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Human nature and governance: soulcraft and statecraft in eleventh century China

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Chapter 2
Governing by Transforming Human Nature
-- The Political Theory of Wang Anshi

This chapter reconstructs the statecraft Wang Anshi presented emperor Shenzong during their 1068/4 meeting. To undo the existing humanist way of decentralized governance, Wang Anshi's countermeasure drew mainly from two theoretical sources: *Laozi* and *Mencius*.¹ In line with Laozi's idea of *daode*, he first recentralized the dispersed moral authority to the monarch and replaced the humanist value system with one that served the interest of the ruler's state; then, building mainly on Mencius' insight into human nature, he worked out a full procedure, using externally imposed behavioral regulations to firmly establish these statist values into the people's hearts, to the extent that they would guide their social-political actions unreflectively.

Each of these two sides has been explored by previous scholars: two decades ago, Lu Guolong has highlighted the role Daoism played in Wang's political philosophy;² and Wang's relationship to Mencius has been studied from many angles,³ including Li Huarui's recent argument that Mencius' political thought on humane governance had guided the reform Wang architected.⁴ Benefiting partly from the former⁵ while making a start in presenting an alternative to the latter, I integrate Wang's key takeaways from his two favorite books to reveal more of the content of the morality Wang wished to have all uphold, the procedure through which to get it firmly established in the people's hearts, and his efforts at justifying this crafted nature.

I. Reversing Literati Self-Governance

In the previous chapter, we have seen that the theory of literati self-governance was first formulated by Han Yu in "Tracing the Way" and he did so by defining four terms – *ren*, *yi*, *dao*, *de* – at its very beginning. When working out its countermeasure, Wang Anshi did it in a similar

¹ Sima Guang noted these were Wang Anshi's two favorite books ("Yu Wang Jiefu shu," in *CJJ*, 60.723).

² Lu Guolong, *Song ru weiyuan*, chapter 2.

³ See, for example, Yang Zhijiu, "Wang Anshi yu Mengzi," 143; Hsia Chang-pwu, *Li Gou yu Wang Anshi yanjiu*, 175–212; Jin Shengyang, "Wang Anshi *Yijie* yu Mengzi de guanxi chuyi."

⁴ Li Huarui, "Northern Song Reformist Thought and Its Sources." See also his "Lun Bei Song houqi liushi nian de gaige" and "Songdai jianxing Mengzi de renzheng sixiang."

⁵ My main disagreement with Lu, noted below, is where he thinks Wang was seeking to restrict imperial power.

way, by defining five terms, four of which taken from Han Yu, at the opening of an essay called “After Nine Changes Can Reward and Punishment Be Spoken of” 九變而賞罰可言.⁶

Although not as famous as Han Yu’s “Tracing the Way,” the central importance of “Nine Changes” in Wang Anshi’s school of learning can be seen from the frequency with which it appeared across their extant works:⁷ among those we know, in a letter written to Han Qiuren 韓求仁 (?-?) around 1064, Wang Anshi explicated parts of it⁸ – this suggests it was composed before this time but not too far ahead to make it lose freshness, fitting the late 1050s dating, as I argue in the Appendix, of the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes to which it belongs; in his commentary on the “Great Plan,” another part was found;⁹ in 1070, Wang’s student Lu Dian 陸佃 (1042-1102) used the gist of this piece to his advantage in the first palace exam held after the reform was officially launched;¹⁰ and Wang Pang 王雱 (1044-1076), Wang Anshi’s son, incorporated it in his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*.¹¹

It began thus:

That on which the myriad things rely for their existence is *tian*; that from which none does not proceed to go there is *dao*; what of the *dao* that is in me is *de*; to love according to *de* is *ren*; to love [in this way] appropriately is *yi*.

萬物待是而後存者，天也；莫不由是而之焉者，道也；道之在我者，德也；以德愛者，仁也；愛而宜者，義也。¹²

Except for *tian* (Heaven), all were what Han Yu had defined. Moreover, starting from *dao*, each subsequent term was defined in terms of the preceding one, a chain that bound the latter four

⁶ Wang Anshi, “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan,” in *LCJ*, 67.710. Perhaps reflecting its central position in volumes 63-70, this piece also threads together many pieces therein.

⁷ Taking the “Nine Changes” as a constitutional document in Wang’s political philosophy building, Lu Guolong uses his reading of this essay to organize his discussion of the philosophies of Wang Anshi, Wang Pang and Lu Dian (*Song ru weiyuan*, 22-23, 108).

⁸ Wang Anshi, “Da Han Qiuren shu,” in *LCJ*, 72.763. Discussed below. Liu Chengguo (*Wang Anshi nianpu changbian*, 680) and Li Desheng (*Wang Anshi shiwen xinian*, 164) both date the letter to 1064. Wang’s mourning period fell between 1063 to 1065.

⁹ Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.686: “道者，萬物莫不由之者也。”

¹⁰ Discussed below. On the institution of the palace examination, see Bol, “Emperors Can Claim Antiquity Too,” 180-83.

¹¹ Wang Pang, *Nanhuazhenjing xinzhuan*, 16.196. See also the 1097 palace exam question (Liu Lin et al. eds., *SHY, xuanju* 7, 5404.30). On the continuity between Huizong era governance and Wang Anshi’s theory, see chapter 3.

¹² Wang Anshi, “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan,” in *LCJ*, 67.710.

together while leaving out *tian* alone. This structural feature, plus the seemingly similar definitions of *dao*, suggests Wang Anshi was engaging with Han Yu head-on. As for what kind of engagement this was, Yu Yingshi thinks Wang was trying to attain a higher degree of accuracy on the basis of Han's definitions.¹³ Reading it closely against the context established in chapter 1, we shall come to see Wang was, in line with the idea of *daode* originating from Laozi, advancing an anti-humanist centralized approach to governance in direct opposition to Han Yu.

Looking at the overall structure of “Nine Changes,” whereas at the beginning of “Tracing the Way” Han Yu first established two broadly sharable humanist virtues and then left what is moral for each individual to decide on their own, telling them there isn't a predefined way one must follow and that it is not necessary to rely on any authority other than oneself, Wang began with two centralist concepts that precluded individual independence and moral autonomy – all must rely on a single source for existence and all must follow a single path. With this reiteration, echoed by repeated invocation of Laozi's *daode* toward the end of this essay, Wang brought to the fore the overarching importance of a unitary authority.

Wang's main concern in what came in between was advancing his anti-humanist concepts using Han's terms. This was no ordinary task given the mainstream at the time, nor was it easy to achieve. Wang took great care both to manage this feat and to avoid making it too explicit. Other than creating a façade of similarity with Han Yu's definitions by borrowing some of his words, he mainly proceeded from two directions: sequence and content.

First, Wang reversed the sequence of Han Yu's pairs of terms. This reversal changed everything.¹⁴ As we have seen, in formulating his humanist approach to governance, the crucial thing Han Yu did was putting *renyi* before *daode* and making the latter empty positions whose meanings had to be filled with humanist love. Now, by putting Laozi's *daode* before *renyi* and having the latter's meanings depend on the former, Wang quietly declared his war against Han's humanism.

Second, in line with this reversal, not only was the core concept changed from *ren* to *dao*, but what they meant also became fundamentally different. As Lu Guolong noted, although the

¹³ While noting similarities in Wang's definition of *dao* and that of Han Yu's, Yu's focus is on Wang's concept of *de* (*Zhu Xi de lishi shiji*, 61-62).

¹⁴ On the great importance Wang attaches to sequence in general, see Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*,” 212–13. See also his stress of this point later in the essay with Zhuangzi's words: “What is there to gain from the Way were it not spoken of according to the sequence?” 語道而非其序，安取道 (Wang Anshi, “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan,” in *LCJ*, 67.711).

words Wang used to define *dao* looked similar to those employed by Han Yu – he only added two characters “*mobu*” 莫不 (none not) in the front –,¹⁵ because Han defined his *dao* after *ren* and *yi*, “proceeding from this to go there” means acting according to the principle of broadly loving humans and doing so appropriately.¹⁶ That is, constituted by the virtues *ren* and *yi*, Han’s *dao* is the humanist way in the Confucian tradition. This is not the case with Wang’s *dao*. Put at the beginning of a chain of four interconnected terms, it does not have any concrete content, but stands on its own as an abstract concept – that which all must follow. If we go with Sima Qian’s characterization cited in the previous chapter – “the *dao* Laozi valued contained nothing” –, Wang’s *dao* is Laozi’s way that is incompatible with *renyi*,¹⁷ i.e., anti-humanist.

Because all the subsequent three concepts are defined in terms of this *dao*, Wang’s *de* did not mean “virtue” in the Confucian sense, nor was his *ren* humanist love. Different from Han Yu, who gave his core concept *ren* a substantive content – to love broadly, Wang Anshi’s *ren* did not have an independent meaning of its own but had to be filled with that of his *de*, whose meaning was further dependent on that of his *dao*, the only way that all must follow. Defined in this manner, *ren* now meant to love in accordance with one’s grasp of the one and only right way. The focus here was not love, but a directive on the need to follow this way, as immediately after defining his *yi* on the basis of this *ren*, Wang wrote: “[In conducting] *ren*, there is what comes before and what comes after; [in conducting] *yi*, there is what is above and what is below. This is called distinction. What comes before does not make free with [what belongs to] what comes after; what is below does not infringe upon what is above.¹⁸ This is called maintaining [the distinction].” 仁有先後，義有上下，謂之分。先不擅後，下不侵上，謂之守。¹⁹ Furthermore, several lines thereafter, quoting a phrase from the *Book of Documents*, he glossed *renyi* as “reverence and deference” 允恭克讓.²⁰ All these were to make *ren* not mean broad love of humanity.²¹

¹⁵ By adding these two characters, however, Wang made Han’s open-ended approach to morality closed. On Huizong’s adoption of this definition of *dao* in his commentary on *Daode jing*, see Yin Zhihua, *Bei Song Laozi zhu yanjiu*, 48–49.

¹⁶ Lu Guolong, *Song ru weiyan*, 109.

¹⁷ Recall Laozi’s “大道廢，有仁義” in chapter 1.

¹⁸ Of the two directives here, Wang’s focus was on the latter.

¹⁹ Wang Anshi, “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan,” in *LCJ*, 67.710.

²⁰ *Ibid.* This is closer to Wang’s *li*. For more on this, see below.

²¹ In his commentary on the “Great Plan,” at the only place where *renyi* was mentioned, Wang Anshi interpreted *ren* as “不虐營獨” and *yi* “不畏高明” (*LCJ*, 65.690). This again was not Han Yu’s *renyi* as broad love and doing so appropriately, but a directive against conducting specific actions. For more on Wang’s new concept of *ren* advanced in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, see below.

Wang's anti-humanism is most carefully packed in the conceptual content of his *tian*. When discussing this text, Douglas Skonicki thinks Wang's *tian* refers to the cosmos and was where Wang grounded his political order.²² This is the rhetorical effect Wang wanted to achieve, like with these sentences in the middle of the essay:

Among those who spoke of where *daode* originated in antiquity, none did not attribute it to *tian*. Yao was a great one among the sages. Confucius commended him thus: "*Tian* is great and Yao modeled upon it." This is called knowing *tian*.

古之言道德所自出而不屬之天者，未之有也。堯者，聖人之盛也，孔子稱之曰：“惟天惟大，惟堯則之。”此之謂明天。²³

The way Wang worded it made it look like being in line with the earlier imperial worldview,²⁴ such as that expressed in Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (192-104 BCE) statement that "the great source of *dao* came from *tian*" 道之太原出於天.²⁵ However, Wang's use of two "*shi*" (this) in the opening definitions of *tian* and *dao*, each with a different referent, tells us he saw this *tian*, alone left out of the interconnected chain of four terms, as *parallel to* rather than integrally connected with his *dao*.²⁶ As for what this *tian* actually referred to, a conversation between Wang and Shenzong recorded in his diary made it clear.

In 1072, when discussing issues related to carrying out the village militia (*baojia* 保甲) policy, Wang Anshi wanted to replace the convention of having the government pay monetary reward to local security helpers with unpaid militia, who furthermore were to pay for weapons and relevant expenses on their own. Shenzong was concerned with the resentment this major change would cause among the people, saying: "When the people are used to it, they are at ease with it, like it is natural. [If imposing upon them something] they are not used to, they would necessarily resent. If the riverbanks broke, destroying the people's properties, the people would not resent the broken riverbanks. But if the destruction was caused by someone, then they would resent him." 民

²² Skonicki, "Cosmos, State and Society," 520.

²³ Wang Anshi, "Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan," in *LCJ*, 67.711.

²⁴ On this worldview, see Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 58-60.

²⁵ Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 56.2518-19.

²⁶ Wang Anshi, "'Hongfan' zhuan," in *LCJ*, 65.695.

習慣則安之如自然，不習慣則不能無怨。如河決壞民產，民不怨決河，若人壞之則怨矣。

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Earlier in this conversation Wang had pointed out that Shenzong was so concerned about the populace that in making laws, he followed the principle of making it convenient to the people in everything.²⁸ Now, he picked up this example to teach the emperor how to govern:

Your Majesty precisely should do what Heaven²⁹ does. ... What is called “what Heaven does” is like riverbank bursts. “The great power of Heaven and Earth is called ‘rearing.’”³⁰ However, the reason why Heaven is not concerned when riverbanks burst and destruct the people’s properties is because it simply follows the principle ruthlessly. Therefore, bitter coldness and summer rains are what people resent, but Heaven does not make alterations because of this, thinking the year’s harvest cannot be accomplished without bitter coldness and summer rains. Confucius said, “Heaven is great and Yao modeled upon it.” Yao had Gun repair watercourses and Gun put the five elements in disorder for nine years. With Your Majesty’s heart that is concerned about the populace, it may well be that [Yao] should have been unable to eat or sleep well. And yet Yao was able to wait for so long. This was because he could do what Heaven does: following the principle ruthlessly.

陛下正當為天之所為。...所謂天之所為者，如河決是也。“天地之大德曰生，”然河決以壞民產而天不恤者，任理而無情故也。故祈寒暑雨，人以為怨，而天不為之變，以為非祈寒暑雨不能成歲功故也。孔子曰：“惟天為大，惟堯則之。”³¹堯使鯀治水，鯀汨陳其五行³²九載。以陛下憂卹百姓之心，宜其寢食不甘，而堯能待如此之久，此乃能為天之所為，任理而無情故也。³³

This was Wang Anshi explicating to the emperor the theory he formulated in “Nine Changes” in a face-to-face meeting, during which he revealed the referent of *tian* that he took care not to make apparent in his public writings.

²⁷ Li Tao, *XCB*, 236.5742.

²⁸ Li Tao, *XCB*, 236.5741.

²⁹ I chose this more literal rendering when translating it.

³⁰ From the “Appended Words” chapter of the *Classic of Change*. Translation modified from Lynn trans., *The Classic of Changes*, 77.

³¹ *Mencius*, 3A.4.

³² From the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Book of Documents*.

³³ Li Tao, *XCB*, 236.5742. Li’s source here was Wang’s diary.

Even if we can still translate this *tian* as the cosmos, Wang was not using it to refer to the unknown Nature that humans in earlier imperial times were awed by and looked up to as the model in building their order,³⁴ but how it behaves towards the populace *as interpreted by himself*:³⁵ its great power being bringing up the people, even though some local disasters cause damage to the affected residents, *tian* would not be concerned but simply does what it should do unrelentingly. In order to achieve larger overall accomplishments, it does not change its course of action simply because what it has to do inflicts inconveniences upon the people. This was how Yao governed, Wang claimed by bending the words Mencius put into Confucius' mouth³⁶ towards his purpose: Yao had Gun repair watercourses, which Gun did by throwing into disorder the arrangement of the five elements. This must have caused great trouble to the populace, and yet Yao was resolute enough to have let Gun do it for as long as nine years. Yao was an example, Wang told Shenzong, of a ruler who was capable of behaving like *tian*: just follow the principle of doing what is necessary for attaining the overall goal, not being concerned about how the people might feel.

