



THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

by

Confucius



THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

The *Doctrine of the Mean* is somewhat longer than the *Great Learning*: it is usually edited in 33 sections, but the arrangement is different in this translation, which divides it into ten longer sections, with subsections (the divisions should be considered somewhat experimental). The title literally means, “the central ordinary,” a puzzling idea. In fact, the notion of “ordinariness” is important to the text: one of its key points is that morality is a characteristic feature of ordinary, everyday spontaneity (whose ideas does this resemble?).

This term “ordinary,” as a noun (“the ordinary”), is the same term that we encountered as “ordinary practice” in a key passage of Zhuangzi’s “Seeing Things as Equal” (Section 8), which reads, “Things cannot have any completeness or impairment – all are in the final analysis comprehended as one. Only the person of full attainment knows how to comprehend them as one. He affirms no ‘this is it.’ His affirmation is lodged in *ordinary practice*. Ordinary practice means use; use is comprehension; to comprehend is to grasp – once you grasp it you’re nearly there!” One way to approach the very Confucian “Doctrine of the Mean” is to ask whether there are areas of convergence between it and the *Zhuangzi*.

The opening passages of the “Doctrine” (Section I) introduce a cluster of key terms – Tian, *xing* (human nature), Dao, “centrality” (or, “equilibrium”), and harmony – that play important roles throughout the text. The message of the “Doctrine” concerns the way in which a person can become a Sage through maintaining the centrality and harmony characteristic of the Dao and of our Tian-endowed nature (is this a Mencian or Xunzi School text?).

To this group of concepts, the text adds another key ethical notion: “perfect genuineness,” which is the focus of Section VI (the term appears in the *Great Learning* as well). “Perfect genuineness” is an inadequate translation of a term that denotes a type of perfection, or ethical perfection, that characterizes both the action of Heaven, or Tian (as Nature and, perhaps, as the divine teleology of Nature) and of the Sage (the term is more commonly translated as “sincerity”). We will concentrate in class on this portion of the text, and it should be the focus of your reading attention.

When preparing for class, pay special attention to the following sections, in addition to Section VI: Sections I, II, III, VII. The typographical arrangement of the text is for purposes of clarity only; the text is generally unrhymed; it is not a poem.

In discussing this text in class, I will be laying great stress on the congruence between the metaphysics of the text – particularly its implied ontology – and its ethics. As you read, ask yourself: How does the “Doctrine” picture the relation of man and Tian? To what degree does this text’s Tian represent “Nature?” And how, if Tian and “Nature” (in some sense) *are* closely linked, does the text picture the way in which the Sage understands Nature?

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN (*Zhongyong* 中庸)

CONTENTS

- Section I: The source of the center.**
Section II: Cleaving to the central mean.
Section III: The common basis of the Dao
Section IV: Confucius on the sages.
Section V: On government.
Section VI: Perfect genuineness.
Section VII: The creativity of nature.
Section VIII: The Dao of the Sage
Section IX: The Dao of the ruling *junzi*.
Section X: The sage's power of virtue.
Section XI: The invisibility of ultimate greatness.

Section I: The source of the center.

That which is ordained by Tian* is called our nature;
to lead by our nature is called the Dao;
to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching.

One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant;
that from which one may deviate is not the Dao.

Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see,
is fearful about what he does not hear.

Nothing is more visible than the obscure,
nothing is plainer than the subtle.

Hence, the *junzi* is cautious when he is alone.

Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy:
before they emerge they are called centered;
emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious.

Centered: this is the great root of the world.

Harmonious: this is the ultimate Dao of the world.

Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper
places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.

* Where *tian* appears to represent a spiritual deity, the term is rendered here as Tian. Where it seems to denote the sky or is used in the compounds "heaven and earth" or "Son of Heaven" (king), it is rendered "heaven." The terms *junzi* (the exemplar of moral human excellence) and *ren* (utmost moral excellence) are left untranslated.

Section II: Cleaving to the central mean.

1. Confucius said,
 The *junzi* keeps to the mean in action;
 the small man reverses the mean in action.
 The mean of the *junzi* is such that he is always exact in his timeliness;
 the reversal of the mean of the small man is such that he will
 scruple at nothing.

2. The Master said,
 The mean in action is the ultimate! Few of the people can long
 cleave to it.

3. The Master said,
 That the Dao will not be put into practice, I know it.
 The wise go beyond it and the ignorant do not reach it.
 That the Dao will not be made brilliant, I know it.
 The worthy go beyond it and the unworthy do not reach it.
 No one does not eat, but few can know the taste.

