

Why Is “Following Human Nature Called Dao”?

—An Anthropological Discussion on the Correspondence between “Dao” and “Human Nature”

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Abstract

The doctrine of “following human nature is called Dao” in The Doctrine of the Mean illustrates the corresponding relationship between “human nature” and “Dao”, carrying anthropological and cosmological implications. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the correspondence between human nature and Dao using the methods of anthropology and biology. Dao represents the rule of conduct (movement), and material can form things by adhering to these rules. Consequently, the rule of conduct can be transformed into a spatial structure as a temporal structure, thus forming the essence of everything. This essence originates from Dao and embodies the nature of the corresponding conduct rule, establishing a correspondence between “human nature” and “Dao”. As the universe has evolved from basic particles to human beings, human nature encompasses all essential rules of conduct required for human generation, recording every correct choice of rules to overcome various challenges and ultimately give rise to human beings. Therefore, human nature encapsulates all the rules of the universe. Our development from a single cell to such complex human beings necessitates an increasing value of cooperation and combination, rendering human nature inherently good. Given that nature contains form information and conduct rules, which can be passed on to future generations, it follows that human nature corresponds to genes. According to modern human gene theory, the human genome represents a learning achievement accumulated over 4 billion years. As “human nature” corresponds to “Dao”, individuals can discern Dao through observing the outcomes of spontaneous actions and introspecting nature. However, in comparison with the universe, humans are limited, thus possessing only the potential to uncover all aspects of Dao through human nature. It is only through concerted “civilizing” efforts that individuals can achieve a partial understanding of Dao.

Keywords

Human Nature, Dao, Genes, Rules of Conduct, Evolution

1. Introduction: Why Is “Following Human Nature Called Dao”?

The Doctrine of the Mean opens with the statement, “Heavenly destiny is called nature, following human nature is called Dao, and cultivating Dao is called civilizing” (Zeng, 2016: p. 61). In Chinese, Dao means originally Way, extendedly the rules of the universe or natural law; “human nature” is often abbreviated as “nature”, referring to internal, inherent, and long-term stable human characteristics. This statement means that the overall result of the rules of the universe is the nature of human beings. To act in accordance with that nature is Dao, and to inquire into Dao and use it to regulate one’s own behavior is to educate. Among them, the phrase “following human nature is called Dao” directly corresponds and links “human nature” with “Dao”. This relationship is not only theoretically simple, as the complex and ambiguous Dao can be experienced through the intuitive nature of human beings, but also practically straightforward, allowing one to act correctly without the need for esoteric reasoning and to achieve the goal of goodness. This conclusion appears highly transcendent and impactful. How many intermediate steps would be required by modern science to prove the relationship between the two? How did The Doctrine of the Mean arrive at such a conclusion?

The Doctrine of the Mean is a chapter in the Book of Rites, which is a rather ancient document. Before and after this, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism all had similar views. The Zhuangzi records a dialogue between Confucius and Laozi: “Laozi said, ‘May I ask if benevolence and righteousness are in human nature?’ Confucius said, ‘Benevolence and righteousness are the nature of true humans.’ Laozi said, ‘May I ask, what is benevolence and righteousness?’ Confucius said, ‘Pleasure to everything in mind, and love everyone without oneself. This is the feeling of benevolence and righteousness.’ Laozi said, ‘... Heaven and earth are inherently constant, the sun and moon are inherently bright, the stars are inherently arranged, the birds and beasts are inherently clustered, and the trees are inherently upright. You act with virtue, follow Dao to be perfect. Why do you work so hard to promote benevolence and righteousness?’” (Zhuang, 1991: p. 231). In this dialogue, “benevolence and righteousness” is close to Dao; Confucius says that benevolence and righteousness are the nature of human; Laozi retorts that in that case is there still a need to promote benevolence and righteousness? There is only a slight difference between the two of them. This is also a discussion that directly links human nature to Dao.

Mencius said, “Those who devote their minds know their nature. If they know their nature, they know the heaven” (Mencius, 1988: p. 499). Here, “heaven” re-

fers to Dao. By fully mobilizing one's mind, one can understand his or her nature, which is equivalent to knowing Dao of heaven. In the book *The Doctrine of the Mean*, there is a more detailed discussion on "fulfilling fully nature": "Only with the most sincere people can fully utilize their nature; when they fully utilize their nature, they can fully utilize others' nature; when they can fully utilize others' nature, they can fully utilize material nature; when they can fully utilize material nature, they can praise the transformation and cultivation of heaven and earth; when they can praise the transformation and cultivation of heaven and earth, they can participate with heaven and earth" (Zeng, 2016: p. 124). "To fully utilize one's nature" means fully mobilizing one's own nature, which can fully mobilize the nature of others, and also fully unleash the nature of things, so as to evolve together with the universe and coexist with heaven and earth. This also means that as long as one acts in accordance with human nature, one can reach a state consistent with the evolution of the Heavenly Dao, which is also known as "following human nature called Dao".

The Sixth Patriarch HuiNeng said, "The human nature is pure, and all Dharma arise from one's own nature." "Such as the various Dharma, in one's own nature, the sky is always clear, the sun and moon are always bright, covered by floating clouds, bright above and dark below, and clouds suddenly scattered by the wind, all above and below are bright, and all phenomena appear" (HuiNeng, 2017: p. 87). In Buddhism, "Dharma" is equivalent to "Dao". So what the Sixth Patriarch said is that Dao is in nature, and Dao is born from human own nature. It is also a direct correspondence and connection between Dao and human nature. So if you want to convert to Buddhism, you don't need to seek it from outside, just search for it from within and convert yourself. In practice, many people do not know what the "Dao" is. It is like a floating cloud blocking the sun, and one's nature is obscured by greed. Cultivating oneself and seeking Dao is like the wind blowing away clouds, seeing the sky again; removing greed, and returning to one's own nature. Buddhism - Dao only needs to be found within oneself, which is human nature.

In the Song Dynasty, *The Doctrine of the Mean* gradually became the highest classic of Confucianism, and the theory that "following human nature called Dao" was widely recognized. Mr. Yichuan said, "Human nature is the essence of reason" (Cheng & Cheng, 2000: p. 347), and "the mind is connected to Dao" (Zhu (ed), 1995: p. 113). "Mind" is the nature of mind, another term for "human nature". He explained, "In heaven it is fate, in righteousness it is reason, in human it is nature, and in the body it is mind, they are actually one" (p. 254). Zhang Zai said, "Nature is the single source of all things, not my private property. Only big man can fully fulfill Dao" (Zhang, 2020: p. 146). Zhu Xi said, "Human nature is reason" (Zhu (ed), 1995: p. 486); "The nature of destiny is everywhere, but when searching, it starts from oneself." Therefore, "human nature is the form of Dao" (p. 469). Here the "reason" is Dao. Zhu Xi has already concluded, "Dao is the general name, reason is the detail item. In the mind called nature, in the things called reason" (p. 490). Thus, when Wang Yangming said

that “the mind is the reason”, it was not an innovation, but only inherited the existing Confucian tradition, or also borrowed from Zen Buddhism. According to the concept of Song Confucianism, mind is nature and reason is Dao. “Mind is reason” means “nature is Dao”. It is back to “following nature is called Dao”.

This view of human nature and Dao as virtually equivalent is found not only in the Chinese tradition, but also in the traditions of other civilizations. For example, the Christian New Testament says, “Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13.5). It also says, “Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.” (Romans 1.19). In this context, “Christ” is a synonym for natural justice, which corresponds to the Chinese concept of Dao. “Christ is in you” means that there is natural justice in the human mind. In the Hindu classic, the Bhagavad Gita, there is the concept of the “Supreme Self”, that is, every ordinary person has a sense of knowing the supreme rules of the universe in his or her mind (Vyasa, 1989: p. 68), and this “Self” is both his or her self-consciousness and the manifestation of Dao of Heaven in his or her mind. The Upanishads say that “This self is the brahman” (*Ayam atma brahman*) (quoted in Armstrong, 2006: p. 126). Armstrong discusses the Hindu concept of the “Divine Self” (*purusha*): “Every single human being had his or her own individual and eternal purusha ...which existed beyond space and time”, and “*purusha* had somehow become entangled with *prakrti*, ‘nature’” (Armstrong, 2006: p. 191).

