

CHAPTER SIX

LAOZI

Daodejing

Introduction

Traditionally, Lǎozǐ 老子 is said to have been an older contemporary of Kongzi (Confucius), and the author of the *Laozi* or *Dàodéjīng* 道德經. But most contemporary scholars regard Laozi (literally “Old Master”) as a mythical character and the *Laozi* as a composite work. The present version of the text consists of short passages, from a variety of sources, over half of which are rhymed. These were collected together into a single volume of eighty-one chapters, which were then divided into two books. Book I consists of chapters 1 through 37, the *Dào* 道, “Way,” half of the text; Book II consists of chapters 38 through 81, the *Dé* 德, “Virtue,” half. On the basis of this organization, this version of the text came to be known as the *Daodejing*, which means simply “The Classic of *Dao* and *De*.” This division in no way reflects the contents of the chapters themselves, except that the first chapter begins with the word *Dao* and the thirty-eighth chapter begins by describing the highest *De*. The text may have reached its present form some time during the third or perhaps second century BCE. Another version of the text, named after its place of discovery, Mǎwángduī 馬王堆, is similar in content and firmly dated to the middle of the second century BCE. But in the *Mawangdui* version, the order of the books is reversed, giving us the *Dedaojing*.

Though it was probably cobbled together from different sources, the *Laozi* may well have been assembled during a relatively short period of time and perhaps even by a single editor. When it was put together, China was near the end of a prolonged era of fierce interstate rivalry known as the Warring States Period (see *Important Periods* in the appendices). The text can be understood, at least in part, as a reaction to this

troubled age. In it we hear the lament of a time tired of war and chaos, one yearning for a bygone age of innocence, security, and peace. The text denounces wars of expansion and government corruption, tracing both complaints to the unbounded greed and ambition of those in power. These ideas are connected to the view that excessive desire is bad per se and to the related belief that our “real” or “natural” desires are actually quite modest and limited. The text claims that it is unnatural to have excessive desires and that having them will not only not lead to a satisfying life but will lead, paradoxically, to destitution, want, alienation, and self-destruction.

The *Laozi* appeals to an earlier golden age in human history, before people made sharp distinctions among things. This was a time when values and qualities were not clearly distinguished, when things simply were as they were and people acted out of pre-reflective spontaneity. Chapter 38 describes the history of the decline of the Way from an earlier golden age to its present debased state. The *Dao* declined as civilization and human self-consciousness arose. The *Laozi* urges us to return to the earlier, natural state when the Way was fully realized in the world. We are to “untangle,” “blunt,” and “round off” the sharp corners of our present life and let our “wheels move only along old [and presumably more comfortable] ruts.”

According to the *Laozi*, the *Dao* is the source, sustenance, and ideal state of all things in the world. It is “hidden” and it contains within it the patterns of all that we see, but it is not ontologically transcendent. In the apt metaphor of the text, it is the “root” of all things. The *Dao* is *zìrán* 自然, “so of itself” or “spontaneous,” and its unencumbered activity brings about various natural states of affairs through *wúwéi* 無為, “nonaction” (see *Important Terms* in the appendices). Human beings have a place in the *Dao* but are not particularly exalted. They are simply things among things (a view well-represented by the marvelous landscape paintings inspired by Daoism). Because of their unbridled desires and their unique capacity to think, act intentionally, and alter their nature—thus acting contrary to *wuwei* and bringing about states that are not *zìrán*—humans tend to forsake their proper place and upset the natural harmony of the Way. The *Laozi* seeks to undo the consequences of such misguided human views and practices and lead us to “return” to the earlier ideal. The text is more a form of philosophical therapy than the presentation of a theory. We are to be challenged by its paradoxes and moved by its images and poetic cadence more than by any arguments it presents.



Book One

Chapter One

A Way that can be followed is not a constant Way.¹
 A name that can be named is not a constant name.
 Nameless, it is the beginning of Heaven and earth;²
 Named, it is the mother of the myriad creatures.
 And so,
 Always eliminate desires in order to observe its mysteries;
 Always have desires in order to observe its manifestations.
 These two come forth in unity but diverge in name.
 Their unity is known as an enigma.³
 Within this enigma is yet a deeper enigma.
 The gate of all mysteries!

Chapter Two

Everyone in the world knows that when the beautiful strives to be beautiful, it is repulsive.
 Everyone knows that when the good strives to be good, it is no good.⁴
 And so,
 To have and to lack generate each other.⁵
 Difficult and easy give form to each other.

1. Unlike the case of the following line, which has a similar basic structure, there is no way to reproduce in English the alternating nominal and verbal uses of the word dào 道, “Way.” More literally, the first line reads, dào 道 [a] “Way,” “path,” or “teaching,” kě dào 可道, [which] “can be talked about” or “followed,” fēi cháng dào 非常道, “is not a constant Way.” Cf. the grammar and sense of the poem “The Thorny Bush Upon the Wall” in the *Odes* (Mao # 46) (see *Important Texts* in the appendices). Compare the second sentence of section seven and the last line of section twenty of *Nature Comes from the Mandate* (in chapter 12 of this volume). For other passages that discuss the Way and names, see chapters 32, 34.

2. On the idea of being “nameless,” see chapters 32, 37, and 41.

3. Cf. the reference to xuán tóng 玄同, “Enigmatic Unity,” in chapter 56.

4. The point is the common theme that self-conscious effort to be excellent in any way fatally undermines itself. Cf. for example, chapters 38, 81.

5. Cf. chapter 40.

Long and short offset each other.
 High and low incline into each other.
 Note and rhythm harmonize with each other.
 Before and after follow each other.

This is why sages abide in the business of nonaction,⁶ and practice the teaching that is without words.⁷

They work with the myriad creatures and turn none away.⁸

They produce without possessing.⁹

They act with no expectation of reward.¹⁰

When their work is done, they do not linger.¹¹

And, by not lingering, merit never deserts them.

Chapter Three

Not paying honor to the worthy leads the people to avoid contention.

Not showing reverence for precious goods¹² leads them to not steal.

Not making a display of what is desirable leads their hearts away from chaos.¹³

This is why sages bring things to order by opening people's hearts¹⁴ and filling their bellies.

They weaken the people's commitments and strengthen their bones;

They make sure that the people are without "knowledge,"¹⁵ or desires;

And that those with knowledge do not dare to act.

Sages enact nonaction and everything becomes well ordered.

6. For wúwéi 無為, "nonaction," see *Important Terms* in the appendices. A study of this idea, which explores the notion across different schools of early Chinese philosophy, is Edward G. Slingerland's *Effortless Action: Wuwei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

7. Cf. a similar line in chapter 43.

8. Cf. chapter 34.

9. This line also occurs in chapters 10 and 51.

10. This line also appears in chapters 10, 51, and 77.

11. Recognizing that the credit for their success lies with the Way and not with themselves is a characteristic attitude of Daoist sages. For similar ideas, see chapters 9, 17, 34, and 77. This and the previous line occur together in chapter 77.

12. For other passages discussing "precious goods," see chapters 12 and 64.

13. Cf. *Analects* 12.18 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

14. See xīn 心, "heart," under *Important Terms* in the appendices.

15. "Knowledge" here is zhī 知 (meaning 智, "wisdom"). See this under *Important Terms* in the appendices.

Chapter Four

The Way is like an empty vessel;
 No use could ever fill it up.
 Vast and deep!
 It seems to be the ancestor of the myriad creatures.
 It blunts their sharpness;¹⁶
 Untangles their tangles;
 Softens their glare;
 Merges with their dust.
 Deep and clear!
 It seems to be there.
 I do not know whose child it is;
 It is the image of what was before the Lord himself!¹⁷

Chapter Five

Heaven and earth are not benevolent;
 They treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs.¹⁸
 Sages are not benevolent;
 They treat the people as straw dogs.
 Is not the space between Heaven and earth like a bellows?
 Empty yet inexhaustible!
 Work it and more will come forth.
 An excess of speech will lead to exhaustion,¹⁹
 It is better to hold on to the mean.

Chapter Six

The spirit of the valley never dies;
 She is called the “Enigmatic Female.”

