

The New Great Learning Oneness Epistemic Model:

A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept
of Oneness and its Application in Veganism

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Abstract

Being an essential idea in ancient thought, the concept of Oneness becomes increasingly crucial again following intense technological advancements and processes of globalization. Multiple planetary crises, such as environmental pollution, global warming, deforestation, destruction of marine ecology, and pandemics, are rooted in the lack of consciousness of Oneness. One main consequence is the large-scale reality of animal farming and overfishing. The present paper facilitates the concepts of the Great Chain of Being in the West and of the Unity of Heaven and Man in China in view of addressing these multiple crises to find solutions. Furthermore, the philosophy of Great Learning, one of the Confucian classics, focusing on personal development, is suitable for applying the Oneness concept in our era of hyper-individualism. Building on the New Great Learning philosophy of Oneness, the thesis integrates relevant Chinese and Western ideas to create a more peaceful and sustainable world. The practical application of veganism is suggested as an effective method to address and reduce the consumption of cruel, polluting, and unhealthy animal products. This is worked out as a model to help people reconnect better with Nature and each other with love in view of building a more sustainable and peaceful world.

Keywords: animal ethics, Chuang Tzu, climate change, Confucianism, COVID-19, Daxue, environmental ethics, epistemology, global warming, globalization, Great Chain of Being, Great Learning, Heraclitus, *I Ching*, Lao Tzu, micro-plastics, Oneness, pandemic, plague, Plotinus, Taoism, Unity, veganism, vegetarianism, Will Tuttle.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of the Anthropocene, human activities are pushing our planet toward unprecedented global warming with dire consequences. Blinded by short-term goals, people and governments exacerbate the waste of resources and energy and the creation of pollution, social inequality, and waste. On the personal level, many lose sight of their ability to discern truth, goodness, and beauty, letting themselves be trapped in a vicious cycle of materialism and emptiness. Some hold on to the false hope in technological progress alone, akin to expecting a mythical hero to solve the problems.

New knowledge and applications that reverse our planet's dire trajectory are crucial at this historical juncture. The World has to be seen as an interconnected whole, from the material level to the highest form of consciousness. A unified cognitive model reflecting our typical human and ecological existence could help pave the way to harmonious and sustainable solutions.

Although essential in many philosophies, the notion of Oneness has been overshadowed by reductionism, isolationism, and specializationism. Both Western and Chinese traditions engaged the concept of Oneness, but it suffered from a lack of attention since the rise of modern science and technology, also contributing to societal issues like isolation and loneliness. Losing sight of Oneness also lurks at the core of significant global problems such as climate change, pandemics, and resource scarcity.

This thesis aims to construct a new cognitive system centering on the concept of Oneness, capable of addressing the 21st-century global crises. The study will explore the historical concepts of Oneness/Unity in significant schools of thought in ancient Greece and China, focusing on the Western Great Chain of Being and the Chinese Unity of Heaven and Man. The goal is to construct a new Oneness epistemic system based on *The Great Learning's* philosophy combining elements from Western and Chinese traditions. Furthermore, veganism is proposed as one practical translation and application of this oneness philosophy to effectively address the global intellectual, spiritual, ecological, and social crises, paving the way for sustainable development and the survival of ecosystems and human civilization.

CHAPTER ONE

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITY OF GLOBALIZATION

The Age of Discovery witnessed Western powers' expansion and competition for colonies, leading to rapid industrialization and a massive industrial-consumerist society with a tremendous impact on our planet. In the past, human society was part of the Earth's closed-loop circular ecosystem. However, the modern industrial model of production and consumption is based on a linear non-recyclable end-of-pipe system, using the atmosphere, land, and water as emission tanks. This model results in tremendous overconsumption and waste of natural resources, carbon dioxide accumulation, and pollution of air, soil, and water with heavy metals and plastics. A linear mindset, short-term perspectives, anthropocentrism, blind faith in science and technology, and the absence of a holistic understanding of the ecosystem and society are the root causes of this unsustainable model, which undoubtedly leads to the collapse of the Earth's ecosystem and threatens humans and all living beings with extinction.

1.1 Meat, Eggs, Milk Production and Overfishing: The Road to Total Destruction

Global warming has received the most attention among multiple crises due to its complexity and factual consequences. Scientists are highly concerned about reaching irreversible tipping points, causing weather extremes with disastrous consequences. The U.N. flagship Report, *ClimateChange 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*¹ by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), indicates that the harmful carbon emissions from 2010-2019 reached the highest level in human history, urging to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. Unless immediate action is taken, some major cities will soon be underwater. The U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warns of "unprecedented heatwaves, terrifying storms, widespread water shortages and the extinction of a million species of plants and animals."² According to the 2006 FAO report *Livestock's Long*

1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *ClimateChange 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change, the Working Group III Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report*, (Geneva: IPCC, 2022); <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/>.

2 UN News, "UN Climate Report: It's 'Now or Never' to Limit Global Warming to 1.5 Degrees," April 4th 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115452#:~:text=A%20new%20flagship%20UN%20report,limit%20global%20warming%20to%201.5.>

Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options,³ the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO₂ equivalent (18 %) than the entire global transport system (15 %). It also accounts for a significant source of land and water degradation. Global meat production is projected to double from 229 million tonnes in 1999/2001 to 465 million tonnes in 2050, while milk output is set to climb from 580 to 1043 million tonnes. "Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today's most serious environmental problems. Urgent action is required to remedy the situation," explains Henning Steinfeld, Chief of FAO's Livestock Information and Policy Branch. "The environmental costs per unit of livestock production must be cut by one half, just to avoid the damage worsening beyond its present level," the FAO report warns sternly. Livestock generates 9% of CO₂ emissions from human-related activities. However, it also produces a high percentage of harmful other greenhouse gases, such as 65% of nitrous oxide, 37% of methane, and 64% of ammonia, gases that have a much greater warming potential than CO₂, e.g., Nitrous oxide, deriving mainly from manure, is 296 times more potent than CO₂; methane 23 times; and ammonia is one of the significant contributors to acid rain.

According to the study, livestock currently occupies 30% of the planet's surface, generally as permanent pasture, with 33% of the World's arable land allocated to producing livestock feed. Deforestations occur primarily to make way for new fields, particularly in Latin America, where, for instance, almost 70% of the Amazon's former forests have been converted to grazing pastures. Herds likewise contribute to widespread land degradation; due to overgrazing, compaction, and erosion, roughly 20% of pastures are deemed to be degraded. About 20% of all biomass from terrestrial animals is now mainly composed of meat and dairy-producing animals. Livestock is associated with reducing 15 out of 24 essential ecosystem functions, with their presence on large land areas and demand for feed crops contributing to biodiversity loss. A study by GRAIN and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy found that the World's five giant meat and dairy producers contribute more greenhouse gases than the top three oil producers together, ExxonMobil, Shell, and

3 United Nations/Food and Agriculture Organization *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* (Rome: FAO, 2006), <https://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e00.htm>.