“Following human nature is called Dao,” which corresponds “human nature” to “Dao,” is a significant philosophical idea that provides a convenient way to investigate Dao. However, it poses a very big and difficult anthropological question: are human beings really like that? If so, what method did the philosophers use to reach this conclusion thousands of years ago? This conclusion—“following human nature is called Dao”—seems to exist in classical philosophy and religious classics, but it may not be familiar or convincing to modern people. If it is correct, shouldn’t it be an effective way to explore Dao—the natural law—today? Then, we have to first prove, using modern theoretical methods, why “following human nature is called Dao.”

2. Dao Is the Rule of Conduct, the Fundamental Rule of the Universe

Now that “Dao” means “Way”, which is for walking, in traditional Chinese academic term, it refers to conduct rules. Throughout the entire Dao De Jing, apart from the elusiveness and ambiguity of Dao, it focuses on how to behave according to the principles of Dao. Specifically:

Water is good to all things but does not contend, and stays where people don’t like, so it is almost Dao.

Who can like a turbid stream to stop flowing, and quietly become clear? Who can settle down to slowly grow? He who keeps this way does not seek self-satisfied. It is only because he is not self-satisfied that he is able to constantly renew himself.

Therefore, the sage holds to the one as an example for the world. Without self-seeing, therefore insightful; without self-righteous, therefore manifesting; without self-bragging, therefore meritorious; without arrogance, therefore long. Only by not competing, no one in the world can compete with.

If you want to shrink something, you must first expand it. If you want to weaken something, you must first strengthen it. If you want to abolish something, you must first promote it. If you want to take something, you must first give it.

Do nothing then can do everything. Governing the world is always done by doing nothing. When something needs to be done, it is not enough for governing the world.

When the government is unobtrusive, the people are pure; when the government is scrutinizing, the people are defective. Therefore, the sage is upright but not stiff, sharp but not hurtful, straightforward but not reckless, bright but not dazzling.

Governing a large country is like cooking a small fish.

Difficult matters of the world must be handled through easy means, great matters of the world must be handled through small means.

Among them, such as “not competing”, “without self-bragging”, “must first expand it”, “do nothing”, “cooking a small fish”, and “handled through easy means”, these are specific conduct rules, with a particular emphasis on “do nothing” as a special rule, which is the most important rule in the behavioral guidelines and is a negative rule. This is one of the three characteristics emphasized by Hayek when discussing due conduct rules—negativity. Hayek states, “That practically all rules of just conduct are negative in the sense that they normally impose no positive duties on any one” (Hayek, 2013: p. 202). Negative conduct rules are the most permissive and free because, outside of what cannot be done, there is room for everything else.

The statements from “The Doctrine of the Mean” and “The Great Learning” reflect the characteristics of conduct rules.

The way of the gentleman starts from the relationship between husband and wife.

The way of the gentleman must begin from near if traveling far, and from low if climbing high.

The great Dao of the world has five aspects, and there are three virtues in practicing the great Dao. Ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger siblings, and the bond between friends are the five aspects of the great Dao in the world. Wisdom, benevolence, and courage are the three virtues of the great Dao in the world. The principles of practicing the great Dao are the same.

People in a lower position who seek to gain trust and support from those above, there is a way. If your friends don't trust you, you won't be able to gain trust and support from those above, to make friends trust you, there is a way. If you cannot be filial to your parents, then you cannot gain the trust of your

friends, to be filial to parents, there is a way. If one cannot be honest with oneself, then one cannot be filial to one's parents, to be honest with oneself, there is a way. If one cannot show one's good nature, then one cannot be honest within.

The way of a gentleman is to be calm yet never tire of it, to be simple yet literate, to be warm yet rational, to know the proximity of distance, to know where the wind is from, to know the manifestation of the subtle, and may cultivate virtue together.

The way of Great Learning consists of manifesting one's bright virtue, loving the people, and stopping at the highest goodness.

Making the world peaceful depends on the governor of the country. If the governor respects parents, then people are filial; if the governor respects elder brothers, then people respect their elder brothers; if the governor shows compassion to orphans, then people do not deviate from it. Therefore, the gentleman has the way of empathy.

Therefore, a gentleman has a great way, and must be loyal and trustworthy in order to gain it, and arrogant and prosperous to lose it.

Compared to the abstraction and generalization of the Dao De Jing, the discussion of Dao in these two Confucian classics focuses more on the specific form of the real world. For example, in the relationship between husband and wife, ruler and subject, father and son, etc., this is reflected in the rules of behavior of interaction between people, such as filial piety, fraternity, loyalty, faith, etc. It is also reflected in the degree and form of behavior, such as “to be calm yet never tire of it, to be simple yet literate, to be warm yet rational”. In a word, Dao of Confucianism is also a rule of conduct. It differs from Daoism in that the latter emphasizes negative rules, while the former focuses on seemingly positive rules that have become customs, such as the Confucian emphasis on propriety. In fact, propriety is also a negative rule, but the impression is positive. For example, “don't travel far when parents live” is negative. The first sentence in the Book of Rites is “Don't be disrespectful”, and then four “no” words are used in succession, “don't grow proud, don't follow desires, don't fill with aspirations, and don't be extremely happy.”

Another difference between Confucianism and Daoism is that the Dao of Confucianism focuses on the Dao of human society, while the Dao of Daoism refers to the Dao of all things in the universe. In other words, it pertains to the rules of behavior of all things in the world. Inanimate substances, lacking conscious behavior, adhere to rules of motion. In the classic literature of Daoism and Confucianism, “Dao” is regarded as the fundamental order of the universe, the root cause of complex cosmic phenomena, and the beginning of all things in the universe. The Dao De Jing states, “Dao is void, which may not be full when used. It is abyss, like the ancestor of all things” (Chapter 4); as the saying goes, “Dao is the mystery of all things.” (Chapter 62) This means that all things are born out of Dao. Thus, Dao, or the conduct rules, represents the basic rules of the universe. This perspective differs from the view that the universe is composed of matter and that the rules of the universe are the rules of the material

structure. The distinction lies in one regarding matter as the essence of the universe and the other regarding Dao as the essence of the universe. Aristotle discussed matter as being shaped by putting form on materials. Materials are what cannot yet be called matter, constituting the makeup of matter. We can conceive of the spatial structure of things as form, which is generated by the behavior of the materials (matters).

All molded objects, whether living or not, are composed of material behavior (movement). Behavioral rules possess temporal characteristics and are manifested as actions resembling structures in a time series, thereby exhibiting a temporal structure. As revealed by Wolfram in the book **A New Kind of Science**, the behavioral rules of one-dimensional two-state metacellular automata are expressed as a quasi-regular two-dimensional pattern in the time series (Wolfram, 2002: pp. 23-39). These behaviors, if confined to a single point in space, do not constitute behavior; behavior spans across space, leaving its trajectory behind and forming a spatial structure, which Aristotle referred to as “form”: “What we are exploring is precisely the cause, that is, the formal cause, so that matter can become certain definite things, and this is the essence of things” (Aristotle, 2016: p. 149). Thus, the time structure is transformed into a spatial structure. Consequently, form originates from behavioral rules, and the rules of behavior also represent forms—the forms of time. For instance, the atom represents the spatial form of the behavioral trajectory of the nucleus and the electrons, while the plant embodies the spatial legacy of growth behavior. This is what is known as “Dao gives birth to all things.” Therefore, the rules of behavior are more fundamental than the material existence in the rules of the universe.