4. The Master said,
 The Dao is not put into practice.

5. The Master said,
 How great was the wisdom of Shun!
 Shun loved to ask questions and loved to inquire into teachings near at hand.
 He put evil in the shadow and raised up good.
 He grasped both ends, but employed the center in ruling the people –
 Was this not Shun!

6. The Master said,
 Men all say, “I am wise.”
 Drive them into a net or catch them tumbling into a trap;
 none knows how to evade them!
 Men all say, “I am wise.”
 But let them choose the mean in action and none can keep to it
 for a round month!

7. The Master said,
 Yan Hui was a man who, having chosen to cleave to the mean in action,
 would clutch any point of goodness tight in his fist, press it to his heart

and never lose it.

8. The Master said,
 One may level all the states of the world,
 decline high rank and salary,
 tread upon naked blades,
 and yet be unable to cleave to the mean in action.

9. Zilu asked about strength. The Master said,
 The strength of the South or the strength of the North?
 Or do you mean your type of strength?

Instructing through leniency, not responding in kind to unjust acts:

such is the strength of the South

– the *junzi* dwells in this.

To sleep in one's armor, to die unflinchingly: such is the strength of the North

– your type of strong man dwells in this.

The *junzi* acts harmoniously but does not join in vulgarity

– the strength of the strong!

He stands at the center and does not lean

– the strength of the strong!

When the state possesses the Dao, he is unchanged from when his way was blocked

– the strength of the strong!

When the state is without the Dao, he remains unchanged even though it means death

– the strength of the strong!

10. The Master said,
 Those who seek to live in hiding and practice strange arts will still be spoken of in
 later ages
 – but I do not do these things.
 A *junzi* may guide his way with respect to the Dao and fall by the wayside halfway
 – but I cannot cease.
 A *junzi* may cleave to the mean in action by fleeing from the world to live
 unknown and feel no regret
 – but only a sage could do so.

Section III: The common basis of the Dao.

1. The Dao of the *junzi* is broad yet hidden.
 Any husband or wife may partake in knowledge of it,

yet reaching to its ultimate nature,
 there is that which even the sage does not know of it.
 Even an unworthy husband or wife may practice of it,
 yet reaching to its ultimate nature,
 there is that which even the sage cannot act of it.

Heaven and earth are great indeed,
 yet there are still those things which lead men to despair in them.

So it is that when the *junzi* speaks of what is great,
 there is nothing in the world that can bear it up;
 yet when he speaks of what is small,
 there is nothing in the world that can split it.

The *Poetry* says,

*The kite flies high, striking the heavens;
 The fish leap in the abyssal depths.*

That is to say that both high and low are fully delved.

The Dao of the *junzi* forges its basis on the common husband and wife;
 yet reaching to its ultimate nature, it delves into heaven and earth.

2. The Master said,

The Dao does not depart far from man.

If a man creates a *dao* that departs far from others, it cannot be
 taken as the Dao.

The *Poetry* says,

*When cutting an axe handle,
 The model is never far.*

Say you hold an axe handle to cut an axe handle and glance aside at the handle in
 your grasp

– it would be like taking this to be distant.

The *junzi* governs men by means of what is human;
 once they have reformed, he stops.

Devotion and reciprocity are not far from the Dao.

If you would be unwilling to have something done to you,
 do not do it to others.

There are four aspects to the Dao of the *junzi*:
 not one am I able to fulfill!

To serve my father with that which I seek from my son

– I cannot do it!
 To serve my ruler with that seek from my subordinates
 – I cannot do it!
 To serve my elders with that which I seek from my juniors
 – I cannot do it!
 To first practice towards my friends what I seek from them
 – I cannot do it!

In the practice of common virtue, in exercising care in normal speech,
 if you fall short, dare not fail to exert yourself;
 if you overstep, do not carry on to the end.
 In speaking, look to your action.
 In action, look towards your speech.
 How can a *junzi* fail to be ever alert!

3. The *junzi* simply acts according to his natural place;
 he does not long for what is outside of it.
 If he is naturally in a position of wealth and high status,
 he acts according to the norms of wealth and high status.
 If he is naturally in a position of poverty and low status,
 he acts according to the norms of poverty and low status.
 If he is naturally placed among the nomad tribes,
 he acts according to the norms of the nomad tribes.
 If he is naturally placed amidst confusion and trouble,
 he acts as is appropriate for times of confusion and trouble.
 There is no situation in which the *junzi* is not fully self-possessed.