B.P. After studying the 35 biggest beef, pork, poultry, and dairy producers' greenhouse gas emissions, the researchers discovered that the companies' emissions are dangerously high due to unchecked expansion and government subsidies to guarantee low production costs and supplies, such as animal feed. According to the report, a large number of major meat and dairy businesses fail to register their emissions, and many are growing their production without attempting to lower their emissions. If the output is unchecked, meat and dairy farms will be responsible for 80% of anticipated greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.⁴

While the land has been overused and highly polluted, the condition of the oceans is even worse. According to the US-based Pew Commission, agricultural runoffs, which include livestock feces and fertilizers applied on crops used for producing animal feed, are the biggest threat to the global marine ecosystems, followed by overfishing.⁵ There exist already more than 400 dead zones in the oceans caused by fertilizer runoffs, primarily from cattle, adding to the lack of required oxygen in the ocean.⁶ According to scientists, almost 90% of large fish in oceans have vanished during the past 50 years due to the consequences of industrial fishing.⁷ They stated that if fishing continues at the current rate, all fish species will be endangered worldwide by the year 2050 and that prompt recovery activities are required.⁸

There is an apparent connection between industrialized overfishing and global warming. When the ecosystems are damaged by fishing, the ocean's capacity to absorb

4 GRAIN and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), "Emissions Impossible: How Big Meat and Dairy Are Heating up the Planet," July 18, 2018, <https://grain.org/article/entries/5976-emissions-impossible-how-big-meat-and-dairy-are-heating-up-the-planet>.

5 Leon E. Panetta, "America's Living Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change" (PEW Oceans Commission, May 2003), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2003/06/02/americas-living-oceans-charting-a-course-for-sea-change>.

6 Robert J. Diaz and Rutger Rosenberg, "Spreading Dead Zones and Consequences for Marine Ecosystems," *Science* 321, no. 5891 (2008): 926–29.

7 "Big Fish Stocks Fall 90 Percent Since 1950," *National Geographic News*, May 15, 2003, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/05/0515_030515_fishdecline.html.

8 "Oceans' Fish Could Disappear by 2050," *Discovery News*, May 17, 2010, <http://news.discovery.com/earth/oceans-fish-fishing-industry.html>.

greenhouse gases decreases rapidly. Ocean acidification⁹ and rising ocean temperatures are drastically changing aquatic marine habitats. "Healthy diets and sustainable food systems,"¹⁰ according to a 2019 study published in *The Lancet*, a shift in diet towards plant-based food and away from animal products, is essential for boosting a healthy planet. Future projections emphasize that "vegan and vegetarian diets were associated with the greatest reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions." By 2050, switching to a plant-based diet could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from food production by 70% and the mortality rate by 10%, respectively. Subsidizing foods intended for human consumption instead of those made from animals might aid in the battle against climate change and promote public health.

1.2 Pandemic: On the Tragic Relationship with Animals

Since the domestication of animals during the Neolithic period (circa 3900 BC), diseases like measles, plague, and smallpox have been on the rise. Global epidemics of zoonotic illnesses, including HIV, Ebola, SARS, MERS, H1N1 swine flu, COVID-19, monkeypox, etc., have often occurred in recent decades. Animals are the source of more than half of all human infections. Furthermore, zoonotic infections comprise between 60% and 76% of newly emerging infectious diseases.¹¹

Being the most recent and impactful pandemic of modern times, COVID-19 has left the most extensive traumatic impact worldwide. However, the nature and the consequences of zoonotic diseases have not yet been considered sufficiently. From the World Health Organization and most governments to mainstream media, most discussions have been focused on pandemic policies, vaccinations, sovereign remedies, etc. Regarding this issue,

9 Ocean acidification is the ongoing decrease in the pH value of the Earth's oceans, caused by the uptake of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere which has been increased due to human actions since the industrial revolution began.

10 Rasmus Einarsson, Gavin McCrory, and U Martin Persson, "Healthy Diets and Sustainable Food Systems," *The Lancet* 394, no. 10194 (June 21, 2019): 215. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)31116-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)31116-X/fulltext)

11 K. E. Jones et al., "Global Trends in Emerging Infectious Diseases," *Nature*, no. 451 (2008): 990–993.

people were easily lured into believing that the development of technology would be the only solution against epidemics (scientism). Few people reflect on the source of the virus and the dangerous eat-and-be-eaten relationship that exists between humans and animals. The scholars Jan Dutkiewicz and Justin Bernstein offer three plausible solutions for countering the danger of zoonotic diseases by limiting or even ending intensive animal husbandry.¹² They recommend (1) the promotion of plant-based food alternatives by offering government subsidies, (2) discouraging intensive animal source food use by implementing a "zoonotic tax," and (3) in the long run, banning such food sources.¹³ The enormous number of life-stock animals confined in filthy industrial farms make the Earth a breeding ground for viruses. People may be more motivated to reconsider their established dietary habits to prevent the danger of another pandemic.

1.3 Epistemic Schizophrenia: The Root of the Global Crises

Global crises are interconnected and complex. People fail to respond appropriately not due to intellectual or moral inferiority but because the cognitive system of the public and academia does not keep up with the rapidly changing challenges of high-speed globalization coming along with a high level of division of labor. Relying on fragmented knowledge from outdated textbooks and caught up in narrow frameworks, politicians often focus only on personal gains and losses, and scholars engage in blinkered microscopic thinking within subdivided disciplines. Positivist science shuns profound metaphysical questions and analyses, including questions related to rational cognition, real and true value evaluation, and practical ethical behavior.

The complex interconnectivity of the multiple global crises overwhelms the people who struggle to understand and respond appropriately, often blinded and discouraged by an outdated cognitive framework. The high-speed globalization and labor division result in

¹² Justin Bernstein is an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy at Vrije University Amsterdam, and Jan Dutkiewicz is a political economist.

¹³ Justin Bernstein and Jan Dutkiewicz, "A Public Health Ethics Case for Mitigating Zoonotic Disease Risk in Food Production," *Food Ethics* 6, no. 2 (October 2021): 1–25.

fragmented knowledge and lock-ins into narrow outlooks. Politicians all too often focus on short-term gains, while scholars in ivory towers limit their reflection to specialized microscopic areas. Positivist science "decapitated philosophy," ignoring deeper metaphysical questions of cognition, value evaluation, and practical reason and behavior. Edmond Husserl worried about this lack of philosophical engagement:

Along with this falls the faith in "absolute" reason, through which the world has its meaning, the faith in the meaning of history, of humanity, the faith in man's free dom, that is, his capacity to secure rational meaning for his individual and common human Existence.¹⁴

Husserl's fear of the absence of holistic cognition was caused by the proliferation of empirical sciences, eventually contributing to the disaster of World War II due to the domination of technology and the law of the jungle. Such a cognitive deficit turns out to be even more apparent today than it was hundred years ago, with potential catastrophes on a scale more devastating than during World War I and II.

In his discussion of the globalization of the technocratic paradigm, Pope Francis wrote:

It is the false notion that "an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed."¹⁵

The belief in endless resources combined with the prevailing paradigm of linear thinking in science, economy, technology, and politics pushes our ecosystem to the limits. There is an urgent need for a new cognitive and ethical system fostering on holistic and

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, 6th pr, Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy, translated by David Carr (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1984), 12.

¹⁵ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 1st edition (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Pub., 2015), no. 106, p. 86.

integrative awareness and sustainable development, which The Oneness Philosophy provides. Unifying knowledge and models of action from Eastern and Western cultures can bring about a new spiritual development, of which the philosophy and praxis of veganism are singled out for paving the way to sustainable lifestyles.