Because this is what Wang thought rulers should learn from *tian*, when later in “Nine Changes” he criticized those who did not learn from *tian* but simply did what they did according to their own sense of right and wrong,³⁷ we should take him as faulting them for caring about the people's feelings in policy-making,³⁸ like his criticism of Shenzong above, or his discontent with Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022-1063) below. As suggested by the temple title conferred upon him posthumously based on the perceived feature of his reign, Renzong – the humane ancestor – governed with humanity. In the late 1050s and early 1060s, however, Wang Anshi repeatedly pointed out to the emperor himself that with his intention to be humane to the people and to love things (*ren min ai wu* 仁民愛物),³⁹ “households ought to have adequate supplies, people live in contentment, and great order be brought about in the world. However, the result did not reach this”

³⁴ As Deng Guangming noted (*Bei Song zhengzhi gaigejia*, 92-97).

³⁵ Just like how he interpreted the sage's intention in his commentary on the *Zhouli* as studied by Bol (“Wang Anshi and the *Zhouli*”) and Song (*Traces of Grand Peace*). The cosmos or Nature can of course be interpreted as ruthless, but can be interpreted as agreeable as well.

³⁶ For other such instances where words not spoken of by Confucius in the *Analects* were cited in Mencius, see Mencius, 2B.4 and 6A.6. For a discussion, see Fu Sinian, *Xing ming gu xun bianzheng*, 632.

³⁷ Wang Anshi, “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan,” in *LCJ*, 67.711.

³⁸ Here lies my major difference from Lu Guolong, who thinks Wang meant this to refer to the ruler's arbitrary will (*Song ru weiyan*, 108-10), hence his argument that Wang was concerned with restraining imperial power. Both Liang Tao (“Wang Anshi de xin waiwang zhengzhi zhaxue,” 261-64) and Lu Hao (“Zhi xin yu zhi dao,” 38) adopted Lu's view.

³⁹ In Wang's terminology, *wu* 物 also referred to people or things in the spiritual sphere. On the latter use, see his commentary on the “Great Plan” (*LCJ*, 65.686).

宜其家給人足，天下大治，而效不至於此。⁴⁰ Being humane to the people and caring about them in governance did not help Renzong accomplish big.⁴¹

Wang's attitude towards the humanist way of governance was fully revealed in an essay titled "King and Hegemon" in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes:

The greatness of the king is like Heaven-and-Earth. Heaven-and-Earth does not trouble the myriad things and the myriad things all get their natures. Even though the myriad things get their natures, they do not know it was the accomplishment of Heaven-and-Earth. The king does not trouble the world, and all under Heaven get ordered. Although they get ordered, none knows this was thanks to the power of the king. The way of the hegemon is not so. Like those kindhearted persons in the world, when [the people] are cold, he gives them clothes; when [the people] are hungry, he gives them food. Although the people know my kindheartedness,⁴² my kindness nonetheless cannot extend far.

王者之大，若天地然，天地無所勞於萬物，而萬物各得其性，萬物雖得其性，而莫知其為天地之功也。王者無所勞於天下，而天下各得其治，雖得其治，然而莫知其為王者之德也。霸者之道則不然，若世之惠人耳，寒而與之衣，飢而與之食，民雖知吾之惠，而吾之惠亦不能及夫廣也。⁴³

Giving people clothes when they are cold and food when they are hungry was what Han Yu meant by governing with *ren* in "Tracing the Way" – Wang almost quoted Han verbatim.⁴⁴ By calling those governing according to this principle "hegemon," Wang was, like Laozi, slighting this humanist approach, as well as implying its illegitimacy. What Wang thinks is true *ren* is governing in an impersonal way,⁴⁵ to have all the myriad things get their proper natures and to put

⁴⁰ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.410. The same idea was also expressed by him in "Ni shangdian zhazi," in *LCJ*, 41.438.

⁴¹ For Wang's pursuit of the perfect order, see Bol, "This Culture of Ours," chapter 7; and "Government, Society, and State."

⁴² It was not uncommon for Wang Anshi to write in the first person. For another example, see id., "'Hongfan' zhuan," in *LCJ*, 65.693: "吾所建者道." We shall encounter more below.

⁴³ Wang Anshi, "Wang ba," in *LCJ*, 69.732.

⁴⁴ Han Yu, "Yuan dao," in *HCLJ*, vol. 1, 19.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Drechsler thinks "impersonal" should be the norm in modern public management and that Wang's myriad-word letter to Renzong was where this ideal originated. See his string of publications from 2013, which has given rise to a debate in that field ("Wang Anshi and the Origins of Modern Public Management in Song Dynasty China"; "Debate: Towards Understanding Wang Anshi and Confucian Public Management"; "Debate: Once Again Wang Anshi and Confucian Public Management"; and Xuan Zhao and id., "Wang Anshi's Economic Reforms: Proto-Keynesian Economic Policy in Song Dynasty China"). Adopting a Gadamerian "fusion of horizon" approach and

everything in order.⁴⁶ Compared with those who govern with Han's *ren*, the kindness of Wang's kings is not immediately apparent, but the benefit it brings about extends to everything in the world. By calling such rulers "king," Wang was justifying their pursuing a grand goal at the cost of meeting human needs in the here and now.⁴⁷ That is, he thinks attaining such lofty goals necessitates inhumane means,⁴⁸ as he wrote in his commentary on *Laozi*: "Not being *ren* (humanist *ren*) is the utmost *ren* (Wang's *ren*)" 不仁乃仁之至.⁴⁹

It was this new concept of *ren* that Wang was talking about in "Nine Changes,"⁵⁰ as did he across the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, like "my *ren* is sufficient to reach Heaven above, saturate grasses and trees below, and overflow to the barbarians to the side" 吾之仁，足以上格乎天、下浹乎草木、旁溢乎四夷，⁵¹ "*ren* helps the myriad things without being exhausted" 仁濟萬物而不窮，⁵² "King Wu advocated the great *yi* (rightness) in the world, ... this is *ren*" 武王倡大義⁵³於天下，... 仁也⁵⁴ and "*ren* [the term] is the same as that [used by] the ancients but the love is different" 仁與古人同而愛不同。⁵⁵ Even Wang's *ai* was also a new concept, as he wrote, again in his commentary on *Laozi*: "Those who love (Wang's *ai*) the people love them (Wang's *ai*) by not loving (humanist *ai*) them. Only in this way can they grow." 愛民者，以不愛愛之，乃長。⁵⁶ This is a new type of "love" that does not refer to interpersonal care among humans.⁵⁷ Wang did

taking Wang Anshi as representing the Confucian tradition, Drechsler gives Wang a central place in his proposal for public administration to go beyond Eurocentrism ("Paradigms of Non-Western Public Administration and Governance"; "Beyond the Western Paradigm: Confucian Public Administration"; and "Max Weber and the Mandate of Heaven").

⁴⁶ Wang's *ren* was similar to Li Gou's (*Li Gou ji*, 12), which Zheng Jianzhong thinks was completely "utilitarian" ("Bei Song ren xue sixiang yanjiu," 87). For a similar view, see Song, *Traces of Grand Peace*, 166.

⁴⁷ In other words, Wang's governance was "programmatic policy making" rather than responding to circumstances, as Bol noted in "Wang Anshi and the *Zhouli*" (251).

⁴⁸ As shown in Wang Zengyu, "Wang Anshi Bianfa jianlun"; Meng Wentong, "Bei Song bianfa lun gao"; and Smith, "Shen-Tsung's Reign."

⁴⁹ Rong Zhaozu, *Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben*, 9-10. For relevant discussions, see Luo Chuanqi and Wu Yunsheng, *Wang Anshi jiaoyu sixiang yanjiu*, 125 and Liang Tao, "Wang Anshi de xin waiwang zhengzhi zhaxue," 275.

⁵⁰ This is the kind of *ren* governance (*renzheng*) spelled out in Li Huarui, "Northern Song Reformist Thought and Its Sources."

⁵¹ Wang Anshi, "Ren zhi," in *LCJ*, 67.717.

⁵² Wang Anshi, "Daren lun," in *LCJ*, 66.707.

⁵³ This rightness seems closer to "萬世永賴時乃功" in "Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan" (*LCJ*, 68.710).

⁵⁴ Wang Anshi, "Boyi," in *LCJ*, 63.675.

⁵⁵ Wang Anshi, "Liyue lun," in *LCJ*, 66.705.

⁵⁶ Rong Zhaozu, *Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben*, 18.

⁵⁷ Like the *ai* in "Fengsu" (*LCJ*, 69.737): "天之所愛育者民也，民之所系仰者君也。聖人上承天之意，下為民之主，其要在安利之，而安利之要不在於它，在乎正風俗。" That is, to love and nurture the people means to correct their behavioral pattern rather than meeting their needs.

keep using *ren* and *ai* in the conventional sense, like in “*ren min ai wu*” above,⁵⁸ but what makes the difference is the new sense he invented and made them take on.

Read in this light, given that it was Han Yu who most forcefully drove out Laozi’s *daode* in his advocacy of the humanist way of governance that became the mainstream around the time Wang was completing *Miscellaneous Theories*, when toward the end of “Nine Changes” Wang lamented the disuse of *daode* in governance, we should take him as putting the blame on Han Yu, in direct opposition to whose “Tracing the Way” this essay was written. Behind the carefully crafted linguistic shield, Wang was saying: governing in the humanist way theorized by Han Yu was how the world got into great chaos and made those intent on accomplishing big unable to attain their goal.⁵⁹

If in “Nine Changes” Wang only stressed the importance of having a uniform source of authority, in the two pieces where parts of his definitions of the five terms appear, he pointed out this source should be the monarch. In the letter replying to Han Qiuren, who probably had difficulty understanding Wang’s new concepts, Wang explicated his definitions of *dao* and *de* as follows:

Speaking of the totality of the *dao*, then there is no place where it does not exist and nothing that it does not do. Scholars cannot possess it, but must necessarily have it in their hearts. What of the *dao* that is in me is *de*. *De* can be possessed.

語道之全，則無不在也，無不為也，學者所不能據也，而不可以不心存焉。道之在我者為德，德可據也。⁶⁰

The *dao* that all must follow is not for scholars to hold in hand, but only for them to keep in mind. This is because, he wrote in the other piece – his commentary on the “Great Plan” –,⁶¹ “what I build is the *dao*; what the populace know is just the *de*” 吾所建者道，而民所知者德而已矣。⁶²

⁵⁸ Although this is outside the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, as is the *ren* in the “Yao Wangzhiguo wo lu” poem: “知子有仁心，不忍鉤我魚” (*LCJ*, 1.87). A thorough research is yet to be done on all uses of *ren* in Wang’s oeuvre.

⁵⁹ Recall what he said on his being a minority in the Jiayou court in chapter 1.

⁶⁰ Wang Anshi, “Da Han Qiuren shu,” in *LCJ*, 72.763. Wang’s gloss of *ren* in this letter by referring to Confucius’ leaving Lu again has nothing to do with broad love of humanity. Moreover, he also openly, albeit subtly, affirms that Laozi’s attack on *renyi* was appropriate.

⁶¹ Wang’s definition of *dao* in “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan” appears, in a paraphrased form, early in this commentary (*LCJ*, 65.686).

⁶² Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.693. That at a critical moment early in the reform, when Shenzong seemed to be wavering in the face of strong objections, Wang presented this to the emperor (Li Tao, *XCB*, 216.5257) suggests this is in the interest of the ruler.

The *dao* that is omnipresent and does everything is to be built by the monarch from the perspective of the totality. This should be kept from the populace – scholars included – who shall only know the *de*.⁶³ The respective roles of the monarch and the populace were most clearly designated in his comments on the *huangji* section of the “Great Plan”:

Huang, the monarch; *ji*, the center. [This] says that when the monarch establishes the center, then the myriad things all fall into their place. ... The son of Heaven makes the people’s parents, so as to reign over all under Heaven. [The people] should obey and go along with him, so as to imitate what he does and not go against him.

皇，君也；極，中也。言君建其有中，則萬物得其所。...天子作民父母以為天下王，當順而比之，以效其所為，而不可逆。⁶⁴

And, this monarch is not to be restrained by Nature or the cosmos:

The ruler of course should assist Heaven-and-Earth to manage the myriad things. When Heaven-and-Earth and the myriad things did not get their normalcy, then it surely is appropriate for him to be fearful and cultivate and reflect on himself. Now, some think that Heaven had this change must have been brought about by my having this fault, or think disasters and unusual phenomena were originally Heaven’s affairs, having nothing to do with me, and that I know working on human affairs and that is all. Should one act according to the former theory, one is unperceptive and fearful; should one act according to the latter theory, one is single-minded and negligent. Those who are not unperceptive, fearful, single-minded or negligent would take changes in Heaven as [a reason to] fear for oneself, without saying that Heaven had this change must be due to my having done this thing. They only use the right principle under Heaven to check if they have made any mistake and that is all.

人君固輔相天地以理萬物者也。天地萬物不得其常，則恐懼修省，固亦宜也。今或以為天有是變，必由我有是罪以致之；或以災異自天事耳，何豫於我，我知修人事而已。蓋由前之說，則蔽而憚；由後之說，則固而怠。不蔽不憚，不固不怠者，亦以天變為己懼，不曰天之有某變必以我為某事而至也，亦以天下之正理考吾之失而已矣。⁶⁵

⁶³ Which is embodied in the various rites (“德以禮為體”) (Wang Anshi, “*Yi xiang lun jie*,” in *LCJ*, 65.698).

⁶⁴ Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.689, 65.691.

⁶⁵ Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.695.

Wang was not maintaining a connection between the cosmos and human affairs or using natural abnormalities to restrain imperial power. Rather, while paying a lip service to the earlier imperial model, he was mainly making the point that the monarch should stick to his course of action without being afraid of Heaven.⁶⁶

In her study of five Northern Song thinkers' commentaries on the "Great Plan," Michael Nylan finds Wang Anshi "alone sought to preserve the central notion, inherent in both the original and Han 'Plans,' that power and authority must be unified in the person of the ruler if the empire is to enjoy peace and prosperity."⁶⁷ This is consistent with Wang's relationship with the mid-eleventh century mainstream discussed in the previous chapter. Whereas Han Yu in "Tracing the Way" sought to make the central authority irrelevant, Wang made the monarch – the one who wields Laozi's *daode* to operate all under Heaven – the source of social values once again; whereas Han Yu made moral autonomy an imperative to the literati, Wang asks all to obediently follow the ruler and not go against his will. In his counteraction to the new way of governance that emerged in the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion, not only did Wang bring back the old way of centralized imperial rule, but he also freed the monarch from being constrained by the natural order, encouraging him to do whatever it takes to accomplish big.⁶⁸

After he began spearheading the reform, this was what Wang did in practice. On the one hand, he kept teaching the monarch to centralize moral authority to himself.⁶⁹ Here are two of the fourteen instances recorded in *Long Draft* alone:

Your Majesty must necessarily want likes and dislikes and right and wrong derive from yourself.
陛下必欲好惡是非出己。⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See, for example, how Su Shi took Wang to mean here: “君於天下無所畏，惟天以儆之，今乃曰天災不可以象類求，我自視無過則已矣。為國之害，莫大於此。” (*Dongpo Shu zhuan*, 8.278-79). In his paraphrase, Su simply disregarded the camouflage Wang created with his rhetoric.

⁶⁷ Nylan, *The Shifting Center*, 97.

⁶⁸ Ling Zhang notes Wang's government activism extended to controlling and regulating the physical environment (*The River, the Plain, and the State*, 150). For Wang's imposing the human order he created upon the natural order, see the last section of this chapter.

⁶⁹ Li Tao, *XCB*, 223.5419, 223.5427, 225.5474, 230.5590, 232.5632, 233.5658, 234.5675, 236.5739, 239.5809, 239.5813, 240.5837, 242.5894, 246.5996, and 250.6089.

⁷⁰ Li Tao, *XCB*, 239.5813.

If Your Majesty makes likes and dislikes on your own, even if they are excessive, you can still have others fear you; if Your Majesty let others make likes and dislikes, then I fear your [authority to] punish or reward will be stolen by others.

陛下若自作好惡，雖有過當，尚令人畏；陛下若令他人作好惡，即恐威福為人所竊。⁷¹

The fact that Wang Anshi needed to reiterate this to Shenzong over and over again tells us the young emperor was new to the idea that the monarch should monopolize moral authority – despite his early interest in Han Fei, Shenzong after all grew up during the Jiayou and Zhiping periods, when “one person has one sense of what is right and ten persons ten.”

