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## Appendix

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# 'Neo-Confucianism,' Leibniz, and the fight against the Enlightenment

by Michael Billington

*The preceding Special Report has shown how the Conservative Revolution grew out of the assault upon the Renaissance, during the seventeenth-century Enlightenment in Europe. Venetian and British operatives spawned opposition to the Renaissance and the Platonic tradition, as represented by, especially, Johannes Kepler and Gottfried Leibniz. The following essay, part of a broader study on the use and misuse of developments in China by several leading figures in the Enlightenment, demonstrates that the principled issues that dominated the development of China in the last millennium, are identical to those which are central to the mortal conflict between oligarchism and republicanism in the West.*

To understand how the practitioners of the Enlightenment used China in their battle to destroy the influence of Leibniz and the Platonic Christian tradition, it is necessary to investigate the foremost philosophical battle which defined the course of history in China—the parallel in Chinese culture to the conflict in the West between those advocating the worldview of Plato on the one hand and the Aristotelians on the other. This fundamental conflict can be traced back in Chinese antiquity to the same general era as that of Plato, with Confucius and Mencius confronting the Taoists and the Legalists. But in modern times the conflict is most often presented in the opposing ideas of Chu Hsi (1130-1200) and Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529). Chu and Wang are popularly described as the leaders of two different schools within the same general philosophical category known as “Neo-Confucianism” in the West, just as Plato and Aristotle are often deceptively linked together as co-thinkers in something called “Greek thought.” Although Wang Yang-ming and his followers, even today, attempt to portray Chu and Wang’s thought as compatible, with minor differences on secondary issues, they are in fact the antagonists of opposite, irreconcilable conceptions of man and his or her role in the universe. Chu Hsi revived the teachings of Confucius and Mencius from antiquity, whose ideas had been diluted and formalized, or outright discarded, over the centuries by the influences of Taoism, Buddhism, and the Legalist form of political despotism. Chu led a Confucian Renaissance, in part by

developing a metaphysics which answered many questions left open by Confucius and Mencius, while countering the gnostic and empiricist metaphysics of the Taoists, and the mysticism of the Chan (Zen) Buddhists. Wang Yang-ming, three centuries later, finding the fundamental ideas and method of Chu Hsi incomprehensible, and after more than 20 years as a Taoist, developed an amalgam of Taoist metaphysics and Confucian rites, perverting the Confucian tradition and fostering an acceptance of an immoral syncretic mix of Confucianism, Taoism, and Chan Buddhism. This, we will see, is the ideology embraced by the Enlightenment figures in Europe.

### Chu Hsi

Chu Hsi took the fundamental concept of Confucianism, *jen* (humanness, or humanity), and developed it in a way which is usefully compared to the concept of *agapē* in the New Testament. He complained that the term had been used to represent love, which was not wrong in itself, but which missed the essence of the concept intended by Confucius and Mencius. In an essay called “Treatise on *Jen*,” Chu argued that *jen* is the “principle of love, the source of love, and that love can never exhaust *jen*.” Reflecting the Christian notion of *agapē* as the Holy Spirit, which connects all things in the unity of God, Chu Hsi wrote, “*Jen* cannot be interpreted purely from the point of view of function, but one must understand the principle that *jen* has the ability to function. One should not regard the original substance of *jen* as one thing and its function as another. The meaning of *jen* must be found in one idea and one principle. Only then can we talk on a high level about a principle that penetrates everything. Otherwise it will be the so-called vague thusness and stupid Buddha nature.” What distinguishes this higher notion of love is that it is an active principle of change in the universe rather than a Buddhist or Taoist feeling-state which submerges the individual in a universal “all is one” soup of undifferentiated substance. Specifically, Chu says that “The mind of Heaven to produce things is *jen*. In man’s endowment, he receives this mind from Heaven, and thus he can produce.”

