second, while most current interpretations strive to explain the development of the super-ego on the basis of the child’s “biological” relation to his or her parents, the genesis of the super-ego cannot be fully accounted without taking the role of social and historical influences into consideration. The child’s superego, as some scholars point out, “may be modeled more on the parent’s super-ego than on the perceived image of the parent.” The emergence of the super-ego will only become intelligible when we catch
sight of its social and historical roots. For a proper understanding of the genesis of the super-ego, thus, we have to look into Freud’s theory of totemism. In what follows, I will first demonstrate the everyday experience of conscience as a fear of anxiety, which according to Freud is in essence a fear of castration [Kastrationsangst]. The castration anxiety, as I will show, has a close relation with the Oedipus complex, which is one of two important factors in the origin of the ego ideal. I will then trace the genesis of the super-ego by making manifest its relation to totemism and the double identity of the father.

The pang of conscience [Gewissenangst], for Freud, is a phenomenon of anxiety. English translators of Freud seem to have kept a very loose track of his distinction between fear [Frucht] and anxiety [Angst]. As a result, Gewissenangst, Todesangst, Kastrationsangst, die Angst vor dem Über-ich, Objekt-Angst have been persistently and often inappropriately translated as “fear of conscience,” “fear of death,” “fear/dread of castration,” “fear of the super-ego,” and “fear/dread of an object” respectively. The reasons for such inconsistency are manifold. Apart from the consideration for the habits of English language, it stems partly from Freud’s own equivocality in the use of the concepts Frucht and Angst and partly from the nebulous and intertwined phenomena of fear and anxiety themselves. In a late note in Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, Freud remarks that “Anxiety has an unmistakable relation to expectation: it is anxiety in the face of [vor] something. It has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object. In precise speech we use the word ‘fear’ rather than ‘anxiety’ if it has found an object.” It seems that anxiety is occasioned by some danger one expects in the future, however indefinite or unknown the dangerous being may be. Fear, in contrast, is always related to a
determinate object here and now. From certain perspective, it seems possible to hypothesize that while the sources of anxiety have more to do with one’s imagination, one’s internal libido and the psychical, the causes of fear are for the most part something belonging to the external reality and the physical. On the other hand, when the ego’s interaction with the external world is so often characterized by such dynamic processes as transference, displacements, projections, etc., it is not always possible to draw a clear-cut line between the internal world and the external world, between the psychical and the physical, and thus, between anxiety and fear. We have to allow for certain ambiguities in the concepts of fear and anxiety, which, with regard to the complicacy of the phenomena themselves, seem quite inevitable.

While Freud’s theory of anxiety has undergone a number of changes over time, he maintains consistently that “the ego is the actual seat of anxiety.”\textsuperscript{17} The nebula around the phenomenon of anxiety may dissolve in some way if we dwell for a moment upon what such anxiety is about [\textit{um}]. That about which the ego is anxious is apparent itself, or more accurately, the balanced economy of the circulation and distribution of its instinctual energies in the face of external stimuli and threats. Anxiety, Freud determines, is “a reaction of the ego to danger.”\textsuperscript{18} Now the danger, coming from both internal and external sources, lies in essence in the disruption of the “balance” the ego maintains between its instinctual energies and the external world, and later, between the libido of the id and the super-ego. The real essence of the danger, as Freud says, is “the economic disturbance caused by an accumulation of amounts of stimulation which require to be disposed of.”\textsuperscript{19} The loss of food, water, or an loved object – the dangers from the external world –, which leave the instinctual energies unsatisfied and accumulate inside the body,
for example, breaks down the balanced economy of the ego and lead it to anxiety. The demand of the libido drives from the id that cannot be discharged into the surrounding world causes the anxiety in the same way, though from an opposite source. The danger may also come from the excessive stimuli from the external world, of which the ego finds itself incapable of handling and managing; or from the presence of an external force that may destroy the ego or its economic situation completely. This latter source of danger, apparently, corresponds most closely to the meaning of the word “danger” in its everyday use. Remarkably, the affect of anxiety occurs not only in the face of real dangers, but also, and more often, on the ego’s expectation of dangerous situations. The conscience anxiety is essentially an expectative reaction to the threats or signals of great dangers and the outbreak of more severe anxiety – a situation that we will elaborate in a moment.

For the most part, the ego masters its anxiety by fleeing away from the internal and external dangers. In our everyday lives, this is the most natural and obvious response to a definite threatening object from the external world. One of the most common way that the ego protects itself from a dangerous instinctual impulse, on the other hand, is through “the process of repression,” the nature of which is “fundamentally, an attempt at flight.” But where does the ego flee in the face of the danger of hunger, thirsty or loss of a loved object? Initially, when all attempts to seek alternative sources in the external world fail and when the mechanism of repression has not been fully developed, the ego returns to itself, to its own body and imagination for satisfaction. The practice of thumb-sucking, which “appears in early infancy and may continue into maturity, or even persist all through life,” offers a good example here. The purpose of thumb-sucking is related to both the taking of nourishment and the sexual activity, which are not independent from
each other in early infancy.

In the procedure of thumb-sucking, as Freud elaborates, “the instinctual drive is not directed towards other people, but obtains satisfaction from the subject’s own body.” A child who indulges in thumb-sucking, thus, is “determined by a search for some pleasure which has already been experienced and is now remembered.” Through this autoerotic practice, the child manages its anxiety by a complete flight from the external world to a surrogate of the external source of pleasure (e.g. the mother’s breast) created by its own body and imagination.

Conscience anxiety is essentially a reaction to the danger of punishment imposed by the super-ego. What is hidden behind the ego’s anxiety of conscience and the fear of the super-ego is the fear or dread of castration. In The Ego and the Id, Freud identifies the dread of castration as “the nucleus round which the subsequent fear of conscience has gathered; it is this dread that persists as the fear of conscience.” The punishment threatened by the super-ego, as Freud elaborates later in Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, “must be an extension of the punishment of castration. Just as the father has become depersonalized in the shape of the super-ego, so has the fear of castration at his hands become transformed into an undefined social or conscience anxiety [sozialen oder Gewissenangst]. But this anxiety is concealed. The ego escapes it by obediently carrying out the commands, precautions and penances that have been enjoined on it.” By escaping the punishment of the super-ego, remarkably, the ego also flees away from a possible outbreak of a more severe state of anxiety. The child, as Ernst Jones points out, “has within itself extremely formidable sources of anxiety, for which the formation of the super-ego is one attempted mode of salvation.” We characterize the everyday fear of conscience as a “fear of anxiety.” What is feared and held in ban by the conscience
phobia is in essence the recurrence of a “primal anxiety,” a traumatic situation that is on the one hand expected in all other forms of anxiety and on the other hand repeated in a mitigated form. This traumatic situation, as Freud elaborates, occurs initially in the act of birth, which is “the first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety.” In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud identifies the fear of castration as “the same situation as that which underlay the first great anxiety-state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing – the anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother.” Freud develops the theme of separation anxiety and the trauma of birth further in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. Drawing on Otto Rank’s discoveries in *The Trauma of Birth*, Freud asserts that the process of birth is “The first situation of danger, and the economic upheaval which it produces becomes the prototype of the reaction of anxiety.” Seven years later, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud alludes again to this original traumatic moment and concludes that “what is feared, what is the object of anxiety, is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment, which cannot be dealt with by the normal rule of the pleasure principle.”

The traumatic nature of the act of birth stems from the helplessness of the infant, who, on its separation from the mother, is forsaken into the sway of the external world and the instinctual drives of the id. It is overwhelmed by these two masters and has no way of flight because it has no knowledge of what specifically the dangers are and where they come from. In general, Freud says, “what it is that the ego fears [befürchtet] from the external and the from the libidinal danger cannot be specified; we know that the fear is of being overwhelmed or annihilated [Überwältigung oder Vernichtung], but it cannot be grasped analytically.” The newborn, who cannot identify the dangers and who knows
no way of exit from the imperative powers from the external world and the internal id, has to bear the full brunt of this traumatic situation of helplessness and forlornness. The newborn almost has an experience of anxiety as such. For it is only later, with the evolving of the ego and its consciousness of its own body, the external objects and the internal psychical entities, that it is able to identify the sources of danger and to flee away from them. The object cathexis, the autoerotism, the early narcissism, the animal phobia, projection, as well as the genesis of the super-ego, all involve a process of fixation, through which the ego either locates or creates imaginatively a definite source of danger or a specific “protector.” Through this process of fixation, the ego turns the experience of “primal anxiety” gradually into fear. For now the ego is able to flee away from the outbreak of the primal anxiety and the traumatic situation by simply escaping from those feared objects. Insofar as the definiteness of the sources of danger is concerned, thus, a whole range of hybrid experiences stretches between the two poles constituted by the primal anxiety on the act of birth and the fear of a determinate object actually present in the external world. The ambiguity of the concepts of fear and anxiety seem quite inevitable.

It is both interesting and illuminating in this connection to draw a comparison between the psychoanalytical account of anxiety and fear and the existential exposition of the phenomena by Heidegger. Fear, in Heidegger’s view, is “Angst which has fallen [verfallen] to the ‘world’. It is inauthentic and concealed from itself as such. [uneigentliche und ihr selbst als solche verborgne Angst]” (SZ 189) Fear, in other words, is the semblance [Scheinen] of Angst in everyday experience. In everyday entanglement, Angst shows itself not as itself, but as it is not, that is, as fear, which is nonetheless first
made possible by *Angst*. (SZ 186) The relation between fear and *Angst* will become transparent after a comparison of their existential structures.

That in the face of which one has *Angst* [das Wovor der Angst] is not something fearsome that one encounters within the world, whether it is something ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, or some other Da-seins. That in the face of which one has *Angst* is “nothing and nowhere,” (SZ 186, 188); it remains “completely indefinite.” (SZ 186) The “nothing and nowhere” however, does not mean a total nothing, but “is based on the primordial ‘something,’ on the world.” (SZ 187) That in the face of which one has *Angst* is Da-sein as being-in-the-world itself to whom the world essentially belongs. That in the face of which *Angst* is anxious is *my* thrown being there; it is the burden of being [Seinslast], which is first disclosed in *Angst* itself as the fundamental state-of-mind [Befindlichkeit] and from which Da-sein initially and for most part turns away. That in the face of which one has *Angst* is the same as that about which *Angst* is anxious [Worum die Angst sich ängstet], that is, being-in-the-world itself. *Angst* ‘throws’ Da-sein back upon that about which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world.” (SZ 187) *Angst* individuates Da-sein, being-in-the-world as “being-possible.” (SZ 188) The most extreme possibility of Da-sein disclosed by *Angst* is the possibility of the impossibility of its existence. In *Angst*, Da-sein finds its being as being-toward-death, as mortal temporality. For only because Da-sein is being-toward-death, as finite, is Da-sein anxious [*Angst*] about [*um*] its being as being-in-the-world, that is, is Da-sein concerned about its being in its own being [es geht ...*um*]. In the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, “Da-sein is concerned about its being-in-the-world absolutely.” (SZ 250) That in the face of which and that about which one has
Angst is essentially this possibility of being-toward-death that is the most proper non-relational, certain, and yet indefinite possibility of Da-sein not to be bypassed.

What we are afraid of [das Wovor der Furcht], in contrast, is always some kinds of being [Seiendes] or reality. We are afraid of threats from innerworldly beings or Mitdaseins, whether such threats are imminent, that is, real at present, or “only possible,” that is, not yet real. What is fearsome is always “something and somewhere” even when its character and source remain to some degree indefinite and unknown. A threat that is “only possible” is a deficient mode of the real threats and is thus defined by what is in reality. The about which fear is afraid [das Worum der Furcht], on the other hand, is the fearful being itself. That about which fear is afraid is Da-sein in its everyday entanglement, its being-with with innerworldly beings and other Da-seins. That about which fear is afraid is Da-sein’s being-at-home in the “world” it is taking care of. Only when Da-sein in everyday entanglement is afraid about its being-at-home, can it also fear for [um] innerworldly beings, e.g., house and home, and for others with whom Da-sein is being-with [sein bei]. Innerworldly beings and others with whom Da-sein is being-with constitute the “world” in which Da-sein absorbs [aufgehen] itself and in which it is at home.

“Only a being which is concerned in its being about that being [es geht ... um]” however, “can be afraid.” (SZ 141) The everyday entanglement is also a disclosure of Da-sein’s being there, though the being that is disclosed remains inauthentic. Fear always “reveals Da-sein in the being of its there, although in varying degrees of explicitness.” (SZ 141) The happening of fearing is also a showing of Angst, not as it is as such, but as it is not. Fear is the semblance of Angst that is distorted in Da-sein’s being-at-home in the
“world” it is taking care of in its everyday entanglement. Fear is “Angst which has fallen [verfallen] to the ‘world’. It is inauthentic and concealed from itself as such.” (SZ 189) Da-sein in its falling turns away from itself – it turns away from the uncanniness [Unheimlichkeit] and the burden of being disclosed in Angst as such and flees toward the “world” of innerworldly beings and the they in and among which it is at home. Initially and for the most part, Da-sein evades the burden of being disclosed in the state-of-mind [Befindlichkeit] of Angst in which it finds itself. But the evasion happens only when Da-sein is first and foremost anxious about its being – only when Da-sein is still in a sense concerned about its being, would it turns away from the threats and burden revealed in Angst. The anxiety34 that turns Da-sein away from its most proper possibility as being-toward-death, however, is inauthentic because it turns Da-sein away from Angst as such. Yet the evasion is no evidence against the thrown being that is disclosed there in Angst. Rather, “in the evasion itself the there [da] is something disclosed.” (SZ 135) “The turning away of falling [Verfallen] is based on Angst which in turn first makes fear possible.” (SZ 186)

Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety and fear concurs with the psychoanalytic interpretation of the phenomena in some degree and the dialogue between these two interpretations bring the structure of these phenomena and their relation to the phenomenon of conscience to further transparency. While the existential phenomenon of conscience calls Da-sein to face up to the affect of anxiety and the finitude of its being-in-the-world, the everyday experience of conscience, which is characterized by fear or fear of anxiety, is apparently a flight away from the “reality” of the external world and the uncanniness of human existence. There are two important differences, however,
between the existential and psychoanalytical accounts of anxiety and fear. First, in contrast to the existential interpretation that presupposes a primordial phenomenon of *Angst* as such and sets it in utter opposition to the semblance of fear, psychoanalytical interpretation takes its point of departure from the everyday experiences in which anxiety and fear are essentially entwined and entangled and often undistinguished from each other. Second, while Heidegger describes anxiety as a fundamental affect in the face of the possibility of death, Freud identifies the source of the primal anxiety not in death but in castration. I will turn in the next section to the theme of castration anxiety and its relation to the Oedipal myth. The Oedipus complex and “the lengthy duration in man of his childhood helplessness and dependence”, as Freud says in *The Ego and the Id*, are the two highly important factors for “the origin of the super-ego.”

**III. The Fear of Castration and the Oedipal Myth**

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud argues that “the high-sounding phrase, ‘every fear is ultimately the fear of death,’ has hardly any meaning, and at any rate cannot be justified.” It is possible, on the contrary, to regard the fear of death [*Todangst*], like the fear of conscience, “as a development of the fear of castration.” In the face of an excessive danger of life that the ego finds itself unable to escape or overcome by its own strength, for example, the ego turns to its internal protector, to the super-ego that “fulfills the same function of protecting and saving that was fulfilled in earlier days by the father and later by Providence or Destiny.” But when such an internal protector turns out to be ineffective in the face of a real danger, the ego sees itself “deserted by all protecting
forces and lets itself die.” Here, Freud says, the ego finds itself once again in “the same situation as that which underlay the first great anxiety-state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing – the anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother.” In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud insists again that the castration anxiety is more original than the anxiety in the face of death. For while “castration can be pictured on the basis of the daily experience of the faeces being separated from the body or on the basis of losing the mother’s breast at weaning, …nothing resembling death can ever have been experienced.” The fear of death, accordingly, “should be regarded as analogous to the fear of castration and …the situation to which the ego is reacting is one of being abandoned by the protecting super-ego – the power of destiny [den Schicksalsmächten] – so that it has no longer any safeguard against all the dangers that surround it.”

Freud’s interpretation of the fear of castration as the prototype of anxiety and Heidegger’s existential interpretation of the origin of *Angst* in terms of Da-sein’s being-toward-death, as we have shown, approach the phenomenon of anxiety from two different perspectives. But these two interpretations are not as incompatible as they appear. We need note first that existentially, that in the face of which one has *Angst* is not death itself, which, as Freud point out, “is an abstract concept with a negative content for which no unconscious correlative can be found.” Rather, that in the face of which Da-sein has *Angst* is the finitude of its existence, its authentic thrown being-in-the-world as being-toward-death. This thrownness of Da-sein’s being-there, whose whence and whither remain obscure, compares well to the traumatic situation of helplessness, which, according to the psychoanalytical interpretation, is the origin of the primal anxiety of the ego. Death, remarkably, is not taken in popular belief as “nothingness” but as a
separation of the soul and the body, viz., as the departure of some mysterious vital power from the body. And this mysterious power, since the very beginning of human civilization, has been associated by people in various cultures and religions with the power underlying reproduction, sexuality and love. Existentially, we can say that such belief in the mysterious power of reproduction, sexuality and love is one of the primal shelters \([\text{Bergen}]\) of human existence. Psychoanalytically, as Freud points out, for the ego, “living means the same as being loved.”\(^41\) The fear of death is analogous to the fear of castration because both of them are characterized by the separation of the body from the mysterious vital power of love, a separation that first occurs on the act of birth. The first experience of anxiety that an individual goes through is birth, which is “a separation from the mother. It could be compared to a castration of the mother (by equating the child with a penis).”\(^42\)

For the child, the act of birth is also comparable to a castration, as it is separated from its loved object, the mother. The fear of castration, indeed, comes from two sources: the loss of the genital organ, the symbol and vehicle of the mysterious power of love, sexuality and reproduction, and the loss of a loved object that is irreplaceable for the ego. It is possible to identify the source of the castration complex in the danger of the loss of love, which manifests itself in two ways: the loss of the genital organ or the sexual substances, the germ-plasm; and the loss of the loved object. The fear of castration, thus, arises not only from a real or fantasized danger of castration but also from the danger of loss of a loved object – castration in its symbolic form.

Otto Rank places priority on the primal anxiety of birth and views all later anxieties as attempts at abreacting the trauma. The castration complex, accordingly, is
“the echo – mediated through a long series of traumatic experiences – of the anxiety of birth.” While drawing on Rank’s conclusions on the traumatic moment of birth anxiety, Freud rejects Rank’s explanation of neurosis, which, incidentally “dethroning the Oedipus complex,” regards the separation anxiety in the birth trauma as the prototype for all subsequent anxiety. Freud’s own position about the priority of the castration complex and its relation to the birth anxiety and neurotic anxiety, granted, is not always conclusive, consistent and clear. It is possible, however, to understand the primal anxiety of the trauma of birth, like the anxiety in the face of death, as analogous to the castration anxiety. The helplessness of the child stems from its separation from the mother, which is to be overcome mainly through the acquisition of love from the external world, a love that seems to have been lost by the economic upheaval at birth. Anxiety in children, Freud argues, “is originally nothing other than an expression of the fact that they are feeling the loss of the person they love.” When we identify the essential meaning of castration as the loss of love, we can compare the danger the ego experiences during the act of birth to the danger of castration, a danger that takes many symbolic forms in early infancy and only materializes in the phallic period, during the Oedipus complex.

While Freud remains equivocal concerning the origin of anxiety and the relation between the birth anxiety, castration anxiety and the neurotic anxiety, he is rather persistent on the theory of Oedipus complex, which is surely one of his most fundamental and significant discoveries. In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, for example, Freud identifies Oedipus complex as “the nuclear complex of the neuroses, … It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adult. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the
Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis.\textsuperscript{46} More than a century after Freud’s discovery of the Oedipus complex, however, its meaning and evaluation in both the public opinion and the academic discourse remain highly diverse and controversial. Since the first date of its publication, a considerable number of people, both laymen and specialists, have resisted the idea by either disparaging it as perverse, “unscientific” or “unverifiable” or by simply interpreting it away or leaving it out of memory.

In this section, I do not intend to establish the “validity” of the Oedipus complex. For as I see it, Oedipus complex is not a “universal” model of the constellation of instinctual drives of the child during the phallic stage, a model that can be “scientifically” tested. Rather, like other psychoanalytical concepts such as instinct, libido, ego, id, and super-ego, it is a \textit{metaphorical} account of a critical stage in the development of the child, a stage whose outcome will have profound and long-lasting effects on the child’s later psychical life. Instincts, as Freud asserts in \textit{New Introductory Lectures}, are “mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness.” Psychoanalytical theory of the instincts, thus, “is so to say our mythology.”\textsuperscript{47} The Oedipus complex, therefore, is an ancient myth that finds its recurrence in the early sexual life and fantasies of every child in relation to its parents. The question is not whether the theory of Oedipus complex is scientifically “correct,” For it is precisely here, when the line between the psychical and physical fades away, that the usual scientific methods, which seek to verify a fixed model by establishing its correspondence with certain “facts” through experiments, meet their limits. The “theory” of Oedipus complex is a myth through and through. A “demythologized” theory of the Oedipus complex is none other than a boy who has been
castrated, deprived of all essence and vitality. The Oedipal myth, however, is not an entertaining legend that any of us can simply do away with. Rather, by bringing a constellation of psychical phenomena into unity, it reveals a path toward the hidden mystery of human psyche as it spells out the *common destiny* of human existence from which none of us have happily escaped.

The destiny of the Oedipus complex is the culmination of the paradoxical situation of the early childhood in which the ego finds itself. This superlative paradoxical situation is already foreshadowed in the very beginning of infancy by the double existence of the individual, by the unity and conflict between the ego and the id. The individual, Freud asserts in *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, “does actually carry on a double existence: one designed to serve his own purposes and another as a link in a chain, in which he serves against, or at any rate without, any volition of his own. The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his own ends; while from another point of view he is only an appendage to his germ-plasm, to which he lends his energies, taking in return his toll of pleasure – the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance – like the inheritor of an entailed property who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him.”

This double existence of the individual reflects the interplay between the ego-instinct and the sexual instincts. Freud elaborates this double relation between the ego and sexuality further in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*: “in the one, the individual is regarded as of prime importance, sexuality as one of his activities and sex satisfaction as one of his needs; while in the other the individual organism is looked upon as a transitory and perishable appendage to the quasi-immortal germ-plasm bequeathed to him by the race.”

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud designates this impersonal, unknown and
unconscious force represented by the quasi-immortal germ-plasm as the “id.” Freud attributes this Nietzschean term to Georg Groddeck, who insists that “what we call our ego behaves essentially passively in life… we are ‘lived’ by unknown and uncontrollable forces.”

The ego is “first and foremost a body-ego.” The body of the ego, and above all its surface, “is a place [Ort] from which both external and internal perceptions may spring.” The body of the ego is the site at which the life of the id takes place. The ego, we can say, is “used” by the id as a vehicle for its enactment. The ego and the id need each other and make use of each other. The ego has thus an ambivalent attitude towards the id, which on one hand constitutes the source of its energies and pleasure, but on the other hand continuously drives the ego beyond its own limits by disrupting its economic situation and exposing it to the dangerous external world. In a sense, this ambivalence toward the id is the source of the later ambivalent attitudes of the ego toward its loved objects. It reflects the fundamental paradoxical situation in which the ego finds itself. For the ego almost always faces the impossible choice between the unrelenting demands of the id and the overpowering reality of the external world. It always faces the undecidable decision of either living a “secure but meaningless” life by waning gradually and melancholy from the loss of love, or driving itself out for a “gambling” in the external world in order to satisfy its escalating desires, however transitory this pleasure may be. In its unity and conflict with the id, the ego strives “desperately” to establish its own identity, though the ideal of the self and the balance of its economy are just too rapidly demolished and exceeded by the imperative external and internal forces. The ego is overwhelmed by the need to master the unrelenting demands from the id, to put the
demanding instinctual drives under its own control – a task which is so crucial for its
independent identity and which the ego is often so powerless to accomplish by itself. It is
only later, when the ego makes alliance with the others dominated by the same fate by
submitting itself to and identifying itself with a collective ego ideal, that it finally finds a
way of tempering its internal master to some degree.

Freud describes the ego ideal as a “substitute for the lost narcissism of his
childhood – the time when he was his own ideal.” The development of the ego during
the Oedipus complex, thus, consists in “a departure from the primary narcissism and
results in a vigorous attempt to recover it. This departure is brought about by means of
the displacement of libido to an ego-ideal imposed from without, while gratification is
derived from the attainment of this ideal.” We may recount briefly the legendary
development of the ego ideal and the positive Oedipus complex in a body as follows. The
initial reaction of an infant to the early anxiety from unsatisfied desires, which in Freud’s
view is analogous to the castration anxiety, is by turning to its own body, e.g., by thumb-
sucking. The child, as Freud elaborates, “does not make use of an extraneous body for his
sucking, but prefers a part of his own skin because it is more convenient, because it
makes him independent of the external world, which he is not yet able to control.” With
the development of the ego and the growth of its libido energy, this auto-erotic stage is
succeeded by the state of narcissism, when the ego takes its body “as a whole” as an
object of love. The body of the ego is the first independent “external” object that the ego
takes as a sexual object. It is now, we can say, that a distinct “self-consciousness” first
develops. The ego, however, holds a dynamic and paradoxical relation to its own body.
On the one hand, the ego reaches a relatively stable economic situation when the ego-
instincts and the libidinal instincts are “acting in harmony with each other, inseparably
blent, as narcissistic interests.” On the other hand, the ego must in a sense already
“transcends” its own body in order to take is as an “object” of love. The ideal and
consciousness of the ego, thus, continuously exceed the body of the ego, which gradually
falls short of the ideal. With the growth of the libidinal drives, the gap between the body
and the ideal of the self-directed sexual wishes increases. Sooner or later, the ego is going
to realize this gap between the reality and fantasy and seek the satisfaction of its libidinal
wishes from some other external objects in reality. Such is the normal course of the
development of the ego. The megalomania characteristic in schizophrenia, which Freud
believes as a recurrence of the early narcissism, is a mental disorder precisely because
the patient is lost in the delusions of an overestimated ideal of the ego and thus conflates
the fantasy of the self with its reality.

It is during the phallic stage, when the erotogenic zone moves to the genital
organs, that the internal demand for a sexual unity with a “real” external object escalates
and that the ego is pressed to break through the temporary self-sufficiency of the
narcissistic stage. It must be noted, however, that during the narcissistic stage, there is
some other important, though secondary, trends and elements in the development of the
ego. Along with the narcissistic interests in his body, the little boy also develops
gradually the object-cathexis for his mother and the identification with his father.
Presumably, it is with the consciousness of the self that the ego first recognizes the
mother as an “independent” being, instead of merely a breast. A similar recognition takes
place with the child’s relation with the father. The child, as Patrick Mullahy relates, “in
various ways, often subtle, has the personality of the father as his model. In this way the
child’s ego tends to become like the ego of the father, or what the child takes to be the ego of his father; and his character is formed and moulded in such a fashion.”  

It is notable that this identification with the father, as Freud asserts, “is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone’s removal.” Indeed, the feeling of ambivalence “appears early, making its appearance in the oral-sadistic stage and is markedly in evidence by the next or anal-sadistic stage.” Far before the father becomes an obstacle for the child’s sexual wishes toward the mother, therefore, the boy has already ambivalent attitudes toward the father and takes him as a model that he wishes to identify and at the same time to exceed by removal. The early identification, as Freud elaborates, “behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such.”

Considering this early ambivalence toward the father, it seems to me that Melanie Klein has indeed drawn too hasty an inference when she first identifies the monstrous images in the fantasies of early childhood as representing the parents and then equates the fear of these terrifying figures as the fear of the super-ego. Klein postulates accordingly an “archaic superego in the third to sixth month of life.” The demonic images in the early childhood, it seems, can well be a projection of an early model of the father toward which the child also has ambivalent feelings. And more importantly, the genesis of the super-ego, if we understand this term in the proper Freudian sense, involves a metamorphosis of the ideal of the father that can only come about through the commotion and ordeal of the ego in the Oedipus complex.
The Oedipus complex originates during the phallic stage, when “the boy’s sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them…. His identification with the father then takes on a hostile coloring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Henceforward his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if the ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest.” The early ambivalence toward the father intensifies and becomes manifest as both the hostility against the father and the need for a higher ideal escalate during the phallic stage.

In general, the economic situation of the ego reaches its stabilization on the basis of certain ideal of the ego. The intensified libidinal drive from the id, however, disrupts the established economic situation of the ego as it shatters the early narcissistic ideal and the ideal of the father in early identification. On the disillusionment of these early ideals, the ego enters into a critical stage of its development. With the disruption of its established identity and economic situation, the ego faces the possible recurrence of the primal anxiety of the birth trauma. And now, and with the erotogenic zone moves into the genital organs, the danger of castration, which has been symbolic in the early childhood, becomes materialized as a “real” threat. The fear of father has now a material content of the fear of castration. During the Oedipus complex, the child is facing again the impossible choice: either exposing himself to the danger of castration and the loss of love from his parents, or surrendering himself to the torments of the inexorable demands of the id. Under the sway of the overwhelming reality of the external world and the unrelenting demands of its internal master, the child is desperate with his sexual wishes toward the mother. He finds himself again in complete helplessness. It is only then that
he first “realizes” his tragic destiny in the world. Now the only salvation the little boy has is to direct his growing libidinal energies toward a higher ideal. The boy only manages to attain a new economic situation by making tacit alliance with others sharing the same destiny, by identifying himself with a collective ego ideal and by internalizing an authority that is both represented by and at the same time higher than the father. And just as “the father has become depersonalized in the shape of the super-ego, so has the fear of castration at his hands become transformed into an undefined social or moral anxiety.”