On the other hand, the anti-humanist centralized approach to governance Wang formulated in “Nine Changes” also became the new guideline for literati learning, as can be seen from the 1070 palace examination. Held just a year after the reform was launched, the policy question asked prospective officials how the sage kings in antiquity were able to put everything in order.⁷² A goal inherent in Wang Anshi’s concept of *ren* but not always pursued in the Song,⁷³ it is said most examinees were shocked on reading it.⁷⁴ But Lu Dian, who had been learning with Wang since at least 1066,⁷⁵ answered nice and easy with a successful essay, in which he wrote, squarely against Han Yu but fully in line with Wang Anshi:

After *daode* has been made clear, follow it then with *renyi*. ... This is that by which the myriad things get their order.

道德已明，然後次之以仁義。...此萬事之所以得其序也。⁷⁶

II. Replacing the Humanist Value System

⁷¹ Li Tao, *XCB*, 233.5658.

⁷² Liu Lin et al. eds., *SHY, xuanju* 7, 5398.19.

⁷³ See, for example, Su Shi’s questioning of the premise of this question (“Ni jishi dui yushi ce,” in *Su Shi wenji*, 9.302).

⁷⁴ Lu Dian, “Yushi ce,” in Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin eds., *Quan Song wen*, 101.111; Tuo Tuo et al., *Song shi*, 343.10918.

⁷⁵ Lu Dian, “Shen jun mubiao,” in *ibid.*, 101.267. Written in 1075/8.

⁷⁶ Lu Dian, “Yushi ce,” in *ibid.*, 101.109. Lu Guolong points out that “Jiu bian er shangfa ke yan” was one of Lu’s intellectual sources in this essay (*Song ru weiyan*, 147).

Not only did Wang Anshi reverse Han Yu's humanist theory of decentralized governance, but he also worked out an alternative value system to replace Han's that was centered on love of humanity. In an essay titled "Tracing [Humane] Nature" 原性, Han Yu wrote:

Human nature is what arises when one is born. ... That by which human nature is constituted are five [virtues]: *ren* (humanity), *li* (propriety), *xin* (trustworthiness), *yi* (appropriateness), and *zhi* (wisdom).

性也者，與生俱生也。...其所以為性者五：曰仁、曰禮、曰信、曰義、曰智。⁷⁷

Han claims that human nature is comprised of the five constant virtues and they are generated in humans on birth. Whether this was his belief or not,⁷⁸ it is clear he wanted people to believe that such humanist virtues are undetachable from their being. Eye to eye, Wang wrote an essay titled the same, where he made his target explicit:

The Great Ultimate is that from which the Five Elements were born, but the Five Elements are not the Great Ultimate. Human nature is the Great Ultimate of the five constant [virtues], but the five constant [virtues] cannot be called human nature. This is why I differ from Master Han.

夫太極者，五行之所由生，而五行非太極也。性者，五常之太極也，而五常不可以謂之性。此吾所以異於韓子。⁷⁹

By comparing the relationship between human nature and the five constant virtues to that between the Supreme Extreme and the five specific elements deriving from it, Wang Anshi downgraded the five constant virtues from being identical to human nature to merely its derivatives. The

⁷⁷ Han Yu, "Yuan xing," in *HCLJ*, vol. 1, 26.

⁷⁸ DeBlasi, for instance, reads this essay as Han Yu's attempt to explain "why men are not moral" (*Reform in the Balance*, 132).

⁷⁹ Wang Anshi, "Yuan xing," in *LCJ*, 68.726. It is true that in an essay titled "Xing lun" (*LCJ*, 1064-65), Wang expressed a different view, saying "性者，五常之謂也。" Regarding the date of composition of the latter essay, Hsia Chang-pwu thinks it was written later than "Yuan xing" (*Li Gou yu Wang Anshi yanjiu*, 209n82). I share the view of scholars like Chen Zhi'e (*Bei Song wenhua shi shulun*, 240), Liu Chengguo (*Jinggong Xinxue yanjiu*, 136), and Xu Hu ("Wang Anshi Zhi renxing lun jiqi kaizhan," 104) that this was written earlier. My grounds are simple: in "Xing lun," Wang Anshi was still following Han Yu by saying human nature is constituted by the five humanist virtues and following Mencius by saying human nature is good, whereas the statecraft he built by the late 1050s and began putting into practice from the late 1060s was centered on anti-humanism. This shows this essay was written before Wang's learning was completed and was considered not representing the mature Wang's thought, hence its not being included in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, nor even in the main body of *LCJ*.

implication is they can then be detached from the source that gave rise to them. With this, Wang had opened up the path for removing the value system centering on humanity.⁸⁰

In its place, Wang prepared a dual-track new value system. The replacement had quietly taken place in the myriad-word letter to Renzong, where after lamenting the lack of talents in the Jiayou world, he pointed out the way to form them:

The situation among humans is that what they wish to obtain are good conduct, beautiful reputation, honorable ranks, and fat profit. These the Former Kings were able to wield to reign over the literati under Heaven. To those literati under Heaven who were able to abide by them to put the world in order, they gave all they wished to obtain.

人之情所願得者，善行美名尊爵厚利也，而先王能操之以臨天下之士。天下之士有能遵之以治者，則悉以其所願得者以與之。⁸¹

By good conduct, Wang did not mean *renyi*, which was not mentioned even once in this long letter,⁸² but *liyi* 禮義⁸³ and *lianchi* 廉恥 (non-corruption and shame), the latter was invoked seven times.⁸⁴

Some scholars think *lianchi* is no different from *renyi*.⁸⁵ Han Yu's fellow ancient prose proponent Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819), however, made a clear distinction:

Non-corruption and shame are the minutiae of rightness (*yi*) that ought not to be on a par with rightness as the strings [that uphold a state]. What the sages used to establish the world is called

⁸⁰ For an alternative reading, see Zheng Jianzhong, "Bei Song ren xue sixiang yanjiu," 92–93. Zheng sees Wang as having made important contributions to the Confucian tradition.

⁸¹ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.421. The formulation is refined, partly by fixing a grammatical issue in the long letter, in "Ni shangdian zhazi" (*LCJ* 41.439): "夫成人之才甚不難。人所願得者尊爵厚祿，而所榮者善行，所恥者惡名也。今操利勢以臨天下之士，勸之以其所榮，而予之以其所願，則孰肯背而不為者？" This is strikingly similar to the method for getting the populace to go all out to work for the ruler that Shang Yang put forward (Pines trans., *Book of Lord Shang*, 148-49).

⁸² The five times when "*ren*" alone was mentioned were for questioning its efficacy.

⁸³ Given Wang's unique use of especially *li*, I shall present my translation after the extensive discussions below.

⁸⁴ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.410-23. It seems Wang was building a new ranking system, where one's qualification for promotion is based on *lianchi* and the reward is *liyi*. Phrases like "獎之以禮義" (*ibid.*, 419) would not make grammatical sense unless we assume Wang was using his special term to refer to ranks in a new hierarchical honor system. For more on their meanings, see below.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Chen Zhi'e, *Bei Song wenhua shi shulun*, 34. As such, Chen takes Wang's advocating *li-yi-lian-chi* as part of "the revival of traditional Confucian culture" (*ibid.*, 19). The very fact that Wang proposed them as that towards which the current social custom should be changed suggests he was using them to break up with the tradition.

renyi. *Ren* focuses on kindness whereas *yi* judgment. With kindness making [the ruler] close [to the people] and judgment [his treatment of them] appropriate, the way to govern is complete. Carrying it out is *dao*, obtaining it is *de*, fulfilling it is *li* and being sincere about it is *xin*. All are named differently according to where it goes. Now, what Mr. Guan took as strings [i.e., *li-yi-lian-chi*]⁸⁶ are perhaps not what the sages established?

廉與恥，義之小節也，不得與義抗而為維。聖人之所以立天下，曰仁義。仁主恩，義主斷。恩者親之，斷者宜之，而理道畢矣。蹈之斯為道，得之斯為德，履之斯為禮，誠之斯為信，皆由其所之而異名。今管氏所以為維者，殆非聖人之所立乎？⁸⁷

After meeting Shenzong, Wang Anshi presented this replacement value system to the emperor, giving it fuller explication in their face-to-face conversations, some of which were recorded in his diary. On the one hand, Wang advised Shenzong to generously reward those obeying his orders with official ranks and high salaries: “Your Majesty should not be tired of rewarding meritorious services. It is rather difficult for the subjects to obey orders, while it is rather easy for the ruler to distribute ranks and salaries. If even Your Majesty is tired of distributing ranks and salaries, how can the subjects not be tired of obeying orders?” 陛下賞功不當倦。人臣用命甚難，人君出爵祿甚易。陛下出爵祿尚倦，則人臣用命豈能無倦？⁸⁸ On the other hand, this cannot work alone, as Wang told Shenzong on another occasion: “The ruler should prioritize forming a custom of non-corruption and shame with *li* and *yi*. Profit is negative and the negative should be hidden; *yi* is positive and the positive should be manifested.” 人主當以禮義成廉恥之俗為急。凡利者，陰也，陰當隱伏；義者陽也，陽當宣著。⁸⁹ Motivating the subjects to follow the ruler with high ranks and salaries could not be made apparent.⁹⁰ This must work together with forming a new social custom of *lianchi* with *liyi*. That is, in the new value system Wang designed, there are two tracks: the openly advocated and the secretly operative. There were well-thought reasons for this, Wang explained to Shenzong:

⁸⁶ On this, see below.

⁸⁷ Liu Zongyuan, *Liu Zongyuan ji jiaozhu*, 3.229.

⁸⁸ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 90. Dated to 1073/3/20. On how this advice was followed by the emperor, see a complaint Peng Ruli 彭汝礪 (1042-1095) voiced in 1076/11 (Li Tao, *XCB*, 279.6818).

⁸⁹ Yang Shi, *Yang Shi ji*, 107. Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 129. Undated. Later Wang would come to agree with Shenzong that before gaining the ability to carry out this agenda, they needed to first generate enough revenue (Li Guoqiang, “Lun Bei Song Xining bianfa de shizhi,” 68). For more on this, see chapter 3.

⁹⁰ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 90, 129. Yang Shi, *Yang Shi ji*, 107.

Managing revenues indeed cannot be delayed. But if to prioritize managing revenues, and regard it as urgent to use those capable [of making money], then people will devise clever means to pursue profit. Were this custom formed, it won't be to the ruler's benefit, nor the world's blessing. [Managing] affairs in the world is like harmonizing [the different flavors] in a soup – one should make the sour and the salty balanced and then it would be harmonious. ... Manifest *li, yi* [duty], non-corruption, and shame, to show the people the loyal and the good are valued and promoted – this I am afraid cannot be postponed.

理財誠不可緩，然以理財為先，以能使為急，則人將機巧趨利。此俗成，則非人主之利，非天下之福。天下事譬如和羹，當令酸鹹適節，然後為和。...明禮義廉恥，以示人崇進忠良，恐不可緩。⁹¹

It is precisely because in the hidden, the ruler spurs his subjects with profit that it is important to build a new social custom, to neutralize the profit-seeking desire the secret incentive shall encourage among the people. To its designer, these two tracks work together to bring about a harmonious moral order in the world.

While as we have seen above, to Wang, there was an inner structure between *liyi* and *lianchi* – the former was the means by which to form a social custom consisting of the latter –, he often spoke of *li-yi-lian-chi* together. Other than in the above passage, below is another example. During a meeting before 1069/2, Shenzong asked Wang how to implement his statecraft. To this Wang responded:

Changing the social customs and establishing methods and measures are what is urgent today. For anyone wanting to beautify social customs, the key lies in increasing the superior men and decreasing the petty men. This is because *li-yi-lian-chi* comes out of the superior men. ... When the way of the petty men wanes, then the custom of *li-yi-lian-chi* is formed and those who have turned into superior men from below average would be many. When the custom of *li-yi-lian-chi* is broken down, then those who have turned into petty men from below average would also be many.

⁹¹ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 129. Undated.

變風俗、立法度，方今所急也。凡欲美風俗，在長君子、消小人，以禮義廉恥由君子出故也。...小人道消，則禮義廉恥之俗成，而中人以下變為君子者多矣。禮義廉恥之俗壞，則中人以下變為小人者亦多矣。⁹²

Why *li-yi-lian-chi* instead of the five constant virtues? The earliest advocacy of this set of values appeared in the *Guanzi*:

When the four strings are put up, then the monarch's orders are carried out. ... When the four strings are not put up, the state then demises. ... What are called the four strings? The first is *li*, the second *yi*, the third *lian*, and the fourth *chi*. *Li* makes [the people] not transgress, *yi* makes them not advance on their own, *lian* makes them not hide their evils, and *chi* makes them not follow the wicked. Therefore, if they do not transgress, then the ruler's position is secure; if they do not advance on their own, then the people will be free of cunningness and deceit; if the people do not hide their evils, then their conducts would naturally be integral; if the people do not follow the wicked, then perverse things will not arise.

四維張，則君令行。...四維不張，國乃滅亡。... 何謂四維？一曰禮、二曰義、三曰廉、四曰恥。禮不踰節，義不自進，廉不蔽惡，恥不從枉。故不踰節，則上位安；不自進，則民無巧軸；不蔽惡，則行自全；不從枉，則邪事不生。⁹³

Li-yi-lian-chi are the four strings supporting *the monarch's* state. Establishing these four strings, all for restraining the populace, is so that his orders will be carried out, whereas not setting them up would lead to the demise of his state.

In the 1930s, the New Life Movement of the Nationalist Party also promoted *li-yi-lian-chi* as core values.⁹⁴ Like the late eleventh century reform, which had to handle the consequences of the ancient prose movement, it was confronted with the task to counteract the New Culture Movement (*Xinwenhua Yundong* 新文化運動), which similarly led to increased moral individualism and value pluralism. In an insightful study, Arif Dirlik points out:

⁹² Yang Zhongliang, *JSBM*, 59.1045-6. See also Li Tao, *XCB*, 239.5808 (not *renyi*).

⁹³ Translated adapted from Rickett, *Guanzi*, 53.

⁹⁴ Chiang Kai-shek, *Xinshenghuo Yundong gangyao*.

[M]orality in New Life ideology is instrumental, existing only to serve the ends of the state. In the Kuomintang version, national interest was the only criterion to distinguish the moral from the immoral: that which contributed to state power was moral, that which did not, immoral.

Moreover, Dirlik follows by saying, because the New Life ideology expected the people to prove their worthiness to their ruler, obedience rather than inner conscience was the highest possible virtue.⁹⁵

Li-yi-lian-chi are statist values.⁹⁶ Just like the secretive track in Wang's value system that encourages subjects to obey orders by rewarding them with high salaries and official ranks, these values in the open track serve the same purpose: making it habitual for them to obediently follow the ruler's orders. This is in stark contrast to the humanist value system advocated by men like Han Yu and Ouyang Xiu, which asks the literati to build a personal foundation of morality within themselves under the general principle of *renyi*, including when necessary offending the ruler and remonstrating him straightforwardly. As Su Shi wrote when prefacing Ouyang's anthology: "Since the emergence of Master Ouyang, all under Heaven strive to polish themselves, ... taking saving the times to practice the Way as worthy and offending imperial authority to remonstrate him as loyal" 自歐陽子出，天下爭自濯磨，...以救時行道為賢，以犯顏納諫為忠。⁹⁷

It is true that at the same time when advocating *renyi*, Ouyang Xiu also wrote these words in the introduction to the biography of Feng Dao 馮道 (882-954) in the *New History of the Five Dynasties*:⁹⁸

It is said: "*Li-yi-lian-chi* are the four strings of the state. If these four strings were not put up, the state will then perish." Excellent indeed is Mr. Guan's way with words! *Li-yi* is the premier method for governing the people; *lian-chi* is the premier integrity with which to establish the people. Had they no *lian*, then there would be nothing they would not take; had they no *chi*, then there would be nothing they would not do. When the people are like this, then there would be no catastrophic

⁹⁵ Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement," 971.

⁹⁶ [A search in Ctext](#) shows that in early Chinese texts, the four characters "*li-yi-lian-chi*" appeared together only in Daoist and Legalist sources (the one in *Hanshu* was citing *Guanzi*).