1.4 The Unitive Oneness of the Ecological System and Everything Else

Through concrete cases, one would understand more clearly how the ancient wisdom of "The Oneness of All Things" prevails in reality but has been ignored by modern people eager for quick success and profit. In the name of "science" and "development," people have been blinded by capitalism with grave and reckless indifference. Plastics can be taken as an example to explore how artificial chemical substances destroy the unity of the Earth's ecological circular system. Since their invention in the 1850s, plastics have been used in multiple ways. However, solid waste has been increasing because of its difficulty in terms of decomposition. Once entering Nature, it obstructs the cycle of the ecosystem, destroying the unity of the Earth's ecology and leading to serious environmental problems. From the perspective of people's daily lives, plastic brings many conveniences, and its price is so low that it is discarded anytime. The damage inflicted on the environment becomes is pushed aside. Severe forms of air pollution arise from its incineration. Under certain circumstances, some plastics, including polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polycarbonates, may emit toxic compounds called endocrine disruptors, endangering the reproductive abilities of living beings. Plastic is often discarded, assuming its toxicity and destructiveness will be kept far away. The reality is that no matter how far the plastic is thrown away, it will not only pollute the land, rivers, and sea, poison living creatures, and explode the stomachs of animals that swallow it by accident, but will also eventually be broken down into micro-plastics, which finally enters the human body through the food chain, hindering human body's circulatory system with damaging health effects.

According to a 2021 study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 1,100 tons of floating plastic particles above the western United States pollute even the most remote parts of North America and are showering down as "plastic rain."

Many assume plastic particles derive from major industrial Midwestern cities like Denver and Salt Lake City. However, data show that 84% of plastic particles in the western U.S. originate from roadways, and only 11% come from the ocean. Plastic particles can stay in the air for nearly a week, enough to cross continents and oceans.

It is proven that plastic particles exist ubiquitous on land, water, and air, entering the human body through the food chain, forming substances complicated to dissolve. People may think they can get rid of these harmful substances by discarding or littering plastics, which often end up in the oceans, where Nature keeps sending back toxic substances to humans – e.g., via the sea-food chain:

This phenomenon of plastic being deliberately abandoned by people but being broken into pieces by Nature and then entering the human body in the form of microparticles has a more bizarre and subtle mechanism and process than harmful gases that humans themselves eventually absorb. This reality brings up a more philosophical question that deserves deeper contemplation and active consideration: there exists an ever more profound and tighter connection between people and Nature than we ever had imagined. This kind of subtle physical connection is a concrete and clear proof of the reality of physical and metaphysical interconnectivity of everything with everything.¹⁶

Suppose we extend the reflection on the phenomenon of plastic particles circulating within the ecosystem to more minute and universal particles, such as atoms, electrons, quanta, and even photons and quarks. We reach a similar level as ancient Greek philosophers exploring the primordial nature - *arche*, and the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (老子, also translated as Lao Tze and Lao Zi) elaborating on the Tao (道, also translated as Dao). At this stage, the principle of all things can be reduced to the unity of plurality. Just as Heraclitus and the I Ching (《易經》) affirm that everything is harmonized and unified

¹⁶ Interconnectivity and Interdependence are main topics in Pope Francis' *Laudatu Si'*: nos. 5, 42, 61, 70, 86, 137, 138, 142.

in transformation and change and keeps returning permanently, in the same way as the plastic particles behave today.

The concept of Oneness has been explored profoundly in all major systems of human thought. In the last centuries, it has been widely neglected, following compartmentalized scientific thinking. The following chapter reviews and compares significant concepts of Oneness in both Western and Chinese philosophical systems to extract the theoretical and practical wisdom necessary to establish a new cognitive model and praxis that aligns better with today's complex, sophisticated reality in response to today's multiple crises.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTS OF ONENESS IN WESTERN AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is the science of everything connected with everything. Therefore, the concept of Oneness is philosophy's beginning and end. Looking deeply enough into one reality, one will find evidence and the metaphysical connection between everything with everything. E.g., if one views the whole World from a macrocosmic perspective, one will encounter similarities to the microcosmic structure. Viewed from religious, philosophical, historical, social, economic, political, and psychological perspectives, the human mind reveals a deep-rooted quest for the experience and understanding of "Oneness." This desire seems to be deeply rooted in the primordial human nature. We can reflect here on the original Oneness of a mother with her child. Humans find ultimate peace and satisfaction in the experience of Unity, both physically and metaphysically. The concept of Oneness can be categorized into three forms:

1. Oneness of all beings: A great web of the Existence in which all beings are interconnected and interwoven with each other;
2. Oneness of the extended self: The union and identification of the individual self with the extended self and even the whole Existence;
3. Oneness of the root: The search for a unified root of the Nature of Life and Existence, with which one can explain everything with one principle.

The Oneness of all beings is a metaphysical and physical worldview in which all people, creatures, and things are understood to be deeply connected and inextricably intertwined. The notion of Unity of Heaven and Man (天人合一) is one of the most widely known concepts of Oneness of the extended self, which is deeply rooted in all Chinese traditions. The concept of the Great Chain of Being (*scala naturae*) is the corresponding Western counterpart. The Confucian philosophy in *The Great Learning* (《大學》) is a well-developed example of the Oneness of the extended self, in which an individual is interconnected with his family, community, and the world. The family, society, and the world could be recognized as one's extended self, with his/her influence being based on his/her intellectual knowledge and spiritual accomplishment. While the "Oneness of all beings" and "Oneness of the extended self" share a similar conception of an interrelated

unity or a Universal Totality, the significant difference between the two is that the former emphasizes the interconnectedness and continuity of all things, while the latter emphasizes the ontological Unity between the individual and the whole.

Furthermore, "Oneness of the Root" is a universal concept deeply rooted in almost all traditions, the search for the ultimate singular Source of Existence. It takes the forms of Monotheist religions, concepts of arche, theory of atoms, God Particle, Big Bang Theory, Unified Field Theory, etc. It is self-evident in the philosophy of the I *Ching* and Lao Tzu in ancient China and of Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Plotinus in ancient Greece.

2.1 Oneness in Ancient Greek Philosophy

Parmenides is recognized as the founder of metaphysics. His argument for strict monism and the concept of Oneness influenced the whole history of Western philosophy.

In his single known work *On Nature*, Parmenides describes two different worlds respectively: 1) In "The Way of Truth," all reality is one, change is impossible, and Existence is timeless, uniform, and necessary; 2) In "The Way of Seeming," the world consists of appearances, in which one's sensory faculties lead to conceptions which are false and deceitful.¹⁷ In other words, it goes both ways: the noumenal World is One and eternal, and the phenomenal World is Many and illusionary. According to Parmenides, Reality is one eternal totality that cannot be divided and bears the same properties. He asserted that none of the ideas held by humans are true. He believes that the concept of generation and destruction is a myth since nothing that already exists can ever cease to exist.¹⁸ Parmenides' concept of unchangeable Oneness preluded and initiated the history of Western metaphysics.

17 Plato and Samuel Scolnicov, *Plato's Parmenides*, The Joan Palevsky Imprint in Classical Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 77.

18 Pamela Huby and C. C. W Taylor, *Simplicius on Aristotle Physics I*, vol. 1.3-4 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 55-56.

