CHAPTER 1

T'oebye's Letter to Kobong

The paragraph excerpted here was an almost incidental part of a letter on other topics T'oebye wrote to Ki Tae-sung (Kobong) in 1559. In his emendation to Ch'ŏng Ch'ŏl's Diagram of the Heavenly Mandate, T'oebye had said: "The Four Beginnings are the issuance of principle; the Seven Feelings are the issuance of material force." Hearing of Kobong's critical discussion of this, he proffers a modification, and with this began the written interchange that was to become the central landmark in Korean Neo-Confucian thought.

Also, I have heard from scholar friends something of your discussion of my thesis regarding the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings. I was already dissatisfied myself with the imprecision of the wording, and, having gotten word of your helpful critique, I am even more aware of its error. So I have revised it to read: "The issuance of the Four Beginnings is purely a matter of principle and therefore involves nothing but good; the issuance of the Seven Feelings includes material force and therefore involves both good and evil." I am not sure whether or not this way of putting it is acceptable.
Kobong's Letter to T'oegye
on the Four Beginnings—Seven Feelings Thesis

Kobong wrote this letter in the third month of 1559. It presents his basic objections, introducing themes that become broadened and deepened in the course of the ensuing debate. This letter evoked T'oegye's first major attempt to enunciate his position.

Tzu Ssu [in the first chapter of the Doctrine of the Mean] says: "When joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are not yet aroused, it is called equilibrium; when they have been aroused and are all perfectly measured, it is called harmony." Mencius says: "The sense of commiseration is the beginning of humanity; the sense of shame and dislike [for evil] is the beginning of righteousness; the sense of yielding and deference is the beginning of propriety; the sense of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom." As for these propositions regarding the nature and the feelings, the pronouncements of former Confucians have been perfectly clear. As I have understood it, Tzu Ssu was speaking of them in a way described as "speaking of them in their entirety," while Mencius's discussion is described as "singling out [the good side]." For before a person's mind-and-heart is aroused, the condition is considered the nature, and after it is aroused, it is considered the feelings. In that case, the nature involves nothing but good, while the feelings involve both good and evil.

The nature-feelings relationship is cast in the pattern of the latent and manifest, which is frequently encountered in East
Asian thought: the Neo-Confucians spoke of this kind of relationship as one of "substance and function." In this case, the nature is substance, the latent, quiet condition of something just being as it is. Feelings are function, an active condition that manifests the pattern latent in the nature. Humanity, for example, is a fundamental pattern or structure inherent to our nature; although it can never be directly observed in itself, this pattern is manifest in the active life of the feelings as warmth, affection, benevolence, compassion, and so on.

The nature, substance, is equated with 里, and hence is perfectly good. Mencius's famous discussion of the Four Beginnings (humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom) was part of his argument that human nature is good, so he is characterized as "singing out" just those feelings that are a direct and pure manifestation of the (good) nature. The comments about joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure attributed to Tzu Ssu as the imputed author of the Doctrine of the Mean, however, specify "when they have been aroused and are all perfectly measured," that is, the possibility of their being somehow excessive or deficient is implied; thus he is said to speak of the feelings "in their entirety," including both good and evil. Although he mentions only four such feelings, he is considered to speak for the whole body of ordinary feelings symbolized by the conventional list of seven found in the Book of Rites. Kobong's contention, as we shall see, is that the Four Beginnings are thus simply a subset of these "Seven Feelings."

Such is the definite rationale of this matter. It's just that in the case of Tzu Ssu and Mencius, that with respect to which they were speaking was not the same, and so there is the distinction between the Four Beginnings (of which Mencius spoke) and the Seven Feelings (of which Tzu Ssu spoke). It is not that apart from the Seven Feelings there are also the Four Beginnings. Now, if one regards the Four Beginnings as being issued by principle and [hence] as nothing but good, and the Seven Feelings as issued by material force and so involving both good and evil, then this splits up principle and material force and makes them two [distinct] things. It would mean that the Seven Feelings do not emerge from the nature and the Four Beginnings do not mount on material force [to issue]. What such wording conveys cannot but be considered problematic, and later students of the matter will certainly have doubts about it.

The nature, as 里, is the formative, structuring element, while material force, 里, is the concretizing and energizing component of existence. Any activity therefore must involve both. What introduces a problem here is the Neo-Confucian use of "the turbidity" of 里 to explain how distortion enters the picture. In its concretization and actualization through imperfect, turbid 里, the pure goodness of the original nature can become distorted, that is, evil. Such is not the case in the feelings spoken of by Mencius, but the possibility is clearly there in the feelings spoken of by Tzu Ssu. T'oebye's initial formulation of a distinction between these feelings concentrates on the pure goodness of 里 in the case of the former and the possible disruption by 里 in the latter, but as Kobong here objects, this does not seem to give due weight to the mutuality of 里 and 里 in the arising of all feelings.

And then again, if you amend it by saying, "The issuance of the Four Beginnings is purely a matter of principle and therefore involves nothing but good; the issuance of the Seven Feelings includes material force and therefore involves both good and evil" [Cf. A1b], although it may be somewhat better than the former, in my view it likewise seems questionable. For if in the issuance of the nature material force does not interfere the original goodness of the nature] can be directly manifest, and this is truly what Mencius described as the Four Beginnings. These are definitely purely a matter of that which heavenly principle issues. Nonetheless, they cannot emerge as something apart from the Seven Feelings; rather they represent the systematic sprouts (myo maek, Chin. miao-mai) of those among the Seven Feelings that issue and are perfectly measured.