When in high position, do not be arrogant towards those below.
 When in low position, do not prevail upon those above.
 Make yourself upright and do not seek what you wish in others,
 then you will encounter no resentments.
 Above, do not bear resentment towards Tian;
 below do not blame men.

Hence the *junzi* dwells in what is simple, awaiting his destiny.
 The small man engages in precipitous practices
 in search of a lucky fortune.

The Master said,
 There is in archery that which resembles the *junzi*.
 Should one miss the target, he seeks for the cause
 within himself.

4. The Dao of the *junzi* may be compared to the saying that a distant journey must begin from nearby, that a climb to great heights must begin from below.

The *Poetry* says,

*Wife and children in loving cooperation,
It is like plucking the zither strings.
Brothers all in unison.
In happy harmony and joy.
How sound is your household!
Take joy in your wife and children.*

The Master said, “How these parents have acted in accord!”

5. The Master said,

How abundant is the virtue of ghosts and spirits!
You look at them and do not see,
listen to them and do not hear,
yet they inhabit affairs without exception.
They make all the people of the world fast and don ritual robes
in offering up sacrifices.
Thrilling, how they seem to hover above,
how they seem to be at every side.

The *Poetry* says,

*The arrival of the spirits
Cannot be anticipated,
Much less may one be remiss.*

The plain clarity of the subtle

– in just this way perfect genuineness cannot be obscured.

Section IV: Confucius on the sages.

1. The Master said,

Did not Shun fulfill great filiality?
His virtue was that of a sage,
he was exalted as the Son of Heaven,
his wealth was the possession of all within the four seas,
his ancestors were feasted by him at the clan shrines
and his descendants protected them.

Thus it is that great virtue
 inevitably gains its proper position,
 inevitably gains its proper stipend,
 inevitably gains its proper fame,
 inevitably gains its proper longevity.

Thus it is that when Tian gives birth to a thing it treats it with generosity
 according to its potential.
 Hence when plants are cultivated they should be nurtured,
 but when they lean askance, they should be cut down.

The *Poetry* says,

*The junzi of great goodness,
 How abundant his fine virtue!
 Fit for the people, fit for all others,
 He receives his stipend from Tian
 Which protects and assists him with the mandate
 Extended from Tian.*

Thus great virtue inevitably receives the mandate.

2. The Master said,

Utterly without cares: would this not characterize King Wen?
 His father was King Ji; his son was King Wu.
 His father initiated it; his son continued it.

King Wu extended the thread from King Tai, King Ji, and King Wen.
 As soon as he donned the clothes of war the world was his.
 His brilliant fame in the world was never diminished,
 he was exalted as the Son of Heaven,
 his wealth was the possession of all within the four seas,
 his ancestors were feasted by him at the clan shrines
 and his descendants protected them.

In the end, King Wu received the Mandate.

The Duke of Zhou perfected the virtue of Wen and Wu.

He conferred posthumous royal titles on King Tai and King Ji,
 and in sacrifices to the former lords he employed
 the rituals for the Son of Heaven.

This rule was then extended to the patrician lords,
 the grandees, and the common people:
 If the father is a grandee and the son a mere knight,
 bury the father as a grandee,

sacrifice to him as a knight.
 If the father is a knight and the son a grandee,
 bury the father as a knight,
 sacrifice to him as a grandee.

The mourning period of a year was extended to all grandees.
 The mourning period of three years applied to the Son of Heaven.
 But when mourning a parent, there are no distinctions of rank:
 all are the same.

3. The Master said,

King Wu and the Duke of Zhou, were they not of ultimate filiality!
 The filial son extends well the intentions of his father
 and carries on his father's affairs.
 In spring and autumn he repairs the ancestral shrines,
 sets out the ancestral vessels,
 lays out the ancestral robes,
 and offers up the food of the season.

The rituals of the ancestral shrines are the means of ordering the
 lines of descent, alternating the generations of *zhao* and *mu*.^{*}
 The ordering of ritual ranks
 distinguishes the exalted from the humble.
 In ordering the ceremonial affairs,
 distinctions reflect degrees of worthiness.
 In the rituals of toasting, superiors toast inferiors,
 extending the rites to the humble.
 In the closing banquet the white-haired take the places of honor
 to represent ordering by age.