2.1.1 *Arche* and *Logos*

Western philosophy began with the search for the *arche*, the first principle or primary element in ancient Greece, which strongly implies the conception of Oneness. From Thales' *water*, Heraclitus's *fire*, Anaximander's *apeiron* (the endless or boundless), and Anaximenes' *air* to Democritus' *atomism*, there was a pronounced tendency to believe in material monism. Among these material monists, Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BC) can be recognized as the first philosopher of Oneness, who went far beyond the quest for a physical theory and search for metaphysical foundations and its moral applications. Apart from his famous doctrine of universal flux, Oneness is an essential aspect of his central theory: his direct affirmation of Unity: *hen panta einai* (Greek: "all things are one"). He stated straightforwardly: "It is wise, listening not to me but to the report (*logos*, Greek: "reason" or "word"), to agree that all things are one."¹⁹ He complained that most people fail to comprehend *logos*, a universal principle (*arche*), through which all things and all beings are interrelated. According to Heraclitus, ordinary people live a miserable life of chaos because they do not realize the actual organism of the world, just like dreamers with a false view of the world. He is not only concerned with explanations of the nature of Existence, but also stresses the necessity for people to live together harmoniously as a community, in which *logos* is the common principle of consensus, communication, and public unity among the individuals of a society. In his doctrine, rationality (*logos*) makes communication and unification among people possible. In the same way, the principle (*arche*) makes the underlying Unity of all nature possible. It could be simply understood that *logos* means rationality as the foundation of speech, thought, and action. Without rationality, there would not be any communication and interaction among people. Heraclitus claimed that *logos* is the underlying connection between opposites, like good and evil, high and low, and hot and cold:

For there would be no attunement without high and low notes nor any animals without male and female, both of which are opposites.²⁰

¹⁹ Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, translated by Charles Harry Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), fr. XXXVI, p. 45.

²⁰ Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, fr. LXXXI, p. 67.

He claimed that the world existed as an auto-balanced system of Unity of Opposites in which a corresponding change will spontaneously be compensated. Everything is interconnected and possesses a hidden self-neutralizing force.

2.1.2 The Great Chain of Being

The Great Chain of Being, also referred to as the "Chain of Being," has a longstanding tradition, going back to Plato's division of reality into two different worlds: the intelligible world of forms and the physical world – separated by the Divided Line – both of which are full of beings and sensible objects, imitations of the eternal Forms.²¹ Aristotle expanded on this idea to create a more systematic chain of categorized plants, animals, and humans, based on the degree of perfection of their souls, with strong or weak continuity, known as *scala naturae* (Latin: Ladder of Being).²² In Aristotle's "Ladder of Being," lifeless "artifacts," such as rocks, occupy the lowest rung, and all living things with souls (*anima*), including human beings, occupy the higher rung. Furthermore, the hierarchy of souls has been ordered based on the specific inherent powers characteristic of each soul (plant, animal, man). The rational soul, which provides humans with the rational ability and functions to reason, defines the human soul and being. Above these, the celestial entities (sun, planets, stars, etc.) are regarded as eternal and divine. On top of everything, Aristotle added "the Unmoved Mover," the Prime Mover, the ultimate Source and Principle of all movement throughout the Universe, usually called "God."²³

Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus (205-270 AD), turned Aristotle's hierarchy of beings into a mystical system of Oneness (*henosis*), building on the legacy of Plato. While the most significant "forms" were given to wholly spiritual creatures who were superior to material beings, the essential structure of the ladder remained the same as Aristotle's. Plato's

21 Nicholas Bunnin, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Chichester: Wiley, 2007), 289.

22 Herbert Granger, "The Scala Naturae and the Continuity of Kinds (1985)," *Phronesis* 30, no. 2 (1985): 186.

23 Karl-und-Gertrud-Abel Stiftung and Christoph Horn, eds., *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: New Essays: Proceedings of the 13th Conference of the Karl and Gertrud-Abel Foundation Bonn, November, 28th-December 1st, 2010*, Philosophie Der Antike : Veröffentlichungen Der Karl Und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung, Band 33 (Berlin : De Gruyter, 2016), p. 1.

conceptions of the unchanging Idea and *The Good (To Agathon)*, which is "beyond all being," has been evolved by Neoplatonists into the concept of the *One (Tò "Ev)*. The Neoplatonist conception of the One incorporated Aristotle's definition of the continuum and graduated scales of Existence. Plotinus stated in his *Enneads*:

The One is all things and is not one thing...²⁴

In Neoplatonism, the Source of goodness is referred to as the *One*. Furthermore, the degree of goodness of a thing – how much a being participates in the One or the Good – depends on its level of Existence. Plotinus established a bridge between the One and All, the One and Many, and thus the Self and the Other, connecting seemingly opposing or contradictory aspects.²⁵

Saint Augustine (354-430) adopted this basic Neoplatonic view of the Great Chain of Being and integrated it theologically into his Christian cosmological framework. In Christianity, the hierarchical Chain of Being connects God, angels, church, humans, animals, plants, and minerals from top to bottom, covering every aspect of Existence: from celestial beings to humans and below, from stars, planets, and moon to precious stones and metals; from kings, princes, nobles, and commoners; and animals to plants, living and nonliving in a whole picture, believed to have been designed and decreed by God. Nothing exists in isolation within this vast chain; everything has a distinct form and proper function within an interconnected holistic system.²⁶

In the eighteenth century, zoologists attempted to identify "the missing links" within the Great Chain of Being, relying on plenitude and continuity as *a priori* logical rules of Nature. They attempted to locate all the missing species between beings, particularly by including apes on the Scale of Beings as the "nearest relations of the human race."²⁷

²⁴ Plotinus, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, Translated by Lloyd P. Gerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Ennead 5.2.1., p. 549.

²⁵ Plotinus, *Plotinus*, p. 381.

²⁶ Arthur Oncken Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, The William James Lectures 1933 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 60–66.

²⁷ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 231–41.

Furthermore, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) developed his Theory of Evolution in *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, claiming that all species of organisms arise and develop through natural selection. These inherited variations enhance the species and individual's capacity for competition, survival, and reproduction.

2.2 Concept of Oneness in Chinese Philosophy

The notion of Oneness has been more carefully investigated, thoroughly defined, and articulated in-depth in the *I Ching*, and is profoundly ingrained in Chinese epistemology in practically all schools of thought, and being widely accepted for millennia.

2.2.1. The Concept of Unity in Taoism

The most well-known principle of Oneness in Chinese philosophy is the "Unity of Heaven and Man", the most common foundation of all schools of Chinese philosophy, including Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Chinese Buddhism, etc. According to Lao Tzu (l. c. 500 BCE), all things came into being from the formless and eternal Mother, the Dao, creating the world in a well-organized mathematical procedure:

The Dao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.²⁸

This is a typical example of the Oneness of the origin, attributing the root of all things to the metaphysical One. "One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things" summarizes the binary structure of the Eight Trigrams of the *I Ching*.²⁹

²⁸ Laozi, p. 78. “道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。”

²⁹ It is interesting to note, that also in Aristotle, the number Three is considered to be the basic unit of ‘all’ and of the “whole”, see: “‘Whole’ (*holon*) means ‘that from which no part of that which is said to be by nature a whole is missing’” (*Metaphysics* 1023b26); “That of which nothing is outside is complete (*teleion*) and whole. For we define a ‘whole’ thus: as that from which nothing is absent.” (*Physics* 207a9-11); “‘All’ (*pan*) means ‘a quantity that has a beginning, middle and termination point (*eschaton*) but whose positions make no difference.’ If position does make a difference, then it is a whole.” (*Metaphysics* 1024a1-3).