16. This line and the next three, preceded by two lines from chapter 52, appear in chapter 56.

17. This is the only occurrence in the text of the character dì 帝, “Lord,” a name for the high god or supreme ancestral spirit of ancient China. For other passages concerning xiàng 象, “image,” see chapters 14, 21, 35, and 41.

18. “Straw dogs” were used as ceremonial offerings. Before and during the ceremony, they were protected and cherished, but as soon as the ceremony ended, they were discarded and defiled. Others interpret the characters in this expression as “straw and dogs.” The point is the same.

19. Cf. the opening lines of chapter 23.

The portal of the Enigmatic Female
 Is called the root of Heaven and earth.
 An unbroken, gossamer thread;
 It seems to be there.
 But use will not unsettle it.

Chapter Seven

Heaven is long-lasting;
 Earth endures.
 Heaven is able to be long-lasting and earth is able to endure, because they do not
 live for themselves.
 And so, they are able to be long-lasting and to endure.
 This is why sages put themselves last and yet come first;
 Treat themselves as unimportant and yet are preserved.
 Is it not because they have no thought of themselves, that they are able to perfect
 themselves?

Chapter Eight

The highest good is like water.
 Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures, while not contending with
 them.
 It resides in the places that people find repellent, and so comes close to the
 Way.
 In a residence, the good lies in location.
 In hearts, the good lies in depth.
 In interactions with others, the good lies in benevolence.
 In words, the good lies in trustworthiness.
 In government, the good lies in orderliness.
 In carrying out one's business, the good lies in ability.
 In actions, the good lies in timeliness.
 Only by avoiding contention can one avoid blame.

Chapter Nine

To hold the vessel upright in order to fill it²⁰ is not as good as to stop in time.
 If you make your blade too keen, it will not hold its edge.
 When gold and jade fill the hall, none can hold on to them.

20. The reference is to a "tilting vessel" that would fall over and pour out its contents if filled to the top.

To be haughty when wealth and honor come your way is to bring disaster upon yourself.

To withdraw when the work is done is the Way of Heaven.²¹

Chapter Ten

Embracing your soul and holding on to the One, can you keep them from departing?²²
Concentrating your *qi*, “vital energies,”²³ and attaining the utmost suppleness, can you be a child?

Cleaning and purifying your enigmatic mirror, can you erase every flaw?

Caring for the people and ordering the state, can you eliminate all knowledge?

When the portal of Heaven opens and closes, can you play the part of the feminine?

Comprehending all within the four directions, can you reside in nonaction?

To produce them!

To nurture them!

To produce without possessing;²⁴

To act with no expectation of reward;²⁵

To lead without lording over;

Such is Enigmatic Virtue!²⁶

Chapter Eleven

Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of a wheel.

But only by relying on what is not there²⁷ do we have the use of the carriage.

By adding and removing clay we form a vessel.

But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the vessel.

By carving out doors and windows we make a room.

But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the room.

And so,

What is there is the basis for profit;

What is not there is the basis for use.

21. For similar lines, see chapters 2, 17, 34, and 77.

22. For other examples of “the One,” see chapters 22, 39, and 42.

23. See *qi* 氣 under *Important Terms* in the appendices.

24. This line also appears in chapters 2 and 51.

25. This line also appears in chapters 2, 51, and 77.

26. Chapter 51 concludes with the same four lines. For another passage concerning *xuándé* 玄德, “Enigmatic Virtue,” see chapter 65.

27. Literally, only by relying on “nothing” (i.e., the empty space of the hub) can the wheel turn and the carriage roll.

Chapter Twelve

The five colors blind our eyes.²⁸
 The five notes deafen our ears.
 The five flavors deaden our palates.
 The chase and the hunt madden our hearts.
 Precious goods impede our activities.
 This is why sages are for the belly and not for the eye;
 And so, they cast off the one and take up the other.²⁹

Chapter Thirteen

Be apprehensive about favor or disgrace.
 Revere calamity as you revere your own body.
 What does it mean to be apprehensive about favor and disgrace?
 To receive favor is to be in the position of a subordinate.
 When you get it be apprehensive;
 When you lose it be apprehensive.
 This is what it means to be apprehensive about favor and disgrace.
 What does it mean to revere calamity as you revere your own body?
 I can suffer calamity only because I have a body.
 When I no longer have a body, what calamity could I possibly have?
 And so,

Those who revere their bodies as if they were the entire world can be given
 custody of the world.

Those who care for their bodies as if they were the entire world can be entrusted
 with the world.

Chapter Fourteen

Looked for but not seen, its name is “minute.”
 Listened for but not heard, its name is “rarefied.”
 Grabbed for but not gotten, its name is “subtle.”³⁰

28. These sets of five refer to conventional standards of evaluation in regard to the different sensory faculties. The passage is not a rejection of the pleasures of the senses, nor does it express skepticism regarding the senses per se. Rather, like the view one finds in *Zhuangzi* chapter 2 (in chapter 8 of this volume), it expresses a profound distrust of conventional categories and values and advocates moderation of sensual pleasures.

29. This line also appears in chapters 38 and 72.

30. Cf. the thought expressed in these lines to what one finds in chapter 35.

These three cannot be perfectly explained, and so are confused and regarded as one.

Its top is not clear or bright,

Its bottom is not obscure or dark.

Trailing off without end, it cannot be named.

It returns to its home, back before there were things.³¹

This is called the formless form, the image of no thing.³²

This is called the confused and indistinct.

Greet it and you will not see its head;

Follow it and you will not see its tail.

Hold fast to the Way of old, in order to control what is here today.

The ability to know the ancient beginnings, this is called the thread of the Way.

Chapter Fifteen

In ancient times, the best and most accomplished scholars

Were subtle, mysterious, enigmatic, and far-reaching.

Their profundity was beyond understanding.

Because they were beyond understanding, only with difficulty can we try to describe them:

Poised, like one who must ford a stream in winter.

Cautious, like one who fears his neighbors on every side.

Reserved, like a visitor.

Opening up, like ice about to break.

Honest, like unhewn wood.³³

Broad, like a valley.

Turbid, like muddy water.

Who can, through stillness, gradually make muddied water clear?

Who can, through movement, gradually stir to life what has long been still?

Those who preserve this Way do not desire fullness.

And, because they are not full, they have no need for renewal.

31. Returning to an ideal past state is a common theme in the text. For other examples see chapters 16, 25, 28, 30, and 52.

32. For other passages that concern *xiang*, “image,” see chapters 4, 21, 35, and 41.

33. Pǔ 朴, “unhewn wood,” is a symbol for anything in its unadulterated natural state. In other contexts, I will translate it as “simplicity,” but here and in certain later passages the metaphor is an important part of the passage’s sense. For other examples, see chapters 19, 28, 32, 37, and 57.

Chapter Sixteen

Attain extreme tenuousness;
 Preserve quiet integrity.
 The myriad creatures are all in motion!
 I watch as they turn back.
 The teeming multitude of things, each returns home to its root;
 And returning to one's root is called stillness.
 This is known as returning to one's destiny;
 And returning to one's destiny is known as constancy.
 To know constancy is called "enlightenment."
 Those who do not know constancy wantonly produce misfortune.
 To know constancy is to be accommodating.
 To be accommodating is to work for the good of all.
 To work for the good of all is to be a true king.
 To be a true king is to be Heavenly.
 To be Heavenly is to embody the Way.
 To embody the Way is to be long-lived,
 And one will avoid danger to the end of one's days.³⁴

Chapter Seventeen

The greatest of rulers is but a shadowy presence;
 Next is the ruler who is loved and praised;
 Next is the one who is feared;
 Next is the one who is reviled.
 Those lacking in trust are not trusted.³⁵
 But [the greatest rulers] are cautious and honor words.³⁶
 When their task is done and work complete,³⁷
 Their people all say, "This is just how we are."³⁸

34. This line also appears in chapter 52.

35. This line appears again in chapter 23. I interpret it as an expression of the *Daodejing*'s characteristic view on Dé 德, "Virtue." For a discussion of the idea of "Virtue" in the *Daodejing* and how it differs from related Confucian conceptions of "Virtue" or "moral charisma," see my "The Concept of *de* ('Virtue') in the *Laozi*," in Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the "Laozi"* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 239–57. For other passages concerning the concept of trust, see chapters 49 and 63.