⁹⁷ Following Wang Gung-wu ("Feng Tao"), scholars generally take Ouyang's concept of loyalty as meaning serving only one ruler. See, for example, Jay, *A Change in Dynasties*, 94; Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 32; Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*, 13; and de Pee, "Notebooks (*Biji*) and Shifting Boundaries of Knowledge," 147-48. It seems to me Ouyang thinks a literatus' loyalty is owed to *res publica* rather than to any monarch or his state.

⁹⁸ In the aforementioned article, Wang Gung-wu defends Feng as a Confucian and accuses Ouyang of being moralistic, typical of the Song neo-Confucians.

turmoil and devastating defeat that would not arrive. How much more so when it comes to those who are high officials. When there is nothing they would not take and nothing they would not do, how can all-under-Heaven not be chaotic and the state not perish? I have read Feng Dao's "Jottings of the Old Man of Eternal Joy" and saw the account he gave of himself as glories. He can be called someone devoid of *lianchi*. From this, one can then know about all-under-Heaven and the state.

傳曰：“禮義廉恥，國之四維；四維不張，國乃滅亡。”善乎，管生之能言也！禮義，治人之大法；廉恥，立人之大節。蓋不廉，則無所不取；不恥，則無所不為。人而如此，則禍亂敗亡，亦無所不至，況為大臣而無所不取不為，則天下其有不亂，國家其有不亡者乎！予讀馮道“長樂老斂”，見其自述以為榮，其可謂無廉恥者矣，則天下國家可從而知也。⁹⁹

In the main body of the biography, however, Ouyang noted Feng was not greedy about money.¹⁰⁰ As Sheng Xianfeng points out, Ouyang's focus was on *chi*,¹⁰¹ specifically on Feng's not being shamed of serving some ten monarchs in a disorderly world. This to Ouyang was against Confucius' concept of *chi*: “in a state that is without the way, to be wealthy and high-ranking is a shame” 邦無道，富且貴焉，恥也。¹⁰² As such, the point Ouyang was making in the above passage was that individual literati's adherence to their own ethical principle in matters of serving or withdrawal had bearing on the well-being of all-under-heaven and the state. Note Ouyang was not concerned with any particular ruler's state, but the generic state and more importantly human society on the whole. In this, he was reiterating the progression from individual self-cultivation to pacifying all-under-heaven in “Great Learning”: “After having cultivated oneself, the family is then managed; after one's family is managed, the state is then ordered; after the state is ordered, all-under-Heaven is then pacified” 身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平，¹⁰³ just like what Han Yu did in “Tracing the Way.”¹⁰⁴

In other words, while on the surface Ouyang seemed to be commending *Guanzi*'s statist values, in this private historiographical project of his,¹⁰⁵ he actually bent them toward the literati,

⁹⁹ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi*, 54.611. Translation modified from id., *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, trans. Richard L. Davis, 438.

¹⁰⁰ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi*, 54.612.

¹⁰¹ Sheng Xianfeng, “Lun *Xin Wudai shi* de ‘lianchi’ guan.” Rickett notes *lian* “is not an important virtue in either the *Lun yu* or the *Mengzi*” (*Guanzi*, 51).

¹⁰² *The Analects*, 8.13.

¹⁰³ Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda, *Liji zhengyi*, 60.1859.

¹⁰⁴ DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Sung, “An Ambivalent Historian.”

like how he bent the institution of remonstrance in the letters of recommendation for Wang Anshi: whereas to *Guanzi*, setting up these four strings was so that the ruler's orders would be carried out, Ouyang was criticizing Feng Dao, a man of letters, for going along with different rulers so as to remain in high office under them all.¹⁰⁶ As made clear with his criticism of those literati who did not cherish themselves but bore humiliation in order to survive toward the end of the introduction to Feng's biography,¹⁰⁷ Ouyang was admonishing his intended audience to hold dear their personal integrity and not to compromise before power.¹⁰⁸ By no means was he calling for the literati to subject themselves to monarchs, nor did we ever find him trying to use *lian* to replace *renyi*, the core values he carried forward from Han Yu, made the mainstream by the mid-eleventh century, and kept upholding by the early 1070s when editing "On the Roots" not long before his death.

By contrast, Confucius' concept of *chi* did not figure in the value system Wang Anshi designed.¹⁰⁹ Rather, at the same time when using *lian* to stress non-corruption,¹¹⁰ he used *chi* to refer to being ashamed of extravagance in personal expenditure.¹¹¹ This is because to him, a social custom in which people are proud of extravagance is the source of corruption, as he wrote: "Heavy-handedly banning corrupt officials while taking the law against extravagance lightly, this is the so-called banning the incidental while implementing the fundamental" 重禁貪吏而輕奢靡之法，此所謂禁其末而施其本。¹¹² It also encourages those with greater private wealth to trespass their defined place in society, making it harder to maintain social order, as he wrote in an essay belonging to the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes titled "Social Customs" 風俗:

The superior man makes custom with frugality. The harm [of social customs] lies in extravagance. Were the people extravagant and not checked, how to handle the harm? Were it like this, then there would be people who exhaust their wealth and go beyond their designated social ranks to go after what is trendy at the time.

¹⁰⁶ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi*, 54.614-15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.612.

¹⁰⁸ Bol notes Ouyang thinks that "intellectual values should be independent of power at court" ("The Sung Context," 33).

¹⁰⁹ Even though he himself adhered to it throughout his life. On Wang's treating himself differently from all the other literati, see Conclusion.

¹¹⁰ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.412: "養廉恥而離於貪鄙之行。"

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.416: "婚喪、奉養、服食、器用之物，皆無制度以為之節，而天下以奢為榮，以儉為恥。"

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 39.417.

君子制俗以儉，其弊為奢。奢而不制，弊將若之何？夫如是，則有殫極財力僭瀆擬倫以追時好者矣。¹¹³

It was for this reason he advocated frugality (*jian* 儉).¹¹⁴ Despite the view that has been made popular by today's "Confucian" thinkers and politicians,¹¹⁵ frugality was *not* a core value upheld by Confucius. Although in the *Analects*, Confucius said he preferred spending less to extravagance,¹¹⁶ he did not regard it as a principle in governance,¹¹⁷ nor did Mencius for that matter.¹¹⁸ It was the statist political thinker Mozi who strongly advocated this value.¹¹⁹ And the Confucians were actually his target of criticism in this regard,¹²⁰ because he thought they ornately decorate ritual and music (*fan shi liyue* 繁飾禮樂) rather than adhering to the principle of spending less for the sake of the state.¹²¹ Wang's advocacy of frugality is in line with this statist tradition rather than the Confucian one, just like his uses of *lianchi* are truly in line with *Guanzi*.¹²² Unlike Ouyang Xiu's stress of individual literati's ethics for the well-being of *res publica*, Wang's focus is on regulating the subjects' monetary relationship to a specific ruler's state.

Not only is *li-yi-lian-chi* a statist value system under Wang Anshi, but it is also anti-humanist. This is seen most clearly in his unique concept of *li*, yet another new concept advanced

¹¹³ Wang Anshi, "Fengsu," in *LCJ*, 69.737.

¹¹⁴ On Wang's deploring the culture of luxury and his advocacy of austerity, see Song, *Traces of Grand Peace*, 224, 226.

¹¹⁵ Who identify the so-called "Confucian values" with "the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety, and loyalty" (Zakaria, "Culture Is Destiny," 114). To the early to middle period Chinese political thinkers covered in this study, none of these was considered the core values in the Confucian tradition of statecraft, which they – Confucians or not – took to be *renyi*. For a useful differentiation between cardinal virtues and dependent virtues, see Cua, "Virtues of Junzi." See also id., *Moral Vision and Tradition*, chapter 13.

¹¹⁶ The *Analects*, 3.4, 7.36, and 9.3. See also *ibid.*, 1.5.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, the *Analects*, 10.6.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, *Mencius*, 2B.16.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, the "Jie yong" 節用 and "Jie zang" 節葬 chapters in *Mozi*. This is also how Han Fei saw it, to whom Mozi was a model for being spendthrift whereas Confucius to the contrary (Chen Qiyong, *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 50.1129).

¹²⁰ Sun Yirang, *Mozi xian gu*, 39.180.

¹²¹ On Mozi being a state consequentialist, see Ivanhoe, "Mohist Philosophy." See also id., *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 17.

¹²² Adopting a social evolutionist perspective, Sun Shaohua sees a change from stressing *chi* during the Spring and Autumn period to emphasizing *lianchi* during the Warring States period instead of seeing them along the lines of different schools ("Xian Qin lianchi sixiang ji shehui fengsu de bianqian").

under the cloak of an existing term. Its content is spelled out in two adjacent essays in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes: “On *Li*” 禮論 and “On *Li* and Music” 禮樂論.¹²³

Before looking into them, it is necessary to address the dating of the second piece, as some scholars think it was written late in Wang’s life, given its speculative outlook.¹²⁴ This outlook is probably due to the prevalence of discussions of the internal, like heart and human nature, in it. This, however, does not mean they are not about statecraft. Quite on the contrary, they turned out to be central to it, as we shall soon see. Taking it as no different from the other pieces in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, I date it to the late 1050s together with the “On *Li*” that precedes it. For those still doubting this, we can in any case date the ideas in it to before 1064-65, for in Wang’s famous “Inscription on the Qian Prefectural School” 虔州學記, discussed in the next chapter, they were already present. For now, let us see what Wang meant by *li*.

In “On *Li*,” he wrote:

In general, what is used as *li* must necessarily humiliate their free and proud heart and thwart their desire-indulging nature. None does not desire leisure and [*li*] makes them work for the superior. None does not desire gains, and [*li*] makes them give precedence to the senior.

凡為禮者，必誦其放傲之心，逆其嗜欲之性。莫不欲逸而為尊者勞，莫不欲得而為長者讓。

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Wang Anshi saw humans as by nature self-regarding, tending to get their desires met. This is how he saw beings in general, as he wrote in a poem:

¹²³ *LCJ*, 66.701-06. As we shall see, they are actually both about *li*. Wang probably added “music” in the title of the second essay to avoid repetition.

¹²⁴ For instance, Skonicki asserts that “[i]t is certainly true that the essays Wang composed during his retirement at Jinling 金陵 were more speculative than his earlier writings,” and he includes this essay as one among those (“Cosmos, State and Society,” 455). See the similar view of Li Zhiliang (*Wang Jinggong wenji jianzhu*, 939 and 1033). Bol suspects it belonged to Wang’s late writings because it and “On Attaining and Using Unity” “are concerned with the internal and the cosmological” (“Government, State, and Society,” 165n81). Bol’s surmise seems partly based on Hsia Chang-pwu’s view that “Xing lun,” where Wang expressed the view that human nature is all good, was written after Wang had retired (“Wang Anshi sixiang yu Mengzi de guanxi,” 315; *Li Gou yu Wang Anshi yanjiu*, 209n82). In a footnote at the beginning of this section, I have presented my grounds for why this essay was written early in Wang’s career, specifically before he completed his learning. Here I would add that Wang’s writings on the internal that seem “speculative” are actually integral to his statecraft, which is, as indicated in the title of this dissertation, a soulcraft. I thank the anonymous reviewer for *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* for helping me realize the necessity of discussing this matter in detail.

¹²⁵ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

Chapter 2

牛若不穿鼻 Were an ox not roped in the nose,
豈肯推人磨 How can it pull the millstone for the human?
馬若不絡頭 Were a horse not bridled on the head,
隨宜而起臥 It will get up and lie down as it pleases.¹²⁶

It is for this reason that *li* was devised, to work against their natural inclinations and make them work for those above them in the social hierarchy. He followed by making a couple of analogies:

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Cutting wood to make a utensil and harnessing a horse to make it drive a carriage – these are not what the wood or horse is born capable of. Therefore, one must chop the wood with an axe, straighten it with the carpenter’s line marker, round it with the compass, square it with the L-square and bind and glue the pieces together. It is thereafter the utensil becomes fit for use. [With the horse], in the front, restrain it with a bridle; in the back, force it with flogging. [Whether it] gallops or trots, runs slowly or quickly, do not let it run freely on its own but make it obey the driver in every movement. It is thereafter the horse becomes fit for driving.

夫斫木而為之器，服馬而為之駕，此非生而能者也。故必削之以斧斤，直之以繩墨，圓之以規而方之以矩，束聯膠漆之，而後器適於用焉。前之以銜勒之制，後之以鞭策之威，馳驟舒疾，無得自放，而一聽於人，而後馬適於駕焉。¹²⁸

Wang’s *li* is regulative: like the axe with which the carpenter chops off the unwanted part from the piece of wood to be made into a utensil, or the bridle put on the horse’s head for the driver to control each and every of its movements.

It is not hard to see whom Wang was referring to with the unbridled horse. In the long letter to Renzong written in the late 1050s, when complaining the lack of talents, he was referring to the absence of a specific quality:

¹²⁶ First of Wang’s “Ni Hanshan shide ershi shou,” in *LCJ*, 3.99. For a discussion, see Qi Xia, *Qiu shi ji*, 492.

¹²⁷ Like Mencius, Wang Anshi likes to use analogy in argument. On Mencius’ use of analogy in argument, see Lau, *Mencius*, Appendix 5. David Nivison suggests Mencius uses “recognizable Mohist techniques of argument and refutation” and is familiar “with the use of Mohist dialectical concepts” (*The Ways of Confucianism*, 104). See also Ivanhoe, “Mohist Philosophy.”

¹²⁸ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

Your subject thinks we can know that the talents currently in office are insufficient from where I had been to as part of my job assignment. Now, within thousands of *li*¹²⁹ in a circuit, those who can carry out the court's laws and ordinances, know the priorities among them, and in everything drive the people so as to fulfill their duties are very few.

臣以謂方今在位之人才不足者，以臣使事之所及則可知矣。今以一路數千里之間，能推行朝廷之法令，知其所緩急，而一切能使民以修其職事者甚少。¹³⁰

An official's "talent" is measured by whether he would faithfully carry out the court's orders or not. In a conversation with Shenzong on 1070/9/2 that was recorded in his diary, Wang Anshi made a similar point:

Recent state councilors were engaged in advancing their friends and faction, blocking the ruler's [channels of information], excluding and crushing literati of talent, and cannot be driven, therefore among your present aides extremely few have real capabilities and are usable."

近世執政務進朋黨，蔽塞人主，排抑才士，不可駕御者，故今侍從有實材可用者極少。¹³¹

The usability of a state councilor lies in his controllability by the ruler. As such, Wang's regulative *li* is designed for taming the self-governing literati mainstream, to turn them from free and proud individuals into subjects fully under the ruler's control.¹³²

This *li* is diametrically different from that of Ouyang Xiu's.¹³³ Whereas Ouyang uses *li-yue* to guide people toward *renyi*, Wang's *li* works against the natural inclinations of humans, saying "being close to how humans feel is not the utmost of *li*" 禮之近人情，非其至。¹³⁴ That is, Ouyang's *li* is humanist whereas Wang's anti-humanist. As such, Wang's new concept of *li* is not one of the five constant virtues in the Confucian tradition. Rather, it refers to the behavioral regulations meant to turn humans against how they are by nature so that they can be made useful

¹²⁹ Chinese mile, one equaling 0.31 mile.

¹³⁰ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," 39.411.

¹³¹ Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 28.

¹³² Wang's strong disapproval of such literati can be seen from an incident taking place in 1061, when he refused to draft the edict to appoint Su Zhe as an official, because he suspected Su "assists the prime minister and concentrates on attacking the ruler" 右宰相，專攻人主 (Li Tao, *XCB*, 194.4711).

¹³³ Skonicki notes Ouyang Xiu thinks ritual activities should be distinguished from government administration ("Cosmos, State and Society," 495n105, 290-91).

¹³⁴ Wang Anshi, "Li yue lun," in *LCJ*, 66.704. On Ouyang's valuing "emotional responses to the actualities of human life" (*renqing* 人情), see Bol, "This Culture of Ours," 201.

to the ruler's state. Considered together with Wang's actions against the humanist *ren*,¹³⁵ it seems Wang was trying to use this anti-humanist *li* to replace *ren* as the new core value:¹³⁶ recall in "Nine Changes," he glosses *renyi* as "reverence and deference", which is actually the conceptual content of his *li*; in "On *Li* and Music," he similarly wrote: "Do not watch unless it accords with *li*; do not listen unless it accords with *li*; do not speak unless it accords with *li*; do not move unless it accords with *li*. Then the way of *ren* is not far away." 非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動，則仁之道亦不遠也。¹³⁷ Adhere to the regulative *li* and one would come close to what Wang conceived of as *ren*.

