

Natural Cosmology

We begin our discussion by adopting a methodology of contrasting Wang Fuzhi's cosmology against a Judeo-Christian assertion of Creationism. After exploring the antithesis to Wang's cosmology, we move to define key cosmological terms that Wang employs to explain the world in which we live. This discussion takes us into a naturalistic account of the Chinese philosophical terminology of "*tian*." The inquiry then proceeds to analyze Wang's insistent naturalism with regard to neo-Confucian terminology of cosmological creativity. In this context we engage in an extended analysis of neo-Confucian concepts of "great ultimate," "without limits," and "great harmony." Having analyzed this terminology, we will be in position to turn in the next chapter to a synthetic dialogue between the contemporary worldview of ecological humanism and Wang Fuzhi's neo-Confucianism.

Creationism as Antithesis

During his mission to Ming Dynasty China, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) wrote a treatise in Chinese with the purpose of arguing for the superiority of the biblical Creationism. Employing a popular European analogy of the time, he likened the world to a manmade structure: "Nothing is able to make itself; it must depend on an external being

to make it. Pavilions and houses do not spontaneously arise; they are always made by the hand of a carpenter” (Ricci 76).¹ Understanding the world as an artifact, which implies a divine Artisan, stands in stark contrast to the natural cosmology of Wang Fuzhi. Citing Ricci’s analogy, Jacques Gernet explains the incommensurability between the Jesuit and neo-Confucian perspectives:

The argument reproduced by all the missionaries [in seventeenth-century China], according to which it must be that the universe was created by a being exterior to nature, could only have been shocking in a world that did not admit anything beyond nature. The explication of the complexity and the constant evolution of living phenomena by way of a coarse model of action by an artisan on “matter,” moreover, would seem to have found difficulty in being accepted. (Gernet 83)²

Picking up on this theme, both Allison Black and François Jullien present Wang Fuzhi’s naturalism as an antithesis to theistic creationism.³ The argument, in short, is that Wang Fuzhi’s cosmology and the cosmogony of creationism are incompatible. Creationism presupposes the existence of a transcendent external cause of natural world; the cause is an intelligent and purposive agent, which creates the world according to design and teleological plan. Wang Fuzhi’s cosmological philosophy asserts none of these propositions.

In the legacy of early Christian missionaries like Ricci, the Chinese term 天 *tian* has traditionally been interpreted in terms of “Heaven.” As is demonstrated in the ensuing discussion, however, it would be a categorical error to interpret Wang Fuzhi’s concept of *tian* in terms of *heaven*. I follow the arguments of Jullien, Gernet, and Black with respect to Wang Fuzhi’s commitment to naturalism. Building upon their arguments, I make the case that Wang Fuzhi’s concept of *tian* is better understood as *nature*.

The method of identifying Wang Fuzhi’s cosmological thesis by way of contrasting it against its antithesis is instrumental to foregrounding Wang’s natural cosmology. Contrasting Wang’s philosophy

against metaphysical dualism is further propaedeutic to apprehending his reading of the neo-Confucian metaphysics of his Song dynasty forefathers, for Wang saw in them a tendency toward metaphysical dualism and hypostatization of metaphysical first principles. As a case in point, Wang takes a critical position with regard to Zhu Xi's theory of patterning (*li* 理) and energy (*qi* 氣). He argues that Zhu's theory dualistically bifurcates these two categories and reifies the former. Zhou Bing (2005) observes Wang's position along these lines: "On the question of 'li and qi,' Wang Fuzhi expresses a continuity of *qi* ontology and a novel perspective on the inseparability of *li* and *qi*" (5).⁴ By the same token, Wang takes analytical caution with regard to his predecessors' interpretation of *taiji* 太極, the cosmological source of the world for neo-Confucianism. *Taiji* is immanent in Wang's philosophy. Through the subtle and cosmic interactions of its inherent forces, the natural world demonstrates an autopoietic capacity to continuously engender novel forms of life and experience. I return to an explication of the central concepts of *tian*, *li*, *qi*, and *taiji* later in this chapter. Before turning to this explication, however, I first follow the lead of Gernet, Jullien, and Black by establishing the antithesis to Wang Fuzhi's natural cosmology.

