

**MIND IS PRINCIPLE**  
By Lu Jiuyuan

**Introduction**

“Neo-Confucianism” is a general term used to refer to the renaissance of Confucianism during the Song dynasty following a long period in which Buddhism and Daoism had dominated the philosophical world of the Chinese and also to the various philosophical schools of thought that developed as a result of that renaissance. Neo-Confucianism had its roots in the late Tang, came to maturity in the Northern and Southern Song periods, and continued to develop in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods. As a whole, Neo-Confucianism can best be understood as an intellectual reaction to the challenges of Buddhist and Daoist philosophy in which avowedly Confucian scholars incorporated Buddhist and Daoist concepts in order to produce a more sophisticated new Confucian metaphysics.

As Neo-Confucianism developed, two trends of thought emerged out of the Southern Song philosopher and official Zhu Xi’s synthesis of the “learning of Principle” and the “learning of the Mind and Heart.” Both trends agreed that all the myriad things of the universe are manifestations of a single “Principle” (*li*) and that this Principle is the essence of morality. By understanding the Principle that underlies the universe (just as Buddhists understood all things in the universe as manifestations of the single Buddha spirit), then, men may understand the moral principles that they must put into practice in order to achieve an ordered family, good government, and peace under heaven. The two trends of thought differed, however, on the way in which human beings are to understand Principle.

In the following document, the Song Neo-Confucian Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193, also known as Lu Xiangshan) states his side of the argument.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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**Mind Is Principle**  
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The mind is one and principle is one. Perfect truth is always a unity; the essential principle is never a duality. The mind and principle can never be separated into two. That is why Confucius said “In my Way there is one thing that runs throughout,”<sup>1</sup> and Mencius said, “The Way is one and only one.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Analects* 4:15.

<sup>2</sup> *Mencius* 3A:1.

...

The Teacher said that the myriad things exist luxuriantly in the mind. What permeates the mind and, pouring forth, extends to fill the universe, is nothing but principle.

The Teacher always said that outside the Way there are no events and outside events there is no Way.

...

... Most interpreters have explained the human mind [which is liable to make mistakes] as equivalent to human desires and the mind of the Way [which follows moral law] as equivalent to the Principle of Heaven. This interpretation is wrong. The mind is one. How can a human being have two minds?

**Questions:**

1. If the mind and principle are one, how then does one go about understanding principle (which is morality)?
2. What implications might Lu Jiuyuan's understanding of the relation between the human mind and the Principle of Heaven have for the authority of imperial laws?
3. What implications might Lu Jiuyuan's understanding of the relation between the human mind and the Principle of Heaven have for everyday behavior?

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Mencius said, "That wherein human beings differ from the birds and animals is but slight. The multitude of people relinquish it, while the noble person retains it."<sup>3</sup> What is relinquished is the mind. That is why Mencius said that some people "lose their original mind."<sup>4</sup> What is to be preserved is the mind. That is why Mencius said, "the great man is he who does not lose the mind of a newborn babe."<sup>5</sup> [What Mencius referred to as] the four sprouts [of pity and

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<sup>3</sup> *Xiangshan quanji* 35:10a.

<sup>4</sup> *Mencius* 4B:19.

<sup>5</sup> *Mencius* 4B:12.

## Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQs) on MIND IS PRINCIPLE, BY LU JIUYUAN

compassion, shame and aversion, modesty and compliance, and the sense of right and wrong] are this mind. It is what Heaven has endowed in us. All human beings have this mind, and all minds are endowed with this principle. The mind is principle.

The affairs of the universe are my own affairs; my own affairs are the affairs of the universe.

The human mind is most intelligent, and principle is most clear. All people have this in mind and all minds contain this principle in full.