IV Conscience and The Genesis of the Super-ego

The super-ego, Freud says, is “the heir to the Oedipus complex,” the content of which, for a boy, lies in “an ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother.” In Civilization and Its Discontent, Freud identifies the conscience anxiety, the sense of guilt, as “an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the external struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death.” The love of the father plays a critical role in the repression of the Oedipus complex. It is out of the love of the father that the son internalizes the model of the father as an ideal of the ego, so that he finally puts off the sexual wishes toward the mother and deposits the libidinal energies upon the internalized super-ego. The repression of the Oedipus complex, thus, results from a triumph of the love of the father over the hostility against him and the increasing sexual wishes toward the mother. It marks a revolutionary stage in the development of the ego, which has now, at least temporarily, made a “conquest” of the id by following a phylogenetic model, by incorporating the cultural and
social elements into his own ideal of existence. On the other hand, this conquest of the id involves one of the most violent turmoil and disturbance in early childhood. For the most part, the categorical imperative of the super-ego is not internalized through education and love but imposed by the coercive forces of the father. For after all, there is no way that the little child may “understand” the “rationale” behind the sacrifice he has to make about his strongest internal wishes and the primordial rule of social “justice” imposed upon him that represents the will and interests of the stronger – the father. The ambivalence toward the father, therefore, carries on in the form of the ambivalence toward the ego ideal or super-ego, which the child admires and loves, but at the same time fears and abhors. This ambivalent attitude, as we said, is already foreshown in the early ambivalence of the ego toward the id. It reflects a fundamental conflict between the two aspect of the instinctual power of the id: love and hate, life and death, the Eros and the instinct of destruction or aggression.

The destiny of the Oedipus complex and its dissolution by the internalization of the ego ideal, therefore, is a superlative manifestation of the destiny of an individual who is under the sway of these conflicting instinctual forces. Here, let us pause for a moment to elucidate Freud’s accounts of the instinctual forces, which is grouped into such opposite classes as the libidinal instincts and the death instincts, or as the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts or the self-preservative instincts. The relation between these instincts, however, is not immediately clear and many scholars now regard the concept of the death instincts as a highly speculative formulation unconfirmed by any biological investigation.69
Let us enter into the maze of Freud’s theory of instincts, the “mythology” of psychoanalysis, by dwelling upon a series of the three major instincts and their guiding principles Freud summarizes in *The Economic Problem in Masochism*: “the Nirvana-principle expresses the tendency of the death-instincts, the pleasure–principle represents the claims of the libido and that modification of it, the reality-principle, the influence of the outer world.” The reality-principle, apparently, represents the so-called ego-instincts, which Freud often sets in opposition to the sexual instincts governed by the pleasure-principle. But in his later works, Freud also put the sexual-instincts in contrast to the death instincts. It thus becomes a little baffling how these three different instincts and principles can be grouped into two opposite classes. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud regards the ego-instincts as a form of Eros or the sexual instincts, which comprise “not merely the uninhibited sexual instinct proper and the instinctual impulses of an aim-inhibited or sublimated nature derived from it, but also the self-preservation instinct, which must be assigned to the ego and which at the beginning of our analytic work we had good reason for contrasting with the sexual object-instinct.” But Freud has not really spelled out in *The Ego and the Id* this “good reason” for his early juxtaposition of the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts, which indicates clearly an equation of the latter with the death instinct. There is thus an ambiguity about whether the ego-instinct corresponds more to the life-instincts or to the death instincts. When we note that these two conflicting classes of instincts both stem from the id, it becomes uncertain in what sense the self-preservation tendency of the ego is also an instinct and whether it is an instinct in the proper sense of the word at all.
I believe the difficulty concerning the ego-instincts stems from the vagueness of the concept “instinct [Trieb]” and the double existence of the ego. In popular and everyday thinking, an instinct can refer to any natural or acquired tendencies or aptitude in our behavior that seem otherwise inexplicable. “People assume as many and as various instincts as they happen to need at the moment – a self-assertive instinct, an imitative instinct, an instinct of play, a gregarious instinct and many others like them.”\(^7\) The psychoanalytical theory, in contrast, takes instinct as a primal psychical force, a constant internal impetus or stimulus. An instinct, thus, is in essence an instinctual drive. These internal impetus and forces, which Freud divides into two major classes as life and death instincts, apparently, all have their sources in the id. For the ego does not have force in itself; it only “uses borrowed forces”\(^74\) from the id. It seems that the ego-instinct is less primal than the life and death instincts. The concept is ambiguous because it stretches between the everyday and psychoanalytical understanding of instinct as its meaning involves both the life and death instincts. The tendency of the ego to hold on to its established identity, to its economic situation or equilibrium, indeed, is a manifestation of both the life and death instincts. This ambiguity stems from the double existence of the individual we have shown above. On the one hand, if we regard the ego as an independent individual that takes sexuality as one of his own ends, then sexual instincts, which are undistinguished from the instinctual drive for food at early infancy, agree with the self-preservation instincts. At their first appearance, Freud explains, the sexual instincts “support themselves upon the instincts of self-preservation, from which they only gradually detach themselves; in their choice of object also they follow paths indicated by ego-instincts. Some of them remain throughout life associated with these
latter and furnish them with libidinal components.” On the other hand, the ego can also be taken as “a transitory and perishable appendage to the quasi-immortal germ-plasm bequeathed to him by the race,” as the site at which the instinctual drives from the id manifest and assert themselves. The adherence to the established identity or economic situation of the ego, then, inevitably blocks the way of the libidinal drives of the id and impedes the possibility of higher forms of unity urged by the sexual instincts. But with the repression and the regression of the libidinal drives, the ego cannot really maintain its identity and economic situation for long. For life is much like a sailing against the tide. Just as without food and water the human body would soon perish and degrade into lower forms of biological organisms; without love, the psychical ideal of the ego would dissolve and decline by and by. To preserve the established identity of the ego by warding off the libidinal drives from the id, thus, is none other than to put oneself under the power of the death instincts that have been defused from the life-instincts.

Freud describes the death instinct as a tendency that leads “organic life back into the inanimate state,” an initial state “from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads.” While the life instinct is represented by the germ-plasm, the sexual substance that carries the immortal information of the species, the soma, the body itself is mortal and is subject to the death instincts. In popular beliefs, therefore, the event of death is usually understood as a separation of the body from the soul, the mysterious vital force that is represented by reproduction, sexuality and love. This, according to Freud, “accounts for the likeness of the condition that follows complete sexual satisfaction to dying, and for the fact that death coincides with the act of copulation in some of the lower
animals. These creature die in the act of reproduction because, after Eros has been eliminated through the process of satisfaction, the death instinct has a free hand for accomplishing its purposes.”

Contrary to the opinions of many contemporary psychoanalysts, Freud’s hypothesis of life as a “conflict and compromise” between the life and death instincts agrees not only with the biological investigations of his day but also with some cutting-edge theories in the contemporary biological research. For the tendency of a body to return to the initial inanimate state is precisely what is described by the second law of thermodynamics, which insists that within closed systems, such as isolated human bodies, “the entropy of a system should be maximized.” In other words, these closed systems, like nature as a whole, when governed exclusively by the second law of thermodynamics refined by Boltzmann in the middle of the 19th century, are “decaying toward a certain death of random disorder.” In the middle of last century, Erwin Schrödinger attempted to tackle the apparent dilemma between the second law of thermodynamics and the existence of biological systems, which, as Darwin’s theory of evolution explains, are “marching away from disorder and equilibrium” into highly developed structures “of increasing complexity, specialization and organization.” He proposed in his seminal book *What is Life* two fundamental processes of life: “one ‘order from order’ and the other ‘order from disorder.’” In their influential article delivered at a conference in memory of Erwin Schrödinger in 1993, Eric D. Schneider and James J. Kay offered an in-depth analysis of ecosystems from a thermodynamic perspective, which supported Schrödinger’s latter premise of the fundamental process of life as “order from disorder.”
They concluded that “life represents a balance between the imperatives of survival and energy degradation.”

Here, I cannot elaborate Schneider and Kay’s theory and its connection with and difference from Freud’s theory of the life and death instincts, which is an interesting and important project calling for separate research. But the potential accord with the discoveries of the contemporary biological investigations does lend support for Freud’s hypothesis of the two classes of instincts, which deserves more careful examination and evaluation. It must be noted also that the validity of Freud’s theory of instincts should not be determined on the basis of biological investigations of human life, which have their own mission, methodology, presuppositions and limits. The primary criterion in the evaluation of a psychoanalytical theory, as we summarized above, lies in the way the theory may bring a wide range of psychical phenomena into a possible unity and the way such psychoanalytic synthesis may open up a way into the mystery of human psyche.

For Freud, it is the theory of the two classes of instincts that brings the psychoanalytic interpretation of the phenomena of conscience and guilt into a unity. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud asserts that the meaning of the evolution of civilization “must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species. And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven.” This contradiction between the primal instincts of Eros and death, which according to Freud is “probably an irreconcilable one,” presages the destiny of the
individual who finds himself helpless in front of the inexorable urges of his internal master and the overwhelming reality of the external world. The destiny of the individual becomes fully transparent in the Oedipus complex, when the father, who has been the model for the child, becomes an obstacle for his sexual instincts and thus the object of hostile feelings, of the externalized death instincts. The external strife between the sexual wishes toward the mother and the prohibitions from the father preludes a more intense internal strife between the ambivalent feelings of the love and the hate of the father. For the stronger are the instinctual drives from the id, the severer is the influence of the death instincts defused from the sexual instincts, and the more intense is the child’s hostile feelings – the externalized death instincts – against the father. Sooner or later, the instinctual drives of the child will reach a point so that the psychical ideal of the father with which the child has identified himself earlier has to be given up. With the dissolution of this early ideal of the father and the narcissistic ideal of the ego, with the obliteration of his psychical identity, however, the child finds himself again in a helpless situation that is analogous to the trauma of birth. It is from the anxiety in the face of this traumatic situation that arises the savior of the super-ego, which is a \textit{metamorphosis} of the early model of the father. For the super-ego that is internalized, as we will elaborate in a while, is not based upon the person of the father, but upon his own super-ego. The new protector of the super-ego, thus, represents a social ideal. By identifying with this social ideal, the ego manages to endure the traumatic situation of the Oedipus complex and temper the inexorable demand of the id that are otherwise intolerable. The individual secures his economic situation by attaching himself to a new social identity, the ego ideal. Conscience or sense of guilt, Freud says, is a social anxiety. This social anxiety, as the
fear of the super-ego, is a fear of anxiety. It is the fear of the recurrence and outbreak of
the primal anxiety, the castration anxiety which one first encounters on birth and of
which one only bears the full brunt in the traumatic situation of the Oedipus complex. It
reflects a flight away from one’s tragic destiny into the psychical shelter of the super-ego.

The psychoanalytical interpretation of conscience as a social anxiety, as a fear of
the super-ego, brings the complex phenomena of the everyday experience of conscience
and guilt to a possible unity. According to Freud, we should speak the phenomenon of
conscience or guilt only when the external parental or social authority “is internalized
through the establishment of a super-ego.” For conscience in the everyday experience is
an internal court of justice and the guilt of an action must be judged by the inner
authority. By the internalization of the super-ego, moreover, the distinction “between
doing something bad and wishing to do it disappears entirely, since nothing can be
hidden from the super-ego, not even thoughts.” The conscience phobia or the sense of
guilt, thus, arises on the transgression of our actual as well as intended actions. Because
the ego ideal, as the psychical shelter of the ego, represents a social ideal that has binding
force upon everyone in a society, the pang of conscience is occasioned whether the
transgression takes place in the actions or intentions of myself or in those of the others. It
is apparently the violation or transgression of the ideal itself that really matters, instead of
who violates it or the material damages caused by the violation. The ego ideal carries a
sacrosanct dignity, which must be restored on every occasion of its transgression. For
upon the sanctity of the ego ideal rests the economic equilibrium of the ego. Even the
 slightest violation of the categorical imperative of the super-ego may bring about a
recurrence of the trauma of the Oedipus complex and the outbreak of the castration
anxiety. The restoration of the sanctity of the ego ideal, thus, is a return to the protection of the super-ego that guarantees one’s security and salvation.

The inviolable sanctity of the ego ideal can only be maintained, however, when the categorical imperatives of the super-ego have universal prohibitive power upon everyone in a society. For the commands of the super-ego represents the voice of Providence or Fate that is our only guide toward the land of salvation. The specific commands of the super-ego, granted, depend upon the historical and social community to which one belongs. Given the diversity of the sources of the authorities and their edicts that are internalized, it is no surprise that different people can have marked different consciences. But no form of conscience is able to give up its claim of universality and objectivity, upon which rests its very validity. It is from this apparent conflict that there arises an eclectic solution that proposes a universal and objective conscience, which is expressed in different forms by the different consciences of different people. The adherence to the universality and objectivity of the voice of conscience is evidenced by the etymology of the word “con-science,” which suggests a common knowing. If the commands of the super-ego constitute what is known in the call of conscience, then the sense of guilt or the pang of conscience is precisely what drives us toward such knowledge. Conscience, thus, may refer also to the faculty by virtue of which we commit ourselves to the “moral truth” embodied in the categorical imperatives of the super-ego.

When people believe the supreme social authority and the foundation of social justice as the authority of reason, thus, conscience may also be identified as a rational faculty. But we must not conflate the institute of conscience with a cognitive faculty. For conscience, in essence, as Kant asserts, is “an instinctual drive.” The super-ego, according to Freud,
“the representative of the internal world, of the id.” Indeed, the sense of guilt, which Freud later designates as the need for punishment, stems from the defused death instincts that are either turned upon oneself or externalized as the aggression against others.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, thus, the everyday sense of guilt or conscience anxiety stems from the need for releasing the defused death instincts. In early childhood, when the death and the life instincts are still united with each other, the function of the death instincts is manifest in the destruction and “excess” of the established identity or ideal of the ego that is urged forward by its increasing sexual drives from the id. But with the establishment of the super-ego as an insurmountable ego ideal, the death instincts, along with the sexual instincts, are subject to regression. In a way, these two aspects of the instinctual drives are both re-directed toward the super-ego, toward which the child has ambivalent feelings. But the hostility against the super-ego has to be further repressed in order to maintain its sacrosanct dignity. As a result, these defused death instincts are either externalized or turned back upon one’s ego in the form of a need for punishment. “Every piece of aggression whose satisfaction the subject gives up,” as Freud elaborates, “is taken over by the super-ego and increases the latter’s aggressiveness.” The authority of the super-ego is only endorsed by the power to enforce punishment upon whoever dares to defy its supreme commands. Punishment, indeed, “must be exacted even if it does not fall upon the guilty.” And in the enforcement of punishment, a part of the repressed hostile feelings against the super-ego, the defused death instincts, have also found their displacement in a substitutive form. We have to acknowledge that despite the severity of the super-ego and the austerity of its edicts, the commands of conscience have been continuously challenged and actually
transgressed throughout the human history. The transgression of the categorical
imperatives of the super-ego often involves a double satisfaction: the sexual instincts that
find their fulfillment in the actual violation and the instincts of destruction that find their
satisfaction in the enforcement of punishment. For such is the fate of the repressed
instinctual drives that have to find their displacement in the ceaseless battle between the
super-ego and the id, in which the two masters get the upper hand alternatively. The
establishment of the ego ideal, indeed, has not achieved a “real” conquest of the id but
only resulted in a recurrent cycle of violation, confession, punishment and redemption.

When for any reason the “proper” punishment fails to pursue the transgression of
certain prohibitions of the super-ego, however, the voice of conscience will lose
gradually its effectiveness and binding force. Ancient Chinese politicians remarked long
before that “to tolerate evil is to abet it.” The lesson of appeasement in the Second World
War is also fresh in our memories. It appears that the halo around the ego ideal would
soon die away, if “proper” punishment is not in place to endorse its sacrosanct dignity.

The decline of the authority of the super-ego, on the other hand, underlies also the
transformation and evolution of our traditions and customs. The overthrowing of the old
social institutions that enforce law and punishment or the weakening of their supervision
over the daily lives of the people, thus, often preludes the dethronement of the ego ideal
of a historical community or its restraining power. This accounts for the large scale of
violence, the release of the long repressed aggressive instincts during most of the social
revolutions in history. But the stronghold of traditional values and norms are not as easy
to level as many tend to believe. For even if the punishment fails from the side of human
authorities, the defenders of traditional morals have never hesitated to deter the
transgression by resorting to the natural disasters, to Fate, or to the “undisputable” threat of the pending Judgment in the after-world. While the old customs and values did change over time, however slowly and hesitantly, the transformation of traditions have been seldom successful without the reestablishment of a “new” super-ego, with modified tone and commands but mostly intact in its authority and severity. For the satisfaction of the repressed instinctual drives on the dethronement of the super-ego proves no “salvation.” After the transitory rapture of the sexual instincts and the temporary violent transgression of the prohibitions of the super-ego, the destiny of the individual again announces itself—a destiny that has already been determined and presaged in the irreconcilable conflicts of the life and death instincts. There thus appears no escape from this destiny except to return to the accustomed ethos, to the haven and shelter of the super-ego.

The psychoanalytic theory of instinct and the super-ego has brought the complex phenomena of conscience and guilt to a unity. It reveals also the everyday experience of conscience and guilt as a fear of anxiety, a flight away from the helpless and traumatic situation of human existence that is predestined by the irreconcilable conflicts of the life and death instincts, which reaches its culmination in the Oedipus complex. Existentially, the everyday experiences of conscience and guilt, as well as the sanctity of the ego ideal, are merely semblances. Precisely because the everyday experiences of conscience and guilt are characterized by a flight away from the destiny of human existence, they do not confront the primordial phenomenon but cover it over. The question remains, however, where and in what way the everyday experiences miss the “truth” of human existence and how this concealment of the primordial phenomenon takes place.
In order to unravel the entangled phenomena of conscience and guilt, therefore, we must look further into the genesis of the phenomenon of conscience by examining its historical origin, which Freud traced to the founding of totemism. The Super-ego, Freud claims, “actually originated from the experience that led to totemism.” But Freud’s account of the prototype of the super-ego is not always clear and consistent. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud takes the super-ego as a representative of the father and argues that “as a child grows up, the role of the father is carried on by teachers and others in authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain powerful in the ego ideal and continue, in the form of conscience, to excise the moral censorship.” In *New Introductory Lectures*, however, Freud refines this position by clarifying that “a child’s super-ego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents but of its parent’s super-ego; the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the time-resisting judgments of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation.” We may clarify the vagueness in Freud’s accounts by proposing a double identity of the father. For the child, his father is not only an individual with concrete characters and personalities but also a representative of the social authority – he is both “*my* father” and “the father.” It is the “impersonal” social authority – “the father” – that is internalized as the super-ego, though such internalization would never occur without the love of and from “*my* father” as a concrete individual. Because what the child internalizes during the repression of the Oedipus complex is the commands of the social and historical authorities embodied by his father, the formation of the super-ego in the childhood involves really an infantile recurrence of totemism. In order to make
manifest the genesis of the super-ego and the true origin of conscience, therefore, we
have to turn to Freud’s theory of totemism.

Freud’s theory of totemism, granted, remains one of his most controversial discoveries. In recent years, it has been mostly forgotten and neglected because of unfavorable anthropological evidences and evaluations. But the theory of totemism, as we have shown, plays an indispensable role in the psychoanalytic interpretation of the genesis of the super-ego. The critical importance of the theory calls for a more careful and open-minded examination and consideration of its meaning and “validity.” For the anthropological research of totemism is far from conclusive and at the same time limited by their own methodology and presuppositions. In the next chapter, therefore, we will explore the mysterious origin of totemism and its relation to the origin of conscience through a case study of the totem of dragon in early Chinese civilization.
Notes

1 Augustine, Exp. On Psalm 57, 1; On Order, II, 8, 25, quoted in The Essential Augustine, p. 150.
2 Milton, Paradise Lost, III: 194-5.
4 Douglas C. Langston, Conscience and Other Virtues, p. 91.
5 Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 33.
6 Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 33.
7 Freud, Totem and Taboo, Basic Writings, p. 828.
8 Heinz Hartmann, Psychoanalysis and Moral Values, p. 18.
10 Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 58.
11 Ibid, p. 32.
12 Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 181-82.
13 Freud, General Psychological Theory, p. 60.
16 Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, p. 100. Cf. Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 11: “‘Anxiety’ describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. ‘Fear’ requires a definite object of which to be afraid.”
17 Freud, ISA, p. 70-1. The Ego and the Id, p. 59.
18 ISA, p. 57.
19 ISA, p. 67.
20 ISA, p. 86.
21 Freud, Three Essays on Sexuality, p. 48.
22 Ibid, p. 47.
23 The Ego and The Id, p. 60.
24 Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, p. 56-7.
26 Freud, Inhibition, Symptoms, and Anxiety, p. 102.
27 Footnote to the second edition of The Interpretation of Dreams (Standard Ed., 5, 400), quoted in Editor’s Introduction, Symptoms, Inhibition, and Anxiety, xxxv.
28 The Ego and the Id, p. 61.
29 Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, p. 83ff.
30 Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 94.
31 Freud, The Ego and the Id, 60.
Note possibility, as a modal category as opposed to necessity is different from possibility as an existential. Cf. SZ 143, “As a modal category of objective presence, possibility means what is not yet real and not always necessary. It characterizes what is only possible. Ontologically, it is less than reality and necessity. In contrast, possibility as an existential is the most primordial and the ultimate positive ontological determination of Da-sein…”

“World” in the sense of “totality of beings which can be objectively present within the world.” For the distinction between Heidegger’s use of world and “world”, see SZ 64-5. I will follow Heidegger’s use of quotation mark for the distinction of world and “world” in this paper.

The confusion between anxiety [Angst] and fear presents a difficulty for the discussion of different understanding of anxiety either as an existential or as an everyday experience. In this paper, I will use the German Angst, or the English word accompanied by the German to refer to the phenomenon of Angst as such. I use the word “anxiety” for the everyday experience of Angst or when its connotation is still not clear and waiting to be investigated.

Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 31.
Ibid, p. 61.
Ibid, p. 61.
Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, p.58.
Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 60.
Ibid, p. 61.
Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, p. 59.
Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 58.
Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, xxxvi.
Freud, Three Essays on Sexuality, p. 90.
Freud, Three Essays on Sexuality, p. 92.
Freud, New Introductory Lecture, p. 95.
Freud, A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis, in General Psychological Theory, p. 60-1.
Freud, Instincts and Their Vicissitudes, in General Psychological Theory, p. 90.
Groddeck, Das Buch vom Es, Vienna, 1923, quoted in Freud, The Ego and the Id, 17.
Freud, A Note on the Unconscious, p. 74.
Freud, A Note on the Unconscious, in Psychoanalysis, in General Psychological Theory, p. 80.
Freud, Three Essays on Sexuality, p. 48.
Freud, A Note On the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis, p. 73.
Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the ego, p. 47.
64 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 27.
67 Ibid, p. 27.
68 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontent*, p. 95.
72 See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 63: “Our argument had as its point of departure a sharp distinction between ego-instincts, which we equate with death instincts, and sexual instincts, which we equated with life instincts.”
73 Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 95.
76 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 38.
77 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 45.
81 Ibid, 161.
82 Ibid, 161.
83 Ibid, p. 171.
84 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 82.
85 Ibid, p. 106.
86 Ibid, p. 86.
88 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 32.
89 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontent*, p. 91.
90 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 44.
91 Ibid, p. 35.
Chapter 4

Dragon and the Oedipus Complex of Early Chinese People

Really we never can relinquish anything; we only exchange one thing for something else.

– Freud, *Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming*

The dragon [*long 龍*] has long been the symbol of the Chinese people. The first appearances of the images of the dragon in China date back more than 5,000 years. The images of the dragon have showed themselves on the bronze sacrificial instruments and jade pendants, on the robes, chairs and beds of the kings and emperors, on different parts of temples and palace buildings, on a variety of weapons and wagons, and on miscellaneous articles of both the nobles and the common people. Although it is predominantly a sign of auspice today, the dragon was often an omen of misfortune and disaster. This double character of dragon reflects the enigmatic nature of this imaginary animal, whose origin is as mysterious as its figure and identity are complex and capricious.

The phenomena of dragon worship in ancient China remain enigmatic. To enigmas of this kind, one cannot reasonably demand or expect an exhaustive answer. In this essay, I do not have the ambition to “unravel” the mysteries clouding the images of the dragon. I intend only to find a path toward the heart of such mysteries so that we may observe these mysteries as mystery. Only when we situate ourselves at the heart of the mystery, is it possible for us to discern the thread running through all kinds of different
images and legends of the dragon, to discover the meanings and origins of this imaginary animal, and to bring to language a unity of the phenomena of dragon worship in ancient China. If I make manifest here the hypothesis of this study that the dragon is a totem, then the strategy of my investigation is to demonstrate the totemic nature and origin of the dragon by revealing its hidden but crucial relation with the Oedipus complex of the early Chinese people. In this sense, it is also correct to call this essay a case study of Freud’s theory of totemism.

I. Freud’s Theory of Totemism and Our Methods of Investigation

In Totem and Taboo, Freud sums up the following essential facts of totemism: “The totems were originally only animals and were considered the ancestors of single tribes. The totem was hereditary only through the female line; it was forbidden to kill the totem (or to eat it, which under primitive conditions amounts to the same thing); members of a totem were forbidden to have sexual intercourse with each other.” These facts refer to three major traits of totemism: taboos in relation to the totem, such as the taboo of exogamy and taboo of killing the totem animal; the identification of the members of the tribe with the totem animal; the ambivalent attitude toward the taboo object or the action forbidden by the taboo. By revealing the similarity between the phenomena of totemism and taboo in primitive society and the symptoms of compulsion neurotics, which are both characterized by the feeling of ambivalence, Freud ascertains that “the totemic system resulted from the conditions underlying the Oedipus complex.” According to Freud’s analyses, the totem animal is a substitute of the father and the totemic system originates
from the primordial crime of killing the primal father by the band of brothers impelled by the incest wishes towards their mother. Totemism is one of the earliest social institutions by means of which the Oedipus complexes of the primitive people are repressed. The institution of totemism resulted from a sense of guilt for the primordial crime, which “survive for thousands of years, remaining effective in generations which could not have known anything of this deed.”

The survival of this sense of guilt takes the form of the “infantile recurrence of totemism” and the “conscience phobia” whose sources remain unknown and unconscious. Taboo, as Freud shows, is “a command of conscience, the violation of which causes a terrible sense of guilt which is as self-evident as its origin is unknown.”

Freud makes out this unknown and unconscious source of conscience – which “answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man,” – to be the Oedipus complex and concludes that “the beginning of religion, ethics, society, and art meet in the Oedipus complex.”

Anthropologists, however, have been very hesitative in recognizing Freud’s conclusions in *Totem and Taboo*. Some scholars like Ernest Jones rejected it vehemently. Freud’s theory does not even appear in the historical review of the interpretations of totemism by Lévi-Strauss, who dismisses Freud’s hypothesis in passing. The long silence in the field of totemism after Lévi-Strauss’s demonstration of the totemic “illusion” seems to have reflected a wide skepticism among the anthropologists toward such “phenomena.” But the case of totemism is far from closed. As Joseph Haekel concludes in his article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “it seems fair to many authorities to ask whether it is possible to dispose of totemism simply as an illusion, whether the very abstract structural interpretation of the facts is actually legitimate. To those who question
the position, it seems clear that even though all totemistic forms of expression can hardly be seen under one common denominator, reality cannot be totally denied to totemism.”

Edwin Wallace has also pointed out that while anthropologists direct much of the negative criticism against Freud’s explanation of totemism, “his ideas on the incest taboo, on spirits as projections, on magic as wish fulfillment and omnipotence of thoughts, and on ambivalence toward the dead have been favorably received.”

The whole point of the theory of totemism, however, has been misplaced in the anthropological discourse that focuses upon the “reality of totemism,” viz. upon a possible correspondence of the theory of totemism to the “realities” of the primitive society. The question, as I see it, is not the “verification” of the theory of totemism by archeological and anthropological discoveries and evidence. For, as Levi-Strauss acknowledges, “we do not know, and shall never know, anything about the first origin of beliefs and customs the roots of which plunge into a distant past.” In the eyes of the modern people, moreover, the beliefs of the primitive man, such as the faith in the omnipotent of thought or the superstition concerning the holiness of certain animals, are nothing but fictions or illusions. It is thus doubtful to what kind of reality should the theory of totemism correspond. To the “reality” of the primitive fictions and illusions, which are characterized precisely by their lack of reality? There seems to be no way to “verify” the psychoanalytical narrative of the primitive beliefs and the theory of totemism may be essentially “unverifiable.”

But a narrative of an illusion and its origin may not be an “illusion” itself; just as what is unverifiable “scientifically” is not necessarily “meaningless.” We cannot simply dismiss the theory of totemism because of the lack of “hard” historical or anthropological
“verification.” Rather, the meaning of the theory must be explored on the basis of its internal coherency and its potential of bringing the complicated phenomena of the primitive myths and beliefs to a possible unity and thus working out a possible path toward the heart of the ancient mystery. It is here that contemporary anthropology, as a science that bases the validity of its theories and hypotheses upon the rule of verification, meets its limits. To reject the theory of totemism on the basis of its lack of “verifiability,” is to go beyond the very limits of the “science” of anthropology. It is on the transgression of this limit that the humble explorers who kept their eyes and minds open to various phenomena in nature and human histories become doctrinaire tyrants who strive to impose their established rules upon those unclaimed territories. The situation compares well to what happens to the Aesopian fox, which, after trying in vain to reach the fine bunch of grapes, acquired the sudden “insight” of their sourness.

