The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean

CONFUCIAN CLASSICS

The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean

大學 · 中庸

Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited



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The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean · Confucian classics

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Learning and *The Doctrine of the Mean* are two short chapters of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), a Confucian collection compiled in the second and first centuries BC from earlier writings. Tradition credited the first to Confucius and his disciple Zengzi and the second to Confucius's grandson Zisi; modern scholars date both to the late Warring States or early Han period, roughly the third century BC. In the twelfth century AD the philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) set them beside the *Analects* and the *Mencius* as the Four Books, and from 1313 to 1905 they were the core of the civil service examinations in China.

The Great Learning is a compact program for self-cultivation and government. It traces a chain of steps from investigating things and making one's intentions sincere, through setting the heart right and cultivating oneself, to ordering the family, governing the state and bringing peace to the world. *The Doctrine of the Mean* begins with Heaven, human nature and the Way, praises the balanced, unremarkable steadiness of the "mean," and rises to a vision of sincerity as what unites human beings with Heaven and Earth.

This edition follows Zhu Xi's arrangement. He divided *The Great Learning* into a short classic text and ten chapters of commentary, reordering passages he believed had been displaced; he held that most of the fifth chapter, on investigating things, was lost, and wrote a supplement of his own, which is not included here. *The Doctrine of the Mean* keeps its traditional order in thirty-three chapters. Zhu Xi's notes are omitted. Passages are cited as "GL Classic," "GL 1" to "GL 10" (the commentary chapters) and "Mean 1" to "Mean 33."

The Great Learning

大學

From investigating things and sincere intentions to an ordered family, a well-governed state and a world at peace.

THE CLASSIC TEXT

The aims of great learning, and the chain of steps from investigating things to a world at peace.

GL Classic The Way of great learning lies in making one's bright virtue shine, in renewing the people, and in resting in the highest good. Knowing where to rest, one is then settled; settled, one can then be still; still, one can then be at peace; at peace, one can then deliberate; deliberating, one can then attain. Things have their root and their branches; affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Way. The ancients who wished to make their bright virtue shine throughout the world first governed their states. Wishing to govern their states, they first ordered their families. Wishing to order their families, they first cultivated themselves. Wishing to cultivate themselves, they first set their hearts right. Wishing to set their hearts right, they first made their intentions sincere. Wishing to make their intentions sincere, they first extended their knowledge. Extending knowledge lies in investigating things.[1] When things are investigated, knowledge is then extended. When knowledge is extended, the intentions are then sincere. When the intentions are sincere, the

1 "Renewing the people": the text has 親 "being close to" the people; Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi read it as 新 "renewing," as commentary chapter 2 assumes.

heart is then set right. When the heart is set right, the self is then cultivated. When the self is cultivated, the family is then ordered. When the family is ordered, the state is then governed. When the state is governed, the world is then at peace. From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all alike take cultivating oneself as the root. For the root to be in disorder and the branches well governed—this cannot be. For what deserves the most care to be treated slightly, and what deserves slight care to be treated with the most—there has never been such a case.[2]

COMMENTARY 1: MAKING BRIGHT VIRTUE SHINE

Three passages from the Documents on making virtue shine.

GL 1 The "Announcement to Kang" says, "Able to make virtue shine." "Tai Jia" says, "Keep your gaze on Heaven's bright decree." The "Canon of the Emperor" says, "Able to make lofty virtue shine." All of these are about making one's own virtue shine.

COMMENTARY 2: RENEWING THE PEOPLE

Tang's basin inscription and other texts on daily renewal.

GL 2 The inscription on Tang's bathing basin read: "If one day you can renew yourself, renew yourself day after day, and again each day renew yourself." The "Announcement to Kang" says, "Rouse a people that renews itself." The *Odes* says, "Though Zhou is an ancient state, its mandate is new." Therefore there is nothing in which the exemplary person does not give their utmost.[3]

2 "Heart" (心) is the heart-mind, the seat of both feeling and thought. "Sincere" (誠) means being genuine through and through; it is also rendered "integrity."
3 Tang was the founder of the Shang dynasty.

COMMENTARY 3: RESTING IN THE HIGHEST GOOD

Odes on resting where one belongs, and the stations in which ruler, minister, son and father rest.

GL 3 The *Odes* says, "The royal domain, a thousand li around—there the people come to rest." The *Odes* says, "Twittering, the yellow oriole rests on a corner of the hill." The Master said, "In resting, it knows where to rest. Can a human being be less than a bird?" The *Odes* says, "Profound and grave was King Wen—oh, ever bright, reverent in his resting!" As a ruler, one rests in humaneness; as a minister, one rests in reverence; as a son, one rests in filial devotion; as a father, one rests in kindness; in dealings with the people of the state, one rests in trustworthiness. The *Odes* says, "Look at that bend of the Qi, its green bamboo so lush. Here is a refined exemplary person, as if cut, as if filed, as if carved, as if polished. How grave, how stern! How radiant, how imposing! Here is a refined exemplary person who can never be forgotten." "As if cut, as if filed" speaks of learning; "as if carved, as if polished" speaks of self-cultivation; "how grave, how stern" speaks of inner awe and caution; "how radiant, how imposing" speaks of an awe-inspiring bearing; "here is a refined exemplary person who can never be forgotten" speaks of abundant virtue and the highest good, which the people cannot forget. The *Odes* says, "Ah, the former kings are not forgotten!" Exemplary persons treat as worthy those whom the former kings treated as worthy, and hold dear those whom they held dear; petty persons enjoy what they made enjoyable, and profit from what they made profitable. That is why, though they have passed from the world, they are not forgotten.[4]

4 Zhu Xi reads the "exemplary persons" and "petty persons" here as the nobles and the common people of later generations.