Behavior requires energy. Therefore, behavior is a form of energy. We know that matter and energy can be transformed. Energy manifests itself in the form of time, while matter manifests itself in the form of space. Matter represents the regularity and stability of the temporal form of energy in space, much like how the atom embodies a stable and regular form of energy between the nucleus and the electrons. The atomic structure represents the dynamic equilibrium between the nucleus and the electrons, transitioning from a temporal form to a spatial form. Of course, matter can also destabilize the spatial form to release energy, as seen in the case of an atomic bomb, which represents the reverse process. Nonetheless, when we refer to matter, it is transformed by energy. If we consider the Big Bang as the beginning, energy comes first. The Big Bang is a massive burst of energy, and the subsequent formation of the universe represents the energy seeking appropriate behavioral rules and the establishment of a stable spatial structure. Therefore, the spatial structure or form of things is the energy of the rules of behavior from the temporal structure to the spatial legacy.

3. Identification of “Human Nature”

While we regard Dao as rules of behavior, we need to identify what human nature is that corresponds to Dao. Broadly speaking, “nature” refers to the essence

of all things; specifically, it pertains to the nature of human beings; and concretely, it denotes the attributes that determine the behavioral characteristics of things. In the Confucian classics, the discussion often revolves around human nature. Throughout ancient and modern times, various opinions have been put forth regarding human nature. For instance, some argue that human beings possess inherently negative traits such as greed, viciousness, lust, jealousy, and deception. Are these also considered human natures? This issue has already been extensively discussed by past sages, leading to certain conclusions. In China, “nature” typically refers to basic human nature, while the diverse preferences and specific tendencies of human beings are labeled as “desire”. In comparison to “nature,” desire is neutral, encompassing activities such as “food and sex”. However, it can also carry a slightly derogatory connotation, as seen in the phrase “to reserve reason of heaven, to destroy human desire,” which does not denote normal and proper desires, but rather excessive ones. These fundamental desires are at times described in terms of “nature,” as in the expression “Food and sex are nature.” The term “nature” has undergone a continual evolution in its meaning and has ultimately settled into a more or less singular interpretation.

Mou Zongsan once summarized the evolution of the meaning of “nature” in his book *The Body of Mind and the Body of Nature*. According to him, in the old tradition before Confucius, life and nature were not seen as separate and were sometimes used interchangeably. Initially, nature primarily referred to desire. For instance, “meeting your life” in “Poetry · Daya: Volume A” denotes “fulfillment of one’s desires” (cited in Mou, 2010: p. 172), and “limiting nature” in “Zhou Shu: Zhao Gao” (modern text) means “to restrain one’s prurient and lustful nature” (cited in Mou, 2010: p. 172). In the “Shang Shu · Xibocanli”, the phrase “not to be worried about nature” extends beyond the notion of desire, referring to “the normality of life as it naturally exists” (cited in Mou, 2010: p. 172). In the Shang Shu · Taijia, there is a saying that “custom and nature are formed.” According to Mou Zongsan, this refers to three levels of meaning: biological instinct, human temperament, and the transcendental nature of righteousness (cited in Mou, 2010: p. 173).

Over time, the concept of “nature” has been converged as human nature. For instance, “nature is living” and “living is called nature.” Mou Zongsan explains that nature is the cause of living, which he refers to as the “principle of shaping”—the rule that generates human life and simultaneously constitutes “the characteristics of a natural life” (Mou, 2010: p. 80). This aligns with the idea that an object is born from Dao, or the conduct rule, and thus inherits characteristics from the rules of generation, embedding the conduct rules in their nature. However, Mou Zongsan points out that this interpretation of nature is still physical. In the case of Confucius, although he didn’t extensively discuss the “Dao of heaven” and “nature,” he emphasized “benevolence,” indirectly suggesting that human nature is “benevolence.” In Song Confucianism, “nature,” as “the reason why,” “is considered metaphysical, transcendental, ontological, deductive, and heterogeneous” (p. 80).

Kant observed the “special properties of human nature,” the “special natural characteristics of human beings,” the “temperament, disposition, and natural inclination,” or “any special inclination,” and puts these “human qualities” to the opposite of “free, autonomous, self-disciplined, and absolutely good will” (cited in Mou, 2010: pp. 109-110). Mou Zongsan points out that the former is akin to the “nature of temperament” in a particular lineage of Chinese tradition, while the latter is akin to the “nature of righteousness” as described by Mencius and the Doctrine of the Mean. The “nature of righteousness” embodies “the nature of inner morality, and its so-called goodness is the goodness of this inner morality. This nature is universal, a priori, and pure” (Mou, 2010: p. 109). In contrast to the “special attributes of human nature” or the “nature of temperament,” which are “colorful and different from person to person,” and “either good or evil, or indifferent to good or evil,” “the will of absolute goodness” or “the nature of righteousness” possesses universality, permanence, “internal morality,” and “connecting internal morality directly to the Dao of heaven and destiny is not only moral but also ontological cosmology” (Mou, 2010: p. 110). This discourse directly addresses the fundamental core of human nature, which is innate and inherent. It distinguishes it from its appearance and extracts the basic principles that internalize the rules of the universe. It is also possible to connect human nature with the Dao, that is, “following human nature is called Dao.”

It appears that Mr. Mou has placed excessive emphasis on the disparity between the Confucian and Song Confucians’ interpretations of nature and the previous “living is nature”, particularly in his assertion that according to the “pre-existing background of human nature and destiny,” nature is defined in terms of reason or morality, representing the transcendental nature and idealistic righteousness, which constitutes the positive aspect of Confucian theory of human nature. Conversely, nature in the context of living is viewed as the nature of reality from a pragmatic perspective, representing the negative aspect of Confucian human nature theory (Mou, 2010: p. 187). This interpretation may be overstated. “Living is called nature” implies that the principles and experiences of life shape the inherent nature of human beings, and these life principles embody the universal rules that, through numerous challenges and risks, ultimately give rise to human beings. One fundamental orientation of these rules is goodness, encompassing cooperation, friendliness, and respect. Consequently, the nature of human beings shaped by the process of living tends toward goodness. Therefore, “living is called nature” equates to “humans created by Dao are called nature,” aligning with the concept of the “pre-existing background of human nature and destiny.” Confucius, Mencius, and the Song Confucians did not identify any characteristics distinct from human nature; they simply emphasized that human beings possess this benevolent nature. This nature does not inherently dictate that humans are good; rather, it signifies that humans have “good sprouts”, indicating their potential for moral development. Righteousness is the outcome of this moral education, representing “civilizing” rather than “nature.” The “nature of righteousness” denotes this initial potential, mirroring the es-

sence of “living is nature.”

Another concept akin to “nature” is “emotion,” sentiment, or mood. According to psychological research, emotions have evolved in human beings and play a crucial role in their survival. For instance, fear, anger, grief, or jealousy help individuals avoid attacks from natural enemies, instill courage for self-defense, foster love and care for loved ones, and regulate exclusion of others from spouses, thereby contributing to the formation of a structured society. Nevertheless, emotions are automatic neuronal responses that are not governed by reason. Emotions function optimally when they are at the appropriate level, but excessive emotions can be ineffective or even counterproductive. Consequently, emotion is considered a fluctuating factor, distinct from the inherent and constant nature of righteousness mentioned earlier. However, just as nature is elevated to the “nature of righteousness,” emotion can also be elevated to the “moral sentiment.” According to Kant, moral emotions such as love, respect, sympathy, sense of right and wrong, deference, and shame can automatically react to immoral behavior or spontaneously generate the impulse to practice morality. These emotions serve as the driving force for upholding the moral law, which would otherwise be empty and powerless.

