



CHAPTER NINE

XUNZI

Introduction

Before the unification of China by the Qin state in 221 BCE, which brought to a close the classical period of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism had one last great exponent, Xúnzǐ 荀子, whose work represents the highest development of the school in the Warring States period. (See *Important Periods* in the appendices.) Whereas the views of Kongzi and Mengzi are preserved only in piecemeal sayings, Xunzi's thought has come down to the present in the form of tightly constructed essays that give sustained discussions of various topics and together constitute a remarkably coherent system of arguments. Although his writing is not quite as colorful as that of Zhuangzi, his style is extremely elegant and forceful, occasionally bursting into poetry that movingly conveys his passion for the Confucian way of life.

Much of Xunzi's effort is devoted to ardently defending Confucianism against various challenges. For example, he vehemently condemns Mozi's rejection of ritual and music and argues vigorously that these cultural forms are absolutely necessary. He also attacks Laozi and Zhuangzi for advocating that people adopt the perspective of Heaven and abandon conventional values in favor of yielding to the natural flow of things. Xunzi instead stresses the distinctive importance of the human point of view, and in stark contrast to their emphasis on *wúwéi* 無為, “nonaction” or “non-striving action,” he claims that good things are achieved only through *wéi* 假, “deliberate effort.” Yet even as he repudiates rival philosophers, Xunzi also learns from them and incorporates their insights. The influence of Zhuangzi on his thought is particularly evident in his characterization of the heart as mirrorlike and in his description of how it comes to know the Way, though the substance of Xunzi's views differs considerably from that of Zhuangzi.

For Xunzi, the threats to Confucianism come not only from outside the tradition, but also from *within* it, in the form of Mengzi's doctrine

that human nature is good. In Xunzi's opinion, such a claim undermines the authority of ritual as a guide to behavior, destroys the necessity of learning, and simply flies in the face of the facts. Xunzi makes the opposite declaration that human nature is bad, but this should not be read as saying that people naturally delight in evil. Rather, his point is that people lack any inborn guide to right conduct, and that without the external restraint of ritual they will fall into wrongdoing and be reduced to a chaotic, impoverished state strongly reminiscent of the "state of nature" depicted by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Nevertheless, Xunzi shares Mengzi's belief that everyone has the potential to achieve moral perfection. However, since we are not inclined to virtue by nature, the process of self-transformation will be slow and difficult, and this idea is reflected in Xunzi's repeated comparison of learning with the harsh processes involved in bending wood.

In his own day, Xunzi was a well-known scholar and was even given high office at one point. Among his students were Han Feizi and Li Si, who was instrumental in bringing about the Qin state's domination of China. Xunzi may even have lived to witness this event. Other students of his were responsible for preserving classic Chinese texts, including the *Odes*. Despite Xunzi's important position in early Chinese intellectual history, when Mengzi's views later came to be favored, Xunzi was rejected for claiming that human nature is bad, and his works were largely neglected for centuries. Recently, however, there has been a renewal of scholarly interest in Xunzi, and he is once again receiving the attention he deserves.



Chapter One: An Exhortation to Learning

The gentleman says: Learning must never stop. Blue dye is gotten from the indigo plant, and yet it is bluer than the plant. Ice comes from water, and yet it is colder than water. Through steaming and bending, you can make wood straight as an ink-line¹ into a wheel. And after its curve conforms to the compass, even when parched under the sun it will not become straight again,

1. A carpenter's tool used for marking straight lines.

because the steaming and bending have made it a certain way. Likewise, when wood comes under the ink-line, it becomes straight, and when metal is brought to the whetstone, it becomes sharp.² The gentleman learns broadly and examines himself thrice daily,³ and then his knowledge is clear and his conduct is without fault.

And so, if you never climb a high mountain, you will not know the height of Heaven. If you never approach a deep ravine, you will not know the depth of the earth. If you never hear the words passed down from the former kings, you will not know the magnificence of learning. The children of the Han, Yue, Yi, and Mo⁴ peoples all cry with the same sound at birth, but when grown they have different customs, because teaching makes them thus. . . .

I once spent the whole day pondering, but it was not as good as a moment's worth of learning.⁵ I once stood on my toes to look far away, but it was not as good as the broad view from a high place. If you climb to a high place and wave, you have not lengthened your arms, but you can be seen from farther away. If you shout from upwind, you have not made your voice stronger, but you can be heard more clearly. One who makes use of a chariot and horses has not thereby improved his feet, but he can now go a thousand *li*. One who makes use of a boat and oars has not thereby become able to swim, but he can now cross rivers and streams. The gentleman is exceptional not by birth, but rather by being good at making use of things. . . .

If you accumulate enough earth to form a mountain, then wind and rain will arise from it. If you accumulate enough water to form a deep pool, then dragons will come to live in it. If you accumulate enough goodness to achieve Virtue, then you will naturally attain to spirit-like powers and enlightenment, and the heart of a sage is complete therein.

And so,

Without accumulating tiny steps,
You have no way to go a thousand *li*.
Without accumulating little streams,
You have no way to form river or sea.
Let the horse Qi Ji⁶ take a single leap;

2. Compare Gaozi's metaphors for self-cultivation in *Mengzi* 6A1–2 (in chapter 4 of this volume) and *Xunzi* chapter 23 (below).