The four directions and upward and downward constitute the spatial continuum. What has gone by in the past and what is to come in the future constitute the temporal continuum. These continua, or the universe, are my mind, and my mind is the universe. Sages appeared tens of thousands of generations ago. They shared this mind; they shared this principle. Sages will appear tens of thousands of generations to come. They will share this mind; they will share this principle. Over the four seas sages appear. They share this mind; they share this principle.

The mind is one and principle is one. Perfect truth is always a unity; the essential principle is never a duality. The mind and principle can never be separated into two. That is why Confucius said, "In my Way there is one thing that runs throughout,"<sup>6</sup> and Mencius said, "The Way is one and only one."<sup>7</sup> [Quoting Confucius,] Mencius also said, "There are just two ways: being humane and being inhumane."<sup>8</sup> To act in a certain way is humaneness. Not to act in a certain way is the opposite of humaneness. Humaneness is the mind, the principle. "Seek and you will get it"<sup>9</sup> means to get this principle. "Those who are first to know" know this principle, and "those who are first awakened"<sup>10</sup> are awakened to this principle. It is this principle that constitutes love for parents, reverence for elders, and the sense of alarm and commiseration when one sees a child about to fall into a well. It is this principle that makes people ashamed of shameful things and hate what should be hated. It is this principle that enables people to know what is right to be right and what is wrong to be wrong. It is this principle that makes people deferential when deference is due and humble when humility is called for. Reverent seriousness (*jing*) is this principle; rightness is this principle. And what is internal and what is external are all this principle. ... Mencius said, "What people are able to do without having learned it is innate ability. What they know without having to think about it is innate knowledge."<sup>11</sup> These are endowed in us by Heaven. "We definitely possess them ... they are not infused into us from

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 1, above.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 2, above.

<sup>8</sup> *Mencius* 4A:2.

<sup>9</sup> *Mencius* 6A:6.

<sup>10</sup> *Mencius* 5A:7.

<sup>11</sup> *Mencius* 7A:15.

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without.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore Mencius said, “All the ten thousand things are complete in me. To turn within to examine oneself and find that one is sincere -- there is no greater joy than this.”<sup>13</sup>

The Teacher said that the myriad things exist luxuriantly in the mind. What permeates the mind and, pouring forth, extends to fill the universe, is nothing but principle.

The Teacher always said that outside of the Way there are no events and outside of events there is no Way.

The theory that principle is due to Heaven whereas desire is due to human beings is, surely not the best doctrine. If principle is due to Heaven and desire due to man, then Heaven and humans must be different. This theory can be traced to Laozi. The “Record of Music” says, “By nature a human being is tranquil at birth. When influenced by external things, he begins to be active, which is desire arising from his nature. As one becomes conscious of things resulting from this impact, one begins to have likes and dislikes. ... When [as a result of these likes and dislikes] one is unable to return to his original mind, the Principle of Heaven is destroyed.”<sup>14</sup> Here is the origin of the theory that principle is from Heaven whereas desire is from humans. And the words of the “Record of Music” are based on the Daoists. If it is said that only tranquility is inborn nature, is activity not inborn nature also? It is said in the *Classic of Documents* that “the human mind is precarious, the mind of the Way is subtle.”<sup>15</sup> Most interpreters have explained the human mind [which is liable to make mistakes] as equivalent to human desires and the mind of the Way [which follows moral law] as equivalent to the Principle of Heaven. This interpretation is wrong. The mind is one. How can a human being have two minds?

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<sup>12</sup> *Mencius* 6A:6. Mencius refers here to humaneness, rightness, ritual decorum, and wisdom. In this “quotation,” Lu Jiuyuan reverses the order of the two clauses.

<sup>13</sup> *Mencius* 7A:4.

<sup>14</sup> “Record of Music,” *Record of Rites*; see James Legge, *Li Ki (Li-chi). Book of Rites*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Sacred Books of the East, 1885; reprint, New York: University Books, 1967), 96.

<sup>15</sup> “Counsels of the Great Yu,” *Classic of Documents*; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893-1895; reprint, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1979), 61.