For instance, people blush when they are ashamed, their heart beats faster when they are angry, they cry when they are sad, and they laugh when they are happy, all of which are automatic moral responses. This closely resembles the Confucian concept of “the feelings of the saints.” According to Wang Bi, “the feelings of the sages respond to things without being burdened by them” (cited in Mou, 2010: p. 113). This implies that the emotions of the sages do not fluctuate like those of ordinary people, thereby avoiding negative impacts on specific matters. The proper function of the sages’ emotions is precisely to guide them to adhere to morality and the Dao of Heaven, and to “be emotionless by obeying all things with their emotions” (Cheng & Cheng, cited in Mou, 2010: p. 114). In other words, moral emotions align with the law of all things and appear to exhibit no general emotional fluctuations, thus making “the saint’s emotion” consistent with the “nature of righteousness.” Zhu Xi stated, “Nature is not yet moved, emotion is already moved; the mind can encompass both the already moved and not yet moved.” He likened it to “the mind is like water, nature is like the stillness of water, and emotion is like the flow of water” (Zhu, 2018: pp. 70-71). Here, nature and emotion represent two states of the human mind: they remain unexpressed when still but inherently contain nature, and they become evident when in motion.

4. “Heavenly Destiny Is Called Nature”: Nature Is the Trait Left behind by the Spatial Trajectory of Dao

Since the spatial structure of a form or object represents the spatial legacy of its behavioral trajectory, it possesses a specific trait that corresponds to the behavioral rule. This trait not only records the character of the behavioral rule but also facilitates the object it generates to adhere to that behavioral rule more easi-

ly and conveniently. The attributes of an object encompass the features of its behavior, and the rules it follows in its behavior are the very rules that give rise to it. This trait is encoded in a set of information that living organisms pass on to their offspring through condensed packets of information such as seeds, eggs, or sperm. This set of information is the gene. It can be said that this set of information is characterized by the traditional Chinese academic term “nature.” Hence, we observe the relationship between Dao and nature. Dao represents the behavioral rules, while nature embodies the characteristics of entities. It is Dao that engenders nature, and nature possesses traits that correspond to Dao. Therefore, in classical Chinese literature, Dao and nature are frequently interconnected; as stated in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, “Following human nature is called Dao.” By adhering to nature, Dao—the behavioral rule—is revealed.

Since nature is approximately equivalent to Dao, it contains the characteristics that Dao contains. Dao, the conduct rule that generates human beings, has evolved over billions of years before it finally generates human beings, who are the best of all things. When Dao created a single cell, it was also a rule that united the materials in a form with a certain regularity and stability. This rule contained the value of promoting cooperation and combination. Thus, the nature of this single cell also had the value of promoting cooperation and combination. As a result, it was able to exist in a more stable manner, utilize energy more efficiently, and survive better than it would have without such a form, and thus such a form was preserved. The development from the single cell to the human being has gone through countless upgrading processes, and each upgrading means that the conduct rules that make it upgrading have a stronger value of promoting cooperation and bonding. Therefore, human nature contains the correct conduct rules to be chosen for each upgrading since the development of the universe, and the values they contain. Otherwise, the upgrading process would not have succeeded and would have been stuck in the original place, just as human beings stay in the state of the chimpanzee.

Genes are the immobilization of spatial structures resulting from conduct rules, which are used to pass on to future generations. It is generally believed that genes record information about the spatial structure of organisms, such as what the roots, stems, and leaves of a plant look like. However, do genes also record the temporal structure of organisms, i.e., the conduct rules? The answer should be yes. Organisms have their predetermined behaviors, such as when plants blossom and bear fruits, which is the behavior corresponding to the time; birds can fly, fishes can swim, and beasts can run are all genetically stipulated behaviors. Not only that, the development and growth process of plants and animals is the result of the growth behavior rules. For example, plants grow their roots, stems, and leaves according to the rules of growth, and baby in the mother’s womb also have genetically prescribed growth sequences and processes.

This view has been confirmed by geneticists. They found that humans, fruit flies, and mice have the same homologous gene cluster. This gene is responsible for the growth of body structure. Fruit flies have 8 homologous genes, while

humans have 13 homologous genes. These genes grow from beginning to end. This is probably because on the road of biological evolution, organisms are developing in a more complex direction, that is, they are constantly lengthening from head to tail, rather than vice versa. This evolutionary path is recorded in genes and is displayed in the process of biological breeding and development. Matt Ridley said, “Homologous genes repeat the evolution of past species” (Ridley, 2015: p. 226). As Ernst Haeckel said, “‘The history of individual development repeats the history of ethnic development.’ Individuals repeat the process of phylogenetic evolution during embryonic development, which is known as the ‘embryonic replay law’.” (cited in Ridley, 2015: pp. 226-227)

Understandably, a good rule of behavior, once followed, brings benefits to the follower, who in turn follows the rule consistently over time. This temporal rule determines the spatial structure of the organism so that its spatial structure corresponds to the temporal rule, making it easier for the organism to implement the rule of behavior. The spatial structure is internalized over time as genes, which are recorded as genetic information. Behavioral rules are recorded in genes in two ways. One is indirectly recorded in the genes through the spatial structure that corresponds to it. For example, a certain spatial structure is formed to facilitate a specific behavior, such as the ruminating behavior of cattle, which is realized by the spatial structure of the cattle’s two stomachs. The other is recorded directly in the genes, such as baby suckling.

The problem is that everything in the world is not static, and the history of biological evolution is a history of constant changes in the physical structure of living things. In particular, human beings discover new rules of behavior that bring gains to people, and after being practiced for a considerable period of time, are they internalized into genes? Biological and psychological studies have partly revealed that behavior leads to changes in the body (spatial structure), and changes in the body lead to changes in genes. Darwin, in his *On the Origin of Species*, said, “Habit also has a deciding influence”. He noted that “in the domestic duck that the bones of the wing weigh less and the bones of the leg more, in proportion to the whole skeleton, than do the same bones in the wild-duck”. He “attributed to the domestic duck have flying much less, and walking more, than its wild parent”. He also cites the fact that “the great and inherited development of udders in cows and goats in countries where they are habitually milked, in comparison with the state of these organs in other countries” to prove that there is “the effect of use” (Darwin, 1997: p. 24). Thus, changes in behavioral rules can lead to genetic changes.

Darwin’s modern successor, Edward Wilson, said, “It is behavior that changes first, then structure” (Wilson, 2019: p. 15), and “social behavior is also commonly used as an evolutionary vanguard. The whole evolutionary process generally consists of behavioral changes accompanied by morphological changes” (p. 16). It is also said that the change of behavioral rules is the first evolutionary change, which leads to the change of body structure and then to the change of genes. Genes contain information about the stable body structure that is passed on to

the next generation. The most obvious example of this is the human brain. In recent tens of thousands of years, the brain capacity of human beings has significantly increased because the scale of human social organization has gradually become larger, and people need to have a more complex brain to deal with more complex interpersonal relationships, thus giving rise to the social brain—a brain with a larger capacity (Ye et al., 2013: pp. 157-161).

The brain can be used for observation, memory, calculation, reasoning, decision-making, etc. Broadly speaking, the concepts generated by the brain are also a kind of behavior, and the concepts that are in line with Dao are also a kind of behavioral rules. The concept that conforms to Dao can also be called a moral concept, which coincides with the expression “Virtue is gaining”, and since a moral concept is a conduct rule of the mind, it can also be internalized into genes. Therefore, the source of human morality may also be the innate morality in the genes. For example, Mencius said that people have “four good sprouts”, they are “not from outside to fuse me, I inherent.” Anthropologists cite the example of a male teacher. He had a benign tumor in his brain that pressed on the prefrontal cortex, and as a result, he behaved indecently and attempted rape and molestation many times. But when he had surgery to remove this brain tumor, he became normal (Boehm, 2019: p. 29). This suggests that there is indeed a part of the brain’s “hardware” that specializes in moral behavior.