The cosmogony of creationism depicts the origins of the world as a definite temporal beginning (Black 22, 40–41; Jullien 78). Black introduces the fundamentals of creationism through a philological investigation into the term "create":

The word "create" in English usage is derived directly from the Latin *creare* . . . The critical event for the meaning of the word as it passed into medieval Latin and then into English was its use to translate the Hebrew *bara*, a verb used exclusively in the Hebrew scriptures for the creative activities of God. The consequence was that the root meaning of the word "create" in English usage was inextricably associated with its theological application. (6)

The term *bara* occurs in Genesis 1.1: "In the beginning, God *created* (*bara*) the heavens and the earth." Without pretending to give an

exhaustive account of the manifold, entrenched interpretations of *Genesis*, Black and Jullien agree on salient implications of the biblical account. In the first case, the act of God “in the beginning” is absolutely unique in the advent of the world. Jullien thus writes, “The minimal justification of God within occidental rationalism is to attribute to him the initial impulsion in the chain of causes and effects that constitute the course of the world” (79).⁵

Neither Jullien nor Black explicitly note the name of St. Thomas Aquinas, but analysis of the rationale behind Aquinas’s popular cosmological proofs of God supports their critique. Aquinas’s brand of Catholicism is a marked appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics in order to provide deductive proofs of God’s existence. In Article III, “Whether God Exists,” of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologia*, the author concludes, “There must be found in the nature of things one first immovable Being, a primary cause, necessarily existing, not created; existing the most widely, good, even the best possible; the first ruler through the intellect, and the ultimate end of all things, which is God.”⁶ God is thus understood as the primary unmoved mover of the world. Insofar as God exists outside of the natural order of causality that governs the world, God is himself supernatural. The categorical distinction between the creator and the creation, or cause and effect, demonstrates that creationism is founded on a conception of external causality. In other words, causality here is a disjunctive relation, radically sundering effect from cause. The Creator stands metaphysically independent of and prior to his dependent creation.

Continuing her analysis, Black identifies three defining characteristics of *creation*:

Here “creation” seems to denote basically the conscious and deliberate making of something new. In other words, we have (1) an intelligent agent, (2) deliberate action, in the form of making according to an original conception of the maker’s, and (3) the thing made, dependent for existence on its source but also distinguishable from it, and new in some radical sense. (Black 6)

Jullien makes this same point in his definition of simple cosmogony and the “philosophical necessity of a primary mover”:

At least two traits appear to me to have essentially contributed to the conception of this representation: on the one hand, the anthropological valorization of a category of subject-agent as the unique and voluntary instance; and, on the other hand, the ideological valorization of the radical difference between the status of the Creator and his creation. (Jullien 82)⁷

In addition to the commitment to external causality, creationism further presupposes that the cause is an act of a volitional, purposive, rational agent. The Creator conceives of the course of the world in accordance with divine Providence. He creates the world out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, and sets it in motion toward a predetermined end, or *télos*.

Although the biblical account of creation provides a primary archetype for the creationist paradigm, this model is a member of a greater “nexus” of theories that distinguish Western cosmogonies from Chinese cosmologies (Black 7). “The receipt of *Genesis*, as important as it is, finally represents only one possible version of the advent of the world in the midst of a panoply of occidental conceptions” (Jullien 83).⁸ In the family of models that represent creationist thinking, yet another primary archetype of the creative agent is found in Plato’s *Timaeus* (Jullien 18, 82–90; Black 6–8). Plato’s *Timaeus* purports to recount a “true story” of how the world was created out of Chaos by a divine artisan, known as the Demiurge. The Demiurge is an agent who constructs the world according to an intentional deliberate plan. The Demiurge, it is said, contemplates the ideal, eternal realm of Platonic Forms, and constructs the world of change as an image of the eternal. Exercising his capacity for theoretical reason, the Demiurge constructs the world according to an a priori intelligent design (Jullien 84–86). Insofar as the creator has a set form or blueprint in mind for the creation, he creates the

world toward a determinate end. The root metaphor underlying the archetype of the creator is that of a divine *craftsman* (Jullien 84 ff.; Black 18). The craftsman is self-sufficient. Again, he is ontologically independent from and prior to his creation. Conversely, the creation is ontologically dependent on and secondary to the creator. The Creator causes the creation to come into being. As an external cause, the creator has also been likened to a watchmaker (Jullien 85). The watchmaker designs the mechanism such that once it is set in motion it will continue to function without further intervention by the maker. The maker sets the gears in place, winds it up, and then steps back while the mechanism continues to synchronically tick in local motion. This version of the creationist paradigm is thus represented as a mechanistic model of linear causation.

As opposed to Creationism and its assertion of a supernatural cause of the world, Wang Fuzhi's worldview presents a naturalistic cosmology. Wang's naturalism maintains that each and every thing, including the world itself, is completely the result of natural causes. On this account, the natural world and its constituent components are all that there is.

