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The Limits of the Senses in the *Zhongyong*¹

Jane Geaney

The *Zhongyong* ends with an odd statement about *de* 德 (charisma or virtue).² It cites a line from the *Book of Songs* that appears to say that *de* resembles a piece of hair—perhaps in being equally light—but the *Zhongyong* rejects this analogy, noting that *de* is without smell or sound.³ This seems to be a strange comment since, while it might be plausible to think of hair as smelling, there seems to be no way around the incongruity of speaking of hair in terms of whether or not it makes sound. Perhaps the passage is attempting to say, in a clumsy way, that *de* is completely beyond all sensory capacities. This impression could be reinforced by a similar comment about not seeing or hearing *de* in *Zhongyong* 16. However, a series of contrary descriptions undermines this possibility: in various passages, *de* is described as big (*Zhongyong* 17, 30), small (*Zhongyong* 30), and bright (*Zhongyong* 33.6). Moreover, *Zhongyong* 16 itself refers to a *de* that “embodies” things.⁴ This

¹ While not the comments I presented at the *Zhongyong* panel, this paper is based on those comments and the fruitful discussion that followed the panel.

² The translation of *de* is much disputed, but since it is not my purpose to resolve such disputes, in the rest of the argument, I will leave controversial terms of this sort untranslated.

³ The passage reads:

《詩》曰：“德輶如毛。”毛猶有倫。
“上天之載，無聲無臭。”至矣。

The *Book of Songs* says: “The influence of *de* is as light as a feather.”

But even a feather is no comparison.

“The sky/heaven above goes about its work without using sound or scent.”

It is indeed superlative. (*Zhongyong* 33.7)

All translations herein are my own, based on those of Hall and Ames unless otherwise noted.

⁴ The line reads: 子曰：鬼神之爲德，其盛矣乎。… 體物而不可遺。

conflicting sensory rhetoric in the *Zhongyong* is not restricted to the phenomenon of *de*. Indeed, in many places the text seems to describe the proper *dao* and those who employ it as simultaneously hidden and yet broadly displayed, invisible and yet intensely apparent. In other words, the text makes obvious, even strained, attempts to describe a peculiar kind of sensory mode. I will employ Hall and Ames' concept of "extension" to try to clarify this sensory mode. Hall and Ames discuss extension—what the *Zhongyong* refers to as *da dao* 達道—in the context of education and ritual.⁵ They argue that extending is the method by which one advances in these areas, by creatively drawing upon something already available or understood. I will first support their claim regarding the significance of extension in the text, and then argue that the unusual sensory rhetoric in the *Zhongyong* is also explainable in terms of this idea of *da dao*, understood as extension.

In their analysis of the *Zhongyong*'s view of education, Hall and Ames note that extension is a repeated pattern in the text. They point out that, in part, education takes what is already there and draws it out towards other things. For instance, they say that education means building upon "inner tendencies" in order to practice self-cultivation (Ames and Hall, 51). And this phenomenon, they argue, applies to many other features of the text.

Most of the terms invoked to describe Confucian religious experience connote this process of growth and extension explicitly. As we have seen, productive familial relations are the "root (*ben* 本)" whence one's way (*dao* 道) advances. The repeated contrast between the exemplary person and the petty person, the inclusiveness of appropriateness (*yi* 義) as opposed to the exclusiveness of personal benefit (*li* 利), and the emergence of the authoritative person (*ren* 仁) from individuated persons (*ren* 人) and from the common masses (*min* 民), all entail growth and extension through patterns of deference. Even the term "spirituality" (*shen* 神) crosses the divide between "human spirituality" and "divinity." Further, *shen* is cognate with the terms "to extend, to prolong" (*shen* 申 and 伸). (Hall and Ames, 50)

Hall and Ames understand extension as an "advancing pathway"—*da dao* 達道. The advancing pathway first appears in *Zhongyong* 1 in the form of a plant metaphor. The extension in this case is a kind of organic growth—beginning with a small and hidden root and then stretching out in the form

⁵ "It is this sense of education that is captured in the *Zhongyong*'s expression 'an advancing pathway (*dadao* 達道)'" (Ames and Hall, 51).