COMMENTARY 4: THE ROOT AND THE BRANCHES

Confucius wishes to end lawsuits, an example of knowing the root.

GL 4 The Master said, "In hearing lawsuits I am like anyone else. What is needed is to bring it about that there are no lawsuits!" Those without truth on their side cannot press their pleas to the end, for the people's minds are held in great awe. This is called knowing the root.

COMMENTARY 5: INVESTIGATING THINGS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

A two-sentence fragment of the chapter on investigating things and extending knowledge.

GL 5 This is called knowing the root. This is called the utmost of knowledge.[5]

COMMENTARY 6: MAKING THE INTENTIONS SINCERE

Not deceiving oneself, and being watchful when alone.

GL 6 What is called making the intentions sincere means not deceiving oneself—as when we hate a bad smell, as when we love a beautiful sight. This is called being content with oneself. Therefore the exemplary person must be watchful over themselves when alone. Petty persons, living at leisure, do what is not good and stop at nothing; on seeing an exemplary person, they then shamefacedly cover up, concealing what is not good in them and displaying what is good. But others see them as if seeing their very lungs and liver—so what is gained? This is what is meant by "sincere within, it takes shape without." Therefore the exemplary person must be watchful over themselves when alone. Zengzi said, "What ten eyes look at, what ten hands point

5 Zhu Xi judged the first sentence a stray repetition and the rest of this chapter lost; he wrote a supplementary chapter of his own on investigating things and extending knowledge.

to—how severe it is!" Wealth enriches a house; virtue enriches the person. The heart is broad and the body at ease. Therefore the exemplary person must make their intentions sincere.

COMMENTARY 7: SETTING THE HEART RIGHT AND CULTIVATING THE SELF

Anger, fear, delight and worry keep the heart from being right.

GL 7 What is meant by "cultivating oneself lies in setting one's heart right" is this: if one harbors anger, the heart is not right; if one harbors fear, the heart is not right; if one harbors fondness and delight, the heart is not right; if one harbors worry and anxiety, the heart is not right. When the heart is not present, we look but do not see, listen but do not hear, eat but do not know the taste. This is what is meant by "cultivating oneself lies in setting one's heart right."

COMMENTARY 8: CULTIVATING THE SELF AND ORDERING THE FAMILY

Partiality toward others shows why ordering the family depends on cultivating oneself.

GL 8 What is meant by "ordering one's family lies in cultivating oneself" is this: people are partial toward those they hold dear and love; they are partial toward those they despise and dislike; they are partial toward those they hold in awe and respect; they are partial toward those they pity and feel sorry for; they are partial toward those they treat with arrogance and neglect. So those who love someone yet know their faults, or dislike someone yet know their merits, are rare in the world. Hence the proverb: "No one knows the faults of their own child; no one knows how big their own sprouts have grown." This is what is meant by: if the self is not cultivated, one cannot order one's family.

COMMENTARY 9: ORDERING THE FAMILY AND GOVERNING THE STATE

Virtues learned at home spread outward to govern the state.

GL 9 What is meant by "to govern the state one must first order one's family" is this: no one who cannot teach their own family is able to teach others. Therefore the exemplary person, without leaving the family, achieves teaching throughout the state. Filial devotion is how one serves the ruler; respect for elders is how one serves one's elders; kindness is how one directs the multitude. The "Announcement to Kang" says, "As if caring for a newborn child." If the heart sincerely seeks it, though one may not hit the mark, one will not be far off. No young woman has ever learned to raise a child first and only then married. When one family is humane, the whole state rises to humaneness; when one family yields, the whole state rises to yielding; when one person is greedy and perverse, the whole state falls into disorder. Such is how things are set in motion. This is what is meant by: one word can ruin an affair; one person can settle the state. Yao and Shun led the world with humaneness, and the people followed them. Jie and Zhou led the world with violence, and the people followed them. When what rulers command runs counter to what they love, the people do not follow. Therefore the exemplary person, having it in themselves, only then seeks it in others; being free of it themselves, only then condemns it in others. If what one harbors in oneself is not reciprocity, yet one can make others understand—there has never been such a case. Thus governing the state lies in ordering one's family. The *Odes* says, "The peach tree is young and lovely, its leaves lush and thick. This young woman going to her new home will live in harmony with her household." Only in harmony with one's household can one then teach the people of the state. The *Odes* says, "In harmony with elder brother, in harmony with younger brother." Only in harmony with elder and younger brothers can one then teach the people of the state. The *Odes*

says, "Their bearing is without fault; they set right the states of the four quarters." Only when one's conduct as father and son, elder and younger brother is worth emulating will the people then emulate it. This is what is meant by: governing the state lies in ordering one's family.[6]

COMMENTARY 10: GOVERNING THE STATE AND BRINGING PEACE TO THE WORLD

The way of the measuring square, the Odes on winning the people, and virtue before wealth.