Tian 天 qua Nature

The philosophy stemming from Wang Fuzhi's root-categories of *tianrenheyi* 天人合一 and *tianrenzhiji* 天人之際 offers a rich resource for developing a neo-Confucian model of ecological humanism. According to the present interpretation, *tianrenheyi* and *tianrenzhiji* are respectively translated as "continuity of nature and persons" and "interstitial interrelations between nature and persons." This thesis hinges on the recognition that in the context of Wang's work the Chinese term *tian* functionally signifies *nature*. The thesis requires analytical proof that for Wang Fuzhi the concept of *tian* falls under the purview of naturalism.

Li Zhecheng (2003) sheds light on the hermeneutic prejudices that inform Wang Fuzhi's naturalistic understanding of *tian*. "Among the pre-Qin philosophies of China," Li writes, "the scholarly tradi-

tions that chiefly advocate a kind of scientific naturalism are the Lao-Zhuang school and the school of Xunzi” (56).⁹ Li argues that Wang Fuzhi’s understanding of nature reflects the influence of both of these lines of thought (56).¹⁰ Wang expresses his appreciation for Xunzi’s philosophy in his *Reading the Complete Compendium of Statements on the Four Books* (*Du Sishudaquan shuo*, 讀四書大全說, hereafter referred to as “DSS”):

The venerable Xun was fifty when he began his scholarship. Zhu Yun began his undertaking of the *Yijing* and the *Analects* at forty. As for what they understood, compared with the cunning lads of our age, whose understanding after all is higher and whose inferior? [. . .] Xun and Zhu most certainly pushed to the heights of Shun, Yao, and Confucius. They took action without intentional thought, without purposive action, and the brilliance of *tian* manifested of itself. While young, they were bright and intelligent, but did not depend on scholarly study. They avoided technical, self-serving, excessive prose and scholars that did not practice careful observation. They did not have any confusion in distinguishing persons from the rest of the animal kingdom. How unique! (DSS 852)¹¹

For Xunzi, “*tian*” means “*ziran jie* 自然界”—in the modern Mandarin sense of “natural world” (Zhang and Chen 785).¹² Xunzi’s interpretation of *tian* qua *ziran* resonates with classical Daoist natural cosmology.¹³ *Ziran* literally translates as “self-so.” Wang employs it in this sense by stating of things: “of themselves they are so” (自然而然). The Chinese term, *ziran*, is rich in semantic content. To qualify the cosmos as such means that it is a completely *natural*, *spontaneous*, *autopoietic*, *auto-regulative*, *non-purposive*, *amoral* event. In upholding this position, Wang Fuzhi, Xunzi and the early Lao-Zhuang authors are critical and skeptical of the view of *tian* celebrated by Confucius and Mencius.¹⁴

Confucius relates to *tian* as a kind of a personified participant and ubiquitous, immanent force in human affairs.¹⁵ Zheng Xiong’s

(2006) work on *tian* in the context of the *Analects* and *tian* in the context of Wang Fuzhi demonstrates that Confucius viewed *tian*, in accordance with the predominant religious culture of his time, as an anthropomorphic and controlling power (“人格力量,” “主宰力量”) (Zheng 52).¹⁶ Its subjective attributes include affectivity: it appreciates human actions at times, and takes offense to them at others (*Analects* 14.35). *Tian* is held in awe in the *Analects*, for it controls the longevity and death of creatures; moreover, it can enact cultural revolutions, sociopolitical capitulations, and epochal shifts in human history (*Analects* 9.5).¹⁷ Finally, *tian* is purposive, intentional, and deliberate in its actions. In sum, *tian* in the context of the *Analects* is masterful and volitional (Zheng 52).¹⁸

Though *tian* carries these attributes in the eyes of Confucius, it would be a fallacy of equivocation to identify the *tian* of Confucius as a transcendent God. The metaphysical assumptions of classical Confucianism are inconsistent with the metaphysics of traditional theism. In brief the latter presupposes a metaphysical dualism between a transcendent, independent, ultimate reality, on the one hand, and a concrete, dependent, contingent reality, on the other. The theistic model functions according to a top-down causality. The relationship between God and persons is unilateral: persons depend on God for their existence and identity, but the converse is not the case. The metaphysical structure of the *tian*-person relationship for Confucius is bilateral. In other words, *tian* continuously emerges in positive correlation to the moral and cultural achievements of persons. *Tian* is a *spiritual culture* developed by persons over the course of history, and sustained through ancestral reverence. *Tian* serves as the consummate symbol and collective memory of one's cultural heritage. Whereas the theistic model is based on the premise, God created man in his image, the model of *tian* assumes the opposite. The image of *tian* takes shape in the form of historical figures. This process is explained by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr.: “Culturally significant human beings—persons such as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius—are ‘theomorphized’ to become *tian*, and *tian* is itself made anthropocentric and determinate in their persons” (47). *Tian*'s

