Notes toward a Comparative Study of the Concept Skill in Mencius 5B:1.7 and Its Implications for Self-Culture

Part 2:

Biblical and recent Western Thought

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Explanatory note:

The following discussion is an attempt to see what genuine comparative aspects obtain among Confucian, Biblical and recent contemporary western thought. I included the relatively longer and more technical analysis of biblical thought in an effort to compare an ancient western text which I hoped might serve as a bridge from earlier Confucian thought to the present. If preferred, one can omit the biblical discussion and begin with the four recent western thinkers beginning with p. 24.

The purpose of Parts I and II of the paper is to make a beginning toward 1) abstracting the formal principle of self-cultivation which is embodied in timeliness and 2) to abstract the principle of one's functional relation to ultimacy or Tao in its aspect of finality. This is embodied, I think, in self-unification or wholeness.

II

Comparisons with Biblical Thought and Some 20th Century Thinkers:

Maritain, Dewey, Santayana, Ryle

The dialectic of the will pointed to by Mencius (5B:1.7) with his analogy from archery - that one reaches the mark by reason of strength but it is not owing to strength that one hits it - seems based on the fundamental intuition that right action, successful aim, is activity of the total person. The recognition of this duality in unity enables him to observe the relation between timeliness and self-fulfillment as a six-fold polar structure: wisdom/ sageness; beginning/ending; skill/strength, i.e., skill, wisdom and beginning are dialectically opposed to strength, sageness and ending. Since these oppositions are by nature polar they are interdependent and form an organic whole. They are not an opposed aggregation of parts atomistically related. This secures them against a merely quantitative reduction since an abstract analysis of their elements will not suffice to grasp their root significance. One, himself, must be living out their principle or miss their meaning.

Biblical:

The creation story of Genesis I has, I think, an ontological implication which lends support to this vision of Mencius. In the Genesis series of primordial creative acts the separation of the waters into above and below is the only instance that requires the severing of one body into two. This establishes a duality within one and the same element and nature.

The separation performed upon the waters is an interior division--a separation within the same nature. Such an act entails a natural bent toward an undividing of the division, a reintegration of what has been put asunder. Water, when suspended in fall tends to ensphere itself (for instance, into droplets); its ideal tendency is always toward a spherical form, an organic whole. Its currents follow its nature and wherever its activity prevails it rounds itself about its object absorbing into itself the nature of the other. This marvelous capacity for comprehending its object without incurring undue resistance to is embrace enables water to be always on its way. It is an archetype of homelessness precisely because it is so capable of being wholly a totality unto itself. It looks for no separate abiding place.

No other element so strives to return to itself. Genesis most aptly chooses water's division to introduce an image of finite being striving always to complete itself. With the established separation of the waters from the waters through the creation of the vault, contingency is born, and in this condition all concrete forms enjoy their natural careers. Finite freedom, that which both binds and excites movement, secures the unending flow of things that come to be and pass away.

The Hebrew text of Genesis describing the dividing of the waters clearly localizes the firmament (vault or heaven(s)) between the waters; i.e., literally, it is created to cause the dividing between them. The preposition, bēyn, 'between' is from the root bīn, 'discern.'

Bēyn is used not only of locality and with verbs of dividing but also with judging and teaching, explaining, distinguishing. Instruction and understanding are also associated with uses of the word. The power of conscious reflection is implied in these extended meanings. The word is used metaphorically for the division between the day and night caused by the creation of the luminaries in the expanse or firmament (Gen.1:14). The word points to formal distinctions recognized and generated by thought, and so it is not farfetched to infer from this that the image, water, implies metaphorically a reflective power, a capacity to make and discern distinctions which are the mark of understanding. Proverbs 8:14 uses bīnāh, 'understanding,' as a property of wisdom, hākmāh: '. . . I (am) understanding (AV). Clearly more is entailed for meaning here than were this simply a case of literary parallelism. If this text is translated quite literally, it appears that understanding or discernment is intrinsic to wisdom's nature whereas counsel, discretion and strength, she says, she possesses. Most striking is the relation of the vault or heaven to the division of the waters. The text does not say that the waters separated or were made to separate so that heaven could come into being. Rather, it is heaven itself which, at God's command, separates waters from waters. Clearly, this indicates that heaven is not a vacuum nor an imposed privation. It is a being in its own right whose appointed activity is, according to the literal Hebrew, 'to be in-the-midst-of the waters dividing between waters to-waters'; or, 'in the interval of waters with reference to waters, i.e., between the waters and the waters.' It is a being-in-the-middle being that