GL 10 What is meant by "bringing peace to the world lies in governing one's state" is this: when those above treat the aged as aged, the people rise to filial devotion; when those above treat elders as elders, the people rise to respect for elders; when those above care for the orphaned, the people do not turn their backs. Therefore the exemplary person has the way of the measuring square. What you dislike in those above you, do not use in directing those below; what you dislike in those below you, do not use in serving those above. What you dislike in those ahead of you, do not use in leading those behind; what you dislike in those behind you, do not use in following those ahead. What you dislike in those on your right, do not use in dealing with those on your left; what you dislike in those on your left, do not use in dealing with those on your right. This is what is called the way of the measuring square.[7] The *Odes* says, "Joyful is the exemplary person, father and mother of the people." To love what the people love and hate what the people hate—this is what is called being father and mother of the people. The *Odes* says, "Towering is that southern mountain, its rocks rugged and steep. Majestic Grand Master Yin, the people all look up to you." Those who hold a state cannot fail to be careful; if they are partial, they will be destroyed by the world. The *Odes* says, "Before Yin lost its multi-

6 Jie and Zhou (紂, not the Zhou dynasty 周) were the last kings of the Xia and Shang dynasties, archetypal tyrants.

7 The "measuring square" (絜矩) is the carpenter's square: taking oneself as the measure for how to treat others.

tudes, it was a match for the Lord on High. Take Yin as your mirror: the lofty mandate is not easily kept." This says: win the multitude and you win the state; lose the multitude and you lose the state. Therefore the exemplary person is first careful about virtue. Having virtue, one has people; having people, one has land; having land, one has wealth; having wealth, one has the means for use.[8] Virtue is the root; wealth is the branches. To make the root outer and the branches inner is to set the people quarreling and teach them to plunder. Therefore when wealth is gathered in, the people scatter; when wealth is dispersed, the people gather. Therefore words that go out against what is right come back against what is right; goods that come in against what is right go out against what is right. The "Announcement to Kang" says, "The mandate is not constant." This says that with goodness one gains it, and without goodness one loses it. The *Book of Chu* says, "The state of Chu has nothing it takes as treasure; it takes only goodness as treasure." Uncle Fan said, "An exile has nothing to take as treasure; humaneness toward kin is taken as treasure."[9] The "Declaration of Qin" says: "Suppose there were a single minister, steadfast and true, with no other skills, yet with a heart generous and broad, as if able to embrace all. When others had skills, it would be as if that minister had them; when others were accomplished and sagely, that minister's heart would love them—more than any words from that minister's own mouth could say. Truly able to embrace them, such a minister could protect my descendants and the common people—surely there would be benefit in that! But when others have skills, to envy and hate them; when others are accomplished and sagely, to thwart them so that they cannot advance—truly unable to embrace them, such a one could not protect my descendants and the common people—how perilous that would be!"[10] Only the humane person banishes and exiles such a one,

8 Yin is another name for the Shang dynasty, whose mandate passed to Zhou.
9 Uncle Fan (Hu Yan) was the maternal uncle and adviser of Prince Chong'er of Jin, later Duke Wen, during his exile in the 7th century BC.
10 The "Declaration of Qin" is a chapter of the *Documents* attributed to Duke Mu of Qin (7th century BC).

driving them out among the peoples of the four borders and not letting them share the Central States. This is what is meant by: only the humane person is able to love others and able to hate others. To see the worthy and fail to raise them up, or to raise them up but not give them precedence—this is negligence. To see what is not good and fail to dismiss it, or to dismiss it but not send it far away—this is a fault. To love what others hate and hate what others love—this is called going against human nature, and disaster will surely reach that person. Therefore the exemplary person has a great Way: it must be gained by doing one's best and being trustworthy, and it is lost through arrogance and complacency. There is a great way to produce wealth: let those who produce it be many and those who consume it be few; let those who make it be quick and those who use it be sparing—then wealth will always be sufficient.[11] The humane use wealth to raise up themselves; those who are not humane use themselves to raise up wealth. Never has it happened that those above loved humaneness and those below did not love rightness; never has it happened that those who loved rightness failed to bring their tasks to completion; never has it happened that the wealth in the storehouses and treasuries was not the ruler's own. Meng Xianzi said, "Those who keep a four-horse carriage do not look to chickens and pigs. A family that cuts ice does not raise cattle and sheep. A house of a hundred chariots does not keep a minister who squeezes out levies. Rather than have a minister who squeezes out levies, better to have a minister who steals." This is what is meant by: a state does not take profit as profit; it takes rightness as profit.[12] When one who heads a state or a house devotes themselves to wealth and its uses, it must come from petty persons. The ruler deems them good; but when petty persons are set to run the state and the house, disaster and harm arrive together. Even if there are good

11 The text has 命 "fate"; following Zheng Xuan and Zhu Xi, it is read as 慢 "negligence."

12 Meng Xianzi was a minister of the state of Lu in the 6th century BC; cutting ice for funerals and sacrifices was a privilege of high-ranking families.

people, there is nothing they can do about it. This is what is meant by: a state does not take profit as profit; it takes rightness as profit.[13]

13 Zhu Xi thought the words 彼為善之 (“The ruler deems them good”) garbled; the rendering follows the common reading.

The Doctrine of the Mean

中庸

Heaven, human nature and the Way; the balanced steadiness of the mean; and sincerity as the bond between people and Heaven and Earth.

CHAPTER 1

What Heaven decrees, the Way and teaching; the center and harmony.

Mean 1 What Heaven decrees is called nature; following nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called teaching. The Way cannot be departed from for a single moment; what can be departed from is not the Way. Therefore the exemplary person is cautious about what they do not see, and apprehensive about what they do not hear. Nothing is more visible than what is hidden, nothing more manifest than what is subtle; therefore the exemplary person is watchful over themselves when alone. The state before joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure have arisen is called the center; when they arise and all hit the proper measure, it is called harmony. The center is the great root of the world; harmony is the universal Way of the world. Bring the center and harmony to their utmost, and Heaven and Earth take their proper places, and the myriad things are nourished.