2.2.2 The Concept of Oneness in the *I Ching*

One can understand more easily the philosophical meaning of the Unity of Heaven and Man with the basic idea of the *I Ching*, especially about the structure of Heaven, Human, and Earth, which is explained magnificently in *The Great Treatise I, Book of Changes*:

Therefore, there is in the Changes the Great Primal Beginning. This generates the two primary forces. The two primary forces generate the four images. The four images generate the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams determine good fortune and misfortune.³⁰

This actually describes the development of the Eight Trigrams. It starts with the Great Primal Beginning of nothingness, producing two primary forces –yin and yang, which can be represented with one-line yao (爻) binary symbols: — (yang) -- (yin). Furthermore, these two primary forces generate the four images, which can be represented with two-line symbols: == (Young Yang), = (Old Yang), == (Young Yin), and == (Old Yin). On top of the four images, adding one more line to them, eight trigrams are produced: ☰ (Qian), ☷ (Dui), ☲ (Li), ☵ (Zhen), ☴ (Xun), ☶ (Kan), ☳ (Gen), and ☱ (Kun). During divination,³¹ these trigrams are used to simulate all real things. The mysterious omens found in specific combinations of trigrams and given seasons could be recognized as good fortune or misfortune.

Archaic faith in the Three Spheres of Heaven, Man, and Earth (三才, *sai cai*, as "three primal powers" in Richard Wilhelm's translation) could be deduced from the structure of the trigrams. The three lines in every trigram simulate the concept of a tripartite unity, in which the upper line represents Heaven, the middle line Man, and the bottom line the Earth, exactly as what people see in reality with human beings being situated and living between

30 Richard Wilhelm, "Ta Chuan: The Great Treatise I," *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 359-360. "是故，易有太極，是生兩儀，兩儀生四象，四象生八卦，八卦定吉凶，吉凶生大業。"

31 *I Ching* divination is a form of cleromancy through reading the images of trigrams, hexagrams and the text of *I Ching*.

the upper sky (Heaven) and the lower realm or sphere of the Earth. Taking the trigram 離 (Li, Fire) as an example, the bottom line (Heaven) and the top line (Earth) are *yang* (陽), and the middle line (Man) is *yin* (陰). One can see how the concept of Heaven, Man, and Earth is projected into the structure of the trigram.

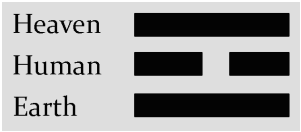


Figure 2.01: The Three Spheres structure of the trigram *Li* (離)

When two trigrams are piled up together, a hexagram results. In the book *The Great Treatise I of I Ching*, this process has been explicated in the following:

The Tao of Heaven is in it, the Tao of the Earth is in it, and the Tao of Human is in it. It combines these three primal powers and doubles them; that is why there are six lines. The six lines are nothing other than the ways (Tao) of the three primal powers.³²

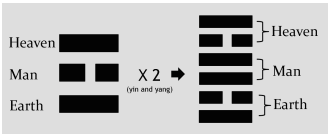


Figure 2.02: Three Spheres, Three Lines, and Six Lines

According to the *I Ching*, everything on the many levels of existence can be projected onto this six-line framework. For instance, if a kingdom were to be projected, Heaven would serve as the king and the capital, Humans would be the *junzi* (君子), officers, and academics, and the Earth would be the commoners, the animals, and the villages.

32 Richard Wilhelm, “Ta Chuan: The Great Treatise I,” p. 387. “有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉。兼三才而兩之，故六。六者，非它也，三才之道也。”

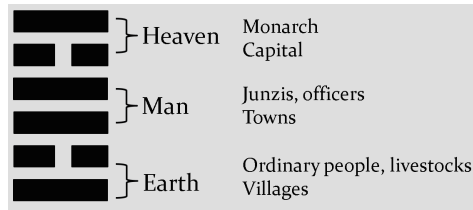


Figure 2.03: A kingdom projected in a hexagram

If a hexagram is to be interpreted as the body of a standing person, Heaven would represent the head, mind, or reasoning; Man would represent the chest, heart, emotion, and stomach; and Earth would represent the hip, legs, feet, etc., taking from the bottom to the top, from the feet to the head accordingly. In this way, the ancient Chinese viewed the world and analyzed everything in a unified hierarchical structure. Every single matter, no matter how vast or tiny, is considered an integral complete totality, within which each part is interconnected, forming a unity, just like all parts of the human body are functionally linked to each other in a meaningful way. This accounts for the basic principle of the conception of Oneness in the *I Ching*.

2.3 A Comparison of the Chinese and the Western Concept of Oneness

Both the Western and Chinese concepts of Oneness have a mystical root in spiritual practice. For Plotinus, the Unity with the One or the Good is the destiny of Life. "Becoming simple and unified, the soul is one with the Good. Hence, the union with the supreme God is the end of the spiritual journey."³³ For Chuang Tzu, the Unity with Heaven and Earth, Oneness with All, is the common state of a True Man (真人), who has returned to the Natural state of Existence, where no difference exists. This state of complete equality is called *qiwu* (齊物), or "Working Everything Out Evenly."³⁴

³³ Plotinus, *Plotinus*, p. 194.

³⁴ Chuang Tzu, *The book of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Martin J. Palmer, (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 60.

Differing conceptions of Oneness between the West and China are evident. While the Chinese notion of the Unity of Heaven and Man encompasses the Unity of Man with All Things in Heaven and Earth, the Western understanding of Unity refers to the individual's reunion with the One, God, or the Creator. In Western Oneness, an inherent and unbridgeable gap remains to exist between the individual and the supreme consciousness. Conversely, the Chinese concept of the Unity of Heaven and Man entails a state of complete equality and equanimity, where each thing operates in accordance with the laws of Nature. It involves the full integration of a human being with all things in Nature and the metaphysical Tao. Chinese Oneness embraces a monistic idealism that seeks identification with a universal principle in view of a harmonious outcome. In contrast, Western Oneness follows a theistic tradition seeking reunion with the ultimate One or the personal God, the transcendent Creator, without seeking identity with Him.

CHAPTER THREE

NEW GREAT LEARNING ONENESS EPISTEMOLOGY

The concept of Oneness permeates all significant civilizations at various levels over human history. The ancient theory of Oneness has remained relevant throughout the historical development of navigation, physics, chemistry, globalization, the Big Bang theory, quantum physics, string theory, unified field theory, and many other significant intellectual breakthroughs. Unfortunately, few scholars have considered revisiting and deepening the concept of Oneness beyond the mere notion of being used as a platitude.

"The Unity of Heaven and Man" is not a dead concept. As Yu Ying-shi wrote, the modern and even post-modern connotations of Chinese culture could be interpreted through this ancient concept. The Chinese intellect continues to be centered on the Unity of Heaven and Man, in contrast to the dominant modern Western civilization's goal of "conquering nature." If interpreted as "harmony between nature and man," in Yu Ying-shi's perspective, it could hold the key to one of the many doors into the depth of Chinese spiritualism.³⁵ Yu's perspective reveals a common bias among scholars when discussing cultural differences between China and the West. The exploitation of Nature and causing environmental damage are not inherent characteristics of Western thought, but rather, they are the results of gross development patterns that emerged during the historical process of modern imperialism and the Industrial Revolution. China, valuing as Empire historically the philosophy of Unity of Heaven and Man, has experienced periods of rapid development characterized by this same kind of grossness. Therefore, the emphasis should not be merely on the East or the West, but on finding the foundations of a common holistic understanding rooted in each culture, from which inspiration, strength, and new solutions may be derived.