At the institutional level, Wang's *li* is laid out in his commentary on *Zhouli*:¹³⁸ each person has a designated role in the hierarchical social-political system and every level has its stipulated behavioral codes.¹³⁹ The ruler orders from above and each level downward carries them out. Each inferior obeys his superior and all the way up to the ruler. As Wang wrote therein:

The implementation of *li* is to have the worthy govern the unworthy and the noble govern the lowly. ... When everyone agrees with their superior and goes all out [to carry out his orders], then *li* comes from one source and above and below are ordered.

禮之行，有以賢治不肖，有以貴治賤...人各上同而自致，則禮出於一，而上下治。¹⁴⁰

As a value for the people to uphold, it means to observe such regulations and not to violate them.

Wang did not seem to have spelled out the content of his concept of *yi* 義,¹⁴¹ but Lin Zhiqi 林之奇 (1112-1176) told us:

¹³⁵ This makes Wang's closer to the type of *li* that Lu Xun called "eating man" (Tu, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*, 13).

¹³⁶ In this, Wang's approach shows similarities to Li Gou's. In his seven essays on *li* written in 1032 and a postscript written 15 years thereafter, Li proposed an overarching concept of *li* that incorporates (and fundamentally changes the meanings of) the other four constant virtues (*Li Gou ji*, 5-27). Bol notes *li* for Li Gou was "the sum of all values" (Hymes and Schirokauer, "Introduction," 10n1).

¹³⁷ Wang Anshi, "Li yue lun," in *LCJ*, 66.703.

¹³⁸ For a study of this commentary, see Song, *Traces of Grand Peace*. For discussions of Wang's *li*, see Fang Xiaoyi, *Bei Song Xinxue yu wenxue*, 49-50, 112-18; and Hu Jinwang, *Wang Anshi de zhexue sixiang yu Sanjingxinyi*, 108-11. Both (mis)take Wang's governing with *li* as in line with governing with *de* in the Confucian tradition.

¹³⁹ This is more like a military order. For a comparable modern case, see James Scott's discussion of Le Corbusier's city (*Seeing like a State*, 114-15).

¹⁴⁰ Cheng Yuan-min, *Sanjingxinyi jikao huiping (I)* -- Shangshu, 290.

¹⁴¹ Although it could be like in the case of *renyi*, the meaning of *yi* depends on that of the cardinal value preceding it.

Chapter 2

When interpreting the classics, Mr. Wang often takes “cruelty” as “*yi*” and also often contrasts “*ren*” with “*yi*”.

王氏之解經，多以“忍”為“義”，亦多以“仁”、“義”對說。¹⁴²

Wang interprets *yi* as cruelty and makes it the opposite of the humanist *ren*. Similarly, Su Shi complained:

There is the *rěn* meaning cruelty; there is the *rěn* meaning tolerance. ... However, some recent scholar said “when one has to be decisive, one cannot be compassionate. Cruelty is what is meant by *yi*.” This is King Cheng teaching Junchen to be resolute at punishing and executing people and take cruelty as *yi*. ... The disaster of inhumanity stopped at the six classics. And yet now he falsely interprets the classics like this to support and encourage inhumanity.

有殘忍之忍，有容忍之忍。... 而近世學者乃謂“當斷不可以不忍，忍所以為義，”是成王教君陳果於刑殺，以殘忍為義也。... 不仁之禍，至六經而止，今乃析言誣經以助發之。¹⁴³

These suggest Wang’s *yi* is also an anti-humanist concept.

To sum up, this replacement value system is anti-humanist and serves the interest of the ruler’s state. These constitute the two mutually reinforcing points Wang Anshi took away from Laozi’s idea of *daode*. On the one hand, he asks morality to be defined by a unitary source – the ruler, to whom all individuals should defer their moral autonomy. On the other, because this is a ruler-centered approach to morality, the old values revolving around individuals have to be replaced with new ones centering on the ruler – the head of state – as well.¹⁴⁴ We all know the reform Wang designed was aimed at unifying morality. It was with this new value system that morality was to be unified.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Cheng Yuan-min, *Sanjingxinyi jikao huiping (1)* -- Shangshu, 213.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 212-13. On the referent of “recent scholar” being Wang Anshi, see Li Yun-long, “Su Shi *Dongpo Shuzhuan yanjiu*,” 151-54. See also Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*,” 438n79.

¹⁴⁴ Other than *li-yi-lian-chi*, there appeared more derivative values along this line, like the Eight Conducts discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁴⁵ Given the difference between nation and state (De Weerd, “Review of Nicolas Tackett”), it is probably a bit of a stretch to call *li-yi-lian-chi* a nationalistic value system. But if “nationalism” indeed appeared in the eleventh century as Nicolas Tackett argued (*The Origins of the Chinese Nation*), Wang Anshi’s efforts could have played a not insignificant part in it. For an illuminating comparative case, see Nguyen, “The Noble Person and the Revolutionary,” esp. 138-50.

It should be noted that these are just for the governed, not applicable to the governing. As Wang wrote in his commentary on the “Great Plan:”

Adhering to the constant to serve the ruler is the way of the officials; holding discretion to drive the officials is the way of the ruler.

執常以事君者，臣道也；執權以禦臣者，君道也。¹⁴⁶

Discretion is the ruler’s exclusive¹⁴⁷ right not to be bound by the constant norms he made for those working for him.¹⁴⁸

Here comes an issue: humans are not born to care about the ruler’s state. How then to get these externally introduced values that do not serve the individual self’s interest established in them? This is where the original part in Wang’s statecraft lied. If so far the discussion is primarily on how he brought back Laozi’s idea of *daode*, in what follows we shall see the new path he broke, building mainly on Mencius’ insight into human nature.

III. Making the Statist Values “Natural”

Tu Wei-ming notes that “*li* without *ren* easily degenerates into social coercion.”¹⁴⁹ Wang Anshi, however, did not wish his *li* to be simply coercive.¹⁵⁰ Nor is this *li* the *fa* 法 in the Legalist tradition.¹⁵¹ In his long letter to Renzong, Wang had made a clear distinction between the two.¹⁵² Over a decade later, in a face-to-face conversation with Shenzong, he explicated it as follows:

Penal laws and the legal system are not the basis for governing. These are the business of clerks, not the ruler’s way. ... Manipulating [the people’s] spirit and transforming them with soulcraft, so

¹⁴⁶ Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.692.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.693.

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of this concept, see Yang Qianmao, *Wang Anshi “Yi” xue yanjiu*, 190–99. For an example of how Wang used *quan*, see Smith, “Shen-Tsung’s Reign,” 365. For another example, see Wang Anshi, *Xining zoudui rilu*, 12. The latter case is discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁴⁹ Tu, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ As Yinan Luo contends (“Ideas in Practice,” 84).

¹⁵¹ Many scholars take Wang as mainly a Legalist. See, for example, Deng Guangming, *Bei Song zhengzhi gaigejia*, 73; Zhang Chengzhong, “‘Yi zhongren wei zhi’”; Zhao Dongmei, *Da Song zhi bian*, 9. For a disagreement with Deng, see Li Huarui, “Northern Song Reformist Thought and Its Sources,” 237–38. For Deng’s revision of his own view, see *Deng Guangming zhishi congkao*, 129–52.

¹⁵² Wang Anshi, “Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu”, in *LCJ*, 39.412. For more on this, see chapter 3.

as to make them naturally change toward the good and stay away from punishment is the ruler's way. ... If to harmonize all under Heaven as one, and check the barbarians simultaneously, in the humble opinion of your servant, ... there is no other way except for fundamentally changing the custom, to make everyone want to go all out [to serve the ruler]. Mere legal system cannot be relied upon to succeed in attaining the goal.

刑名法制非治之本，是為吏事，非主道也。...蓋精神之運、心術之化，使人自然遷善遠罪者，主道也。...若欲調一天下，兼制夷狄，臣愚以為非...風俗丕變，人有自竭之志，則區區法制未足恃以收功。¹⁵³

Wang is not satisfied with what laws have to offer.¹⁵⁴ Part of the reason was because, as he wrote in his commentary on *Laozi*, “Laws and ordinances are for prohibiting wrongdoing under Heaven. Because they prohibit wrongdoing, inauthenticity thus arises. When laws are issued, offenders are given rise to; when ordinances are promulgated, treacheries are generated.” 法令者，禁天下之非。因其禁非，所以起偽。蓋法出奸生，令下詐生。¹⁵⁵ What Wang wanted was to have the people “naturally” think in accord with the new morality he designed. For this, Wang had his *li* take on a transformative role in addition to the regulative one discussed above. This is again formulated in “On *Li*” and “On *Li* and Music.”

In “On *Li*,” after using cutting wood and taming the horse to make clear the regulative function of his *li*, Wang pointed out: “That the sage does not make a utensil unless with wood and does not drive a carriage unless with the horse is also based on their Heaven-endowed raw material.” 聖人舍木而不為器，舍馬而不為駕者，固亦因其天資之材也。¹⁵⁶ By way of analogy, he was saying that the reason why the self-regarding humans can be turned into being useful to the ruler's state, like the raw piece of wood getting turned into a utensil or the wild horse into a carriage-driving equipment, is because there is some raw material in them to work on. What is this material? Immediately thereafter, he wrote:

¹⁵³ Li Tao, *XCB*, 230.5590-91. Dated to 1072/2.

¹⁵⁴ This is consistent with Wang Zhaoyu's view that “legal constraint is at best of secondary importance (Song, *Traces of Grand Peace*, 211).

¹⁵⁵ Quoted from Lu Guolong, *Song ru weiyuan*, 131.

¹⁵⁶ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

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Now at birth, a person has the feeling of fearing his father and loving his mother. The sage follows what he desires by nature and makes regulations for him. Therefore, although the regulations are coercive, they work by following what he desires by nature. ... The body of a monkey or an ape is not unlike that of a human. [But should the sage] want to restrain it with [the ranking system defining] the noble and the lowly, and control it with [behavioral norms like] bowing and deferring, then it will hurry off to deep mountains and big forests and flee. Even if frightening it with force and taming it with transformative [techniques], can it obey? ... Therefore, I say, *li* begins with Heaven[’s endowment] and completes through human [efforts]. Were there no such [endowment] from Heaven and yet humans wanted to do it, of all the things in the world, I have never seen such. 今人生而有嚴父愛母之心，聖人因其性之欲而為之制焉，故其制雖有以強人，而乃順其性之欲也。...夫狙猿之形，非不若人也，欲繩之以尊卑而節之以揖讓，則彼有趨於深山大麓而走耳，雖畏之以威而馴之以化，其可服邪？...故曰：禮始於天而成於人，天則無是，而人欲為之，舉天下之物，吾蓋未之見也。¹⁵⁷

The theory Wang is formulating here is built on two passages from *Mencius*:

Humans all have the feeling of compassion and pity. Humans all have the feeling of shame and detest. Humans all have the feeling of reverence and respect. Humans all have the feeling of right and wrong.

惻隱之心，人皆有之；羞惡之心，人皆有之；恭敬之心，人皆有之；是非之心，人皆有之。

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The feeling of compassion and pity is the beginning of *ren*. The feeling of shame and detest is the beginning of *yi*. The feeling of reverence and respect is the beginning of *li*. The feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of *zhi*. ... In general, having these four beginnings within oneself, if one knows filling them all out, it will be like a fire starting up, a spring breaking through. If one can fill them out, they will be sufficient to care for all within the Four Seas. If one does not fill them out, they will not be sufficient to serve one’s parents.

¹⁵⁷ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

¹⁵⁸ *Mencius*, 6A.6. Translation modified from Van Norden trans., *Mengzi*, 149.

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惻隱之心，仁之端也；羞惡之心，義之端也；辭讓之心，禮之端也；是非之心，智之端也。...凡有四端於我者，知皆擴而充之矣，若火之始然，泉之始達。苟能充之，足以保四海；苟不充之，不足以事父母。¹⁵⁹

All human beings are born with a variety of feelings. These are the starting points from which they can come to acquire various moral values. Knowing this and working on enlarging these feelings, powerful morality can be established in them.¹⁶⁰

We know Wang Anshi fully mastered this Mencian theory, because in an essay titled “Yang [Xiong] and Mencius” 揚孟, again belonging to the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, he selectively applied it for his purpose:

At birth, no human being does not have the nature (i.e., natural feeling) of shame and detest. Let us for now illuminate this with the beginning [originating from the feeling of] shame and detest. Suppose there is someone who, being ashamed of the good conduct's not being cultivated and detesting the good reputation's not getting established, exerts himself at the good to fill out his nature of shame and detest, then who can resist his becoming a worthy? This is a person who gets the proper nature and what Mencius called by “nature.”

夫人之生，莫不有羞惡之性，且以羞惡之一端以明之。有人於此，羞善行之不修，惡善名之不立，盡力乎善以充其羞惡之性，則其為賢也孰禦哉？此得乎性之正者，而孟子所謂性也。¹⁶¹

Of the four feelings Mencius mentioned, Wang Anshi chose the one that leads to *yi* 義, which Lin Zhiqi and Su Shi told us Wang had to mean cruelty and used as the opposite of *ren*. This is not coincidence, for in “Tracing [Human] Nature,” he explicitly took issue with Mencius’ taking *ren* as innate in human nature:

Mencius thought the feeling of compassion and pity everyone has, hence his saying that by nature, no human is not *ren* (*humae*). Were the so-called nature like what he said, it must be that the feeling

¹⁵⁹ *Mencius*, 2A.6. Translation modified from Van Norden trans., *Mengzi*, 46.

¹⁶⁰ For an insightful analysis of how moral training actually took place with Mencius, see Ivanhoe, “Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi’s Notion of Extension.”

¹⁶¹ Wang Anshi, “Yang Meng,” in *LCJ*, 64.680.

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of bitter resentment and anger all humans do not have. It is only thereafter that it can be said that by nature no human is not good. But do all humans indeed have no such?

孟子以惻隱之心人皆有之，因以謂人之性無不仁。就所謂性者如其說，必也怨毒忿戾之心人皆無之，然後可以言人之性無不善，而人果皆無之乎。¹⁶²

Read in this light, what Wang meant by “good conduct” in “Yang [Xiong] and Mencius,” as we have pointed out when discussing his dual-track value system, does not refer to *renyi* in the Confucian tradition, but the statist values *li-yi-lian-chi*.

Now we can see, in the “On *Li*” passage, he was saying: All human beings are born with the natural feeling to fear their father, so the sage made the ranking system according to this fundamental truth in their nature, to have the inferior revere the superior with fear; all human beings are born with the feeling to love their mother, so the sage made behavioral regulations according to this fundamental truth in their nature, to have those below give precedence to those above.

These are not what they would do naturally, Wang admits of their coerciveness, but in design they followed what they desire in their nature. Other species, even though they might look like humans on the outside, like apes and monkeys, because in their nature there are no such feelings, such efforts won’t work. Humans alone are suitable to be tamed and transformed with Wang’s *li*. The feeling of fearing their father and loving their mother they are born with provides the biological foundation on which to cultivate in them fear for and love of the ruler¹⁶³ with the ranking system and its accompanying behavioral regulations that are designed based on this fundamental truth about human nature. Making them intimidated and taming them with efforts at transforming them, eventually they will become obedient. Wang’s *li* begins by working on such inborn feelings and completes its mission with human efforts at transformation.

A passage Wang Anshi’s son Wang Pang 王雱 (1044-1076) wrote in his commentary on *Zhuangzi* made a similar point:

¹⁶² Wang Anshi, “Yuan xing,” in *LCJ*, 68.726. This is consistent with Wang’s mature, anti-humanist view of human nature, rather than the one he expressed in “Xing lun,” when he was still following Mencius by saying human nature is all good.

¹⁶³ This was eventually written into the goal of education under Huizong, as we shall see in chapter 3.