CHAPTER 2

The exemplary person holds to the mean; the petty person goes against it.

Mean 2 Confucius said, "The exemplary person holds to the mean; the petty person goes against the mean. As for the exemplary

person and the mean: being exemplary, they keep to the center as the times require. As for the petty person and the mean: being petty, they have no scruples and fear nothing."[1]

CHAPTER 3

Confucius laments that few can sustain the mean.

Mean 3 The Master said, "The mean—is it not the utmost! For a long time now, few among the people have been able to attain it."

CHAPTER 4

The wise and the worthy overshoot the Way; the foolish and unworthy fall short.

Mean 4 The Master said, "Why the Way is not practiced, I know: the wise go beyond it, and the foolish do not reach it. Why the Way is not understood, I know: the worthy go beyond it, and the unworthy do not reach it. There is no one who does not eat and drink, but few are able to know the taste."

CHAPTER 5

Confucius laments that the Way is not practiced.

Mean 5 The Master said, "So the Way is not being practiced!"

CHAPTER 6

Shun's wisdom: asking questions and applying the center to the people.

Mean 6 The Master said, "Shun—surely his was great wisdom! Shun loved to ask questions and loved to examine plain words close at hand. He passed over what was bad and made known what was good. Grasping the two extremes, he applied the center between them to the people. Was it not by this that he was Shun?"

1 The mean (zhongyong): holding to the center in ordinary conduct, as in *Analects* 6.27.

CHAPTER 7

People call themselves wise yet cannot keep to the mean for a month.

Mean 7 The Master said, "People all say, 'I am wise,' yet when driven into nets, snares, traps, and pitfalls, none of them knows how to avoid them. People all say, 'I am wise,' yet when they choose the mean, they cannot keep to it for a full month."

CHAPTER 8

Yan Hui holds fast to each good thing he gains.

Mean 8 The Master said, "This is the kind of person Yan Hui was: he chose the mean, and when he gained one good thing, he clasped it firmly to his breast and never lost it."

CHAPTER 9

Ruling, refusing office and facing blades are easier than the mean.

Mean 9 The Master said, "The world, its states and families can be set in order; rank and salary can be declined; naked blades can be trodden on; but the mean cannot be achieved."

CHAPTER 10

Zilu asks about strength; Confucius contrasts south and north.

Mean 10 Zilu asked about strength. The Master said, "The strength of the south? The strength of the north? Or your own strength? To teach with breadth and gentleness, and not to retaliate against those who lack the Way—this is the strength of the south, and the exemplary person abides in it. To lie down on weapons and armor, and to die without complaint—this is the strength of the north, and the strong abide in it. Therefore the exemplary person is in harmony but does not drift along—strong indeed, and unbending! They stand in the center and do not lean—strong indeed, and unbending! When the state has the Way, they do not change from what they were in obscurity—strong indeed,

and unbending! When the state lacks the Way, they do not change even to the point of death—strong indeed, and unbending!"[2]

CHAPTER 11

Confucius rejects strange practices and stays the course without recognition.

Mean 11 The Master said, "Searching out the hidden and practicing the strange, so that later ages will have something to tell of—this I do not do. There are exemplary persons who follow the Way and walk it, but give up halfway—I cannot stop. The exemplary person relies on the mean; withdrawing from the world and going unrecognized, yet without regret—only a sage is capable of this."[3]

CHAPTER 12

The Way of the exemplary person is far-reaching yet hidden, beginning with ordinary people.

Mean 12 The Way of the exemplary person is far-reaching yet hidden. Ordinary men and women, foolish as they are, can share in knowing it; yet in its utmost reaches there is something even the sage does not know. Ordinary men and women, unworthy as they are, can practice it; yet in its utmost reaches there is something even the sage cannot do. Great as Heaven and Earth are, people still find something in them to fault. Thus when the exemplary person speaks of its greatness, nothing in the world can contain it; when speaking of its smallness, nothing in the world can split it. The *Odes* says, "The hawk flies up to Heaven; the fish leaps in the deep." This speaks of its being manifest above and below. The Way of the exemplary person begins with

2 Zhu Xi takes 塞, "blocked," as one's earlier days before gaining office.
3 Following Zhu Xi, who reads 素 "plain" as 索 "to search out."

ordinary men and women; in its utmost reaches, it is manifest throughout Heaven and Earth.[4]

CHAPTER 13

The Way is near at hand; Confucius admits falling short of four duties.

Mean 13 The Master said, "The Way is not far from human beings. If people take as the Way something far from human beings, it cannot be the Way. The *Odes* says, 'Hewing an ax handle, hewing an ax handle—the pattern is not far off.' One grasps an ax handle to hew an ax handle, yet glancing sidelong at it, one still thinks the pattern far away. Therefore the exemplary person governs people by means of people, and stops once they have changed. Doing one's best and reciprocity are not far from the Way: what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others. There are four things in the Way of the exemplary person, and I have not managed even one of them: to serve my father as I would require of a son—this I have not managed; to serve my ruler as I would require of a minister—this I have not managed; to serve my elder brother as I would require of a younger brother—this I have not managed; to be the first to treat a friend as I would require of a friend—this I have not managed. In practicing ordinary virtue and taking care in ordinary speech, where there is some shortfall, one dares not fail to make the effort; where there is more than enough, one dares not use it all. Words keep deeds in view; deeds keep words in view—how could the exemplary person be anything but earnest!"