It is this *jen*, subsuming the other fundamental Confucian

virtues which are man's inborn gift from Heaven (righteousness, propriety, and wisdom), which defines man as fundamentally good, as Mencius, especially, insisted. Chu Hsi, aware that this was often misinterpreted, wrote: "Love is not *jen*; the principle of love is *jen*. The mind is not *jen*, the character of the mind is *jen*." This was particularly aimed at a contemporary of Chu Hsi (Lu Hsiang-shan, the forerunner of Wang Yang-ming's ideas), who argued that the mind itself was *jen*, meaning that the mind alone was adequate to achieve sagehood, without any notion of *jen* permeating all the things in the universe, or any need to investigate those things. Wang Yang-ming was to argue later that the mind was able to know good from evil naturally, without the need to study or investigate the laws of the universe, as if by intuition. This he called "innate knowledge (*liang chih*), which he considered to be his major contribution to human knowledge. Chu Hsi had identified the problem with this concept long before Wang Yang-ming articulated it, arguing that it was the capacity of the mind to love, to study, to investigate, and to create which was the gift of Heaven, not a set of formal criteria inherently in the mind for making judgments. Chu wrote in regard to his contemporary Lu and (implicitly) Wang: "Their defect lies in completely discarding study and devoting themselves solely to practice. . . . They even want people to be alert and intuit their original mind. This is their great defect."

While Chu repudiated the atheistic view of the Buddhists and Taoists that all things are made of a single substance, he believed that all things are created by the same Creator and reflect the universal principle of that Creator. This principle he called, simply, Principle (*Li*). The Universal Principle he equated with God, the Lord-on-High, the Supreme Ultimate, while he defined the nature of every created thing as its individual principle (*li*), which partakes of the pure goodness and complete wholeness of Universal Principle. Man, alone, is created with the perfection of form which allows for the conscious investigation of the Principle of things, for the participation with the mind of Heaven in the production and creation of the universe.

*Li* is the Principle which underlies the laws of the universe, a concept of Natural Law which locates man's capacity to know and participate in the unfolding development of the myriad things and events in the universe. Showing the Platonic/Christian nature of Chu's conception of the relationship between God (Universal *Li*) and created things (individual *li*'s), he emphasized repeatedly that: "*Li* is One, but its manifestations are many." Leibniz, upon studying Chu Hsi's ideas, recognized in the concept of the *Li* a notion very close to his own concept of the "monad" as the primitive substance of all things in the universe, each different, without parts, extension or divisibility. About the Universal *Li*, Leibniz wrote: "Can we not say that the *Li* of the Chinese is the sovereign substance which we revere under the name of God?" Chu Hsi distinguished the Universal *Li* from the *li* of the created things, including that of man, by the fact that the mind of Heaven, which



Although both Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming are identified as "Neo-Confucians," Confucius (shown here) and Mencius were as distant from the latter as Plato was from Aristotle.

is *Li*, is conscious and intelligent, but, "it does not deliberate as in the case of man." The question of man's free will is located within the perfect will of God.

Chu Hsi combines a negative and a positive theology in explaining the nature of God, the Universal *Li*. In equating *Li* with the Supreme Ultimate and the Ultimate of Non-being, Chu argues that "it occupies no position, has no shape or appearance. . . . It is prior to physical things, and yet has never ceased to be after these things came to be. It is outside *yin* and *yang* and yet operates within them, it permeates all form and is everywhere contained, and yet did not have in the beginning any sound, smell, shadow, or resonance that could have been ascribed to it." (Note that *yin* and *yang* to the Taoists represented the fundamental duality of the universe, whereas Chu Hsi reduced them to being nothing more than the existence of opposites inherent in all created things: positive/negative, light/dark, etc., all subsumed in the unity of the real world defined by *Li*.)

Chu Hsi chose a passage from the Confucian classic work, "The Doctrine of the Mean," with his own specific interpretation, in order to identify the foundation of the peace and well-being of society as the act of the individual mind to "extend knowledge to the utmost, which lies in fully investigating the Principle in things." By making this invisible Principle, *Li*, which has no shape or other sensory aspects, the subject of investigation in the development of human knowl-

edge, Chu Hsi laid the groundwork for a truly modern science, in a manner similar to that of Nicolaus of Cusa in the West in the fifteenth century. Rather than empiricist methods of merely recording sensory data and deducing linear consequences of such appearances of things, Chu Hsi set the course for the investigation of the lawful causal relations in the developing universe, the investigation of Natural Law.

## Wang Yang-ming

But the Mongul hordes swept across China in the decades immediately following Chu Hsi's death in 1200, depopulating China and destroying its Renaissance. The revival of the Confucian tradition, and of Chu Hsi's teachings in particular, under the Ming Dynasty that overthrew the collapsed Mongul rule in 1388, contributed to the promise of a renewed Renaissance in China. But by the 1430s there was a reversal of the policies of development and global exploration of the early Ming leaders, and the dynasty entered a sustained period of decay and collapse.

