

The Yijing and the Ethic of the Image

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Situational Ethics: The Individual and the Implicit Order

Ethical practice is usually based on the relation of the individual to certain norms, values, standards, ideals or virtues which act as guides to decision and behaviour in the situations of everyday life. Behind this in almost all ethical systems is the assumption of an *implicit* order, a creative ordering which provides a “heavenly cosmological or metaphysical basis” for such ideals.¹ The extent to which this implicit order, variously conceived as *Dao*, *Tenchi*, God or "Cosmos, supports fixed forms of social interaction is a source of constant debate. However, the individual's interaction with this implicit order expressed as awareness and conscious decision is the ground of any approach to ethical behaviour. The individual turns to this interaction with an implicit order particularly when social norms and concepts fail to provide information adequate to the decision making process.

Depth or archetypal psychology gives us a particular way of understanding this interaction, a new insight on traditional ethical stances toward the implicit order. From this perspective the implicit order produces or *constellates* an “unceasing stream or perhaps ocean of images and figures” in the individual, an underlying fantasy activity which, though beyond our direct control, “constitutes [our] immediate experience.”² Conscious interaction with this stream of images is the manifestation of the implicit order within each individual. The information provided by such imaginative interaction offers a basis for moral action within the particular situations each individual confronts. It is the ground of ethical behaviour.

Images of the Unknown

Yijing as an oracle or divinatory practice offers itself as a “formal and processual duplicate”³ of the image-making activity of the implicit order. As such it is a powerful tool for both psychological insight and ethical decision-making. Traditionally it is the *shen* or “spirits”, what C. G. Jung has called the “living units” of the objective psyche (*CW* 8, §210), that are the heart of the book. They speak to the individual through the book's images, thus evoking a process which “completes the ceaseless activity of heaven,” the continual creative activity of the implicit order. In Jung's words, the divinatory use of the *Yijing* “... provide[s] spiritual nourishment for the unconscious elements or forces ... giv[ing] these forces the attention they need in order to play their part in the life of the individual” (*CW* 11, §982).

Yi or “versatility,” the central concern of this divinatory image-system, can be understood in terms of three other key terms: *Dao*, *De*, and *Junzi*. *Dao*, literally “way,” is a central term in most Eastern thought. It refers to the way *in which* everything happens and the way *on which* everything happens. *De*, often translated as “power” or “virtue,” refers to the power of realizing *Dao* in individual life and action. It suggests a straightening of the inner essence which permits being to become what it is intrinsically meant to be.

***Junzi*: Imaginative Process and Ethical Stance**

Yi Jing is a guide to decision making in unique personal situations, where fixed rules or norms are felt to be inadequate. Its images, constellated by a specific question posed by a specific person, allow the individual to perceive how the unseen aspects of a situation may develop. The underlying assumption is that humans, through conscious awareness and moral decision, may interact with the

images of the implicit order and, potentially, change the course of events. The images provided by the oracle thus represent events *in statu nascendi*, the potential inherent in a situation. The individual's awareness and attitudes are an integral part of this configuration. They are synchronistic, not deterministic, giving information in depth about the archetypal configuration of a particular situation.

The Junzi or Realizing Person is the ideal user of this system. One is a Junzi insofar as one turns to the oracle in order to organize one's life according to *Dao* and the images of the psyche rather than wilful intentions, to perceive and actively participate in the implicit order of events. The oracle's statements are not fixed guides to establishing control in a given situation, but are contextual and corrective invitations to a dialogue with *Dao*. Their ethical core is the Junzi's willingness to adapt to *Dao* through *yi*, versatility.

The function of *Yi* in this dialogue is to “provide symbols” (*Zizizhuan*, B3.1), symbols through which the interaction with the implicit order can become a conscious act, a choice. It connects the user to a level of imagining that is prior to visible experience and offers the opportunity to influence the flow of events through conscious moral decision. For becoming aware of the archetypal forces at work in a situation does not eliminate the individual's responsibility. Rather it redefines this responsibility as an act of imaginative awareness, becoming aware, for example, of the deeper and darker implications of one's own will and desires, what psychologists call the “shadow.” Responsibility then becomes a conscious choosing in light of the ideal of the Junzi: one who seeks to act in concert with the implicit order and realize it in and through his or her person. In this sense the Junzi is the image of a continuous process, the individual's interaction with the images of the implicit order as the imaginative ground of practical ethical behaviour. The language of the oracle is the specific instrument that guides one in this task.

Preserving the Language

Yijing uses language in a special way, a direct reflection of the way in which the objective psyche creates reality. Its short phrases do not describe specific events but present “image-clusters” or “image-concepts.” The psychological and ethical power of the book comes directly from this quality of its language, for its images are “potent symbols” which have emerged from a long divinatory tradition as descriptive of basic structures of the psyche, a tradition that emphasizes altering perception in order that one might come into relation with the *shen*, *daimones* or “living units” of the objective psyche.

Each of the phrases which make up *Yijing*'s texts is simultaneously an image, an action and a quality. The way in which they move and combine when stimulated by a divinatory question represents a seeing through images that is quite different from discursive thought. It is a basic way in which the implicit order and the imagination interact to generate meaning.

The commentary tradition on *Yijing* insists that these texts cannot be “kept at a distance,” i.e., they are not only to be analyzed but experienced. Though they cannot be “conformed to a rule,” as we “turn and roll the words in the heart” “spontaneously rules arrive (*Zizizhuan*, A2.10-11). When the texts touch a meaningful cluster of images and emotions, what psychologists call a “complex,” *shen*, awareness of spirit and spirits is constellated. Preserving the openness and precision of the image-clusters is the key to this active use of *Yijing* as a psychological and ethical tool, an aid to the individual in his or her attempt to “lead their life.”

It is this creation of a dynamic field of meaning between the individual and the spirits, re-established in each consultation through the oracle's image-clusters that is the real heritage of the text. The language of *Yijing* puts its users in the position to experience their own spirit or identity precisely through their interaction with

the images of an implicit order. Responsibility and choice remain with the individual who, through *Yijing's* divinatory images, is given a deeper insight into the archetypal powers informing his situation.

Notes

1. Minoru Murai, "Morality and Education in Japan," *Moral Education I*, Papers from the 1990 Merrill House Conference, (New York: Carnegie Foundation/Uehiro Foundation, 1990), 52-65, p. 58.
2. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Bollingen Series xx, v. 1-20, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951-79), *CW8*, § 674, 680.
3. Willard J. Peterson, "Some Connective Concepts in China," *Eranos* 57/1988, p. 225.