The concept of Oneness is deeply ingrained in the thinking of most ancient civilizations and seems to be embedded in the subconscious and common sense of all human beings. In their quest for truth, people inevitably gravitate towards this idea of "The One." While the concept had a place in academic circles, few have attempted to update or systematize it according to modern contexts, let alone develop it into a consistent cognitive system of Oneness that is simple, realistic, and suitable for the present era. There is an

35 Yu Ying-shih 余英時, *Lun Tian Ren Zhi Ji - Zhongguo Gudaisixiang Qiyuan Shitan* 論天人之際——中國古代思想起源試探, First Version 初版 (Taipei 台北: Lianjing Chubanshe 聯經出版社, 2014), p. 72–73.

urgent contemporary need for a new cognitive system centered on the philosophy of Oneness that provides the public with easy-to-understand and workable, practical ethical rules. In the face of numerous challenges, we must seek a universal system that aligns deeply with historically tested wisdom traditions and enables practical implementations for individuals and all societies. This cognitive rationale and mechanism must be comprehensive and integrate local and global appeals. Additionally, it should not be biased towards the secular or spiritual side, avoiding endless debates over materialism, idealism, etc. Taking all these factors into account, the following three principles and eight objectives of the Confucian *The Great Learning* system offer an excellent method:

- 1) First of all, it is not theological or anti-religious in any way.
- 2) It emphasizes reason while simultaneously focusing on the cultivation of individual virtues.
- 3) It has both the out-of-this-world insight of metaphysical penetration into the infinite inner consciousness and the in-this-world compassion of actively building world peace.

It is critical to emphasize that a new system must prioritize personal freedom, despite all individuals being deeply connected both locally and globally, physically and metaphysically. Everyone possesses a complete, independent spirit that should be respected and not subjugated, manipulated, or sacrificed for any self-proclaimed political unity. Collaboration between individuals should be based on a shared social culture and spiritual beliefs and formed actively in view of mutual benefit rather than coerced by the formation of the whole or the majority.³⁶

A community as a social unity should not become a tool of deception and exploitation used by collectivism and dictatorship. In order to achieve actual and practical unity, it is essential to respect individuality and foster a true conceptual commonwealth through the centripetal and adhesive force of ensuring pluralism rather than through a violent and repressive regime. Otherwise, a Leviathan or a collectivist monster will instill fear in

³⁶ This is called in the Western tradition the principle of subsidiarity.

modern individuals who cherish universal values such as freedom and democracy, becoming a substantial obstacle to the critical task of cultural and spiritual solidarity, subsidiarity, and unity in response to contemporary crises.

As Nietzsche advocated, people should acquire "the fundamental knowledge of the unity of all that exists, and achieve a restored unity in the ecstasy under the spirit of Dionysus, and in this way transcend fear and tragedy."³⁷ People should deepen their knowledge of the truth of Unity, draw the bliss and power of Life from Unity, crossing the gap between individuals, between humans and Nature, and break free from the shackles of the *principium individuationis*, transcend the phenomenon of division, and achieve greater harmony, unity, and peace.³⁸

3.1 The Concept of Oneness in *The Great Learning*

The concept of Oneness is practically expressed in the *Daxue* or *The Great Learning*, an essential work that deals explicitly with Learning, the central topic of Confucianism.

The Great Learning was one of the "Four Books" of Confucianism. It explains what "Learning" means in Confucianism and how to achieve its goals. Firstly, one must know about the meaning of the ancient Chinese character Learning (*xue*, 學), illustrating a scenario where a disciple (子, *zi*) practices divination with two hands, drawing or reading the lines (爻, *yao*) of trigrams or hexagrams. Thus, "Great Learning" refers to enquiring about Knowledge from Heaven through divination and self-illumination. *The Great Learning* begins with the Three Guidelines: making one's "bright virtue" brilliant, making the people new, and coming to rest in the highest Good:

The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright Virtue brilliant, in making the people new, in coming to rest at the limit of the good. Only after wisdom

³⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The birth of tragedy out of the spirit of music*, Translated by Michael Tanner, (London; New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 60

³⁸ Nietzsche, p. 11.

comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend. Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao.³⁹

Moreover, it provides the Eight Stages of the Great Learning: Aligning affairs, Extending understanding, Making intentions genuine, Balancing the mind, Refining one's person, Aligning one's household, Ordering the state, Setting the world at peace.

Only after affairs have been aligned may one's understanding be fully extended. Only after one's understanding is fully developed may one's intentions be perfectly genuine. Only after one's intentions are perfectly genuine may one's mind be balanced. Only after one's mind is balanced may one's person be refined. Only after one's person is refined may one's household be aligned. Only after one's household is aligned may one's state be ordered. Only after one's state is ordered may the world be set at peace. From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, refining the person is the root. That roots should be disordered, yet branches ordered is not possible. What should be thickened is thin, yet what is thin becomes thick has never yet been so.⁴⁰

These Eight Stages represent the holographic principle of the *I Ching*, creating a metaphysical interconnection between personal deeds and the ideal of world peace, from the inner spiritual practice to house-holding⁴¹ and setting the whole world at peace. The

39 Robert Eno, *THE GREAT LEARNING and the Doctrine of the Mean: An online teaching translation* (Version 1.0, 2016), p. 11 “大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。知止而后有定，定而后能靜，靜而后能安，安而后能慮，慮而后能得。物有本末，事有終始，知所先後，則近道矣。”

40 Robert Eno, 11-1

41 In Greek “house-holding” means: *oiko-nomike* (“house-ruling”), of which the English word “economy” is derived. “Householding” or “household management” (“economics”) is also differentiated and subordinated to “politics”, quite similar as in Aristotle’s *Politics*.

concept of Unity holds a very important, if not supreme, position in Confucian epistemology, cosmology, and ethics, though little noticed by scholars.

3.2 Recapitulation of *The Great Learning*

The philosophy of *The Great Learning* is distinctive in that it promotes personal development alongside global peace, which is especially relevant in today's globalized era valuing humanism and liberalism. It addresses the heightened conflicts between individualism and collectivism. It provides a model for conceptualizing cognition and action as a unity well-suited for finding practical and sustainable solutions that benefit the whole community. In terms of philosophical implications, The Way of *The Great Learning* not only encompasses Chinese cultural values of internal and external harmony, the concept of the Unity of Heaven and Man, and the pursuit of "Resting at the highest good," but it also aligns with the Neoplatonist concept of approaching unceasingly the One. It contains the core knowledge of philosophical and spiritual traditions without imposing a specific religious identity, making it more applicable to people from various world view backgrounds and forms of spiritual growth.