So could it be permissible to take the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings as mutually contrasting expressions and speak of them as [respectively] "pure principle" and "including material force"? In discussing the human mind and the Tao mind, perhaps one may use such an explanation, but when it comes to the Four
Beginnings and the Seven Feelings, I suspect one may not explain it in such fashion, for the Seven Feelings cannot be seen exclusively as a matter of the human mind.

Principle is the master of material force, and material force supplies the material for principle. The two are certainly distinct, but when it comes to their presence in actual things, they are certainly mixed together and cannot be split apart. It’s just that principle is weak while material force is strong; principle has no concrete sign, but material force is physically in evidence. Therefore when it comes to the matter of [concrete] activity and manifestation, there cannot but be divergences of excess or deficiency [because of the imperfection of material force]. This is the reason that in the issuance of the Seven Feelings, some are good and some evil, and the original substance of the nature at times cannot be integrally [manifest]. Nonetheless, [those of the Seven Feelings] that are good are the original condition of the Heavenly Mandate, while those that are evil are a matter of excess or deficiency in the psychophysical endowment of material force. This is what I describe as the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings from the start not meaning two different things.

Recent scholars have not discerned Mencius’s intent in approaching just the good side and singling it out and referring to it, so for the most part they discuss the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings as differentiated from one another. In my humble opinion, that is a mistake. Master Chu says: “Joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are feelings. The condition before they have issued is the nature.” And then when it comes to discussing the relationship between the nature and the feelings, he time after time speaks of it in terms of the four characteristics of the nature [i.e., humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom] and the Four Beginnings, for he feared people would not understand and would speak of the nature in terms of material force. Nonetheless, those who pursue learning must understand that principle is not external to material force, and cases where material force has its natural manifestation without excess or deficiency are the same as the original substance of principle. If they understand that and apply their effort in that direction, then perhaps they will not be much off the mark.

Chapter 3

Toegye’s Reply to Kobong Arguing the Distinction of the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings in Terms of Principle and Material Force

In the eleventh month of 1560, Toegye responded to Kobong’s critique with this letter. According to his remark in the twelfth section of the letter, the long gap between Kobong’s critique and this response owed to his own doubts about his position. He became convinced, however, when he found a passage in Chu Hsi’s Yu-lei (Recorded Conversations) in almost exactly the same words he had originally used. Thus encouraged, he composed this letter defending his position; after receiving Kobong’s lengthy critique of this letter, he rewrote it, changing the wording of certain passages in the light of Kobong’s response (cf. below, A29a–33a). In his comments, Kobong divided Toegye’s letter into twelve sections. These divisions have been introduced into the text for ease of reference.

A3a Section One

As for the argumentation regarding the nature and the feelings, the pronouncements and clarifications of former Confucians have been precise. But when it comes to speaking of the Four Beginnings and the Seven Feelings, they only lump them together as “feelings”; I have not yet seen an explanation that differentiates them in terms of principle and material force.

[cf. Kobong’s response, A7a–10b]
Section Two

Some years ago, when Mr. Ch'ong made his diagram, it included the thesis that the Four Beginnings issue from principle and the Seven Feelings issue from material force. My opinion was that the dichotomy was too stark and would lead to controversy. Therefore, I emended it [in my letter to you] with the expressions “pure goodness,” “combined with material force,” and so on. This was for mutual support in working it out clearly. It’s not that I thought there was no problem in the expression.

[cf. Kobong’s response, A10b–11a]

Section Three

Now that I have received your critique pointing out my mistakes, my eyes have been opened, and I have benefited greatly from the warning. Nonetheless, there are still some elements that are not fully settled in my mind. Let me present my ideas so that you can help me get it straightened out.

Section Four

Indeed, the Four Beginnings are feelings, and the Seven Feelings are also feelings. Both are equally feelings, so why is there the distinct terminology of the Four and the Seven? What your letter describes as “that with respect to which one speaks” (so ch'ui i ŏn chi) being not the same is the reason. For principle and material force are fundamentally mutually necessary as substance and are interdependent as function; there definitely can never be principle without material force or material force without principle. Nevertheless, if that with respect to which one speaks [in using such terminology] is not the same, then it is also true that it is not countenanced to not distinguish them. From ancient times, sages and wise men have discussed them as two; how has it ever been necessary to fuse them together as a single thing and avoid speaking of them as distinct?

[cf. Kobong’s response, A11b–12b]

Section Five

And if we were to discuss the matter in terms of just the single word, “nature,” Tzu Su refers to the nature that is the “Heavenly Mandate,” and Mencius refers to the nature that is the “good nature”; to what, may we ask, does the word “nature” refer in these two cases? Could it be anything other than a matter of approaching the composite of principle as endowed with material force and pointing to this as the aspect of principle in its original condition as endowed by Heaven? Since the point of reference is principle, not material force, it therefore can be described as purely good and without evil, that is all. If, because principle and material force are inseparable, one therefore wanted to include material force in the explanation, then it would already be other than the nature’s original condition.

This is a clear example of the thinking that led neo-Confucian thinkers to develop the idea of a perfectly good “original nature” conceptually but not existentially distinct from the imperfect “physical nature,” that is, the nature as concretized in material force. Although the distinction is a conceptual one and all agreed that there are not two natures, Neo-Confucians would not readily say that the physical nature is the reality and the original nature represents a simple conceptual abstraction. T'oegye's side of the debate, in fact, could be viewed as a search for the consequences of the original nature in the phenomenal realm of the life of the feelings.