CHAPTER 14

Acting fittingly in any position and seeking the cause of failure in oneself.

Mean 14 The exemplary person acts according to the position they are in and does not wish for anything beyond it. Placed in

wealth and honor, they act as one in wealth and honor; placed in poverty and low station, they act as one in poverty and low station; placed among the Yi and Di peoples, they act as one among the Yi and Di peoples; placed in trouble and hardship, they act as one in trouble and hardship. There is no situation the exemplary person enters in which they are not at ease. In a high position, they do not bully those below; in a low position, they do not cling to those above. They set themselves right and seek nothing from others, and so they feel no resentment. Above, they do not resent Heaven; below, they do not blame others. Thus the exemplary person dwells in ease and awaits Heaven's decree, while the petty person walks in danger and hopes for luck. The Master said, "In archery there is something like the exemplary person: when one misses the center of the target, one turns back and seeks the cause in oneself."[5]

CHAPTER 15

The Way starts from what is near, as harmony begins at home.

Mean 15 The Way of the exemplary person is like traveling far: one must start from what is near; it is like climbing high: one must start from what is low. The *Odes* says, "Wife and children in loving union, like the playing of zither and lute; elder and younger brothers in accord, harmonious and joyful, delighting long together; order well your house and household, delight in your wife and children." The Master said, "How content the parents must be!"

CHAPTER 16

The virtue of ghosts and spirits, unseen yet everywhere.

Mean 16 The Master said, "How abundant is the virtue of ghosts and spirits! Look for them and you do not see them; listen for them

4 夫婦, literally "husband and wife," is read by Zhu Xi as ordinary men and women; the last sentence is also often taken as "begins with husband and wife."
5 The Yi and Di: the peoples beyond the Zhou states.

and you do not hear them; yet they are in the substance of all things and leave none out. They cause the people of the world to fast and purify themselves and to dress in full attire to carry out the sacrifices. Vast and flowing! They seem to be above, they seem to be to the left and right. The *Odes* says, 'The coming of the spirits cannot be fathomed—how much less can they be treated with indifference!' So manifest is the subtle; so impossible is sincerity to conceal."

CHAPTER 17

Shun's great filial devotion and the rewards of great virtue.

Mean 17 The Master said, "Shun—surely his was great filial devotion! In virtue he was a sage; in honor he was the Son of Heaven; in wealth he possessed all within the four seas. In the ancestral temple he received sacrifices, and his descendants preserved his line. Thus great virtue is sure to gain its position, sure to gain its salary, sure to gain its renown, sure to gain its long life. Thus in producing things, Heaven always responds to their capacities and gives them more. Thus what is planted it nurtures, and what leans it overturns. The *Odes* says, 'Admirable and joyful is the exemplary person, shining with fine virtue! Fitting for the people, fitting for officials; receiving blessings from Heaven—protected, aided, and appointed, renewed from Heaven!' Thus one of great virtue is sure to receive the mandate."

CHAPTER 18

King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Zhou, and the rites they extended to all ranks.

Mean 18 The Master said, "The one without sorrows—was it not King Wen alone! He had King Ji as his father and King Wu as his son; the father began the work, and the son carried it on. King Wu continued the enterprise of the Great King, King Ji, and King Wen. Putting on armor but once, he possessed the world, and he never lost his illustrious name throughout the world. In honor he was the Son of Heaven; in wealth he possessed all within the

four seas. In the ancestral temple he received sacrifices, and his descendants preserved his line.[6] King Wu received the mandate late in life. The Duke of Zhou completed the virtue of Wen and Wu, posthumously honored the Great King and King Ji as kings, and further back sacrificed to the earlier lords with the ritual of the Son of Heaven. This ritual extended to the feudal lords and the great officers, and down to the officers and commoners. If the father was a great officer and the son an officer, the father was buried as a great officer and sacrificed to as an officer. If the father was an officer and the son a great officer, the father was buried as an officer and sacrificed to as a great officer. The one-year mourning extended up to the great officers; the three-year mourning extended up to the Son of Heaven; mourning for father and mother was the same for noble and humble alike."

CHAPTER 19

Filial devotion as carrying on ancestors' aims through the rites of the ancestral temple.

Mean 19 The Master said, "King Wu and the Duke of Zhou—surely theirs was a filial devotion recognized by all! Filial devotion is being good at carrying on the aims of others and good at continuing their undertakings. In spring and autumn they repaired their ancestral temples, set out their ancestral vessels, laid out their robes and garments, and offered the foods of the season. The ritual of the ancestral temple serves to set out the order of the generations in the ancestral temple; ordering by rank serves to distinguish noble and humble; ordering by tasks serves to distinguish the worthy; in the general toasting, those below raise their cups to those above, which serves to reach down to the humble; at the feast, seating by the color of the hair serves to order by age. To stand in their places, perform their rituals, play their music, revere those they honored, love those they held dear, serve the dead as they served the living, serve the

6 The Great King (Taiwang) and King Ji were King Wen's grandfather and father, honored as kings only after the Zhou conquest.

departed as they served those still present—this is the height of filial devotion. The ritual of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth serves to worship the Lord on High; the ritual of the ancestral temple serves to sacrifice to one's forebears. For one who understands the ritual of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and the meaning of the di and chang sacrifices, governing a state would be like looking at something in the palm of the hand."[7]

CHAPTER 20

Duke Ai asks about government; the five relationships, three virtues and nine constant rules, ending in sincerity.