of branches. “Equilibrium is the great root of the world; harmony is the branching of the proper way in the world (中也者，天下之大本也。和也者，天下之達道也)” (*Zhongyong* 1). Beyond plant growth, the text features other metaphors of development, including a geographic extension (in distance and wind) and a kind of perceptual extension that seems to operate in a similar fashion. That is, *Zhongyong* 33.1 speaks of exemplary persons who “know the nearness of what is distant, know the source of the wind, and know the conspicuousness of what is subtle 知遠之近，知風之自，知微之顯” (*Zhongyong* 33.1).⁶ In other words, the exemplary persons know the origin that is near, which is directly connected to the vastness that develops from it. The point of this knowledge of origins and their outcomes is summed up as a principle in *Zhongyong* 15: one must start somewhere.

君子之道，辟如行遠，必自邇；辟如登高，必自卑。

In traveling a long way, one must set off from what is near at hand, and in climbing to a high place, one must begin from low ground: such is the proper way of exemplary persons. (*Zhongyong* 15)

Thus, extension refers to the way in which that which is small, hidden, or near at hand connects incrementally with the vast and distant. In terms of the individual’s education, this seems to mean that one must know one’s own person/body in order to know one’s proper *dao*, since the text points out that the root of the exemplary person’s *dao* is his/her body: 君子之道本諸身 (*Zhongyong* 29).⁷ As a result, this principle may explain why the exemplary person’s *dao* is accessible to even the most unintelligent and immoral person:

夫婦之愚，可以與知焉 ...
夫妻之不肖，可以能行焉。

The dullest of ordinary men and women can know something of it [the exemplary person’s *dao*]... The most unworthy of common men and women are able to travel a distance along it....” (*Zhongyong* 12)

⁶ Although 風 suggests “custom,” as Hall and Ames translate it, the location of a wind’s source underlies this metaphor.

⁷ As Hall and Ames note, the line evokes *Lunyu* (*Analects*) 1.2, where filial relations occupy this role as the root: “Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold the proper way will grow therefrom. . .” (Ames and Hall, 39).

Presumably, the dull and the unworthy have this small grasp of the *dao* because even the *dao* has a source from which it extends, as does distance and the wind. At the same time, since the individual must start with his or her body/self, the extension of knowledge must begin with that individual's condition, even if it is the condition of dullness and unworthiness.⁸ Learning proceeds by extensions of this sort. Thus, as Hall and Ames claim, extension is a common theme in the text with a specific application to education.

Extension is also helpful for understanding the *Zhongyong* passages that invoke the senses, because they often make the point that the subtle is connected to the great. In explaining that sprouts (or small things) are able to be *cheng* 誠 (sincere/creative),⁹ *Zhongyong* 23 emphasizes increasing levels of perceptibility that link the least to the greatest. Something that starts as small as a sprout, first becomes formed, then becomes manifest—and finally, appears as bright.¹⁰

其次致曲，曲能有誠，
誠則形，形則著，
著則明，明則動，
動則變，變則化。

Next there is arriving at small things, so that each aspect of them is able to have *cheng*. When there is *cheng*, there is form; when there is form, it is manifest; when it is manifest, there is brightness; when there is

⁸ From these beginnings, one can extend to all possible places, hence the various images of complete coverage. The image of heaven and earth implies such inclusion of everything, as in *Zhongyong* 30:

辟如天地之無不持載，無不覆幬。
辟如四時之錯行，如日月之代明。
萬物並育而不相害，道並行而不相悖。

He is comparable to the heavens and the earth, sheltering and supporting everything that is. He is comparable to the progress of the four seasons, and the alternating brightness of the sun and moon. All things are nurtured together and do not cause injury to one another; the various ways are traveled together and are not conflicted.

⁹ Hall and Ames make a case for translating *cheng* as “creative.”