In the late fifteenth century, Wang Yang-ming emerged as the first of a series of philosophers who became known as the School of Mind, as opposed to Chu Hsi's School of Principle. Historian Julia Ching, in her glowing biography of Wang Yang-ming, accurately compares him and his followers over the following century: to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and, especially, Heidegger.

Wang dates his own development from a failed experiment that he and a friend carried out in 1492. Wishing to discover what Chu Hsi meant by his concept of *Li*, the young men decided to investigate the principle of something to the utmost, as Chu had suggested. They chose some bamboo in the garden of Wang's father. Like the people in Plato's cave, they sat and stared at the bamboo for days on end, failing to understand that Chu Hsi had demonstrated that the physical appearance of the bamboo was merely a shadow of its true nature, its *Li*. They gave up without having discovered anything except that they were both getting sick.

Wang turned to Taoism and Chan Buddhism, and, after many years, reflecting back on the experiment in his father's garden, he made the "discovery" that: "There is no object, no event, no moral principle (*Li*), no righteousness and no good that lies outside of the mind. To insist on seeking the supreme good in every event and object is to separate what is one into two." It is from this sudden enlightenment that Wang developed his notion of *liang chih* mentioned above, which can be translated either as "innate knowledge" or "Knowledge of the good." In place of Chu Hsi's emphasis on extending knowledge through the investigation of the principle in things, Wang Yang-ming wrote: "Extension of knowledge is not what later scholars understood as enriching and widening knowledge. It means simply extending my innate knowledge to the utmost. . . . The sense of right and wrong requires no deliberation to know and does not depend on learning to function. That is why it is called innate knowl-

edge." Thus, what Chu Hsi ascribed only to God, namely, the capacity to act intelligently without deliberation, Wang Yang-ming ascribes to all mankind. Like the innate moral intuition of Descartes, and the categories of *a priori* judgment in Kant, Wang Yang-ming replaces the intelligibility of the laws of the universe and of the creative process with pure instinct, or at best a form of conscience. Wang argues that if one's intentions are sincere, then the innate knowledge will correctly guide one to the correct action. In fact, he specifically replaces Chu Hsi's scientific investigation with sincere intentions: "The work of seeking sincerity of intention is the same as the investigation of things."

This essentially atheistic rejection of any universal principle in favor of a dependence on conscience or intuition identifies the total breakdown of the concept of man in the living image of God. Each individual is reduced to his own physical being, like any beast, confronting the world on the basis of a Hobbesian "each against all," lacking any universal criterion or measure for determining whether one's conscience or "innate knowledge," or any idea whatsoever, conforms with Natural Law. This is the subject of LaRouche's discovery in the science of physical economy, and his notion of relative potential population-density.

It is lawful that, just as Descartes and Kant led to the overt fascism of Nietzsche and Heidegger, so Wang Yang-ming's school generated the anarchy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in China (such as that of Li Chih, a Nietzsche-like figure of the late sixteenth century) which brought down the Ming Dynasty.

It was precisely this question of the inadequacy of "following one's conscience" without any concept of a universal principle to inform the conscience, that Pope John Paul II addressed in his Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* in 1993. In this regard, it is worth quoting at length from one chapter of the pope's recent book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, for two reasons: First, he looks at the Enlightenment in a way which demonstrates the close parallel to the Chu/Wang conflict in China; and, second, it shows in sharp contrast the difference between the pope's views and those of Julia Ching, who is collaborating with the schismatic Hans Küng in operations against China. Both Küng and Ching are nominal Catholics, while fully embracing the same ideologues of the Enlightenment here attacked by the pope.

The pope in chapter 8 of his new book, looks at Descartes, who, he writes, "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought, who . . . inaugurated the great anthropocentric shift in philosophy. 'I think, therefore I am,' . . . is the motto of modern rationalism. All the rationalism of the last centuries—as much in its Anglo-Saxon expression as in its continental expression in Kantianism, Hegelianism, and the German philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to Husserl and Heidegger—can be considered a continuation and an expansion of Cartesian positions. . . . [Descartes] distanced us from the philosophy of

existence, and also from the traditional approaches of St. Thomas which led to God who is autonomous existence. . . . By making subjective consciousness absolute, Descartes moved instead toward pure consciousness of the Absolute, which is pure thought. Such an absolute is not autonomous existence, but rather autonomous thought. Only that which corresponds to Human thought makes sense. The objective truth of this thought is not as important as the fact that something exists in human consciousness." This passage could be transposed virtually word for word, substituting Wang Yang-ming and his followers for Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, and substituting Chu Hsi for St. Thomas Aquinas. Wang's *liang chih*, like Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," replaces the Absolute, the Supreme Ultimate, the Universal *Li*, of Chu Hsi, with the totally subjective Absolute of the mind. Wang Yang-ming even writes: "The mind is *Li*. Is there any affair in the world which is outside the mind? Is there any virtue which is outside the mind?"