Indeed, Tzu Su and Mencius had a penetrating view of the substance of the Tao in its integral wholeness and set up their propositions from that point of view, but that does not mean that they were aware of just the one side and not the other. It is really
because if one speaks of the nature as mixed with material force, then one cannot see the original goodness of the nature. It was only in later times, after the appearance of the Ch'eng brothers, Chang Ts'ai, and other thinkers that a thesis regarding the physical nature finally became unavoidable. That likewise was not just a case of creating differences out of a fondness for complexity. Since what they were referring to had to do with the condition after having been endowed [with material force] and being born, then it was also not practicable to refer to it without distinguishing it from the original nature.

Therefore I recklessly venture that the distinction of the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings in the case of the feelings is similar to the difference between the original nature and the physical nature in the case of the nature. If that is so, since it is considered permissible to distinguish between principle and material force in speaking of the nature, why should it suddenly become impermissible to distinguish between principle and material force when it comes to speaking of the feelings?

[cf. Kobong's response, A13a–14a]

Section Six

From whence do the feelings of commiseration, shame and dislike [for evil], yielding and deference, and right and wrong issue? They issue from the nature that is composed of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. And from whence do feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred, and desire issue? They are occasioned by circumstantial conditions when external things contact one's form and cause a movement internally. As for the issuance of the Four Beginnings, since Mencius has already referred to them in terms of the mind-and-heart, and since the mind-and-heart is the combination of principle and material force, then why do we say that what is referred to in speaking of them has principle as its predominant factor (so chu)? That is because the nature composed of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and

T'oegye's Reply to Kobong

A4b wisdom exists in its pure condition within us, and these four are the commencements [of its active manifestation]. As for the issuance of the Seven Feelings, Master Chu says they originally have a standard of what they ought to be, so it's not that they are without principle.

But then why is what is referred to in speaking of them a matter of material force? When external things arise, that which is most susceptible to stimulus and the first to move is our physical form, and the Seven Feelings are its systematic outgrowth. It does not make sense to say that [the Four Beginnings] are within us as pure principle, but at the moment they issue they are mixed with material force, or that what is externally aroused [i.e., the Seven Feelings] is physical form, but its issuance is the original substance of principle.

The Four Beginnings are all good. Therefore it is said, "Without these four dispositions, one is no longer human." And it is also said, "As for the feelings, it is possible for them to be good." In the case of the Seven Feelings, then, good and evil are not yet fixed. Therefore, as soon as we have them but are not able to exercise discernment, the mind-and-heart will not attain its proper condition. And only after they have issued with proper measure can they be called harmonious.

From this perspective, although neither of the two is separable from principle and material force, on the basis of their point of origin, each points to a predominant factor and emphasis, so there is no reason why we cannot say that the one is a matter of principle and the other a matter of material force.

[cf. Kobong's response, A14a–18b]
Kobong’s Response to T’oegyé’s Letter Discussing the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings

Kobong responded to T’oegyé’s letter with a forty-one-page, detailed critique. After a few preliminary formalities, he begins with remarks ostensibly addressed to Section One of T’oegyé’s letter, though in fact his remarks (A7a–10a) constitute a general introduction to his critique. He first seeks to ensure common ground by citing clear passages from Chu Hsi defining the nature and relationship of the mind, nature, and feelings. Then he mounts a preliminary attack on Section Six of T’oegyé’s letter, which he regards as the heart of the matter. With this, he turns to Section Two of T’oegyé’s letter and commences his more systematic, section-by-section analysis, in which Section Six in its turn receives extensive further comment.

On the First Section

A7a I would say that as for the explanation of the nature and the feelings, the discussions of the former Confucians certainly could hardly be improved. Nevertheless, it is also the case that some are precise and some are summary, and so they could not be exactly alike. This means that what remains for us later scholars is just to take fully into account the precise or summary character of their discussions and repeatedly reflect on and thoroughly investigate the matter in order to seek out what we may personally attain in our own minds. This is permissible. What is impermissible is to
A7b just depend on the explanations already formulated and summarily lump them together and say that the truth of the matter is like this and nothing more. Master Chu said:

As for the distinction of the mind, the nature, and the feelings, with the Ch'engs and Master Chang [Tsai] it was fixed and uniform. But when it came to the various disciples of the Ch'engs, on the contrary what each understood as the fully formed explanation conveyed by their master consistently diverged.¹

Indeed, if even what the Ch'engs' disciples understood as their master's explanation still could not avoid divergence, then how much more will such be the case with us later scholars!

Carefully thinking over the matter at issue, I feel that although in its broad outline there is nothing that amounts to a real obstacle, among the fine points there are a number that are still dubious; I fear that it cannot yet be considered as free from slight deviations [from what is correct].

Master Chu says: "As for the fact that the various Confucians' discussions of the nature are not the same, it's not that there is a lack of clarity regarding good and evil, but because the meaning of the word 'nature' is not unambiguously determined."² In my opinion, this is also the case with the question at hand: it's not that there is a lack of clarity regarding principle and material force, but I suspect that the words "mind" and "nature" and "feelings" have not been unambiguously determined, and that's the problem.