36. Sages are reluctant and slow to speak, but their words are worthy of complete trust.

37. Cf. chapters 2, 9, 34, and 77.

38. Literally, "We are this way *ziran* 自然." See *ziran* under *Important Terms* in the appendices. For other examples, see chapters 23, 25, 51, and 64.

Chapter Eighteen

When the great Way is abandoned, there are benevolence and righteousness.

When wisdom and intelligence come forth, there is great hypocrisy.

When the six familial relationships are out of balance, there are kind parents and filial children.

When the state is in turmoil and chaos, there are loyal ministers.³⁹

Chapter Nineteen

Cut off sageliness, abandon wisdom, and the people will benefit one-hundred-fold.

Cut off benevolence, abandon righteousness, and the people will return to being filial and kind.

Cut off cleverness, abandon profit, and robbers and thieves will be no more.

This might leave the people lacking in culture;

So, give them something with which to identify:

Manifest plainness.

Embrace simplicity.⁴⁰

Do not think just of yourself.

Make few your desires.

Chapter Twenty

Cut off learning and be without worry!

How much distance is there really between agreement and flattery?

How much difference is there between the fair and the foul?

What other people fear one cannot but fear.

Immense!

Yet still not at its limit!

The multitude are bright and merry;

As if enjoying a grand festival;

As if ascending a terrace in springtime.

I alone am still and inactive, revealing no sign;⁴¹

Like a child who has not yet learned to smile.

Weak and weary, I seem to have nowhere to go.

The multitude all have more than enough.

39. The idea that more can lead to less and its implication that less can yield more is a theme that appears in several places in the text. For examples see chapters 19 and 38.

40. Literally, "unhewn wood." See note 33 above.

41. In this passage, the author enters into an autobiographical mode. See also chapters 69 and 70.

I alone seem to be at a loss.

I have the mind of a fool!

Listless and blank!

The common folk are bright and brilliant.

I alone am muddled and confused.

The common folk are careful and discriminating.

I alone am dull and inattentive.

Vast!

Like the ocean!

Blown about!

As if it would never end!

The multitude all have something to do.

I alone remain obstinate and immobile, like some old rustic.

I alone differ from others, and value being nourished by mother.

Chapter Twenty-One

The outward appearance of great Virtue comes forth from the Way alone.

As for the Way, it is vague and elusive.

Vague and elusive!

Within is an image.⁴²

Vague and elusive!

Within is a thing.

Withdrawn and dark!

Within is an essence.

This essence is genuine and authentic.

Within there is trust.

From ancient times until the present day, its name has never left it.

It is how we know the origin of all things.

How do I know what the origin of all things is like?

Through this!

Chapter Twenty-Two

Those who are crooked will be perfected.

Those who are bent will be straight.

Those who are empty will be full.

Those who are worn will be renewed.

42. For other passages concerning *xiang*, "image," see chapters 4, 14, 35, and 41.

Those who have little will gain.

Those who have plenty will be confounded.

This is why sages embrace the One and serve as models for the whole world.⁴³

They do not make a display of themselves and so are illustrious.

They do not affirm their own views and so are well known.

They do not brag about themselves and so are accorded merit.

They do not boast about themselves and so are heard of for a long time.⁴⁴

Because they do not contend, no one in the world can contend with them.⁴⁵

The ancient saying “Those who are crooked will be perfected” is not without substance!⁴⁶

Truly the sages are and remain perfect.

Chapter Twenty-Three

To be sparing with words is what comes naturally.

And so,

A blustery wind does not last all morning;

A heavy downpour does not last all day.

Who produces these?

Heaven and earth!

If not even Heaven and earth can keep things going for a long time,

How much less can human beings?

This is why one should follow the Way in all that one does.

One who follows the Way identifies with the Way.

One who follows Virtue identifies with Virtue.

One who follows loss identifies with loss.

The Way is pleased to have those who identify with the Way.

Virtue is pleased to have those who identify with Virtue.

Loss is pleased to have those who identify with loss.

Those lacking in trust are not trusted.⁴⁷

43. For other examples of “the One,” see chapters 10, 39, and 42.

44. See chapter 24 for a set of lines similar to the preceding four.

45. The same line appears in chapter 66.

46. While the *Daodejing* does not cite ancient sages or texts by name, here and elsewhere it clearly does quote ancient sources. For other examples see chapters 42, 62, and 69.

47. The same line appears in chapter 17. See note 35 above.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Those who stand on tiptoe cannot stand firm.
 Those who stride cannot go far.
 Those who make a display of themselves are not illustrious.
 Those who affirm their own views are not well known.
 Those who brag about themselves are not accorded merit.
 Those who boast about themselves are not heard of for long.⁴⁸
 From the point of view of the Way, such things are known as “excess provisions and
 pointless activities.”
 All creatures find these repulsive;
 And so, one who has the Way does not abide in them.⁴⁹

Chapter Twenty-Five

There is a thing confused yet perfect, which arose before Heaven and earth.
 Still and indistinct, it stands alone and unchanging.
 It goes everywhere, yet is never at a loss.
 One can regard it as the mother of Heaven and earth.
 I do not know its proper name;
 I have given it the style “the Way.”⁵⁰
 Forced to give it a proper name, I would call it “Great.”
 The Great passes on;
 What passes on extends into the distance;
 What extends into the distance returns to its source.⁵¹
 And so,
 The Way is great;
 Heaven is great;
 Earth is great;
 And a true king too is great.
 In the universe are four things that are great and the true king is first among them.
 People model themselves on the earth.
 The earth models itself on Heaven.

48. See chapter 22 for a set of lines similar to the preceding four.

49. This line appears again in chapter 31.

50. There is a play here on the difference between one's *míng* 名, “proper name,” and one's *zì* 字, “style.” In traditional Chinese society one does not use the former, personal name in public. And so, the author can be understood as saying he is not intimately familiar with the Dao and so knows only its style, or perhaps that it would be unseemly to speak its true and proper name to unfamiliar.

51. Cf. the description of the Way found in *Zhuangzi* chapter 6 (in chapter 8 of this volume).

Heaven models itself on the Way.
The Way models itself on what is natural.⁵²

Chapter Twenty-Six

The heavy is the root of the light.
The still rules over the agitated.⁵³
This is why sages travel all day without leaving their baggage wagons.
No matter how magnificent the view or lovely the place, they remain aloof and unaffected.
How can a lord who can field ten thousand chariots take lightly his role in the world?
If he is light, he loses the root;
If he is agitated, he loses his rule.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

One who is good at traveling leaves no tracks or traces.
One who is good at speaking is free of slips or flaws.
One who is good at numbers need not count or reckon.
One who is good at closing up needs no bolts or locks, yet what they have secured cannot be opened.
One who is good at binding needs no rope or string, yet what they have tied cannot be undone.
This is why sages are good at saving people and so never abandon people,⁵⁴
Are good at saving things and so never abandon things.
This is called inheriting enlightenment.⁵⁵
And so,
 The good person is teacher of the bad;
 The bad person is material for the good.
Those who do not honor their teachers or who fail to care for their material, though knowledgeable are profoundly deluded.
This is a fundamental mystery.

52. "Natural" is *ziran*.

53. Cf. chapter 45.

54. Cf. chapter 62.

55. The expression *xí míng* 襲明, "inheriting enlightenment," is open to numerous interpretations. I take it as describing the good that bad people inherit from those who already are enlightened.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Know the male but preserve the female, and be a canyon for all the world.
 If you are a canyon for all the world, constant Virtue will never leave you, and you
 can return home to be a child.
 Know the white but preserve the black, and be a model for all the world.
 If you are a model for all the world, constant Virtue will never err, and you can
 return home to the infinite.
 Know glory but preserve disgrace, and be a valley for all the world.
 If you are a valley for all the world, constant Virtue will always be sufficient, and
 you can return to being unhewn wood.⁵⁶
 When unhewn wood is broken up, it becomes vessels.⁵⁷
 Sages put these to use and become leaders of the officials.
 And so, the greatest carving cuts nothing off.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Those who would gain the world and do something with it, I see that they will
 fail.⁵⁸
 For the world is a spiritual vessel and one cannot put it to use.
 Those who use it ruin it.
 Those who grab hold of it lose it.⁵⁹
 And so,
 Sometimes things lead and sometimes they follow;
 Sometimes they breathe gently and sometimes they pant;
 Sometimes they are strong and sometimes they are weak;
 Sometimes they fight and sometimes they fall;
 This is why sages cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive.