The anthropologists have not done justice to Freud’s theory of totemism because they have not put themselves in the right relation to Freud’s discoveries. For the question is not whether or not Freud’s conclusions in *Totem and Taboo* provide any verifiable or useful information and insights about the primitive people that may help the anthropological study. Rather, the question is how the revelation of the Oedipus complex as the common destiny of human existence ever since the earliest ages would redefine the starting point and restructure the anthropological thinking as a whole. When most anthropologists confine their research on the basis of “scientific verification,” however, they have to leave the historical origin of the anthropological phenomena unthought. This is the very limitation of the prevalent anthropological methodologies, such as functionalism and structuralism. As Piddington confesses, “the adoption of the functional
method necessarily rules out the majority of problems of origin, not because they are unimportant, but because it is impossible to study them scientifically.”

But instead of recognizing the limits of such methodological doctrines, most of the anthropologists, by their commitment to the scientific methods of functionalism and structuralism, have confined themselves within the authority of these methodologies and thus ruled out all other possible paths toward the historical origin. Levi-Straus, for example, claims that the causes of primitive religious institutions and social customs “can be sought only in the organism, which is the exclusive concern of biology, or in the intellect, which is the sole way offered to psychology, and to anthropology as well.”

Human impulses and emotions, accordingly, “explain nothing: they are always results, either of the power of the body or of the importance of the mind.” Because human impulses and emotions are always results and never causes, the origin of social institutions and customs cannot lie in the affection of anxiety – the pang of conscience \[Gewissenangst\] or the conscience phobia that Freud identifies as the very source of the earliest social and religious norms and institutions. Contrary to what Freud maintains, Levi-Straus argues, “social constraints, whether positive or negative, cannot be explained, either in their origin or in their persistence, as the effects of impulses or emotions which appear again and again, with the same characteristics and during the course of centuries and millennia, in different individuals. For if the recurrence of the sentiments explained the persistence of customs, the origin of the customs ought to coincide with the origin of the appearance of the sentiments.” But social institutions and customs cannot be a result of individual affections such as anxiety because they are external non-sentient norms that are imposed upon the individuals and thus the causes of individual sentiments.
Social behavior, Levi-Straus continues, “is not produced spontaneously by each individual under the influence of emotions of the moment. Men do not act, as members of a group, in accordance with what each feels as an individual; each man feels as a function of the way in which he is permitted or obliged to act. Customs are given as external norms before giving rise to internal sentiments, and these non-sentient norms determine the sentiments of individuals as well as the circumstances in which they may, or must, be displayed.”

But Levi-Straus, confined by his methodology of functionalism and structuralism and his commitment to the modern theory of causation, has lost sight of the essential characteristics and meanings of human emotions, such as the affection of anxiety. It is first of all doubtful whether the modern theory of causation applies to human affections such as anxiety at all. Causation, in its modern sense, refers to the necessary (or conceived) connection between a chain of individual and isolated events. A billiard ball on a table, for example, may strike another billiard ball on the same table and “cause” the latter to move. The movement of the second billiard ball is a result or effect “caused” by the event of striking. But this mechanical model of causation falls apart in the face of the complicacy and caprice of human emotions. In the billiard ball example, we may indeed regard the movement of the second ball as occasioned by the striking of the first ball. But such movement is at same time determined by a number of other factors such as the material, shape and slope of the table, the temperature and the air pressure in the room as well as the absence of all other external forces. The causal relation established between the event of the movement of the second ball and the event of the striking of the first ball presupposes that all the other factors remain unchanged or stable during the process of
these two events. Such simple and ideal states presupposed by the mechanical causal explanations, however, are seldom met in the changing real world, let alone in the realm of various human impulses and emotions.

Here, I do not intend to involve myself in a comprehensive examination of the modern theory of causation. But it is clear that anxiety, like all other human emotions, is not an isolated event that is the cause or result of other individual and isolated events in a mechanical chain of causation. Nor is it, as Levi-Straus assumes, something “accompanies” the human individuals or their behaviors. Rather, the affection of anxiety discloses a fundamental human situation in the world. Freud describes anxiety as a state of human psyche in the face of the traumatic situation of helplessness that reaches its culmination during the Oedipus complex. The primal anxiety in the face of the Oedipus complex is neither a cause nor an effect. It is not individual sentiment but originates in the common destiny of human beings who are under the unremitting sway of the conflicting life and death instincts. Social institutions and customs, accordingly, which acquires their sacred authority on the basis of the infantile recurrence of the sense of guilt – the conscience phobia that I have revealed as a “fear of anxiety,” constitute one of our major ways to master or to escape the sway of this inevitable original situation, the common destiny manifested in the Oedipal myth. Because Lévi-Strauss fails to catch sight of the deep meanings of this human affection, his rejection of Freud’s theory of totemism on the ground that anxiety “is not a cause” and that the persistence of social customs cannot be explained by “the recurrence of sentiments” are superficial and unfounded.
Freud’s theory of totemism, as I see it, is not a system of psychoanalytical concepts and propositions to be “verified” by a variety of historical and anthropological “facts.” Like the concepts of instincts, which Freud designates as “mythical entities,” the concepts and propositions in the theory of totemism are metaphorical and heuristically instruments to bring to a psychoanalytical synthesis the psychical lives of the primitive people haunted by the hidden mysteries of human destiny. If the psychoanalytical concepts are mythological and metaphoric in nature, however, is the theory of totemism a mere collection of whims or arbitrary speculations lack of any scientific rigor? But the scientific rigor does not lie solely in the clarity and precision of its concepts or in the austerity of the procedures scientists conform themselves in verifying their ideas and theories. A true scientist must have also the rigor of thinking. The rigor of thinking, Heidegger remarks, “does not consist merely in an artificial, that is, technical-theoretical exactness of concepts. It lies in the fact that speaking remains purely in the element of being [Sein] and lets the simplicity of its manifold dimensions rule.”¹⁷ As I see it, the rigor of thinking lies in the courage to break through the confinement of established conceptual frameworks and the unrelenting persistence to progress to the truth of human life and to the phenomena themselves. We only find such rigor of thinking in the greatest scientists like Freud or Einstein, who never lack the audacity and perspicacity to “create new ideas, new theories…to break down the wall of contradictions which frequently blocks the way of scientific progress.”¹⁸ Psychoanalytic concepts, as Freud elaborates, “are not the basis of science upon which everything rests: that, on the contrary, is observation alone. They are not the foundation-stone, but the coping of the whole structure, and they can be replaced and discarded without damaging it. The same thing is
happening in our day in the science of physics, the fundamental notions of which as regards matter, centers of force, attraction, etc., are scarcely less debatable than the corresponding ideas in psychoanalysis.”

The “validity” of the theory of totemism, therefore, is not dependent upon its “verifiability” but upon how far this psychoanalytical narrative will let us progress toward the heart of the mysteries of the primitive minds. My case study, accordingly, aims to enter into the mysteries of early Chinese minds by bringing to language a possible unity of the phenomena of the dragon worship in ancient China and disclose its parallel with the Oedipal myth. It calls for some careful consideration, indeed, how and in what sense one may use “totemism” or “the Oedipus complex,” terms so foreign to ancient Chinese thinking, to describe the primitive social institutions and underlying psyches of the early Chinese people. My case study aspires to reach a psychoanalytic synthesis of the phenomena of dragon worships on the basis of Freud’s theory of totemism so as to show that, with the connection between the dragon and the Oedipus complex, a whole host of phenomena would now come into a coherent unity that had defied explanation before.

My approaches to the phenomena of dragon worship of the early Chinese people call for some introductory remarks. By “the early Chinese people,” I refer to the people living in the historical period before the first unification of China by the Qin 唐 Dynasty (221 B.C.), i.e., in the Yin 殷/Shang 商 (1600 B.C – 1046 B.C) and the Zhou 周 (1046 B.C – 221 B.C.) dynasties. This period lies between the legendary Xia dynasty and the Han 漢
(206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) dynasty, between the period of the initiation of dragon worship and the age in which such practice become finally institutionalized. It is an important transitory period which preserves many traces of primeval customs and beliefs and which determines the beginning and essential character of Chinese civilization. But for phenomena of more than two thousands of years ago, reliable data and facts are hard to come by. In sum, we have at our disposal only three possible sources or clues: the artifacts unearthed, the relevant historical literature and records, the remnant customs of dragon worship among contemporary Chinese and in certain minority ethnic groups with less developed or primitive culture.

The archeological discoveries, ranging from the gorgeous bronze sacrificial instruments to jade pendants and everyday utensils decorated with the images of the dragon, constitute the most physical and reliable data for our investigation. Despite the wide presence of the image of dragon and other animals on the articles unearthed, their proper interpretations raise some serious questions, which remain unsettled among contemporary scholars. In modern age, it often seems that works of art like paintings, sculptures, or various images on the articles of everyday use serve merely the purpose of supplying “beautiful things to people who wanted them and enjoyed them.” But for ancient people, these images are no simple works of art that happen to be put on the instruments for the sake of beauty or ornament. Rather, in an age when people still had difficulty feeding themselves, it is remarkable that they took such great efforts in producing images with a technique and an excellence that are exacting and stunning even for the people today. As we will show, these images have profound psychological meanings and reveal the fundamental existential situations of these ancient people.
We cannot discover the full meanings of these images without first understanding the world to which these people belonged. In order to understand the world of the early Chinese people, we need to look closely at the historical accounts of their customs and beliefs. There are scores of historical literature passed down but with mixed degrees of authenticity and reliability. Thus, the use of the ancient Chinese texts call for some special discretion and tactics. Piddington points out that the texts of primitive people, “which embody the legends, mythology and historical traditions of the people … are important, not as an account of what actually happened in the past, but as a body of beliefs which gives a traditional justification for present-day institutions. We are concerned with such historical accounts only in so far as they live in the present, in the form of beliefs, whether true or false, which actually influence the lives of the natives.”

Such a guideline, though helpful, is not fully applicable to some of the ancient Chinese classics we are concerned with. By the time these texts were composed, early Chinese people had already a progressive civilization and a sophisticated system of writing. We should not treat the ancient Chinese classics, therefore, in the same way anthropologists treat the myths and legends of the primitive people. The narratives by certain ancient Chinese historians are not only valuable for us to catch sight of the social customs and religious beliefs of that time. They constitute also the most important resources for us to understand the world to which they belonged. Though it is hard to draw a strict line, we need to distinguish basically two different kinds of historical narratives: 1) the historical records maintained by the ancient government or written by important ancient scholars, which include the traditional Confucian classics, books of history composed and compiled under the government supervision, and representative works of major schools
of thinking; 2) legends and myths scattered in less important texts, such as folklores or legends collected and published by private compilers. Though the texts of the first category may not always be authentic and reliable, they constitute the primary source for our investigation and demonstration. The texts of the second category, which corresponds more to the kind of texts Piddington refers to, can only be used as secondary and supportive evidences.\textsuperscript{22}

The investigation of dragon worship and certain related customs and beliefs in less developed or primitive minority ethnic groups in contemporary China meets most properly the definition of the so-called social anthropology. Given the variation and transformation of social customs in the thousands of years, however, the anthropological findings in these ethnic groups may reflect the situation of the early Chinese people only indirectly. The accounts of their customs and beliefs by contemporary anthropologists, therefore, may only provide some secondary evidences supporting our thesis about the totemic nature of the dragon and its relation to the Oedipus complexes of the early Chinese people.

\textbf{II. The Dragon and the Father Complex}

My investigation of the relation between the dragon and the Oedipus complex consists in three parts: 1) the investigation of the relationship between the phenomena of dragon worship and the father complex of early Chinese people; 2) the revelation of the connection between the images of the dragon and the incest wishes of the early Chinese
people; 3) the summary about the existential meanings of the images of dragon and its
totemic nature, which will bring to language a unity of the phenomena of dragon worship.

In this section, I intend to show the relationship between the dragon and the father
complex of the early Chinese people. I will demonstrate this relation in two steps. First, I
will show the ambivalent attitudes of the early Chinese people toward the dragon, which
tally with their ambivalent feelings toward the father. Second, I will provide some solid
textual evidences to establish that the early Chinese people took dragon as the symbol of
the father or the king.

(a) The Ambivalent Attitudes toward the Dragon and the Father

Freud claims that “the relation of the child to animals has much in common with that of
primitive man.”\(^\text{23}\) There are two traits that are common for the animal phobia of the child
and the totemism of primitive man: “the complete identification with the totem animal,
and the ambivalent affective attitudes towards it.”\(^\text{24}\) The ambivalence of emotions, the
hostility hidden in the unconscious behind tender love, “exists in almost all cases of
intensive emotional allegiance to a particular person.”\(^\text{25}\) Being a fundamental
phenomenon of our emotion life, it was originally “acquired by mankind from the father
complex,”\(^\text{26}\) one of the essential aspects of the Oedipus complex. The animal in totemism
of primitive man and in the animal phobia of the child, thus, is nothing else than a
substitute for the father. A child, for example, assumes a double or “ambivalent
emotional attitude towards the father and relieved himself of this ambivalent conflict by
displacing his hostile and anxious feelings upon a substitute for the father.”\(^\text{27}\) According
to Freud’s psychoanalysis, “the totem animal is really a substitute for the father, and this
really explains the contradiction that it is usually forbidden to kill the totem animal, that the killing of it results in a holiday and that the animal is killed and yet mourned. The ambivalent emotional attitude which today still marks the father complex in our children and so often continues into adult life also extended to the father substitute of the totem animal."

The ambivalence attached to the father complex continues in totemism and in religions in general. In primitive sacrifices, the god maintains a close relation to the holy animal. As Freud puts it, the totem being the first form representing the father, the god, which is “nothing less than an exalted father,” may have been a later substitute in which “the father regained his human form.”

If it can be shown that the early Chinese people viewed dragon as a symbol of the father and that they held ambivalent feelings toward both the dragon and the father, then we would be justified to assume that the dragon is a substitute for the father, upon which the hostile and anxious feelings were displaced. My hypothesis that the dragon is a totem, accordingly, would first become plausible.

1. Ambivalence of Feelings towards the Dragon

The ambivalent attitudes of the early Chinese people toward the dragon is reflected by the double nature of the dragon, which was taken both as a sign of auspice and an omen of disaster. Let us look at these two characters of the dragon one by one.

i) The Dragon as a Sign of Auspice

As Okakura remarks, the dragon in the east “is not the gruesome monster of mediaeval imagination, but the genius of strength and goodness. He is the spirit of change, therefore
of life itself.” Elliot Smith points out that while in the West the dragon is usually a “power of evil,” “in the far East he is equally emphatically a symbol of beneficence.”

Today, most Chinese hold dragon as an auspicious animal. Such belief has a long history and originates probably in the early Chinese civilization. Contemporary scholars have few doubts about the auspicious nature of the dragon in ancient China. There is plenty of evidence in ancient Chinese literature and archeological findings to support this claim. Here it suffices to mention only some of the most important ones.

The wide appearance of the image of dragon on articles and clothes of ancient Chinese people illustrates well the auspicious nature of dragon. The Book of Decorum, one of the most important Confucian classics, depicts the image of dragon on the robe of the king as a sign of nobility. As Prof. Ji Chengming puts it, ancient Chinese carved and drew the images of dragon on their clothes and daily instruments “for the sake of seeking auspices, taking dragon as an auspicious sign.” According to ancient Chinese literature, the appearance of the dragon is an auspicious sign, indicating something fortunate. De Visser, among others, has pointed out rightly that “the birth of great sages and Emperors was preceded by the appearance of dragons and phoenixes.”

ii) The Dragon as a Demonic Animal

Most people are not well aware that the dragon was also a demonic and monstrous creature for the early Chinese people. The fear of the dragon is covered up by the wide belief of its auspicious nature. But evidence is not wanting for the demonic nature of the dragon. The description of the dragon as a monstrous creature, though eclipsed by the prevalent accounts of its auspicious nature, bobs up time and again in ancient Chinese
literature. De Visser enumerated a dozen instances in which dragons were taken as “bad omens” for ancient Chinese. Wang Chong, a famous thinker in Easter Han (25 – 220 A.D.) dynasty, related a story in which Yu 禹, a legendary ancient king, confronted courageously the appearance of a yellow dragon: “Once Yu was riding on a river to the south. A yellow dragon took the boat on its back and the people in the boat were all frightened. Yu laughed and said: ‘I receive the ordinance from heaven and try my best to benefit the people. For me, life is an expedition of which death is the destiny. What can disturb me? I regard the dragon as a dragon-fly.’ The dragon then fled away.” Han Fei Zi, a creator of the school of legalism in the Warring States period (475 – 221 B.C.), describes once the inverted scales of the dragon and warns that whoever touches these scales will be killed by the dragon. *History of Han* records a story about the customs of the people of Yue 越, who cut their hairs and cover their bodies with tattoos of the dragon in order to avoid the harm by the dragons in water. This story appears with slightly different versions in some other books such as *Shuo Yuan* 说苑, which is known as a book that copies and assembles scattered old texts. Wen Yiduo, a renowned contemporary scholar, concludes that the story must have come from the ancient books of pre-Qin period. The customs of the people of Yue and their fear of the dragon, thus, both date back to an older age.

In the west, notably, the dragon has long been a monstrous animal representing the “power of evil.” The comparison of the legends and images of the dragon in the ancient world indicate that there may well be a common origin of the dragon-myth. Elliot Smith argues that “An association of anatomical features of so unnatural and arbitrary a
nature can only mean that all dragons are the progeny of the same ultimate ancestors… it is not merely a case of structural or anatomical similarity, but also of physiological identity, that clinches the proof of the derivation of this fantastic brood from the same parents.”

If this hypothesis of the common origin of the dragons is true, then, given the exclusively demonic nature of the dragon in the west, it would be logical to assume that the dragon as a demonic monster is earlier than the dragon as a beneficent creature, which can well be a later development. Because even in the East, as we have shown, “the dragon’s reputation is not always blameless. For it figures in some disreputable incidents and does not escape the sort of punishment that tradition metes out to his European cousins.”

It is clear that the dragon is also a monstrous creature for early Chinese people. But since many contemporary scholars do not recognize and understand properly the ambivalent feelings of the early Chinese people, they fail to catch sight of the demonic nature of the dragon. For many, the double character of the dragon remains a puzzle. For example, Wen Yiduo, though arguing strongly for the totemic nature of the dragon, regards it an enigma that the people of Yue are fearful of the dragon, the auspicious totem representing their ancestors. It is only through Freud’s theory of ambivalence that the double character of the dragon and its relation to the double attitude towards the father come into a coherent unity.

2. Ambivalence of Feelings towards the Father
Like the double character of the dragon, the ambivalent feelings towards the father are not widely recognized, despite much solid evidence in ancient Chinese literature. While the tender love of the father is a known fact, the hostile feelings towards the father remain mostly unknown and unconscious. Since these hostile feelings are not expressed straightforwardly, to bring them into presence requires certain tactics. My strategy in showing the ambivalent feelings of the early Chinese people is based upon the psychoanalysis of the meanings of taboos. Freud has shown that the ambivalent attitudes towards the totem animal and the father are reflected in the ambivalent feelings toward *taboos* in the totemism of primitive people. As Freud puts it: “Taboo is a very primitive prohibition imposed from without (by an authority) and directed against the strongest desires of man. The desire to violate it continues in the unconscious; persons who obey the taboo have an *ambivalent* feeling toward what is affected by the taboo.”

In early Chinese societies, there are a variety of taboos concerning the father and the king. These taboos and the custom of ancestor worship demonstrate convincingly the ambivalence of feelings toward the father.

i) The Ancestor Worship of the Early Chinese people

The ancestor worship of the ancient Chinese people is well known. The complexity and scale of the cult of the ancestor are remarkable in comparison to those in other early civilizations. In Shang dynasty, the ancestor worship was institutionalized and systematically established and maintained as a significant religious event of the whole nation. David N. Keightley asserts that the cult of the ancestors in late Shang dynasty, “as it was recorded in the oracle-bone inscriptions, involved not mere venerations or
commemoration, but actual worship." Prof. Li Chi describes the civilization of Shang dynasty as “a theocratic religion dominated by excessive devotion to ancestor worship.”

D. Howard Smith elaborates further the relation between the ancestor and Di or Ti, the god or the divine king: “The deified ancestors of the Shang were known as Ti. When a ruler died he became a Ti, associated on high with the first ancestor-spirit who was regarded as the supreme Ti. A study of this character as it is used in the oracle bone inscriptions suggests that this founder ancestor of the Shang dynasty was thought of as a supreme god, dwelling on high.” With the ancestors worshiped as the father, it is clear that for early Chinese people, both the god and the king, who is the son of the god or heaven, represented also the father. The ancestor worship, thus, is a deified love or cult of the father. This tender love of the father and the king is epitomized in the concept of xiao, which is usually translated as the “filial piety.” The unique concept of xiao, which is developed in early Chinese societies, refers to both the respect and good treatment of the father or the parents when they are alive and the long-lasting mourning and remembrance after their death. The concept of xiao plays an important role for the early Chinese people and such practice persists in later dynasties. It embodies a high degree of the love of the father or the parents in ancient Chinese society.

ii) Taboos and the Ambivalent Attitudes towards the Father

The taboos and prohibitions concerning the father and the king in ancient Chinese societies are complex and sophisticated. The systems of taboos have a long history and originate obviously from the customs of the early Chinese people. The ancient Chinese call these prohibitions “jin-ji [禁忌].” Many ancient and contemporary Chinese scholars
have endeavored to rationalize these prohibitions by attributing their origins to the love of
the father or the king. But the etymologies of the words jin and ji indicate otherwise. The
word jin禁, which is usually understood as “to forbid,” carries a multiple of meanings.

The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Language enumerates the following
meanings of jin: “prohibition, law, the secret or mystical, the dwelling place of the king,
the prison, the container of the wine, the demonic power.” It is also used as a verb with
the senses of “to prohibit, to hold, to preside over, to be cautious, to forbear, to order or
control.”\textsuperscript{48} Shuowen defines the original meaning of jin as “the prohibition [ji, 忌] about
the auspicious and the ominous.”\textsuperscript{49} Ji 忌, which defines the word jin, carries not only the
sense of “to prohibit,” but also the sense of “to hate, to resent, to fear, to envy, to avoid,
etc,” or the feeling or the objects of “hatred, resentment, fear, dread, envy or evasion.”
The most original meaning of ji, according to Shuowen 说文, is “to hate and resent.”\textsuperscript{50}
The etymologies of the word jin and ji reveal that the origins of taboos and prohibitions,
as ancient Chinese understood them, are none other than the feelings of hatred and dread.
The objects connected with the king or the father are prohibited and forbidden because
they are the objects one fears and avoids, but at the same time envies. The dwelling place
of the king, for example, is a privileged place of “envy” that the common people have to
“avoid.” It is a “mystical” place guarded by the taboos and “prohibitions” – the “laws”
“forbidding” the common people from transgressing the privilege of the king. The
common people need to “forbear” and “be cautious” about these taboos and prohibitions
because there are demonic powers” accompanying the prohibited objects. Thus, when the
state is able to ““hold” these taboos and prohibitions as laws, the king is said to “preside
over” the state, which is under the “order or control” of these laws or prohibitions. The most original meaning of ji as hatred and resentment shows that even the ancient Chinese were aware, at least to a degree, that the underlying emotions of the taboos and prohibitions are the feelings of “hatred and resentment,” though such feelings remain for the most part in the unconscious.

Apart from the dwelling place of the king, there are a number of other taboos and prohibitions in connection with the father and the king and especially with their death. These taboos and prohibitions include the rules of the burial of the dead, the regulations of mourning activities during the date and anniversary of the death of the father and the king, the obligation to avoid the names of the father and the king in speech and writing, and so on. For example, the person of the king has long been a taboo object that one should avoid as long as possible. A common saying in Chinese compares the duty of accompanying the king to the danger of accompanying the tiger. Book of Decorum stipulates that when looking at the king, who is the son of heaven, “one should not look higher than his collar or lower than his waist-belt.” Such sight taboos regarding the king stems from the primitive superstition regarding the mysterious power that the king possesses, which is to some degree passed down to government officers. In Popular Taboos in China, Ren Cheng describes a common theatrical scene in ancient China in which persons of humble origins dare not look at even the lowest rank government officers at a court without first being pardoned for their “crimes” of such looking. These regulations and prohibitions derive apparently from the taboos of the early Chinese people, the most remarkable of which is concerned with the names of the father and the king. According to the Confucian classics, the practice of avoiding the names of the gods
and the dead king was first institutionalized in Zhou dynasty and were soon extended so that one should not mention the father’s and the king’s (first) names even when they are still alive. When a king or monarch is dead, a special title will be endowed, which will be used in the burial ceremony and in the sacrifices and the official records afterwards. When the king and the father are still alive, one should never call them by their names but only by their titles. The characters in a king’s name are forbidden to use by the people in the whole nation and the characters in a father’s name are avoided by his sons and daughters in their writings and speeches. Even Si-ma Qian, the renowned historian in Han dynasty and the author of History, one of the most important book of history in ancient China, changed the names of historical figures such as “Zhao Tan 赵谈” and “Li Tan 李谈” to “Zhao Tong 赵同” and “Li Tong 李同” simply for the sake of avoiding using the character “tan 谈,” which is his father’s first name. The motive of avoiding the name of the father and the king, apparently, has much to do with the feeling of fear. Ren Cheng has offered an illustrative example that the Chinese Er-Lun-Chun 鄂伦春 ethnic group believe “the mentioning of the names of the ancestors is a disrespect, which will irritate the ancestors and incur disasters.”

(b) The Dragon as the symbol of the father

I hypothesize that for the early Chinese people, the dragon is a substitute for the father, upon which the hostile feelings toward the father are displaced. The early Chinese have ambivalent feelings towards the father and the king. According to the discoveries of psychoanalysis, the hostile feeling ensconced in the unconscious may find their satisfaction with the death of the father and the king. Such unconscious feelings of
satisfaction would incur a serious sense of guilt that is displaced through a projection. As Freud puts it, “The survivor will deny that he has ever entertained hostile impulses toward the beloved dead; but now the soul of the deceased entertains them and will try to give vent to them during the entire period of mourning. In spite of the successful defence through projection, the punitive and remorseful character of this emotional reaction manifests itself in being afraid, in self-imposed renunciations and in subjection to restrictions which are partly disguised as protective measures against the hostile demon.”

The taboo of the dead, which manifests the ambivalent feelings of the conscious grief and the unconscious satisfaction at the death of the father, can be traced back to the “fear of the soul of the dead after it has turned into a demon.” Presumably, the demon, upon which the hostile feelings toward the deceased father and king are displaced, may find many different embodiments. We take the dragon as one of the primary substitutes of the demonic soul of the deceased father for the early Chinese people. It is the totem which substitutes the father and in which the fear of the demon finds its primary incarnation. My demonstration of the ambivalent feelings towards the father and the double character of the dragon in early China support this hypothesis. This relation between the dragon and the father complex will be further substantiated by the actual identification of the dragon with the father and the king in early Chinese legends and literature.

Elliot Smith remarks that the original dragon in the East was “the personification of water, and was identified with kings and gods.” Book of Changes, for example, explains the meaning of the hexagram “Zhen” as the dragon and the thunder and asserts that the divine king [Di 帝] originates from the hexagram “Zhen.” The
identification of the dragon with the thunder, which is mentioned also by Wang Chong.\textsuperscript{60} is noteworthy. In Greek mythology, Zeus, the father (i.e., the ruler and protector) of both gods and men, was also regarded as the sender of thunder and lightning, rain, and winds. It seems that the phenomena of thunder and lightning are taken as an embodiment of the demon in both ancient Greece and China. The thunder has clearly the double character of reifying the punishment from heaven and at the same time presaging the propitious advent of the rain essential to the livelihood of the people. Obviously, the association between the dragon and the thunder in \textit{Book of Changes} indicates an incarnation in the dragon both the demonic and auspicious nature of the divine king, who is the deified ancestor and the symbol of the father.

The belief that the kings are dragons is indeed widely reflected in other ancient Chinese texts. De Visser relates a number of legends and folklores in ancient China that identify the ancient kings such as Huang Di 黄帝 and Shun 舜 with the dragons.\textsuperscript{61} Si-ma Qian’s \textit{History} records a story in which Qin Shi-Huang 秦始皇, the emperor of the Qin dynasty who achieved first unification of China, was regarded as an “ancestral dragon.”\textsuperscript{62} The wide appearance of the images of the dragon on the dwelling places and daily utensils of the kings and emperors in the ancient China, which the recent archaeological findings show indisputably, confirm again the ancient desire to identify the kings and emperors with the dragons.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence is the many legends that associate the appearance of the dragon with the conception and the birth of the kings. Si-ma Qian’s \textit{History} narrates a legend about the birth of Liu Bang 劉邦, the first emperor of Han
dynasty. According to the legend, the mother of Liu Bang “once slept beside a big lake and dreamed of encountering a god. During that time, it became dark and gloomy with thunders rumbling and lightning flashing. Liu Bang’s father saw a couple of dragons entwined with each other having intercourse above her. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to Liu Bang.” 63 Shan-Hai Jing 山海经, the first ancient Chinese mythology, relates a similar story about the conception of the ancient king Fu-Xi伏羲, who is the legendary creator of the eight trigrams and whose image is often associated with the dragon: “A big footprint came out of the Lake of Thunder. Hua Xu trod on it and then gave birth to Fu-Xi.” 64 It is interesting and enlightening to compare these legends with the beliefs of the primitives in Australia and Melanesia. As Frazer reports in Totemism and Exogamy, “women become impregnated when a spirit of an animal or a spiritual fruit enters into their wombs. Since the children therefore participate in the nature of the animal or plant, these plants or animals take on significance. These ideas were hereditary and resulted in the beginning of totem clans derived from a particular natural creature.” 65 The psychological motives underlying these legends and beliefs seem to be none other than the attempts to identify the sons with the animal and the plant, which are associated with special spiritual powers. The ancient Chinese legends, for example, identify the kings with the dragon. With little doubt, the “thunder” that appears in both stories, first as the real thunder and second as the name of the lake, implies the dragon, which is taken as the symbol of the deified father. This symbolic nature of the dragon is evidenced again in another story, in which the conception of Hou Ji后稷, the first king of the people of Zhou, is said to occur when his mother trod upon the footprint of the divine king, or the king...
of heaven [tian-di]. Both the divine king of heaven and the dragon, apparently, are substitutes of the father. With their conception associated with the dragon and the divine king of heaven, the ancient Chinese kings were designated as the “sons of heaven” and were believed to have inherited the special spiritual or demonic powers of the dragons and the gods.