The concept of Oneness – the interconnectedness between the individual and the whole and the interdependent relationship between personal spirituality and society – is evident in the Eight Stages. With the Self at the center, The Eight Stages account for a well-organized epistemological structure of Oneness, as illustrated in the following:

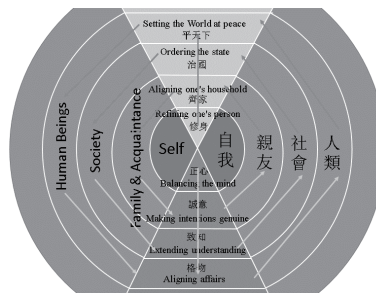


Figure 3.01: The Eight Stages of the Great Learning with intentionality analysis

This diagram clarifies that "The Great Learning" is about learning to achieve the "greater" Self through deepening wisdom by extending the individual self. By carefully studying the illustration of the Eight Stages, one could quite easily find its spontaneous two-way (inwardness and outwardness) structure. The first four stages, namely "Aligning affairs," "Extending understanding," "Making intentions genuine," and "Balancing the mind," guide to an ever-deepening inward journey and process of spiritual growth, with "Balancing the mind" as starting point. The other four stages set out from "Refining one's person," "Aligning one's household," and "Ordering the state" to the ideal of "Setting the World at peace," forming an outward journey of development in personality and social and civic career. This two-way development aligns with Chuang Tzu's ideal of the Inwardly Sage and the Outwardly King (內聖外王).⁴²

Moreover, this Great Learning system can be placed into the structure of the Three Spheres. An individual is positioned in the middle of the world, the Man Sphere, where one should balance his mind and refine his personality. When facing his family, society, and the world, one needs to make his intentions genuine, extend his understanding and align all affairs if he wants to align his household, order the state, and set the world at peace. This is how a *junzi* (君子) in the Sphere of Man works on the root in the Sphere of Earth in order to achieve the goals in the Sphere of Heaven, i.e., having the Dao born. This is what the Unity of Dao means in Confucianism.⁴³

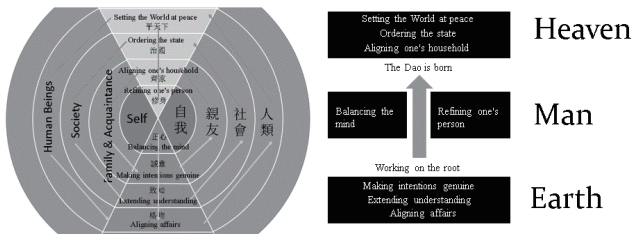


Figure 3.02: The Oneness concept in *The Great Learning* and in the *Analects*

42 Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*, Translated by James Legge (Chinese Text Project <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>) Miscellaneous Chapters, Tian Xia, 1, “是故內聖外王之道，闡而不明，鬱而不發，天下之人各為其所欲焉以自為方。”

43 Disciples of Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, translated by Robert Eno, 1.2. “有子曰：其為人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好犯上，而好作亂者，未之有也。君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！”

In Chinese philosophy, one must be a sage if one is eager for a crown.⁴⁴ Actually, being a sage and being crowned are supposed to happen at the same time. In Chinese mythology, all ancient Kings, the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (三皇五帝), are described as sages of perfection. Furthermore, the first Sovereign Fuxi (伏羲) was even ascribed as the first author of the *I Ching*.

Moreover, within this epistemological model, in which different levels of knowing and acting are always co-occurring, the philosophy of "Unity of Knowing and Doing" by Wang Yangming (1472–1529) can be understood more clearly. The stages from Balancing the mind to Aligning affairs could be defined as Knowing, and from Refining one's person to the ideal of Setting the World at peace, this stage could be defined as Doing. If one has the proper knowledge, one will adopt the right action. When one acts correctly, it means one has the proper knowledge.⁴⁵ The most significant difference between this reconstruction of the Way of *The Great Learning* and the prior linear understanding is the stronger emphasis on Oneness as an extended self and the interaction between spiritual growth and social influence or impact. According to this mechanism, when one tries to align his household, one needs not only to refine his personality, he should make his intentions genuine ("virtuous"), because "Aligning one's household" and "Making intentions genuine" are at the same level as "family and acquaintance." In the same way, in view of governing a state, one has to expand his knowledge to handle complex issues because "Ordering the state" and "Extending understanding" are on the same level. Finally, to create a peaceful world, one must attain to the level of "Aligning affairs." With the expansion of the range of involvement, a person's grasp of the truth of things should also be deepened in order to cope with the complex challenges ahead. This is the true meaning of the Way of *The Great Learning*.

44 This aligns with Plato's view in the *Republic*, Book VII, in his famous "Philosopher King".

45 This aligns with Socrates and Plato. We know that Aristotle in his critic of both goes beyond that in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE). For Aristotle, knowledge is not sufficient for acting well and correctly. One can very well know what should be done, but in fact acts contrary to this knowledge (see NE Book VII). Knowledge must be accompanied by proper habituation and education in view of acquiring the proper character virtues which are necessary inner dispositions of the human soul to be able to act well or virtuously.

Based on what has been discussed in Chapter One, the current global crises stems from the fact that the collective cognition of human beings does not yet possess the awareness of Oneness of all things and does not correspond to the interconnectedness of everything with everything. For instance, an enormous number of industrialized farm livestock has already impacted the Earth's entire ecosystem. Regarding this issue, the classical Great Learning system of Three Guidelines and Eight Stages could be expanded to "Three Guidelines and Nine Stages."

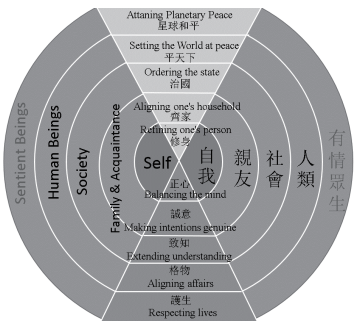


Figure 3.03: The Nine Stages of New Great Learning

If the notion of "respecting life" is positioned at the very bottom of the hierarchy, highlighting universal respect for all life, including humans and animals (and even other species and biodiversity in general). In that case, it will add a more practical and eco-friendly modern dimension to this ancient model of cognition. With this principle as a primary consideration, recognizing the interdependence of all life, an upgraded epistemological model will revitalize the old system, ushering in a more responsible and effective mechanism, as Pope Francis expressed in *Laudato Si* in 2015:

When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves: "Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed." ⁴⁶

46 Francis, *Laudato Si*’, nos. 94, 116.

In recent centuries, humans have adopted a ruthless attitude toward the environment and, specifically, animals, under the guise of "objectivity" and "progress." Consequently, there is an urgent need to increase respect and care for all sentient beings and Nature in general. Reconnecting to their nature, humans learn to appreciate the essence of their existence. This appreciation transcends familial, ethnic, racial, and species ties and centers on respect and love for Life itself. This love for Life must bring people closer to the Creator or the common Source of all existing beings according to their respective faith tradition, since the Creator or "The One" is the Source of all Life.

Deepening the understanding of the true meaning of their respective faiths, people will be enabled to practice universal love for Life inherited from various religious and philosophical traditions. Even those without religious beliefs can improve their cognitive systems through rational observation and personal growth experiences.

3.3 NGL Oneness: A Universal Cognitive Model for Modern Society

In the global context, the concept of Oneness is undoubtedly an antidote to fragmentation, reductionism, over-specialization, wastefulness, and over-narrowed nationalism, creating a more consistent universal framework of cognitive values that can be promoted in a multicultural world. The model of the New Great Learning (NGL), a modern cognitive system of Oneness, can help people cope with the massive amount of information, the complexity of all kinds of issues, and rapidly changing situations, especially in global and pluralistic societies, and establish an ethical foundation that better responds to the needs of the era and maintains the core values of Life.