I would suggest, in the Yü-lei one passage says:

As soon as the nature activates, then it is the feelings. The feelings have both good and evil, but as for the nature, it is entirely good. And the mind is that which embraces the nature and the feelings.³

Another passage says:

As for the nature, feelings, and mind, Mencius and Heng-ch'u [Chang Tsai] have explained them well: Humanity is the nature, compassion is [the correlative] feeling that must be manifested in

the mind. The mind is that which governs and unites the nature and the feelings. The nature is just how something should be. It is just this principle, it's not that there is some actual matter there; if it were some actual matter then there being good, there would also have to be evil. It's only that it does not have some actual matter but just its principle, therefore it is nothing but good.⁴

And another passage says:

The nature is nothing but good. As for what the mind issues as feelings, sometimes they are not good. To say that what is not good does not pertain to the mind also will not do. This rather is a matter of the mind's fundamental substance originally being nothing but good; its slipping into what is not good is a matter of the feelings' being led astray by things and so that happens. "Nature" is the comprehensive term for principle; "humanity," "righteousness," "propriety," and "wisdom" are all the terms for individual principles within the nature. "Commiseration," "shame and dislike [for evil]]," "declining and deference," and "the sense of right and wrong" are the terms for what issues forth as feelings. They are cases where the feelings issue forth from the nature and are good.⁵

If one considers these three passages, then one can mostly understand the words "mind," "nature," and "feelings."

[T'oegye agrees with these three quotations, A34b]

As for an explanation that distinguishes between principle and material force in terms of the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings, before this I never saw one. Now I have received your letter quoting the words of the Yü-lei to that effect, so I see that former Confucians have spoken of it. It was just that with my narrow and coarse learning I had not yet seen it, that is all. Nevertheless, in what is stated as "The Four Beginnings, these are the issuance of principle; the Seven Feelings, these are the issuance of material force," I still suspect that there cannot but be some fine points [to be considered].⁶
Your letter regards the feeling's being distinguished as the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings as similar to the nature's having the differentiation of the original nature and the physical nature. These words are very appropriate; truly they and Master Chu's words mutually clarify one another, and my own opinion has never been otherwise. Nevertheless Master Chu has a saying:

When one discusses the nature of Heaven and Earth, one speaks with exclusive reference to principle; when one discusses the physical nature, then one speaks in terms of principle mixed together with material force.\textsuperscript{3}

If one considers the matter in the light of this, the statement "The Four Beginnings, these are the issuance of principle" is speaking with exclusive reference to principle, and the statement "The Seven Feelings, these are the issuance of material force" speaks in terms of principle mixed together with material force. And this means that [the statement that] "these are the issuance of principle" certainly cannot be altered, while "these are the issuance of material force" is not a matter of exclusively referring to material force.

\textbf{A9a} This is what I meant when I said that there cannot be some fine points [to be considered].

[T'oegeye disagrees, A38a]

In general, although there are quite a few points of agreement between your letter and my opinion, there likewise are quite a few points of difference. What's more, the points where we differ are major items; if we are not able to agree on these, then there is no need to discuss the points of similarity or difference or right or wrong in the rest of the explanation. We must first have a clear discernment and strong confidence regarding these items, and then we will be able to take up the points of agreement and disagreement, right or wrong, in the rest of the explanation.

For, according to your letter, the Four Beginnings are the issuance of the nature's [principles of] humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Therefore, although [the issuance] is a matter of the combination of principle and material force, what is referred to in speaking of them focuses on principle. As for the Seven Feelings, external things stimulate the [physical] form, and they are moved within and issue forth thus conditioned. Therefore, they are not without principle, but what is referred to in speaking of them consists in material force. Therefore, the Four Beginnings are within as pure principle and at the moment of issuance are not admixed with material force; the Seven Feelings are stimulated externally by physical form, and their issuance is not the original substance of principle; so that from whence the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings come is not the same [cf. A4a]. These words are truly what you, sir, have attained yourself. Therefore, in the whole treatise, although there are manifold and multiple leads on the matter, the main meaning is nothing other than this.\textsuperscript{4}

As for my ignorant opinion, it differs from this. Man's feelings are but one, and what they are as feelings definitely combines principle and material force and has both good and evil. It's just that Mencius approached the wondrous combination of principle and material force and exclusively referred to what issues from principle as nothing but good; these are the Four Beginnings. Tzu Ssu approached the wondrous combination of principle and material force and spoke in an undifferentiated way, so the feelings he described definitely combine principle and material force and have both good and evil; these are the Seven Feelings. This truly is a matter of that with respect to which they were speaking being different.

Nevertheless, principle itself is present in the midst of what are called the Seven Feelings, even though they may involve material force; when they issue and are perfectly measured, they represent the nature that is the Heavenly Mandate and the original substance, and are the same reality with a different name as what Mencius called the Four Beginnings. When it comes to those that issue and are not perfectly measured, that is the doing of [imperfection in] the psychophysical endowment and selfish desires, so they do not recover the original condition of the nature. Therefore, this is really what I was getting at in my former explanation when I said that it was not that outside the Seven Feelings there were another Four Beginnings, and again when I said that from the start.
the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings never meant two different things [cf. A2b], this is what I meant.

[T'oegye disagrees, 42a]

If we pursue the matter in this light, then in saying that the Four Beginnings particularly focus on principle and the Seven Feelings particularly focus on material force [cf. A4b], although the broad outline is the same, there are also fine points in which we do not mean the same thing. Indeed, if on the basis of words as clear and concise as those of Master Chu, the views of scholars unavoidably involve points of difference and agreement, is this not what is referred to as “a hair’s-breadth divergence”? But in that case, if one interprets Master Chu’s words in terms of your opinion, the matter is straightforward and easy to understand, while if one would substantiate them in terms of my views, the matter becomes intricate and difficult to comprehend. What was said about a hair’s-breadth divergence I truly suspect applies not to you, but to me. It’s just that when I consider the matter in terms of the Chung-yung chang-chi and the Hua wen and in the light of Master Chu’s lifelong teachings, it makes me suspect that it might be like this. I humbly beg that you think it over carefully.