III. The Dragon and the Incest Wish

I have shown the double character of the dragon and the ambivalent feelings toward the father. As a substitute of the father, the dragon is that upon which the father complex is displaced. In this section, I will spell out further the totemic nature of the dragon by revealing the sexual implications of the image of the dragon and its relation to the incest wishes. I intend to demonstrate this relationship again in two steps. First, I will investigate the sexual taboos of the early Chinese people and their ambivalence toward the incest desire. After that, I will examine the metaphorical meanings of the images of “dragons couple” that are widely represented in ancient Chinese legends, bronze sacrificial instruments, paintings, sculptures and other works of art.

(a) Sexual Taboos and Ambivalence toward the Incest Desire

The sexual taboos in ancient China are as complex and sophisticated as the taboos concerning the father and the king. These taboos reflect the ambivalent attitudes towards sex, which were regarded as sacred and holy but at the same time unclean and blasphemous. The phallic cult of sex, i.e. the belief in the mysterious power of the act of
sexual intercourse, which is found to be common for most primitive people in the ancient world, plays an essential role in the ancient Chinese theory of Yin and Yang. The combination of Yang and Yin represents the combination of light and dark, day and night, heaven and earth, hexagram Qin 乾 and Kun 坤, the sun and the moon, warm and cold, male and female. The harmony of Yin and Yang carries some crucial and mysterious significance for the prosperity of the evolution of the universe. The harmony of two sexes, meantime, has often been taken as one of the primary metaphorical expressions of the harmony of Yin and Yang. Guo Moruo, a renowned contemporary historian of early China, argues that the diagrams for Yin and Yang in *Book of Changes* originated in the images of the male and female sexual organs.  

*Book of Changes* compares the interaction of heaven and earth to the sexual intercourse of man and woman and regards them as the foundation of the emergence of all beings in the world.  

Xun Zi, one representative Confucian thinker in the Warring State period, says also that “All beings emerge on the intercourse of heaven and earth; all changes arise on the interaction of Yin and Yang.” The ancient Chinese attitude toward sex, however, is ambivalent. The belief in the significant and mysterious power associated with the harmony of Yin and Yang, which is embodied in the act of sexual intercourse, produced also a system of taboos against “improper” sexual activities and everyday interaction between man and woman. Among all these different taboos, we can only mention a few that are related most directly to the incest wishes of early Chinese people. The most remarkable sexual taboos are those concerning the exogamy of the clans sharing the same family name. The taboo that men and women with the same family name should never marry each other shows itself in a number of ancient Chinese texts.
Zuo Zhuan, for example, warns that the marriage of men and women with the same family name results in infertility. While this prohibition was first institutionalized in Zhou dynasty, it is apparently a derivation of the incest taboos of an earlier age. Bai Hu Tong Yi identifies the origin of family name [Xìng, 姓] as a social institution for the sake of regulating marital relations and avoiding incest. Despite the efforts of some contemporary scholars to rationalize such regulations on the basis of eugenic concerns, the scientific knowledge of digenesis of children from marriages in proximity of blood is undeniably a recent discovery and is unlikely to play any significant role in the beliefs of the early Chinese people. Rather, it seems more reasonable to attribute the origin of this taboo to the sense of guilt and the fear or dread of disasters that will ensue the violation of such taboos. Guo Yu states that “To avoid taking a wife with the same family name is for fear of disasters.” Ren Cheng relates the belief of the Chinese Wa 佤 ethnic group that the marriage between men and women with the same family name will offend “heaven [天, tian],” which will inflict punishments and disasters such as the death of human beings and domestic animals, bad crops, excessive or deficient rains and thunder strikes. Such kind of beliefs, as Ren Cheng elaborates, is present in many other ethnic groups as well. The fear of infertility, to which some Confucian classics refer, thus, can well be one of the embodiments of the disasters or punishments from the heaven. This fear of punishment and disasters is probably also the origin of many other sexual taboos restricting the everyday interaction between men and women in ancient Chinese societies. In a family, for example, it is forbidden to speak to or serve one’s brother- or sister-in-law. A similar kind of prohibition applies to the interaction between brothers and sisters.
Men and women who are strangers, on the other hand, are supposed to avoid each other. They should not sit at the same table or on the same mat, neither should they look at or speak to or touch each other. Many such regulations continue in the customs of different Chinese ethnic groups today. All these prohibitions, as Ren Cheng remarks, are meant to avoid the suspicious sexual behaviors between men and women. They are all variation of the sexual taboos, which originate in the incest taboo.

I have elaborated the psychoanalytic discovery that taboos are prohibitions imposed from without and directed against “the strongest desires of man. The desire to violate it continues in the unconscious; persons who obey the taboo have an ambivalent feeling toward what is affected by the taboo.” Such ambivalent attitudes toward sex are most vividly evidenced in the activities of early Chinese people during certain holidays. 

Decorum of Zhou records the following practice for a holiday in the Zhou dynasty: “During the second month of the spring, men and women are ordered to gather and meet each other. At that time, there is no prohibition against those having illegal sexes.” Remarkably, such practices were not regarded as a temporary suspension of the sexual taboo. Rather, they were performed under an order from the government, which would “punish those who do not observe this order without a legitimate reason.” The description of this kind of holidays by some other ancient Chinese texts confirms the actual existence of such kind of practices in ancient China. In fact, as Si-ma Qian’s History records, it is precisely in one of such kind of sexual activities that Confucius was conceived.

The ambivalent attitudes towards the sexual activities reflect the repressed incest wishes. The early Chinese people were aware of such incest wishes and regarded the
social institutions such as the maintenance of family name \([xìng]\) as means of regulating such primitive impulses. These incest wishes, however, were never completely done away. Rather they were only displaced and showed themselves in different substitutive fulfillments such as the sexual activities during the holiday I mentioned above. The images of “dragon couple” that are widely present in the ancient Chinese works of art, as we will see, constitute an important metaphorical fulfillments of the incest desires of the early Chinese people.

(b) The Sexual Implications of the Image of the Dragon

More often than not, the dragons appear in pairs in ancient Chinese texts. Wen Yiduo alludes to more than a dozen texts that talk about two dragons or a couple of dragons.\(^{81}\) Wen demonstrates that the so-called \(jiao\ long\) \([蛟龍]\), which appears frequently in early texts, refers to a pair of dragons intertwined with each other having intercourse.\(^{82}\) He argues further that the so-called “two-headed serpent” and “intertwined serpent [teng she 螣蛇]” are really two serpents mating with each other.\(^{83}\) The serpent, as Wen shows, is one of the prototype of the dragon in early Chinese legends. I have mentioned above that the emperor Liu Bang was conceived when a couple of dragons \([jiao\ long\ 蛟龍]\) had intercourse above his mother. Si-ma Qian’s \textit{History} records another well known story according to which two dragons had intercourse in the court of a king in the legendary Xia 夏 dynasty, an event which was later taken as a bad omen.\(^{84}\) Two dragons playing and having intercourse with each other is also a recurring theme for the carvings on sacrificial instruments, jade pendant and many other ancient works of art. Shanghai Museum
preserves a semi-annular jade pendant [yu huang 玉璜] of late Shang dynasty, veined with two dragon heads sharing the same body. Palace Museum of Taiwan preserves a bronze wine vessel [song hu 颂壶] of late Western Zhou dynasty. The front of this sacrificial instrument is carved with two dragons with the same head, their bodies entwined with each other. Sackler Gallery of Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC has a bronze rice container [fu 篑] of early Spring and Autumn period (770 – 476 B.C.). The body of this container is covered with the veins of interconnected dragon bodies. "Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Relics Bureau of Henan Province keeps a bronze cooking device [li 鬲] of the late Spring and Autumn period. It is decorated with three dragons on the outside and covered with knotted veins representing the body of the dragon. The sexual implications of all these different images of intertwined dragons are not difficult to recognize. Remarkably, for ancient Chinese, these images of the dragon are not simply for the sake of ornamentation or beauty. Rather, they are metaphorical expressions of the repressed sexual wishes that are displaced in the production and appreciation of these works of art. While such kind of works of art are too many to enumerate here, the most spectacular one is probably a bronze drum seat of early Warring States period. Upon this drum seat are the sculptures of sixteen dragons tangled with each other and dozens of smaller dragons attached to the eight pairs of main dragons. As Liu Zhixiong and Yan Jinrong sum up in The Dragon and Chinese Culture, this sculpture of the dragon group represents not only sexual intercourse but also the religious import of reproduction. It refers to the great virtue of heaven and earth that is called creation [sheng 生]."
The relation between the dragon and the incest wishes of the early Chinese people is most convincingly shown by the legends, paintings and sculptures about Fu Xi伏羲 and Nü Wa女娲, two mythological ancestors of the Chinese people. According to a variety of ancient texts, Fu Xi and Nü Wa are husband and wife but at the same time brother and sister. Contrary to Anne Birrell’s assertion, the legends of Fu Xi and Nü Wa, which are widely represented in the literature and works of art in the Han dynasty, date back to a much earlier age. In the Warring State period, the great poet Qu Yuan from the state of Chu楚 already mentioned the goddess Nü Wa in conjunction with a divine king. Wang Yi, an annotator in Eastern Han dynasty, identifies this divine king as Fu Xi. This interpretation is supported by a silk book unearthed from an ancient tomb of the state of Chu in 1942. In this silk book of Warring State period, which is held now by Freer Gallery of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Fu Xi and Nü Wa are said to be the divine king and queen who instigate the emergence of all beings by their sexual intercourse that embodies the interaction of Yin and Yang. Many paintings and sculptures discovered so far portray Fu Xi and Nü Wa as a man and a woman with serpent-like bodies, whose tails are closely intertwined with each other. I have mentioned above that the conception of the divine king Fu Xi is related with the Lake of Thunder and thus with the dragon. The image of the dragon has long been connected with the image of the serpent, which is often taken as one of the prototypes of the dragon in legends and folklores around the world. It is clear that for the ancient Chinese, Fu Xi and Nü Wa are two dragons intertwined with each other having intercourse. It is clear also that the sexual implications of the image of two dragons point to the incest desires, which
find their metaphorical expression in the myths, paintings and sculptures. This thesis is confirmed further by the anthropological investigation of a variety of Chinese minority ethnic groups in the early twentieth century. All these ethnic groups are found to have passed down some old legends that identify the ancestors of human beings as a brother and a sister who were compelled to marry each other after a disastrous flood. Wen Yiduo enumerates twenty-five such records and shows that the heroes and heroines in a number of these stories are either identified with Fu Xi and Nü Wa or found to have very similar names. 95

IV A Summary of Inferences

Granted, we do not have enough evidence to ascertain whether the myth of Fu Xi and Nü Wa were old enough to be the source of all the images of dragon couple. Neither can we determine whether the sexual implications of the dragon originate directly from the belief in the mysterious power associated with the interaction of Yin and Yang, so that the story of Fu Xi and Nü Wa is merely a later development. On the other hand, both the legends of Fu Xi and Nü Wa and the images of the intertwined dragons having intercourse have the common origin of the human condition underlying the Oedipus complex, which in Freud’s view marks “the beginning of religion, ethics, society, and art” 96 In fact, it is only by clarifying this fundamental condition of human existence that the double meaning of the image of the dragon, which serves as both the substitute of the father and the metaphorical fulfillment of the incest wishes, can be understood.
Psychoanalytically, the fundamental condition underlying the Oedipus complex is “the lengthy duration in man of his childhood helplessness and dependence,” which begins with the “great anxiety-state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing – the anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother.” Freud takes this childhood helplessness as a biological factor that, along with the historical factor of the Oedipus complex, is responsible for the genesis of the super-ego. I have shown in the last chapter that the formation of the super-ego is occasioned by the need to manage collectively the traumatic situation of helplessness and to flee away from the domination of the power of destiny presaged by the unrelenting sways of the conflicting life and death instincts – a common destiny of human existence that reaches its culmination in the Oedipus complex.

So far as the early Chinese people are concerned, it seems that the primal anxiety in the face of the traumatic situation of helplessness was contained in two major ways: 1) the animistic belief in the mysterious power of sexual intercourse, which represents the interaction of Yin and Yang vital for the evolution of the universe; 2) the establishment of an ego ideal or super-ego as the protector and guarantor, which is most vividly embodied in the ancestor worship. These two major ways of containing the primal anxiety, which correspond to the two aspects of the Oedipus complex, are interconnected with each other. I have also made manifest that they are both related to the image of the dragon.

The sexual implications of the images of the dragon are clear. For early Chinese people, however, the images and legends of the intertwined dragons having intercourse with each other were not merely a metaphorical fulfillments of the incest wishes. Rather, they represented the animistic belief according to which the dragon and the sexual
activity of human beings are endowed with spiritual power and significances. The
dragon, as I mentioned in passing above, played a central role in the magic for the rain.
The ceremony of causing rain in ancient China, as Wang Chong interprets, was to
harmonize the Yin and Yang so that the rain will come of itself. Such harmony of Yin
and Yang, in turn, was sought through a kind of imitation, i.e. through the regulation of
sexual behaviors of human beings, which found its metaphorical expression for example
in the harmony of the paintings and sculptures of the dragon couple.

The mysterious spiritual power associated with sexual activity, according to the
beliefs of the primitive people, is also possessed by the father or the ego ideal. As Freud
says, the father and the king are “the bearer of that mysterious and dangerous magic
power which communicate itself by contact, like an electric charge, bringing death and
destruction to any one not protected by a similar charge.” The father’s possession of
the mysterious spiritual power is shown vividly in the legends of the conception of the
great kings and emperors, which occurs when the spirit of the dragon or the divine king
enters the wombs of their mothers.

For the early Chinese people, remarkably, the formation of the ego ideal depends
more on the social authority than on the real father. As I proposed in the last chapter, it
is the psychological image of “the father,” which most often finds its representation in the
king or the ancestor, that carries the authority and mysterious power. A child’s super-ego,
as Freud clarifies later, “is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents but of its
parents’ super-ego.” I regard the origin of the psychological need for “the father” – the
prototype of the super-ego – as the state of anxiety in the face of the childhood
helplessness and the unbearable destiny of human existence that persists even after one has grown up.

For the early Chinese people, the fear of “the father,” which is reflected in the fear of the dragon, originates in the beliefs of his control of the mysterious power associated with the sexual activities and the harmony of the Yin and Yang. The prerogative position of “the father” is represented for example in the privilege of the real father over the mother. This prerogative position that the sons envy is the source of the hostile feelings of the sons, who are deprived of the right over the mother and sisters and who remain ambivalent in their attitudes toward the father. With their growing sexual wishes toward the mother and sisters, the son’s love of the father as the primary protector is in constant conflict with their hatred of the father who prohibits them from such desires. The ambivalent feelings toward the father originate in the paradoxical human situation. The everyday “moral conscience” speaks the voice of “the father,” i.e., of the super-ego who calls the sons away from the primal anxiety to the “certainty” of their being-at-home under the protection of “the father.” I have shown that the conscience anxiety in the everyday moral sense of guilt is in essence a “fear of anxiety.” It is a fear of a more severe outbreak of anxiety that the sons have experienced during the traumatic situation of birth and the Oedipus complex. The sons are only capable of fleeing away from such primal anxiety by identifying themselves with the collective ego ideal of “the father.” The everyday moral conscience, thus, also manifests itself as a fear of the father, or a fear of the loss of love from the father – the fear of castration. It is through this fear of anxiety in the form of fear of castration that one represses the prohibited desires and the growing hatred of the father.
The occurrence of the repression makes manifest that the psychological need for a protecting father always prevails over the real needs of the sexual desires, which, like the hostile feelings and the conscience phobia, must be displaced through a projection upon substitutive objects. As a primary representative of the mysterious power associated with sexual intercourse, the dragon becomes one of the major demonic creatures upon which the hostile feelings toward “the father” are projected and displaced. It is the primary substitutes of the demonic soul of the deceased father for the early Chinese people, the totem which substitutes the father and in which the fear of the demon finds its primary incarnation.

The transformation of the dragon from a demonic creature into an auspicious animal marked a point at which the ambivalent feelings toward the father found a metaphorical reconciliation. With the identification with the dragon as the clan totem, the early Chinese people attempted to find a “balance” between the real needs of their sexual desires and the psychological needs for a protecting and blessing father. At least superficially, the tension between the hostile feelings and the psychological need for “the father” were reconciled through the identification with the dragon. Thus, the image of the dragon that representing the father concurred with the image of the two dragons intertwined with each other. The combination of these two psychological motives in the single image of the dragon refers to the sanction of a controlled, metaphorical satisfaction of the sexual desires under the protection and authorization of “the father.” This took place when the people in the clan identify themselves to the totem of the dragon and subordinate themselves to the command of the taboos concerning the father and sexual activity. This identification is most vividly demonstrated in the ritual and sacrificial
ceremonies, as well as certain festivals about the dragon. We have to leave the investigation of the meaning of the image of the dragon in these ritual and sacrificial ceremonies for the future. Presumably, the images of the dragon on the bronze sacrificial instruments are meant to indicate that the meat and wine served in those instruments are supposed to be the meat and blood of the dragon. The sacrificial ceremony was thus characterized by the so-called totem feast, a communal repast in which the sacrificing community ate the meat of the dragon and drank its blood. The participation in the eating and drinking established the holy bond between the communicants, who were believed to be of the same blood of the dragon, which was the symbol of the father. In the killing and eating of the dragon or its substitutes during the ritual and sacrificial ceremonies, thus, not only did the sacrificial community establish their common identity with the protecting father, but their hostile feelings toward the father were also satisfied in the unconscious.

Based upon Freud’s theory of totemism, my study has brought to language a possible unity of the phenomena of dragon worship in early China. I have also demonstrated the totemic nature of the dragon by clarifying its parallel to the Oedipus myth. Granted, many issues about the dragon remain untouched, such as the origin of the image of the dragon; its relation to other real and imaginary animals like the serpent, the phoenix, the tiger or the chameleon; its protean identity and its significance for the origination of the ancient Chinese philosophical thinking. We remain undecided also as to whether the totem of the dragon originates in the Oedipus complex or whether the dragon worship, along with other forms of animal worship, stems from separate origin and was later institutionalized for the repression of the Oedipus complex. The mysteries surrounding the image of the
dragon, indeed, are far from clarified. Nevertheless, with all its limitation and reservation, our investigation of the phenomena of dragon worship of the early Chinese people has made a solid step in a path toward the heart of the mysteries of the dragon and has provided a shining example of Freud’s theory of totemism.

By guiding us progress toward the heart of mysteries of the early Chinese minds, the theory of totemism, the psychoanalytical mythology, has also proved its vitality. At the same time, it makes manifest the genesis of the super-ego in early human history and brings thus the psychoanalytical interpretation of the meanings and origins of conscience to a preliminary synthesis. The super-ego, Freud claims in *The Ego and the Id*, “actually originated from the experience that led to totemism.” The clarification of the historical origin of the everyday experience of conscience, thus, prepares the way for an authentic dialogue between the existential and psychoanalytical interpretations of conscience. In the next chapter, I will first recapitulate some major relations between the question of ethics and the question concerning conscience. Then, I will instigate a dialogue between the existential and psychoanalytical interpretations of the meanings and origins of conscience by focusing upon a founding moment of conscience and morality, a moment of the truth of humanity: the death of the father.
Notes

1 Freud, Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming, in Character and Culture, p. 36.
3 Freud, Totem and Taboo, Basic Writings, p. 857. These essential facts that Freud summarized almost a century ago tallies well with the current definition of totemism. In a recent article for the Encyclopædia Britannica, for example, Prof. Josef Haekel gives the following essential characteristics of totemism: “(1) viewing the totem as a companion, relative, protector, progenitor, or helper—superhuman powers and abilities are ascribed to totems and totems are not only offered respect or occasional veneration but also can become objects of awe and fear; (2) use of special names and emblems to refer to the totem; (3) partial identification with the totem or symbolic assimilation to it; (4) prohibition against killing, eating, or touching the totem, even as a rule to shun it; and (5) totemistic rituals.” (Totemism, Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved January 4, 2005, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocId=38109>)
4 Freud, p. 876.
5 Ibid, p. 895.
7 Freud, The Ego and The Id, p. 33.
9 Haekel, Ibid..
10 Wallace, Freud and Anthropology, p. 169.
16 Ibid., p. 70.
19 Freud, A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis, in General Psychological Theory, p. 60.
20 E.H. Gombrich, The Story of Art, 16th ed. (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 475: “The purpose of painting or sculpture remained in general the same, and no one seriously questioned it. This purpose was to supply beautiful things to people who wanted them and enjoyed them.”
21 Piddington, p. 20
22 Since M.W. De Visser did not make such a distinction in his use of ancient Chinese texts in his book Dragon in China and Japan, some of his conclusions remain unconvincing and compromised. His book often indicates the assumption, whether held explicitly by De Visser or not, that the phenomena of dragon worship as he describes it
are uniform in all regions of China throughout all ages. See M.W. De Visser, *Dragon in China and Japan* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1913), Book I.

26 *Ibid*, p. 895
36 Wang Chong王充, Lun Heng論衡, Chapter Yi-Xu異虛, quoted in Tu Er-wei, p. 142.
37 Han Fei Zi韓非子, Chapter Shuo Nan説難, in Complete Selection of the Most Important Literary Works in the Four Categories of Chinese Classics, History, Philosophy and Literature四部備要, Photo offset edition, Vol XX.
40 Smith, *Ibid*, p. 81. Smith summaries the similarities of the dragons around the world as follow: “Although in the different localities a great number of most varied ingredients enter into its composition, in most places where the dragon occurs the substratum of its anatomy consists of a serpent or a crocodile, usually with the scales of a fish for covering, and the feet and wings, and sometimes also the head, of an eagle, falcon, or hawk, and the
forelimbs and sometimes the head of a lion…. Wherever dragon is found, it displays a special partiality for water. It controls the rivers or seas, dwells in pools or wells, or in the clouds on the tops of mountains, regulates the tides, the flow of streams, or the rainfall, and is associated with thunder and lightening.” (Smith, p. 81-2)

41 Cf. Yuan Ke 袁珂, *Myths in Ancient China* 中国古代神话 (Beijing 北京: Hua Xia Press 华夏出版社, 2003), p. 11, where Yuan elaborates the transformation of the image of the Western Queen from a demonic and beastly creature to auspicious goddess with insurmountable beauty.

42 Smith, p. 83.
43 Wen Yiduo, A Study of Fu-Xi, p. 105.
53 See Ren Cheng, p. 322.
54 Ren Cheng, p. 322-23.
56 Freud, Totem and Taboo, in *Basic Writings*, p. 822.
60 Wang Chong, *Lung Hen* 論衡, Chapter Long-Xu 龍虛: “The dragon and the thunder are the same kind and they elicit each other when affected, 雷龍同類, 感氣相致.”

63 Si-ma Qian, History, Biography of Liu Bang 刘邦本紀.


65 Frazer, Totemism and Exogamy, quoted and elaborated in Joseph Haekel, Totemism, Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Basing his view on research done among primitives in Australia and Melanesia, Frazer saw the origin of totemism as one possibility in the primitive interpretation of the conception and birth of children (“conceptionalism”). According to this primitive idea, women become impregnated when a spirit of an animal or a spiritual fruit enters into their wombs. Since the children therefore participate in the nature of the animal or plant, these plants or animals take on significance. These ideas were hereditary and resulted in the beginning of totem clans derived from a particular natural creature.”

66 There are a number of different versions of this story, which Wen Yi-duo elaborates in his Study on the story of Jiang Yuan’s treading on the footprint of a Great Man,” in Dead Water, Myth and Poetry, p. 148.

67 Guo Moruo 郭沫若. The Social life in the age of Book of Changes 周易时代的社会生活, in Investigation of Ancient Chinese Society 中国古代社会研究, Vol. I, p. 33: “We can see clearly that the foundation of the eight Trigrams are the relics of the ancient worship of sexual organs. Draw one line as the image of penis and divide it into two for the image of female sexual organ. From this evolved the concepts of man and woman, father and mother, yin and yang, hard and soft, heaven and earth.”


Bai Hu Tong Yi 白虎通義, Chapter Family name and Given Name 姓名篇, quoted in Ren Cheng, p. 90-1. Note that ancient Chinese people had two systems of family names: Xing 姓 and Shi 氏. Xing, which is used for women, is passed down from the maternal line and represents the blood lineage; Shi, which is used for men, is passed down from the paternal line and represents the dwelling place of one’s father, and thus becomes a sign of one’s nobility. This system was later broken down so that Xing is also used for men and become a social institution for the sake of regulating the marital relationship. As Prof. Zhou Guchen elaborates, “Xing is for restricting the marriage, shi is for distinguishing the nobility… Xing is used for calling women; shi is used for calling men. . . In matriarchal society, it is not woman, but man who leave his old family for marriage. Women do not leave their family for marriage, so that they are able to maintain the family name (Xing) that represents the blood lineage. During the Spring and Autumn period, matriarchal society is gone for a long time. But the customs of the use of Xing and Shi remain.” (Zhou Gucheng 周谷城, History of Politics in China 中国政治史 (Beijing 北京, Zhong Hua Shuju 中华书局, 1982) p. 4ff.)

Guo Yu 國語, quoted in Ren Cheng, p. 91.

Ren Cheng, p. 91.

Ren Cheng, p. 77.

Ibid, p. 77.

Freud, Totem and Taboo, in Basic Writings, p. 802.

Decorum of Zhou 周禮, Chapter Di Guan Si Tu 地官司徒, quoted in Guo Xingwen 郭兴文, Traditional Marriage Customs in China 中国传统婚姻风俗 (Xi An 西安, Shan Xi 陕西人民出版社, 2002), p. 58.

Decorum of Zhou, Chapter Di Guan Si Tu 地官司徒, quoted in Guo Xing-wen, p. 58.


Si-ma Qian, History, Chapter Biography of Confucius 孔子世家.

Wen Yi-duo, p. 99-100.

Wen Yi-duo, p. 95-6


Si-ma Qian, History, Chapter History of Zhou Dynasty.

See Appendix, Picture 1.

See Appendix, Picture 2.

See Appendix, Picture 3.

See Appendix, Picture 4.

See Appendix, Picture 5.

See Appendix, Picture 6.

Liu Zhi-xiong, p. 147.

Anne Birrell, Chinese Mythology: An Introduction (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) p. 34: “From the period of the Former Han, the female gender of Nü Kua was underscored (some primeval gods being of indeterminate gender), and at that time she began to be paired with the mythic figure of Fu Hsi, the two being presented as a married couple and patrons of the institutions of marriage.”
Qu Yuan 屈原, Questioning Heaven 天問, in Poems of Chu 楚辞, quoted in Liu Zhixiong, p. 178
Wang Yi’s annotates that the first line of Qu Yuan about the divine king talks about
“Fu Xi, who draws eight trigrams and cultivate virtues so that all people hold him as the
king.” in Jin Kaichen, A Collection of Interpretations of Question Heaven, quoted in Liu
Zhixiong, p. 178.
Lian Shaoming 连劭名, The silk books of the State of Chu found in Changsha and the
Wen Yi-duo, p. 86-91.
Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 30-1.
Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 61.
Freud, Totem and Taboo, in Basic Writings, p. 807.
Cf. Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 33: “As a child grows up, the role of the father is
carried on by teachers and other authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain
powerful in the ego ideal and continue in the form of conscience, to exercise the moral
censorship.”
Freud, New Introductory Lecture, p. 67.
Ibid, p. 35.
Chapter 5
Conscience and Ethos: Thinking across the Limits of Normativity

Die Tragödien des Sophokles bergen, falls überhaupt ein solcher Vergleich erlaubt ist, in ihrem Sagen das ethos anfänglicher als die Vorlesungen des Aristoteles über „Ethik“.

- Heidegger, Brief über den „Humanismus“

I intend to open up a new horizon for the question of ethics by working out the question concerning the meanings and origins of conscience. I take the question of justice as the guiding question of this inquiry. The western tradition has long interpreted the concept of justice in terms of law and moral norms. The examination of the meanings, origins and characters of law and moral norms, thus, constitute a central task in my investigation. I will base this study upon the existential and psychoanalytic interpretations of the origins of conscience, law and morality. The dialogue I instigate between these two interpretations will be focused upon a “moment of the truth of humanity” – the death of the father. This dialogue will make visible the original meanings of the phenomenon of conscience and the double character of law. The universal imperatives of law, while establishing the “independent” rights and values of human beings in an authoritative way, eliminate their very individuality. Law as legomenon, thus, both reveals and conceals the truth of human existence. By revealing the commandments of law as an interpretation of
the mandate of heaven, it becomes manifest that the central strife in the question of ethics is the strife between two fundamental kinds of interpretations of human dwelling. It is in essence the strife between the powerless superpower of heart and conscience and the demonic power of the super-ego that speaks in the voice of the everyday “moral conscience.” The question of ethics, thus, turns out to be a question of hermeneutics, the primary site of which, as I will show, lies in the question of practice. Moreover, because the articulation of understanding and interpretation lies in language, the question of ethics and the question of the essence of language belong together. The way to the question of ethics, therefore, would only open up in the way to language. The way to language, Heidegger says, calls for a speaking from out of its essence, which can only be a dialogue. The instigation of an authentic dialogue, thus, would not only elicit a hearing of the summons of heart and conscience but also open up a new horizon for the question of ethics.