Pope John Paul II continues that Descartes created the climate in which, within 150 years, "all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside. This was the time of the Enlightenment in France, when pure rationalism held sway. The French Revolution during the Reign of Terror, knocked down the altars dedicated to Christ, tossed crucifixes into the streets, introduced the cult of the goddess of Reason." The Holy Father should have added that these practitioners of the Enlightenment also beheaded Lavoisier, declaring that the Revolution had no need for science. The "Reason" worshipped by the Enlightenment was not the Divine Spark which guided Cusa, Kepler, and Leibniz in the creation of modern science, but the empiricist, subjective logic of Aristotle which can be used to justify anything at all, no matter how evil or destructive.

Wang Yang-ming also attacked the "scholars of these later days," as he referred to Chu Hsi and his supporters, on the issue of Taoism and Chan Buddhism. While insisting in his later life that he was not only a Confucian but the true philosophical descendant of Confucius and Mencius, he nonetheless wrote: "The practices of the two teachings [Chan Buddhism and Taoism] can all be my practices. . . . But certain scholars of these later ages have not understood the completeness of the teachings of the Sages. For this reason, they have distinguished themselves from the two teachings as though there exist two views of truth." This has, through the ages, served those who advocate the Taoist gnostic camp but who, for political reasons, need to pay lip service to Confucianism. This is most evident in reviewing the current "New Confucianism" movement. In this regard it is not surprising that Wang Yang-ming believed in what is now called "appropriate technology" for the peasant masses, whose lives, he insisted, should remain the same generation after generation, unfettered by knowledge of the laws of the physical universe or by or economic development. Wang praised the golden age of

Yao and Shun, the semi-mythical emperors of the third millennium B.C., when he claimed (contrary to the historical records as written by Confucius), "there was no pursuit after the knowledge of seeing and hearing to confuse them, no memorization and recitation to hinder them, no writing of flowery composition to indulge in, and no chasing after success and profit." This is the model of Oriental Despotism so desired by the Venetian designers of the Enlightenment.

Although the characterization of China as the model of "Enlightened Despotism" is a false construct, based on the worst tendencies in Chinese history and society, it is nevertheless the case that Chu Hsi and his school, who created the Confucian Renaissance during the Sung Dynasty, never proposed or discussed any notion of the concept of the modern nation-state. Nicolaus of Cusa's building on the concept of Natural Law developed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, posed the necessity of establishing governments on the basis of the consent of a free and informed citizenry, drawing on the divine spark of reason in Man to derive laws, and for the people to participate in the process of empowering or removing governments according to their adherence to Natural Law. As LaRouche said recently in regard to the Augustinian notion of natural law before the time of Cusa, it remained "contemplative," never becoming adopted as the basis of political society. This could also be applied to Chu Hsi and the leaders of the Confucian Renaissance. Chu Hsi advocated the extension of education to all children, and even wrote children's books toward that purpose, while he also sponsored books and educational programs on agricultural technology for farmers; but he never proposed the kind of nation-state which was necessary for these educational initiatives to succeed against the policies of those who believed it served their purposes to keep the masses in a state of ignorance.

The Mongul invasion crushed any potential for further development. Subsequently, despite the initial promise of the Ming Dynasty, as the dynasty declined, Wang Yang-ming and his followers destroyed the concept of Natural Law altogether in a manner similar to what William Wertz describes in the works of Grotius and Pufendorf, who "divorced natural law from moral theology" (see "Man Measures His Intellect Through the Power of His Works," *Fidelio*, Winter 1995). In the Chinese case, Natural Law was replaced (at best) by the Rites, by custom, which, as important as such questions are for a society, must be recognized as derived from Natural Law, not as Natural Law itself. Giving the Rites the force of Natural Law creates the potential for those Rites to become the means of distortion and oppression, rather than the means for celebrating and learning about the underlying truths at the source of the Rites. Set free from its moorings in the Absolute, in Universal Truth, custom is rendered subject to the vagaries of individual intention. As with Nietzsche and as Li Chih, such "freedom" from the Absolute opens the door to arbitrarily changing or outright discarding the Rites, the customs, and creating anarchy and fascism.