God himself calls heaven (v.8). When the waters remain unseparated, the light, like the Spirit (wind), touches only their surface. When heaven separates them transcendent energy finds an immanent role and a home within the finite order. While the possibility of self-estrangement is established through the separation of the higher and the lower within the same nature, heaven, as the separator, remains the connecting medium between them. Heaven, the divider, is also the reconciler through which are brought together in a higher level of activity what must otherwise remain asunder.

Applied to an analysis of 'fallen' human beings, the separation, as such, serves as an image of unstable, doubleminded self-consciousness. This condition is described in biblical Hebrew as one's having 'a heart and a heart' (bĕlēb̲ wālēb̲, Ps.12:2(3) and its negation in a warrior's firm resolve, bĕlōʾ lēb̲ wālēb̲ I Chron.12:33(34)) literally, 'not of a double heart'. St. James probably had this expression in mind when describing it in Greek as (δίψυχος, Jas.1:8; 4:8 and nowhere else in N.T., LXX or the secular writings). In 4:8 he associates this word with the heart directly (. . . καὶ ἁγνίσατε καρδίας δίψυχοι).

Psalm 85:10-13, one of the most beautiful passages in the Hebrew scriptures, describes the union of divine attributes in terms of a functional duality: 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth ~~sall~~ shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven' (10,11 AV). The simple structure of the dialectical interrelations enjoyed by these vir-

tues is profound and far-reaching. Even a brief examination of the text should indicate this. The ancient visionary motif of the complementary relation between heaven and earth underlies and supports this operation of harmony and reconciliation among the energies described. Clearly, on the side of heaven are mercy (ḥesed, 'goodness,' 'loving-kindness') and righteousness; on that of earth, truth and peace. Isaiah 45:8 (NEB) presents a similar image of polar activity: 'Rain righteousness, you heavens, let the skies above pour down; let the earth open to receive it, that it may bear the fruit of salvation with righteousness in blossom at its side. All this, I the Lord, have created.' Essentially, the initiative is heaven's and the response belongs to earth. Existentially, the relation between heaven and earth is dialectically continuous and reciprocal; initiative (action) and response (undergoing) are shared alike since the principals, heaven and earth, influence each other mutually: heaven stimulates earth whose response stimulates heaven which responds by restimulating earth. Existence knows both rupture and ongoing communion within this cosmic dance whose ethical and spiritual correlatives move the play of human choice and transformation. These raise the destiny of man above the round of natural process while his ends are served within it--but only insofar as man awakens to his possible re-birth to a qualitatively higher level of existence has he any hope of attaining to his proper destiny. Until then its prospect quite eludes him.

The Hebrew words for righteousness and peace, (ṣeḏeq and šālōm) imply a relationship of functions and power which is not immediately apparent

abiding and present acquiring. Activity determines character.

What has all this to do with the waters of Genesis I? Much, since none of the above differentiations are independent of the duality called heaven and earth, and these come into manifest being after the waters are divided--not before. It is apparent that from the very beginning of the Genesis account primordial duality obtains - from the beginning of the Spirit's moving upon the waters to the separation of light from darkness to separation of the heavens above and the earth beneath. In the same order righteousness and mercy are associated with heaven as peace and truth are with earth--as noted earlier on. Analogously, then, the primordial association of righteousness is with the upper waters (cf. Isa.45:8) and peace with the lower.