Kobong again takes up the issue of Section Six below, A14a–18b. The essence of his view is that all feelings arise in the same way, so far as li and ki are concerned. The Four Beginnings refer not to special feelings that are a more direct manifestation of our nature, but simply to feelings that are an accurate and undistorted manifestation of our nature. Thus they are in fact no different than any other proper and good feelings; they amount to the Seven Feelings when the Seven Feelings are not distorted.

On the Second Section

A10b

“The Four Beginnings issue from principle, the Seven Feelings issue from material force.” These two phrases, which Master Ch’eng expressed in his Diagram, truly do not differ from what Master Chu said; when they are understood aright, how could there be any problem? My former doubts about it were truly a matter of fearing that it would lead to problems for those who do not understand.

In a general discussion of the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings, there is certainly nothing impermissible in saying that the Four issue from principle and the Seven issue from material force. But when it comes to making a diagram in which you take the Four Beginnings and locate them in principle’s circle with the characterization, “issue from principle,” and take the Seven Feelings and locate them in the circle of material force with the description, “issue from material force,” although the fundamental requirements of making a diagram make it unavoidable, it seems that this positioning cannot help but make them appear too sharply separated. If later scholars see it and, noting its clearly defined form, separate principle and material force and discuss each apart from the other, then will it not have grievously misled them?

[T'oegye disagrees, A42a]

After that, I received your letter that emended it by saying that “the issuance of the Four Beginnings is a matter of pure principle and therefore is nothing but good; the issuance of the Seven Feelings combines material force and therefore includes both good and evil.” This seems much clearer than the earlier expressions, but, in my humble opinion, it is not yet quite satisfactory. For if one speaks of the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings as a contrasting pair, and thus displays them in a diagram that describes the one as “nothing but good” and the other as “including both good and evil,” then people will look at it and wonder whether there are two kinds of feelings. And even if they do not wonder about two kinds of feelings, they might suspect that among the feelings there are two kinds of good, one issuing from principle and another issuing from material force. In this respect, it is not yet suitable.

[T'oegye disagrees, A42b]

Thus what I formerly questioned had to do with this matter. Now when I carefully scrutinize your letter and reexamine the diagram’s explanation, it seems that what is dubious goes beyond just this matter. That is, although I am not yet sure on which side of
the question the true rights and wrongs lie, what I questioned in the past—whether it would lead to problems for those who do not understand—was not just a concern brought about by overscrupulous consideration.

[Response to Section Three omitted]

A11b  On the Fourth Section

The Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings are certainly both equally feelings, and as for there being different terminology for them, is it not because that with respect to which one speaks is not the same? The intent of my former explanation was just this, and now your letter likewise considers it so. Nevertheless, as for the phrase “that with respect to which one speaks is not the same,” if one interprets it in terms of my explanation, then there is no problem as regards there being basically a single kind of feelings, but with dissimilarities in the way of speaking of them. But if one examines the meaning [of the phrase] in terms of your letter, then the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings each have their own point of origin, and it’s not just that the way of speaking of them is dissimilar. This means that although we use the same expression, what you and I each mean by it is something different, and this cannot be disregarded.

[T'oegye responds, A43a]

What’s more, [even in my opinion] the dissimilarity in what was said by Tzu Ssu and by Mencius is not just a matter of [different] words, but as for their intent likewise, each had a particular focus. I have seen a letter of Master Chu’s, the “Reply to Ch’en Ch’i-chih,” that says:

The nature is the undifferentiated substance of the Supreme Ultimate; fundamentally it cannot be described by language. But in its midst the ten thousand principles are replete, and the greatest

of the major guiding principles are four in number; thus they are named with the terms “humanity,” “righteousness,” “propriety,” and “wisdom.” The disciples of Confucius had never fully elaborated them, but finally with Mencius they were fully presented. For in the time of Confucius the principle that the nature is good was so clear that although the items involved were not exactly expressed the thesis of itself was sufficiently complete. But by the time of Mencius swarms of heretics had arisen and at times they regarded the nature as not good. Mencius feared that this principle was not sufficiently clear and thought about how to clarify it. If he just spoke in an undifferentiated way of the integral substance, then he worried that it would be like a scale without weights or a ruler without inches marked; it would in the end not be sufficient to enlighten the world. Therefore he spoke of it as distinguished into four units and with that the theory of the Four Beginnings was established.11

[T'oegye agrees with quotation, A34b]

How is this not a matter of that with respect to which they spoke being different, and the intention of each likewise having its predominant element? For when Tzu Ssu discussed the characteristics of the nature and the feelings, he did so in terms of equilibrium and harmony, and when he mentioned joy and anger, sorrow and pleasure, these were cases of feelings combining principle and material force and including both good and evil; this was certainly speaking of them without differentiating—what I have described as “speaking of them in their entirety.”14 In clarifying the principle that the nature is good, Mencius spoke in terms of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom and mentioned [the correlated feelings of] commiseration, shame and dislike [for evil], yielding and deference, and a sense of right and wrong; this was just a matter of speaking only of feelings that are good, which I have described as “singing them out.”12

When the sages and wise men of ancient times discussed principle and material force or the nature and the feelings, there certainly were times when they spoke of them as combined and times when they spoke of them as differentiated. Their intention likewise
in each case had a predominant element (so chu), and it is up to the scholar to be subtle in discerning it, that is all.