I. Conscience and the Question of Justice

The question of justice is the guiding question of ethics. In the west, justice has been interpreted for the most part on the basis of law or metaphysical norms and principles. My study of the question of ethics, hence, starts with the investigation of the meanings and origins of law and moral norms.

A comprehensive study of the essence and origin of law and morality and their relation to conscience requires a separate project. In what follows, I will work out the psychoanalytic and existential interpretations of law and morality. By making explicit
these two narratives of the origin of the question of ethics and bringing them into dialogue, I anticipate to elicit the silent summons of conscience that constitutes a hidden ground of the western understanding of justice in terms of legal and moral norms.

Let me sketch at first some essential characteristics of conscience, law and morality with respect to their relation to justice. In the west, the purpose of law is taken in general as the expression and enforcement of justice. The concept of justice being primarily a moral determination, it seems that the purpose of law lies in the moral order of a society. Contemporary ethicists and legal theorists have thrown doubt upon the simple equation of law and morality. There are a number of important differences between the two as regards their objects of investigation, their scopes of application, the nature of their social and political function, etc. Nonetheless, It is undeniable that there is a fundamental affinity between law and morality. The close relation between law and justice is evidenced by the Greek word for justice dikaiosune, which is derived from the word dike, meaning “law” or “custom.” When few extant legal systems could disclaim their moral foundation and their objective as establishing and maintaining a just society, it is no surprise that so many people today mistake whatever is legal as moral.

The affinity between law and morality can be traced to their common source in ancient social customs. Laws and customs in ancient and primitive societies are usually identical with each. In ancient Greek, for example, the word for “custom” and “law” [nomos] is one and the same. The ancient Greeks take law or custom as the king [nomos pantwn basileus]. They “do not let a man rule [archein], but the law.” This shift of the locus of justice from human, say, the king, to law or custom carries through the western history afterwards and defines the western conception of the relation between justice, law
and moral norms. For a long time, law and custom remain undistinguished from each other. As Koenigswarter points out, as late as the 14th century, an ordinance in France declared that “the whole kingdom is regulated by ‘custom,’ and it is as ‘custom’ that some of our subjects make use of the written law.” The moral norms or the ethical principles, as the etymology of the word “moral” or “ethics” demonstrate, also stem from ancient customs. Thus, both law and moral norm have their origin in customs, while law seems to express and institutionalize such customs in a more formal and forceful way than moral conventions.

In contrast with other social norms, law is distinguished first and foremost by its authoritativeness. Law manifests the supreme command that orders all people in a society under its inexorable authority. The absolute authority of law is embodied in two factors: its universality and its imperative power. Law is only law when it is endowed with the prescriptive power toward all people governed under its sway. For “covenants, without the sword, are but words.” While it is the social authorities who actually make and enforce all kinds of legal regulations, the supreme command of law can never be truly established without resorting to the divine authority. All social authorities are dependent upon the authority of the god. In his Critique of Violence, Walter Benjamin spells out the mythic power associated with law that is not a means to an end, but “manifestation.” As it is clearly shown in early societies, the authority of law can never be fully established without referring to a higher power – a power that is beyond human, i.e. the mythic divine power. The power that establishes the authority of law always exceeds the power of humans who actually make and enforce concrete legal orders. The mythic legislative power is manifestation of the divine power, or the power of God.
Humans, say, the kings, are only in a position to make and enforce a law, when they, by demonstrating their own power in defeating their opponents, prove that it is they who represent that higher power of the divine. The king is capable of ruling a state by law only because he is the one chosen by God to communicate the power and the will of the divine. Law carries prescriptive powers, thus, only because it articulates the mandate of heaven. The mythical imperative power of law is not a means to an end that lies outside law. Rather, law itself is the end imposed by the mythical divine power.

Herbert Spencer spells out that “law, whether written or unwritten, formulates the rule of the dead over the living. In addition to that power which past generations exercise over present generations by transmitting their natures, bodily and mental… there is this power they exercise through these regulations for public conduct handed down orally or in writing. Among savages and in barbarous societies, the authority of laws thus derived is unqualified, and even in advanced stages of civilization, … conduct is controlled in a far greater degree by the body of inherited laws than by those laws which the living make.”

Apparently, the dead is able to impose a law upon the living only because the demonic power that is associated with the dead exceeds the actual power of the living. The laws passed down by the past generations are thus “divinely communicated,” for the spirits of the dead heroes, of “distinguished men, regarded with special fear and trust, become deities.”

Spencer’s conclusion that “law is mainly an embodiment of ancestral injunctions” is substantiated by many later investigations of the origin of law and customs, especially those about the taboos of the primitive people. Wundt calls taboo the oldest unwritten code of law of humanity, which is older than the gods and goes back to
the pre-religious age. As Wundt points out, taboo was originally “nothing more than the objectified fear of the demonic power thought to be concealed in the tabooed object.” This demonic power then “gradually became an autonomous power which has detached itself from demonism. It becomes the compulsion of custom and tradition and finally law.” Accordingly, taboos are the oldest codes of custom that formulate the rule of the dead over the living. The authority of the ancestral injunction relies upon the belief in the mysterious demonic power associated with taboo.

Freud reveals the ambivalent attitudes towards taboo and identifies the origin of taboo as a command of conscience, the sense of guilt that “contains much of the nature of anxiety.” In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud claims that “the totemic system resulted from the conditions underlying the Oedipus complex.” According to Freud, the totem animal is a substitute for the father and the totemic system originates in a primordial crime – the killing of the primal father by the band of brothers impelled by the incest wishes towards their mother. The institution of totemism resulted from the conscience phobia, viz. the sense of guilt for the primordial crime, which survived “for thousands of years, remaining effective in generations which could not have known anything of this deed.” Taboo, such as the incest taboos that belong essentially to totemism, is “a command of conscience, the violation of which causes a terrible sense of guilt which is as self-evident as its origin is unknown.” Freud makes out this unknown and unconscious source of conscience to be the Oedipus complex and concludes that “the beginning of religion, ethics, society, and art meet in the Oedipus complex.”

As Freud elaborates, law and morality begin with the sense of guilt, the feeling of conscience anxiety in the face of the death of the primal father. Freud interprets “the first
rules of morality and moral restrictions of primitive society as reactions to a deed (viz. the killing of the primal father) that gave its perpetrator the concept of crime. They repented [bereuten] this deed and decided that it should not be repeated and that its execution must bring no gain. This creative sense of guilt [schöpferische Schuldewußtsein] has not become extinct with us. We find its asocial effects in neurotics producing new rules of morality and continued restrictions, in expiation for misdeeds committed, or as precautions against misdeeds to be committed.17 According to Freud’s exposition, the perpetrators of the crime refrained from the deed because “no son was able to satisfy his primal desire to take the father’s place.’ The murder founders because the dead father holds even more power.”18 The power of the dead father exceeds the actual power of the father that is alive. The power of the dead father is the demonic power associated with the primordial taboos arising from the sense of guilt of the sons. The survival of this sense of guilt takes the form of the “infantile recurrence of totemism,” so that the transmission of the rule of the dead accompanies the survival of the sense of guilt from one generation to another.

Derrida poses in this context a critical question about “how and why” the sons may repent the killing of the father, since “this happened before law and morality existed.”19 This question of the origin of conscience and the sense of guilt constitute indeed the fundamental question of ethics. The origin of morality and the institution of law and social custom would only become visible when we truly engage ourselves with this question. Freud only addresses this critical question in passing. And his answer, which resorts to the reclaim of the son’s suppressed tender impulses toward the father after “they had satisfied their hate by his removal,”20 is remarkably terse and insufficient.
In the next section, I will approach this fundamental question from a phenomenological perspective. In “The Letter on ‘Humanism,’” Heidegger asserts that “the tragedies of Sophocles … preserve the ethos in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics.’” If we recall that the original meaning of the Greek word *ethos* is “abode, dwelling place,” then it is clear that the question of ethics is in essence the question of human dwelling upon the earth. According to Heidegger, the tragedies of Sophocles, say, the tragedy of the Oedipus Rex, reveals a more primordial truth of human dwelling, of human existence in the world that is essential for the question of ethics. The Myth of Oedipus, which plays a central part in both Heidegger’s and Freud’s thinking of the question of ethics, provides thus a common ground for a dialogue between the phenomenological and psychoanalytic narratives of the origin of conscience and morality. I would like to show through this dialogue that the *death of the father is a primordial* tragic event and a founding moment of conscience and morality. The question of whether historically the brothers really killed the father or whether their hostile feelings were merely projected upon the dead father, in contrast, is a question of less *philosophical* significance.

II. The Death of the Father and the Moment of the Truth of Humanity

How and why may the son *repent* for the killing of the father? How and why may the son feel the conscience *phobia*, the sense of guilt at the death of the father, even before any law or moral norms ever existed? This question refers to the origin of the phenomenon of conscience and lies in the heart of the question concerning the origin of law and morality.
For this fundamental question of ethics, however, Freud has offered few penetrating insights and satisfactory elaboration. The *lacuna* left open in the psychoanalytical interpretation calls us to dwell upon this profound moment of humanity more deeply and carefully.

From a phenomenological perspective, the sense of guilt at the death of the father emerges from the understanding of the truth of situated human existence in the world. It arises from the discovery of the tragic situation of human dwelling upon the earth and the destiny of one’s being. This discovery and disclosure of the truth of humanity occurs on the occasion of the death of the father when “none of the sons could carry out his original wish of *taking the place of* the father.”23 Had the killing of the father indeed been performed, then “the deed could not bring full satisfaction to any of the perpetrators. In a certain sense it had been in vain.”24 Not only is the murder of the father in vain, but it also throws the son into a sever anxiety arising from the *disillusionment* of a model that he has admired, envied and feared. For the son discovers that *even* the father also dies. The father, with whom the son has endeavored to identify himself because of his mysterious power and his privilege over the mother, has nonetheless died. At the death of the father, the son finally realizes that his being is *irreplaceable*. In the face of the death of the father, the son is unable to take the father’s place. The death of the father reveals the limit and thus the *individuality* of his being. It makes manifest the being of the father as something *more* than a means, e.g. as the protector and guardian for the son or as the model of his being. The death of the father delimits and discloses his being as an *end in itself*. Conscience and morality, Kant says, arise when “you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but
always at the same time as an end [Zweck].” The death of the father, which is apparently also an “end,” opens up an irremediable fissure for the son. At the death of the father, the son loses his (psychological) sheltering and protection and is thrown back into the dangers of the external world and the tragic situation of human existence. It is at the death of the father that the son first encounters the finitude of his own being, viz., the possibility of his own death. Da-sein can gain an experience of death, as Heidegger asserts, “all the more because it is essentially being-with with others.” (SZ 237)

In the everyday world, however, “we do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense.” When we take others as merely means to certain ends, when we represent others in such general categories as teachers, neighbors, hunting-mates, officials, etc, any individual could in one way or another be “replaced” by somebody else. The no-longer-being-there of one Da-sein at its death is thus soon forgotten when its place is taken up and filled in by another Da-sein. Initially and for the most part, the death of the other has not been genuinely experienced, nor does it impel one to think the possibility of his own death.

But the death of the father individualizes him as mine. The sense of guilt and the anxiety of conscience arise when the death of my father disrupts forever the everyday world that I have been taking care of, when it breaks open an irremediable fissure in my being-in-the-world. This irremediable fissure discloses a fundamental lack in my own being. Existentially, the sense of guilt at the death of my father stems from a primordial being-guilty in my own being. The conscience phobia reflects a fundamental anxiety about my being-in-the-world. Freud calls the phenomenon of conscience at the death of the father the “creative sense of guilt,” which is the origin of religion, ethics, art, and
social institutions. From a phenomenological perspective, the creativity of conscience stems from the primordial anxiety in the face of the finitude and uncanniness of my being-in-the-world. Only when I recognize my being as finite, only when I realize the limit of my desire of “power,” would I understand my being-in-the-world as essentially a being with others. Only then would I acknowledge the “independent” being of the other, would I treat humanity in the person of the other as an end in itself. Heidegger designates this primordial anxiety as a fundamental existential situation [Befindlichkeit] that “individualizes and discloses Da-sein as ‘solus ipse.’” (SZ 188) The anxiety of conscience discloses the authentic self of Da-sein as finite being-in-the-world. Existentially, only when I understand the finitude of my being, only when I understand the possibility of death as the most proper possibility, am I truly concerned about my being in my being. In the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, Heidegger says, Da-sein is “concerned about its being-in-the-world absolutely.” (SZ 250) Only the being who is concerned about its being in that being [es geht ... um] is for the sake of [um-willen] itself, that is, is for the sake of the possibility of its being. (SZ 84, 143) Only the being whose being is for the sake of itself, viz. whose being is an end in itself, can disclose and discover a surrounding world in a circumspect heedful way.

The sense of guilt at the death of the father can be “creative” only because it stems from a primordial anxiety that individualizes Da-sein as a site for the authentic disclosedness of the world. Heidegger calls this authentic disclosedness of Da-sein constituted by the existential situation of anxiety and attested in its conscience “resoluteness [Erschließenheit].” As Heidegger elaborates, “it is from the authentic being a self of resoluteness that authentic being-with-one-another first arises.” (SZ 298) In
Heidegger’s term, we can say that authentic being one’s self and authentic being-with other are equiprimordial descriptions of Da-sein’s being-in-the-world. Neither of them, thus, have priority over the other. It is only on the basis of authentic being-with-one-another, moreover, that true love of the other is possible. The affection of compassion between one Da-sein and another is not merely conditioned by their “reciprocity” or common interests. Rather, as a fundamental existential situation, genuine compassion originates from the love of the other as an individual in itself. It is based upon the common destiny [Geschick] of Da-seins as mortal temporality. As Heidegger says, the authentic resoluteness of Da-sein lies in its choice to be free for its death, i.e. for the finitude of its existence. Being free for the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, the most proper possibility of Da-sein disclosed in the authentic resoluteness attested in the call of conscience, describes the fate [Schicksal] of Da-sein. Since “fateful Da-sein essentially exists as being-in-the-world in being-with others, its occurrence is an occurrence-with and is determined as destiny [Geschick]. With this term, we designate the occurrence of the community of a people. Destiny is not composed of individual fates, nor can being-with-one-another be conceived of as the mutual occurrence of several subjects. … The fateful destiny of Da-sein in and with its ‘generation’ constitute the complete, authentic occurrence of Da-sein.” (SZ 385-5) The authentic occurrence of Da-sein, thus, is not complete until it has taken over the powerless superpower of conscience and has chosen the choice to be free for the finitude of its existence and for its destiny in the community of a historical people. Since the knowing of conscience [Gewissen], which is essentially a knowing-with [Mit-wissen], originates from the common destiny of the community of a historical people, it also ensconces within itself the
possibility of a common knowing of who we are. In the anxiety of conscience that individuates Da-sein as “solus ipse,” thus, the possibility of sensus communis and of the commonality of the community of a historical people has nonetheless been disclosed.

Freud attributes the emergence of the sense of guilt to the “suppressed tender impulses” that “had to assert themselves” after the sons “had satisfied their hate by his removal and had carried out their wish for identification with him.” This explanation, which is based upon the psychoanalytic perspective, is not wrong. But it is insufficient and limited in that it does not elaborate in a satisfactory way how and why the love of the dead father, the “suppressed tender impulses” toward him could trump the strong instinctive sexual wish toward the mother. Nor does it spell out the disillusionment of the mysterious power associated with the father on his death – a disillusionment that portends the futility of the sons to identify themselves with a model that they admired, envied and feared and that thwarts the sons from ultimately taking the father’s place at his death.

From a phenomenological perspective, the sense of guilt and the anxiety of conscience at the death of the father arise from a fundamental understanding of the destiny of human existence in the world as a being-with others and being-in the community of a historical people. The love of the father attested by the mourning of the dead is not merely a “tender impulse.” Rather, the love of the dead that holds the sons back from their sexual wishes reflects a heartfelt recognition of the humanity of the father as an individual in itself. Confucius designates the love of the other out of one’s heart and conscience as humaneness [ren 仁]. Humaneness, for Confucius, describes a kind of love and compassion for the other that is not simply based upon mutual interests or upon the command of God. The origin of morality lies in such love and compassion for the
individuality of the other, in which one also “accomplishes” himself. Existentially, what is “accomplished” in the summons of heart and conscience is the authentic resoluteness and the decision to free oneself for the fateful destiny [das schicksalhafte Geschick] of the community of a historical people to which one belongs. The fateful destiny disclosed in the call of conscience reveals the primordial being-guilty of one’s being-in-the-world. The revelation of this primordial being-guilty occurs on the recognition of the individuality of the self and the other as mortal temporality. The recognition of this individuality is only possible when one frees himself for death, viz., for the finitude of his existence.

The sense of guilt at the death of father occurs before any law and moral norms existed. It refers to the primordial anxiety about the finitude and uncanniness of one’s being-in-the-world that individualizes Da-sein as “solus ipse.” But initially and for the most part, the sons dare not endure the uncanniness of their being disclosed in the primordial anxiety but flee away from this tragic existential situation. Incapable of facing up to the destinies of their being, the sons strive to repress the tragic existential situation by seeking substitutes for the father. They aspire to replace the model that they admired, envied and feared and that has been shattered at the death of the father. And in order to reinstate this model and the mysterious power associated with it, they would rather give up their sexual wishes for the mother. “The dead now became stronger than the living had been.”27 The no-longer-being-there of the father constantly announces itself as the phantom of the dead haunting the world of the sons. For the dead father now becomes the super-ego. The super-ego, as Freud clarifies in The Ego and the Id, “originates from the experience that lead to totemism.”28 The totem animal “is really a substitute for the
father. … The ambivalent emotional attitude which today still marks the father complex in our children and so often continues into adult life also extended to the father substitute of the totem animal.”

The super-ego that is first reified in the totemic animals, as we have seen, is the source of taboos that “impose their own prohibitions.” It is also the prototype of the god, which is “nothing less than an exalted father” and which may have been a later substitute in which “the father regained his human form.”

For the primitive people, the tabooed animal totem does not refer to a particular animal but a whole category of animals like the ox or the dragon. The father that is individualized at his death as my father, thus, is generalized again as an ideal of the father. The super-ego that represents the dead father becomes the ego ideal. It becomes an ideal of existence that imposes itself upon the son – a universal ideal with which the son identifies himself and of which the son is at the same time enamored and fearful. This ambivalent attitude toward the super-ego characterizes the experience that leads to the origination of conscience phobia and taboo prohibitions. It is from this conscience phobia that the moral sense of guilt on the transgression or violation of such prohibitive norms first arises.

As I interpret it, the establishment of the ancestral injunction of ego ideal and prohibitive norms transforms forever the relation between the fathers and the sons in later history. Since both the fathers and the sons do not live in an isolated family but in a community governed by laws and moral norms passed down from the past, since the fathers themselves are subjected to the ancestral injunction of the ego ideal and taboo prohibitions, the relation between a father and a son can never be the simple and “natural” relation between one individual and another. Rather, the later fathers always
reify the super-ego of the *primal father*. For the son, the father is not only an individual, but represents also a universal ego ideal that decrees and enforces the ancient injunction of prohibitive norms. The emergence of this universal ego ideal and the prohibitive norms it decrees, which pass down from one generation to another through the “infantile recurrence of totemism,” is the source of law and morality, as well as the most primitive concept of justice or righteousness. There can be little doubt that the primitive concept of justice is based upon the simple conformation to these prohibitions as the command of the super-ego. These prohibitive norms constitute the first authoritative standard of “ethics” that institutes the most original social and moral judgment of right and wrong. Undeniably, such blind submission to the higher demonic power of the ego ideal, though quite “irrational” in the eyes of contemporary people, has its “positive” side. The earliest taboos are the incest taboo and the taboo of killing the father or the totemic animal – a symbol of the father. With the authority of the mysterious demonic power of the dead, thus, ancient taboos has forced upon the primitive people a tacit acknowledgement of the limits of their desire and the “independent value” of the being of others. This forced recognition of the being of the others constitutes the base for the being-with others and the possibility of community for the primitive people. Thus, the conscience *phobia* of the primitive people, with all its limitations, has brought them away from the chaotic animal world and set a foundation for the social and moral order of early civilizations. But even so, the primitive people did not refrain from the killing and acknowledge the limits of their desires and the independent *being* of the others on account of the summons of their *hearts and consciences*. Rather, they did so because of the authoritative command of the
taboo prohibitions and the conscience \textit{phobia}, the mysterious fear whose sources remain in the unknown and unconscious.

\textbf{III. Conscience and the Double Character of Law and Moral Norms}

The existential analysis has revealed the origin of morality in the understanding \textit{[Verstand]} of the finitude of one’s existence and the recognition \textit{[Anerkennen]} of the \textit{individuality} of the self and the other. The authentic understanding of the truth of existence arrives when one hears the reticent summons of conscience that calls one to be free for his fateful destiny in the community of a historical people. The event of the death of the primal father is a founding moment of humanity only insofar as it elicits the summons of conscience from the son. The death of the primal father individualizes him as a being that is an end in itself. This moment of truth brought about by the anxiety of conscience reveals the tragic situation of human existence in the world. The primordial anxiety in the face of the finitude and uncanniness of being-in-the-world also individualizes and discloses the being of the son as “\textit{solus ipse}.” It discloses the primordial being-guilty and the authentic being-in-the-world as being-with others. But the anxiety about the primordial being-guilty is soon transformed into a conscience \textit{phobia}, a sense of guilt that haunts the son when his actions or intentions transgress the categorical imperatives of the super-ego. The western tradition has long spoken of “moral” conscience or “moral” sense of guilt in relation to such authoritative moral norms. With taboo prohibitions established as the earliest law and moral norms, the taboo conscience may well be regarded as the earliest form of “moral” conscience. But the
enactment and enforcement of law and moral norms, which have played a central role in the western inquiry into a “just and ethical” way of life, do not take the question of ethics up as a real question as it covers over the truth of human dwelling. Under the authoritative command of the super-ego, in the blind submission to the demonic power instigating the conscience phobia, the sons have not heard the reticent summons of heart and conscience. The dominance of metaphysical norms and principles in the traditional western ethical inquiry, thus, has led away from the origin of morality as it left the question of ethics and the essence of human dwelling unthought.

The son’s remorse on the death of the primal father occurs before the existence of law and moral norms. In order to distinguish the existential interpretation of conscience from the traditional “moral conscience,” let us designate as “heart” the site of disclosure for one’s authentic being-a-self, the authentic disclosedness attested in the reticent summons of conscience. Then, heart is not only the source of the authentic understanding of one’s finite being-in-the-world, but also the seat of the existential situation [Befindlichkeit] of primordial anxiety and genuine compassion that reveals one’s authentic relations with others. Ancient Chinese, for example, regard heart as the “great origin of the world” and language as the “voice of heart.” As a site of disclosure for the truth of existence, heart is thus also the hidden ground of “moral conscience,” i.e. what Freud designates as the “creative sense of guilt.” The primitive sense of guilt can be “creative” only because it originates in the summons of heart and conscience that discloses the fundamental truth of the fateful destiny of human existence in the world. The tragic situation of human dwelling becomes manifest when the death of the primal father breaks open an irremediable fissure in the world of the sons. Unable to endure the
tragic reality of human existence, however, the sons would not take the place of the father. Rather, like the neurosis in a later age, they flee away “from a dissatisfying reality to a more pleasurable world of phantasy.”\textsuperscript{32} They restrain the strong sexual wishes in order to submit themselves to the super-ego, to the ideal of the father and its authoritative imperatives. By establishing the ego ideal as a transcendental substitutes for the father, the sons seek to be “at home” again as if under the protection of a real father. The universal ideal of the super-ego, which became the \textit{immortal} paradigm of existence for the son, was thus endowed with superlative and unlimited power. Under the protection and guidance of this immortal ideal of existence, under the supreme command of the super-ego, the son was finally “at home.” But being “at home,” the son lost his individuality, as he is now nothing more than a “replica” of the paradigmatic ideal of the super-ego.

Therefore, in the very protection and preservation of the \textit{person} of the other, the superlative directives of law and moral norms have debilitated the \textit{individuality} of both the self and the other. The universality of the command of the ego ideal crushes the individuality of the sons. With the establishment of the super-ego, everybody was subordinated to the “categorical imperatives” of its command and no violation could be tolerated without punishment. For the mysterious power of the super-ego manifests itself primarily in the power of \textit{punishing} those who dare to transgress its command. And punishment, first and foremost, is death. He who contravenes the prohibitions of the super-ego must die. Such is the rule of the earliest societies, whose influences are still visible today. All other kinds of punishment that evolved in later age can with few exceptions be regarded as substitutes of death. He \textit{must} die, no matter how trivial and
unintentional the violation might appear to be. For it is only through death that the demoniac mysterious power of the ego ideal really asserts itself. In ancient societies, it is the ruler’s capability to enforce the death penalty that attests to his privileged position as the representative of the demoniac power of the super-ego, of the divine. As Walter Benjamin points out, “the death penalty in primitive legal systems is imposed even for such crimes as offenses against property, to which it seems quite out of ‘proportion.’ Its purpose is not to punish the infringement of the law but to establish new law. For in the exercises of violence [Gewalt] over life and death, more than in any other legal act, the law reaffirms itself.” It is only by the demoniac power of death that the law and the ego ideal establish their sacred authority and uninfringeable universality.\(^{33}\) This primitive demonic power of death still haunts the modern legal systems. Locke, for example, defines political power as “a right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties.”\(^{34}\) The wide presence of death penalties in nations today evidences this irreplaceable spell of capital punishment. But punishment in itself, such as the death penalty, can never promote the humanity of an individual. Rather, it devastates and destroys humanity as it wipes out the individual completely from the world.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, it can be said that the double character of the rule of law and moral norms, which protects the human “person” but at the same time eliminates his individuality, originates from the ambivalent attitudes toward the super-ego and its superlative command. Freud describes taboo, the earliest form of law and moral norms, as “a very primitive prohibition imposed from without (by an authority) and directed against the strongest desires of man. The desire to violate it continues in the unconscious; persons who obey the taboo have an ambivalent feeling toward what is
affected by the taboo.”

“They therefore assume an ambivalent attitude toward their taboo prohibitions; in their unconscious they would like nothing better than to transgress them but they are also afraid to do it; they are afraid just because they would like to transgress, and the fear is stronger than the pleasure.”

This ambivalent feeling toward the taboo prohibitions continues in the attitudes toward law and moral norms in later societies. Precisely because the reticent summons of heart and conscience is covered over under the dominance of the metaphysical norms and principles, with the blind conformity to the command of law and moral norms, one does not understand authentically the finitude of his existence and the limits of his desire of “power;” nor can one have a genuine compassion and heartfelt recognition of the individuality of the other. The basic instincts of the primitive people – the secret sexual wishes toward the mother and the strong desire to kill the father, thus, have not been appropriately and ultimately resolved under the authoritative rule of law and moral norms. Rather, the Oedipus complexes are only repressed under the domination of divine and social authorities that decree law and norms for religion, ethics and society. The repressed Oedipus complex, however, must find its displacement, i.e., its “legitimate” substitutive expression in everyday social behaviors.

Such repressed sexual wishes and the desire of killing forbidden by law and moral norms, ironically, have often been released precisely in the name of law and morality themselves.

This double character of law and moral norms can be most vividly illustrated by the twofold meanings of the English word “sanction.” The word sanction derives from the Latin word sanctus, saint and indicates thus something holy, consecrated, or sacred. The primary and proper meaning of the word sanction is “law and ecclesiastical decree
that are authorized by the divine.” But the word sanction carries also the sense of “the specific penalty enacted in order to enforce obedience to a law.” As we have shown above, penalty, in its most original and proper sense, means death of the violator. With few exceptions, all other forms of penalty can be viewed as substitutes for the death penalty. Now the killing of an individual is precisely what is forbidden by “law and ecclesiastical decree” – sanction in the proper sense of the word. The second sense of sanction as “penalty against the violation of law,” hence, refers to the kind of action contradictory to the rule of sanction in its primary sense. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the twofold meanings of the word “sanction” illustrate well the ambivalent attitudes toward law and moral norms. For the hatred against the other and the instinctive desire to kill are only repressed into the unconscious by the sacred sanctions, i.e., by law and moral prohibitions. Such repressed hatred and instinctive desire of killing, however, are released precisely in the “sanction” against the violators of such law and moral prohibitions, viz., in the penalty of the individual who dare to transgress the rule of the sacred sanctions. For it is precisely by the punishment and death of the violators that the “sacredness” and demonic power of law and moral prohibitions assert themselves. The “sanction,” i.e., the permission and countenance of theses acts of killing and punishment, thus, belong essentially to the enforcement of law and ecclesiastical decrees of the divine. As Freud points out, “all those acts which religion forbids – expressions of the instincts it represses – are yet committed precisely in the name of, and ostensibly in the cause of, religion.”