3. Compare *Analects* 1.4 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

4. These are the names of “barbarian” states and tribes.

5. Compare *Analects* 15.31 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

6. The horse Qi Ji was famous for his ability to go a thousand *li* in a single day.

It still would go no farther than ten strides.
 Yet old nags ridden ten days equal him;
 Not giving up is where success resides.⁷

If you start carving and give up, you will not be able to break even rotten wood, but if you start carving and don't give up, then you can engrave even metal and stone. The earthworm does not have sharp teeth and claws, nor does it have strong bones and muscles. Yet, it eats of the earth above, and it drinks from the Yellow Springs below,⁸ because it acts with single-mindedness. In contrast, the crab has six legs and two pincers. Yet were it not for the abandoned holes of water snakes and eels, it would have no place to lodge, because it is frenetic-minded. For this reason,

If you do not first have somber intention,
 No brilliant understanding can there be.
 If you do not first have determined effort,
 No glorious achievements will you see. . . .

Where does learning begin? Where does learning end? I say: Its order begins with reciting the classics, and ends with studying ritual. Its purpose begins with becoming a noble man, and ends with becoming a sage. If you truly accumulate effort for a long time, then you will advance. Learning proceeds until death and only then does it stop. And so, the order of learning has a stopping point, but its purpose cannot be given up for even a moment. To pursue it is to be human, to give it up is to be a beast. Thus:

The *History* is the record of government affairs.
 The *Odes* is the repository of balanced sound.
 Rituals are the great divisions in the model for things.
 Outlines of things' proper classes are in the rituals found.

And so, learning comes to ritual and then stops, for this is called the ultimate point in pursuit of the Way and Virtue. In the reverence and refinement of ritual, the balance and harmony of music, the broad content of the *Odes* and *History*, the subtleties of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, all things between Heaven and earth are complete.

7. In the present translation, passages which rhymed in the original have been translated with rhyming English, mostly using lines with fixed numbers of syllables (but the rhymes do not always follow the Chinese rhyme scheme and the line lengths do not match the length of the original Chinese lines). When a rhyming translation would have significantly obscured an important philosophical point or was otherwise not feasible, such passages in the original are translated as indented prose sections and are pointed out in the footnotes.

8. The Yellow Springs were believed to be deep underground and were thought of as the abode of the spirits of the dead.

The learning of the gentleman enters through his ears, fastens to his heart, spreads through his four limbs, and manifests itself in his actions. His slightest word, his most subtle movement, all can serve as a model for others. The learning of the petty person enters through his ears and passes out his mouth. From mouth to ears is only four inches—how could it be enough to improve a whole body much larger than that? Students in ancient times learned for their own sake, but the students of today learn for the sake of impressing others.⁹ Thus the learning of the gentleman is used to improve his own person, while the learning of the petty man is used like gift oxen.¹⁰ To speak without being asked is what people call being presumptuous, and to speak two things when asked only one is what people call being wordy. Being presumptuous is wrong, and being wordy is wrong. The gentleman is simply like an echo.

In learning, nothing is more expedient than to draw near to the right person. Rituals and music provide proper models but give no precepts. The *Odes* and *History* contain ancient stories but no explanation of their present application. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is terse and cannot be quickly understood. However, if you imitate the right person in his practice of the precepts of the gentleman, then you will come to honor these things for their comprehensiveness, and see them as encompassing the whole world. Thus, in learning there is nothing more expedient than to draw near to the right person.

Of the paths to learning, none is quicker than to like the right person, and exalting ritual comes second. If at best you cannot like the right person, and at worst you cannot exalt ritual, then you will simply be learning haphazard knowledge and focusing your intentions on blindly following the *Odes* and *History*. If so, then to the end of your days you cannot avoid being nothing more than a vulgar scholar.¹¹ If you are going to take the former kings as your fount and make benevolence and righteousness¹² your root, then rituals are exactly the highways and byways for you.

9. Compare *Analects* 14.24 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

10. In ancient China, animals were given as gifts to superiors or honored guests. Xunzi's point is that the petty man likewise shows off his learning to ingratiate himself to others and win official positions.

11. The last word here is *Rú* 儒, which later came to mean simply "Confucian" (see *Important Terms* in the appendices). In Xunzi's time it did not yet have such a specific denotation but instead referred more generally to a "scholar." Compare *Analects* 6.13 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

12. The word here is *yi* 義, an extremely important term for Xunzi. In his writings, it can refer both to a specific set of social standards created by the sages, and to the virtue of abiding by those standards. In the former usage, it is frequently paired with ritual, and the standards to which it refers appear to be higher-order standards for structuring society (e.g., by defining various social roles), from which are derived the more particular directives for behavior contained in ritual. For those contexts, in order to mark that Xunzi is referring to an external set of standards, rather than an internal disposition, it is rendered in this translation as "the standards of righteousness." See *yi* under *Important Terms* in the appendices.

It will be like the action of turning up your fur collar by simply curling your five fingers and pulling on it—it goes smoothly numberless times. If you do not take the regulations of ritual as your way, but instead go at it with just the *Odes* and *History*, then it will be like trying to measure the depth of a river with your finger, or trying to pound millet with a halberd, or trying to eat out of a pot with an awl—you simply will not succeed at it. And so, if you exalt ritual, then even if you are not brilliant, you will still be a man of the proper model. If you do not exalt ritual, then even if you are an acute debater, you will be only a dissolute scholar. . . .

One who misses a single shot out of a hundred does not deserve to be called good at archery. One who falls short of going a thousand *li* by the distance of even a half-step does not deserve to be called good at chariot-driving. One who does not fully comprehend the proper kinds and classes of things, or who is not single-minded in pursuit of benevolence and righteousness, does not deserve to be called good at learning. Learning is precisely learning to pursue them single-mindedly. To depart from it in one affair and adhere to it in another is to be such as common people. To have in oneself little that is good and much that is not good is to be such as Tyrant Jie and Tyrant Zhou and Robber Zhi. Perfect it and complete it, and only then is one truly a learned person.