intentions and affective responses are derived from and represent the ideal qualities of sagely persons. *Tian*'s personified perspective on any state affairs just is the idealized perspective taken by ancestral spirits, or one's cultural *zeitgeist*. "*Tian* sees as my people see, *tian* hears as my people hear" (Mencius 5A5).

Wang pushes neo-Confucianism toward a fully naturalistic understanding of *tian*. In his worldview, *tian* is fully immanent and completely devoid of anthropomorphic qualities. Thus, JeeLoo Liu rightly states that Wang Fuzhi's *tian* is "the totality of the natural world" (360). In Wang Fuzhi's work, *tian* is nature qua *ziran*. That is, in the context of his cosmology, *tian* is fully natural and spontaneous, *ziranzhitian* 自然之天, as opposed to anthropomorphic, deliberate, and volitional, *yizhitian* 意志之天. A survey of recent scholarship in the field of Wang Fuzhi studies draws attention to this aspect of his thought:

Cosmic transformations do not have feeling or intentionality. They are without heart-and-mind. That which is called "without-heart-and-mind" is also spontaneous. (Deng Hui 76)¹⁹

Wang Fuzhi criticized Confucius's "volitional nature," and transformed it into spontaneous nature. (Zheng Xiong 50)²⁰

Wang Chuanshan believes that nature does not have volition or intention; it only adaptively moves within itself and nothing more. (Li Zhecheng 56)²¹

Nature is without a heart-and-mind; without purposive activity; it does not have volition; it does not have feelings; it cannot control persons' destiny. (Xiong Lümao and Yang Zhengzheng 27)²²

Wang Fuzhi makes claims to this effect throughout his work: "*Tian* does not intentionally act . . . Thus, when fortune and misfortune

constantly change and the myriad patterns all come to fruition, they spontaneously achieve complete excellence” (Li, 2003, 56).²³ This claim further advances the idea of spontaneous nature by formulating it in terms of non-intentional action, *wuwei* 無為. Wang lifts this interpretive strategy straight from the Daoist playbook. Indeed, a host of corresponding negations or “*wu*-forms” are implied by Wang’s appropriation of the Daoist “*xiran*”: *wuwei* 無為, *wusi* 無思, *wusi* 無私, *wuji* 無己, *wuzhi* 無知, *wuxin* 無心. Respectively, nature is without intentional action, without deliberate thought, without personal inclinations, without self-awareness, without knowledge. In sum, nature is *without heart-and-mind*.

Lacking a mind and will of its own, *tian* does not judge:

Raising the hands is an act of respectful salutation; kneeling in formal posture is an act of pride: these are the rituals of people. Nature, however, causes fear and trembling but does not instruct by means of ritual reverence; it establishes and underwrites divisions, but does not direct according to self-conceit. People fear the imperial corporeal punishments of tattooing, amputation, castration, and execution because they invoke condemnation. From the perspective of nature, however, the crippled are so *not* because they were robbers, and the emasculated are so *not* because they are licentious.²⁴

Spontaneous nature possesses a sublime power to enact transformations. Wang believes that the anthropomorphic worldview constitutes a diminution of nature’s sublimity. Making this point, he rhetorically questions the belief in *tian* as a quasi-personal force: “*Tian* is only *yinyang* and five phases, arising and descending, emerging and retracting in the heavens and earth. Why should it ever condescend to the level of giving orders as such?” (DSS 454). Insofar as Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy of nature presupposes the cosmological categories of neo-Confucianism, it should come as no surprise that nature is here regarded as a dynamic holistic structure of energetic forces. That is, *tian* is nothing more than patterns of energy, *qixhili* 氣之理.