¹⁰ I am using variations on the term “perception” here in a non-technical sense for the sake of simplicity, but as I explain in *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought*, the early Chinese conception of sensory operations does not fit this model.

brightness, there is movement; when there is movement, there is change; when there is change, there is transformation. (*Zhongyong* 23)

Thus, small things (origins, in this context) are important because they develop in this kind of progression, so that something that starts out small and barely perceptible ends up manifest and bright enough to cause change and transformation. In other words, tiny sprouts have a powerful effect. Indeed, the text implies that even things that strive to avoid being apparent cannot succeed in hiding their effects: the fish that swims to the bottom of the water to conceal itself remains visible despite its efforts.¹¹ In particular, as *Zhongyong* 33.1 says, that which comes from the exemplary person will make itself felt, even if (or because) it is hidden. (By contrast, things that come from the small person also becomes manifest, but seem to fade, perhaps precisely because they are shown off.)¹²

故君子之道，闡然而日章。
小人之道，的然而日亡。

Thus the ways of exemplary persons while hidden, day by day become more conspicuous; the ways of petty persons while obvious, day by day disappear. (*Zhongyong* 33.1)

The inevitable progression by which small and hidden things become manifest justifies the passage's subsequent assertion that one should attend to origins (the nearness of the distant etc.). Furthermore, it explains why the text says that when something fortunate or unfortunate is about to occur, it will be given away by perceptible signs—either indicated in the tools of divination or manifest in the movements of the four limbs.¹³ Finally, it may also explain the claim that, “There is nothing more visible than what is hidden, and nothing more manifest than what is inchoate 莫見乎隱莫顯乎微” (*Zhongyong* 1). Not that these subtly perceived things are truly the most visible and manifest, but perhaps they are in the sense that worthy things are those that, without displaying themselves, have the most long range effect.

¹¹ *Zhongyong* 33.2 reads: “The *Book of Songs* says: Although having dived down to lie on the bottom, The fish is still highly visible (詩云：潛雖伏矣，亦孔之昭).”

¹² Much of the *Zhongyong*'s perceptual rhetoric is similar to that of the *Laozi*, and this same reversal of expectations appears in *Laozi* 22.

¹³ See discussion of *Zhongyong* 24 below.

The *Zhongyong* contains a series of opposing patterns about perception that confirm this concern with the effects of the subtle. On the one hand, the text makes the point that sagely actions that are manifest compel extreme results. On the other hand, it also implies that sagely actions that are *not* manifest compel equally remarkable results. For example in *Zhongyong* 31, the sage's appearance, speech, and movement are effective in a kind of total sense: "They appear, and all defer to them; they speak, and all have confidence in what they say; they act, and all find pleasure in what they do (見而民莫不敬，言而民莫不信，行而民莫不說)" (*Zhongyong* 31). The passage not only notes that everyone is swayed by these manifestations, it also immediately explains their sensory influence in terms of extension. Because the sage's visible and aural manner is so effective, it says, the sage's name (specifically referred to as a sound) stretches throughout every conceivable location.

是以聲名洋溢乎中國，施及蠻貊；
舟車所至，人力所通，天之所覆，地之所載，
日月之所照，霜露所隊，
凡有血氣者莫不尊親；
故曰配天。

It is for this reason that their sonorous name spreads out over the Central States, extending to the *Man* and *Mo* barbarians in the south and north. Everywhere that boats and carriages ply, everywhere that human strength penetrates, everywhere that is sheltered by the heavens and borne up by the earth, everywhere that is illumined by the sun and moon, everywhere that the frosts and dew settle—all creatures that have breath and blood revere and love them. Thus it is said that they are the complement of *tian*. (*Zhongyong* 31)

Thus we have, on the one hand, the effectiveness of the sage's appearance and speech extending throughout all areas. Yet on the other hand, in cases where there is a kind of "sensory blockage" (in the sense that some sensation is said not to happen), the same total effectiveness ensues. That is, when *Zhongyong* 26 describes utmost *cheng* 誠 as being "apparent without being seen, changing without moving, and completing without doing (如此者不見而章不動而變無爲而成)," it then proceeds to describe heaven, earth, mountains, and water. The point is that its effect is all-encompassing.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ With an almost identical last line, this *Zhongyong* line echoes *Laozi* 47 (Wang Bi), which appears to be about knowing by focusing on the local: "Not going yet knowing, not seeing yet naming, not doing yet completing (不行而知，不見而名，不爲而成)."