The stark importance of this correlation lies in its suggestion for the foundations of human behaviour, since if the biblical vision of the nature of man is fundamentally correct it is always incumbent upon him to engage activity which works toward harmonizing the existential duality within himself. All attempts to overlook or reduce this duality to an undifferentiated chaos must be assaults which he misguidedly makes upon his own nature. Such responses to his impatience and frustration with his contingent existence reveal a deeper motivation than the desire to play the tragic hero. Rather, they betray his vague apprehension that his own nature (as with the Waters) is essentially one; and that its existential duality requires from him an immediate and appropriate response which, when based solely on his

own contrivance, forever eludes him. The power to undergo such an apprehension marks man as a spiritual being in that one of the principal activities of spirit is the rectification of immanent activities which have become disordered. The only standpoint that admits of a possible self-reconstitution--by which one recovers his true self--has many varying descriptions among the religious literatures of the world. It is cogently expressed by Kierkegaard in his observation that "man, regarded as spirit, is always in a critical condition . . . when man is regarded as spirit both health and sickness are critical. There is no such thing as 'immediate' health of the spirit."

If there is no such thing as immediate health for the spirit of man, since both health and sickness-spiritually understood--are critical, he must find his stability in an energy which while immanently available to him possesses a perfection of healing quietude and strength qualitatively transcendent to anything he could ask or think. This transcendent immanence is always presented in biblical literature as an energy anthopomorphically intuited as similar to the immanent activities of thought and will in man.

Precisely the transcendent quality of this abiding immanence generates in us the sentiment for perfection. Equally, its power to release our latent potentialities for growth stimulates the longing for completion. Perfection is not properly conceived as an end beyond the activity undertaken to achieve it. It is intrinsic to the ac-

tivity itself. A thing can move perfectly while completing itself--as a plant when growing well or a human person so in accord with his nature that his very acting fulfills him. Whereas 'there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Eccl.7: 20 AV), the one who 'doeth righteousness at all times' is accounted blessed (Ps.106:3; 15:1-2 AV). Righteousness, as something accomplished in the doing is consonant with perfection, a quality of movement.

The longing for completion sees in peace its consummation; for peace requires that all parts are met suitably in the whole. It is both a social condition and its achievement. Further, it is associated with timing, i.e., a proper, suitable time. Time (et) in this sense is used some twenty-six times in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 in which the providence of God is described as so arranging the passage of events that man has no other recourse but to make the best of things as they are. Among the things timed providentially is peace (šālōm) which the Septuagint translates εἰρήνη; no other word than šālōm is so translated.

The reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship between righteousness and peace (fulfillment) is grounded on rhythm, the measured motion of nature. Right action is first and foremost action in harmony with one's own nature and what a time requires, however difficult it might be to discern the nature of the time and what is fitting to the purpose. Complementarily, fulfillment attends both the decision and the deed that issue in a timely new existence. Right-

teousness and peace, according to the paradigm in Psalm 85 enjoy an intemporal relation. Where and when the one is, there is the other also. In obedience to God, one's peace is as a river and his righteousness as the waves of the sea (Isa.48:18), and to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom.8:6), and great peace is the possession of those who love His law (Ps.119:165). Where peace is referred to a future condition as the fruit of righteousness (Isa.32:17), the image is drawn from organic being in which the principles of beginning (seed) and end (fruit) are properly grasped as compresent causes. The complement to this Isaian text indicates the cyclical character, the formal movement, of the relation between righteousness and peace: 'And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace'--- (James 3:18 AV), or 'by them that make peace' (τοῖς ποιοῦσιν εἰρηνήν); i.e., the fruit of the seed sown in peace by those who are doing peace is a is a harvest of righteousness. The two texts dynamically reflect one another as though they danced together in a movement timelessly pulsed. Isaiah envisions a "time," a situation, when the desolation described in verses 13-14 no longer obtains after the Spirit is poured down from on high (v.15); and now 'righteousness' shall yield peace and its fruit be quietness and confidence forever (v.17 NEB).

Clearly, in the functional order of their relationship, righteousness is dominant; as in the logical order it is prior to peace. Yet, generatively, unless the seeds of righteousness are sown in peace the harvest cannot be counted on to be reaped in peace. The divine order marvelously secures itself against the humbug of a sentimental altruism

that imagines that "good works" alone can coerce peace or a benign environment alone generate righteousness.