The gentleman knows that whatever is imperfect and unrefined does not deserve praise. And so, he repeatedly recites his learning in order to master it, ponders it in order to comprehend it, makes his person so as to dwell in it, and eliminates things harmful to it in order to nourish it. He makes his eyes not want to see what is not right, makes his ears not want to hear what is not right, makes his mouth not want to speak what is not right, and makes his heart not want to deliberate over what is not right.¹³ He comes to the point where he loves it, and then his eyes love it more than the five colors, his ears love it more than the five tones, his mouth loves it more than the five flavors, and his heart considers it more profitable than possessing the whole world. For this reason, power and profit cannot sway him, the masses cannot shift him, and nothing in the world can shake him.¹⁴ He lives by this, and he dies by this. This is called the state in which Virtue has been grasped.

When Virtue has been grasped, only then can one achieve fixity.¹⁵ When one can achieve fixity, then one can respond to things. To be capable both of fixity and

13. Compare *Analects* 12.1 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

14. Compare the last lines of *Mengzi* 3B2 (not in this volume).

15. The Chinese word translated here as “fixity” is *ding* (定), which is distinct from and etymologically unrelated to the Chinese word *bi* (蔽) that is translated as “fixation” in *Xunzi* chapter 21 (below) and elsewhere. The former word connotes stability and is generally, as seen here, a positive trait for *Xunzi*, whereas the latter word connotes a failure of understanding (that comes from or leads to an excessive and improper concern for something) and is hence a negative trait.

of responding to things—this is called the perfected person. Heaven shows off its brilliance, earth shows off its breadth, and the gentleman values his perfection.

Chapter Two: Cultivating Oneself

When you observe goodness in others, then inspect yourself, desirous of cultivating it. When you observe badness in others, then examine yourself, fearful of discovering it.¹⁶ If you find goodness in your person, then commend yourself, desirous of holding firm to it. If you find badness in your person, then reproach yourself, regarding it as calamity. And so, he who rightly criticizes me acts as a teacher toward me, and he who rightly supports me acts as a friend toward me, while he who flatters and toadies to me acts as a villain toward me. Accordingly, the gentleman exalts those who act as teachers toward him and loves those who act as friends toward him, so as to utterly hate those who act as villains toward him. He loves goodness tirelessly, and can receive admonitions and take heed. Even if he desired not to improve, how could he avoid it? The petty man is the opposite. He is utterly disorderly, but hates for people to criticize him. He is utterly unworthy, but wishes for people to consider him worthy. His heart is like that of a tiger or wolf, and his conduct like that of beasts, but he hates for people to consider him a villain. To those who flatter and toady to him he shows favor, while those who would admonish him, he keeps at a distance. Those who cultivate correctness he considers laughable, and those truly loyal to him he considers villains. Even though he does not wish to perish, how could he avoid it? The *Odes* says,

These men conspire and practice slander.
This is a matter for great sorrow!
To any plan that's worth adopting,
Complete resistance is what they show.
But as for plans not worth adopting,
These they completely wish to follow!¹⁷

This expresses my meaning.

The measure for goodness in all things is this:

Use it to control your *qi* and nourish your life,
Then you will live longer than Peng Zu.
Use it to cultivate yourself and achieve fame,

16. Compare *Analects* 4.17 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

17. *Mao* # 195.

Then you'll be equal to Yao and Yu.

It is fitting in times of prosperity.

It is useful in facing adversity

—truly such is ritual.

If your exertions of blood, *qi*, intention, and thought accord with ritual, they will be ordered and effective.¹⁸ If they do not accord with ritual, they will be disorderly and unproductive. If your meals, clothing, dwelling, and activities accord with ritual, they will be congenial and well regulated. If they do not accord with ritual, then you will encounter dangers and illnesses. If your countenance, bearing, movements, and stride accord with ritual, they will be graceful. If they do not accord with ritual, they will be barbaric, obtuse, perverse, vulgar, and unruly.

Hence,

If their lives are without ritual,
Then people cannot survive.
If affairs are without ritual,
In them success does not thrive.
If state and clan are without ritual,
For them peace does not arrive.

The *Odes* says:

Ritual and ceremony have right measure completely.
Laugh and speak only in complete accord with propriety.¹⁹

This expresses my meaning.

To lead others along in what is good is called “teaching.” To harmonize with others in what is good is called “proper compliance.” To lead others along in what is bad is called “flattery.” To harmonize with others in what is bad is called “toady-ing.” To endorse what is right and condemn what is wrong is called “wisdom.” To endorse what is wrong and condemn what is right is called “stupidity.” To attack a good person is called “slander.” To injure a good person is called “villainy.” To call the right as right and the wrong as wrong is called “uprightness.” To steal goods is

18. The five sentences after this one are rhymed in the Chinese text, and some scholars suggest that this sentence was originally part of that rhyming group, but became corrupted and so no longer rhymes. Since its grammatical structure is closely parallel to the sentences that follow, I have offset it with the rest of the rhymed lines.