final passages in the *Zhongyong* repeats the rhetoric: with neither movement nor speech, there is respect and trust (33.3); with no reward or anger, there is encouragement and awe (33.4); with no manifestation of *de*, there is imitation (33.5); with neither sounds nor looks, there is transformation (33.6).¹⁵ In sum, it is not necessary to show oneself or make a sound in order to achieve the goal of affecting the situation. This is not because the sage (or the exemplary person) uses powers beyond human perception, but because things that appear subtly are intensely effective. It is clear that the effect of the sage is the same whether “blocked” or not, because *Zhongyong* 33.1 slips from listing pairs of “blocked” sensations to contrasting “blocked” sensations with fulfilled sensations, as if there were no difference. That is, the line begins by saying the exemplary person’s way is delicately flavored *and not* tiresome,¹⁶ and then adds that it is simple *and yet* refined, lax *and yet* regulated (君子之道淡而不厭簡而文溫而理). Apparently, it does not matter that this is a switch from making analogous (delicately flavored and not tiresome) claims to juxtaposing opposites (simple and yet refined): in either case the idea is that exemplary person’s manifestation is completely effective. *Zhongyong* 16 (discussed below) makes a similar point that something exceedingly subtle has an exceedingly far ranging effect: the *de* of ghosts and spirits is not seen or heard, but they appear to be everywhere. Hence the passage notes, “Such is the way that the inchoate becomes manifest and *cheng* is irrepressible.” The astonishing result comes from extension: from things so subtle as to be *almost* not manifest.

It is important to clarify that extension in the *Zhongyong* does not always refer to moving further. In certain circumstances, it can be a critique of moving *on* in favor of moving *into*—a point that is made in another reference to perception in the text. A number of passages in the *Zhongyong* show the drawbacks of pushing too far. Things are limitless: one cannot reach the end of the *dao* any more than one can reach the end of heaven and earth. Even the sage cannot know or do everything.

君子之道費而隱。
夫婦之愚可以與知焉；

¹⁵ The *Laozi* 10 (Wang Bi) attributes a similar kind of “blocked” achievement to profound *de*. “[It] gives birth but does not possess acts but does not depend, helps grow but not rule. This is called profound *de* (生而不有，爲而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德).”

¹⁶ The term *dan* 淡 can also be taken as “lightness,” which suggests more of a contrast in weight.

及其至也，雖聖人亦有所不知焉。
 夫妻之不肖，可以能行焉；
 及其至也，雖聖人亦有所不能焉。
 天地之大也，人猶有所憾。

The proper way of exemplary persons is both broad and hidden. The dullest of ordinary men and women can know something of it, and yet even the sages do not know it all. The most unworthy of common men and women are able to travel a distance along it, yet even the sages are not able to travel it all. As grand as the world is, people are still never completely satisfied. (*Zhongyong* 12)

This is why sometimes the text describes a person as knowledgeable and virtuous and yet no better off than one who is ignorant or lacking virtue.

子曰：“道之不行也我知之矣。
 知者過之，愚者不及也。
 道之不明也我知之矣。賢者過之，不肖者不及也。
 人莫不飲食也，鮮能知味也。”

The Master said, “I know why this proper way is not traveled: The wise stray beyond it while the simple-minded cannot reach it. I know why this proper way is not evident: Those of superior character stray beyond it while those who are unworthy cannot reach it. Everyone eats and drinks, but those who know taste are rare.” (*Zhongyong* 4)

The perceptual metaphor is revealing: the way does not necessarily involve extending toward extremes. As with knowing the taste of what one eats and drinks, it is more a matter of paying attention to what is right there than pressing forward. Given the significance of *yong* 庸 in the title of the work, this may reflect the importance of being attuned to the ordinary. But being more attuned to the immediately present is also a kind of extension: that is, extending one’s awareness to what has been taken for granted.

This notion of extending sensations also seems to factor in the text’s puzzling references to *de*. It is fair to say that *de* is something that can be manifest, if sometimes only tenuously. This is evident because *Zhongyong* 33.5 speaks of *de* not being manifest in a way that implies it has the potential to be.

《詩》曰：“不顯惟德，百辟其刑之！”
 是故君子篤恭而天下平。

The *Book of Songs* says: “Without manifesting his *de*, the various vassals model themselves after him.” It is for this reason that exemplary

persons are earnest and reverential and the world is at peace.
(*Zhongyong* 33.5)

Moreover, the passage from the *Book of Songs* cited in *Zhongyong* 26 exclaims over the manifestation of King Wen's *de*. Indeed, *de* can even be described as "bright." There is an implicit contrast between being covertly "bright" and expressing "great" noise or visual appearance—a contrast in which subtlety (keep this "brightness" close to the chest) can transform others more effectively than more obvious methods (obvious speech and looks).