Neo-Confucian Terminology of Cosmic Creativity

According to Chen Lai 陈来 (2004), “Wang Chuanshan’s *Annotated Commentary on Master Zhang’s Zhengmeng* is an interpretation and development of Zhang Zai’s *Zhengmeng* [. . .] From the perspective of a theory of origin, the fundamental idea of the *Zhengmeng*’s naturalistic philosophy for the most part comes from the *Zhouyi*, primarily the *Commentaries on the Changes*” (361).²⁵ Chen Lai here advances the notion that Zhang Zai, Wang Fuzhi, and the *Yijing* are to be read as having a theory of origins. The conjunction of Chen Lai’s claim with Jullien’s and Black’s rejection of reading Wang Fuzhi’s work as a theory of origins foregrounds a particular *problématique*, which Wang Fuzhi himself saw in the neo-Confucian tradition.

Wang Fuzhi’s dilemma of origins grows out of the question of how to interpret the concept of supreme limit *taiji* 太極 and the generative forces of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 in the context of the *Yijing*’s claim:

Changes have a supreme limit, *taiji*: this produces two modes; two modes produce four figures; four figures produce eight trigrams (*Xici shang* 11.3).²⁶

On Black’s account, “The general import of his [Wang’s] argument was to remove from *t’ai-chi* [*taiji*] the concept of generative source and define it as principle of harmony characterizing *yin* and *yang*” (65). Black’s intentions are in the right place; nonetheless, her unqualified claim that Wang did not recognize *taiji* as a generative source is too strong. It is not the case that he seeks to remove the connotations of generative source from the concept of *taiji* altogether, nor is it the case that he sees *taiji* as a creator in the sense of Creationism. Wang Fuzhi is particularly concerned with the tendency of the neo-Confucian tradition to interpret the notion of *taiji* as a cosmogonic (external) cause that precedes the advent of the natural world and its multifarious concrete particulars (Jullien 69).²⁷ Wang takes a critical posture when analyzing the cosmology of *taiji*, *yinyang*, and the productive activity of engendering, *sheng* 生. He intends for his philosophy to serve as an articulation of the neo-Confucian commitment to an immanent

source of creativity, life, novelty, and diversity. In this vein he seeks to purge the neo-Confucian tradition of implying the existence of a supernatural cause of the natural world. He intends to clearly distinguish his philosophy of the *Yijing* from any conceptions of origin that presuppose an atemporal beginning or cosmological priority of one state of affairs over and above all others. Wang maintains that *taiji* is a cosmological source or origin, to be sure, but it is an immanent and participatory source identifiable with the world itself. In a word, *taiji* is the root-body, *benti* 本體, of the world:

These [*yin* and *yang*] are how *taiji* brings forth the myriad things; becoming the myriad patterns, and giving rise to the myriad events. These are the *root-body* of beginnings and growth. (ZYN 525)²⁸

Rather than acting on the world according to a top-down structure, the *taiji* qua root-body is an emergent source of transformation, life, and diversity. As Wang Fuzhi describes it, *taiji* just is the globalized unity of all *yin* and *yang* interactions, on all levels of organizational structures and in all localities.

Although the idea of *taiji* is found in the pre-Qin *Appended Phrases*, *Xici*, section of the *Yijing*, it was not a prominent concept for philosophical speculation prior to Zhou Dunyi's early-Song Dynasty *Explanation of the Taiji Diagram* (Jullien 69, Black 65). After Zhou Dunyi, neo-Confucian thinkers "made it the foundation of their representation of the course of the world, the advent of all existence, and the ultimate limit, which amounts to all process" (Jullien 70).²⁹ Black provides the following translation of Zhou's *Explanation*:

Without Ultimate—the Supreme Ultimate!
 In the Supreme Ultimate there is movement and the
 birth of *yang*;
 At the limit of movement: stillness.
 In stillness is the birth of *yin*;
 At the limit of stillness: the return of movement.
 Movement and stillness alternating are one another's root;
Yin and *yang* dividing constitute two modes. (Black 65)³⁰

Paraphrasing Wang Fuzhi, Jullien explains Wang's interpretation of "taiji" along these lines: "One is not able to go farther, climb higher: because there is no farther and no higher. This ultimate limit is one of void itself, as non-actualization (*wuji*) at the source of all actualization: not the void *qua* non-existence, but on the contrary as absolute plenitude—in its phase of non-actualization it is but all possible actualizations . . ." (Jullien 69–70).³¹ Whereas *taiji* refers to the world as a dynamic and holistic unity of all diverse phenomena, the concept of *wuji* is postulated to ensure that the world is understood as an unbound totality. Furthermore, *wuji* is not nothing in the sense of *nihilo*. As absolute plenitude, *wuji* refers to the boundless capacity of the cosmos to endlessly give rise to novel actual occasions from its own internal dimensions. *Wuji* is essentially a negative term, meaning *without limits*; *wuji* signifies that there is no determinate objectified source or limits to the transformations of the world (Gernet 156). In this sense, moreover, the complexity and sublime fecundity of the world is beyond the bounds of reason, and thus opens itself up to profound aesthetic and religious appreciation of nature's sublimity.