To occupy his post,
 to carry out his rituals,
 to perform his music,
 to respect what he honored,
 to love what he cherished,
 to treat the dead as one treats the living,
 to treat the departed as one treats those who remain,
 This is the ultimate of filiality.

The suburban rite of sacrifice ministers to the Lord on High;

^{*} Zhou shrines separated lineages into alternating generations called *zhao* and *mu*. The significance of this practice is not fully understood.

the rituals of the ancestral shrines minister to one's forbears.
 He who comprehends the rite of the suburban sacrifice
 or the meaning of the great spring and autumn sacrifices
 can rule a state as though it lay in his palm.

Section V: On government.

1. Duke Ai of Lu inquired about governing. The Master said,
 The governance of Wen and Wu is laid out in the bound records.
 When men such as these live, such governance is implemented;
 after they die it withers away.
 It is the Dao of humankind to be quick at government as
 the Dao of earth is to be quick at growing things.
 Governments grow like rushes.

The success of a government thus lies in the men it chooses.
 In selecting men, judge by your own person.
 Refine your person by means of the Dao.
 Refine the Dao by means of *ren*.

Ren (仁) means a man (*ren* 人):*

cleaving to one's kin is its foremost element.

Righteousness (*yi* 義) means appropriate (*yi* 宜):**

honoring the worthy is its foremost element.

The degrees that govern cleaving to one's kin
 and the ranks that govern honoring the worthy
 are the things that give birth to ritual.

Hence the *junzi* cannot fail to refine his person:

intending to refine his person,

he cannot fail to minister to his parents;

intending to minister to his parents,

he cannot fail to understand others;

intending to understand others,

he cannot fail to understand Tian.

There are five things that extend throughout the world
 and three means of practicing them:

ruler and minister;

father and son;

*The two words are etymologically related homonyms. (*Ren*, untranslated here, denotes humane dispositions in this Mencian text.)

**These are also related homonyms, though their modern graphs are dissimilar.

husband and wife;
 elder and younger brother;
 friend meeting friend.

These five form a universal Dao for the world.

Wisdom, *ren*, valor.

These three form the universal virtues for the world.

There is but a single means of putting them into practice.

Some are born understanding it,
 some study to understand it,
 some come to understand it only through crisis.

But once they understand it, they are all one.

Some practice it through natural ease,
 some practice it to benefit thereby,
 some practice it by forcing themselves.

But once they succeed by means of it, they are all one.

2. The Master said,

Loving learning is close to wisdom.

Assiduous practice is close to *ren*.

Knowing shame is close to valor.

He who knows these three things knows how to refine his person.

He who knows how to refine his person knows how to rule others,

He who knows how to rule others knows how to rule the states of the world.

There are nine canons for ruling the states of the world:

refine your person,
 honor the worthy,
 cleave to your kin,
 respect high ministers,
 empathize with all officers,
 treat the common people as your children,
 attract the skilled craftsmen,
 treat those distant from you with gentleness,
 cherish the patrician lords.

When your person is refined the Dao is established;
 when you honor the worthy you become free from confusion;
 when you cleave to your kin, your father, uncles, and brothers
 will have no complaint against you;
 when you respect high ministers you will not be deceived;
 when you empathize with all your officers

knights will respond with great ritual courtesies;
 when you treat the common people as your children
 the people will be exhort one another;
 when you attract the skilled craftsmen you will have a sufficiency of goods;
 when you treat those distant from you with gentleness
 the four quarters will flock to you;
 when you cherish the patrician lords then the world will be in awe of you.

Fasting and purification, the ritual robes, no movement not in accord with *li*:
 this is the means to purify your person.

Ridding yourself of flatterers and keeping sexual attractions at a distance,
 treating goods as cheap and virtue as dear:
 this is the means to encourage the worthy.

Exalting their positions and providing generous emoluments,
 loving and hating as they love and hate:
 this is the means to encourage your kin.

Well staffed offices with adequate responsibilities:
 this is the means to encourage high ministers.

Devotion and trustworthiness, generous emoluments:
 this is the means to encourage knights.

Seasonable labor service and light taxation:
 this is the means to encourage the common people.

Daily supervision and monthly reviews, provisions corresponding to works,
 this is the means to encourage skilled craftsmen.

Welcoming them when they come and sending them off well when they depart,
 with praise for their accomplishments and compassion for their inabilities:
 this is the means to be gentle with those distant.