In the western history, the ambivalent attitudes toward law and moral norms, the primordial “inconsistency” embedded in the “categorical imperatives” of the super-ego
and their enforcement are highlighted in the strife between the demonic power of the universal and authoritative divine sanctions and the resisting power that preserves the differences and individuality of particular identities striving to break through the dominance of law and moral norms. At the beginning of western civilization, this primordial strife is represented, with utmost purity, in the tragedy of Antigone when she, in defiance of the king’s order, resolves to bury her brother who has been guilty of leading an attack on the city-state of Thebes. For Antigone, the love of her dead brother as an individual prevailed over the law decreed by the human king. For “the slain man was no villain but a brother” and there is no other way of achieving “a name so glorious as by burying a brother.” In the tragedy *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus undergoes the same kind of strife when he strives to discover his true identity as an individual who, as a human representative of the divine law, has committed the very forbidden crimes of murdering his father and desecrating his mother.

Heidegger describes such strife as the “confused, intricate struggle between the powers of being and appearance.” For the early Greek thinkers, “the unity and conflict of being and appearance preserved their original power. All this was represented with supreme purity in Greek tragic poetry.” With little hesitation, we may construe this struggle between being and appearance as an entangled *unity* and *conflict* of the reticent summons of heart and conscience and the voice of “moral conscience” that decrees the “categorical imperatives” of the divine and social authorities. It is the primordial strife between the demonic power of the super-ego and the powerless superpower [*die ohnmachtig Übermacht, SZ 385*] of one’s heart and conscience. It is precisely the summons of heart and conscience that calls Antigone to defy the law of Thebes so as to
honor her brother with a proper burial. The summons of heart and conscience calls her to choose glory [kleos] over life; it reveals a fundamental knowing of her tragic destiny with the people of the city-state of Thebes. I know, Antigone says, “that I must die, … For death is gain to him whose life, like mine, Is full of misery.”

It is true that in defending her deeds against the ordinance of the king, Antigone resorts to “the immutable unwritten laws of heaven,” which no mortal man could “by a breath annul and override.” According to tradition, thus, the struggle between Antigone and the state of Thebes has been portrayed and interpreted as a conflict between human and divine laws. Such representation of the central conflict of this tragedy, though more or less suggested by Sophocles himself, does not bring the nature of this primordial strife to full transparency. Let us recall that what Antigone claims to be the human laws of the state Thebes also have their ultimate foundation in the directive of the gods. For in the Greek states, as in the states of other early civilizations, the authority of the king and his command can only be fully established on the ground that the king is a human representative of the divine. It is well known that in most of the early societies the king and the priest are one and the same. The division of the function of the king and that of the priest in later ages results probably from the ever-increasing social responsibilities of the king. But the social authority of the king is still dependent upon the authority of the divine. A king may have the prerogatives that “all his acts and all his words are law” only because he is the one chosen to represent and communicate the will and mandate of heaven. A king is capable of making and enforcing human laws only because of his alleged “interpretative power” of the divine law. The Greek polis or city-state, as Werner Jaeger elaborates, “appears as both an exalted ideal and a despotic power. As such, it is
something like a god; and the Greeks always felt its divinity. … The polis was a universal, with a religious basis. It is clear thus that what is fundamentally at strife in the tragedy of Antigone is not the conflict between the human and divine laws but the different interpretations of the message from heaven. It is the strife between the reticent summons of heart and conscience and the authoritative interpretations by the “moral conscience” that speaks the commanding voice of the super-ego.

When law and moral norms are themselves identified as interpretations, however, it becomes manifest that the question of ethics is in essence a question of hermeneutics. Here, I do not use the word “hermeneutics” in the sense of biblical or legal hermeneutics. The event of hermeneutics occurs long before the “practice” of biblical or legal hermeneutics, or even before the appearance of the Greek word “hermeneutikos.” In Being and Time, Heidegger designates the phenomenology of Da-sein, i.e., of situated human existence in the world, as “hermeneutics in the original signification of that word.” (SZ 37) The original meaning of hermeneutics, accordingly, refers to the interpretation of the essence of human dwelling upon the earth. The tragedies of Sophocles, Heidegger says, “preserve the ethos in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics.’” Presumably, the poetic sayings of Sophocles’s tragedies, for Heidegger, belong also to a hermeneutical event. It is a more primordial interpretation of human ethos because it articulates and preserves with supreme purity the fate of Greek heroes and the tragic destiny of the community of Greek people to which they belong.
IV. Hermeneutics and Praxis: the Question of Ethics and the Question of Language

My assertion that the question of ethics is in essence a question of hermeneutics calls for further elaboration. The original sense of the Greek word ethos, as I mentioned above, is “abode, dwelling place.” The question of ethics, accordingly, belongs to the question of human dwelling upon the earth. In Being and Time, Heidegger designates being-in as the “formal existential expression of the being of Da-sein which has the essential constitution of being-in-the-world.” The word “in,” as Heidegger elaborates, “stems from innan-, to live, hatitare, to dwell. … We characterized this being to whom being-in belongs in this meaning as the being which I myself always am. The expression ‘bin’ is connected with ‘bei.’ ‘Ich bin” (I am) means I dwell, I stay near… the world as something familiar in such and such a way. Being as the infinitive of ‘I am’: that is, understood as an existential, means to dwell near…, to be familiar with.” (SZ 54) Since being-in-the-world carries also to the root sense of dwelling, it becomes manifest that the question of ethos belongs also to the question of the meaning of being.

But the question of the meaning of being, as I will show, is itself a question of interpretation. As Heidegger asserts, phenomenology of Da-sein, through which the question of being is worked out, is “hermeneutics in the original signification of the word, which designates the work of interpretation.” For “the methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation. The logos of the phenomenology of Da-sein has the character of hermeneuein, through which the proper meaning of being and the basic structure of the very being of Da-sein are made known to the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein itself.” (SZ 37)
The relation between the question of ethics and the question of interpretation would come to full light when we catch sight of the existential meanings and structures of interpretation. Ontologically, being-in as such, Heidegger elaborates, has three constitutive factors: existential situation [Befindlichkeit], understanding and discourse. Existential situation and understanding are the two equiprimordially constitutive ways Da-sein is its “there,” viz. Da-sein discloses itself as the being it is delivered over to be. Ontically, what existential situation indicates is most familiar: attunement, mood or affect [die Stimmung], being attuned, that is, being in a mood or affection [das Gestimtsein]. (SZ 134) Da-sein is always already in a mood. Being always already in a mood discloses the facticity of Da-sein as thrown being-there. When existential situation always has its understanding, understanding is itself always attuned [gestimmt]. Understanding, moreover, has the existential structure of project. “It projects the being of Da-sein upon its for-the-sake-of-which just as primordially as upon significance as the worldliness of its actual world.” (SZ 145) Da-sein as being-in-the-world is always for the sake of its possibilities disclosed in the “there.” It constantly throws itself into the for-the-sake-which that is understood. As projecting, thus, “understanding is the mode of being of Da-sein in which it is its possibilities as possibilities.” (SZ 145) The development [Ausbildung] of understanding as the projecting upon the possibilities disclosed in the there is called “interpretation [Auslegung].” As a development of the possibilities projected in understanding in which “understanding appropriates what it has understood in an understanding way,” (SZ 148), interpretation works out the totality of relevance of the world that is disclosed in understanding. Things at hand discovered in circumspection are always “interpreted in their in-order-to and are taken care of according to the
interpretedness which has become visible. What has been circumspectly interpreted with regard to its in-order-to as such, what has been explicitly understood, has the structure of something as something.” (SZ 149) The interpretation of something as something, viz., the determination of which relevance things at hand have is foreshown [vorgezeichnet] in terms of the total relevance (SZ 84). The total relevance leads back to a what-for which no longer has relevance. It leads back to a primary “what-for,” to the for-the-sake-of-which that is disclosed in understanding. The possibilities upon which Da-sein projects itself, thus, determine the total relevance of its world and the way it interprets things at hand.

Apparently, the total relevance that constitutes the things at hand in a religious ceremony, e.g., the bread and wine, the chalice, the cross, etc. is different for a priest presiding the ceremony and an atheistic scientist, who are sure to interpret those things at hand in different ways. The different interpretations of things at hand, however, do not “presuppose” that initially something merely objectively present is experienced which then is understood and interpreted as a chalice, as a cross, etc. Rather, “what is encountered in the world is always already in a relevance which is disclosed in the understanding of world, a relevance which is made explicit by interpretation.” (SZ 150) Things at hand are always already understood and interpreted in terms of a totality of relevance. With existential situation and understanding constituting equiprimordially its being there, Da-sein has always already interpreted its world. The facticity of Da-sein means thus that Da-sein is always already thrown into its possibilities and into a world that is interpreted. As thrown, Da-sein is its possibilities. It has “always already projected itself and is, as long as it is, projecting.” (SZ 145) As projecting, Da-sein is always
between different interpretations of the world and as this “between” it is always already in the strife of different interpretations. It always faces the decision to project itself upon different possibilities and thus the choice to sublate \(\text{aufheben}\) the interpretation of the world into which it is thrown for the sake of different and new interpretations. But initially and for the most part, Da-sein flees away from the decision and choice for different interpretations as it leaves the question of the meaning of its being-in-the-world unthought. The oblivion of the question of the meaning of being and the neglect of the strife of different interpretations have the character of submitting oneself to the “truth” of the most “commonsensical” or the most authoritative interpretations of the world and thus losing oneself in the everyday undecidedness.

The western intellectual tradition, for example, has long regarded statement [\textit{Aussage}] or judgment as “the primary and true ‘locus’ of truth.” (SZ 154) According to tradition, truth refers to the correspondence of the statements to the things in reality. The truth of the statement “the chalice is silver,” thus, lies in its correct predication of a subject – the chalice – that it points out. In such pointing out and definition, the statement communicates with others the being that is pointed out in its definiteness. The phenomenon of statement, as Heidegger defines, is “a pointing out which communicates and defines.” (SZ 156) But as a derivative mode of interpretation, “the statement is not an unattached kind of behavior which could of itself primarily disclose beings in general, but always already maintains itself on the basis of being-in-the-world.” For “the statement’s pointing out is accomplished on the basis of what is already disclosed in understanding, or what is circumspectly discovered.” (SZ 156) The statement, after all, is also a kind of interpretation. It interprets beings that are supposed to be merely objectively present.
Since things at hand in the surrounding world are always already understood in terms of a totality of relevance, every interpretation of something as something is “essentially grounded in fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception.” (SZ 150) For a priest presiding a religious ceremony, for example, the fore-having of the circumspect interpretation of a chalice at hand lies in the totality of relevance of things at hand for the ceremony that is already understood. This fore-having of the circumspect interpretation, however, has already been transformed when we take the chalice as an object of statement. For in the pure theoretical statement “the chalice is silver,” the chalice at hand with which the priest uses for the religious ceremony has turned into something “about which” the statement that points it out is made. (SZ 158) The theoretical statement determines the chalice “as” silver. But in such determination, the as-structure of interpretation has been modified and “forced back to the uniform level of what is merely objectively present.” The primordial “as,” the existential-hermeneutical “as” of the circumspect interpretation “dwindles to the structure of just letting what is objectively present be seen by way of determination.” (SZ 158) Since the apophantical “as” of the statement is based upon a leveling down of the primordial “as” of circumspect interpretation, statement constitutes a derivative mode of interpretation. It “cannot deny its ontological provenance from an interpretation that understands,” i.e. from a circumspect interpretation. (SZ 158) In addition to the theoretical statements, other “sentences” such as “statements about events in the surrounding world, descriptions of what is at hand, ‘reports on situations,’ noting and ascertaining a ‘factual situation,’ describing a state of affairs, telling about what has happened,” all have “their ‘origin’ in circumspect interpretation.” (SZ 158)
Because all these statements and sentences are only derivative modes of interpretation, the primary site of interpretation cannot be the narratives or descriptions of the “worldly events” or the interpretation of “texts” such as what is preformed in the biblical or legal hermeneutics. For the statements and sentences always already maintain themselves on the basis of being-in-the-world. Thus, it is the meaning of Da-sein’s being-in-the-world that is the primary site of interpretation. The primary site of interpretation is the meaning of human existence and dwelling. As a being who is thrown into the mode of being of projecting, Da-sein has always already interpreted its being-in-the world and is, as long as it is, interpreting. The question of ethics, which belongs to the question of human dwelling, thus, turns out to be a question of interpretation. For the way Da-sein is its being-in-the-world, the way Da-sein is its possibilities, are determined by how it understands and interprets the meaning of its being-in-the-world, viz. by upon which possibilities Da-sein projects itself. The primary site of the question of interpretation, hence, is the question of practice.

By determining the primary site of interpretation in practice, I dare to use the word “practice” in a sense that has been thoroughly unfamiliar up to now. I am challenging the word to take a meaning that is the strangest and yet, perhaps, the oldest. In the ordinary usage, “practice” is often taken as a synonym with “act” or “deed.” People talk about practice as opposed to theory. Practice means the application of a theory or an idea in the real world. To put a theory or an idea into practice is to bring the theory or idea into realization or actualization. Through practice, the theory or the idea comes into effect – an effect that is then judged according to its utility. Understood in this way, practice has the character of accomplishing an established theory or idea. For it is
said that “practice makes perfect” and the perfection means here the fulfillment and
conformity to a paradigm or an idea.

Such understanding of practice can be traced back to the very beginning of
western philosophy. Aristotle defines the proper function [ergon] of man as “the practical
life of a rational being [pratike tis tou logon exontos].”\textsuperscript{47} The good of man, which is also
the end in which man reaches happiness, is “the active exercise of his soul’s faculties in
conformity with excellence or virtues,”\textsuperscript{48} viz., in conformity with the rational principle
[kata logon]. The good and virtue of man, for Aristotle, is not merely an idea, but lies in
habitual practices or actions. For a man “becomes just by doing just actions and
temperate by doing temperate actions; and no one can have the remotest chance of
becoming good without doing them.” (Loeb, 1105b 10-12) The end of actions or
practices, thus, is the accomplishment of moral virtue – the idea of good that is attainable
by humans. Aristotle defines moral virtue as “a state of character [hexis] concerned with
choice, lying in a mean [mesoteti], i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a
rational principle [logw], and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom
[phronimos] would determine it.”\textsuperscript{49} Now the concept of mean, as John Burnet points out
rightly, is “no isolated ethical doctrine, but the regular Platonic and Aristotelian way of
explaining the Formal Cause.”\textsuperscript{50} The mean of actions, which is determined in accord with
a rational proportion, is also a formal cause. And as a formal cause, it refers to the telos
and energeia of human as a rational being. It is in the attainment of the mean of actions
and emotions that a human being stands in its end and actuality. Phronesis, the practical
wisdom by virtue of which one determines the mean in accord with the rational principle,
thus, is concerned with a kind of doing [praxews] that is an end itself. Doing well
[eupraxia], Aristotle says, “is in itself the end” (1140b 3) and “it is at this that desire aims.” (1139 b 5) As Heidegger points out in Plato’s Sophist, “the telos of phronesis is not a pros ti and not a eneka tinos; it is the anthrwpos himself. Aute e eupraxia telos (1140b7), the proper being of man is the telos. But this is zve praktike meta logou. The telos of phronesis is a telos aplws and a ou eneka, a “for the sake of which.”

Heidegger claimed that in phronesis “Aristotle has come across the phenomenon of conscience [Gewissen]. Phronesis is nothing other than conscience set into motion, making an action transparent.” Here, we would like to leave the question open as regards whether phronesis corresponds more to the phenomenon of heart and conscience or to the phenomenon of everyday “moral conscience.” It is clear, however, that Aristotle understands human practice on the basis of an ideal of existence, i.e., the ideal of good determined in accord with the rational principle. This ideal of existence, moreover, is articulated ultimately in justice, i.e., in the law of the polis. For happiness, the ultimate end of man, is “none other than “the actuality (or activity) [energeia] of the soul in conformity to the perfect virtue [psuxes energeia tis kat’ areten teleian].” (1102a 6) This perfect virtue is justice; for justice [dikaiosune], the perfect virtue in which every kind of virtue is summed up [syllebden], (1129b 39) is also “a kind of mean.” (1133b 34) Now Aristotle understands justice in general as “that which is lawful and that which is equal and fair.” (1129a34-5) For it is the law or custom that is the king [nomos pantwn basileus] and “we do not let a man rule [archein], but the law.” (1134b1) The law of a city, accordingly, which is the absolute justice that is “immutable in the souls of those who are under it, orders all the life of the state.” (400 b6) This is so because active life, the end of which lies in happiness as well-doing [eupragian], “is the best life both for the
whole state collectively and for each man individually.” As Jaeger points out, the constitutional Greek city-state is rooted in the universal idea that “the world and life in all their appearances can be interpreted by one fundamental standard.” The law of the city-state, therefore, articulates a universal ideal of existence that prescribes all human practices.

In contrast with the traditional identification of practice as the fulfillment of an idea or theory, say, the ideal of existence that is understood and interpreted by the “moral conscience”, I take the most original meaning of practice as the enactment of the thinking of being. Thinking, Heidegger asserts, is “the engagement of being;” it is l’engagement par l’Être pour l’Être, viz. the engagement by and for the truth of being. Practice, thus, does not mean the realization of an idea but the performance and accomplishment of being [Vollbringung des Seins]. Practice involves the active engagement in an ethical life, in the way of which the truth and beauty of human existence shine forth. Practice is the ec-stasis of Da-sein, the temporalization of its temporality; it belongs to the authentic disclosedness of the resolute Da-sein who has heard and understood the reticent summons of conscience. The summons of conscience “reveals itself as the call of care.” (SZ 277) The summons comes from Da-sein in its anxious thrownness and calls Da-sein out of its entanglement in the everydayness forth to its most proper potentiality-of-being as being-toward-death. The call of conscience, as Heidegger elaborates, “has its ontological possibility in the fact that Da-sein is care in the ground of its being.” (SZ 278) Care, as the ontological structure of Da-sein’s being-in-the-world, however, is not a theoretical exposition of an ideal of existence. Rather, ‘theory’ and “praxis” in their traditional senses “are possibilities of being for a being whose being must be defined as care.” (SZ
Care “includes the being of Da-sein so primordially and completely that it must be already presupposed as a whole when we distinguish between theoretical and practical behavior.” (SZ 300)

I regard practice in its most original sense as the enactment of the most proper being of Da-sein in resoluteness, which “constitutes the mode of authentic care.” (SZ 327) Granted, many Heidegger scholars have taken the resoluteness of Da-sein as a moment of silence that isolates Da-sein from all active practices. Michel Haar, among others, claims that “Anxiety indeed suspends action, just as it strikes us silent! The Heideggerian Gewissen, like Socrates’ daimon, interrupts the impulse to act, rather than provoking it. This spontaneous voice is antispotaneous itself. It throws Dasein back into the pure uncanniness of its isolation.” Contrary to such interpretations, Heidegger states clearly that care does not “mean primarily and exclusively an isolated attitude of the ego toward itself.” (SZ 193) To hear the call of conscience authentically, as Heidegger elaborates, “means to bring oneself to factual action.” (SZ 294) As authentic being a self, thus, “resoluteness does not detach Da-sein from its world, nor does it isolate it as free floating ego. How could it, if resoluteness as authentic disclosedness is, after all, nothing other than authentically being-in-the-world? Resoluteness brings the self right into its being together with things at hand, actually taking care of them, and pushes it toward concerned being-with with the others.” (SZ 298) The authentic self of Da-sein disclosed and individualized in anxiety, therefore, does not refer to a solipsistic self. Nor can it be taken as a transcendent worldless subject. Da-sein, so far as it is, is always being-in-the-world. Thus, resoluteness does not take place in a region that transcends the world in which Da-sein dwells. The site of the authentic disclosure is always in the world into
which Da-sein as being-in-the-world is thrown and of which Da-sein takes care. The summons of conscience does not call Da-sein away from its world but only discloses a world with new meanings. Conscience does not suspend or interrupt Da-sein from acting spontaneously. Rather, it brings the action of Da-sein to its highest spontaneity as it calls the being of Da-sein forth to ec-stasis. “Resolute, Da-sein is always already acting.” (SZ, 300) But for the resolute Da-sein, the meaning of action or practice does not lie in the actualization or per-fection of an ideal of existence. The meaning of practice can only be understood within the engagement in the e-vent of the truth of being. For Da-sein, who is essentially in the truth, being is always already acting.

The question of ethics is a question of interpretation, the primary site of which lies in the question of practice. I have revealed the original meaning of practice as the enactment of the most proper being of Da-sein in resoluteness, which “constitutes the mode of authentic care.” (SZ 327) But resoluteness does not refer to an isolated and transcendent state of authenticity. Rather, it means the clearing [Lichtung] of the authentic being-in-the-world in its unity and conflict with the irresolute Da-sein. As care, “Da-sein is determined by facticity and falling.” (SZ 298) Da-sein does not escape from the “reality” of the world in resolution, which is “precisely the disclosive projection and determination of the actual factual possibility.” (SZ 298) In resolution, Da-sein decides to face up to its facticity, falling and its primordially being-guilty. Resoluteness “appropriates untruth authentically.” Disclosed in its “there,” thus, Da-sein “stays equiprimordially in truth and untruth…. Da-sein is always already in irresoluteness, and perhaps will be soon again.” (SZ 299) It must be noted that irresoluteness does not indicate a lesser being of Da-sein;
it only describes the falling of Da-sein who remains undecided about its situation and who has lost itself in the everyday interpretation of the world. The term irresoluteness, Heidegger elaborates, “merely expresses the phenomenon that was interpreted as being at the mercy of the dominant interpretedness of the they. As the they-self, Da-sein is ‘lived’ by the commonsense ambiguity of publicness in which no one resolves, but which has always already made a decision. Resoluteness means letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the they. The irresoluteness of the they nevertheless remains in dominance, but it cannot attack resolute existence.” (SZ 299)

The dominance of irresoluteness cannot annihilate the possibility of authentic disclosure; just as the authoritative voices of the they cannot eliminate the reticent summons of heart and conscience but only covers it over. As long as Da-sein is, therefore, it has always already the choices to be resolute or irresolute. Being-in-the-world, it is always already in the strife between two fundamentally different kinds of interpretation of the world, between the authentic disclosure of the most proper potentially of being a self and the concealment and lostness of its individuality in the they-self, and between the powerless superpower of its heart and conscience and the demonic power of the ego-ideal that regulates its everyday activities in the form of “moral conscience.” Such strife and struggle reveal the plight of human dwelling and the entangled unity and conflict of being and appearing and of truth and untruth.

The law of a state, undeniably, as an interpretation of the mandate of the divine that prescribes the paradigm and ideal of human existence, can also be viewed as a kind of truth [aletheia]. The law of the Greek polis articulates the absolute justice, which, as the perfect virtue is also a kind of mean. Phronesis, which determines the mean of actions
in accord with the rational principle [logou], Aristotle says, is a state of truth [exin alethe]\textsuperscript{58} that is “concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings.” (1140b 5, 23) As an action of deliberation, phronesis is also one way in which the soul “speaks the truth [aletheuei] by way of affirmation and denial.”\textsuperscript{59} (1139b 15) And the ultimate truth that is spoken is the law of the polis, which articulates an ideal of existence that regulates all human practices. For the law is logos qua legomenon, which in its articulation of justice determines the proper ratio [logon] of the distribution of rights and valuables in a society and which is thus “precisely the common way truth is present.”\textsuperscript{60}

The rise of the constitutional city-state governed by the rule of law, indeed, marks a progress of Greek civilization from the dominance of traditional religions. The codification of laws and norms created a new foundation of the sense of community in the city by superseding the authority of the tyrants who abused their interpretive power of the commands of the gods to advance their own interests. The establishment of a legal standard by written law, as Jaeger puts it, “was for the Greeks an educational act. Law is the most important stage in the development of Greek culture from the social ideal of aristocracy to the fundamental conception of man as an individual.” Law, as the soul of the city-state, was “the most universal and permanent form of Greek moral and legal experience. The culmination of Plato’s work as a philosophical educator comes in his last and greatest book, when he himself turns lawgiver; and Aristotle closes Ethics by calling for a legislator to realize the ideal he has formulated.”\textsuperscript{61}

But law as legomenon, i.e., what is said, has the double character of both revealing and concealing the truth of human existence. This is so because the educational
force of law is based upon the ideal of existence it establishes in accord with the rational principle [logou]. The Greeks understood human beings as zoon logon echon, which for centuries has been interpreted as animal rationale, i.e. rational animal. As Jaeger summarizes, the Greeks did not understand human being as the subjective self, but “realize the universal law of human nature. The intellectual principle of the Greeks is not individualism but ‘humanism,’ … It meant the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature. That is the true Greek paideia, adopted by the Roman statesman as a model.”\footnote{Jaeger} For the Greeks, law represents a rational standard in accord with which the rights and valuables in the city would not be appropriated unjustly by those who are strong and powerful but distributed with a fair ratio or proportion [logos, mesotes] determined by reason. But as a universal command prescribing all human activities, the codification of the written law resorts to a new authority, viz., the authority of reason that supersedes [aufheben] the old religious authorities represented by the tyrants and priests. In the reliance upon the power of the human spirit that copes with the laws of reality, as Freud points out, “there still lives on a fragment of this primitive belief in the omnipotent of thought.”\footnote{Freud} In the new embodiment of the ego ideal by the all-embracing rational principle, there still lives on a residue of the demonic power of the super-ego. Law as legomenon conceals the truth of human existence as it suppresses the genuine individuality of human being and thus covers over the true way of justice. If we compare the plight of human dwelling to a Gordian knot, then the universal and categorical imperatives of law do not unloose the knot but cut it forcefully right through the middle.
The question of ethics, which is a question of human dwelling, turns out to be a question of interpretation. Under the authoritative interpretation of law, however, the question of ethics remains a puzzle unsolved. The universal and categorical imperatives of law suppress the individuality of human being and leaves the essence of human dwelling unthought. But the dominance of the rule of law and the metaphysics of normativity are not merely a semblance of the truth of being or a western obsession. Rather, they characterize the way in which the truth of being manifests itself in its unity and conflict with untruth. To find within the boundaries of law and moral norms a way of thinking and dwelling that would cross their very limits and confinement determines the historical destiny of the western people. This is so, even in the contemporary efforts to locate the site of justice in the deconstruction of law and normativity. Such destiny is already foreshown in the fate of Socrates, who, while being called away from the political engagement by his daimon, has resolved nonetheless to conform to the law and sentence of the city of Athens by drinking the hemlock. The death of Socrates individualizes him as the one who is courageous enough to face up to the paradox of human ethical life. It highlights the historical destiny of Greek people as it defines the historical path of the western inquiry into the question of ethics.

The question of ethics reveals itself as the question of the plight of human dwelling. The plight of human dwelling, the plight of man’s homelessness, Heidegger says, consists in this, “that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight.” As a question of interpretation, the primary site of the question of human dwelling is the question of practice. The original meaning of practice is not the realization of an ideal of existence but the enactment of the thinking of the truth of being.
Such enactment takes place when “thinking let itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being.”\textsuperscript{65} Insofar as understanding and interpretation constitute the primordial mode of human dwelling, and insofar the articulation of understanding and interpretation lies in language, the question of ethics and the question of the essence of language belong together. In thinking, Heidegger says, “being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell.”\textsuperscript{66} Language speaks. The way to the essence of language opens up when thinking lets itself into the saying of the truth of being.

The truth of being reveals the uncanniness of being-in-the-world; it reveals man’s homelessness. But as soon as “man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling.”\textsuperscript{67} The summons is a call of heart and conscience that discloses the destiny of a community of historical people to which one belongs. All language, Heidegger says, “is historical.”\textsuperscript{68} This is so because “thrownness is essential to language.” (SZ 161) The way to the essence of language, thus, would only open up when we let ourselves into its silent saying by listening to the summons of our hearts and consciences, which means, when we face up to the destiny into which we are thrown and when we let ourselves into the enactment of the thinking of the truth of being.

The question remains how can the reticent summons of heart and conscience be heard. The hearing of the summons calls for a speaking from language – a speaking that is “called from out of the essence of language, and be led to its essence.”\textsuperscript{69} To speak from out of the essence of language, however, is only possible when one first enters into “a hearing that at once reaches that essence.”\textsuperscript{70} The way to language, thus, manifests itself
as a hermeneutical circle. To hear the summons of heart and conscience and to speak
from out of the essence of language, thus, call for a decision to enter into this inevitable
circle, viz. into “an originary experience of hermeneutical relation.” A speaking from
language, Heidegger says, “could only be a dialogue,” viz. “a dialogue from out of the
essence of language.” A dialogue takes place at a site between two individuals who are
different in their understandings and yet share certain common ground. An authentic
dialogue of language needs a site within the essence of language so that both partners of
the dialogue could speak from out of the essence of language by letting themselves into
this site. Since the question of ethics and the question of the essence of language belong
together, let us follow our way to language through a dialogue within the question of
ethics between Heidegger’s thinking and early Confucian teachings. While Heidegger
works within the western metaphysical tradition to break through its dominance and
confinement, the early Chinese thinkers take an approach to the question of ethics that
has little to do with metaphysics. This unique character of early Chinese thinking is
evidenced by the central place of the question of heart and conscience in their
engagement in the question of moral practice and human dwelling. In contrast to their
western counterparts who interpret justice primarily in terms of law and moral norms,
early Confucian thinkers understand justice [yi] as a proper way of human dwelling
called forth by heart and conscience. By instigating and following this dialogue within
the question of ethics, therefore, we may anticipate the advent of a hearing that would
open up a new horizon for the question of ethic by leading us into the essence of
language.
Notes

7 Spencer, ibid, p.180ff.
8 Ibid, p. 181-82.
9 Ibid, p. 192.
16 Ibid, p. 895.
19 Ibid, p.137.
23 Freud, ibid., p. 884, note.
27 Freud, p. 885.
Cf. Freud describes the genesis of the super-ego as a result of the defusion of the Eros instinct and the death instinct or aggressive instinct. This defusion, according to Freud, “would be the source of the genreal character of harshness and cruelty exhibited by the ideal – its dictatorial ‘Thou shalt.’” (EI, p. 57) “The liberation of the aggressive instincts in the super-ego,” (EI, p. 59) apparently, not only gives rise to the sever punishment of the self, but is also responsible for the execution of the ego ideal against others, as evidenced in the enforcement of law and moral norms with the capital punishment.