Chapter Thirty

One who serves a ruler with the Way will never take the world by force of arms.
 For such actions tend to come back in kind.
 Wherever an army resides, thorns and thistles grow.

56. Or “simplicity.” See note 33 above.

57. Qì 器, “vessel” or “implement,” is a common metaphor for a government official. Playing on this image, it carries the slightly negative connotation of someone with limited “capacity.” Cf. *Analects* 2.12 (in chapter 1 of this volume; see also the note to that passage).

58. For qǔ tiānxià 取天下, “gaining the world,” see chapters 48 and 57.

59. These two lines also appear in chapter 64.

In the wake of a large campaign, bad harvests are sure to follow.
 Those who are good at military action achieve their goal and then stop.
 They do not dare to rely on force of arms.
 They achieve their goal but do not brag.
 They achieve their goal but do not boast.
 They achieve their goal but are not arrogant.
 They achieve their goal but only because they have no other choice.
 They achieve their goal but do not force the issue.
 For after a period of vigor, there is old age.
 To rely on such practices is said to be contrary to the Way.
 And what is contrary to the Way will come to an early end.⁶⁰

Chapter Thirty-One

Fine weapons are inauspicious instruments;
 All creatures find them repulsive.
 And so, one who has the Way does not rely upon them.
 At home, a cultivated person gives precedence to the left;
 At war, a cultivated person gives precedence to the right.⁶¹
 Weapons are inauspicious instruments, not the instruments of a cultivated person.
 But if given no other choice, the cultivated person will use them.
 Peace and quiet are the highest ideals;
 A military victory is not a thing of beauty.
 To beautify victory is to delight in the slaughter of human beings.
 One who delights in the slaughter of human beings will not realize his ambitions in the world.
 On auspicious occasions, precedence is given to the left;
 On inauspicious occasions, precedence is given to the right.
 The lieutenant commander is stationed on the left;
 The supreme commander is stationed on the right.
 This shows that the supreme commander is associated with the rites of mourning.
 When great numbers of people have been killed, one weeps for them in grief and sorrow.
 Military victory is associated with the rites of mourning.

60. The final three lines also appear at the end of chapter 55.

61. The left side being associated with happy and auspicious events and the right side with sad and inauspicious events.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The Way is forever nameless.⁶²
 Unhewn wood⁶³ is insignificant, yet no one in the world can master it.
 If barons and kings could preserve it, the myriad creatures would all defer to them
 of their own accord;
 Heaven and earth would unite and sweet dew would fall;
 And the people would be peaceful and just, though no one so decrees.
 When unhewn wood is carved up, then there are names.
 Now that there are names, know enough to stop!
 To know when to stop is how to stay out of danger.⁶⁴
 Streams and torrents flow into rivers and oceans,
 Just as the world flows into the Way.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Those who know others are knowledgeable;
 Those who know themselves are enlightened.
 Those who conquer others have power;
 Those who conquer themselves are strong;
 Those who know contentment are rich.⁶⁵
 Those who persevere have firm commitments.
 Those who do not lose their place will endure.
 Those who die a natural death are long-lived.⁶⁶

Chapter Thirty-Four

How expansive is the great Way!
 Flowing to the left and to the right.
 The myriad creatures rely upon it for life, and it turns none of them away.⁶⁷
 When its work is done, it claims no merit.⁶⁸
 It clothes and nourishes the myriad creatures, but does not lord it over them.

62. On the idea of being “nameless,” see chapters 1, 37, and 41.

63. Or “simplicity.” See note 33 above.

64. Cf. the similar line in chapter 44.

65. For the value of *zú* 足, “contentment,” see chapters 44 and 46.

66. Cf. the teaching quoted in chapter 42.

67. Cf. chapter 2.

68. Cf. chapters 2, 9, 17, and 77.

Because it is always without desires, one could consider it insignificant.⁶⁹
 Because the myriad creatures all turn to it and yet it does not lord it over them, one
 could consider it great.
 Because it never considers itself great, it is able to perfect its greatness.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Hold on to the great image and the whole world will come to you.⁷⁰
 They will come and suffer no harm;
 They will be peaceful, secure, and prosperous.
 Music and fine food will induce the passerby to stop.
 But talk about the Way—how insipid and without relish it is!
 Look for it and it cannot be seen;
 Listen for it and it cannot be heard;
 But use it and it will never run dry!

Chapter Thirty-Six

What you intend to shrink, you first must stretch.
 What you intend to weaken, you first must strengthen.
 What you intend to abandon, you first must make flourish.
 What you intend to steal from, you first must provide for.
 This is called subtle enlightenment.
 The supple and weak overcome the hard and the strong.
 Fish should not be taken out of the deep pools.
 The sharp implements of the state should not be shown to the people.⁷¹

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The Way does nothing yet nothing is left undone.⁷²
 Should barons and kings be able to preserve it, the myriad creatures will transform
 themselves.⁷³

69. Literally, one could míng 名, “name,” it or classify it among the small.

70. For other passages that concern *xiang*, “image,” see chapters 4, 14, 21, and 41.

71. The proper sense of lì qì 利器, “sharp implements,” is a matter of considerable controversy. Whether it refers to the weapons of the state, its ministers, labor-saving tools, the Daoist sage, or something else is hard to say, so I have left it ambiguous. Cf. the use in chapter 57.

72. Cf. the similar line in chapter 48.

73. For zì huà 自化, “transform themselves,” see chapter 57.

After they are transformed, should some still desire to act,
 I shall press them down with the weight of nameless unhewn wood.⁷⁴
 Nameless unhewn wood is but freedom from desire.
 Without desire and still, the world will settle itself.

Book Two

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Those of highest Virtue do not strive for Virtue, and so they have it.
 Those of lowest Virtue never stray from Virtue, and so they lack it.
 Those of highest Virtue practice nonaction and never act for ulterior motives.
 Those of lowest Virtue act and always have some ulterior motive.
 Those of highest benevolence act but without ulterior motives.
 Those of highest righteousness act but with ulterior motives.
 Those who are ritually correct⁷⁵ act, but if others do not respond, they roll up their
 sleeves and resort to force.
 And so,
 When the Way was lost there was Virtue;
 When Virtue was lost there was benevolence;
 When benevolence was lost there was righteousness;
 When righteousness was lost there were the rites.
 The rites are the wearing thin of loyalty and trust and the beginning of chaos.
 The ability to predict what is to come is an embellishment of the Way and the
 beginning of ignorance.
 This is why the most accomplished reside in what is thick, not in what is thin.
 They reside in what is most substantial, not in mere embellishment.
 And so, they cast off the one and take up the other.⁷⁶

Chapter Thirty-Nine

In the past, among those who attained the One were these:⁷⁷
 Heaven attained the One and became pure;
 Earth attained the One and became settled;
 The spirits attained the One and became numinous;

74. Or “nameless simplicity.” See note 33 above. On the idea of being “nameless,” see chapters 1, 32, and 41.

75. The word rendered here as “ritually correct” is *li* 禮, which in other contexts is translated as “having propriety.”

76. This line also appears in chapters 12 and 72.

77. For other examples of “the One,” see chapters 10, 22, and 42.

The valley attained the One and became full;
 The myriad creatures attained the One and flourished;
 Barons and kings attained the One and became mainstays of the state.
 All of this came about through the One.
 If Heaven lacked what made it pure, it might rip apart.
 If earth lacked what made it settled, it might open up.
 If the spirits lacked what made them numinous, they might cease their activity.
 If the valley lacked what made it full, it might run dry.
 If the myriad creatures lacked what made them flourish, they might become extinct.
 If barons and kings lacked what made them honored and eminent, they might fall.
 And so,
 What is honored has its root in what is base;
 What is lofty has its foundation in what is lowly.
 This is why barons and kings refer to themselves as,
 “The Orphan,” “The Desolate,” or “The Forlorn.”⁷⁸
 Is this not a case where what is base serves as the foundation?
 Is it not?!
 And so, the greatest of praise is without praise.
 Do not desire what jingles like jade; desire what rumbles like rock!