Restoring lines of broken succession and reviving abolished states,
 ordering chaos and supporting those in danger,
 setting regular times for their visits to court,
 asking they bring little when they come and sending them off with much:
 this is the means of cherishing the patrician lords.

These are all the nine canons for ruling the states of the world.
 There is but a single means of putting them all into practice.

3. In all things, when plans are well laid, stand by them;
 when they are not, discard them.

When words are settled in advance there is no stumbling.

When affairs are settled in advance there are no tight straits.

When actions are settled in advance there is no flaw.

When the Dao is settled in advance it is inexhaustible.

Section VI: Perfect genuineness.

1. If those in inferior positions do not gain the trust of their superiors, the people cannot be ruled.

There is a Dao to gaining the trust of superiors:

if you are not faithful to friends,
you will not gain the trust of your superiors.

There is a Dao to being faithful to friends:

if you are not obedient to your parents,
you will not be faithful to friends.

There is a Dao to being obedient to your parents:

if in reflecting upon yourself you are not perfectly genuine,
you will not be obedient to your parents.

There is a Dao to perfecting your genuineness:

if you are not enlightened about the good,
you will not perfect your genuineness.

2. Perfect genuineness is the Dao of Tian.
Making things perfectly genuine is the Dao of humankind.

One who is perfectly genuine hits the mark without effort,
succeeds without forethought.

To keep to the center of the Dao at perfect ease
is to be a sage.

One who makes things perfectly genuine is one who
chooses the good and invariably grasps it tight.

3. Study broadly,
inquire probingly,
contemplate carefully,
distinguish clearly,
practice sincerely.

If there remain things unstudied, do not act upon what you have
not mastered.

If there remain things unprobed, do not act upon what you do not
understand.

If there remain things un contemplated, do not act upon what you
have not grasped.

If there remain aspects undistinguished, do not act upon what is not

clear to you.

If there remain aspects unpracticed, do not act upon what you cannot sincerely do.

When others can do one, demand that you do one hundred;
when others can do ten, demand that you do one thousand.

He who fully masters this Dao
though ignorant shall surely become enlightened,
though weak shall surely become strong.

4. Spontaneously genuine in its enlightenment:
it is this that we refer to as our nature.
Spontaneously enlightening us about genuineness:
it is this that we refer to as the teaching.

If one is perfectly genuine one will be enlightened.
If one is enlightened then one will be perfectly genuine.

5. Only those in the world who are perfectly genuine to the utmost
can exhaust their natures.
Those who can exhaust their natures
can exhaust others' natures.
Those who can exhaust others' natures
can exhaust the natures of things.
Those who can exhaust the natures of things
can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian.
Those who can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian
can form a triad with heaven and earth.

The next best is to master a single aspect.

If one can perfect genuineness in one aspect,
that genuineness will appear in one's form;
appearing in one's form it will become plain;
becoming plain it will shine forth;
shining forth it will move;
moving it will responsively change;
responsively changing it will transform things.

Only those in the world who are perfectly genuine to the utmost can transform things.

6. Through the Dao of being perfectly genuine one may possess foreknowledge.
When a state is about to flourish, there must be auspicious omens.
When a state is about to perish, there must be omens of its demise.

These appear in milfoil and turtle shell;
they course through the four limbs.

When blessings or disasters are about to arrive,
if it is good, he will surely know it first;
if it is bad, he will surely know it first.
Hence the utmost of perfect genuineness resembles the spirits.

7. Perfect genuineness spontaneously completes things;
the Dao spontaneously guides them.
Perfect genuineness is the cycle of things ending and beginning anew.
Without genuineness there would be no things.

For this reason the *junzi* treats perfect genuineness as of greatest value.

Perfect genuineness is not merely the perfection of oneself;
it is the means of perfecting all things.

Perfecting oneself is *ren*.

Perfecting things is wisdom.

It is the virtue of our nature to conjoin the Dao of inner and outer;
hence it is applied with the appropriateness of timeliness.

Hence the utmost of perfect genuineness never ceases.

Never ceasing, it endures.

Enduring, it is manifest.

Manifest, it reaches distant.

Reaching distant, it is broad and deep.

Broad and deep, it is high and bright.

Broad and deep is that which bears all things.

High and bright is that which covers all things.

Distant and enduring is that which completes things.

Broad and deep, complementing earth.