35 Freud, Ibid., p. 802.
36 Freud, Ibid., p. 799.
37 Ibid, p. 893: “A process like the removal of the primal father by the band of brothers must have left ineradicable traces in the history of mankind and must have expressed itself the more frequently in numerous substitutive formations the less it itself was to be remembered.”
39 Sophocles, Antigone, 517.
40 Antigone, 502-4.
41 Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 106.
42 Antigone, 461-65.
43 Antigone, 453-6.
44 Antigone, 506-7.
46 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 269.
47 Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1098a 3-5.
48 Ibid, 1198a 17.
52 Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, p. 39.
53 Translation modified.
54 Aristotle, Politics, 1325 b15-8, cf. ibid. 1325b 32-4: “the same life must be the best both for each human being individually and for states and mankind collectively.”
55 Jaeger, p. 111.


It is notable that the Greek word “exis” comes from “exw,” which is the future indicative of the verb “echw.” Echw means “to have” or “to hold.” Exis alethe, which I translate as “the state of truth,” hence, also has the meaning of “holding oneself in the truth,” or “having oneself in the state of being true.”

Translation modified. Aletheuw, literally, means “to speak the truth,” instead of “to possess or achieve the truth” as is suggested in the translations by Ross and by H. Rackham.

Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, p. 18.


Jaeger, p. xxiii.


Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, p. 239.


Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 133


Chapter 6

On Ge Wu: A Phenomenological Interpretation of the Great Learning

The ancients who wanted to bring the shining virtue to light in the world would first bring peace to their states; those who wanted to bring peace to their states would first bring order to their families; those who wanted to bring order to their families would first cultivate themselves; those who wanted to cultivate themselves would first set their hearts in the right place; those who wanted to set their hearts in the right place would first be sincere in their intentions; those who wanted to be sincere in their intentions would first elicit the understanding; the eliciting of the understanding lies in letting things themselves come.

– Great Learning

This chapter intends to open up a new horizon for the hermeneutics of early Confucian texts by re-thinking the meaning of a central idiom in the Great Learning. For a long time, the translation and interpretation of ancient Chinese classics have been performed largely within or in comparison to the western metaphysical frameworks. Granted, this hermeneutical practice governed by metaphysics has helped to introduce the ancient Chinese writings to the west and to clarify their significance to some degree. But it has also covered over the unique character of early Chinese thinking, which takes a fundamentally different path from that of the western philosophical tradition. Since its
very beginning, the question of *being* has been the guiding question of western philosophy. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines the first philosophy, which seeks “the principles and the highest causes,” as a science that “investigates being *qua* being and what belongs essentially to it, *epistêmê, he theôrei to on hê on*.“¹ In contrast, we argue that *early* Confucian thinking is in essence *not* metaphysical. Not only does the concept of *you* [*有*, existence, possession; *Vorhandenheit*], which barely constitutes a plausible equivalent to the Greek concept of being [*to on*], carry no priority at all in ancient Chinese thinking in general. But the major concerns of early Chinese thinkers are neither the search of any super-natural reality or divinity as the first and highest cause, nor the investigation of any permanent fundamental principle in nature or human society. Rather, the guiding question of early Chinese thinking is the question of *dao* [*道*], a *singulare tantum* that can no more be translated than the Greek *logos*.² As the name for the unnamable, the *unspeakable* mystery that characterizes the origin and the mode of the vital emergence [*sheng*, 生] of human life and natural beings, *dao* eludes the attempts of any metaphysical categorization. Confucius himself, we are told, made few comments “on human nature and the way [*dao*] of heaven.”³ The translation and interpretation of early Chinese texts with western *metaphysical* language, therefore, have missed inevitably the *simplicity, poesy and mystery* [*das Geheimnis, xuan*] of early Chinese thinking.

If, following the tradition, we determine the priority of “practice” as the unique and distinctive character of the early Confucian teaching, then it is precisely the *meaning* of such “practice” that is still unclear as its essence remains unthought. For the priority of
practice has nothing to do with the priority of the so-called “practical reason” or “practical philosophy.” In the west, “practical philosophy,” along with theoretical and productive philosophy, belong to the philosophical science, which Aristotle designates as a science of truth, epistēmē tēs alētheias.”⁴ Now for Aristotle, the investigation of truth lies in the search of the principles and the first and highest causes. For “we do not understand a truth without its cause [tēs aitias]”⁵ and we “do not understand a thing until we have acquired the why [to dia] of it (and this is to acquire the first cause [tēn prōtēn aitian]).”⁶ Accordingly, practical philosophy, which includes ethics, economics and politics, seeks the knowledge [epistēmēm] for the sake of action. It is a science that investigates the first principles of action – an investigation that is also guided by the question of “why.” For the most part, western thinkers after Aristotle have maintained that the end of ethics is to enquire “what ‘ought’ means, and why we ought to do what we ought to do.”⁷ The question of ethics, thus, has been largely confined within the search and justification of a system of moral norms and principles to which we ought to conform our actions.

But for early Confucian thinkers, “practice” is not concerned with the “knowledge” of the first principles of human actions or their applications. Nor does it entail a systematic and theoretical exposition of the question of “why” we ought to conform our actions to certain metaphysical norms. Rather, practice or moral practice always involves the question of “how” we conduct ourselves under concrete human situations. “Practice” describes the path through which one lives up to an ethical life. The engagement in moral practice belongs to the poetic e-vent of human life and human dwelling upon the earth. As a way through which human ethical life shines forth, moral
practice is not understood in contrast or in relation to the theory or knowledge of the first
principles of human conduct. It does not rely upon the authority of any metaphysical
norms or principles, but contains its “justification” in its very enactment. The early
Confucian texts in which such practice finds its initial narrative belong neither to science,
nor to philosophy, nor to religion. Yet, the seeming fragmentariness of the early
Confucian texts and the absence of any theoretical “foundation” do not prove a lack of
thinking. On the contrary, the aphorism and epigram characterizing the early Confucian
classics bear out a thinking that is returning to its highest originality. The early Confucian
writings constitute a historical narrative [shu 述] of the unspeakable and unfathomable
mysterious origin and its humble and reticent function [yong 用: performance]. As a
preservation of the silent saying of dao that finds its primary manifestation in moral
practice, these early texts belong essentially to “hermeneutics” in the oldest sense of the
word: the bearing and conveying of the message of the destiny [das Geschick; ming 命] from the divine.\(^8\)

This essay intends to make a first step to spell out this unique dimension of early
Chinese thinking by disclosing the hidden meaning of a central idiom in the Great
Learning. I propose to re-interpret this crucial idiom by bringing the text of the Great
Learning into dialogue with Heidegger’s phenomenology. In Being and Time, Heidegger
identifies the phenomenology of Da-sein, i.e., of situated human existence in the world,
as “hermeneutics in the original signification of that word.” (SZ 37) As a movement to
overcome the dominance of metaphysics in the traditional western thinking, Heidegger’s
phenomenology initiates a possibility to think the question of ethics without the
endorsement of any metaphysical principles or norms, but from the poetical essence of human dwelling upon the earth. The original meaning of the Greek word *ethos*, from which the word “ethics” derives, is “abode, dwelling place.” The tragedies of Sophocles, Heidegger insists, “preserve the *ethos* in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics.’”9 The dialogue I instigate between Heidegger’s phenomenology and the early Confucian texts, thus, would not only work out a new horizon for the hermeneutics of early Confucian classics but also reveal a new possibility for the question of ethics.

I. A Historical Review of the Traditional Interpretations of “Ge wu”

The saying in the Great Learning that we are concerned with appears short and simple:

… 致知在格物。物格而後知至 …

James Legge translates:

… Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge being complete … 10

The two parts of the saying quoted above that are divided by the period in the translation are the end and beginning of two long sentences, which, in the original Chinese text, can be read in such a way that the characters in these two sentences just form the mirror images of each other. At the heart of this symmetrical structure sits our idiom *ge wu*, which is the heart of the whole paragraph. The saying itself is constituted only of two phrases: *ge wu* [格物], which Legge translates as “the investigation of things,” and *zhī-zhī* [致知], “the extension or completion of knowledge.” Under Legge’s translation and
interpretation, which is based largely upon the commentary and annotation by Zhu Xi 朱熹, the meaning of this saying turns out to be plain and simple. For even today, it goes without saying that the only way to extend and complete one’s knowledge is to investigate things.

It must be noted, however, that for Zhu Xi, the kind of knowledge “completed” by the “investigation of things” has nothing to do with the so-called “scientific knowledge.” It refers instead to the knowledge of the ultimate principle [li 理] of things, which embraces both the metaphysical principles of nature and the moral principles of the human world. Originally a chapter in the Book of Decorum 禮記, the Great Learning is not involved in the question of science, but instead in the question of politics and ethics. The way of the great learning, as the chapter begins, “lies in bringing the shining virtue to light, in making for ever new lives for the people and in dwelling in the highest good.” As Daniel Gardner points out, Zhu Xi’s greatest contribution to the neo-Confucian approach for the moral transformation of the individual lies in the development of “the highly systematic method of self-cultivation.” This program of self-cultivation, in turn, “evolved principally out of his reading” of the Daxue or Great Learning. In Zhu’s reading of the text, ge wu “became the first step, the foundation of the self-cultivation process. That is to say, only through the apprehension of the principle in things might an individual gradually perfect himself,” thereby “bringing the shining virtue to light.” As Gardner elaborates, “implicit in this method of self-cultivation was the belief that all things in the universe share a common principle. Thus, understanding of the principle in external things would lead ultimately to an understanding of the principle within oneself.
And, since principle in man was identical to his nature, understanding of that principle would lead to self-realization."\(^{15}\) It is not immediately clear, however, how the principle of external things and the principle of one’s internal self can be one and the same and how “the investigation of things” in general may bring the knowledge of the principle for one’s self-cultivation. Indeed, Zhu’s interpretation of ge-wu and its relation to the self moral cultivation remains one of the most controversial issues in later neo-Confucian discourse.

We would like to argue that Zhu Xi’s interpretation, while providing a significant and coherent new reading of the Great Learning, miss the true meanings of the text and its originality. It covers over the unique character of early Confucian thinking, which may only come to light under a more careful and penetrating study. In order to set the stage for the search of the original meanings of the text and to examine Zhu’s commentary under a broader perspective, let us first take a brief historical review of the traditional interpretations of this idiom “ge-wu” by ancient Chinese scholars.

The text of the Great Learning and the phrase ge wu seem to have received no “special” attention and comments prior to Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 commentary of the Book of Decorum. Zheng glossed the character ge and wu in this way: “Ge [格], to come; wu [物], is the same as event.” This annotation of the meanings of the two characters, as we will show, is accurate and well founded. Zheng’s explanation of the idiom ge wu as a whole and its relation to the rest of the Great Learning, however, turns out to be rather confusing: “The good things will come for those who have profound knowledge of the good, while the evil things will come for those who have profound knowledge of the evil.
(The text) says that the events are coming according to the preference of man.”¹⁶ In the text, it is said that zhi zhi [致知] lies in ge wu, that is, the knowledge or understanding arrives as a result of the coming of things. Ge wu, the coming of events or things, is apparently prior to the knowledge or understanding of humans. But in Zheng’s interpretation, knowledge itself becomes prior to the coming of things. For the events or things are said to arrive according to the preference of human, that is, according to the knowledge of good and evil that one has beforehand. This interpretation, hence, messed up completely the internal order that the original text follows. Nor does it spell out the connection between ge wu and the rest of the text in a satisfactory way. We still do not know, for example, how the “coming of things” and the cultivation of the self are related with each other.

A more profound interest in the Great Learning began to develop in the mid-Tang Dynasty, when Han Yu 韓愈 made use of the text to illustrate the Confucian way of self-cultivation.¹⁷ Although Han did not touch upon the idiom ge-wu, his disciple and friend Lia Ao 李翱 elaborated the central saying of the Great Learning at length. But Li Ao, though taking over Zheng Xuan’s annotation of “ge” as “to come,” interpreted the phrase in a completely different way: “When things come before one, the mind should not be moved by them.”¹⁸ Such an interpretation, like the later interpretation by Sima Guang 司馬光,¹⁹ which set humans and the external things in an antagonistic opposition, is based upon an apparent distortion of the original text. They can hardly be consistent with the acknowledged meaning of the character ge as “to come.”
With the rising attention on the *Great Learning* and the development of neo-Confucianism or the school of *Li* [理] since the beginning of the Song Dynasty, it is not until Chen Yi’s 程頤 commentary that a consistent and coherent interpretation of the phrase *ge-wu* and its relation to the rest of the text first come up. For Chen Yi, *li* [理] is the supreme principle shared by all things in the universe: “All things under heaven can be understood through the principle. ‘Where there are things there are rules.’ Each thing necessarily has its manifestation of the principle.”

*Ge wu*, as the fundamental way toward the understanding of the principle, becomes a central point to the art of moral cultivation and thus to Cheng Yi’s whole philosophy: “The extension and completion of knowledge [*zhi zhi*] lies in *ge wu*. *Ge* means *zhi*, ‘to arrive at,’ ‘to reach.’ *Wu* means *shi*, ‘event.’ In all events there is the principle; to reach at the principle is *ge wu*.”

As a remote disciple of Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao 程顥, Zhu Xi inherited Cheng Yi’s interpretation of *ge wu* and developed from it a more coherent and influential commentary of the *Great Learning*. Remarkably, while all commentators before had recognized the meaning of the character “*ge*” as “to come [*lai* 来],” Cheng Yi glossed the character *ge* as *zhi* [至]: “to arrive at, to reach.” Zhu took over this subtle shift in the gloss of the character *ge* and extended it. For Zhu, the character *ge*, when identified with “*zhi* [至],” carries not only the meaning of “to come, to reach or to arrive at,” but also the meaning of “up to the utmost.” At the same time, Zhu pushed the word *zhi* [致] for a less common sense as ‘to extend to the extreme [*tui ji* 推極],’ though *zhi* [致], in its most natural and proper sense, means simply to send to, lead to, or to invite or elicit, i.e., to let somebody or something come into presence, to let appear.
This seemingly trivial shift in the annotation of the character *ge* [格] and *zhi* [致] has a significant consequence. As we have shown, for Zhu Xi, what is “reached” is not “things themselves,” i.e., the simple event of things’ happening as such, but the ultimate principle or reason [*li*, 理] of the things. The cultivation of the self, thus, means to reach oneself for the ultimate principle of the universe. The ultimate principle of the universe can only be grasped through extending one’s knowledge to the utmost and this again through reaching the ultimate principle or reason of the *external* things and events.

Granted, Zhu’s gloss of the character *ge* and *zhi* [致] agrees largely with the basic meanings of these two characters. By virtue of this annotation, Zhu has not only brought the interpretation of the *Great Learning* to an unprecedented coherence and clarity, but also worked out a systematic method for self-cultivation that is the foundation of his whole neo-Confucian philosophy. Nevertheless, Zhu’s interpretation does not spell out the original meaning of the text, which has been left unthought and even in some way distorted. Remarkably, the concept of *li* [理], principle or reason, which plays a crucial role in Zhu Xi’s interpretation, is not influential in early Chinese thinking, during the period of which the *Great Learning* first appears. In contrast to the concept of *li*, principle or reason, which plays a central role in the neo-Confucian philosophy, originally, the catchword [Leitwort] for early Chinese thinking is *dao* [道], the way. The shift from *dao* [道] to *li* [理], which is clearly reflected in Zhu’s interpretation of the *Great Learning*, is not a simple and innocent event. It marks a turning point in ancient Chinese thinking, a point since when *metaphysical* thinking gets the upper hand and
holds sway up until now, while the question of the meaning of dao has lost gradually its urgency and primacy.

Zhu’s interpretation, as we will show in more detail, fails to bring to light the original meanings of the text but leads away from it. Further away is the later interpretation offered by Wang Yangming, who takes ge [格] as a transitive verb that means “to rectify, to put or set something right.” This interpretation too, which has fewer editorial and textual evidences in its favor and which offers little for a consistent explanation of the relation between “ge-wu” and the cultivation of the self as a humane [ren 仁] person, has covered over the original meaning of the text.

II. Etymological Study of the word “Ge”

What is at stake in the interpretation of ge wu involves three key questions. First, we need to identify the literal meanings of the character ge [格] and the idiom ge-wu. Second, we need to make manifest the original meanings of the word zhi [知], which I translate as “knowing” or “understanding,” and how such knowing or understanding is related to ge-wu. Last but not least, it must be shown how the knowing or understanding that arrives as a result of ge wu fits into what the rest of the text is about, viz. how this knowing or understanding is related to the cultivation of the self as a humane person who aspires to bring the shining virtue to light in the world. Obviously, these three questions are closely related and cannot be answered in isolation from each other. Yet, the clarification of the literal meanings of ge wu, that is, a close study of how the character “ge” is used in early
Chinese texts and the original meanings of ge-wu, must be taken as a starting point of our inquiry.

Prof. Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫 identifies the oldest meaning of the character ge [格] as lai [来] “to come, to arrive at,” which is also indicated by the image of the scripture ge [各] on the oracle bones. One of the original meanings of ‘ge [格],” as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 points out, is the “advent of the divine during the sacrificial ceremony.” In early Chinese texts, ge [格] is used in the sense of “to come [lai, 来]” or “to arrive at [zhi, 至]” repeatedly. Er-Ya 爾雅, 釋言 defines the meaning of ‘ge’ as “to come:” “Ge, is to come; 格, 來也.” It is said in the Book of Poetry 詩經, 大雅, 抑 that “the advent of the divine is unpredictable; 神之格思, 不可度思,” where the meaning of “ge” is identified as either “to come” or “to arrive at.” More instances can be found in the Book of History 尚書, 堯典: “Come Thou Shun, 格汝舜;” and in the Ceremonial Decorum 儀禮, 士冠禮: “When the love of parents and the love of brothers do come, 孝友時格.”

With the character “ge [格]” defined as “to come,” the best translation of the phrase “ge wu” seems to be “to let things themselves come.” It is remarkable, however, that the character “ge” carries another important extended meaning here, which has not been well noted by most of the commentators. Prof. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 has pointed out rightly that “ge wu” in this context means “感通于物,” which I translate as “to open oneself to and be affected by things.” Although ancient commentators and contemporary scholars have largely ignored the sense of “gan [感]” or “gan tong [感通],” there are
strong textual evidences in support of this interpretation. It is stated clearly in *Words and Phrases*， which defines “ge” precisely as “gan tong.” “Ge, is to open oneself to and to be affected by; 格，感通也.” The character “gan” means literally the movement of one’s heart. It points to the stir of the emotion or passion brought about by the influence of external things upon one’s heart. The *Book of Music* 禮記 says that humans “are moved when affected by things, 感於物而動.” In contemporary Chinese, accordingly, “gan” is often used in the sense of “feeling, sensation or emotion, “ or “to sense, to perceive, to be aware.” *Ge wu*, in the sense of “opening oneself to and being affected by [gan tong],” therefore, points to the movement of the heart, to the agitation of human emotion and affection in her engagement and comportment with external things and events in the world.

The textual evidences for the definition of the character “ge” as “gan tong” are abundant. Zhu Junsheng 朱駿聲 notes already that “gan and ge share the same consonant, 感格雙聲” and identifies one meaning of “ge” as “gan.” The instances of this use of “ge” in the sense of “gan tong” in early Chinese texts are many to be found. *Confucian Analects* 論語, 為政 has it that: “Lead the people by virtue and order them by decorum, then they will have the sense of shame; 道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格.” According to Confucius, if the head of the state teaches the people by the education of virtue and decorum, then they will be affected by and be aware of shameful actions. *Ge*, hence, is best interpreted here as “gan,” which means in this context “to be aware of, to be affected, to be disturbed at heart.” This interpretation of “ge” also brings to light the meaning of another statement in the *Book of Decorum* 禮記, 緇衣: “teach them by virtue
and order them by decorum, then the people will have the heart that is aware; 教之以德, 齊之以禮, 則民有格心\(^{33}\) What the people are aware of at heart, of course, is again the shameful actions that are in violation of the teachings of virtue and decorum. Mencius 孟子, 离婁上 says, “Only a great man can be aware of what is in the wrong at the heart of the king, 惟大人能格君心之非.”\(^{34}\) A great man is he who does not obey the authority of a king blindly. And only he is able to perceive or be aware of what is wrong in the king’s mind so that he may bring the king back to the path of humaneness and justice. The interpretation of “ge” as “gan,” that is, as “to be aware, to sense or perceive,” therefore, makes good sense in this context. This sense of “gan tong, to open oneself to and be affected by,” is also found in some older texts such as the Book of History 尚書. In the Chapter Da Gao 書, 大誥, it is asked “How could it be said that he has the capability to intuit and understand the ordinance of heaven, 矣曰其有能格知天命?”\(^{35}\) The chapter Shuo Ming, 書, 說下 has it likewise that: “Open oneself to and be affected by the king of heaven; 格于皇天.”\(^{36}\) Here, the character “ge” is used in connection with the character “tian [天],” which can be translated as “heaven,” though it does not carry the Christian implications of a determinate personified God. In early Confucian texts, tian or heaven refers more often to the mysterious origin of the vital emergence of humans and natural beings in the world.\(^{37}\) The phrase “ge tian [格天]” in the Book of History signifies the intuition and divination of the ordinance of heaven by opening oneself to and being affected by the continuous emergence of life and things in the world. It is only through this opening and affection that one can sense the message from heaven and become one
with heaven. Indeed, the oneness of human and heaven, which becomes later a leading doctrine in ancient Chinese thinking, has already been indicated in the earlier texts such as *Book of History*. This phrase “ge tian,” in the sense of “to open oneself so as to divine the ordinance of heaven,” also becomes an idiom in later writings.  

In summary, the character “ge” means originally the “coming” of the divine or the things in the world. From the standpoint of what is coming, hence, “ge” acquires the sense of “to arrive at [zhi],” while from the standpoint of the person to whom such coming occurs, “ge” derives the meaning of “gan,” i.e., “to be affected” or “gan tong, to open oneself to and be affected by.” Presumably, it is from this sense of “to be affected,” that the later meanings of “to sense, to perceive, to be aware” comes up. And it is from this meaning of “to perceive, to sense” that there arises the meaning of “measurement or standard” or “the right measurement or standard [zheng 正]” with which such perception is to be performed.

The literal sense of the phrase “ge wu,” therefore, is “to let things come,” or “to let things be encountered.” In the context of the *Great Learning*, the phrase carries the extended meaning of “gan tong [感通].” It means to open oneself to and be affected by things around, that is, to open oneself to the engagement and comportment with things and events in the surrounding world. Only when one opens oneself to the things and events around would true knowledge of the world and the self arrive. This understanding of the arrival of knowledge as a result of the coming of things is *echoed* in many ancient Chinese classics. As Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 summed up, the ancient Chinese “took one’s body and heart as the host and things and events as the guests; it is like in military
operations, the guests attack and the host defends …so that “‘knowledge arrives’ after the
things ‘come.’” For example, Wen Zi 文子, 道原 expounds that “the rise and movement
of knowing lies in responding to the coming of things; 物至而應, 智(知)之動也.” In
the Book of Music, it is said straightforwardly that “one knows/understands when things
come; 物至知知.” For ancient Chinese, apparently, what is moved and affected by the
coming of things is the human heart. The movement and affection of the human heart, as
the Book of Music elaborates, “is made possible by things; 人心之動, 物使之然也.” The
movement of knowing in response to the coming of things, thus, is none other than the
movement of the heart. For early Chinese thinkers, the human heart is not only the seat of
emotion and affection, but also the primary seat of knowing or understanding. Guan Zi 管
子, 心術上 identifies the heart as the “house of knowing; 心也者, 智之舍也.” Mencius
defines more directly the heart as “the faculty of thinking; 心之官則思.” The heart only
knows, however, when it is first moved and affected by the coming of things around,
when it opens itself to the surrounding world.

Now, it is clear that Zhu Xi’s interpretation of ge wu and zhi zhi has not only
missed the original meaning of the character “ge,” but also reversed the center of the
knowing process. For early Chinese, the center of knowing is the human heart. The heart,
as the metaphorical core of human existence, is both the seat of affection and the seat of
understanding. But for Zhu Xi, the center of knowing becomes the external things.
Knowledge arises when humans reach the external things for the ultimate principles of
the universe. The knowledge of one’s own self, thus, is only possible when one extends
the knowledge of the principle of external things to the utmost. The ultimate principle
reached by the investigation of things constitutes the *metaphysical* ground of Zhu’s whole neo-Confucian philosophy. By establishing the *priority* of the knowledge of the principle [*li* 理], Zhu provides a new foundation for the self-cultivation and thus brings the long overlooked Confucian teachings to a new land of security. Yet, it is precisely the embracement and dominance of this metaphysical principle of *li* [理] that characterizes the *rootlessness* of the neo-Confucian philosophy. The priority of the knowledge of the principles of external things in Zhu’s neo-Confucianism covers over a knowing from the heart that is the most *internal*. The oblivion of the question of *dao* and the loss of the originality of early Confucian thinking begin with this reversal of the center of knowing in the neo-Confucianism.

It is still unclear, however, what kind of knowing or understanding is supposed to arrive through *ge wu*, i.e. through the engagement and comportment with the things and events in the surrounding world and *how* such knowing or understanding that is the most *internal* is connected with the rest of the *Great Learning*, say, with the cultivation of the self as a humane person who aspires to bring the shining virtue to light in the world. With these questions unanswered, the true meanings of this ancient text remain in the dark. The meanings of the text will only come to light when we let ourselves into the origin from out of which this early Confucian text speaks. The way into that origin [*den Ursprung*] calls for a leap. The difficulty in revealing the meanings of the text boils down to the difficulty in leaping this leap. In order to make this leap possible, let us take Heidegger’s analysis of affection in the contexts of his phenomenology of Da-sein in *Being and Time* as a stepping-stone. We anticipate the hidden meanings of this early Confucian text to
III. Affection and Being-in-the-World – A Phenomenological Study

The project of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is to work out concretely the question of the meaning of being [*Sinn von Sein*], a question of urgency Heidegger claims to have been forgotten in the western metaphysical tradition. As “being [*Sein*] is always the being of a being [*Seiendes*]” (SZ 9), the question of the meaning of being is to be approached through the interrogation of the being [*Sein*] of one specific kind of being [*Seiendes*] that Heidegger calls Dasein. Accordingly, the task of working out the question of being boils down to making transparent the being [*Sein*] of Dasein (cf. SZ 7), of situated human existence in the world. Phenomenology of Da-sein, i.e., phenomenological description and interpretation of the meaning and structure of its being, which Heidegger insists is “*hermeneutics* in the original signification of that word,” (SZ 37) thus, constitutes one of the central tasks of *Being and Time*.

Dasein is being-in-the-world. The being of Dasein differs from the being of other beings we encounter in the everyday world, like the being of this chair or that tomato plant, in that in its being Dasein is “concerned about [es geht ...um] its very being.” (SZ 12) The being of Dasein cannot be *properly and sufficiently* grasped as a *what*, as the being of something that is objectively present, but must be understood as a *who*, as the existence of the *who* that I myself am. (SZ 44-5) “The ‘essence’ of Dasein,” Heidegger says, “lies in its existence.” The essence of Dasein is not the “reality” of this being, e.g.,
the reality of its “physical presence,” but is its possibility to be. But Dasein’s existence or its possibility to be is not something isolated from other kinds of beings. It is always the possibility to be “in” the world, to be with other Daseins and other beings that are merely “inside” the world [Innerweltlich]. Being-in-the-world, thus, is the fundamental constitution of Dasein. The constitution of Da-sein as being-in-the-world has three structural factors: “in-the-world,” i.e., ontological structure of “world,” “the being who is always in the way of being-in-the-world” and “being-in as such” (SZ 53). Being-in as such has again three constitutive elements – existential situation [Befindlichkeit], understanding and discourse – which Heidegger claims to be existentially equiprimordial, that is, they constitute being-in as such at the same time with equal primordiality. As the interpretation of the Great Learning is concerned with human engagement and comportment with beings in the surrounding world and the affection arising out of such engagement, let us look more closely at Heidegger’s analysis of existential situation or situatedness [Befindlichkeit], which indicates something that is “ontically what is most familiar…” attunement, mood or affect [die Stimmung], being attuned, that is, being in a mood or affection [das Gestimmtsein]. (SZ 134)

Moods or affections are not changing and fleeting feelings or sensitivities accompanying human Dasein haphazardly, under the influence of which scientific observation and description of objective facts and realities are inevitably compromised. (Cf. SZ 138) Rather, they point to a primordial disclosure of the existential situatedness of Da-sein, to a fundamental way Dasein is its “there” as being-in-the-world. Dasein, Heidegger asserts, “is always already in a mood.” (SZ 134) Being always in a mood makes manifest the thrownness of Dasein’s being. It indicates the facticity of Dasein’s
being delivered over to the there [Da], though its whence and whither remain unknown (SZ 135). Facticity refers to the existential fact that Dasein is always already caught in a totality of relations among different beings. It has no command and mastery over these beings and relations and yet it cannot get away from them. It cannot isolate itself from other beings in or inside the world but must take the burden of being-in-the-world as a matter of fact. In being in a mood, hence, “Dasein is always already disclosed in accordance with its mood as that being [Seiende] to which Dasein was delivered over in its being [Sein] as the being [Sein] which it, existing, has to be.” (SZ 134) To be always in a mood means Dasein is always affected by other beings in or inside the world that has already been disclosed. Ontologically, it refers to the existential situatedness [Befindlichkeit] of Dasein, to the existential situations in which Dasein always finds itself. But Dasein can only find itself in this or that situation when it first lets beings other than itself be encountered in a circumspect heedful way. Only in its encounter with and being affected by other beings, it can be said, is it possible for Dasein to discover its own being, say, its physical body. Affections of Da-sein announce its constant involvement with the beings and relations in the surrounding world, which makes manifest the fundamental existential situatedness of Dasein’s being there.