Analogously, these scriptural distinctions assist a philosophical grasp of the concepts perfection and completion which in daily discourse are not usually well discriminated. Perfection is essentially a quality of function. It informs the episodic passage of events with an abiding tranquility and repose. Perfection, in the order of human conduct, is revealed in the life of decision when deliberation is based on a pure act of attention. The purer the act of attention, the more just the decision; the more just the decision, the clearer the course of one's passage appears; and since the mind's composure depends upon intelligibility, if one is not in accord with his own nature he cannot act with ease. Such ease, tranquility and repose in action is the material foundation upon which a perfect performance relies. Righteousness is not conformity to an extrinsic rule. It is the immanent perfection of divine or human activity whose goal is intrinsic to that activity; and such activity, satisfied by its own exercise, continues at peace with itself.

Completion provides the link between the end of one movement and the beginning of another. It is the seal of continuity in change. Finite beings, moving to realize their respective ends, possess within themselves ideal tendencies toward their ~~consummations.~~ consummations. Completion is not a terminus. Completion is the abiding energy which directs and draws beings in their passage toward actualizations proper to their natures. Biblically envisioned, the created world, as the direct manifestation of God's providence (Ps. 19; 29; 104), is not subject to some ultimate

caprice but moves with strict regard to an intrinsic formal measure: 'Whatever has been already is, and whatever is has been already, and God summons each event back in turn' (Eccl.3:15). What has happened will happen again, and what has been done will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun (1:9). Generations come and generations go but the earth endures forever' (1:4) NEB. Similarly in the Greek tradition Sophocles has Ajax observe: 'Strangely, the long and countless drift of time brings all things forth from darkness into light, then covers them once more.'

Perfection arises out of freedom of choice which, when actualized, enlarges or diminishes existence. Completion provides existence a certain scope and measured flow. It secures for perfection an intelligible embodiment as does earth the will of heaven; for the earth is fixed on its foundation and can never be shaken (Ps.104:5). Completion's unalterable round is the truth that springs from the earth, as perfection's creatively adaptive precision is the righteousness that looks down from heaven (Ps.85:11).

The discussion so far leads to the conclusion that the root image of the waters, as biblically presented, suggests that out of which development takes its course emergently; yet, not as though the waters were self-generating since their generative function depends upon a higher agency, Spirit (John 4:24). Spirit makes this developmental activity possible by introducing an interiority, a "space" within the nature of this element. With the introduction of this

duality the possibility of self-estrangement is established. Precisely this possibility, however, is the condition upon which love is actualized. For love there must be at least two. Where the possibility of estrangement is actualized (as was not the case in the creation story (Gen. 1-2)) love must work on two fronts since it now faces both the possibility of estrangement and its demonic actualization. This is the condition of the world as we know it.

Briefly stated, a weak righteousness actualizes the possibility of self-estrangement by dissolutely presuming upon a divine intervention to coerce well being. ("Oh well, things will work out.") Correspondingly, a reckless imposition of a "hard" truth in an effort to coerce order for the sake of peace presumes for itself a power to prevail which no finite being possesses. ("One must win regardless!") Either spiritual pathology--whether the weakness of throwing oneself away or that of recklessly imposing self-will--is symptomatic of self-estrangement. Each of these archetypal spiritual disorders is doomed to repeat itself indefinitely until attention turns away from a fixed focus upon extrinsic activity to what is 'from above' or internal activity; for essentially they are one and the same insofar as they point to another, a 'higher' level of being. They are the "heavenly" in contrast with the "earthly."

Where mercy and truth meet, where righteousness and peace kiss each other, they do so just within the heart of the individual person or not at all. To be consciously in touch with one's own inner being is to understand the spirit as distinguished from the letter of the Law; it is to grasp truth, goodness and beauty as present

possessions despite affliction, persecution and general misfortune and despite high pleasure, personal glory and material riches. For as one values in his soul, so is he (šāʿar benapšō Prov. 23:7). This is not difficult to grasp when one sees that the world exists in many dimensions (abiding-places, μοναί, John 14: 2,23) and one's passage among and between them, vertically understood, is a matter of the quality of one's inner life and the degree of consciousness he brings to it; for these underlie the level of a person's being.

The duality in unity between righteousness and peace contains also the polarity between initiative and response (beginning and ending) as was observed in Isa. 45:8. Righteousness, like in Mencius' skill, begins in action that suits the purpose, that conduces to the good end. Peace, an ongoing consummation and not a terminus, is like ending or completion in Mencius in that completion links the end of one movement to the beginning of another. Like Aristotle's material cause it supports the procession of forms as the principle of continuity in change.