High and bright, complementing heaven.

Distant and enduring: without end.

One who is like this
glimmers though unseen,
changes though unmoving,
achieves though taking no action (*wuwei*).

Section VII: The creativity of nature.

1. The Dao of heaven and earth may be thoroughly described in a single phrase:
As a thing, it possesses no duality,
hence the way it gives birth to things cannot be fathomed.

The Dao of heaven and earth
 is broad,
 is deep,
 is high, is
 bright, is
 distant,
 is enduring.

2. Now, heaven is but the composite of many tiny lights,
 but when it extends to its endlessness,
 it suspends the sun, moon, planets, and stars,
 and the world of things covered by it.

Now, the earth is but the composite of many pinches of soil,
 but when it extends to its breadth and depth,
 it carries Hua Peak upon it without its being heavy,
 it bears the rivers and seas upon it without their leaking away,
 and all the world of things is borne upon it.

Now, a mountain is but the composite of many round stones,
 but as it grows to its breadth and greatness,
 grasses and trees are born upon it,
 birds and beasts dwell upon it,
 and precious jewels arise within it.

Now, a river is but the composite of many dipperfuls of water,
 but as it reaches its unfathomable depths,
 turtles and lizards, dragons and fish are born within it,
 and goods are increased by sailing above it.

3. The *Poetry* says,

The Mandate of Tian,

Oh, how endless!

Surely speaking of the manner in which Tian is heavenly.

Oh, glimmering!

The purity of King Wen's virtue!

Surely meaning that the manner in which King Wen was patterned
 lay in endless purity.

Section VIII: The Dao of the sage.

How great is the Dao of the sage!
 Brimming, it nurtures the things of the world,
 and towering, reaches the pole of heaven.
 Enormous in its hugeness!

The ceremonies of *li* number three hundred
 and the ceremonies of etiquette number three thousand:
 All await the right man before they can be put into practice.

Thus it is said,
 If one does not extend virtue,
 the ultimate Dao will not coalesce therein.
 Hence the *junzi* honors his virtuous nature
 and takes learning as his Dao.
 He extends to the broadest expanse
 and exhausts the essence of the minute.
 He reaches to the pole of the high and bright
 and takes the mean in action as his Dao.
 He breathes warmth into the old and understands the new,
 and is deeply sincere in his exaltation of *li*.

Thus when he occupies the superior role he is not arrogant,
 and in the inferior role he is not insubordinate.
 When the state possesses the Dao,
 his counsel can raise it up high.
 When the state does not possess the Dao,
 his silence can accommodate it.
 The *Poetry* says,

*Both bright and shining,
 so guarding his person.*

Does it not mean precisely this?

Section IX: The Dao of the ruling junzi.

1. The Master said,
 Ignorant yet fond of acting by his own lights;
 of low station yet fond of relying only on himself;
 born in this generation and returning to the Dao of old:
 disaster will surely reach such as these.
2. If one is not the Son of Heaven,
 one does not argue matters of *li*,

one does not delineate a system of rules and measures,
one does not make assessments of patterns of culture.

In the world today,^{*}
carts are identical in axle length,
texts are identical in script,
conduct is in identical roles.

Though one occupies the office,
if one lacks the virtue,
one must not presume to innovate *li* and music.
Though one possesses the virtue,
if one lacks the office,
one must also not presume to innovate *li* and music.

3. The Master said,
I can describe the *li* of the Xia,
but the state of Qi is insufficient to confirm them.
I have studied the *li* of the Yin,
the state of Song preserves them.
I have studied the *li* of the Zhou,
we now use them.
And we follow the Zhou.

4. In ruling the world, if one attends to the three weighty matters,
one's errors will be few.
- If the former *li*, though good, lack confirmation,
then lacking confirmation, they will not be trusted,
and not being trusted, the people will not follow them.
If the latter *li*, though good, are not honored,
then in not being honored, they will not be trusted,
and in not being trusted, the people will not follow them.

5. Thus the Dao of the *junzi*
is rooted in his own person,
confirmed in the common people,
assessed against the kings of the three eras,
all without flaw.
When established within heaven and earth it is not rejected.

^{*}This passage suggests strongly that this section of the text, and perhaps the entire text, dates from the days of the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221-208 BCE), just after the close of the Classical period.

When put to examination by the ghosts and spirits it is not suspected.
 If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence,
 he could apply it and be without confusion.