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What is naturally so is [endowed by] Heaven; what is made so is [the result of] human [efforts]. That which is within what is naturally so is what one has; that which is outside what is made so is what one does not have. How can human [efforts] snatch away what one has or increase what one does not have? Therefore, what one has is one's [inborn] nature; what one does not have is what Zhuangzi called "enlarging." *De* (the capacity to be moral) is what one has in oneself. Human [efforts] at increasing what one has in oneself is enlarging.

自然者，天也；使然者，人也。在自然之中者，有也；在使然之外者，無也。人安能奪其所有、益其所無哉？故所有者，性也；所無者，莊子所謂侈¹⁶⁴也。德者，己之所有也。於己之所有，人益之，是侈也。¹⁶⁵

Human beings are born with some natural material for others to work on from outside, so that they would come to acquire the morality they did not have originally.

There still remains a problem: How do we know the externally imposed *li* would necessarily reach inside, making it possible to amplify these feelings from outside, till getting the desired morality established? This is addressed in "On *Li* and Music." In the beginning part of this long essay,¹⁶⁶ Wang wrote:

Nurturing the inborn [nature] lies in maintaining the corporeal form; filling out the corporeal form lies in nurturing *qi* (vital energy), nurturing *qi* lies in pacifying the heart, pacifying the heart lies in being sincere to the utmost, and being sincere to the utmost lies in exhausting [the proper] nature (i.e., going all out to establish the proper nature). Not exhausting [the proper] nature is not adequate for nurturing the inborn [nature]. Those who can exhaust [the proper] nature are sincere to the utmost; those who can be sincere to the utmost have a pacified heart; those who can pacify their heart nurture their *qi*; those who can nurture their *qi* maintain their corporeal form; those who are capable of maintaining their corporeal form nurture their inborn [nature]. Not nurturing the inborn [nature] is not adequate for exhausting [the proper] nature.

¹⁶⁴ This is the key word here. In this context, Pang uses it to mean "enlarge", like Mencius' *chong* 充, as can be seen from his explication in the last sentence.

¹⁶⁵ Wang Pang, *Nanhua zhenjing xin zhuan*, 16.271.

¹⁶⁶ On this being a difficult text, see Bol, "Government, Society, and State," 165. It is also considerably longer than the other essays in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes. However, Liang Tao notes it is crucial for unpacking Wang's political philosophy ("Wang Anshi de xin waiwang zhengzhi zhaxue," 266–68). Liang has rightly connected this text to *Mencius* 2A2. It seems exploring this connection further can yield more fruits. Yinan Luo thinks in this text, Wang "spelled out an entire process of self-cultivation" like that that of the Neo-Confucians, albeit "relatively ambiguous and impractical" ("Ideas in Practice," 80). My reading below suggests otherwise.

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養生在於保形，充形在於育氣，養氣在於寧心，寧心在於致誠，致誠在於盡性，不盡性不足以養生。能盡性者，至誠者也；能至誠者，寧心者也；能寧心者，養氣者也；能養氣者，保形者也；能保形者，養生者也，不養生不足以盡性也。¹⁶⁷

The number of concepts Wang introduced makes it look dazzling,¹⁶⁸ but basically, he was just delineating a bi-directional chain:

inborn [nature] 生 \rightleftharpoons body 形 \rightleftharpoons qi 氣 \rightleftharpoons heart 心 \rightleftharpoons sincerity 誠 \rightleftharpoons [the proper] nature 性

At the center of this long chain lies the assumption that *qi* and heart interact with each other,¹⁶⁹ an assumption that was first theorized by Mencius.¹⁷⁰ This is why after finishing delineating the bi-directional chain, Wang immediately brought out Mencius:

The inborn [nature] and [the proper] nature follow one another; will and *qi* complement one another, one outer, one inner. The inborn [nature] being murky, [the proper] nature will then be concealed; [the proper] nature being murky, the inborn [nature] will then be concealed. This is like “when the will is unified, it moves *qi* and when the *qi* is unified, it moves the will.”

生與性之相因循，志之與氣相為表裏也。生渾則蔽性，性渾則蔽生，猶“志一則動氣，氣一則動志也。”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Wang Anshi, “Li yue lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.703.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Nylan points out that “it is more often that Legalists and Taoists who seek to impress their readers with the marvelous quality of their teachings by dazzling displays of verbal pyrotechnics” (*The Shifting Center*, 33). Wang Anshi applied it not infrequently. For a couple of other examples, see “Yang Meng” and “Dui nan” (*LCJ*, 64.679-70 and 68.728-29).

¹⁶⁹ A number of scholars have noted that Wang was trying to make a connection between the inborn [nature] or body-*qi* and [the proper] nature. See, for example, Ma Zhenduo, *Zhengzhi gaigejia Wang Anshi*, 111; Li Xiangjun, *Wang Anshi xueshu sixiang yanjiu*, 221–22; Hu Jinwang, *Wang Anshi de zhexue sixiang yu Sanjingxinyi*, 52; Liang Tao, “Wang Anshi de xin waiwang zhengzhi zhexue,” 267. Yinan Luo approaches this passage from a political-economical perspective (“Ideas in Practice,” 83).

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Yang Rubin, *Rujia shenti guan*, 45, 52.

¹⁷¹ Wang Anshi, “Li yue lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.703.

The quotation comes from *Mencius* 2A2, arguably one of the most important entries in the entire *Mencius*.¹⁷² When discussing with his student Gongsun Chou 公孫醜 on how to attain an immovable heart as one's moral guide, Mencius says:

Your will is the commander of *qi*. *Qi* fills the body. When your will is there, *qi* follows. It is therefore said: "Keep your will. Do not injure *qi*."

[Gongsun Chou continues:] "You have already said 'When your will is there, *qi* follows.' Why do you then add 'Keep your will. Do not injure *qi*?'"

[Mencius] replies: "When your will is unified, it moves *qi*. When *qi* is unified, it moves your will. Now, [what moves] when running and stumbling is *qi*, but it moves one's heart instead."¹⁷³

夫志，氣之帥也；氣，體之充也。夫志至焉，氣次焉。故曰：“持其志，無暴其氣。”

“既曰‘志至焉，氣次焉’，又曰‘持其志無暴其氣’者，何也？”

曰：“志壹則動氣，氣壹則動志也。今夫蹶者趨者，是氣也，而反動其心。”¹⁷⁴

Mencius thinks that the will – what one sets one's heart on – should be the commander of the *qi*. On the other hand, he also recognizes that the *qi* caused by one's bodily movements can stir one's heart as well. That is, *qi* and heart interact with each other.¹⁷⁵ As Peter Bol points out, this in effect shows that a moral question is a physical one.¹⁷⁶ With this, the key theoretical issue in establishing the desired values in the subjects with externally imposed behavioral regulations has been solved. As Wang followed by saying: "the Former Kings, knowing this is so, therefore made *li* according to their understanding of the nature of all under Heaven" 先王知其然，是故體天下之性而為禮。¹⁷⁷ It is because the Former Kings knew that *qi* and heart interact with each other that they devised *li*, so as to "restore the proper nature through rectifying a person's *qi*" 正人氣而歸正性。¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² Numerous scholars have studied it. My understanding is based on Bol, "There Has Never Been One Greater Than Confucius." For other helpful discussions, see Li Cunshan, *Zhongguo qi lun tanyuan yu fawei*, 108; and Yang Rubin, *Rujia shenti guan*, chapter 3, esp. 154-66.

¹⁷³ Translation modified from Van Norden trans., *Mengzi*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ *Mencius*, 2A.2.

¹⁷⁵ Not everyone shares this assumption. For instance, Mencius' interlocutor Gaozi "refuses to make the connections between external and internal" (Bol, "There Has Never Been One Greater Than Confucius," 50).

¹⁷⁶ Bol, "There Has Never Been One Greater Than Confucius," 50.

¹⁷⁷ Recall what Wang wrote in "On *Li*": "因性之欲而為制" (*LCJ*, 66.702).

¹⁷⁸ Note that Wang is using two meanings of "*xing*": one is one's inborn nature – how humans are naturally –, the other is the nature one ought to have, what I translate as "the proper nature."

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Combining this with what Wang wrote in “On *Li*”, we can see the full procedure Wang had in mind:

Former Kings → *li* → inborn nature → body → *qi* → heart → sincerity → the proper nature

The Former Kings¹⁷⁹ made behavioral regulations to work on people’ inborn nature through their bodily movements. Such movements generate *qi* and because *qi* interacts with the heart, over time the attitude they set their heart on will be changed and the proper nature established in them. Wang’s *li*¹⁸⁰ follows how human nature works to establish the morality he designed in the people’s hearts as the proper nature they should have. This is “the ruler’s way” Wang referred to in the conversation with Shenzong: manipulating people’s spirit and transforming them with soulcraft, till they naturally think in accord with what is defined as good, i.e., in the interest of the ruler’s state. The talks of the internal figure prominently in this essay, because Wang’s statecraft is essentially a soulcraft – governing by transforming human nature.

Compared with forcing people to conform, Wang Anshi prefers having people’s hearts unreflectively think in this way:

Watching it and being necessarily able to see it, listening to it and being necessarily able to hear it, moving toward it and being necessarily able to arrive at it, thinking about it and being necessarily able to grasp it – this is what sincerity attains. Hearing it without listening to it, seeing it without watching it, grasping it without thinking about it, arriving at it without moving toward it – this is what [the proper] nature has inherently and that from which the magical arises, what those who go all out with their heart and sincerity attain. Therefore, what makes it unfathomable from sincerity is [the proper] nature. The worthy are those who nourish and establish [the proper] nature; the sages are those who exhaust [the proper] nature to attain utmost sincerity.

¹⁷⁹ Zhang Chengzhong thinks Wang’s “former kings” were closer to those referred to in *Guanzi* and *Han Feizi* (“Cong *Guanzi* ‘Qingzhong’ dao *Zhouguan* ‘Quanfu’,” 21). It seems to me Wang was referring to those in the broader statist tradition, including the Daoists, Legalists, and Mohists.

¹⁸⁰ Music works together with *li* as its supplement. Wang’s focus was only on *li*, as can be seen from his four prohibitions against behaviors not in line with *li*.

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視之能必見，聽之能必聞，行之能必至，思之能必得，是誠之所至也。不聽而聰，不視而明，不思而得，不行而至，是性之所固有，而神之所自生也，盡心盡誠者之所至也。故誠之所以能不測者，性也。賢者，鞠以立性者也；聖人，盡性以至誠者也。¹⁸¹

Sincerity – one’s conscious efforts – can bring about some results. But it is not as good as when people act out of what is ingrained in their nature. It is therefore the superior man aims at establishing the proper nature in himself and the sage attains sincerity with this proper nature that has been fully established in his heart, without needing to make a conscious effort at being sincere.

What matters in this type of learning is heart instead of eyes and ears, because “to hear and see is what the ears and eyes can do, but that by which one is smart and bright does not lie in the ears and eyes” 聰明者，耳目之所能為；而所以聰明者，非耳目之能為也。¹⁸² What the heart learns is not phenomenal knowledge, but morality. It is therefore at the beginning stage, the superior man would reduce interaction with the outside world and strictly observe the *li*,¹⁸³ until he has come to a point where he would not be led astray by the other schools of teaching:

The *Book of Change* says, “in Reduction/Loss,¹⁸⁴ there is difficulty in the beginning and gain in the end.” ... Reduce sounds in the ears, reduce colors in the eyes, reduce words in the mouth, reduce movements in the body – aren’t these difficult in the beginning? When arriving at the destination, there is nothing the ears do not hear, nothing the eyes do not see, nothing the mouth speaks that isn’t trusted, and nothing the body moves that does not conquer – aren’t these gaining in the end? Therefore, in the beginning of the superior man’s learning, he is like a stupid person or an ignorant child. On arriving at the destination, Heaven and Earth are not big enough for him, people and things are not numerous enough for him, ghosts and spirits cannot hide from him, and the fragmented [teachings] of the various masters cannot confuse him.

《易》曰“損，先難而後獲”。¹⁸⁵...耳損於聲，目損於色，口損於言，身損於動，非先難歟？及其至也，耳無不聞，目無不見，言無不信，動無不服，非後得歟？是故君子之學，始如

¹⁸¹ Wang Anshi, “Li yue lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 66.704.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66.703.

¹⁸⁴ The name of the forty-first of the sixty-four hexagrams.

¹⁸⁵ The *Book of Change* actually says “先難而後易”. It seems Wang intentionally switched “易” with “獲,” in keeping with his general approach to allure people into his program with profit.

愚人焉，如童蒙焉。及其至也，天地不足大，人物不足多，鬼神不足為隱，諸子之支離不足惑也。¹⁸⁶

Like Wang's engagement with Han Yu on sequence, the point is to first establish in the student's heart the right morality, so that in his moral decision-making, environmental input through eyes and ears cannot sway him. The theoretical source again comes from *Mencius*:

The faculties of eyes and ears do not reflect, but are deceived by things. Things interact with things and simply lead them along. The faculty of heart, however, thinks. If it thinks, it will then get it. If it does not think, it will not then get it. This is what Heaven has given me. Establish it in the greater faculty first and then the lesser [faculties] will not be able to gain the upper hand.

耳目之官不思，而蔽於物。物交物，則引之而已矣。心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得也。此天之所與我者，先立乎其大者，則其小者弗能奪也。¹⁸⁷

If in the reform Wang architected, some officials are granted “entrepreneurial autonomy”¹⁸⁸ or allowed to respond to things spontaneously,¹⁸⁹ it should be *after* they have acquired this proper nature.¹⁹⁰

This soulcraft is premised on a theoretical precondition: that human nature can be changed. This was not how people at the time generally thought,¹⁹¹ partly given Confucius' view to the contrary in the *Analects* 17.3:¹⁹² “the wisest and the stupidest do not change” 上智與下愚不移. His other statement – “You can discuss the loftiest matters with those who are above average, but not with those who are below average” 中人以上可以語上，中人以下不可以語上¹⁹³ – also suggests a similar view: some people are not malleable, but simply remain how they were born to

¹⁸⁶ Wang Anshi, “Li yue lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.705-6.

¹⁸⁷ *Mencius*, 6A.15. Translation modified from Van Norden trans., *Mengzi*, 156.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse*, 117.

¹⁸⁹ Luo, “Ideas in Practice,” 80.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Smith has shown that most of those granted such entrepreneurial autonomy “had already displayed their aggressiveness, ingenuity, and loyalty to the reform cause in previous New Policies posts or tasks” and that they were probably typically ruthless (*Taxing Heaven's Storehouse*, 123, 125).

¹⁹¹ See, for example, the views of Liu Chang and Sima Guang cited below.

¹⁹² Mid-eleventh intellectuals did not blindly follow Confucius (Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 61), but the majority still followed him on this specific point.

¹⁹³ The *Analects*, 6.21. Translation Slingerland's (*Confucius Analects*, 59).

be. In two adjacent essays in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, Wang Anshi produced a theory of the malleability of human moral nature, claiming it to be consistent with Confucius.

In “Tracing Human Nature,” referring to the *Analects* 17.3, Wang wrote:

This is about intelligence and stupidity, whereas what I said is about human nature and good and bad. With regard to the good, so long as the bad people do it, it is so; with regard to intelligence, the stupid people perhaps cannot be forced to have it.

此之謂智愚，吾所云者，性與善惡也。¹⁹⁴惡者之於善也，為之則是；愚者之於智也，或不可強而有也。¹⁹⁵

Making a distinction between the intellectual and the moral spheres, Wang says Confucius’ words were about the former only.¹⁹⁶ In the intellectual sphere, Wang grants that the stupid cannot be changed to become intelligent, as Confucius said. The case is, however, different in the moral sphere, Wang points out: here, a bad person can still do good things. That is, one’s moral nature can be changed by making efforts.

By “intelligence,” Wang specifically refers to literary gift, as he follows by writing:

Fu Xi composed the *Change*, whereas the words of later sages’, unless by the brightest and the divinest of all under Heaven, whose can participate in it? Confucius composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and Ziyou and Zixia could not place a single word in it. It is perhaps that Fu Xi’s intelligence, none other than the brightest and the divinest under Heaven can participate in; and that Confucius’ intelligence, even Ziyou and Zixia cannot be forced to be capable of, let alone the stupidest. Its unchangability is clear.