It is not difficult to see in this biblical vision a structure which though expressed in a different idiom, is akin to that which Mencius describes in his effort to reveal the depth dimension in both the movements of self-transformation and natural process. The likeness of concern and concept between the two traditions becomes clear at the point where both declare that the activities proper to timeliness and wholeness (self-unification) are <u>intemporally</u> related and reciprocally reinforcing within the <u>chung shih</u> cycle as discussed in Part I of this essay.

Ryle: The Concept of Mind, Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., London, 1960, pp. 40-51.

In his essay, The Concept of Mind, Ryle offers a discussion of skill which is in sharp contrast to the way it is conceived and expressed in both biblical and Mencian terms. In his cleverly written effort to refute Cartesianism through an attack upon "the ghost in the machine" he successfully indicates the untenable character of a mind-body dualism. Such an effort might encourage one to think that his argument makes common cause with the holistic character of Confucian thought. But there are crucial differences between his position and the Confucian understanding of human behavior. In Ryle's discussion there is nothing corresponding to the issue of moral growth. He cannot talk about the mind prone to err which conduces to a negative act that in no way results from not following a rule. For Ryle, knowing how, while not a single track disposition, is nonetheless exercised by observing rules or canons or applying criteria. A grasp of these and skill in their execution enables the normal person to do ("can do") many things which the idiot cannot do -- such as, perhaps excelling at chess. But the issue of moral growth is not encountered at the level of one's competence to perform specific operations. One cannot analogize the art of living to a game of chess precisely because existence has always the first move and its initiative cannot be wrested from it nor determined in advance. Rather, moral growth - the immanent objective of the art of living--depends upon a movement of the will: whether one will or will not (not can or cannot) voluntarily submit to this ontological condition which imposes the limits of finite freedom. This requires the activity of the total person

and cannot be opposed to one activity among others or specified by these or those rules, canons or criteria.

Ryle misses not only the issue of moral growth but, correlatively, he does not understand the expression "coming to the light" (John 3:21) which refers to seeing something which is inherently conscious - an interior activity. Since there is nothing in his analysis corresponding to vision he misses the crucial activity of contemplation which itself is not a matter of following rules since it is activity that can be done rightly or wrongly. Ryle's definition of marksmanship as "a complex of skills" is difficult to distinguish from the behaviorist position.

Mencius can speak of moral skill on the basis of his vision of moral growth as possessing its own immanent demands rather than a demand imposed from without. He saw the ideal element within human nature which makes it possible to improve it, namely, its potential capacity to embody the mind of Tao.

Dewey: A Common Faith, Yale, 1934, pp. 16-19, 33.

Whereas Ryle sees a preexistent standard as the measure of intelligent capacities built up by training, e.g., marksmanship is measured by hitting this selected target rather than some other, Dewey grasps that moral growth entails the transformation of all standards. On this account the distinction between the mind prone to err and the mind of Tao can be accomodated to his vision of moral activity. He distinguishes between those changes in ourselves in relation to the world which are merely adaptive and those whose scope includes our being in its entirety. These changes entail no specifiable resolve or choices but are

based on a movement of will which is not decision. "It is a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change in will."

The crucial role of imagination in the composing and harmonizing of the self appears in his statement that "the whole self is an ideal, an imaginative projection." Indeed, he remarks that the idea of a whole is not a literal but an imaginative idea. Since the harmonizing of the self operates only through imagination there can be no question of one's making a special act of willing or deciding. Such a special act requires a particular object for its aim and focus. Existence, or the world grasped as a whole, is no such object yet it requires that the self be harmonized with it or remain untranquil. Given, then,that one cannot choose to be in the world correctly - though the need to unify the self remains insistent - only one healing possibility offers itself: a change of will rather than in will. Such a change requires a total orientation, receptivity and openness to being.

Skill as a means of application of wisdom attains to a different significance when operating within this change of will. Now it is seen to apply to an attitude that informs all the elements of our being and is employed to maintain a massive affirmation of existence in the face of every particular occasion for negating it and so falling into the mind prone to err. Each step in one's passage from birth to and through death is self-transformative when made in the mind of Tao. The mind of Tao enables upon each instant a skillful refusal to

to exercise the mind prone to err. Each such refusal, instant by instant, marks a new beginning, as with Shun, in walking along the path of humanity and righteousness.