Mean 20 Duke Ai asked about government. The Master said, "The government of Wen and Wu is laid out on the boards and bamboo slips. When such people are present, such government flourishes; when such people are gone, such government ceases. The Way of human beings works swiftly in government; the Way of the earth works swiftly in trees. Government is like the reed. Therefore government depends on people; one obtains people by means of oneself; one cultivates oneself by means of the Way; one cultivates the Way by means of humaneness. Humaneness is being human, and loving one's kin is the greatest part of it; rightness is what is fitting, and honoring the worthy is the greatest part of it. The gradations in loving one's kin and the degrees in honoring the worthy are what ritual propriety arises from. If those in low positions do not win the confidence of those above, the people cannot be governed.[8] Therefore the exemplary person cannot fail to cultivate themselves; intending to cultivate oneself, one cannot fail to serve one's parents; intending to serve one's parents, one cannot fail to know people; intending to know people, one cannot fail to know Heaven." The universal ways of the world are five, and the means of practicing

7 The di was a great sacrifice to the royal ancestors; the chang was the autumn ancestral sacrifice.

8 Zhu Xi takes 蒲盧 as a fast-growing reed; Zheng Xuan takes it as a wasp said to raise others' young as its own.

them are three. They are ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and the dealings of friends: these five are the universal ways of the world. Wisdom, humaneness, and courage—these three are the universal virtues of the world, and the means of practicing them is one. Some know it from birth, some know it by learning, some know it through hardship—but once they know it, it is one. Some practice it at ease, some practice it for advantage, some practice it by forcing themselves—but once they achieve it, it is one. The Master said, "Loving learning is close to wisdom; practicing with vigor is close to humaneness; knowing shame is close to courage. Knowing these three, one knows how to cultivate oneself; knowing how to cultivate oneself, one knows how to govern others; knowing how to govern others, one knows how to govern the world, its states and families." For governing the world, its states and families, there are nine constant rules: cultivating oneself, honoring the worthy, loving one's kin, respecting the great ministers, identifying with the officials, treating the common people as one's children, attracting the hundred artisans, being gentle to people from afar, and cherishing the feudal lords. If one cultivates oneself, the Way is established; if one honors the worthy, one is not deluded; if one loves one's kin, uncles and brothers feel no resentment; if one respects the great ministers, one is not confused; if one identifies with the officials, the officers repay with weighty courtesy; if one treats the common people as one's children, the populace is encouraged; if one attracts the hundred artisans, wealth and resources are sufficient; if one is gentle to people from afar, the four quarters turn to one; if one cherishes the feudal lords, the world holds one in awe. Fasting and purifying oneself, dressing in full attire, and not moving except in accordance with ritual propriety—this is how one cultivates oneself. Getting rid of slanderers, keeping away from beauty, holding goods cheap and valuing virtue—this is how one encourages the worthy. Honoring their positions, making their salaries generous, sharing their likes and dislikes—this is how one encourages love of kin. Providing ample officials

to carry out commissions—this is how one encourages the great ministers. Doing one's best for them, trusting them, and making their salaries generous—this is how one encourages the officers. Employing them only at the proper seasons and taxing them lightly—this is how one encourages the populace. Daily inspection and monthly testing, with rations matched to the work—this is how one encourages the hundred artisans. Escorting those who leave and welcoming those who come, commending the good and showing compassion for the incapable—this is how one is gentle to people from afar. Continuing lines of descent that have been cut off, reviving fallen states, bringing order to disorder and support to those in danger, receiving court visits and missions at the proper times, giving generously and receiving sparingly—this is how one cherishes the feudal lords. For governing the world, its states and families, there are nine constant rules, and the means of practicing them is one. In all affairs, preparation brings success; without preparation, failure. If words are settled beforehand, one does not stumble; if affairs are settled beforehand, one is not hard pressed; if conduct is settled beforehand, one has no regrets; if one's way is settled beforehand, one is never at a loss. If those in low positions do not win the confidence of those above, the people cannot be governed. There is a way to win the confidence of those above: if one is not trusted by one's friends, one will not win the confidence of those above. There is a way to be trusted by one's friends: if one does not please one's parents, one will not be trusted by one's friends. There is a way to please one's parents: if, looking within, one is not sincere, one will not please one's parents. There is a way to make oneself sincere: if one is not clear about the good, one will not be sincere in oneself. Sincerity is the Way of Heaven; making oneself sincere is the Way of human beings. One who is sincere hits the mark without effort and attains without thinking, naturally and easily hitting the center of the Way—such a one is a sage. One who makes oneself sincere chooses the good and holds to it firmly. Study it broadly, inquire into it carefully, reflect on it cautiously, discern it clearly, prac-

tice it earnestly. If there is something one has not studied, or has studied without mastering, one does not set it aside; if there is something one has not inquired into, or has inquired into without understanding, one does not set it aside; if there is something one has not reflected on, or has reflected on without grasping, one does not set it aside; if there is something one has not discerned, or has discerned without clarity, one does not set it aside; if there is something one has not practiced, or has practiced without earnestness, one does not set it aside. If others can do it once, one does it a hundred times; if others can do it ten times, one does it a thousand times. One who can truly follow this way, though foolish, will surely become clear; though weak, will surely become strong.

CHAPTER 21

Clarity that comes from sincerity, and sincerity that comes from clarity.

Mean 21 Clarity that comes from sincerity is called nature; sincerity that comes from clarity is called teaching. Where there is sincerity there is clarity; where there is clarity there is sincerity.

CHAPTER 22

Utmost sincerity realizes every nature and forms a triad with Heaven and Earth.