When put to examination by the ghosts and spirits it is not suspected:
 such is its understanding of Tian.
 If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence,
 he could apply it and be without confusion:
 such is its understanding of man.

6. Thus the motion of a *junzi*
 can be the Dao of the world for every generation;
 his actions
 can be the model of the world for every generation;
 his words
 can be the standard of the world for every generation.

Those from whom he is distant will gaze towards him;
 those towards whom he draws near will never grow tired of him.

The *Poetry* says,

*Over there none hate him,
 over here none weary of him,
 unceasing day and night,
 ever praising him to the end.*

Never has there been a *junzi* who has failed to be like this,
 yet has early earned praise in the world.

Section X: The sage's power of virtue.

1. Confucius recounted Yao and Shun as ancestral,
 he emblazoned Wen and Wu as regulating models.
 Above, they took the seasons of heaven as rule;
 below, they accorded with the flow of the waters and lands.

This may be compared to heaven and earth,
 nothing do they fail to bear or to cover.

This may be compared to the succession of the four seasons,
 or the alternating brilliance of the sun and moon,
 or the things of the world, which are nourished side by side
 and do not harm one another.

Their Daos were walked side by side
and were not contradictory.

The powers of lesser virtue flow as in the current of a river;
the powers of great virtue deeply transform.
This is the way in which heaven and earth are great.

2. Only the greatest sage in the world possesses
the keen powers of listening and seeing, penetration and wisdom
that fit him to approach men as a ruler;
the magnanimity, generosity, gentleness, and flexibility
that fit him to accommodate others;
the vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution
that fit him to take a firm grip;
the focus, seriousness, balance, and uprightness
that fit him to be reverent;
the pattern, order, concentration, and incisiveness
that fit him to discriminate among different things.

As a broad flood springing from cavernous depths,
it comes forth according to the times.
As a broad flood: like heaven.
Cavernous springs: like a chasm.

When he appears, none fail to respect him;
when he speaks, none fail to have faith in him;
when he acts, none are not content.

For this reason, his singing fame overflows the central states
and is carried forth even to the tribes of north and south.
Wherever boats or carts travel or human labor reaches,
whatever heaven covers or earth carries upon it,
wherever the sun and moon shine or frosts and dews descend,
none of blood and breath do not revere and cleave to him.
Hence, he is said to be the match of Tian.

3. Only the most perfectly genuine man in all the world can thread together
all the great constant norms of the world,
plant the great roots of the world,
and understand the nurturing transformations of heaven and earth.
How would he rely on any other than himself?

How sincere he is in *ren*!

How cavernous he is – an abyss!
Floodlike – like Tian!

Apart from one who is keen of hearing and sight, sage in wisdom, and
fulfilled in Tian-like virtue,
who could understand this?

Section XI: The invisibility of ultimate virtue.

1. The *Poetry* says,

*Over brocaded robes
a plain dress.*

She disliked displaying the patterns.

Thus the Dao of the *junzi*
is hidden dark and grows brighter every day.

The Dao of the small man
strikes the eye but fades every day.

The Dao of the *junzi* is limpid, and one never tires of it;
simple yet patterned,
gentle yet ordered.

He who knows that the distant shall be near,
he who knows that moral influence has a source,
he who knows that subtle shall be manifest
– with such a one, you may enter into virtue.

2. The *Poetry* says,

*Though they be submerged in concealment,
they are yet so plain to see.*

Hence the *junzi* examines himself and is without flaw,
with no evil in his will.

The manner in which the *junzi* surpasses others
lies in what others cannot see.

3. The *Poetry* says,

*Looking into your chambers,
let there be nothing shameful even in the inmost corner.*

Hence men respect the *junzi* though he does not act,
have faith in him though he has not spoken.

4. The *Poetry* says,

*Approaching without words,
and so without strife.*

Hence the *junzi* persuades the people without issuing rewards;
is without anger, yet the people are awed as if by an axe.

5. The *Poetry* says,

*Brilliant his virtue!
The many lords emulate him.*

Hence the *junzi* is profoundly reverent,
and the world is at peace.

6. The *Poetry* says,

*I cherish bright virtue,
with no great sound or appearance.*

The Master said,
Sound and appearance having nothing to do with
transforming the people.

7. The *Poetry* says,

Virtue light as a hair

Yet there remain things comparable to a hair.

*The revolutions of heaven above
possess neither sound nor smell.*

That is the ultimate!