Maritain: Existence and the Existent, Image Book, Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., 1956, pp. 49 n., 60, 88-9. Art and Scholasticism, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1946, pp. 8-16. A Maritain Reader, Image Book, N. Y., 1966, p. 141.

Like Dewey, Maritain relates the activity of willing to the whole self, not only as the act of the person as such but as revealing the person to itself. Thus one is always able to determine the spirit of one's conduct - whether one is acting toward the good opportunistically (for 'profit', as in the Confucian rejection of that motive) or behaving with seriousness and sincerity. Both these thinkers grasp the act of the person as intemporally related to vision. A literal translation of John 3:21 consonantly reflects their philosophical understanding of the human act: 'the one who is doing the truth is coming to the light'. I.e., while one is realizing truth in action, upon the same instant his understanding deepens and expands. The rectitude of our willing conditions the accuracy of our vision.

Chu Hsi's observation that righteousness is not necessarily fulfilled merely by doing good, nor humanity fulfilled merely by one's being correct, indicates his awareness that adequate human conduct is not essentially a matter of rules. This parallels the Scholastic and Maritain's understanding of the virtue of prudence as requiring that every particular case is willed in a particular way of conforming to the end since no single moral case can be absolutely identical with another. This draws Maritain to see that "the truth of the prudential judgment is considered in relation to the undeviating intention (per conformitatem ad appetitum rectum), not in relation to the event.

There seems little, if any, distinction to be made between Maritain's concept, "undeviating attention" and the Confucian virtue of firmness or correctness. Both refer to the ability to remain persevering in right action despite every conceivable occasion for abandoning one's course, i.e., continuity in change. (cf. Hexagram 32, The Image, "---Thus the superior man stands firm and does not change his direction." Wilhelm/Bayne's trans.).

In Part I, p. 7, of this essay where some analysis is made of Mencius' pointing to virtue with an analogy from archery, it is observed that, "No precise duplication of a former shot is possible since in the meantime conditions in one or more respects have changed. Meeting such changes adaptively requires patience and staying-power, strength, qualities preeminently in the sage - - - Adaptive in his strength and firmly ordered in his skill he maintains his fixed direction while changing with the times , and so he keeps on going well." Such an operative habit resides chiefly in the will and perfects in the line of its own nature the person it informs. It functions as an abiding quality of mind and must not be confused with the modern notion of habit, a compulsive, mechanical tendency, routinely expressed.

It is instructive to observe a New Testament text (I John 3:7,9) which because of an incorrect translation has caused untold mischief in Christian moral theology: 'Whosoever is born of God---cannot sin, because he is born of God.' But the Greek does not read "and he cannot commit sin" as the meaning has been rendered, but rather "and he cannot go on sinning," the verb for sin being in the present active infinitive - not in the aorist act. infin. The same sense is observed

in v. 3 which literally translated is: "He that keeps on doing righteousness is righteous...." The point made by the apostle is one of abiding tendency not individual particular acts of which no aggregated sum can by their own activity raise the level of being of the person. Only that quality of mind as a permanent condition which perfects in the line of its own nature the person it informs can generate the "seriousness to straighten the internal life and the righteousness to square the external life" (Hexagram 2, line 2).

Santayana, The Life of Reason, Chas. Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1955, pp. 427 f.

In a remarkable statement on the nature of intent as "action in the sphere of thought" Santayana attempts to raise our grasp of intent above the level of mere feeling to that of aspiration, passage, awareness of an object which at times eludes any feeling for it altogether. He observes that "the parts do not contain the movement of transition which makes them a whole." Perhaps it would not distort his meaning to say that this transition is the movement of a being's growth in capacity to express its latent qualities - a capacity for self-disclosure which is touched off by the shifting character of its circumstantial field. This movement of transition, though based on an ideal tendency immanently possessed by the being itself is in no way reducible to it nor to any physical categories.

It is simply the case that things tend ideally not only to hold to their stations in being but also to expand their influence, all things