Mean 22 Only those of utmost sincerity in the world can fully realize their own nature. If they can fully realize their own nature, they can fully realize the nature of others. If they can fully realize the nature of others, they can fully realize the nature of things. If they can fully realize the nature of things, they can assist the transforming and nurturing of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist the transforming and nurturing of Heaven and Earth, they can form a triad with Heaven and Earth.[9]

9 "Form a triad" renders 參, literally "make a third": the person of utmost sincerity stands alongside Heaven and Earth as the third member of a triad.

CHAPTER 23

Developing one side of one's nature until sincerity transforms.

Mean 23 Next below this is developing a single side of one's nature. That single side can have sincerity. With sincerity there is form; with form, visibility; with visibility, brightness; with brightness, movement; with movement, change; with change, transformation. Only those of utmost sincerity in the world are able to transform.[10]

CHAPTER 24

Utmost sincerity can foresee the rise and fall of states.

Mean 24 The Way of utmost sincerity makes it possible to know beforehand. When a state is about to flourish, there are sure to be auspicious omens. When a state is about to perish, there are sure to be ill portents. These appear in the milfoil and the tortoise, and they stir in the four limbs. When calamity or good fortune is about to come, if it is good, it will surely be known beforehand; if it is not good, it will surely be known beforehand. Therefore utmost sincerity is like a spirit.[11]

CHAPTER 25

Sincerity completes oneself and completes things.

Mean 25 Sincerity is self-completing, and the Way is self-directing. Sincerity is the end and the beginning of things; without sincerity there are no things. That is why the exemplary person values making oneself sincere above all. Sincerity does not merely complete oneself; it is that by which things are completed. Completing oneself is humaneness; completing things is wisdom. These are virtues of one's nature, the Way that unites outer and

10 致曲 "developing a single side" follows Zhu Xi, who takes 曲 as one particular bent or point of goodness that is extended to the full.
11 Milfoil stalks and tortoise shells were the two chief means of divination in ancient China.

inner. Therefore whatever it is applied to, at whatever time, is fitting.

CHAPTER 26

Unceasing sincerity, and the Way of Heaven and Earth.

Mean 26 Therefore utmost sincerity never ceases. Not ceasing, it endures; enduring, it shows forth; showing forth, it reaches far; reaching far, it becomes broad and deep; broad and deep, it becomes high and bright. Broad and deep—this is how it bears things up. High and bright—this is how it covers things over. Far-reaching and enduring—this is how it completes things. In breadth and depth it matches Earth; in height and brightness it matches Heaven; far-reaching and enduring, it is without bounds. Being so, it is manifest without being seen, it brings change without moving, it completes without acting. The Way of Heaven and Earth can be summed up in a single phrase: as a thing it is undivided, and so the way it produces things is unfathomable. The Way of Heaven and Earth is broad, is deep, is high, is bright, is far-reaching, is enduring. Now take Heaven: it is only so much bright sky, but in its boundlessness the sun, the moon, the stars and constellations hang from it, and the myriad things are covered by it. Now take Earth: it is only so much as a pinch of soil, but in its breadth and depth it bears up Mount Hua without feeling the weight, it holds the rivers and seas without letting them leak away, and the myriad things are borne up by it. Now take a mountain: it is only so much as a fistful of stone, but in its breadth and size grasses and trees grow on it, birds and beasts dwell on it, and precious stores come forth from it. Now take water: it is only so much as a ladleful, but in its unfathomable depths giant turtles and alligators, flood dragons and dragons, fish and turtles live, and wealth and goods multiply. The *Odes* says: "Heaven's decree—how profound, and never ceasing!" This means: this is what makes Heaven Heaven. "How

illustrious! The purity of King Wen's virtue!" This means: this is what made King Wen "Wen"—his purity, too, never ceased.[12]

CHAPTER 27

The greatness of the sage's Way and how the exemplary person lives under it.

Mean 27 Great indeed is the Way of the sage! Vast and overflowing, it brings forth and nurtures the myriad things and towers up to Heaven. Ample and great! Three hundred rules of ritual, three thousand rules of conduct. They wait for the right person and only then are carried out. Hence it is said: unless there is the highest virtue, the highest Way will not take form there. Therefore the exemplary person reveres the virtuous nature and follows the path of inquiry and learning, reaches to the broad and great and goes to the end of the fine and subtle, attains the height of the lofty and bright and follows the path of the mean. They review the old and know the new, and are generous and steadfast so as to honor ritual propriety. Therefore in a high position they are not arrogant, and in a low position they are not rebellious. When the state has the Way, their words are enough to raise them up; when the state lacks the Way, their silence is enough to keep them safe. The *Odes* says, "Clear-sighted and wise, they keep themselves safe"—does this not describe it?

CHAPTER 28

Only the Son of Heaven may make rites; Confucius follows Zhou.

Mean 28 The Master said, "Foolish yet fond of relying on oneself, lowly yet fond of acting on one's own authority, born into the present age yet returning to the Way of antiquity—such a person brings disaster upon themselves." No one but the Son of Heaven deliberates on ritual, sets the regulations, or examines the script. Now throughout the world carts have axles of the same

12 文 wen, "pattern, culture, refinement," is King Wen's posthumous title, and the line plays on its meaning.

gauge, writing uses the same script, and conduct follows the same norms. Though one may have the position, if one lacks the virtue, one dare not create rites and music; though one may have the virtue, if one lacks the position, one likewise dare not create rites and music. The Master said, "I can speak of the rites of Xia, but Qi cannot provide sufficient evidence. I have studied the rites of Yin, and Song preserves them. I have studied the rites of Zhou, and they are in use today. I follow Zhou."[13]

CHAPTER 29

Three weighty matters, and the tests the exemplary person's Way must meet.