To take Wang Fuzhi's stance, Zhou Dunyi's *Explanation* and the *Yijing* passage on which it is based delineate a tightrope of interpretation that must be traversed with the utmost caution. The intention in Wang's argument is to retain *taiji*'s sense of cosmological fecundity and yet avoid fallacies of hypostatization and metaphysical reification. Alluding to this difficulty, Jullien writes of the rich ambiguity of Zhou Dunyi's representation of the *Yijing*: "One is able to interpret it in a more cosmogonic sense, conferring on this limit [*taiji*] a status of a point of departure or of origin, or in a purely cosmological sense, by eradication of all exclusive status of anteriority" (70).³² Wang Fuzhi maintained the falsity of the former, and the verity of the latter.³³ He provides the following warning against misinterpreting Zhou Dunyi's *Explanation*:

Those who misunderstand the *Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Limit* say the supreme limit originally does not yet have *yin* and *yang*. [They say] because of movement, then there is the fetal beginning and birth of *yang*, and because of stillness, then there is the fetal beginning

and birth of *yin*. They do not know that movement and stillness are what are engendered by *yin* and *yang*, and [*taiji*] originally has them [*yin* and *yang*] contained. [*Yin* and *yang*] make the natures (*qingzhi*)³⁴ of winter and summer, moistness and dryness, and male and female. The subtle comingling of *yin* and *yang* (*yinyun*) are prior to movement and stillness. As for movement and stillness, these are the movement and stillness of *yin* and *yang*. (Wang, ZMZ, 24)³⁵

Chen Lai advances the discussion by explaining that Wang Fuzhi's emphasis is that *taiji* is the supreme harmony *taihe* 太和 and subtle comingling of *yin* and *yang* (*yinyun* 絪縕) (Chen 368).³⁶ *Taiji* in other words originally contains the generative interactions of the two modalities, and it would be a mistake to conceive of it as a state of affairs that somehow precedes them (ibid.). In his *Inner Commentary to the Zhouyi*, *Zhouyi neizhuan* 周易內傳, Wang comments on the *Yijing*'s claim that *taiji* produces two modes: "Yin and yang have no beginning," he states. "*Taiji* is not something standing on its own over and above *yin* and *yang*" (ZYN 562).³⁷ Again, Wang Fuzhi's philosophy is a radical, process, correlative cosmology. He saw the world *qua* process as having no determinate beginning and no teleological end. Accordingly, Jullien further addresses this issue in his work on Wang's philosophy:

The "virtue" inherent in the grand process that is continuously in operation in the world is that it "embraces all," from the largest to the most minute, and that it is also at the origin of all (that is to say of all the particular actualizations). But there is never "a moment or an existent that would be able to serve as a point of departure for process," of the sort that "all the rest follows it" . . . Just as it does not have an end, the ongoing movement will not have a beginning." (Jullien 68–69)³⁸

The generative interactions of *yin* and *yang* are always at work in a perpetual motion. Neither *yin* nor *yang*, Qian nor Kun, is primary

in the cosmological order of things (Jullien 46–49, et passim, Yan 123–124). Each modality reflects, contains, penetrates, responds to, and implies the other. This dynamic interchange between the two modalities does not have any external cause. In other words, the interaction is *sui generis*, spontaneous and auto-regulative. That is, cosmic creativity is self-so, *ziran*. In agreement with Jullien and Black, Yan Shoucheng makes the case in point in his dissertation on Wang Fuzhi:

Taiji embraces all kinds of the potentials of materials and forces which continuously and spontaneously develop into concrete things and later undergo other, endless transformations. In this sense, Alison Black's interpretation of Wang's philosophy as "expressionism" is applicable—that is it is characterized by innerness, spontaneity, and continuity between the expressive source and the final outcome, and by organic form in which inner and outer are bound inseparably together. (Yan 123)

In sum, there is no *determinate* beginning to the interaction of *yin* and *yang* that one can call *taiji*, nor is there an end. Again, the procreative activity of the cosmos is without limits, *wuji* (Jullien 68–69).