At this point in the debate, the phrase here translated as "predominant element" (so chu) starts to become important. "Chu is ambiguous, since its meaning can shift in differing contexts from something that one makes the "main or controlling thing" (chu) to something that is the "main or controlling thing." Kobong's idea is that Mencius and Tzu Ssu were making different points, so naturally what each made the main center of attention was different. T'oegye, however, is concerned with the existential foundation for the distinction; without this, it becomes essentially verbal, which he is unwilling to accept. Consequently, although he likewise speaks at times of the matter of intent and focus of attention, his tendency is to see chu more in terms of existential condition than a state of mind. A similar ambiguity extends to the use of the term in the Yulgok-Ugye round of the debate as well. In this translation, ch'i is consistently rendered as "predominant," accompanied by "element," "factor," "thing," and so on, as may best suit the context. The intention throughout is to preserve as far as possible the ambiguity of the original text rather than bring out clearly what I understand to be the author's intention in a particular passage, for the ambiguity itself has played a significant role in the unfolding of this controversy.

On the Fifth Section

A13a

The points you make in this section are all extremely subtle and finely drawn; how could I venture to discuss it further? Nevertheless, there remain aspects to be discussed that may advance us yet further. Master Chu says:

Before there is any particular material force, there already is a particular nature; in the case of material force, there can be non-existence, but the nature, on the contrary, is always there. Although it may at a given time be present in the midst of material force, nevertheless the material force is material force and the nature is the nature; they do not become mixed. ¹⁴

Kobong's Response to T'oegye's Letter

And again he says:

As for the nature that is the Heavenly Mandate, if it were not for the material endowment, it would have no place to reside. That being the case, since in man's material endowment there are differences of clearer and coarser, more one-sided and more proper, therefore when it comes to the properness of the Heavenly Mandate [i.e., the nature] there likewise are the differences between the shallower and the more profound, the liberal and illiberal. One must recognize that one cannot but also call this condition the nature. ¹⁵

And again he says:

As for cases where the Heavenly Mandate is described as the nature, this is the nature in its literally fundamental and original condition. ¹⁶

[T'oegye accepts all these quotes, A34b]

And again he says:

In the case of Mencius, he has singled out the nature and described it in its original condition. As for L—ch'uan [Ch'eng I], he included the physical endowment and says essentially they are inseparable. ¹⁷

[T'oegye raises questions, A43b]

And again he says: "The thesis regarding the physical nature arose from the Ch'engs and Chang [Tsai]." ¹¹⁸

Looking at these few paragraphs, I feel that what are called the "nature of Heaven and Earth" and the "physical nature" are extremely clear and that the differences and similarities in what is said by [Tzu] Ssu, Mencius, the Ch'engs, and Chang [Tsai] can be seen. And again Master Chu says:

That whereby Heaven and Earth produce creatures is principle; its [actually] producing the creatures is a matter of the vital and physical stuff [of the universe, i.e., material force]. Men and other creatures must receive this psychophysical endowment in
order to have concrete form, and principle being in its midst is thereby called "the nature."\(^{115}\)

This takes up the case of Heaven and Earth and men and other creatures and applies the distinction of principle and material force; this certainly does not pose any problem as regards each one [i.e., principle and material force] being a single [distinct] thing. But if one takes up the case of the nature for discussion, what is called "the physical nature" is just this principle in the condition of having descended into the midst of material force, that is all; it's not that there is another separate nature.

If this is so, then when one discusses the nature and speaks of the original nature and the physical nature, it is not the same as the case of distinguishing principle and material force in the discussion of Heaven and Earth and man and other creatures, in which [principle and material force] each itself remains a single thing. For the [same] single nature is spoken of differently depending on what it is in [i.e., whether it is considered with or without the limitation of the psychophysical endowment], that is all.

When it comes to discussing the feelings, they issue as feelings only after the original nature has descended into the psychophysical endowment. Therefore, they are characterized as combining principle and material force and having both good and evil, and when they become actively manifest, as a matter of course, there are those that issue from principle and likewise those that issue from material force. But although there is nothing impermissible in distinguishing them in this way, if one is to make a precise determination of the matter, then it likewise seems that [this way of speaking] is not without problems. All the more is this the case if one distinguishes the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings in terms of principle and material force, for the Seven Feelings are not spoken of with exclusive reference to material force. I especially feel that the details of this point are not yet satisfactory.

[T'oegye disagrees, A38b]

Kobong raises a difficult point here; it reflects a tension inherent in Chu Hsi's synthesis, which might be described as a "dualistic monism." On the monistic side, li and ki are described as so perfectly complementary that they amount to almost two distinguishable aspects of a single entity, li describing the formativ/normative aspect and ki accounting for concreteness, particularity, and activity. Clearly, no real existence, including actually occurring feelings, can but combine both these aspects. On the dualistic side, in order to preserve the Mencian doctrine of a good human nature not only as in abstraction but as an existential basis for the practice of self-cultivation, there is the doctrine that even though "li is in the midst of ki as the nature," li and ki are never admitted. In the light of this, the "original nature" is real, not abstract, but at the same time it exists and functions only in conjunction with ki. Kobong interprets this to mean that li and ki each invariably plays their own distinctive roles in the arising of all feelings. When he says that one may speak loosely of feelings that issue from li and feelings that issue from ki, what he means is simply that good feelings manifest the purity of the nature, whereas evil or mixed feelings reflect the imperfections of ki. T'oegye will not settle for this because it seems to leave ki as the final controlling factor and leaves no existential role for the profoundly and normatively human feelings spoken of by Mencius.