《詩》云：“予懷明德，不大聲以色。”
子曰：“聲色之於以化民，末也。”

The *Book of Songs* says: "Harboring the highest *de* in your breast, you have no need of loud speech or looks." The Master said, "Speech and looks are of little use in transforming the common people."¹⁷
(*Zhongyong* 33.6)

Clearly, this subtlety of *de* is not a deficiency. In light of this, it seems the two types of *de* in *Zhongyong* 30 should not be read as expressing the inferiority of small *de*:

萬物並育而不相害，
道並行而不相悖，
小德川流，大德教化，
此天地之所以爲大也。

All things are nurtured together and do not cause injury to one another; the various ways are traveled together and are not conflicted. Little *de* flows in streams; great *de* massively transforms. This is why the heavens and the earth are so great. (*Zhongyong* 30)

If there is any contrast between these types here, it is perhaps that flowing in streams leads to the massive transformations of large *de*. Thus, even smaller *de* leads to larger effects. Moreover, as the use of "bright" vs. "great" in *Zhongyong* 33.6 shows, *de* may not be obvious, but it is not imperceptible.

¹⁷ This does not mean they cannot know the *dao*. *Zhongyong* 12 asserts that even the dullest of people can. But expressiveness on the part of exemplary persons is not necessary for this to occur.

In fact, in the *Zhongyong*, *de* seems to be accessible by extending one's powers and hearing and sight. Truly acute ears and eyes (*congming* 聰明) can extend to the point of reaching heavenly *de*. According to *Zhongyong* 32, Only those whose own capacities of hearing, seeing, and sagely knowledge extend to the *de* of *tian* could possibly understand them [the threads of the great loom of the world] (苟不固聰明聖知達天德者其孰能知之)" (*Zhongyong* 32). Thus the confusion produced by *Zhongyong* 33.7 speaking of *de* without smell or sound, and by *Zhongyong* 16 speaking of a *de* that is not seen or heard, can be resolved in terms of this notion of extension. In other words, in one sense we might say that everyone perceives *de*, since it affects everyone, but strictly speaking *de* is only perceived by those whose senses are finely attuned to its subtle workings.¹⁸

This notion that *de* requires finely tuned senses helps explain the *Zhongyong* 16 assertion that the *de* of ghosts and spirits (*guishen* 鬼神) is not seen or heard:

子曰：“鬼神之爲德其盛矣乎！
視之而弗見，聽之而弗聞，體物而不可遺。
使天下之人，齊明盛服以承祭祀，
洋洋乎如在其上，如在其左右。
《詩》曰：‘神之格思，不可度思，矧可射思！’
夫微之顯，誠之不可揜如此夫！”

The Master said, “The *de* of the gods and spirits is profound. Looking, we do not see it; listening, we do not hear it.¹⁹ And yet it embodies things/events to the extent that nothing can be what it is without it. It causes the people of the world to fast, purify themselves, and put on their finest clothes in carrying out the sacrifices [to the ghosts and spirits]. It is as though the air above our heads is suffused with them, and as though they are all around. The *Book of Songs* says: ‘The descent of the spirits cannot be fathomed—how much less can it be ignored.’ Such is the way that the inchoate becomes manifest and *cheng* is irrepressible.”

¹⁸ Shigehisa Kuriyama makes a similar point about early Chinese medical practices. He notes that the *Lunyu* 12/20 reference to *da* 達 involves sensitivity to tone and voice, which, he argues, is indicative of how early Chinese medicine specifically aimed at spotting the slightest changes in the color (*se* 色) of a patient's face that serve as a hint of more severe impending changes in the form (*xing* 形). See Kuriyama, 181.