In reference to her translation of Zhou Dunyi's text cited above, Black maintains that her interpretation reflects a traditional neo-Confucian reading of the text, but Wang Fuzhi would not agree with her translation of the verb *sheng* as "'generate' or '(give) birth'" (65). Black goes on to cite the following passage from Wang Fuzhi's *Minor Commentary on the Zhouyi* 周易稗疏:

In regards to *birth* (*sheng* 生), it is not the case that what is born is a son, or that which gives birth is called a father. If it were used thus, then there would be a time where there were *taiji* without two modalities, two modalities without four images, four images without of eight trigrams. The birth is the birth of giving rise, as in a person's face giving rise to ears, eyes, mouth, and nose, naturally and completely.

In their distinction then we name them: this is what is now meant by *birth* . . . *Taiji* thus two modes, two modes thus four images, four images thus eight trigrams: as in a person's face, thus, ears, eyes, mouth, nose. In particular, if that which gives rise to what is produced and established is divided up and named, then it is two; it is four, and it is eight. (Wang, ZYBS, 789)³⁹

In this passage Wang pays analytical attention to the verb *sheng* 生. The term *sheng* refers to the processes through which actual occasions or concrete particulars emerge in the world. As a verb, *sheng* 生 literally translates as “to produce, to bring forth, to beget” (Mathews 795). It means “to give birth, to engender.” But Wang Fuzhi maintains that the process of cosmological production is not that of a parent giving birth to a child (Black 66; Jullien 70). If the relation between *taiji* and the empirical world of protean particulars is thus characterized as a relation between a parent and a child, Wang worries that people would get the idea that there was a time in which the source of particulars could have existed apart from the particulars themselves.⁴⁰ *Taiji* refers to the ability of the world to give rise to itself—in all of its novel and diversified transformations. In the language of the *Yijing*, *taiji* thus refers to the capacity of the world to renew itself daily, *rixin* 日新, and create incessantly, *shengsheng* 生生 (*Xici shang* 6). We return to this particular case in point later in the context of neo-Confucian spirituality. There we discuss how a perceived procreative creativity (*shengsheng*) of the world serves as a source and intention of religious experience.

Wang Fuzhi uses *taiji* to refer to the relationship between *yin* and *yang*, but the intention of this usage is to depict this relationship under its unitary and global aspect. That is to say, it does not designate the differential functions of *yin* and *yang*. Wang understands *taiji* as a mode of generalized latency, where *yin* and *yang*, although implicitly different, do not actively manifest their difference and are intimately commingled. In terms of their referent, the synthetic concept of *yinyang* and the concept of *taiji* are the same: They have the same semantic value, namely, the immanent cosmological source and

perpetual generative process pervading all experience. Analytically speaking, while the *referent* of these two concepts (*yinyang*, on the one hand, and *taiji*, on the other) is the same, the *sense* differs. Whereas *yin* and *yang* signify differentiated modes of process, *taiji* signifies that these modalities interpenetrate and harmonize in a global unity (Jullien 71).⁴¹

Wang Fuzhi explicitly identifies the notion of *taiji*, the supreme limit, with Zhang Zai's notion of *taihe* 太和, supreme harmony.⁴² Following Jullien's interpretation, this equation serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, the notion of *taiji* eliminates the risk, always present, of considering this limit as an origin and point of departure; and on the other, as the communal ground of all actualization, the notion of harmony provides a more distinct characterization of the relationality that constitutes all process (72).⁴³ Jullien uses the terms "communal ground" (*fonds commun*), "resorption of contraries" (*résorption des contraires*), and "regulative resorption" (*résorption régulatrice*) of "actualizing differentiation" (*différenciation actualisatrice*) to refer to the function of supreme harmony.

The idea behind Jullien's vocabulary is perhaps conveyed more clearly by Wang's claim: "Before there are yet formal particulars, there is originally nothing that is not harmonized; moreover, after there are formal particulars, this harmony is not lost" (ZMZ 15).⁴⁴ In the same passage, Wang goes on to discuss supreme harmony in the following terms:

Supreme harmony is the reach of harmony. *Dao* is the pervasive pattern of the heavens and earth, and the myriad things, thus it is called supreme limit. *Yin* and *Yang* differentiate, but their intimate comingling (*yinyun*) in the midst of the supreme void comes together (*hetong*) and they do not cause injury to one another, they are evenly intermixed (*hunlun*)⁴⁵ without interstice, thus is the extent of harmony. (ibid.)⁴⁶

Wang here identifies *taiji* with *dao*, which he defines as the pervasive pattern, *tongli* 通理, binding all of the events of the world together.