On the Sixth Section

I would suggest that these paragraphs superbly discuss what it is that makes the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings as they are. Truly this is the most important part of the entire essay. However, since it draws too sharp a distinction between principle and material force, what it considers a matter of material force is no longer spoken of in terms of the mixture of principle and material force, but rather refers exclusively to material force. As a result, the thesis becomes overly one-sided.

[T'oegye agrees, A34a]

Now I beg your leave to discuss first the fact that the Seven Feelings are not exclusively a matter of material force; after that, we can try to comprehend the matter [looking at your text] line by line. The Doctrine of the Mean [chap. 1] remarks:

Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are
Otherwise, why did Master Chu say that pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are feelings, and the state before they are aroused is the nature? Furthermore, why did he say that feelings are the issuance of the nature?

[T'oegye disagrees, A39b]
Your argument states: “Pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy . . . emerge [occasioned by external circumstances].” [Cf. A4a]
My humble position is: The sentence “External things contact the form and cause a movement internally” comes from [Ch’eng I’s] essay on “[Yen Hui’s] Love of Learning.” However, if we examine the original text, it says: “As the form has already been engendered, when external things touch the form they cause a movement internally. When there is an internal movement the Seven Feelings emerge.” When it says “cause a movement internally,” and then says “there is an internal movement,” it is referring to the arousing of the mind-and-heart. When the mind-and-heart is aroused, the desires of the nature emerge; these are what we call feelings. This being the case, when feelings appear externally, they may seem to be occasioned by circumstantial conditions, but in fact they issue from within.

[T'oegye concedes, A34a]
Your argument states: “As for the issuance of the Four Beginnings . . . [it is] the commencement [of the active manifestation of the nature].” [Cf. A4b]
My humble position is: Both the Four Beginnings and the Seven Feelings issue from the mind-and-heart. Since the mind-and-heart is a conjunction of principle and material force, feelings certainly combine both principle and material force. It is not the case that there is a particular distinctive kind of feelings that only issues from principle and not from material force. This point truly calls for one to distinguish the genuine from the false.

[T'oegye disagrees with the implications Kobong sees here, A39b]
Your argument states: “As for the issuance of the Seven Feelings . . . [it is the systematic outgrowth of physical form].” [Cf. A4b]
My humble position is: The Record of Music states: “Humans are born quiet; this is the nature conferred by Heaven. When it is stirred by things and moves, these are the desires of the nature.”

Master Chu says, “The ‘desires of the nature’ are what we call feelings.” That being the case, ‘feelings’ being stirred by things and moving is a natural principle. For it is because there really is a given principle within that there is a match with the stimulus given externally; it’s not that there is originally no such principle within, but upon the approach of an external thing, there is a fortuitous match and [the mind-and-heart] is aroused and moves.

Since this is so, I am afraid that the sentence “When external things approach, that which is most susceptible to stimulus and the first to move is our physical form” does not express [any unique character of] the Seven Feelings. If we are to discuss the matter in terms of being aroused by things and then moving, the Four Beginnings are exactly the same. When the stimulus is a child about to fall into a well, then the principle of humanity automatically responds, and the disposition of commiseration is thereby formed. When the stimulus is passing by a shrine or the court, the principle of propriety automatically responds, and a disposition of reverence is thereby formed. In being aroused by things, these are no different from the Seven Feelings.

[T'oegye disagrees with Kobong’s conclusions, A39b]
Your argument states: “It does not make sense to say that [the Seven Feelings are within us . . . the original substance of principle.” [Cf. A4b]
My humble position is: When it is within, it is definitely pure Heavenly Principle. However, at that time it can only be called the nature; it cannot be called the feelings. But the moment it is aroused, it becomes feelings, with the differentiation of harmonious and unharmonious. For in the not-yet-aroused state, it is exclusively principle, but when it is aroused, it mounts material force to become active. Master Chu’s treatise “On Origination, Flourishing, Benefiting, and Firmness” states: “Origination, flourishing, benefiting, and firmness are nature; production, growth, harvest, and storage are the feelings.” And again he says: “Humanity, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are the nature; commiseration,
shame and dislike [for evil], deference and compliance, and the sense of right and wrong are feelings."
Indeed, in his treating production, growth, harvest, and storage as feelings, we can see the fact of mounting on material force to be active, and so the Four Beginnings are likewise a matter of material force.

[T'oegye disagrees with Kobong's conclusions, A40b]

A17a

It is also stated in Master Chu's answers to his students that commiseration is material force, but that whereby we are capable of commiserating in such a way is principle." This statement is particularly clear, but it refers only to the case of the feelings' issuance when material force is compliant; it does not involve the element of error from the turbulence and confusion [because of imperfect material force].

In your letter, you characterize the Seven Feelings as arising from circumstantial conditions and being aroused by our physical form. I feel uneasy about these assertions. And I find your reference to [the Seven Feelings as] externally stimulated by physical form and so not the original substance of principle particularly unacceptable. In that case, the Seven Feelings would be something external to the nature, and Tzu Ssu's reference to them as harmonious would be wrong.