19. *Mao #209*. These lines are also quoted in chapter 19 of the *Xunzi* (see below). In their original context, they describe people (“Their ritual . . . / They laugh . . .”). Without that context, here the lines are ambiguous, and I have rendered them to fit this context best.

called “thievery.” To conceal one’s actions is called “deceptiveness.” To speak too easily of things is called “boastfulness.” To be without fixity in one’s likes and dislikes is called “lacking constancy.” To abandon righteousness in favor of profit is called “utmost villainy.” To have heard many things is called “broadness.” To have heard few things is called “shallowness.” To have seen many things is called “erudition.” To have seen few things is called “boorishness.”²⁰ To have difficulty in progressing is called “indolence.” To forget things easily is called “leakiness.” For one’s actions to be few and well-ordered is called “being controlled.” For one’s actions to be many and disorderly is called “being wasteful.”

The methods for controlling the *qi* and nourishing the heart: For unyielding blood and *qi*, soften them with harmoniousness. For overly deep thinking, simplify it with easy goodness. For overly ferocious courage, reform it with proper compliance. For expedience-seeking hastiness, restrain it with regulated movements. For small-minded narrowness, broaden it with expansiveness. For excessive humility, sluggishness, or greed for profit, resist it with lofty intentions. For vulgarity or dissoluteness, expunge it with teachers and friends. For indolence or profligacy, illuminate it with the prospect of disasters. For simpleminded rectitude or scrupulous honesty,²¹ make it suitable with ritual and music, and enlighten it with reflection. In each method of controlling the *qi* and nourishing the heart, nothing is more direct than following ritual, nothing is more important than having a good teacher, and nothing works with greater spirit-like efficacy than liking it with single-minded devotion. These are called the methods for controlling the *qi* and nourishing the heart.

If one’s intentions and thoughts are cultivated, then one will disregard wealth and nobility. If one’s concern is for the Way and righteousness is great, then one will take kings and dukes lightly. It is simply that one examines oneself on the inside, and thus external goods carry little weight. A saying goes, “The gentleman makes things his servants. The petty man is servant to things.” This expresses my meaning. If an action tires your body but puts your heart at ease, do it. If it involves little profit but much righteousness, do it. Being successful in the service of a lord who creates chaos is not as good as simply being compliant in the service of an impoverished lord. And so, a good farmer does not fail to plant because of drought, a good

20. “Boorishness,” *lòu*陋, is an important term for Xunzi. It is the uncultivated state in which a person has not yet been shown the greatest goods in life (that is, the way of the sages), and so does not properly appreciate them. Compare *Analects* 9.14 (in chapter 1 of this volume, where the same term is translated “uncouthness”).

21. In most other places in the text, *duān què*端慧 (“scrupulous honesty” or “scrupulousness and honesty”) is presented as something good, with no sense that there is anything deficient about it. Insofar as it is treated here as being in need of modification through ritual, music, and reflection, perhaps Xunzi has in mind a case where it becomes an excessive moral fastidiousness, something that he warns against in other places.

merchant does not fail to open shop because of losses, and the noble man and the gentleman are not lax in their pursuit of the Way because of poverty.

If your bearing is reverent and respectful and your heart is loyal and faithful, if your method is ritual and the standards of righteousness and your disposition²² is concern for others, then you may wander across the whole world, and even if you become trapped among barbarians, no one will fail to value you.²³ If you are eager to take the lead in laborious matters, if you can give way in pleasant matters, and if you show scrupulousness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, self-control, and meticulousness, then you may wander across the whole world, and even if you become trapped among barbarians, no one will fail to employ you. If your bearing is arrogant and obtuse and your heart is stubborn and deceitful, if your method is to follow Mozi²⁴ and your truest essence is polluted and corrupt, then you may wander across the whole world, and even if you reach every corner of it, no one will fail to consider you base. If you try to put off or wriggle out of laborious matters, if you are grasping and will not yield in pleasant matters, if you are perverse and dishonest, if you are not meticulous in work, then you may wander across the whole world, and even if you reach every corner of it, no one will fail to reject you. . . .

He who likes the right model and carries it out is a man of good breeding. He who focuses his intentions upon it and embodies it is a gentleman. He who completely understands it and practices it without tiring is a sage. If a person lacks the proper model, then he will act recklessly. If he has the proper model but does not fix his intentions on its true meaning, then he will act too rigidly. If he relies on the proper model and also deeply understands its categories, only then will he act with comfortable mastery of it.

22. The word rendered here as “disposition” is *qīng* 情, an extremely important concept in Xunzi’s psychological views. In Xunzi’s text, *qing* is most often used as a class term for what in English we call “feelings” (or “emotions”) and “desires.” Xunzi uses it to refer to specific occasions of feeling and desire but also especially for the general *tendency* to feel and desire in various ways. It is to capture this latter sense that I have rendered *qing* as “disposition,” and this translation is used throughout, in order to allow readers to track the term, though this sometimes makes for awkwardness, especially when Xunzi is concentrating on the aspect of it that is closer to “emotion.” In those cases, notes have been added to aid the reader. Xunzi believes that a person’s *qing* can be changed through habituation. Accordingly, he sometimes uses *qing* to refer to those reformed dispositions, but more often to people’s natural dispositions; when he has the second sense in mind, *qing* is sometimes rendered as “inborn dispositions” to make his point clearer.

23. The Chinese text of this and the next three sentences contains rhymed sections.

24. That is, to reject ritual.

Ritual is that by which to correct your person. The teacher is that by which to correct your practice of ritual.²⁵ If you are without ritual, then how will you correct your person? If you are without a teacher, how will you know that your practice of ritual is right? When ritual is so, and you are also so, then this means your disposition accords with ritual. When the teacher explains thus, and you also explain thus, then this means your understanding is just like your teacher's understanding. If your disposition accords with ritual, and your understanding is just like your teacher's understanding, then this is to be a sage. And so, to contradict ritual is to be without a proper model, and to contradict your teacher is to be without a teacher. If you do not concur with your teacher and the proper model but instead like to use your own judgment, then this is like relying on a blind person to distinguish colors, or like relying on a deaf person to distinguish sounds. You will accomplish nothing but chaos and recklessness. And so, in learning, ritual is your proper model, and the teacher is one whom you take as the correct standard and whom you aspire to accord with. The *Odes* says, "While not knowing, not understanding, he follows the principles of the Lord on High."²⁶ This expresses my meaning. . . .