Further research by brain scientists has found that every decision a person makes with his or her brain is fed back to the brain in terms of its consequences for the person, encouraging the neurons or connections between neurons that make the right decisions, forming the “dynamic core”. Edelman notes that “after the brain is produced in evolution by natural selection (which determines value constraints and primary structure), the brain of a given individual is operated by somatic selection” (Edelman, 2019: p. 237). “The most striking feature of each brain is its individuality and variability. The brain exhibits this versatility at all levels of organization, allowing the brain, in the face of a variety of signals from the unknown world, to select and enhance the connections between those groups of neurons that enable the organism to adapt to its environment” (Gu, 2021). What is called somatic selection is behavior. Perhaps the evolution of the brain is indirectly caused by the changes in the body as a result of the evolution of behavior. The idea of following Dao and its decisions will benefit the actor overall in the long run. Over time, the brain structure—the mind—would evolve in the direction of following Dao—the moral rules.

My own experience is that when I drive in countries like the UK or Japan that drive on the left, I always drive to the left unconsciously. This is probably because I am used to driving on the right in mainland China. Continuing to be accustomed to a behavior for a long period of time creates conceptual inertia and may even be internalized in the genes. Of course, the cumulative internalized rules of these predisposed behaviors are not universal and permanent, because different peoples, countries, and cultures are not universal, and there is no absolute superiority over other rules. For example, the driving habits I formed in

China do not help me to drive well in England or Japan. It is therefore a special and temporary trait compared to human nature, which has inherent universal laws. But the conduct rules that are universally applicable in any country at any time are not so special and transient, and the genes that are formed and internalized by them are permanently embedded in human nature.

According to Darwin's theory, the term "superiority" refers to the fact that a rule of behavior is more suitable for survival, so that those who follow this rule of behavior, whether it is genetically determined or acquired, will survive. Therefore, we can judge that all the creatures that have become human beings must have chosen the right rules of behavior in their previous choices. Those who did not choose the right rules of behavior were either exterminated or remained in the lower stages of their previous lives. Therefore, the difference between human beings and other creatures is the difference between human nature and the natures of other creatures; the difference between human nature and the nature of chimpanzees is human nature. The so-called "Destiny of Heaven" is the result of the evolution of the universe, and this result exists, just like the result of "fate" or "order". "What is endowed by heaven is destiny, and what is loved by things is nature" (Zu (ed), p. 7). Nature is the character of this result.

5. Using Darwinian Theory to Reaffirm the Correspondence between Nature and Dao

The Dao De Jing says, "Dao gives birth to one, the one gives birth to two, the two gives birth to three, and the three gives birth to all things." It is also said, "All things are born by Dao and do not stop." "Dao gives birth to all things," Dao is the rules of behavior, but also the form of space, which is the same as Aristotle said, material plus form is the thing. If Dao, the rule of behavior, is the source of the formation of all things in the universe, then all things in the universe can be understood as Dao that determines their forms. Dao is "the substance without shape, the image without thing." If the appearance of things is omitted, everything is Dao; the relationship between things is the relationship between Dao, and the competition between living things is the competition between Dao, the competition of the rules of behavior.

As mentioned earlier, various rules of behavior can correspond to spatial structures, which will be recorded in genes. Genes are an information program. Drawing on the analogy of computer software, Gregory Chaitin pointed out that life is software. The specific form of software is DNA. This is nature's programming. "The origin of life is actually the origin of software, which is the origin of DNA. DNA is a universal programming language found in every cell." This kind of software grows and evolves randomly. From the first single cell to the most complex human, the evolution of this software is based on the existing software. "Nature is a handyman and a tinkerer, who makes do with old things, patches them, and repairs them so that they can be reused." "Our bodies are full of software, and all of them are very old software. We have subprograms from sponges, amphibians, and fish. Each cell contains a complete copy of DNA software,

which is equivalent to the entire biological history” (Chaitin, 2014: p. 29).

“Making do with old things” is actually Darwin’s “survival of the fittest”, which is survived by environmental adaptation, survival competition, and natural selection. This thing is DNA. However, this is not an old thing, but something with higher efficiency and new functions. After multi-level evolution, one extreme will be very different from the other. DNA, as the information recording biological space structure and time form, actually records the behavior rules leading to survival. Because in the final analysis, it is their behavior, not their body structure, that makes living things survive. Body structure is only the condition and boundary of behavior and is relatively immutable, while behavior is much more flexible. The variability of behavior enables organisms to explore new survival strategies. Especially in the competition between the same species, because of the similar body structure, more superior behavior may help win. Therefore, human beings-this software developed starting from a single cell contains all the surviving behavior rules since a single cell.

This view is also supported by geneticists. Matt Ridley said, “Genetic knowledge is like a piece of computer program. They use the same code and can run in various systems. Even after 530 million years of species differentiation, human beings and fruit flies can still recognize each other’s ‘code’. It can be seen that the analogy of computers is accurate. During the Cambrian explosion period, 540 - 520 million years ago, organisms carried out various experiments and produced various forms. This is very similar to the situation that people designed computer software in the mid-1980s. Perhaps it was at that time that an animal was lucky enough to invent the first homologous gene, and we are all its descendants. There were many competitors living with it in that era, but there is no doubt that its descendants ruled the whole earth, or at least most of the earth” (Ridley, 2015: p. 225).

How to judge if a behavior rule should be recorded in the gene? It probably depends on time. If a behavior rule is successful, it should first enable the individual who implements it to survive and allow the offspring to continue to follow this behavior rule, with the result being good, i.e., the offspring survive. The method of transmitting this behavior to future generations is learning, where parents teach their children how to behave, which may form customs or traditions over time. This automatically tests this behavior rule and believes that it is worth fixing, especially if it will benefit future generations if they follow it, so it is worth recording in the gene and passing it on to the next generation. Once a conduct rule should be decided to pass on to the next generation, it must be incorporated into DNA. Of course, this process is not consciously carried out by the organism itself, but the natural selection mechanism will automatically start recording the behavior rules that are beneficial to the organism and have been tested for a long time. On the contrary, any trait that can be inherited must be a trait of genetization.

This insight has also been confirmed by modern geneticists. They have found that populations living in different regions, with different environments, habits,

and diets, are genetically different. For example, peoples who were originally pastoralists “evolved the ability to digest milk. They chose to live on the steppe not because they realized that they were genetically predisposed to digest milk. The discovery is significant in that it provides a case study of cultural change leading to evolutionary and biological structural change. Genes can change according to need; they can change according to free will. Conscious and willful behavior can change the evolutionary pressures of a species, especially humans” (Ridley, 2015: p. 241).

DNA is both an information structure and a substance. It is composed of protein, which has structure and is determined by DNA. “Life is the result of the interaction of two chemicals, protein and DNA” (Ridley, 2015: p. 32). DNA works through chemical action. “Protein represents the external performance of chemical action, life activity, respiration, metabolism, and various behaviors, biologists call it ‘phenotype’. DNA represents the internal characteristics of information, replication, reproduction, and sexual behavior, and biologists call it ‘genotype” (Ridley, 2015: p. 34). So metaphorically, Protein is the “hardware” of life form or behavior rules, while DNA is the “software”. Therefore, once the behavior rule is genetized, it will be “hardened”, that is, the behavior rule will have a certain fixed material structure as the guarantee for its implementation, not just a probability. This is reflected in the characteristics of biological life, which is the innate characteristics of this kind of life and is what the Doctrine of Mean calls “nature”. Matt Ridley concluded that “the process of natural selection has stored the useful information obtained from the environment in genes, so the human genome can also be regarded as the learning achievements accumulated over 4 billion years” (Ridley, 2015: p. 525).