¹⁹ The line is almost identical to *Laozi* 14 (Wang Bi edition), which concerns something whose beginning (head) and end (rear) cannot be found: “Looking at it but not seeing, name it level. Listening to it but not hearing, name it rare 視之不見名曰夷，聽之不聞名曰希。”

Although this describes *de* as unheard and unseen, in a variety of ways the passage emphasizes its sensible manifestations. The passage notes that *de* embodies things/events. It also seems to elaborate on this by adding that *de* causes people to perform physical acts of making bodies clear (*ming* 明) and clothing ample (*sheng* 盛)—in other words, this is perhaps the means by which *de* embodies. Furthermore, the final line explicitly asserts that the subtle is manifest, noting that it cannot be “covered” (*yan* 揜). Hence, something too small for ordinary sight or hearing to sense is accessible to those whose senses are attuned to the way subtle things are the hidden roots of vast things.

It is significant that the passage concerns ghosts and spirits, because ghosts and spirits share with *de* the characteristic of being effective in an exceptionally subtle way.²⁰ In the early Chinese worldview, ghosts and spirits are audible and visible. As the *Mozzi* notes,

生民以來者，亦有嘗見鬼神之物，聞鬼神之聲。則鬼神何謂無乎！

If...since the beginning of humanity, there are also those who have seen events of ghosts and spirits, and heard the voices of ghosts and spirits, how can they be called “not there”? (*Mozzi* 31/12-13)²¹

It seems that ghosts and spirits can also be sensed in the *Zhongyong*, but the sensations are subtle, since the comment about *shen*/spirits in *Zhongyong* 24 claims that foreknowledge is possible with the ability to sense subtle signs (i.e. the turtle plastrons and the four limbs).

至誠之道可以前知。
國家將興必有禎祥；
國家將亡必有妖孽。
見乎蓍龜，動乎四體。
禍福將至，善，必先知之，
不善，必先知之。
故至誠如神。

²⁰ There are references to *de* in the *Zhongyong* that are not necessarily related to ghosts and spirits—small and big *de* [*Zhongyong* 30], ordinary *de* [*Zhongyong* 13], bright *de* [*Zhongyong* 33.6], and heavenly *de* [*Zhongyong* 32]—although the last of these might amount to the same thing as the *de* of ghosts and spirits.

²¹ The *Xunzi*'s contrary position—that ghosts and spirits do not exist—does not doubt that they can be seen and heard, it doubts that they exist at all (*Xunzi* 21/76).

The *dao* of utmost *cheng* is capable of knowing things in advance. When the state and family are about to flourish, there are auspicious omens and signs; when they are about to perish, there are ominous portents and auguries. These will be manifest in the milfoil and turtle plastron divinations and will affect the movements of the four limbs. When a change in fortune is about to happen, either for good or for bad, it is bound to be known in advance. Thus utmost *cheng* is like *shen*.

Foreknowledge seems to be possible for those who can read signs because all things manifest themselves in advance, if only obscurely. The passage seems to say that utmost *cheng* means being able to interpret the faint signs by which things make themselves known. Moreover, foreknowledge is linked to *shen*, presumably either because spirits also know how to sense subtle things in advance or because spirits are things that subtly make themselves known (sensed) in advance. On either reading, *shen* has something to do with the tendency of the subtle to make itself manifest. In other words, while everything may be said to have hidden roots—from the world itself (*Zhongyong* 1) to ignorant people (*Zhongyong* 12)—this seems particularly characteristic of *shen* and *de*, which seem to operate on an exceptionally refined level.²²

²² If extending the subtle explains the idea that *de* is not seen or heard in *Zhongyong* 16, something else from Hall and Ames' work on the *Zhongyong* can help to explain the *Zhongyong* 33.1 comment that one can "enter" *de*.

《詩》曰：“衣錦尚絅。”惡其文之著也。
 故君子之道闇然而日章，
 小人之道的然而日亡。
 君子之道淡而不厭，
 簡而文，溫而理，
 知遠之近，知風之自，知微之顯，
 可與入德矣。

The *Book of Songs* says: "Over her brocade skirts she wears a plain robe." This means she hates to make a display of her refinement. Thus the ways of exemplary persons while hidden, day by day become more conspicuous; the ways of petty persons while obvious, day by day disappear. The ways of exemplary persons are plain and not wearisome, simple and refined, amicable and coherent. Those who know the nearness of what is distant, the source of what is customary, and the conspicuousness of what is subtle—such persons can enter *de*. (*Zhongyong* 33.1)