In seeking profit, the gentleman acts with restraint. In averting harms, he acts early. In avoiding disgrace, he acts fearfully. In carrying out the Way, he acts courageously. Even if living in poverty, the gentleman's intentions are still grand. Even if wealthy and honored, his demeanor is reverent. Even if he lives at ease, his blood and *qi* are not lazy. Even if weary from toil, his countenance is not disagreeable. When angry he is not excessively harsh, and when happy he is not excessively indulgent. The gentleman retains grand intentions even in poverty, because he exalts benevolence. He maintains a reverent demeanor even when wealthy and honored, because he takes contingent fortune lightly. His blood and *qi* do not become lazy when at ease, because he is heedful of good order. His countenance is not disagreeable even when weary from toil, because he is fond of good relations. He is neither excessively harsh when angry nor excessively indulgent when happy, because his adherence to the proper model overcomes any personal capriciousness. The *History* says:

Do not create new likes.
Follow the kings' way.
Do not create new dislikes.
On the kings' path stay.²⁷

25. That is, the teacher shows one both the right rituals to practice and how to practice them rightly.

26. Mao # 241.

27. See the chapter of the *History* titled "Hongfan" ("The Great Plan"), translated in Clae Waltham, ed. *Shu Ching: Book of History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 128. These same lines are quoted again in *Xunzi* chapter 17, "Discourse on Heaven" (below).

This is saying that through avoidance of prejudice²⁸ and adherence to righteousness the gentleman overcomes capricious personal desires.

Chapter Five: Against Physiognomy

. . . What is that by which humans are human? I say: It is because they have distinctions. Desiring food when hungry, desiring warmth when cold, desiring rest when tired, liking the beneficial and hating the harmful—these are things people have from birth. These one does not have to await, but are already so. These are what Yu and Jie both share. However, that by which humans are human is not that they are special in having two legs and no feathers, but rather because they have distinctions. Now the ape's form is such that it also has two legs and no feathers. However, the gentleman sips ape soup and eats ape meat. Thus, that by which humans are human is not that they are special in having two legs and no feathers, but rather because they have distinctions. The birds and beasts have fathers and sons but not the intimate relationship of father and son. They have the male sex and the female sex but no differentiation between male and female. And so, for human ways, none is without distinctions. Of distinctions, none are greater than social divisions, and of social divisions, none are greater than rituals, and of rituals, none are greater than those of the sage-kings.²⁹

But there are a hundred sage-kings—which of them shall one take as one's model? And so I say: Culture persists for a long time and then expires; regulations persist for a long time and then cease. The authorities in charge of preserving models and arrangements do their utmost in carrying out ritual but lose their grasp. And so, I say: If you wish to observe the tracks of the sage-kings, then look to the most clear among them. Such are the later kings. The later kings were lords of the whole world. To reject the later kings and take one's way from furthest antiquity is like rejecting one's own lord and serving another's lord. And so, I say: If you wish to observe a thousand years' time, then reckon upon today's events. If you wish to understand ten thousand or one hundred thousand, then examine one and two. If

28. "Avoidance of prejudice" is my translation for *gōng* 公. It is a virtue opposite both to prejudice in favor of oneself, that is, selfishness, and to prejudice in favor of certain people or certain views, that is, unfair bias. Stated more positively, it combines both public-spiritedness and impartiality. See note 70 in chapter 10 of this volume (re *Han Feizi* chapter 49).

29. Zhuangzi also argues that making normative distinctions sets humans apart from animals, but claims that this tendency is the greatest source of trouble and should be avoided. Here Xunzi turns Zhuangzi's point on its head and glorifies such distinctions as the source of all good. See *Zhuangzi* chapter 2 (in chapter 8 of this volume).

you wish to understand the ancient ages, then examine the way of the Zhou. If you wish to understand the way of the Zhou, then examine the gentlemen whom their people valued. Thus, it is said: Use the near to know the far; use the one to know the ten thousand; use the subtle to know the brilliant. This expresses my meaning. . . .

Chapter Eight: The Achievements of the Ru

The Way of the former kings consists in exalting benevolence. One must cleave to what is central in carrying it out. What do I mean by “what is central”? I say: It is ritual and the standards of righteousness. The Way is not the way of Heaven, nor is it the way of earth.³⁰ It is that whereby humans make their way, and that which the gentleman takes as his way.