¹⁹⁴ Fu Sinian points out that it was Mencius who initiated the discourse on human nature being good (*Xing ming gu xun bianzheng*, 628). For more on what this meant for Wang Anshi’s soulcraft as statecraft, see chapter 4.

¹⁹⁵ Wang Anshi, “Yuan xing,” in *LCJ*, 68.726-27.

¹⁹⁶ This distinction was also made in the earlier “Xing lun” (*LCJ*, 1064). While as noted above, there were indeed changes between “Xing lun” and the later essays in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, if we look at the underlying questions Wang was addressing with such statements, we can find some consistency. For instance, in his three essays on human nature – “Yuan xing,” “Xing shuo,” and “Xing lun” –, Wang Anshi was consistently grappling with one issue: to resolve the challenge posed by what Confucius said in the *Analects* 17.3 to his project of changing human nature.

伏羲作《易》，而後世聖人之言也，非天下之至精至神，其孰能與於此？孔子作《春秋》，則游、夏不能措一辭。蓋伏羲之智，非至精至神不能與；惟孔子之智，雖游、夏不可強而能也，況所謂下愚者哉？其不移明矣。¹⁹⁷

The *Analects* 11.3 tells us Ziyou and Zixia were the two students of Confucius' who are good at literary learning (*wenxue* 文學). If even they cannot add a word to Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals*, then such literary gift is undoubtedly exclusive to the few sages like Fu Xi and Confucius and cannot be acquired through learning at all. This is not necessarily what Confucius meant by intelligence, but Wang Anshi's interpretation of it supports his agenda against literary learning, by telling people this depends on rare inborn talent and excludes most people.

If here Wang still begrudgingly grants the validity of Confucius' words in the intellectual sphere, in "Explicating Human Nature" 性說, Wang absorbs intelligence into morality by supplying a solution for changing one's "intellectual" quality.¹⁹⁸

Practicing the good and doing just that, this is the so-called the wisest; practicing the bad and doing just that, this is the so-called the stupidest. Sometimes practicing the good, sometimes practicing the bad, this is the so-called average men. ... It is only because they do not change that thereafter they are called the wisest; it is only because they do not change that thereafter they are called the stupidest. All are named on their deaths. It is not that what is born cannot be changed.

習於善而已矣，所謂上智者；習於惡而已矣，所謂下愚者；一習於善，一習於惡，所謂中人者。...惟其不移，然後謂之上智；惟其不移，然後謂之下愚。皆於其卒也命之，夫非生而不可移也。¹⁹⁹

Under the façade of linguistic resemblance to Confucius' "by nature, people are close; by practice, they are removed from each other" 性相近，習相遠，²⁰⁰ Wang Anshi carried out a few bold conceptual actions: first, what he now means by *zhi* does not refer to one's inborn intellectual capacity, but the ability to accord with what is defined as good. Second, whereas in Confucius,

¹⁹⁷ Wang Anshi, "Yuan xing," in *LCJ*, 68.727.

¹⁹⁸ Liu Chengguo notes Wang's willingness to contradict himself in order to stress the importance of practice (*Jinggong Xinxue yanjiu*, 139).

¹⁹⁹ Wang Anshi, "Xing shuo," in *LCJ*, 68.727.

²⁰⁰ The *Analects*, 17.2.

buyi 不移 means one's intellectual aptitude remains the same throughout one's life, Wang has them mean one consistently does something without change. Finally, one's aptitude is not determined at birth, but on death, and the criterion for evaluating it is not how one is born to be, but the actions one chooses to perform throughout one's life. In this way, Wang made even "intellectual" nature malleable, so long as one is willing to put efforts into it.²⁰¹

Paul Smith notes that to carry out Wang's plan, suitable men "had to be mustered from all levels of society."²⁰² And yet, as we saw in chapter 1, Wang Anshi did not think men with literary talent – the vast majority of the existing elite who were selected into officialdom through the *jinshi* examination featuring the testing of literary skills – useful. This made it necessary for him to mobilize a new type of men to aspire to climb up on the social ladder, who constituted the vast majority of the adult male population in the state. Wang Anshi had worked out a full procedure for attracting them and turning them into the kind of agents that would be useful to the ruler's state, the question is whether such men, born lacking the talent the literati mainstream at the time considered essential for getting ahead in officialdom, would believe they can do it.²⁰³ In the long letter to Renzong, after pointing out the way to draw people in with the dual-track value system, Wang had noted this problem:

Were the literati unable [to do it], that is it. If they are able [to do it], who would let go of what they wish to have and not encourage themselves to become talents? Thus I say: not to be concerned about the people's not doing it. Be concerned about their inability. ... Except for the stupidest whose material cannot be changed, there is none who is unable to join this.

士不能則已矣，苟能，則孰肯舍其所願得，而不自勉以為才？故曰：不患人之不為，患人之不能。...自非下愚不可移之才，未有不能赴者也。²⁰⁴

The only bottle neck on the stimulation mechanism Wang designed is not everyone thinks they have this ability. This is what he sought to convince his intended audience in these two essays:

²⁰¹ For an insightful analysis of this essay in comparison with Han Yu's "Tracing Human Nature," see Zhang Chengzhong, "Yi zhongren wei zhi," 22-24.

²⁰² Smith, "State Power and Economic Activism," 87.

²⁰³ For instance, around this time, Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019-1068) put forward an argument that managing the state is the job of a select few ("Lun xing," in Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin eds., *Quan Song wen*, 59.259). Likewise, Sima Guang was against the creation of a new elite (Bol, "Government, Society, and State," 180). In this regard, Wang's program was a "progressive" one by today's standard.

²⁰⁴ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong Huangdi yan shi shu," in *LCJ*, 39.421-22.

nothing cannot be changed. So long as one keeps doing what is defined as good till death, even if he was born stupid by intellectual aptitude, he would be called the wisest, not to say changing one's moral nature.

IV. Justifying the Crafted Nature

After the 1068/4 meeting with Shenzong, Wang Anshi wrote the emperor a short note,²⁰⁵ in which he criticized the governance during Renzong's reign and pointed out the two spheres where it failed:

In everything, he followed the natural pattern and tendency, while not working on manipulating spirit or scrutinizing [the relationship] between name and substance.

一切因任自然之理勢，而精神之運有所不加，名實之間有所不察。²⁰⁶

These are the two spheres Wang was addressing with a statecraft devoted to changing the natural state of things.

Wang Anshi's objection to following how things are naturally is because he thinks in this way they are not useful to the ruler's state. Despite his major takeaway from Laozi's idea of *daode*, he faults him for following the natural way.²⁰⁷ Rather, what is natural needs to be completed by the sage through governance: "the sage is only engaged in cultivating what he uses to complete the myriad things, and does not speak of that by which to give birth to the myriad things. It is perhaps because that which gives birth lies in nature, not what human forces can get to participate in." 聖人唯務修其成萬物者，不言其生萬物者，蓋生者尸之於自然，非人力之所得與矣。

²⁰⁸

This includes human nature, as he wrote in his commentary on the "Great Plan":

²⁰⁵ This letter is said to have been read by the emperor attentively for several times (Huang Yizhou, *XCBSB*, 95).

²⁰⁶ Wang Anshi, "Ben chao bainian wushi zhazi," in *LCJ*, 41.446.

²⁰⁷ Wang Anshi, "Laozi," in *LCJ*, 68.723. Cf. Lu Guolong's reading to the contrary (*Song ru weiyan*, 106).

²⁰⁸ Wang Anshi, "Laozi," in *LCJ*, 68.723. See also id., "Li lun," in *LCJ*, 66.701-02.

Likes and dislikes are human nature. What Heaven²⁰⁹ ordains is called human nature. What is made [by the people] is human action. Human action is then contrary to [the proper] nature. ... What is called “showing them likes and dislikes” is nothing but [showing them] the nature [they should have].

好惡者，性也，天命之謂性。作者，人為也，人為則與性反矣。...所謂“示之以好惡者，”²¹⁰性而已矣。²¹¹

Wang kept switching the referents of his terms,²¹² but his point is clear: a person’s nature is not to be left for them to decide on their own, but should be ordained by a higher authority, who shows them the nature they should have.

In the above, we have seen how Wang worked on manipulating spirit to craft the nature they should have. Let us now see how he scrutinized the relationship between name and substance.²¹³ As we know, rectifying names is the top priority in governance according to Confucius. Wang Anshi took this very seriously, claiming “the sage’s teaching lies in rectifying names and that is all” 聖人之教，正名而已。²¹⁴ In a conversation with Shenzong, after citing Confucius’ words in the *Analects* 13.3 about the consequences of not rectifying names, like preventing things from getting accomplished and making the people not knowing where to put their hands and feet, Wang pointed out:

Thus, the root cause for the people’s not knowing where to put their hands and feet lies in the names having not been rectified. ... Now, different opinions exist in the court and most people have

²⁰⁹ Wang used *tian* to refer to the ruler here. The rationale he told us is as follows: “人君以中道布言，是以為彝是以為訓者，於天其訓而已”；“二帝三王之誥命，未嘗不稱天者，所謂於帝於訓也，此人之所以化其上也” (“Hong fan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.691).

²¹⁰ Li Longji and Xing Bing, *Xiaojing zhushu*, 24.

²¹¹ Wang Anshi, “Hong fan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.691.

²¹² For instance, this *ren* 人, used in contrast to Heaven (i.e., the ruler), refers to the populace, different from the *ren* in the “Laozi” quote above.

²¹³ While this was a technique commonly found in Mohist, Daoist and Legalist writings (see, for example, Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*; Defoort, “The Rhetorical Power of Naming”), Xunzi also worked in great depth on this. However, as Michael Fuller’s work on moral epistemology has shown, Xunzi’s approach is phenomenological – to him, humans gain moral knowledge through their sense perception of phenomena in the world via their corporeal faculties (*Drifting among Rivers and Lakes*, 37-39). That is, to Xunzi, the name refers to the substance in the phenomenal world about which humans are to know through their eyes and ears. One’s thinking – the function of the heart – is based on this. This is not the line Wang Anshi was following.

²¹⁴ Wang Anshi, “Yuan xing,” in *LCJ*, 68.727. Rectifying names was the main task of a number of Wang’s essays, including “Yang Meng” (*LCJ*, 64.679-70) and “Dui nan” (*LCJ*, 68.728-29). One signal for when he was doing this is the appearance of such terms as “zhengxing” 正性 and “zhengming” 正命.

treacherous thoughts. ... The devious is taken as upright and the upright devious. [The issue of] names having not been rectified is severe. Then when it causes such harms as to make the people not know where to put their hands and feet and eat each other, it shall not come as a surprise.

然則民無所措手足，其本在於名不正。...今朝廷異論，類皆懷奸，...以邪為正，以正為邪，其為名不正甚矣，則其患至於人無所措手足、人相食無足怪也。²¹⁵

Rectifying names is fundamental for making the people know how to behave, especially at a time when Wang's counter-mainstream value system was still in the minority. It is for this reason that Wang did lots of work in this regard. Below I sketch three lines along which it unfolded.

1. Claiming the shaped nature is not inauthentic

In "On *Li*," at the same time when saying the role of his *li* is to restrain people's natural tendencies with coercive behavioral regulations that over time will transform their nature into the proper one, Wang also justified it:²¹⁶

Alas, Excellency Xun, in his not knowing *li*, said, "The sage transformed human nature and inauthenticity²¹⁷ arose." Thus I know he did not know *li*. The important thing in knowing *li* lies in knowing the point of *li*. However, while Excellency Xun highly praised the beauty of its methods, measures, and rhythms, when it comes to speak of transformation, he then thought it [made people] inauthentic. How could he have known the point of *li*? Now *li* begins with Heaven[']s endowment] and completes through human [efforts]. Knowing Heaven[']s endowment] and yet not knowing human [efforts], it is then crude; knowing human [efforts] yet not knowing Heaven[']s endowment], it is then inauthentic. The sage disliked their being crude and hated their being inauthentic. It was for this *li* arose. Now Excellency Xun took the sage's transforming human nature as giving rise to inauthenticity. His mistake lied in not knowing Heaven[']s endowment].

嗚呼，荀卿之不知禮也，其言曰“聖人化性而起偽”²¹⁸，吾是以知其不知禮也。知禮者，貴乎知禮之意。而荀卿盛稱其法度節奏之美，至於言化，則以為偽也。亦烏知禮之意哉？夫

²¹⁵ Li Tao, *XCB*, 225.5474-5. Dated to 1071/7.

²¹⁶ Wang tends to do these two things simultaneously in one text.

²¹⁷ John Knoblock (*Xunzi*, 150) translates "wei" as "conscious exertion" while Hutton (*Xunzi*, 248) and Virág (*The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 164) "deliberate effort." My literal translation is based on the fact that Wang pairs it with "zhen" (authenticity).

²¹⁸ Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, 23.424.

禮始於天而成於人，知天而不知人則野，知人而不知天則偽。聖人惡其野而疾其偽，以是禮興焉。今荀卿以謂聖人之化性為起偽，則是不知天之過也。²¹⁹

Wang Anshi was referring to what Xunzi said in the “Human Nature is Evil” chapter of *Xunzi*. According to Xunzi’s words there, each person is naturally inclined to get his own needs met and it is only thanks to the norms for ritual propriety and duty (*li* and *yi*) made by the sages that human relationships are ordered. However, because the son’s giving precedence to the father and the younger brother’s working more to relieve the burden of the older brother are not how they would behave naturally, Xunzi said that at the same time when transforming human nature, *li* gave rise to inauthenticity.²²⁰ Wang Anshi agrees with Xunzi on *li*’s going against people’s natural inclinations,²²¹ but he would not allow it be said that the nature people come to acquire through the transformation is inauthentic, because, he contends, such a transformation begins with people’s natural endowment – it is biologically rooted in humans.

Other than grounding this proper nature in human biology to counter charges of inauthenticity, Wang also denigrates the inborn nature. In the above, we have seen him call it “crude.” It is also potentially harmful:

Had the sage not made *li* for them, then under Heaven there would be those who slight their father and hate their mother. [People behaving like] this can also be said to have lost their [proper] nature. If those who have gotten their [proper] nature were regarded as inauthentic, then can those who have lost their [proper] nature be regarded as authentic? This is why Excellency Xun was someone who did not think it through.

聖人苟不為之禮，則天下蓋將有慢其父而疾其母者矣。此亦可謂失其性也。得性者以為偽，則失其性者乃可以為真乎？此荀卿之所以為不思也。²²²

Transforming human nature with *li* is fully justified because otherwise humans would do harm to each other. In helping them get the proper nature, the sage did the people a favor. Through a series of tricky reasoning in the first three sentences, perhaps intentionally so to lead the reader into

²¹⁹ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.701-02.

²²⁰ Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, 23.422-24.

²²¹ Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

²²² Wang Anshi, “Li lun,” in *LCJ*, 66.702.

accepting his argument, Wang turned to take the offensive, by questioning the sense of those who say the shaped nature is inauthentic.²²³

Similar legitimizing efforts were also made elsewhere. For instance, in “Forgiving Mistake,” again an essay in the *Miscellaneous Theories* volumes, Wang wrote:

Existing between Heaven and Earth, it is of course impossible for a human being to be without mistakes. But eventually it does not harm his becoming a worthy and even a sage. Why? It is only because he is good at returning to the norm. ... Heaven endows the five elements to the myriad intelligent beings. Humans originally had them all. Having them but not thinking about them, they get lost; thinking about them but not practicing them, they get laid to waste. One day, one regrets his previous mistakes and resolutely thinks about and practices them. This is getting back what has been lost and picking up what has been laid to waste. If, however, [someone] says this is not his nature, this is leading all under Heaven to harm human nature. ... One’s having money with oneself is certainly not as [firm] as one’s having the nature in oneself. When one gets back one’s lost money, the money cannot be said to be not his; then, can it be said that the nature one lost but gets back is not his nature?