Generally the *Zhongyong* descriptions of *de* point to something we might want to call small, since it is said to be subtle and it contrasts with great. But as Hall and Ames note, there is a

This notion of barely sensed things that extend to produce exceptionally powerful consequences seems relevant for interpreting the text's use of the expression *shen qi du* 慎其獨. As Hall and Ames explain, there is a tradition of interpreting the phrase as if it refers to being careful of one's "uniqueness."²³ Alternatively, the term *du* might refer to solitude—a reading that seems more in accord with the perceptual patterns in the *Zhongyong*. The phrase occurs in *Zhongyong* 1, immediately following a statement about being careful of what is not heard and seen:

是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞。
莫見乎隱，莫顯乎微，故君子慎其獨也。

It is for this reason that the exemplary persons are so concerned about what is not seen, and so anxious about what is not heard. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden, and nothing more manifest than what is inchoate. Thus, exemplary persons are ever careful of their solitude. (*Zhongyong* 1)

The reference to what is not seen or heard may have some bearing on the phrase's meaning, since a similar connection appears in the use of the phrase in both the *Xunzi* and the *Daxue*. The *Xunzi* passage reads:

君子至德嘿然而喻，未施而親，不怒而威。
夫此順命以慎其獨者也。善之爲道者，
不誠則不獨，不獨則不形，不形則雖作放心，
見於色，出於言，民猶若未從也。雖從必疑。

...when the gentleman has attained to perfect *de*, though he remains silent, he is understood, though he has never bestowed any favor, he is considered affectionate; and though he does not display anger, he pos-

default assumption in classical Western traditions that "things" are discrete substances (Ames and Hall, 52). Viewing something subtle as a small discrete thing would reflect that assumption. Hall and Ames suggest that "things" in the early Chinese context are events. They say, "...the 'things' are not discrete objects but are themselves states of being; they are *happenings*. Thus the locution, 'the ten thousand things', must be glossed as 'the ten thousand processes or events'" (emphasis in original, Ames and Hall, 11). Hence, in terms of sensing, we might speak of audible events, visible events etc. If we consider that small *de* flows and that great *de* changes, then it does seem more plausible to think of *de* as an event. Moreover, ordinary *de* is something that can be walked (庸德之行, *Zhongyong* 13). And if *de* is an event, then it seems less odd to speak of "entering" it, as we might enter a flowing stream or a massive process.

²³ This is the reading Hall and Ames endorse. See Ames and Hall, 118–119.

sesses an awe-inspiring dignity.²⁴ This is following his destiny by means of being careful of his solitude. Though a person is adept at acting in accord with the Way, if he lacks *cheng*, he will not be solitary. Not being solitary, he will not take form. Not taking form, though he creates [something] in his mind, displays it on his face, and expresses it in speech, the common people will nonetheless never follow him, and insofar as they must, it will be with suspicion.²⁵ (*Xunzi* 3/30)

In light of the Confucian emphasis on relational personhood, it might seem implausible to interpret *du* as solitude, but the *Zhongyong* does discuss worthies being secluded and hidden. As *Zhongyong* 12 notes, “the proper way of exemplary persons is both broad and hidden (君子之道費而隱), and this is repeated in the *Zhongyong* 33.1 idea that the hidden ways of the exemplary become increasingly manifest. In a minor form, this occurs when exemplary persons restrain their spoken expression because the *dao* does not prevail:

國有道，其言足以興；
國無道，其默足以容。
《詩》曰：“既明且哲，以保其身，” 其此之謂與！

When the proper way prevails in the world, their words will enable them to flourish; when it does not, their silence will win the forbearance. The *Book of Songs* says: “Enlightened, and also wise—Thus he guards his person.” Is this not what this passage means? (*Zhongyong* 27)

But in a more extreme example, without even specifying conditions, *Zhongyong* 11 describes the sage as one who is able to live unseen, withdrawn from the world. “[Those] who withdraw from the world to live out their lives in obscurity without the least regret—only the sages are able to do this (遜世不見知而不悔，唯聖者能之)” (*Zhongyong* 11). Thus the text has good reason to explain how one should behave when alone: such circumstances are not unexpected in the life of the exemplary person. Furthermore, the use of the same phrase in the *Daxue* is accompanied by an illustration that indicates solitude is at issue at least in this context:

所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。

²⁴ The line is quite similar to *Zhongyong* 33.4: “It is for this reason that exemplary persons offer no reward and yet have the best efforts of the common people, show no anger and yet the people stand in awe of their symbols of sovereignty 君子不賞而民勸，不怒而民威於鈇鉞”

²⁵ Knoblock translation modified. Knoblock, vol. I, 178.