Chapter Forty

Turning back is how the Way moves.
 Weakness is how the Way operates.
 The world and all its creatures arise from what is there;
 What is there arises from what is not there.

Chapter Forty-One

When the best scholars hear about the Way,
 They assiduously put it into practice.
 When average scholars hear about the Way,
 They sometimes uphold it and sometimes forsake it.
 When the worst scholars hear about the Way,
 They laugh at it!
 If they did not laugh at it, it would not really be the Way.
 And so, the common saying has it:
 The clearest Way seems obscure;
 The Way ahead seems to lead backward;

78. The same expressions occur in chapter 42.

The most level Way seems uneven;
 Highest Virtue seems like a valley;
 Great purity seems sullied,
 Ample Virtue seems insufficient;
 Solid Virtue seems unstable;
 The simple and genuine seems fickle;
 The great square has no corners;
 The great vessel takes long to perfect;
 The great note sounds faint;
 The great image is without shape;⁷⁹
 The Way is hidden and without name.⁸⁰
 Only the Way is good at providing and completing.

Chapter Forty-Two

The Way produces the One.
 The One produces two.
 Two produces three.
 Three produces the myriad creatures.⁸¹
 The myriad creatures shoulder *yin* and embrace *yang*;
 By blending these *qi*, “vital energies,” they attain harmony.
 People most despise being orphaned, desolate, or forlorn;
 And yet, barons and kings take these as their personal appellations.⁸²
 And so,
 Sometimes diminishing a thing adds to it;
 Sometimes adding to a thing diminishes it.

79. For other passages that concern *xiàng* 象, “image,” see chapters 4, 14, 21, and 35.

80. On the idea of being “nameless,” see chapters 1, 32, and 37.

81. The precise referents of these terms are hard to determine. I take the Way to be the most inclusive term designating the hidden, underlying source of things. The “one” would then be its *xiàng* 象, “image,” the closest thing we can have to a picture or representation of the Way. (For other examples, see chapters 10, 22, and 39.) The “two” would then be the fundamental *qì* 氣, “vital energies,” *yin* and *yang* (see *qi* and *yin* and *yang* under *Important Terms* in the appendices). These, together with our image of the Way as a unified whole, give rise to everything in the world. A similar scheme is described in the “Great Appendix” to the *Changes* (see Justin Tiwald and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the Twentieth Century* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014], 49). This process, whatever its particulars, was understood as a natural progression. There was no creator, and the “nothing” out of which things arose is a primal state of undifferentiated vital energy, the state of no things but not absolute Nothingness. See Slingerland’s comments on these passages in *Effortless Action*.

82. See chapter 39.

What others teach, I too teach: “The violent and overbearing will not die a natural death.”

I shall take this as the father of all my teachings.

Chapter Forty-Three

The most supple things in the world ride roughshod over the most rigid.

That which is not there can enter even where there is no space.

This is how I know the advantages of nonaction!

The teaching that is without words,⁸³

The advantages of nonaction,

Few in the world attain these.

Chapter Forty-Four

Your name or your body, which do you hold more dear?

Your body or your property, which is of greater value?

Gain or loss, which is the greater calamity?

And so, deep affections give rise to great expenditures.

Excessive hoarding results in great loss.

Know contentment and avoid disgrace;⁸⁴

Know when to stop and avoid danger;⁸⁵

And you will long endure.

Chapter Forty-Five

Great perfection seems wanting, but use will not wear it out.

Great fullness seems empty, but use will not drain it.

Great straightness seems crooked;

Great skillfulness seems clumsy;

Great speech seems to stammer.

Agitation overcomes cold.

Stillness overcomes heat.

Purity and stillness rectify Heaven and earth.

83. Cf. the similar line in chapter 2.

84. For the value of “contentment,” see chapters 33 and 46.

85. Cf. the similar line in chapter 32.

Chapter Forty-Six

When the world has the Way, fleet-footed horses are used to haul dung.
 When the world is without the Way, war horses are raised in the suburbs.⁸⁶
 The greatest misfortune is not to know contentment.⁸⁷
 The worst calamity is the desire to acquire.
 And so, those who know the contentment of contentment are always content.

Chapter Forty-Seven

Without going out the door, one can know the whole world.
 Without looking out the window, one can see the Way of Heaven.
 The further one goes, the less one knows.
 This is why sages
 Know without going abroad,
 Name without having to see,
 Perfect through nonaction.

Chapter Forty-Eight

In the pursuit of learning, one does more each day;
 In the pursuit of the Way, one does less each day;
 One does less and less until one does nothing;⁸⁸
 One does nothing yet nothing is left undone.⁸⁹
 Gaining the world always is accomplished by following no activity.⁹⁰
 As soon as one actively tries, one will fall short of gaining the world.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Sages do not have constant hearts of their own;
 They take the people's hearts as their hearts.
 I am good to those who are good;
 I also am good to those who are not good;

86. Very close to the city, thus showing a heightened state of mobilization.

87. For the value of "contentment," see chapters 33 and 44.

88. Until one reaches the state of *wuwei*, "nonaction."

89. Cf. the similar lines in chapter 37.

90. For *wúshì* 無事, "no activity," see chapters 57 and 63. For *qū tiānxià*, "gaining the world," see chapters 29 and 57.

This is to be good out of Virtue.⁹¹
 I trust the trustworthy;
 I also trust the untrustworthy.
 This is to trust out of Virtue.
 Sages blend into the world and accord with the people's hearts.
 The people all pay attention to their eyes and ears;
 The sages regard them as children.

Chapter Fifty

Between life and death,
 Three out of ten are the disciples of life;⁹²
 Three out of ten are the disciples of death;
 Three out of ten create a place for death.⁹³
 Why is this?
 Because of their profound desire to live.⁹⁴
 I have heard that those good at nurturing life,
 On land do not meet with rhinoceroses or tigers,
 And in battle do not encounter armored warriors.
 Rhinoceroses find no place to thrust their horns;
 Tigers find no place to sink their claws;
 Soldiers find no place to drive in their blades.
 Why is this?
 Because such people have no place for death.

Chapter Fifty-One

The Way produces them;
 Virtue rears them;

91. I read this line, and the three lines below it, as playing on the etymological and semantic relationship between Dé 德, "virtue," and dé 得, "to get." Since those with virtue naturally are good to and trust others, they accrue ("get") Virtue; this enables them to gain ("get") the support of others and realize ("get") their greater ends. Cf. chapters 17, 23, 27, and 38.

92. Cf. chapter 76.

93. This passage has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. I take its general theme to be the preservation of one's natural span of life, here connected to the idea that wanting something too badly often leads to its opposite. Some are fated to live long and others to die young. But about one in three bring misfortune on themselves. The missing person in ten is of course the sage. By not doing, sages avoid creating a place for death to enter.

94. Cf. chapter 75.

Things shape them;
 Circumstances perfect them.
 This is why the myriad creatures all revere the Way and honor Virtue.
 The Way is revered and Virtue honored not because this is decreed, but because it
 is natural.
 And so, the Way produces them and Virtue rears them;
 Raises and nurtures them;
 Settles and confirms them;
 Nourishes and shelters them.
 To produce without possessing;⁹⁵
 To act with no expectation of reward;⁹⁶
 To lead without lording over;
 Such is Enigmatic Virtue!⁹⁷

Chapter Fifty-Two

The world had a beginning;
 This can be considered the mother of the world.
 Knowing the mother, return and know her children;
 Knowing her children, return and preserve their mother;
 And you will avoid danger to the end of your days.⁹⁸
 Stop up the openings;
 Close the gates;⁹⁹
 To the end of your life you will remain unperturbed.
 Unstop the openings;
 Multiply your activities;
 And to the end of your life you will be beyond salvation.
 To discern the minute is called “enlightenment.”
 To preserve the weak is called “strength.”
 Use this light and return home to this enlightenment.
 Do not bring disaster upon yourself.
 This is called “practicing the constant.”