Chapter Nine: The Regulations of a True King

. . . Water and fire have *qi* but are without life. Grasses and trees have life but are without awareness. Birds and beasts have awareness but are without standards of righteousness (*yì* 義). Humans have *qi* and life and awareness, and moreover they have standards of righteousness. And so, they are the most precious things under Heaven. They are not as strong as oxen or as fast as horses, but oxen and horses are used by them. How is this so? I say: It is because humans are able to form communities while the animals cannot. Why are humans able to form communities? I say: It is because of social divisions. How can social divisions be put into practice? I say: It is because of standards of righteousness. And so, if they use standards of righteousness in order to make social divisions, then they will be harmonized. If they are harmonized, then they will be unified. If they are unified, then they will have more force. If they have more force, then they will be strong. If they are strong, then they will be able to overcome the animals. And so, they can get to live in homes and palaces. Thus, the reason why people can order themselves with the four seasons, control the myriad things, and bring benefit to all under Heaven is none other than that they are able to get these social divisions and standards of righteousness. And so, human life cannot be without community. If they form communities but are without social divisions, then they will struggle. If they struggle, then there will be chaos. If there is chaos then they will disband. If they disband then they will be

30. This line is probably intended as a polemic against views such as those in *Daodejing* chapter 25 (in chapter 6 of this volume) and *Zhuangzi* chapter 2 (in chapter 8 of this volume), which seem to propose the way of Heaven as the model for human beings. See Xunzi's explicit criticism of this approach in *Xunzi* chapter 21 (below).

weak. If they are weak then they cannot overcome the animals. And so, they will not get to live in homes and palaces. This is the meaning of saying that “one must not let go of ritual and the standards of righteousness for even a moment.”

One who can use these to serve his parents is called filial. One who can use these to serve his elder brother is called a proper younger brother. One who can use these to serve his superiors is called properly compliant. One who can use these to employ his subordinates is called a proper lord. The true lord is one who is good at forming community.³¹ When the way of forming community is properly practiced, then the myriad things will each obtain what is appropriate for them, the six domestic animals will each obtain their proper growth, and all the various living things will obtain their proper lifespans. And so, when nurturing accords with the proper times, then the six domestic animals will multiply. When reaping accords with the proper times, then the grasses and trees will flourish. If government commands accord with the proper times, then the common people will be united, and good and worthy men will submit and obey.

These are the regulations of a sage-king: When the grasses and trees are flowering and abundant, then axes and hatchets are not to enter the mountains and forests, so as not to cut short their life, and not to break off their growth. When the turtles and crocodiles, fish and eels are pregnant and giving birth, then nets and poisons are not to enter the marshes, so as not to cut short their life, and not to break off their growth. Plow in the spring, weed in the summer, harvest in the fall, and store in the winter. These four activities are not to miss their proper times, and then the five grains will not be depleted, and the common people will have a surplus to eat. Be vigilant in the seasonal prohibitions concerning ponds, rivers, and marshes, and then turtles and fish will be fine and plentiful, and the common people will have a surplus to use. Cutting and nurturing are not to miss their proper times, and then the mountains and forests will not be barren, and the common people will have surplus materials.

This is the way a sage-king operates: He observes Heaven above, and applies this knowledge on earth below. He arranges completely everything between Heaven and earth and spreads beneficence over the ten thousand things.

His actions are subtle, yet they are shining.

Though they are brief, their results are long-lasting.

Their scope is narrow; their impact, wide-ranging.

31. Here Xunzi is playing upon that fact that the words “lord” (*jūn* 君) and “community” (*qún* 群) were very similar in both pronunciation and written form during ancient times (a similarity that one can still perceive in their present pronunciations and written forms).

He has spirit-like powers of intelligence that are broad and vast, yet work by the utmost restraint. Thus, it is said: The person who by even the slightest movements always does what is right is called a sage.³² . . .

Chapter Twelve: The Way to Be a Lord

There are chaotic lords; there are no states chaotic of themselves. There are men who create order; there are no rules³³ creating order of themselves. The rules of Archer Yi have not perished, but not every age has an Archer Yi who hits the target precisely. The rules of Yu still survive, but not every age has a Xia dynasty to reign as true kings. Thus, rules cannot stand alone, and categories cannot implement themselves. If one has the right person, then they will be preserved. If one loses the right person, then they will be lost. The rules are the beginning of order, and the gentleman is the origin of the rules. And so, with the gentleman present, even if the rules are sketchy, they are enough to be comprehensive. Without the gentleman, even if the rules are complete, one will fail to apply them in the right order and will be unable to respond to changes in affairs, and thus they can serve to create chaos. One who tries to correct the arrangements of the rules without understanding their meaning, even if he is broadly learned, is sure to create chaos when engaged in affairs. And so, the enlightened ruler hastens to obtain the right person.

Chapter Seventeen: Discourse on Heaven

The activities of Heaven are constant.³⁴ They do not persist because of Yao. They do not perish because of Jie. If you respond to them with order, then you will have good fortune. If you respond to them with chaos, then you will have misfortune.

If you strengthen the fundamental works³⁵ and moderate expenditures, then Heaven cannot make you poor. If your means of nurture are prepared and your actions are timely, then Heaven cannot make you ill. If you cultivate the Way and do not deviate from it, then Heaven cannot ruin you. Thus, floods and drought

32. The text of this paragraph is very difficult, and the translation is tentative.

33. “Rules” here is *fǎ* 法, which generally connotes a rule-like standard for doing things. As such, it can also mean a “method” or “model” or “law.” Here it is translated as “rules” to try to cover all these senses, but it is usually rendered elsewhere as “model.” Xunzi often describes ritual as a kind of *fa* (see *Xunzi* chapter 2, above).

34. This and the next few sentences are rhymed in the original.

35. The “fundamental works” are agriculture and textile production.

cannot make you go hungry or thirsty, cold and heat cannot make you sick, and aberrations and anomalies cannot make you misfortunate.