In the Doctrine of the Mean, “the destiny of heaven is called nature”, in which “destiny of heaven” is the naturally occurring “root of life”, “saying that heaven’s offering to all things is called the destiny of heaven” (Cheng & Cheng, 2000: p. 172), which is the general term for the rules of the universe. Matt Ridley says, “The striking similarity of embryonic genes in worms, flies, chickens, and humans is strong evidence that they share a common ancestor. By comparing the ‘vocabulary’ in the developmental genes of each species, one realizes that they all share the same ‘words” (Ridley, 2015: p. 231). Since human beings evolved from worms, flies, etc., their genes must contain the genes of worms, etc., which, as well as the forms and rules that the genes contain, has been proven by natural selection to be effective and continue to evolve. As Cheng Zi said, “The mind is like the seed of a grain, in which there is the principle of birth, which is nature” (Zhu (ed), 1995, p. 486). Zhu Xi said this analogy is very good. The grain seed is the carrier of genes; genetic information contains the form and rules. Thus, human nature, the nature of the mind, contains Dao of all things in the universe. And this Dao, from the point of view of its evolution of the universe to the generation of human beings, is good because the complexity of human beings needs to overcome countless obstacles with its values of cooperation, fraternity, and respect in order to realize.

6. Discovering Dao in the Nature

With the correspondence between Dao and nature, people have a new way to explore Dao. Direct observation of Dao is often challenging due to its concealment, leading to a trance-like state and difficulty in perceiving its true essence. This is because Dao represents a rule of conduct and a form of time. In the absence of followers, it exists as an abstract concept without a tangible form, making it imperceptible. Even when followed, it fades away with the passage of time due to its temporal nature.

When “nature” is equated with “Dao”, it can be observed calmly due to its stable spatial structure. There are two methods of observation: the dynamic method, which involves observing behavior, as behavior is “spontaneous”; and the quiet method, which involves introspection. Particularly when nature is considered as human nature, mind, or self-nature, the exploration of Dao becomes simple and straightforward. This leads to the concept of “mind generates Dao” (Cheng & Cheng, 2000: p. 329); “Mind is reason”; “Self-nature is Buddha-nature”. People do not need external observation but rather need to reflect on themselves.

First, let’s consider the observation of behavior. In a broad sense, “nature” here refers to the essence of all things, where the laws governing everything can be found in the movements and behaviors of all entities. In a narrower sense, “nature” refers to biological nature, and even more narrowly, it refers to human nature. Throughout human history, people have long observed human behavior. However, due to the varied and complex nature of human behavior, it is essential to identify the key points for observing human behavior. This involves observing the behavioral patterns formed by human behaviors, which constitute customs. Customs are the result of people’s willingness to conform to nature, and they attract attention. Each individual’s behavior is influenced by their nature, and interactions between individuals may lead to cooperative outcomes. This aligns with Hayek’s concept of “spontaneous order,” as acting spontaneously is inherent to human nature. This is because there are positive predispositions in their genes. Although these are only “good sprouts” and mere indications, they can at least promote cooperation between individuals, such as through exchange or division of labor, which is not observed in other animals. This leads to the formation of customs, known as “propriety” in China. Behaviors that are not conducive to cooperation cannot yield positive outcomes, and the actors will face retaliation. Consequently, such behaviors cannot form rules that all parties adhere to and will gradually disappear. Custom or propriety represents the preservation of spontaneous order—the rules of proper behavior, which are closely aligned with Dao.

During the Spring and Autumn Period in China, Confucius discovered the social order contained within proprieties through observation, contemplation, and refinement. Confucius and his students observed, collected, and organized the proprieties from the Western Zhou Dynasty, as well as those passed down from the Xia and Shang Dynasties. This effort led to the formation of three clas-

sic works on etiquette: The Book of Rites, Yili, and Zhouli. In The Book of Rites, Confucianism not only documented the specific forms of proprieties but also delved into their underlying reasons and ultimately extracted the moral values inherent in these codes of conduct.

The Book of Rites states, “A gentleman would like to observe the way of benevolence and righteousness; propriety is his essence” (Wang, 2011: p. 219). Yu Yingshi quoted Ji Wenzi from Zuo Zhuan as saying, “Propriety, in harmony with heaven, is the Dao of heaven” (Yu, 2014: p. 53), indicating that the cultural elites of that time clearly understood the relationship between propriety and Dao, and were actively seeking to discover Dao through propriety. The two chapters in The Book of Rites, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean, represent a refinement and summary of Dao and its nature. Therefore, The Doctrine of the Mean asserts that “following human nature is called Dao,” which is a conclusion drawn from deep contemplation after extensive observation, collection, recording, and organization of numerous proprieties, rather than being merely an abstract theory.

Modern science, especially physics, is characterized by the discovery of the rules of motion through the observation of the motion of objects. For instance, Galileo’s invention of the telescope facilitated the observation of the motion of celestial bodies. Kepler summarized the relative motion of the sun and the earth as Kepler’s laws, and Newton’s system of the universe provides a systematic theory describing the rules of motion of objects within it. Chemistry describes the rules of motion of atoms that form the spatial structure of elements and summarizes the rules of synthesizing new substances by exchanging and linking atoms between elements. Optics explores the rules of photon behavior, while electromagnetism involves the observation and description of electron motion and its magnetic effects, as well as the rules of electromagnetic interaction. During scientific observation and research, material properties are also derived. Without the observation of the rules of behavior, it is difficult to ascertain material properties. For example, the mass of matter is revealed by the presence of acceleration. Another example is the behavioral characteristics of the linear propagation and fluctuation of photons, which reveal the spatial form of the wave and particle phases of light.

Scientists use mathematical formulas to accurately describe the “rules of behavior” of substances. For example, Kepler’s laws discovered the behavior rules of the planets in the solar system, revealing that their orbits are elliptical and that the line connecting planets and the sun sweeps over an equal area at equal time intervals. Additionally, the square of the time taken by all planets to orbit the sun is proportional to the cube of their semi-major axis in orbit. Another example is Newton’s second law, $F = ma$, which states that the acceleration of a particle is proportional to the external force applied in the same direction. Both of these laws accurately describe the “rules of behavior” of matter, enabling people to predict how objects will “act” in the next moment and understand the reasons for such “behavior,” such as the presence of a force. This is the result of observ-

ing and contemplating the “spontaneous behavior” of things, with their behavioral rules—Dao—being encompassed within their behavior.

In a narrower sense, as nature primarily refers to human nature, researchers, as human beings, can explore the existence and form of Dao through introspection of their own nature. Throughout history, human beings have discovered the correspondence between nature and Dao and have used introspection or epiphany to explore Dao. For example, the Dao De Jing speaks of Dao throughout its entire text without a single external observation of Dao, emphasizing introspection. The Dao De Jing states, “Dao is as things, looks a trance. In a daze, there is an image inside. In a daze, there is something inside. Deep and obscure, there is essence inside. Its essence is very genuine, and there is faith.” This indicates that Lao Zi was uncertain about the external observation of Dao, describing it as “looks a trance.” However, through introspection, he perceived the approximate appearance of Dao, noting “there is an image,” “there is something,” “there is essence,” and “there is faith.” This suggests an approximate image, a physical appearance, intricate details, and trustworthy content. Through such introspection, the Dao De Jing roughly depicts the outline of Dao.

Dao imitates nature.

Bending leads to completion, crookedness leads to straightness, hollow leads to surplus, shabbiness leads to novelty, less leads to gain, and more leads to confusion.

Dao often achieves everything by doing nothing. If the Marquis can restrain themselves, all things will self-evolve.

The Dao of heaven is to cut surplus to make up for the shortfall.