95. This line also appears in chapters 2 and 10.

96. This line also appears in chapters 2, 10, and 77.

97. Chapter 10 concludes with these same four lines. For xuán dé 玄德, “Enigmatic Virtue,” see chapter 65.

98. This line also appears in chapter 16.

99. This and the preceding line also appear in chapter 56.

Chapter Fifty-Three

If I know anything at all, I know that in following the great Way, there is but one concern:

The great Way is smooth and easy;
 Yet people love to take shortcuts!¹⁰⁰
 The court is resplendent;
 Yet the fields are overgrown.
 The granaries are empty;
 Yet some wear elegant clothes;
 Fine swords dangle at their sides;
 They are stuffed with food and drink;
 And possess wealth in gross abundance.
 This is known as taking pride in robbery.
 Far is this from the Way!

Chapter Fifty-Four

What is firmly grounded will not be pulled out.
 What is firmly embraced will not be lost.
 Through the sacrifices of one's descendants, it will never cease.
 Cultivate it in oneself and its Virtue will be genuine.¹⁰¹
 Cultivate it in one's family and its Virtue will be more than enough.
 Cultivate it in one's village and its Virtue will be long-lasting.
 Cultivate it in one's state and its Virtue will be abundant.
 Cultivate it throughout the world and its Virtue will be everywhere.¹⁰²
 And so,
 Take stock of the self by looking at the self;
 Take stock of the family by looking at the family;
 Take stock of the village by looking at the village;
 Take stock of the state by looking at the state;
 Take stock of the world by looking at the world;

100. See *Analects* 6.14 (not in this volume) for a related use of the word jing 徑, "shortcut."

101. "It" refers to the Way. Note that in this and the following lines the word translated as "Virtue" also clearly has the sense of a kind of "power."

102. The progression from cultivating the Way in oneself to cultivating it throughout the empire is reminiscent of the progression one sees in the Classic section of the *Great Learning* (in chapter 11 of this volume). Wing-tsit Chan points out that Mencius identifies this basic idea as a "common saying" in *Mengzi* 4A5 (not in this volume). (See Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Way of Lao Tzu [Tao te ching]* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 196.)

How do I know that the world is this way?
Through this!

Chapter Fifty-Five

Those who are steeped in Virtue are like newborn children;¹⁰³
Venomous creatures will not strike them;
Fierce beasts will not seize them;
Birds of prey will not snatch them away.
Their bones are weak and sinews yielding and yet their grip is firm.
They do not yet know the union of male and female, but their potency is at its
height.
This is because they are perfectly pure;
They can wail all day without growing hoarse.
This is because they are perfectly balanced.
Knowing balance is called “constancy.”
Knowing constancy is called “enlightenment.”
What helps life along is called “inauspicious.”¹⁰⁴
When the heart is used to guide the *qi*, “vital energies,” this is called “forcing
things.”¹⁰⁵
For after a period of vigor there is old age.
To rely on such practices is said to be contrary to the Way.
And what is contrary to the Way will come to an early end.¹⁰⁶

Chapter Fifty-Six

Those who know do not talk about it;
Those who talk about it do not know.
Stop up the openings;

103. The early Confucian Mengzi also uses the newborn as an image for his ideal state of mind. See his discussion of the *chizi zhī xīn* 赤子之心, “child’s heart,” in *Mengzi* 4B12 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

104. Cf. the closing lines of *Zhuangzi* chapter 5 (in chapter 8 of this volume), where Zhuangzi says, “Follow the natural and do not help life along” (*yì shēng* 益生).

105. Early Daoists tended to advocate allowing one’s *qi* to find its natural course. For example, see the “fasting of the heart” passage in *Zhuangzi* chapter 4 (in chapter 8 of this volume). They were opposed to those such as the early Confucian Mengzi, who argued that the heart should guide the vital energies. See Mengzi’s discussion of nourishing the “floodlike *qi*” in *Mengzi* 2A2 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

106. The final three lines also appear at the end of chapter 30.

Close the gates;¹⁰⁷
 Blunt the sharpness;
 Untangle the tangles;
 Soften the glare;
 Merge with the dust.¹⁰⁸
 This is known as Enigmatic Unity.¹⁰⁹
 And so,
 One can neither be too familiar with nor too distant from them;
 One can neither benefit nor harm them;
 One can neither honor nor demean them.
 And so, they are honored by the whole world.¹¹⁰

Chapter Fifty-Seven

Follow what is correct and regular in ordering your state;
 Follow what is strange and perverse in deploying your troops;
 Follow no activity and gain the world.¹¹¹
 How do I know that things are this way?
 Through this!
 The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people.
 The more sharp implements the people have, the more benighted the state.¹¹²
 The more clever and skillful the people, the more strange and perverse things
 arise.
 The more clear the laws and edicts, the more thieves and robbers.
 And so, sages say,
 “I do nothing and the people transform themselves;
 I prefer stillness and the people correct and regulate themselves;
 I engage in no activity and the people prosper on their own;
 I am without desires and the people simplify¹¹³ their own lives.”

107. This and the preceding line also appear together in chapter 52.

108. This and the preceding three lines also appear together in chapter 4.

109. Cf. chapter 1, “Their unity is known as an enigma.”

110. This line also appears in chapter 62.

111. For *wushi*, “no activity,” see chapters 48 and 63. For *qu tianxia*, “gaining the world,” see chapters 29 and 48.

112. For the expression “sharp implements,” see chapter 36 and note 71.

113. Literally, “unhewn wood.” See note 33 above.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

The more dull and depressed the government, the more honest and agreeable the people.

The more active and searching the government, the more deformed and deficient the people.

Good fortune rests upon disaster;

Disaster lies hidden within good fortune.

Who knows the highest standards?

Perhaps there is nothing that is truly correct and regular!

What is correct and regular turns strange and perverse;

What is good turns monstrous.

Long indeed have the people been deluded.

And so, sages are

Square but do not cut,

Cornered but do not clip,

Upright but not imposing,

Shining but not dazzling.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

In bringing order to the people or in serving Heaven, nothing is as good as frugality.

To be frugal is called submitting early on.

Submitting early on is known as deeply accumulating Virtue.

If you deeply accumulate Virtue, nothing can stand in your way.

If nothing can stand in your way, no one will know your limits.

If no one knows your limits, you can possess the state.

If you possess the mother of the state, you can long endure.

This is known as deep roots and strong stems.

This is the Way of long life and far-reaching vision.

Chapter Sixty

Ruling a great state is like cooking a small fish.¹¹⁴

When one manages the world through the Way, ghosts lose their numinous qualities.

It's not that ghosts really lose their numinous qualities, but that their numinous qualities do not injure human beings.¹¹⁵

114. The idea is that too much attention and meddling will make either fall apart.

115. Laozi seems here to be arguing against the idea, seen in thinkers like Mozi et al., that the ideal state requires the active participation of ghosts and other spirits in meting out rewards or punishments. Laozi does

Not only do their numinous qualities not injure human beings, sages too do not injure human beings.¹¹⁶
 Since neither of these two injures human beings, Virtue gathers and accrues to both.

Chapter Sixty-One

A great state is like the delta of a mighty river;¹¹⁷
 It is where the whole world gathers.
 It is the female of the whole world.¹¹⁸
 The female always gets the better of the male through stillness.
 Through stillness, she places herself below the male.
 And so, a great state, by placing itself below a lesser state, can take the lesser state.
 A lesser state, by placing itself below a great state, can be taken by the greater state.
 And so, one places itself below in order to take;
 The other places itself below in order to be taken.
 The great state wants no more than to provide for all people alike.
 The lesser state wants no more than to find someone to serve.
 Since both can get what they want, it is fitting that the great state places itself in the lower position.

Chapter Sixty-Two

The Way is the inner sanctum of the myriad creatures.¹¹⁹
 It is the treasure of the good man and the savior of the bad.
 Fine words can sell things;¹²⁰
 Noble deeds can promote someone;

not deny the existence of such beings but, like Kongzi, sees a direct appeal to them as inappropriate. Cf. Kongzi's advice concerning ghosts and spirits in *Analects* 6.22 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

116. They do not disturb the people through too much attention and meddling.

117. Literally, xià liú 下流, "low flow." Cf. the use of the same term in *Analects* 19.20 (not in this volume): "The gentleman dislikes living in low places (*xia liu*) where all the foul things of the world collect." The Daoist of course inverts Confucian values, esteeming what the world regards as lowly.