But there is something even more out of line: Mencius's feeling of joy to the extent that he could not fall asleep was indeed joy. Shun's punishment of the four criminals was anger. Confucius's mourning cry was sorrow. When Min-tzu, Tzu-lu, Jan-yu, and Tzu-kung were in attendance upon him and the Master was pleased, that was indeed pleasure. How could these cases not be the original substance of principle? And if one examines the cases of ordinary people, there are also times when Heavenly Principle is manifest. For instance, when they see their parents and relatives, they spontaneously feel joyful; when they see death, mourning, sickness, and pain, they suddenly feel sad. How can this not be a matter of the original substance of principle? If these cases are all the effects of physical form, then physical form does not have anything to do with the nature or the feelings. Could that be possible?

[T'oegye responds, A43b]

A17b

Your argument states: "The Four Beginnings are all good . . .

It is possible [for the Seven Feelings] to be good." [Cf. A4b]
My humble opinion is: This is precisely what Master [Li] Yen-p'ing referred to when he said the Mencian theory originated from Tzu Ssu [cf. A15a].

Your argument states: "As for the Seven Feelings, good and evil [are not fixed] . . . [after they issue and are perfectly measured] they may be called harmonious." [Cf. A4b]
My humble opinion is: Master Ch'eng says, "Before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused, how could they not be good? After they are aroused and have attained perfect measure, in every respect they are nothing but good." Therefore, the Four Beginnings are certainly all good, and the Seven Feelings are all good. Only if they fall to attain due measure after they have been aroused will they lean toward one side and become evil. How could it be said that good and evil are not yet fixed?!

[T'oegye concedes, A34a]

Now if you say, "Good and evil are not yet determined," and further say, "If as soon as we have them but are not able to exercise discernment, the mind-and-heart will not attain its proper condition. And only after they have issued with proper measure can they be called harmonious," then the Seven Feelings are quite superfluous and useless. And what's more, when they have issued but not yet attained perfect measure, what are you going to term them?

[T'oegye disagrees, A44b]

A18a

And the words "as soon as we have them but are not able to exercise discernment" come from [Master Chu's] Commentary on the Great Learning, chapter 7; its meaning is that as for the four feelings—anger, fear, pleasure, and worry—they should just arise anew [each time]; they may not have a prior fixed place in the mind-and-heart. In the [Ta hsiæ] huo wen it says:

Joy and anger, worry and fear are responses to stimuli. Beauty or filthiness, bending down or looking up are based upon things' physical endowments and are functions of the mind. How could there just be some that do not come out correctly? Only in the occurrence of affairs, if there are matters that are not discerned, then as for the response to them, unavoidably sometimes there
will be mistakes and moreover times when one cannot but be carried away with them. Then as for joy and anger, worry and fear, there must first be a movement internally, and then there may be cases in which they do not attain their correct proportions, that is all.*

This is a matter that pertains to the rectification of the mind-and-heart; quoting it as evidence with regards to the Seven Feelings is a different matter.

[T’oegeye disagrees, A45a]

Indeed, having repeatedly analyzed the explanations in your letter not only with respect to precision, but checking it against what the sages and worthies meant and finding such differences, then as for the statement “On the basis of their point of origin reference to each has its distinctive focus and emphasis,” although there seems to be room for doubt, I suspect that in fact it is all inappropriate.

[T’oegeye disagrees, 45b]

T’oegeye and Kobong agree that a differing focus and emphasis are involved in the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings, but Kobong clearly sees T’oegeye’s intent to root such difference in some kind of an existential difference, “their point of origin.” This is the crux of their disagreement.

A18b

That being the case, then as for the statements that the Four Beginnings are a matter of principle and the Seven Feelings are a matter of material force, how can we just say that they involve nothing impermissible? All the more so since this argument is not just a matter of impermissible terminology, but rather, I suspect that with respect to the reality of the nature and the feelings and the practical application to preserving [one’s inborn good dispositions] and exercising reflection [in activity], in all these respects it has impermissible [implications]. What do you think about it?

On the Seventh Section

I do not have any [special] insight; I just based myself on what was meant by former explanations to the effect that the Four Beginnings mounted material force and the Seven Feelings proceed from the nature. And when you concede [on these grounds] that I have insight into the interdependence and inseparability of principle and material force, I certainly cannot live up to it, and my meaning really is not centered on that aspect of things. In this respect, I fear that your words have missed the mark.

As for my statement that the Four Beginnings and Seven Feelings have, from the start, never meant two different things [cf. A2b], my reasoning was that if one says the Four Beginnings are the same reality with a different name as the Seven Feelings when they issue forth and are perfectly measured, then if one pursues them back to their root and origin, I believe that two different things are not intended, that is all. How could I regard them as originally with absolutely no difference of meaning? If I were to characterize them as having absolutely no difference of meaning, would that not be out of line with what was intended by the sages and worthies?

[T’oegeye disagrees with Kobong’s implications, A41b]

A19a

On the Eighth Section

Everything you discuss in this section has to do with the essence of the proper approach to reading books and investigating principle. How could I venture to do anything but accept it and attentively follow it!

On the Ninth Section

Since these passages all are based on [the authority of] the ancient explanations of former Confucians, they are certainly beyond criticism. But there was included a phrase “one-sidedly referring exclusively to the material force aspect” [A5b], which seems to me not yet quite suitable. For if it is referred to as the nature, then even though it may have descended into the psychophysical endowment, one may not exclusively categorize it as material force.

[T’oegeye concedes, A34a]