According to NGL Oneness, with the expansion of the circle of compassion and the awakening of life-protecting awareness, there are environmental and animal ethical issues that humans are called to respond to with dramatic changes. However, any social change and societal transformation are enormously challenging, as evidenced by the United Nations Climate Change Conference, which has been working hard with little success. According to the NGL Oneness paradigm, general change begins with individuals. Any

significant transformation in human history has always begun with a small group of pioneers. When the underlying concept of "protecting life" is triggered, the manner of "Aligning affairs" and "Extending knowledge" must be thoroughly reconsidered. To redirect the industry from the bottomless abyss of confinement and exploitation of animals and ecosystem resources, overconsumption of earth resources, and pollution of the environment, one must re-examine the way animals are treated and start to reduce or even eliminate reliance on animal products and increase the consumption of vegan products through changes in diet and other habits of life. The NGL Oneness concept naturally encourages sustainable production and consumption patterns in view of long-term survival and well-being.

3.4 Veganism: An Application of NGL Oneness for Planetary Stability and Peace

Veganism represents a philosophy and way of life that aims to eliminate animal exploitation and suffering as much as possible. It promotes developing and implementing alternatives that do not rely on animals. The term "vegan" was coined by Donald Watson in 1945 to describe stricter vegetarianism, which involves abstaining from eggs, honey, milk, butter, and cheese derived from animals. By 1951, "vegan" encompassed the broader doctrine that humans should live without exploiting animals.

Ethical vegans consume plant-based foods and extend the philosophy to other life areas, aiming to reduce cruelty and exploitation of all creatures, including humans. "Environmental veganism" involves avoiding animal products due to the unsustainable and harmful nature of industrial animal farming, which causes an overall negative impact on the environment, on animals, and on human health.

Researches cited in Chapter One suggests that promoting veganism and reducing demand for animal products could help address global warming and climate change, water scarcity, deforestation, food scarcity, energy shortages, pandemics, etc. Veganism is a practical and effective way to address these contemporary issues. The author Will Tuttle believes that veganism is a practical application of the philosophy of Oneness, which

fosters spiritual growth and promotes a more peaceful development from an anthropological, sociological, and psychological perspective. He argues that modern academia has primarily ignored how people eat, leading to the normalization of a bloody, violent, and resource-intensive system and lifestyle that poses an existential threat to human civilization. According to Will Tuttle, today's typical diet reflects the domination of animal-herding civilizations, which begins with exploiting and controlling animals and culminates in manipulating humans and politics. This violence is only possible through a conceptual dissociation from everything, which forms the basis of a violent and manipulative consciousness. To achieve true world peace, he believes that human civilization must accept and re-engage with the reality of interdependence and recognize the physical link that connects all beings and things in the closest and most realistic way, namely, in the need and reality of eating. Thus, veganism represents a practical way to embody the philosophy of Oneness and to bring about positive cultural, societal, and environmental change. By rejecting an exploitative and violent mindset and system inherent in animal agriculture, individuals can promote compassion, empathy, and respect for all living beings, leading to a more peaceful, sustainable, and healthy world. Thus, eating is an act of reconnecting with Oneness:

All the arts are conduits for the expression of this deep human longing for unity, but it is only in the art of food preparation and eating that this Oneness is actually physically achieved. This is part of what makes eating such a powerful experience and metaphor: food art is eaten and becomes us. It enters as object and becomes subject; what is "not-me" is transformed into "me."⁴⁷

Through the act of eating, the food eaten is absorbed into the body and becomes one part of the eater. The apparent gap between the food and the eater is bridged and overcome. It is unquestionably a miraculous process for the Other to become part of Me. The possibility of integration or "becoming one" reveals a more mysterious truth: Man and all things

47 Will M. Tuttle, *The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony* (New York: Lantern Books, 2005), 3.

must have a substantial commonality and Oneness. Otherwise, how would it be possible for an object to become wholly integrated into another subject? Will Tuttle has described this reality more pictorially:

When we eat an apple, we are not just eating an apple as a separate thing. The apple enters us, dissolves within us, contributes to us, and becomes us... We are eating of the rain and the clouds and of all the trees that have gone before to bring this tree into manifestation and of the tears, sweat, bodies, and breaths of countless generations of animals, plants, and people that have become the rain and soil and wind that feed the apple tree.⁴⁸

He believes that an apple is not simply an apple but a collection of the elements of the entire Universe and the nutrients of the entire network or chain of Life.

We humans, eating apples, are in a true sense, apples eating apples. The whole Universe is not only in every apple but in every one of us. In eating, we see that there are no fundamentally separate things at all, but only processes. All things partake of each other, ever-changing, and are eventually eaten by the process and, by time, the great devourer.⁴⁹

Tuttle suggests that, although eating is often taken for granted in modern society, it has the potential to significantly impact people's cultural and spiritual identities. Therefore, individuals should examine their food systems and eating habits because what they eat determines who they are. He argues that practicing veganism and adhering to the Oneness doctrine complement each other. By living a non-violent vegan lifestyle, people can naturally awaken to the communal nature of the compassionate Creator, experiencing the immense peace and joy that comes from the Unity of Heaven and Man and the Oneness of all things. This experience transcends mere theory to become a magnificent living truth worth pursuing and experiencing in life. As Oneness consciousness grows and spreads,

48 Tuttle, *The World Peace Diet*, p. 4.

49 Tuttle, *The World Peace Diet*, p. 5.

people instinctively desire to live a vegan lifestyle, promoting peace. This constructive cycle of reciprocal cognition and action growth embodies the New Great Learning Oneness philosophy.

CONCLUSION

As technology advances and globalization increases, the impact of human activities on Nature has become prominent, and the limitation of Earth's resources is more apparent. Environmental pollution, global warming, extreme weather events, deforestation, destruction of marine ecology, declining biodiversity, lack of arable land and fertile soil, lack of clean water, and pandemics present a global planetary crisis. The root cause of these crises lies in the indifferent and unjust relationship between humans and Nature, inclusive animals. People rely on technological advancement instead of unraveling the root causes of these problems. The philosophy of Oneness, which focuses on the whole and the root of everything, can provide a new theoretical and practical framework in view of finding and living up to solutions. This philosophy has a long history in all significant intellectual traditions, as Western and Chinese philosophical sources make clear. The Chinese concept of the Unity of Heaven and Man and the Western concept of the Great Chain of Being are historical examples of this philosophical approach. The present paper proposes to deploy the philosophy of "The Great Learning," a Confucian classic that embodies the Unity of Heaven and Man, as the basis and add environmental and animal protection concepts to construct an innovative cognitive system called *New Great Learning (NGL) Oneness Philosophy*. The promotion of veganism is a practical implementation of the *NGL Oneness Philosophy*. Veganism reduces greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, waste of land and water resources, and the destruction of the marine ecology caused by the meat industry.

Additionally, it reduces the likelihood of epi- or pandemics caused by over-intensive breeding of animals, minimizing the occurrence of a planetary catastrophe. On a spiritual level, veganism reduces the consumption of food obtained through blood and violence, enabling people to connect with others and all things, deepening the understanding of the Oneness of All Things, connecting with the Creator, realizing the intrinsic Oneness of other beings and themselves, and comprehending the doctrines of benevolence and altruism advocated by various religious and philosophical traditions. Promoting the new system of epistemological Oneness and veganism is urgent in view of an effective form of sustainable development and survival of our ecosystem and human civilization.

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