Accordingly, *taiji* and *dao* convey the sense that a world is thoroughly interconnected in a global, spatiotemporal, holistic structure. *Taiji* bears more connotations of originary source; *dao* bears the connotation of ongoing origination and sustainment of life, structure, and novelty. *Yin* and *yang* are general categories that refer to phenomenal occurrences on all scales, from the most infinitesimally minute and mundane happenings to the greatest cosmological and sublime occurrences. That they commingle with one another without causing harm indicates that the interconnection of events is functional and productive. Chen Lai explains the key terms employed here in Wang Fuzhi's cosmological thought:

The supreme harmony and commingling of *yin* and *yang* (*taihe yinyun*) are the initial sources of the production of the myriad things. This is what is contained in the concept of *taiheyinyun*. Because in Chuanshan's [Wang Fuzhi's] cosmological theory, supreme harmony represents the most primitive existence and state of affairs, the separation of *yin* and *yang* and the production of the myriad things both follow from the capacity of the supreme harmony. Nonetheless, it is certainly not the case that supreme harmony only exists prior to the production of the myriad things and merely serves as the cosmological initial source. In reality, supreme harmony still exists after the production of the myriad things. (Chen 365)⁴⁷

Chen identifies *taihe* as a cosmological source in Wang Fuzhi's philosophy. Again, the tightrope must be walked carefully. Given the continuity of harmony before and after the production of the plethora of existents, it cannot be said that *taihe* is a metaphysical being per se. *Taihe* is another way to allude to the unfathomable and numinous coordination of the fecund energies of *yin* and *yang*. Before the emergence of novelty in the world of particular events, *taihe* is the open indeterminate set of conditions that gives rise to the events themselves. In this sense, *taihe* can also be understood as the root-body *benti* 本體 of all that is. The conditions themselves are not

singular, but manifold: they are a unity of diversity and diversity in unity. *Taihe* refers to the spontaneously coordinated, patterned interaction of these events, which in turn gives rise to new life and new particulars. *Taihe* is a holistic concept that alludes to the interdependent and creative interactions of all events.

Neo-Confucian cosmology of *taiji*, *wuji*, and *taihe* may very well be consistent with the current scientific theory of the Big Bang origins of the universe. According to the latter theory the cosmos originated approximately 13.7 billion years ago by way of an exploding expansion of an originally infinitely dense and extremely hot concentration of energy. This concentration is referred to as a singularity, which is a singular infinitely small point of infinite density and gravitational force. As scientists trace back the origins of the cosmos to infinity, they hypothesize that in the event of singularity, the laws of physics and the very structure of space-time break down to the point that they are no longer applicable to the structuring and movement of matter. If confronted with the proposition of a Big Bang at the origins of the universe, Wang Fuzhi would no doubt find recourse to interpret the theory in terms of *taiji*, *wuji*, *taixu*, and originary, primordial, energy (*yuanqi* 元氣). The terminology of *wuji* and *taixu* (without limits and great vacuity) are readily applicable to the concept of infinity in which our operational observations and rational comprehensions of the cosmos are abnegated. In short, in locating the origins of the structured cosmos in infinity, Wang would undoubtedly move to maintain that the origins themselves, the singularity from which the cosmos expands is in itself unfathomable. Though the Big Bang may be a determinative event, by Wang's lights, this determinacy originates in indeterminacy.

Wang Fuzhi is a naturalist in the sense that he does not believe that anything exists outside of the natural world constituted by *qi*. Although he recognizes that the movements of *qi* often function so subtly that they are invisible to the human eye, he does not conclude that *qi* has any supernatural status. In place of a transcendent source or principle of the patterned changes and structural coordination of natural events, he advocates an emergent order that is immanent within the world itself. For Wang the operations of *qi* from the

cosmic level of *tiandi* to the most infinitesimally small are not fully fathomable by ratiocination; nonetheless, they provide sources for aesthetic and religious appreciations of the dynamically sublime and intricate complexity of the cosmic tapestry. Wang Fuzhi regards the subtle and unfathomable ability of *qi* to transform on all levels of existence as a numinous and sublime quality of *qi*. Wang rejects all modes of thought that postulate, reify, or hypostatize a primary transcendent source of creativity and value in the world. In this respect, he is in agreement with Golley's and Keller's ecological naturalism, which "challenges positions that posit the cause and regulation of the universe as prior to or ontologically distinct from nature itself" (Golley and Keller 12). But the sense of naturalism applicable to Wang Fuzhi goes beyond a simple rejection of metaphysical transcendence; in addition to its negative definition, the axiom of naturalism implies axioms of ontological interconnectedness, internal relations, and holism.