人介乎天地之間，則固不能無過，卒不害聖且賢者何？亦善復常也。...天播五行於萬靈，人固備而有之。有而不思則失，思而不行則廢。一日咎前之非，沛然思而行之，是失而復得、廢而復舉也。顧曰非其性，是率天下而戕性也。...財之在己，固不若性之為己有也。財失復得，曰非其財，且不可；性失復得，曰非其性，可乎？²²⁴

Living according to one’s natural inclinations cannot free one from making mistakes. But if one is good at following the behavioral regulations, one can still gain the proper nature. The biological roots being in every human being, one only needs to know the method and follow it in action. When one acquires it, this new nature cannot be said to be something alien to oneself, but should be taken as the nature one originally had but got lost due to carelessness – even getting back one’s lost money cannot be said to be getting something not belonging to him, how can getting back one’s lost nature, which has deep roots in one’s biological being, be said to not belong to him?²²⁵

²²³ Note Wang did not say the shaped nature is “authentic”. This gives us a sense of the care he took with his wording.

²²⁴ Wang Anshi, “Yuan guo,” in *LCJ*, 69.732.

²²⁵ Scholars note that “retrieving lost nature” was one of the main points made in Wang Pang’s commentaries on *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. See, for example, Lu Guolong, *Song ru weiyuan*, 172; Chiang Shu-chun, “Wang Pang Laozi zhu ‘Xing lun’ fawei”; and Shen Ming-quian, “Wang Pang Nanhua Zhenjing xin zhuan sixiang tixi quan gou,” 138-41.

Conversely, those who turn away from the morality Wang designed can be said to have lost their nature, as Wang wrote in a letter to a student:

The ancients took having no superior men as having no Way and having no auspicious virtue (*de*) as having no virtue – then it is not impermissible to call those who depart from the good and approach the bad as having lost their nature.

古人以無君子為無道，以無吉德為無德，則出善就惡謂之性亡，無不可也。²²⁶

Whether the reader finds Wang's such arguments convincing or confusing, that he felt it necessary to make efforts at legitimization tells his uneasiness with the potential illegitimacy of his political theory. This partly derived from the counter-mainstream nature of the values he proposed and partly from the widely perceived goodness of the humanist virtues – to convince people that broad love of humans is actually bad was perhaps no easy task, so was making people believe that it is good to place the state's interest above that of the individual self. But most importantly, Wang needed to get his revolutionary definition of what is good accepted.

2. Reversing good and bad with rhetorical devices

That rhetorical devices are useful in reversing moral order can be seen from a global comparative case. In his study of rhetoric in Renaissance Europe, Quentin Skinner has shown how virtue and vice are neighbors. Through wielding certain rhetorical techniques, a virtue can be turned into a vice, no matter how implausible it may seem at first sight. One such technique is called “paradiastole,” which some Tudor rhetoricians thought “can actually be *defined* as a method of excusing the vices by redescribing them as virtues.” Skinner's example is Machiavelli: in taking issue with the virtues of clemency and liberality, Machiavelli's tricks lied in using paradiastolic re-descriptions to disparage “the most excellent virtues among men,” and calling things with contrary names “by implying that the great and indispensable virtue of clemency is really a vice,” so as “to praise that which is to be despised and detested, to follow that which is to be fled, to love that which is to be hated,” and above all ‘to bring into a confusion the distinction of good and evil.’”²²⁷

²²⁶ Wang Anshi, “Zai da Gong Shenfu *Lunyu Mengzi shu*,” in *LCJ*, 72.765. See also “Yang Meng,” in *LCJ*, 66.680.

²²⁷ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 153, 163, 172. The last citation is Skinner quoting Innocent Gentillet. Note, however, James Hankins' revisionist argument that what Machiavelli did was to make virtue irrelevant in politics, rather than turning it into vice (*Virtue Politics*, chapter 19).

If rhetorical devices can help Machiavelli in his attempt to turn clemency into a vice and confuse the distinction between good and evil, they can help Wang Anshi in his attempt to convince people humanity is bad and turn the existing moral order upside down as well.

In his commentary on the “Great Plan”, Wang wrote:

Once soft, once hard; once dark, once bright. Therefore, when there is the upright, there is the devious; when there is the fine, there is the foul; when there is the ugly, there is the beautiful; when there is the ominous, there is the auspicious. The workings of nature and destiny and the idea of *daode* are both in this.

一柔一剛，一晦一明，故有正有邪，有美有惡，有醜有好，有凶有吉。性命之理，道德之意，皆在是矣。²²⁸

What did he mean by saying the workings of nature and destiny and the idea of *daode* – the gist of his learning according to his admiring biographer – both lie in pairs of opposites? Wang Anshi was referring to dialectics – the crucial weapon for carrying out a social revolution –,²²⁹ which was supplied by *Laozi*, the “earliest major representative of Chinese dialectics.”²³⁰ For instance, to this line in *Laozi* – “When all under Heaven know that by which the fine is fine, then the foul [shall become apparent]; when all know that by which the good is good, then the bad [shall become apparent]” 天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已；皆知善之為善，斯不善已, Wang’s commentary reads: “The fine is the opposite of the foul. The good is the reverse of the bad. This is the constant way things work.” 夫美者，惡之對；善者，不善之反。此物理之常。²³¹ Things in the moral sphere always exist in relation to their opposites. A thing is fine not because it has intrinsic qualities that make it fine, but because it is the opposite of the foul. A thing is good not because it has intrinsic qualities that make it good, but because it is the reverse of the bad. To Wang, this is how

²²⁸ Wang Anshi, “‘Hongfan’ zhuan,” in *LCJ*, 65.686.

²²⁹ Qi Xia, *Songxue de fazhan he yanbian*, 19; Wang Shuhua, “Jinggong Xinxue zhushu kaobian,” 534–35.

²³⁰ Zhang Dainian, *Zhang Dainian quanji*, 1.21. There was a well-known anecdote about Wang Pang: when asked to identify roe and deer before he was ten, Pang responded by saying that the one next to the roe is deer, and the one next to the deer is roe (Peng Cheng, *Moke hui xi*, 40). Although any smart boy can come up with such an answer, it is possible that Wang Anshi taught dialectical way of thinking to Pang.

²³¹ Rong Zhaozu, *Wang Anshi Laozi zhu ji ben*, 4.

things are in general.²³² Knowing a moral judgment always exists in relation to its opposite and they can always be transformed into each other, society's moral order can always be reversed.²³³

Carrying out this social revolution at a time when the humanist value system was prevailing among the Confucians, to whose ranks Wang belonged given that “Confucianism” was the default learning for those pursuing a government career at the time, Wang Anshi did not think it wise to openly attack *renyi* or call for removing them.²³⁴ This is where dialectics figured. To effect a fundamental change in social values, all he needed was to define which values were considered good and have the ruler reward those exhibiting them. Once the people see obediently following the ruler for the interest of the state is encouraged, what is discouraged – using one's own moral judgment in social-political actions according to the general principle of loving humans broadly and appropriately – shall go without saying. The key lies in what is good and what bad are up to definition and the right to define them belongs to the ruler exclusively, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter.

Perhaps because argumentation often took place in oral exchanges, there are not many sources showing how Wang actually wielded rhetorical devices to reverse good and bad. But the following case can give us a glimpse. In 1070/2, wanting to persuade Wang Anshi to drop the reform, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) wrote his old colleague a myriad-word letter, in which he pointed out:

Now, in governance, Jie fu²³⁵ changed all the old methods of the ancestors, making front rear, above below, right left, and what's established destroyed. ... None is able to follow the conventional and maintain the constant.

²³² Note by “things” (*wu*), Wang meant things in the spiritual realm as well, like how he did at the beginning of his commentary on the “Great Plan”: 五事之本在人心; ...天一生水，其於物為精; ...地二生火，其於物為神; ...” (*LCJ*, 65.685-86).

²³³ For a helpful analysis, see Hou Wailu ed., *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi*, IV-1, 452–54.

²³⁴ Nor would he openly oppose Confucius, as we have seen in his attempt to draw on Confucius' authority when advancing his view on human nature in “Yuan xing” and “Xing shuo” above. Similar efforts were all also made in “Fu zi xian yu Yao Shun” (*LCJ*, 67.711-12). Despite the care Wang Anshi took, however, some of his contemporaries had nonetheless figured this out. Other than Lin Zhiqi and Su Shi above and Chen Cisheng below, his cousin Zeng Gong also noted Wang's turning against Confucius by emptying out *ren* (humanity) in the epitaph he wrote for Wang Ling (“Yu Wang Shenfu shu,” in *Zeng Gong ji*, 16.264).

²³⁵ Wang Anshi's courtesy name.

今介甫為政，盡變更祖宗舊法，先者後之，上者下之，右者左之，成者毀之...無一人得襲故守常。²³⁶

The reform had turned the whole world upside down. In this letter, Sima Guang accused Wang Anshi of setting up a reform headquarters to bypass established government agencies, causing troubles to the people by making none able to continue living in the previous way of life, having the government pursue profit-making, and refusing to accept criticism.²³⁷ To these accusations, Wang responded:

What the Confucians fight about especially lies in name and substance. When names and substances have been made clear, then the reason under Heaven has been gotten. Now what Junshi²³⁸ lectured me on is that I have incurred the resentment and slander of all under Heaven because I encroached upon the bureaucracy, caused troubles, pursued profit-making, and refused to accept criticism. To me, I think receiving the ruler's order to discuss methods and measures and establish them in the court, thereby delegating them to relevant officials [for implementation], is not encroaching upon the bureaucracy. Upholding the Former Kings' governance to generate benefits and remove harms is not causing troubles. Managing revenues for all under Heaven is not pursuing profit-making. Keeping away evil theories and making things difficult for the crafty is not refusing to accept criticism.

夫儒者所爭，尤在於名實。名實已明，而天下之理得矣。今君實所以見教者以為侵官、生事、徵利、拒諫，以致天下怨謗也。某則以謂受命於人主，議法度而修之於朝廷，以授之於有司，不為侵官。舉先王之政，以興利除弊，不為生事。為天下理財，不為徵利。闢邪說，難任人，不為拒諫。²³⁹

With a re-description, Wang made what Sima accused as bad stand on a high moral ground.

3. Claiming a grounding in the Confucian tradition and the cosmos

²³⁶ Sima Guang, "Yu Wang Jiefu shu," in *CJJ*, 60.723. For a similar complaint, see Liu Zhi, "Lun zhuyifa fenxi di er shu," in *Zhongsu ji*, 3.56–57.

²³⁷ Sima Guang, "Yu Wang Jiefu shu," in *CJJ*, 60.719-25.

²³⁸ Sima Guang's courtesy name.

²³⁹ Wang Anshi, "Da Sima jianyi shu," in *LCJ*, 73.773. Li Deshen dates this to shortly after Sima Guang's 1070/2/27 letter to Wang (*Wang Anshi shi wen xinian*, 211).

Wang Anshi recognizes the importance of maintaining continuity with tradition in building legitimacy, as he stressed it by citing a line from the *Book of Documents*: “That the affairs of one, not making the ancients his masters, can be perpetuated for generations, is what I have not heard” 事不師古，以克永世，匪說攸聞。²⁴⁰ This is why despite his love of *Mencius* and *Laozi*,²⁴¹ when designing the core curriculum for teaching this new morality, as we shall see in the next chapter, Wang chose three classics from the Confucian tradition. In this way, he added legitimacy to his revolution by grounding it in the tradition he fundamentally broke up with in terms of the content of core values.

Wang’s most striking legitimizing effort came from the preface he wrote to his *Explication of Characters*:

Strokes, ... and characters, ... are both rooted in Nature and cannot be made by the private intelligence of human beings. [They] and Fu Xi’s eight hexagrams and King Wen’s sixty-four hexagrams, though different in use, were made in the same way. They supplement each other to complete the *Change*. The Former Kings thought this cannot be taken lightly and were concerned that future generations in the world might lose the method. Therefore, they unified [how they were written] once every three years. The reason for unifying it was so as to make *daode* the same.

文者，...字者，...皆本於自然，非人私智所能為也。與夫伏羲八卦，文王六十四，異用而同制，相待而成《易》。先王以為不可忽，而患天下後世失其法，故三歲一同。同之者，一道德也。²⁴²

Again, Wang turned the tradition upside down: according to the earlier imperial view, the writing system resulted from the cumulative efforts of a few humans who modeled upon the patterns in the natural world, evolving step by step from the simpler pictographic symbols – hexagrams included – to an increasingly complex language.²⁴³ In Wang’s account, however, humans were not allowed a role in its creation. With “*yu fu*” 與夫 (and), Wang separated the hexagrams from the

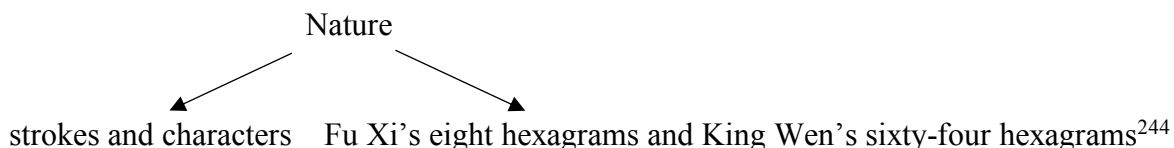
²⁴⁰ Wang Anshi, “Shang wu shi zhazi,” in *LCJ*, 41.440. Translation adopted from James Legge trans., *The Shoo King*, 260.

²⁴¹ Sima Guang, “Yu Wang Jiefu shu,” in *CJJ*, 60.723. Wang did, however, play an important role in elevating the official status of Mencius, as noted in chapter 3.

²⁴² Wang Anshi, “*Xining Zishuo xu*,” in *LCJ*, 84.879.

²⁴³ See for example Xu Shen’s preface to *Shuowen jiezi* (Yan Kejun ed., *Quan Shanggu, Sandai, Qin, Han, Sanguo, Liuchao wen*, vol. II, 43) and the introduction to the bibliography treatise of *Sui History* (Wei Zheng et al., *Sui shu*, 32.903-04).

writing system, making them parallel to each other instead of one following another in a linear timeline:



The Former Kings could help maintain the connection between the writing system and the cosmos by unifying how characters were written every three years,²⁴⁵ but they did not have a hand in their creation. In this way, the characters with which the students were to begin learning the morality Wang Anshi designed had been grounded in the natural order.²⁴⁶ The extraordinariness of this legitimizing effort lied in that whereas in the earlier imperial worldview, humans designed their order by modeling upon that of the cosmos,²⁴⁷ Wang made the speechless cosmos conform to the human order he designed.²⁴⁸

To sum up, deriving from his key takeaways from Laozi and Mencius, Wang Anshi's political theory mainly consisted of four parts: first, in line with Laozi's idea of *daode*, reversing literati self-governance by recentralizing moral authority to the monarch and turning against humanism; second, introducing a dual-track statist value system to replace the humanist one prevailing at the time; third, building on Mencius' insight into human nature, using a full procedure to firmly establish these values in the subjects' hearts, as if there were "natural" to them; finally, justifying this crafted nature by saying it is not inauthentic, wielding rhetorical devices to make the statist values with which it was composed of accepted as good, and claiming a grounding for

²⁴⁴ The sixty-four hexagrams of King Wen did not appear in the *Book of Change*, nor in Xu Shen's preface to *Shuowen jiezi* (Zhonghua shuju 1963 edition, 15a.314), but only in *Shiji* (4.154). I am not sure why Wang said so, but his account from Fu Xi to King Wen could be similar to Zhu Xi's expanding the four characters to sixteen in the introduction to his commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean* ("Zhongyong zhangju xu," in *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 14). For a close reading of Zhu's introduction, see Bol, "Words and Ideas."

²⁴⁵ A practice I am yet to find historical records on.

²⁴⁶ As Qiu Hansheng rightly observes ("Wang Anshi de Xinxue he bianfa sixiang de yuanze," 31).

²⁴⁷ Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 58-60.

²⁴⁸ See also Cai Bian's comment on this work (Chao Gongwu, *Junzhai dushuzhi jiaozheng*, 1000: "晚以所學考字畫奇耦橫直，深造天地陰陽造化之理，著《字說》，包括萬象，與《易》相表裏"). Winston Lo takes Wang's *Zishuo* "as a compendium of knowledge, his statement of the ultimate reality" ("Wang An-shih and the Confucian Ideal of 'Inner Sageliness,'" 48). This stands to the extent that this "reality" refers to the one made by Wang Anshi.

Chapter 2

the new morality in the Confucian tradition and the cosmos. Now, let us turn to its implementation.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ On the difference between political theory and the theory guiding specific political practice, see Liu Zehua, *Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi sixiang fansi*, 5.