If the fundamental works are neglected and expenditures are extravagant, then Heaven cannot make you wealthy. If your means of nurture are sparse and your actions are infrequent, then Heaven cannot make you sound in body. If you turn your back on the Way and act recklessly, then Heaven cannot make you fortunate. And so, although floods and drought have not yet come, you still will go hungry. Although heat and cold are not yet pressing, you still will become sick. Although aberrations and anomalies have not yet come, you still will be misfortunate. To receive the benefit of the seasons is the same as having an ordered age, but calamities and disasters are incompatible with there being an ordered age. You must not complain against Heaven; its way is simply thus. And so, one who understands clearly the respective allotments of Heaven and humankind can be called a person of utmost achievement.

That which is accomplished without anyone's doing it and which is obtained without anyone's seeking it is called the work of Heaven. With respect to what is like this, even though he thinks deeply, a proper person does not try to ponder it. Even though he is mighty, he does not try to augment it by his own abilities. Even though he is expertly refined, he does not try to make it more keenly honed. This is called not competing with Heaven's work. When

Heaven has its proper seasons,³⁶
 Earth has its proper resources,
 And humankind has its proper order,

—this is called being able to form a triad. To neglect that whereby we form a triad and wish instead for those things to which we stand as the third is a state of confusion. The arrayed stars follow each other in their revolutions, the sun and the moon take turns shining, the four seasons proceed in succession, *yin* and *yang* undergo their great transformations, and winds and rain are broadly bestowed.

Their harmony³⁷ keeps the myriad things alive.
 Their nurturing helps the myriad things to thrive.

What is such that one does not see its workings but sees only its accomplishments—this is called spirit-like power. What is such that everyone knows how it comes about but no one understands it in its formless state—this is called the accomplishment of Heaven. Only the sage does not seek to understand Heaven.

36. This and the following two lines are rhymed in the original.

37. I.e., the harmonious operations of the various natural elements that are mentioned in the sentence immediately prior to this remark.

When the work of Heaven has been established and the accomplishments of Heaven have been completed, then the body is set and spirit arises. Liking, dislike, happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy are contained therein—these are called one's "Heavenly dispositions." The abilities of eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and body each have their respective objects and are not able to assume each other's abilities—these are called one's "Heavenly faculties." The heart dwells in the central cavity so as to control the five faculties—this is called one's "Heavenly lord."³⁸ Using what is not of one's kind as a resource for nourishing what is of one's kind—this is called one's "Heavenly nourishment." To be in accordance with what is proper for one's kind is called "happiness," and to go against what is proper for one's kind is called "disaster"—this is called one's "Heavenly government." To becloud your Heavenly lord, disorder your Heavenly faculties, abandon your Heavenly nourishment, go against your Heavenly government, and turn your back on your Heavenly dispositions, so that you lose the accomplishments of Heaven—this is called the "greatest misfortune." The sage keeps clear his Heavenly lord, sets straight his Heavenly faculties, makes complete his Heavenly nourishment, accords with his Heavenly government, and nurtures his Heavenly dispositions, so as to keep whole the accomplishment of Heaven. A person who is thus is someone who knows what he is to do and what he is not to do. Then Heaven and earth will have their proper positions and the myriad things will all be servants to him. His conduct will be completely ordered, his nourishment will be completely appropriate, and his life will suffer no harm—*this* is called "knowing Heaven."

Thus, the greatest cleverness lies in not doing certain things, and the greatest wisdom lies in not pondering certain things.

With respect to Heaven, focus only on those manifest phenomena to which you can align yourself. With respect to earth, focus only on those manifest places which are suitable for growing. With respect to the four seasons, focus only on that manifest order by which work is to be arranged. With respect to *yin* and *yang*, focus only on those manifest harmonies that can be used to order things.³⁹

Let the officials keep watch over Heaven and yourself keep watch over the Way. . . .

If stars fall or trees groan, the people of the state are filled with fear and say, "What is this?" I say: It is nothing. These are simply rarely occurring things among the changes in Heaven and earth and the transformations of *yin* and *yang*. To marvel at them is permissible, but to fear them is wrong. Eclipses of the sun and moon, unseasonable winds and rain, unexpected appearances of strange stars—there is

38. Xunzi is playing on the fact that the character *guān* 官 (here translated as "faculty") means both "organ" and "official." Compare Mengzi 6A15 (in chapter 4 of this volume), where the same term is translated "office."

39. These lines are rhymed in the original.

no age in which such things do not occur. If the superiors are enlightened and the government is stable, then even if all these things come about in the same age, there is no harm done. If the superiors are benighted and the government is unstable, then even if none of these things come to pass, it is of no benefit. The falling of stars and the groaning of trees are simply rarely occurring things among the changes in Heaven and earth and the transformations of *yin* and *yang*. To marvel at them is permissible, but to fear them is wrong.

Of things that come to pass, it is human ill omens that are to be feared. When poor plowing harms the planting, when the cutting loses control over the weeds, when the government is unstable and loses control over the people, such that the fields are overgrown with weeds and the planting is bad, buying grain is expensive and the people face famine, and there are corpses lying in the roads—these are called “human ill omens.” When efforts are not exerted in a timely fashion, such that cows and horses will give birth to each other and the six domestic animals produce monstrous offspring, when government orders are not clear, when policies are not timely, when the fundamental tasks are not well-ordered—these are called “human ill omens.” When ritual and the standards of righteousness are not cultivated, when insiders and outsiders are not properly differentiated, when men and women engage in perverse, disorderly conduct, then fathers and sons are suspicious of one another, superiors and inferiors desert one another, and bandits and other difficulties arrive together—these are called “human ill omens.” Ill omens thus arise from disorder. . . .