118. In the sense that the ideal great state places itself below and attracts the whole world. Also, like a valley or the delta of a river, the great state is like a woman in being fertile and having the ability to feed the whole world. Consider the common metaphor of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as the "cradle of civilization." Cf. chapter 66.

119. "Inner sanctum" is the translation of ào 奧, the southwest corner of one's house where the household gods are lodged and worshipped.

120. Cf. chapter 81.

But can one cast away the bad in people?¹²¹
 And so, when setting up the Son of Heaven or appointing the Three Ministers,¹²²
 Those who offer up precious jades and present fine steeds are not as good as those
 who stay in their seats and promote this Way.
 Why was this Way so honored in ancient times?
 Did they not say that through it,
 “One could get what one seeks and escape punishment for one’s crimes?”
 And so, this is why it is honored by the whole world.¹²³

Chapter Sixty-Three

Act, but through nonaction.
 Be active, but have no activities.¹²⁴
 Taste, but have no tastes.¹²⁵
 No matter how great or small, many or few,
 Repay resentment with Virtue.¹²⁶
 Plan for what is difficult while it is easy.
 Work at what is great while it is small.
 The difficult undertakings in the world all start with what is easy.
 The great undertakings in the world all begin with what is small.
 This is why sages never work at great things and are able to achieve greatness.
 Those who easily enter into promises always prove unworthy of trust.
 Those who often think that things are easy regularly encounter difficulties.
 And so, sages consider things difficult and in the end are without difficulties.

121. Cf. chapter 27.

122. Cf. Mozi’s discussion of how the Son of Heaven and Three Ministers are to be appointed, in *Mozi* chapter 11, “Obeying One’s Superior” (in chapter 2 of this volume).

123. This line also appears in chapter 56.

124. For *wushi*, “no activities,” see chapters 48 and 57.

125. The idea in each case is that one should do what one does in unpremeditated and spontaneous response to the situation at hand. One should do away with set schemes, categories, standards, and plans, and follow one’s natural inclinations and tendencies. And so, for example, one should taste and savor what one finds pleasing, not what others might enjoy or what accords with some socially sanctioned view about good taste. Cf. chapter 12.

126. Here we see a clear contrast with the view of early Confucians. See *Analects* 14.34 (in chapter 1 of this volume). Cf. chapter 49.

Chapter Sixty-Four

What is at peace is easy to secure.

What has yet to begin is easy to plan for.

What is brittle is easy to scatter.

What is faint is easy to disperse.

Work at things before they come to be;

Regulate things before they become disordered.

A tree whose girth fills one's embrace sprang from a downy sprout;

A terrace nine stories high arose from a layer of dirt;

A journey of a thousand leagues began with a single step.

Those who use it ruin it.

Those who grab hold of it lose it.¹²⁷

This is why sages practice nonaction and so do not ruin;

They do not lay hold and so do not lose.

People often ruin things just when they are on the verge of success.

Be as careful at the end as you are at the beginning, and you will not ruin things.

This is why sages desire to be without desires and show no regard for precious goods.¹²⁸

They study what is not studied and return to what the multitude pass by.¹²⁹

They work to support the myriad creatures in their natural condition and never dare to act.

Chapter Sixty-Five

In ancient times, those good at practicing the Way did not use it to enlighten the people, but rather to keep them in the dark.¹³⁰

127. These two lines also appear in chapter 29.

128. Cf. *Mengzi* 7B35 (not in this volume), "For cultivating the heart and mind nothing is better than to make few one's desires."

129. Daoist sages take nature as their model. In philosophical discussions of the time, there was a debate about whether the proper content of learning is part of or opposed to what is naturally so. This debate in turn was a reflection of a larger debate about the character of human nature. Mengzi endorses only particular natural tendencies—those that incline us toward morality—and on this basis claims that human nature is good. Xunzi argues that our untutored nature inclines us toward bad states of affairs. On this basis he concludes that our nature is bad and must be reformed through protracted study and practice. We can see Laozi, Mengzi, and Xunzi as representing a spectrum of views about the proper content of learning that reflects their different views about the goodness of our pre-reflective nature, running from greatest to least confidence in our raw natural state.

130. The idea that the best of actions flow forth without reflection or knowledge was not uncommon in early China. In his note on this line, Wing-tsit Chan cites a passage from the *Odes* in which the Lord on High commends King Wen for his behavior: "Without reflection or knowledge, you comply with my principles" (*Mao* # 241). (See Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, 216.) Cf. *Analects* 15.5 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

The people are hard to govern because they know too much.

And so,

To rule a state with knowledge is to be a detriment to the state.

Not to rule a state through knowledge is to be a blessing to the state.

Know that these two provide the standard.

Always to know this standard is called Enigmatic Virtue.¹³¹

How profound and far-reaching is Enigmatic Virtue!

It turns back with things;

And only then is there the Great Compliance.¹³²

Chapter Sixty-Six

The rivers and ocean are able to rule over a hundred valleys, because they are good at placing themselves in the lower position.¹³³

And so, they are able to rule over a hundred valleys.

This is why if you want to be above the people, you must proclaim that you are below them.

If you want to lead the people, you must put yourself behind them.

This is how sages are able to reside above the people without being considered a burden,

How they are able to be out in front of the people without being regarded as a harm.

This is why the whole world delights in supporting them and never wearies.

Because they do not contend, no one in the world can contend with them.¹³⁴

Chapter Sixty-Seven

The whole world agrees in saying that my Way is great but appears unworthy.

It is only because it is great that it appears to be unworthy.

If it appeared worthy, would it not have become small long ago?

I have three treasures that I hold on to and preserve:

The first I call loving kindness;

The second I call frugality;

The third I call never daring to put oneself first in the world.

131. For *xuan de*, "Enigmatic Virtue," see chapters 10 and 51.

132. This is the only occurrence of the expression *dà shùn* 大順, "Great Compliance," in the text. However, as Arthur Waley points out in his note to this chapter, it does occur in *Zhuangzi* chapter 12 (not in this volume). (See Arthur Waley, trans., *The Way and Its Power* [New York: Grove Press, 1963], 223.) Note too that the same word *shun* appears in *Mao* # 241, quoted in note 130 above.

133. Cf. chapter 61.

134. The same line appears in chapter 22.

The kind can be courageous;
 The frugal can be generous;
 Those who never dare to put themselves first in the world can become leaders of
 the various officials.
 Now, to be courageous without loving kindness,
 To be generous without frugality,
 To put oneself first without putting oneself behind others,
 These will lead to death.¹³⁵
 If one has loving kindness, in attack one will be victorious,
 In defense one will be secure.
 For Heaven will save you and protect you with loving kindness.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

Those good at fighting are never warlike.¹³⁶
 Those good at attack are never enraged.
 Those good at conquering their enemies never confront them.
 Those good at using others put themselves in a lower position.
 This is called the Virtue of non-contention;
 This is called the power of using others;
 This is called matching up with Heaven, the highest achievement of the ancients.

Chapter Sixty-Nine

Military strategists have a saying,
 “I never dare to play host but prefer to play guest.¹³⁷
 I never dare to advance an inch but retreat a foot.”
 This is called a formation without form,
 Rolling up one’s sleeve but having no arm,
 Forcing the issue but lacking an enemy.¹³⁸
 Who can avoid misfortune in war?
 But there is none greater than underestimating the enemy!
 Underestimating the enemy almost cost me my three treasures.¹³⁹
 And so, when swords are crossed and troops clash, the side that grieves shall be victorious.