Mean 29 Ruling the world involves three weighty matters—with them, one will have few faults! What comes from earlier ages, however good, lacks evidence; lacking evidence, it is not trusted; not trusted, the people do not follow it. What comes from those in low positions, however good, is not honored; not honored, it is not trusted; not trusted, the people do not follow it. Therefore the Way of the exemplary person is rooted in one's own person, verified among the common people, checked against the Three Kings without error, set up between Heaven and Earth without contradiction, put before the ghosts and spirits without doubt, and awaits a sage a hundred generations later without misgiving. Put before the ghosts and spirits without doubt—this is knowing Heaven. Awaiting a sage a hundred generations later without misgiving—this is knowing human beings.[14] Therefore when the exemplary person acts, it becomes for generations a way for the world; when they conduct themselves, it becomes for generations a model for the world; when they speak, it becomes for generations a standard for the world. Those far from them look up to them; those near them never tire

13 Qi and Song were small states whose rulers descended from the royal houses of Xia and Shang (Yin).

14 Zhu Xi takes the three weighty matters as deliberating on ritual, setting the regulations, and examining the script (ch. 28); the Three Kings are the founders of Xia, Shang and Zhou.

of them. The *Odes* says, "There, none dislike them; here, none weary of them. Morning and night they strive, to keep their praise forever!" There has never been an exemplary person who was not like this and yet early won praise throughout the world.

CHAPTER 30

Confucius carries on Yao and Shun and is likened to Heaven and Earth.

Mean 30 Confucius carried on the tradition of Yao and Shun and took King Wen and King Wu as his model; above, he followed the seasons of Heaven, and below, he accorded with water and land. He is like Heaven and Earth, which hold up and bear all things and cover and canopy all things; he is like the four seasons in their alternating course, like the sun and moon shining in turn. The myriad things are nurtured together and do not harm one another; ways run side by side and do not conflict. The lesser virtue flows like rivers; the greater virtue is deep and transforming. This is what makes Heaven and Earth great.

CHAPTER 31

The virtues of the utmost sage, whose fame reaches all peoples.

Mean 31 Only the utmost sage in the world can be quick of hearing, clear of sight, perceptive and wise, enough to preside over others; broad, generous, warm and gentle, enough to embrace others; vigorous, strong, firm and resolute, enough to hold fast; orderly, grave, centered and correct, enough to be reverent; refined, ordered, meticulous and discerning, enough to make distinctions. Vast and broad, deep and welling like a spring, they bring it forth in due season. Vast and broad as Heaven, deep and welling as the abyss. They appear, and none of the people fail to revere them; they speak, and none of the people fail to trust them; they act, and none of the people fail to delight in them. Therefore their fame overflows the Central States and spreads to the Man and Mo peoples. Wherever ships and carts reach, wherever human strength penetrates, wherever Heaven covers,

wherever Earth bears up, wherever the sun and moon shine, wherever frost and dew fall—all who have blood and breath honor and love them. Hence it is said: they are a match for Heaven.[15]

CHAPTER 32

Only utmost sincerity can set the world in order and know Heaven's workings.

Mean 32 Only those of utmost sincerity in the world can order and weave the great strands of the world, establish the great root of the world, and know the transforming and nurturing of Heaven and Earth. What do they rely on? Earnest, earnest—their humaneness! Deep, deep—their abyss! Vast, vast—their Heaven! Unless one is truly quick of hearing, clear of sight, sagely and wise, reaching the virtue of Heaven, who could know it?

CHAPTER 33

Odes on hidden virtue, closing with Heaven's working without sound or smell.

Mean 33 The *Odes* says, "Over brocade, a plain unlined robe"—from dislike of the pattern being too conspicuous. Therefore the Way of the exemplary person is hidden yet grows more manifest each day; the way of the petty person is conspicuous yet fades away each day. The Way of the exemplary person is plain yet never wearisome, simple yet refined, warm yet ordered. Knowing that the far begins from the near, knowing where the wind comes from, knowing how the subtle becomes manifest—with this one can enter into virtue. The *Odes* says, "Though it sinks and lies hidden, still it is very clear!" Therefore the exemplary person examines themselves within and finds no fault, and has nothing to be ashamed of in their intentions. Where the exemplary person cannot be equaled is surely in what others do not

15 The Central States (中國) are the Zhou states of the central plain; Man and Mo are historical names for peoples beyond them to the south and north.

see. The *Odes* says, "See yourself in your own room: may you not be ashamed even before the northwest corner." Therefore the exemplary person is reverent without moving and trusted without speaking.[16] The *Odes* says, "They come forward to the spirits without a word; at that time there is no contention." Therefore the exemplary person does not reward, yet the people are encouraged; does not show anger, yet the people stand in greater awe than of the executioner's ax and the battle-ax. The *Odes* says, "How illustrious is virtue! The many princes take it as their model." Therefore the exemplary person is earnest and respectful, and the world is at peace. The *Odes* says, "I cherish bright virtue that makes no great show of voice and look." The Master said, "In transforming the people, voice and look are the branches." The *Odes* says, "Virtue is light as a hair"—yet a hair still has something it can be compared to. "The doings of high Heaven have neither sound nor smell"—that is the utmost!

16 The northwest corner (屋漏) was the most secluded spot in a house, where offerings to the household spirits were made.