如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙。
 故君子必慎其獨也。
 小人閒居爲不善，無所不至，
 見君子而后厭然，
 揜其不善，而著其善。
 人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。
 此謂誠於中，形於外，
 故君子必慎其獨也。

What is meant by “making the thoughts sincere” is allowing no self-deception, as when we hate hateful smells, and love lovely sights. This is called self-enjoyment. Therefore, superior persons must be careful of their solitude. There is no bad thing to which petty persons, dwelling retired, will not proceed, but when they see a superior person, they instantly try to disguise it, concealing their bad and displaying their good. The other looks at them, practically seeing into their lungs and liver—so what is the point? This is an instance of the saying—“What is genuinely within will be manifest without.” Therefore, superior persons must be careful of their solitude.²⁶

Du here refers to occasions when one is not observed by others. The fact that *Zhongyong* 1 includes references to things unseen and unheard makes it seem related to this point (also raised in the *Xunzi* passage) that nothing can be truly hidden. In contrast to the small person who acts badly (爲不善) and expects to be able to hide it, the exemplary person knows that the effect of an action (爲) proceeds inevitably. The effect does not depend upon there being someone in the immediate vicinity to feel it, because it is possible that the action will affect the person in ways that will only be apparent later. Nor does it necessarily depend upon being expressed in one’s voice or face. That is, as *Zhongyong* 33.6 says, “Speech and looks are of little use in transforming the common people.” This could be taken to mean that certain actions betray themselves in one’s face and voice only to those who are exceptionally perceptive (as *Zhongyong* 32 suggests in reference to the perception of *de*). Or it might mean that certain actions—if not seen or heard—may be sensed through a sort of general feeling in the perceiver’s body.²⁷ But either

²⁶ Legge translation modified. 366-367. James Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, & The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Press, 1971) republication of second revised edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1893.

²⁷ As I argue in Chapter One of *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early China*, the body itself sometimes functions as one of the “five senses” and what it senses has to do with comfortable or uncomfortable environments.

interpretation explains why one must be careful when one is alone. Even when no one is present, we are never truly alone in the sense of being isolated from affecting our environment. Moreover, we can only “extend” from wherever we happen to be, which is wherever our actions (taken alone or in the presence of others) place us.

References to things not seen, not heard, and not moving can easily mislead an audience accustomed to thinking in terms of human perception as inherently flawed and limited in its capacity to perceive a “real world” that exists beyond it. But in each case, these apparent references to sensory failure never appear without concomitant hints of sensory “success,” in the sense that things unseen and unheard are also visible (in *Zhongyong* 16) and things that do not move are also somehow able to change (in *Zhongyong* 26). If these things were beyond perception, we might expect the text to say that each different sensory capacity fails to grasp them—i.e. something like an assertion that they systematically fail to be seen, heard, tasted, touched, and smelled. Yet there is no inclusive list of sensory failures of this sort. The final lines in the *Zhongyong* that compare *de* to a hair may expressly rule out its having smell or sound, but we are left with the possibility that *de* is as subtly visible or light as a hair—a possibility that, in fact, the analogy makes more probable. The pattern of extension in the text helps explain such comments about perception. It also clarifies that the discussion of ghosts and spirits does not hint at something beyond human sensation, but rather something only perceived by those who are able to extend their skills in sensing. The reason for the claim in *Zhongyong* 1 that the unseen and unheard are uncommonly manifest is that even the barest hint of an action—one that is easily overlooked—has extraordinary consequences. And sensory “blockages”—things unseen or unheard—are characteristic of exemplary persons, who are the very persons most adept at sensing subtle things and creating remarkable effects. Thus, Hall and Ames’ concept of extension “extends,” so to speak, to explain other things. What they apply to context of education and ritual also applies to these perceptual puzzles.

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