In the Buddhist and Confucian traditions, there are also practices of introspective or epiphanic inquiry. In Buddhism, the most prominent method is the Zen technique of koans. A koan is a question that does not require an answer through logical reasoning, but rather through the quick mobilization of one’s wits. This wisdom leads to an inner epiphany, often resulting in the discovery of the truth implicit in the question. A classic example is the response of the Sixth Patriarch HuiNeng to the question “the wind is moving” and “the streamer is moving” with “the mind is moving.” In this way, he transcended the dilemma of choosing one or the other and instead of delving into the physical causes of the two, he directly addressed epistemology, using the nature of the human mind to explain why “it moves.” In Confucianism, while the mainstream perspective explores Dao from observing behaviors, there is also a non-mainstream tradition of introspection found in certain mainstream Confucian figures. For example, from Mencius’s “Nurture well my great spirit” to Zhu Xi’s “Sit in silence to clarify the mind, and realize the reason of heaven” (cited in Shu, 2003: p. 175). None is more prominent than Wang Yangming’s Longchang enlightenment.

He recorded his experience in Longchang Cave, stating, “I lived in silence day and night, seeking calm; after a long time, my mind became clear. Suddenly, I realized the purpose of seeking knowledge from the natural world in the middle of the night. It was as if someone was speaking in my sleep. I couldn’t help but

startle, surprising others. I came to understand that the Dao of saints is inherently present within me, and those who seek reason from external things are mistaken. Substantiating this with the words of the 'Five Classics' stored in my mind, I found them to be consistent, leading me to write the Five Classics Speculations." (Wang, 1992: p. 1228) Wang Yangming's "Five Classics Speculations" is the result of this great enlightenment. Unfortunately, he burned the book himself, but his students found 13 remaining articles in the discarded manuscript. Among them, his discussion of the hexagram "Jin" in Yi Zhuan can be seen as his intuitive understanding of the hexagram. He said, "When the sun emerges from the ground, it does so on its own, and the sky has no influence. A gentleman's virtue is self-evident, and others have no bearing on it. Those who reveal themselves are free from the cover of their selfish desires." In fact, his "mind is reason" has already been described in the classics, but it originates from his own mind and is "consistent" with references in the classics. His "Five Classics Speculations" not only uses the classics to prove the mind but also uses the mind to prove the classics. Mind and classics mutually support each other.

Although in people's impression, Western thinkers seem to seldom adopt the method of introspection or epiphany, in fact, this is traditional in the West. Yu Yingshi pointed out that there is a "shaman tradition" in the "prehistory" of Greece (Yu, 2014: pp. 186-189). One of the methods used by witches and shamans is the spiritual method. Among the "spiritual exercises" of the Greek shaman, the most noteworthy one is "controlling breathing" (p. 189). This is probably the early time of introspection-meditation. And this tradition may have been passed down to modern times through unknown channels. In the 18th century, both Hume and Kant, Western thinkers, seemed to adopt an introspective approach when exploring human nature. We find that in Hume's Theory of Human Nature, there are few citations with their sources, while in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, there are no citations. Kant often said, "Inside us..." What is "inside us"? It should be our spirit. When he said "pure reason", he ruled out any external experience, so it was an inner state of mind without any external information coming in or stimulating.

In the process of writing the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant wrote to Mask Hertz on February 21, 1772, "If these things are not given to us in the way that they stimulate us, and if this rational representation is based on our internal activities, then how on earth are these things given to us? Where does the consistency between rational representation and objects that are not produced by themselves come from?" (Kant, 2019: p. 46) His answer is, "The root of the pure intellectual concept lies in the nature of the mind, but this does not mean that the mind is influenced by the object, nor does it mean that the mind creates the object itself." (p. 45) It goes without saying that it is innate. He also mentioned in his letter, "Crutius assumed some implanted judgment rules and concepts, and God implanted them into people's minds in the way that they must exist in order to make them harmonious with things." (p. 46) Although he subsequently denied this view, isn't this a shy expression of his inner thoughts? Kant's "thing"

includes both representation and the thing itself, and the latter is actually the form of things. This also corresponds to the Chinese word for Dao. Therefore, the rules and concepts of harmony with things are the “nature” corresponding to “Dao”.

7. Why Is “Cultivating Dao Called Civilizing” Still Needed?

The understanding that “following human nature is called Dao” helps us discover Dao. However, we cannot simply equate “human nature” with “Dao”. Even though cosmic evolution has internalized Dao—the rules of conduct—in our nature, there is a crucial difference between “human” and “universe”: humans are finite, while the universe is infinite. Humans are finite-dimensional beings with limited volume and lifespan. Limited volume implies limited energy, and the expression and manifestation of information depend on energy. If the energy is insufficient, there is no way to act without restriction, fully externalize the rules, or observe comprehensively. Limited volume also translates to limited rationality, i.e., the limited capacity of the brain and thus limited mental activities; even introspection or epiphany will be limited. Both observation and introspection require time, which is constrained by the limited lifespan of human beings. In contrast, the universe, as an infinite being in space and time, is a realm where all rules of behavior can be revealed, and new rules of behavior can be explored. Although the results of the evolution of the universe can be condensed in the human body and brain, their display and manifestation are still limited.

The differences and similarities between “human” and “heaven” are clearly explained by Zhu Xi: “Heaven is vast and boundless, and human nature inherits its completeness, therefore the original mind of a person, its essence, is also limitless. It is only confined by the limitations of individual form and hindered by limited sensory perception, thus there are some aspects that are obscured and not fully comprehended. If a person can thoroughly investigate the principles of events and things, and eventually achieve complete understanding without leaving anything behind, then there is a way to fulfill the essence of the original mind, and the reason why I am as nature and the reason why heaven is as heaven are both consistent.” (Zhu (ed), 1995: p. 489) Heaven—the universe is infinite, but the innate human nature can encompass all aspects of heavenly Dao. It is only due to limited capacity and experience that some aspects of heavenly Dao are obscured. However, by exploring the principles of things, one will eventually be able to integrate the complete heavenly Dao and reach a state of unity with heaven. Although the latter statement may be somewhat exaggerated—humans can never truly reach the same state as heaven, Zhu Xi was correct in emphasizing that it is only possible to achieve this through the study of material things and through meditation and introspection. This process of endeavor is “cultivation.”

Therefore, when we say “following human nature is called Dao,” we mean that “we have the potential to discover Dao in human nature,” which theoretically contains all of Dao. However, to discover Dao from human nature, we need ef-

fort, namely, the effort of observation, the effort of thinking, and the effort of introspection. There is an upper limit to these efforts. Otherwise, why doesn't everyone automatically become a saint? Even saints cannot grasp all of Dao, as *The Doctrine of the Mean* says, "Even saints do not know everything." (Zeng, 2016: p. 85) It can be said that the saying, "Following human nature is called Dao" means that human nature contains Dao, but it does not automatically reveal all of Dao. The saying, "Human nature is the form of Dao" means that the rules contained in human nature are equivalent to Dao, and that not all of Dao can be discovered and grasped through the observation or introspection of human nature. It is not possible to discover and grasp all of Dao from observation or introspection of human nature. Because, as mentioned above, man is a limited being. Kant regarded knowledge as a product of the combination of innate knowledge and acquired sensibility, i.e., a person has to acquire experience through time in order to form knowledge. The Sixth Patriarch said that Buddhism should only seek its own nature inwardly, which also requires a process of "seeking". Mr. Yangming's enlightenment at the Longchang was also a process of meditation and verification with the classics, and it takes time to read the classics. Therefore, it is impossible for a person with a limited lifespan to know all of Dao.