135. The idea that true virtue lies in a harmony within a tension, that it requires a balance between extremes, is seen in many traditions. Early Confucians, too, held a version of this view. For example, see *Analects* 8.2 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

136. That is, they are not overly aggressive or pugnacious.

137. They avoid initiating the action, the first move being the prerogative of the host.

138. Cf. the last two lines with a similar line in chapter 38.

139. See chapter 67 for a possible reference.

Chapter Seventy

My teachings are easy to understand and easy to implement;
 But no one in the whole world has been able to understand or implement them.
 My teachings have an ancestor and my activities have a lord;
 But people fail to understand these, and so I am not understood.
 Those who understand me are rare;¹⁴⁰
 Those who take me as a model are honored.
 This is why sages wear coarse cloth while cherishing precious jade.¹⁴¹

Chapter Seventy-One

To know that one does not know is best;
 Not to know but to believe that one knows is a disease.¹⁴²
 Only by seeing this disease as a disease can one be free of it.
 Sages are free of this disease;
 Because they see this disease as a disease, they are free of it.

Chapter Seventy-Two

When the people do not fear what warrants awe,
 Something truly awful will come to them.
 Do not constrain their homes or villages.
 Do not oppress their lives.
 Because you do not oppress them, you will not be oppressed.
 This is why sages know themselves but do not make a display of themselves;
 They care for themselves but do not revere themselves.
 And so, they cast off the one and take up the other.¹⁴³

Chapter Seventy-Three

To be courageous in daring leads to death;
 To be courageous in not daring leads to life.

140. Cf. this complaint with Kongzi's remark in *Analects* 14.35 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

141. They appear common and unworthy on the outside but possess a secret treasure within. In *Analects* 17.1 (not in this volume), a man named Yang Huo criticizes Kongzi's reluctance to take office by asking him, "Can one who cherishes his treasure within and allows his state to go astray be considered benevolent?" Cf. *Analects* 9.13 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

142. This passage is similar in thought to *Analects* 2.17 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

143. This line also appears in chapters 12 and 38.

These two bring benefit to some and loss to others.
 Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it does?
 Even sages regard this as a difficult question.
 The Way does not contend but is good at victory;
 Does not speak but is good at responding;
 Does not call but things come of their own accord;
 Is not anxious but is good at laying plans.
 Heaven's net is vast;
 Its mesh is loose but misses nothing.

Chapter Seventy-Four

If the people are not afraid of death, why threaten them with death?
 "But what if I could keep the people always afraid of death and seize and put to
 death those who dare to act in strange or perverse ways?
 Who then would dare to act in such a manner?"¹⁴⁴
 There is always the killing done by the Chief Executioner.¹⁴⁵
 The Chief Executioner is the greatest carver among carpenters.
 Those who would do the work of the greatest carver among carpenters, rarely avoid
 wounding their own hands.

Chapter Seventy-Five

The people are hungry because those above eat up too much in taxes;
 This is why the people are hungry.
 The people are difficult to govern because those above engage in action;
 This is why the people are difficult to govern.
 People look upon death lightly because those above are obsessed with their own
 lives;¹⁴⁶
 This is why the people look upon death lightly.
 Those who do not strive to live are more worthy than those who cherish life.

Chapter Seventy-Six

When alive human beings are supple and weak;
 When dead they are stiff and strong.

144. These two lines introduce a question and mark a dialogue within the text. Cf. *Analects* 12.19 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

145. The death that Heaven brings to each person.

146. Cf. chapter 50.

When alive the myriad creatures, plants, and trees are supple and weak;
When dead they are withered and dry.

And so,

The stiff and the strong are the disciples of death;¹⁴⁷

The supple and weak are the disciples of life.

This is why,

A weapon that is too strong will not prove victorious;

A tree that is too strong will break.

The strong and the mighty reside down below;

The soft and the supple reside on top.¹⁴⁸

Chapter Seventy-Seven

The Way of Heaven, is it not like the stretching of a bow?

What is high it presses down;

What is low it lifts up.

It takes from what has excess;

It augments what is deficient.

The Way of Heaven takes from what has excess and augments what is deficient.

The Way of human beings is not like this.

It takes from the deficient and offers it up to those with excess.

Who is able to offer what they have in excess to the world?

Only one who has the Way!

This is why sages act with no expectation of reward.¹⁴⁹

When their work is done, they do not linger.¹⁵⁰

They do not desire to make a display of their worthiness.

Chapter Seventy-Eight

In all the world, nothing is more supple or weak than water;

Yet nothing can surpass it for attacking what is stiff and strong.

And so, nothing can take its place.

That the weak overcomes the strong and the supple overcomes the hard,

These are things everyone in the world knows but none can practice.

This is why sages say,

147. Cf. chapter 50.

148. The Han dynasty commentator Wang Bi illustrates the point of these last two lines with the examples of the roots of a tree and its twigs.

149. This line also appears in chapters 2, 10, and 51.

150. Cf. chapters 2, 9, 17, and 34. This and the previous line also appear together in chapter 2.

Those who can take on the disgrace of the state
 Are called lords of the altar to the soil and grain.¹⁵¹
 Those who can take on the misfortune of the state,
 Are called kings of all the world.¹⁵²
 Straightforward words seem paradoxical.

Chapter Seventy-Nine

In cases of great resentment, even when resolution is reached, some resentment remains.
 How can this be considered good?
 This is why sages maintain the left-hand portion of the tally,¹⁵³
 But do not hold people accountable.
 Those with Virtue oversee the tally;
 Those without Virtue oversee collection.¹⁵⁴
 The Way of Heaven plays no favorites;
 It is always on the side of the good.

Chapter Eighty

Reduce the size of the state;
 Lessen the population.
 Make sure that even though there are labor-saving tools, they are never used.
 Make sure that the people look upon death as a weighty matter and never move to distant places.
 Even though they have ships and carts, they will have no use for them.
 Even though they have armor and weapons, they will have no reason to deploy them.

151. These were the main altars of the state and a common metaphor for its independence and well-being.

152. The idea that the worthiest rulers are willing to offer themselves to Heaven as surrogates on behalf of the people and in the name of the state is a motif seen in writings of this period and earlier. See King Tang's pronouncement to the spirits in *Analects* 20.1 (not in this volume) and Davis S. Nivison, "'Virtue' in Bone and Bronze," in *The Ways of Confucianism* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Press, 1996), especially 20–24.

153. The left-hand portion of a contract of obligation, the part that was held by the creditor.

154. The central idea of this chapter, which is seen throughout the text, is that one cannot force others to be good. If one resorts to force, one's actions will eventually rebound in kind upon oneself. The only way to affect others and turn them to the good is through the power of one's *De*, "Virtue."

Make sure that the people return to the use of the knotted cord.¹⁵⁵
 Make their food savory,
 Their clothes fine,
 Their houses comfortable,
 Their lives happy.
 Then even though neighboring states are within sight of each other,
 Even though they can hear the sounds of each other's dogs and chickens,
 Their people will grow old and die without ever having visited one another.

Chapter Eighty-One

Words worthy of trust are not refined;
 Refined words are not worthy of trust.¹⁵⁶
 The good do not engage in disputation;
 Those who engage in disputation are not good.¹⁵⁷
 Those who know are not full of knowledge;
 Those full of knowledge do not know.
 Sages do not accumulate.
 The more they do for others, the more they have;
 The more they give to others, the more they possess.
 The Way of Heaven is to benefit and not harm.
 The Way of the sage is to act but not contend.

155. That is, let them abandon writing. The use of the knotted cord to keep track of records is mentioned in the "Great Appendix," Part 2, to the *Changes*, and *Zhuangzi* chapter 10 (not in this volume), as well as elsewhere in the early literature. The details are unclear but the practice probably entailed making a knot in a cord for every ten or twenty units counted. Thus, it resembles the Western practice of notching or "scoring" a piece of wood for every twenty units counted, each notch representing a "score" or twenty.

156. In *Analects* 14.4 (in chapter 1 of this volume), Kongzi says, "Those who possess Virtue will inevitably have something to say, whereas those who have something to say do not necessarily possess Virtue." Cf. chapter 62.

157. Confucians too had a general mistrust of glib talkers and disputation. This reflects their similar, though distinct, beliefs about the power of a good person's *De*, "Virtue," to sway others. For examples, see *Analects* 1.3 (in chapter 1 of this volume) and Mengzi's explanation of why he must engage in disputation, though not being fond of it, found in *Mengzi* 3B9 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

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