Dasein can be affected by other beings, however, only because it is concerned in its being about its being. Only a being who is concerned about its being in its being can let beings inside the world be encountered in an circumspect heedful way. “Letting things be encountered in a circumspect heedful way,” Heidegger says, “has … the character of being affected or moved.” (SZ 137) Only Dasein can be affected, moved or touched by other beings. A Chair and a wall, for example, no matter how close they may be, do not
“touch” each other and cannot be affected by each other. (SZ 55) The relation between a chair and a wall is completely “apathetic.” This apathetic relation remains because, if we may draw on the use of the term in ancient Chinese texts, both the chair and the wall are “heartless.” The chair and the wall can only be related to each other because they are both relevant to a Dasein and when their relevance to a Dasein are both foreshown [vorgezeichnet] in a totality of relevance [die Bewandnisanzheit], say, the totality of relevance which constitutes the things at hand in a studio. (Cf. SZ 84) A chair and a wall, in other words, can only be “related” to each other because they both belong to the world of a Dasein. By themselves, the chair and the wall have no world. Things like a chair and a wall are worldless. They can only be inside the world that is already disclosed by Dasein.

The being of a chair is its relevance, which is about its “what-for [wozu].” The thing at hand that we call a chair is relevant in that it lets human Dasein sit and rest. A wall, likewise, is relevant in that it supports and demarcates the boundary of a room in which human Dasein may find its shelter and place of dwelling. Which relevance the chair and the wall at hand may have is foreshown in the totality of relevance which constitutes the things at hand in a room to which the chair and the wall belong, say, a studio in which a Dasein finds its residence. The totality of relevance, as Heidegger points out, “leads back to a what-for which no longer has relevance.” (SZ 84) It leads back to Dasein who is “not a being of the kind of being of things at hand inside [innerhalb] a world, but a being whose being is defined as being-in-the-world.” (SZ 84) “The primary ‘what for’ is a for-the-sake-of-which.” (SZ 84) For only Dasein, the being who is concerned about its being in that being [es geht ... um], is for the sake of [um-
willen] itself, viz. is for the sake of the *possibility* of its being. (SZ 84, 143) Only the being whose being is for the sake of itself, who cares for [*sorgen*] its own being, can take care of things in the world to which it belongs and *discover* a surrounding world in a circumspect heedful way.

Only because the “*senses*” belong ontologically to a being who is concerned about its being in its being, who “finds itself in the existential situation of being-in-the-world [*befindliches In-der-Welt-sein*],” moreover, “can *they* be ‘touched’ and ‘have a sense’ for something so that what touches *them* shows itself in an affect.” (SZ 137) Only Dasein can be affected. Because only for the being that is concerned about its being can what it encounters in the world *matter* to it. “Being affected,” Heidegger remarks, “is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can *matter* to it in this way. This mattering to it is grounded in existential situation, and as existential situation it has *disclosed* the world, for example, as something by which it can be threatened.” (SZ 137)

Therefore, letting beings be encountered, which has the character of being moved or affected, points to the fundamental existential situatedness that *discloses* the being *there* of Da-sein as being-*in*-the-world. Being always already in an affection, Da-sein is a site of disclosure. As a site of disclosure, Da-sein is “*in*” the world. Being- in of Dasein is different from “being inside” of beings like a chair or a wall. Being-in is the “formal existential expression of the being of Dasein.”(SZ 54) The word “in” here does not refer to the objective presence of one being *among* other beings. Nor does it mean being “inside” a space that is objectively delimitated. It is *not* the case that there are a “world”
of beings that are already objectively present, “in” which Dasein happens to find itself.

On the contrary, there is no *world* before Dasein’s being *there*.

But isn’t true that before any human Dasein comes into being, there have long been all kinds of natural and human beings on the earth? Granted. But the stars and clouds, the trees and grasses, just like the rivers and mountains, do not constitute a *world* unless there is a Da-sein *there* in the first place. Without Da-sein’s being there, there can be no “relation” between natural beings except physical actions and resistances. Before natural beings can be *relevant* for Dasein’s existence, they are completely *apathetic* to each other and cannot have any significance. Natural beings can have significance [*Bedeutsamkeit; see SZ 72-88*] only because they belong to the world of Dasein who alone can be meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or meaningless in its being. (SZ 151) The world is significant only because Dasein has meaning, because Dasein, as a being whose being is characterized by its finitude, i.e., whose being is *mortal temporality*, is concerned about its being in its being. Dasein is *in* the world, thus, because it is the very site at which a world opens up. Being-in does not refer to being among some other beings or inside a space that is a receptacle for these beings. Rather, being-in of Dasein means *disclosing* a world and *dwelling* in it together with other beings in and inside the world. It means to find one’s place of dwelling in the world. The word “*in,*” as Heidegger points out, stems from “innan-, to live, *habitare*, to dwell.” (SZ 54-5) Being *in* the world, Dasein is *in* the truth. “In that Dasein essentially is its disclosedness, and, as disclosed, discloses and discovers, it is essentially true. Dasein is ‘in the truth.’” (SZ 221)

In the claim “Dasein is in the truth,” however, the word “truth” does not carry the usual meaning of correctness, viz. the correspondence between a statement and a thing.
Heidegger insists that truth, *aletheia*, in its most original Greek sense, means unconcealment. For Heidegger, making a statement “is a being toward the existing thing itself.” Thus, to say that “a statement is true means that it discovers the beings in themselves…. The being true (truth) of the statement must be understood as discovering.” (SZ 218) The everyday concept of truth as the accord between a statement and a thing itself is grounded upon truth in the most primordial sense as unconcealment. The prepositional truth is only possible on the basis of truth as disclosedness and discovering. On the other hand, truth or being-true as discovering “is … ontologically possible only on the basis of being-in-the-world.” (SZ 218) The disclosure of Dasein as being-in-the-world is the foundation of the primordial phenomenon of truth as unconcealment of things in the world. In that Da-sein essentially is its disclosedness, Dasein is the site of disclosure; as the site of disclosure, it is the site of *being [Sein]*. There is [*Es gibt*] being “only insofar as truth [*aletheia – disclosure*] is. Truth *is* only because and as long as Dasein is.” (SZ 230)

In his phenomenology of Dasein, Heidegger has not only called into question the traditional understanding of being [*Sein*] in terms of beings [*Seiendes*] but also overturns the meaning of truth from the everyday understanding of correctness into the primordial meaning of unconcealment. Accordingly, Dasein as being-in-the-world is not only the foundation of the primordial truth as unconcealment but also the site of disclosure at which the meaning of being can be understood. It is also clear that affections arising from the engagement and comportment with surrounding beings are not something insignificant. They are not *mere* feelings or sensations that one happens to be associated with, but point to the existential situatedness of Dasein, which discloses the being of
Dasein as being-in-the-world. Mood or affection refers to a fundamental mode in which the disclosure of Dasein takes place. It is a *primordial* way in which Dasein is *in* the truth.

**IV. Discovering the Way of the Great Learning**

Heidegger’s phenomenology of Da-sein, of situated human existence in the world spells out the significance of the phenomenon of affection and human engagement and comportment with things. It also throws a new light on the meanings of “ge wu” and of the *Great Learning* as a whole. According to our analysis above, *ge wu* means literally “to let things come.” It carries also the extended connotation of “opening oneself to and being affected by things in the surrounding world.” The site of this opening and affection is the human heart. As the seat of affection and emotion, the human heart is also the site of disclosure at which a world opens up. As the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 says, the heart, which *contains* all human affections such as happiness, anger, sorrow and joy, “is the great origin of the world; 中也者，天下之大本也.” The harmony [*he 和*] of the heart, i.e., the harmony of the affections and emotions in the heart, accordingly, is “the supreme way of the world.” It is on the attainment of this harmony that “heaven and earth will be at the right place and all things in the world will be growing and flourishing.” Now for ancient Chinese, the harmony of human affections and emotions is attained primarily in music. Confucius, for example, elucidates the essence of self-cultivation as to “rouse oneself in poetry, establish oneself in decorum and accomplish oneself in music; 興於詩，立於禮，成於樂.” The *Book of Music 樂記* is a *hidden groundwork* of early
Confucian thinking that has never been adequately studied by contemporary scholars. In this foundational chapter of the Book of Decorum, it is said that music, which “originates from the human heart; 樂由中出,” is “the harmony of heaven and earth; 樂者，天地之和也.” Music articulates the great harmony of the world. It makes manifest an aesthetical common ground to which all human hearts return.\textsuperscript{46} There is thus in music the root of the moral order of the world established with the rule of decorum. But this commonality of human affections and emotions found in music has nothing to do with the metaphysical ground of the universal reason or principle \([li 理]\). Rather, the reason or principle could only have its proper function on the basis of the harmony of the heart brought forth in music.

Remarkably, the character \(li [理]\), the foundational concept of the neo-Confucianism, refers originally not to the universal principle of the nature or human society, but to the different features and lineaments of external things. \textit{Han Fei Zi} 韓非子 defines \(li\) as the different properties of the things such as their being “long and short, big and small, square and circular, hard and crispy, light and heavy, white and black.”\textsuperscript{47} It can be said that for early Chinese, \(li\) describes the way or the reason of how and why an individual thing is what it is.\textsuperscript{48} Every individual thing in the world, thus, “has its own particular reason; 萬物各異理.”\textsuperscript{49} Used as a verb, accordingly, \(li\) has the primary sense of “to distinguish and divide different things in accord with their particular features and lineaments.” It means also “to bring different things to the right order in accord with their individual reasons or properties.” The division and ordering of different things, however, is only possible when it is performed with certain rules and principles. \(Li\), hence, also
carries the meaning of “rule, principle, law,”\textsuperscript{50} or “to be in the proper order in accord with certain rules and principles.”\textsuperscript{51} When used to indicate the proper order of human society, thus, the meaning of $li$ overlaps with that of the concept $li$ [禮], the rule of decorum. The \textit{Book of Decorum} states that “The decorum is the same as the principle, 礼也者, 理也.” \textsuperscript{52} The rule of decorum, as the \textit{Book of Music} clarifies, is for the recognition and distinction of different individuals in a society [禮辨異]. The rule of decorum is for the sake of dividing the individuals in accord with their particular characteristics so as to place them at the right position in the society. Only when the king and the subjects, the fathers and the sons, the husbands and the wives, the brothers and sisters, the partners and friends all live up to their right position in the society according to the rule of decorum, would all things in the world grow and flourish. The rule of decorum, therefore, manifests “the order of heaven and earth; 礼者, 天地之序也.”

Obviously, the different individuals in a society can only be brought together in accord with certain rules and principles when there is a common ground with which all these individuals affirm. In contemporary western society, for example, this common ground lies largely in the \textit{social contract} established by the social authorities, which will enforce punishment upon any violation of the laws and social norms. In medieval age, we find such common ground in the general faith in the supreme power of God, who, as the creator of all beings in the world, is also the divine authority that orders human beings to conform to His commandments in the form of laws and moral imperatives. For early Confucian thinkers, in contrast, the rule of decorum, which is \textit{gentler, more flexible} and thus \textit{more enlightening} than the rule of law, is not based upon the supreme command of
any social or divine authorities. For the common ground that makes the rule of decorum possible is “the sensus communis of the human heart 心之所同然者”\textsuperscript{53} that is expressed and brought forth in music. As Mencius elaborates, the sense [xin 心] of commiseration, the sense of shame, the sense of respect and the sense of right and wrong, which constitute the roots of humaneness, justice, decorum and wisdom respectively, are shared by all people. Since humaneness, justice, decorum and wisdom all originate from the human heart, they are “not imposed upon me from outside, but belong to my own self.”\textsuperscript{54} Music, in bringing forth the harmony of the human heart, thus, also manifests “the harmony of heaven and earth.” It is on the basis of this harmony and the sensus communis of all different individuals that the knowing of dao arrives and a world with proper order in accord with the rule of decorum opens up and prospers. The key and the first step toward this harmony of the heart and the world, as the Great Learning shows, lies in ge wu: opening oneself to and being affected by the things and events in the surrounding world.

Therefore, when Zhu Xi interprets ge wu as “to reach for the ultimate principle of the universe by the investigation of things” and when he regards the knowledge of this universal principle as the foundation of self moral cultivation, he has not only shifted the center of knowing from the internal self to the external things, but also missed the true root of human ethical life in the original text. According to Chen Yi and Chen Hao’s teachings, the universal principle of heaven is manifested in every individual being in the world. Under the line of this thinking, Zhu Xi determines dao as “the principle in external things; 道是在物之理”\textsuperscript{55} and identifies this principle as “the dao that is beyond the
substantial forms and thus the foundation of the emergence of all beings; 理也者, 形而上之道也, 生物之本也.”56 Li [理], which in early Chinese thinking refers to the different reasons and properties of individual things, become a universal metaphysical principle for the explanation of the ultimate reason and cause of all beings in the world. But this metaphysical turn of the neo-Confucianism does not move closer to dao, the way of truth from out of which the early Confucian texts speak; but leads away from it. And in this turning away from the way, it also loses sight of the originality, poesy and mysterious vitality of early Confucian thinking.

As we interpret it, the knowing that arrives from ge-wu is not the universal principle acquired through the investigation of external things, but the understanding of ones’ most internal self – an understanding that can only originate from one’s own heart.

Borrowing certain western philosophical terms, we can say that such knowing refers to the understanding of the truth [aletheia] of situated human existence [Ek-sistenz] in the world. This knowing arising out of one’s affection and emotion, moreover, is neither “subjective” nor “idealistic.” As a more primordial or original understanding of the truth of human existence, it is prior to the metaphysical distinction between subject and object or between idealism and materialism. For the knowing originating from my heart refers neither to the scientific knowledge of external things nor to the knowing of what I myself, as the subject of affection, am. Rather, it is concerned mainly with the knowing of dao [道] and the understanding of who I am.57 As Mencius points out, “He who brings his heart out to the full knows his nature; he who knows his nature knows heaven.”58 The knowing of heaven or the way [dao] of heaven arrives after the
knowing of my nature, viz. the knowing of *who* I am – a knowing that comes ultimately from my own heart. The opening statement of the *Doctrine of the Mean* echoes Mencius’s assertion about the way and human nature:

The mandate of heaven is called human nature; the development of human nature is called *dao*; the cultivation of *dao* is called education.

The meaning of the word *dao*, the way, the unique catchword of early Chinese thinking, however, is still in the dark and will not become explicit all at once. For it names the unnamable, the unspeakable mysterious origin that always turns away from us in its very granting of the possibility of human existence in the world [*反者道之動*]. Heidegger designates the word “*way*” as a primordial word [*Urwort*] of language, which grants itself [*sich zuspricht*] to the meditating [*sinnenden*] humans. It articulates the “proper” meaning of the guideword [*Leitwort*] in Lao Zi’s poetic thinking: “*Tao* [*道*] could be the way that gives all ways … Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful saying conceals itself in the word ‘way.’ *Tao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, … Perhaps the enigmatic power of today’s reign of method … are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.”

In contrast with the *Daoists* who dwell upon the mystery and elusiveness of the way or the way of heaven, early Confucian thinkers are more concerned with the way of human, viz. with the appropriation and manifestation of “the way” in concrete human lives and moral practices. It is the humans, as Confucius insists, who “are capable of bringing *the way* to light; 人能弘道.” For Confucius and his disciples and followers,
thus, *dao* is the supreme open way that gives all ways and grants the possibility of the poetic human dwelling upon the earth. The cultivation of the way, as the *Doctrine of the Mean* says, lies in education, in the teaching and learning of the rules of decorum [*li*] that decree the order of human society. It is well known that Confucius, the first and greatest teacher of the ancient China who spread the royal learning to the ordinary people, believes that “all humans are possible for education, 有教無類.” With education playing a central and critical role in the Confucian moral and political teachings, the possibility of education relies again upon the *sensus communis* of the human heart. This common ground of human affection, as we have shown, is attained in music. By bringing human affections and emotion to harmony, music manifests the harmony of heaven and earth. It brings forth the *sensus communis* of the human hearts on the basis of which true empathy and compassion arise. Such affections as empathy and compassion, if we may borrow the use of certain phenomenological terms, disclose human’s being-in-the-world as a being with others. The occurrence of such affections as empathy and compassion *attests* the common ground of human existence and envisage the clearing [*die Lichtung*] of a world of harmony. The key and first step toward this harmony, as the *Great Learning* states, lies in *ge wu*: opening oneself to and being affected by the things and events in the surrounding world.

The dialogue that we instigated between Heidegger’s phenomenology and the text of the *Great Learning* has opened up a new horizon for the hermeneutics of early Confucian thinking. It has also revealed a new track for us to *think* the question of ethics. This new
track for the question of ethics will become visible as long as we are resolute enough in making the leap toward the origin from out of which the early Confucian classics speak. The leaping of the leap is only possible when we, with ours hearts open, listen to the silent saying of dao and in this listening let ourselves into the region that is disclosed in the way of such saying.

As we pointed out earlier, the question of ethics is in its origin the question of human dwelling. In the Great Learning, there is a line quoted from the Book of Poetry: “The state with so vast a territory is where the people dwell; 邦畿千里，惟民所止.” The ancient Chinese who wanted to bring the shining virtue to light in the world, as the Great Learning elaborates, “would first bring peace to their states.” The end of self-cultivation, thus, is never the accomplishment of virtue for oneself alone. For early Confucian thinkers, moral practice is never a personal matter about one’s self only. For one can only accomplish himself as a virtuous person when the state in which one dwells and for which one serves is in peace and order, so that the whole world is imbued with harmony and happiness. A moral state, on the other hand, is only possible when all people in that state are educated to lead a humane and just way of life so that they all live up to their duties in accord with the rule of decorum. The founding of an ethical state and the accomplishment of a virtuous self, therefore, are interdependent upon each other. From a contemporary perspective, this interdependence of the ethical state and the self moral cultivation might appear to involve a circular movement. It would indeed, if we were to read the Great Learning as a theory of politics and ethics. Nothing, however, is wider of the truth of this early Confucian text. For what the Great Learning is concerned with is not a philosophical exposition of a political or ethical theory of how to build an ethical
state or how to realize a virtuous self. Nor do the eight steps from ge wu to the harmony and happiness of the world form a “logical order” for the “world peace.” The circle manifested in the interdependence of the founding of the ethical state and the attainment of the virtuous self does not involve a logical fallacy. It is not a vicious circle to be avoided. Rather, the epigrams gathered together in the Great Learning constitute a poetical articulation of the way of education; what it elaborates is not a logical order but an order of practice. The sayings of the text call us to leap into the circle. This leaping takes place when people in the state, viz. from the king who is “the son of heaven to the commons all take self cultivation as the foundation.” For it is only through the engagement in the self moral cultivation that we will find a way toward our ethos and place of dwelling in the highest good [zhi shan 至善].

It is notable that the Chinese character shan [善], which is usually translated as “good,” does not refer originally to the qualities of humans or things that meet certain standards or value judgments. Nor does it mean to describe the persons or things with such appreciable or acceptable qualities. The oldest sense of the character shan, as Shuo Wen 説文 explains, is “auspicious; 謄 (善), 吉也.” It has thus “the same meaning as ‘just’ and ‘beautiful;’ 與義美同意.” The characters for good [shan善], just [yi義] and beautiful [mei 美] all share the same component 羊 [yang], which means “goat.” In ancient China, goat is regarded as the best animal for sacrifice in ritual ceremonies. The proper use of the sacrificial animal invites the blessing from the divine. It elicits and reveals the unpredictable divine message from heaven. Only when humans conform
themselves to the mandate of heaven, would they find a way of dwelling that is at the same time auspicious, good, just and beautiful.

To dwell in the highest good, thus, means to open one’s heart and listen to the reticent call from the divine and the silent saying of dao. The divine message from heaven blesses humans with an auspicious place of dwelling. It calls humans to develop their internal good nature and to bring their own good virtues to light. The engagement in such moral practice belongs to the poetic e-vent of the vital emergence of human lives in the world. In the enactment of this poetic way of living, the truth and beauty of human existence also shines forth. The self cultivation for an ethical way of life, as we said, is not a personal matter that only involves an individual in himself. For human dwelling upon the earth is always a dwelling with other human beings. Drawing on phenomenological terminologies, we can say that human’s being-in-the-world is always already being with others. The presence of the others and the necessity to “share” the “world” with others, granted, constitute initially a limitation of one’s existence in the world. For to be with others is to share, to struggle for or to finally give up certain natural resources, valuables and desirables, and ultimately the places of dwelling that one himself wants. It is in the encounter with the others that one first has to recognize and face up to the limits of his own being. But for early Confucian thinkers, it is precisely in the being with others that one’s being-in-the-world can be expanded and elevated. The expansion and elevation of one’s being take place when one is capable of living in harmony with others. The harmony arrives, as the Doctrine of the Mean elaborates, when human affections and emotions are articulated right to the point; 發而皆中節.” To articulate one’s affections right to the point [中節] means here to conform the expression of one’s
emotions to the rule of decorum. The rule of decorum, by restricting the excessive human desires and emotions, decrees humans to live up to their duties and proper positions in a society. It spells out the right and just way of human dwelling upon the earth. When all people in the society maintain themselves in the way of decorum and justice, thus, the world will be in order and harmony. The order and harmony of the world, as the Book of Music states, is accomplished ultimately in music. And to be attuned in the play of music is “to be happy; 樂者，樂也.” To dwell in the highest good, to dwell in a world of order and harmony, to dwell in a way of ethical life that is at the same time auspicious, beautiful and just, thus, is to dwell in the supreme happiness, in the lyrical ethos of human existence. The way toward this poetic human dwelling would only open up when I listens and attune myself to the call of my heart and conscience. For in the call of the human heart comes across the reticent message of the divine and the silent saying of dao. Presumable, the knowing of the divine message of heaven, as the Great Learning says, lies in ge wu – the opening of our hearts to the affections and emotions that disclose the primordial truth of our being-in-the-world and our poetical dwelling upon the earth:

When things themselves come, the understanding will arrive. When the understanding arrives, we will be sincere in our intentions. When we are sincere in our intentions, our hearts will be in the right place. When our hearts are in the right place, our selves will be cultivated. When our selves are cultivated, our families will be in order. When our families are in order, our states will be in peace. When our states are in peace, the world will be in harmony and happiness.
Notes

11 See Legge’s notes for this saying, Legge, 358-9.
13 Gardner, 47.
14 Gardner, 54.
15 Gardner, 54.
16 Zheng Xu’s Commentary in *The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary* 禮記鄭注. Vol. 15 of *Si Bu Bei Yao*四部備要. (1965), the Great Learning. All translations of ancient Chinese texts are mine, unless noted otherwise.
17 See Gardner, 17-9.
18 Li Ao 李翱, quoted in Gardner, 23.
19 See Gardner, 22-3.


29 *Words and Phrases 字彙*, quoted in *EDCL*, 5:194.

30 *The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary禮記鄭注, Book of Music樂記*.


32 *The Analects of Confucius*, 2.3. Translation modified.

33 *The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary禮記鄭注, Zi Yi緇衣*.


37 The meaning of the word *tian* [天] in early Chinese texts is a very complicated question. In certain period of time, the word indeed refers to the God that is correspondent to the Christian Creator. But this is not the understanding of heaven by early Confucian thinkers. For some careful investigation of the concept *tian* in early Chinese thinking, see Liang Qichao 梁啓超, *History of Political Thoughts in Pre-Qin China 先秦政治思想史* (Beijing 北京: The Oriental Press 東方出版社, 1996), 21-49; Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *The Development of the Concept of the Way of Heaven in Pre-Qin China 先秦天道觀之進展*, in *The Bronze Age 青銅時代*, Vol. 1 of *Investigations of Ancient Chinese Society 中國古代社會研究* (Shi Jia Zhuang 石家庄市: He Bei Education Press 河北教育出版社, 2000), 303-360. For example, 後漢書, 朱雋傳: “含格天之下業，踏匹夫之小謙;” 隋書, 高祖紀: “表格天之勳，章不伐之業,” quoted in *EDCL*, 5: 194. Also, one more example of
the use of “ge” in connection with “tian” can be found in the Chapter Shu-Jun. The word gan is also used together with ge to express the sense of being affected. For example, the use of “ge” in connection with “tian” can be found in the Chapter Shu-Jun. "我聞, 在昔成湯既受命, 時則有若伊尹, 格于皇天," quoted in EDCL, 5: 194.


Wen Zi 文子, Ch Dao Yuan 道原, quoted in Qian Zhongshu, 3:909.

The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary, Book of Music. A more literal translation will be “the knowing faculty [zhi 知, noun] knows [zhi 知, verb] when things come.”

Mencius, Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. XV. Translation modified.

I believe the character zhong [中] here should be translated as “heart.” The contemporary translation and interpretation of this character as equilibrium, which is based again on Zhu Xi’s annotation, has missed the original meaning of the word. I will demonstrate the true meaning of this key word in the Doctrine of the Mean in three steps.

(1) In the traditional commentary of Zheng Xuan, the character zhong is indeed interpreted as “heart.” As Zheng Xuan interprets it, zhong (heart) is the great origin because “it contains the affections such as happiness, anger, sorrow and joy and is thus the site from out of which decorum arises; 中為大本者, 以其含喜怒哀樂, 禮之所由生.”

(2) The character zhong [中], as well as nei [内], (cf. Shuo Wen 說文: “Zhong, is the inner, what is internal, 中, 內也), which means literally what is internal or inside, is often used to refer to the human heart in ancient Chinese literature. Book of Decorum 礼記, 文王世子: “Decorum and music communicate in the heart [zhong], 礼樂交錯於中.” Note 註: “Zhong, means in the heart, 中,心中也.” Book of Poetry 詩, 閩雎序: “Emotions stir in the heart [zhong], 情動於中.” Commentary 疏: “Zhongs refers to the heart that is the center, 中, 謂中心;” History, Book of Music 史記, 樂書: “Emotions stir in the heart [zhong], 情動於中.” Annotation 正義: “Zhong is the same as the heart, 中, 猶心也.” All above are quoted in EDCL, 1: 403. (3) The understanding of the heart as the origin of the world is also echoed in the Book of Change 易,復: “Isn’t it true that in the hexagram Fu (return), the heart of the world becomes visible; 復, 其見天地之心乎.” Note 註: “Fu means to return to the origin. The origin of the world is the heart; 復者反本之謂也. 天地之本為心者也,” quoted in EDCL, 3:1698. As regards my translation of the character ben [本] as origin, see History, Book of Music 史記, 樂書: “The origin [ben] lies in human’s heart that is affected by things, 其本在人心感於物也,” Annotation 正義: “Ben is the same as the origin, 本, 猶初也.” Er Ya 廣雅, 釋詁一: “Ben means the beginning, 本, 始也,” quoted in EDCL, 4:1596.
The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary, Book of Music: “樂也者，情之不變者也 .... 樂統同。”

Han Fei Zi 韓非子, Ch Jie Lao 解老, quoted in The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 哲學大辭典, ed. Feng Qi 馮契 et al. (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai Lexicographical Work Press 上海辭書出版社, 1992), 1408. Hereafter with the abbreviation EDP and page number.

Han Fei Zi 韓非子, Ch Jie Lao 解老: “理者, 成物之文也,” quoted in EDCL, 6:455.

Han Fei Zi 韓非子, Ch Jie Lao 解老, quoted in EDP, 1408.


For example, Lü shi Chun Qiu 吕氏春秋, Ch Quan Xue 勸學: “聖人之所在, 則天下理焉,” quoted in EDCL, 6:455; The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary, Book of Music: “四時和焉, 星辰理焉, 萬物育焉.”

Cf. The Book of Decorum with Zheng Commentary, Book of Music, “Decorum is the principle that is unchangeable; 禮也者, 理之不可易者也.”

Mencius, Bk. VI, Pt. I, Ch. VII. Translation modified.

Mencius, Bk. VI, Pt.I, Ch.VI. Translation modified. Cf. Bk. II, Pt.I, Ch. VI.

Zhu Xi, Collections of Words 朱子語類, Vol. 1, quoted in EDP, 1408.

Zhu Xi, An Answer to Huang Daofu 答黃道夫, quoted in EDP, 1408.

Notably, the word zhi has often been coupled with the word dao in early Chinese classics. Some examples in early Chinese texts in which the word zhi is used together with the word dao: 莊子, 秋水: “知道者必達於理,” Book of Decorum, Book of Learning, 人不学, 不知道,” (quoted in EDCL, 6:1194) Mencius, Bk.VI, Pt.I, Ch.VI. : "孔子曰: ‘為此詩者，其知道乎，’ ”

Mencius, Bk. VII, Pt. I, Ch. I. Translation modified.


Xu Shen 許慎, Shuo-Wen説文, quoted in EDCL, 2:833.
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