Comparing human nature to a mineral deposit, which contains all Dao, to acquire the knowledge of Dao, we need to dig. This requires experience, exploration, reading, verification, introspection, and epiphany, which is a process of "cultivating" and "civilizing". However, "civilizing" is a time-consuming and rational process, so from the limited time and rationality of human beings, on the one hand, human beings can discover Dao from their own nature; on the other hand, even after the process of exploring, human beings will never be able to grasp all of Dao. In particular, human beings are limited individuals, and they cannot become omniscient and omnipotent gods. As Kant thinks, people can see the representation of thing, but it is impossible to recognize the thing itself, which is similar to Dao. It is also not inconsistent with the agnosticism that Hayek and others emphasized as irrational. This distinguishes the proposition that "following nature is called Dao" from rationalism or Gnosticism—human beings regarding themselves as gods.

A significant portion of Dao contained within human nature operates automatically within the human body, stimulating or inhibiting neurons through gene expression. This enables cells or organs in the body to follow Dao, resulting in the coordination of physical conditions, without people themselves being aware of it. Another part operates through people's subconscious, and individuals are not fully aware of these behavioral rules. Only a few Dao-behavior rules can be observed or realized by people. Spontaneous behavior is sometimes instinctive, occurring without conscious thought, so people are aware of it, but do not know necessarily the reasons behind it. Therefore, people's behavior unconsciously follows certain rules. It is only when the outcomes of multiple human interactions are observed that people become aware. As Hayek stated, cus-

toms result from people's non-purposeful behavior. The formation of customs clearly lags behind people's initial behavior, so individuals are not initially aware of their own nature. "Following human nature is called Dao" does not imply immediate knowledge of Dao.

Finding Dao at a glance is not easy; it requires careful and repeated observation, recording, discussion, and contemplation to extract the behavioral rules contained within it. This demands rational ability, which is limited and varies from person to person. Some individuals are naturally intelligent, while most people need to cultivate themselves in order to attain a certain level of rational ability. Therefore, the ability to discover Dao from nature requires education and training. The other form, introspection or epiphany, is rarely innate. Even Buddha, Mohammed, or Wang Yangming could only achieve it through meditation. Therefore, it is also referred to as "civilizing".

The structure of the human body and brain contains the hardware of Dao, but the concrete manifestation and implementation of Dao still require "software," which is input from the outside world, such as reading the classics. Reading the classics involves a process of mutual verification with the nature of the mind. The input of information, such as sensory stimulation, can form the manifested rules and cultivate good sprouts into goodness. Moreover, human bias, like conscience, is inherent, and the manifestation of conscience takes time and is often obscured by bias; only by removing bias can conscience be manifested. Additionally, the rules of conduct internalized in the human mind are only rules, and under these rules, people still have a great deal of freedom to choose different behaviors, with distinctions between good and bad. "Cultivation," which involves cultivating the body to seek Dao through meditation, self-reflection, observation, reflection, reading the classics, etc., in order to find, experience, and possibly implement Dao, is referred to as "civilizing". Therefore, "cultivating Dao is called civilizing".

With the development of human society, the rules of human behavior are also changing. These newly generated rules of behavior will not be quickly internalized into genes. Instead, after a longer period of time and the accumulation of several generations or even dozens of generations of people, they will be internalized into genes. Matt Ridley said, "Human behavior is largely determined by genes, but human behavior is more influenced by what we learn later in life. The genome is like a computer that processes information, absorbing useful information from the surrounding environment through natural selection and adding this information to the body's 'design map'. Evolution, on the other hand, is extremely slow in processing information, often taking several generations to produce the slightest change." (Ridley, 2015: p. 275) In recent millennia, human societies have transitioned into civilizations where the rules of behavior have changed dramatically, such as a significant decline in violence. In recent times, the rapid technological and institutional changes that have transformed the environment in which human beings live have inevitably affected human behavior. The slow change of genes obviously cannot keep up with the adjustment of

people's rules of behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to educate or cultivate people to make up for the lag between the change of behavioral rules and the change of genes.

Furthermore, genes have evolved only to the level of determining the basic rules of behavior, which should not and cannot be specified. Otherwise, they would lose the flexibility of specific behaviors, be unable to adapt to the ever-changing actual environment, lack room for innovation, and be devoid of the possibility of evolution. "If, according to the principle of natural selection, vocabulary were to become part of the instinctive nature of language, human beings would not be happy about it. For then language would lose its flexibility and become merely a boring tool." (Ridley, 2015: p. 277) Hence, there is a need to maintain a delicate balance between cultural evolution and genetic evolution. Genetically internalized rules of behavior are expressed as a foundation, an orientation, akin to what Mencius called the "good sprouts," the beginning of goodness, but not yet goodness. This suggests that human beings can be civilized. Behavioral rules internalized as genes are very abstract and general; they will not be stipulated in detail but will leave ample space for people's rationality to make their own choices, adapting to the ever-changing and complicated situation. This is similar to what Hayek said about "rules of just conduct" having the same level of abstraction. This kind of abstraction is precisely the characteristic that just conduct rules should have, allowing them to be flexible and changeable so that behavior can be more suitable for the concrete situation.

Between genetically determined behaviors and individual free choices, there exist cultural traditions formed by human societies. The cultural traditions of each civilization are shaped by the cultural elites of that civilization in the process of exploring Dao, observing people's behaviors, especially the customs formed through interaction, discovering the rules of behavior from these "acts along nature", and then distilling them into civilized principles expressed in words, forming the classics of civilization. These civilization classics are the core of the cultural traditions developed by each civilization. They enable the general public to grasp these civilized rules more clearly, help ordinary individuals understand the rules of proper conduct, and enable them to follow external rules similar to internal rules without the role of genes, thus forming a society that adheres to civilized rules. Therefore, the formation of civilization and the existence of cultural traditions are the inevitable products of human beings compensating for the difference between the heavenly Dao internalized in the genes and individual reason. Considering that Dao—behavior rules need to be passed down from generation to generation, "civilizing" means "teaching". Therefore, cultivating Dao is also called teaching.

8. Concluding Remarks

The assertion in The Doctrine of the Mean, that "Heavenly destiny is called nature, following human nature is called Dao, and cultivating Dao is called civiliz-

ing” appears to be a mere philosophical judgment, but in fact it stands up to anthropological scrutiny and is supported by other modern disciplines. It is correct, concise, condenses a great deal of information, and is simple and easy to apply, making it extremely transcendent and impactful.

The so-called “Heavenly destiny is called nature” refers to the result of the overall rules of the universe, which form the nature of all things, especially human nature. The theory of biological evolution and genetic theory reveals that all living things share a set of genetic coding language, and human beings contain the successful genes of previous living things, so human nature is the result of the overall rules of the universe.

Since human nature is a result of the overall rules of the universe, rules of behavior emerge when people act according to their nature, which is referred to as “following Dao is called human nature”. In this way, “Dao” corresponds to “nature”, indicating that Dao can be found in nature. Because Dao, as a rule of behavior, is invisible when not followed, and even when followed, it is not easily discernible as it passes with time, which is why Laozi spoke of being “in a trance”. When we understand the correspondence between “Dao” and “nature”, exploring Dao becomes easier, not only through observing the results of interaction, but also by introspection, as “the mind is the reason”.

Despite the correspondence between human nature and Dao, the greatest difference between human beings and the universe lies in the distinction between the finite and the infinite. This implies that while human nature encompasses Dao, its manifestation and observation still require time and rationality. Therefore, individuals with limited time and rationality cannot comprehend the entirety of Dao, but can only be said to have the potential to understand it. The process of observing, contemplating, and verifying Dao is referred to as civilizing. To “civilize” is to seek Dao and cultivate oneself, serving as an important method of bridging the gap between genetic determination and rational choice. It also acts as a cultural factor that compensates for the discrepancy between genetic evolution and changes in behavioral norms.

Finally, the method by which the Doctrine of the Mean concludes that “Heavenly destiny is called nature, following human nature is called Dao, and cultivating Dao is called civilizing” is the same method contained in this assertion. Through the observation of nature and proprieties (the results of behavior), coupled with introspective intuition, classical verification, and rational thought, the correspondence between Dao and nature can be discovered.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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