One performs the rain sacrifice and it rains. Why? I say: There is no special reason why. It is the same as when one does not perform the rain sacrifice and it rains anyway. When the sun and moon suffer eclipse, one tries to save them. When Heaven sends drought, one performs the rain sacrifice. One performs divination and only then decides on important affairs. But this is not to be regarded as bringing one what one seeks, but rather is done to give things proper form. Thus, the gentleman regards this as proper form, but the common people regard it as connecting with spirits. If one regards it as proper form, then one will have good fortune. If one regards it as connecting with spirits, then one will have misfortune. . . .

To exalt Heaven and long for it—⁴⁰

How can this compare to nourishing things and overseeing them?

To obey Heaven and praise it—

How can this compare to overseeing what Heaven has mandated and using it?

To observe the seasons and wait upon them—

How can this compare to responding to the seasons and employing them?

40. From here down to the word “confusion” in the next paragraph, the original text is rhymed.

To follow along with things and increase them—

How can this compare to developing their powers and transforming them?

To long for things and appraise them—

How can this compare to ordering things and never losing them?

To desire that from which things arise—

How can this compare to taking hold of that by which things are completed?

Thus, if one rejects what lies with humankind and instead longs for what lies with Heaven, then one will have lost grasp of the disposition of the myriad things.⁴¹

The unchanging element among the reigns of the hundred kings can serve as the binding thread of the Way. As one thing passes by and another arises, respond to them with this thread. If one has mastered the thread, there will be no chaos. If one does not know the thread, one will not know how to respond to changes. The major substance of the thread has never perished, but chaos arises from falling short of it, whereas order arises from adhering to it meticulously. And so as for what is counted good in light of the Way, courses of action conforming to it may be followed, but those veering from it may not be followed. Those that obscure it will create great confusion.

Those who cross waters mark out the deep places, but if the markers are not clear, then people will fall in. Those who order the people mark out the Way, but if the markers are not clear, then there will be chaos. The rituals are those markers. To reject ritual is to muddle the world, and to muddle the world is to create great chaos. And so, when the Way is in no part unclear, and that which is within the bounds and that which is outside the bounds have different markers, and that which is inglorious and that which is illustrious have constant measures, then the pitfalls of the people will be eliminated.

The myriad things are but one facet of the Way. A single thing is but one facet of the myriad things. Foolish people take a single facet of a single thing and think themselves to know the Way—this is to lack knowledge.

Shenzi saw the value of hanging back, but did not see the value of being in the lead.⁴² Laozi saw the value of yielding, but did not see the value of exerting oneself.

41. The Chinese text of the last part of the sentence is ambiguous between two possible meanings: (1) failing to understand how the myriad things actually operate (because one mistakenly thinks Heaven exercises greater influence over them than it really does), and (2) missing the opportunity to control the condition of the myriad things (because one mistakenly focuses on Heaven's influence over them). Both senses are probably intended, and the translation here is worded to allow both construals.

42. From here down to the quote from the *History*, the original text is rhymed. Shenzi is Shen Dao (see chapter 7 of this volume). For more on Songzi, see *Important Figures* in the appendices.

Mozi saw the value of making things uniform, but did not see the value of establishing differences. Songzi saw the value of having few desires, but did not see the value of having many desires. If there is only hanging back and no being in the lead, the masses will have no gateway to advancing. If there is only yielding and no exerting oneself, the noble and the lowly will not be distinguished. If there is only uniformity and no difference, governmental orders cannot be promulgated. If there are only few desires and not many desires, the masses cannot be transformed.

The *History* says:

Do not create new likes.
Follow the kings' way.
Do not create new dislikes.
On the kings' path stay.⁴³

This expresses my meaning. . . .

Chapter Nineteen: Discourse on Ritual

From what did ritual arise? I say: Humans are born having desires. When they have desires but do not get the objects of their desires, then they cannot but seek some means of satisfaction. If there is no measure or limit to their seeking, then they cannot help but struggle with each other. If they struggle with each other then there will be chaos, and if there is chaos then they will be impoverished. The former kings hated such chaos, and so they established rituals and the standards of righteousness in order to divide things among people, to nurture their desires, and to satisfy their seeking. They caused desires never to exhaust material goods, and material goods never to be depleted by desires, so that the two support each other and prosper. This is how ritual arose.⁴⁴

Thus, ritual is a means of nurture. Meats and grains, the five flavors and the various spices are means to nurture the mouth. Fragrances and perfumes are means to nurture the nose. Carving and inlay, insignias and patterns are means to nurture the eyes. Bells and drums, pipes and chimes, lutes and zithers are means to nurture the ears. Homes and palaces, cushions and beds, tables and mats are means to nurture the body. Thus, ritual is a means of nurture. The gentleman not only obtains its nurturing, but also loves its differentiations. What is meant by "differentiations"? I say: It is for noble and lowly to have their proper ranking, for elder and youth to have their proper distance, and for poor and rich, humble and eminent each to have

43. Quoted earlier: see *Xunzi* chapter 2, "Cultivating Oneself" (above).

44. Cf. *Mozi* chapter 11 (in chapter 2 of this volume).

their proper weights. And so, in the Grand Chariot of the Son of Heaven there are cushions, as a means to nurture his body. On the sides are carried sweet-smelling angelica, as a means to nurture his nose. In front there is a patterned crossbar, as a means to nurture his eyes. The sounds of the attached bells match the tunes *Wu* and *Xiang*⁴⁵ when proceeding slowly, and they match the tunes *Shao* and *Hu*⁴⁶ when proceeding quickly, as a means to nurture his ears. There is a dragon pennant with nine tassels, as a means to nurture his ability to inspire trust. There are insignias of a crouching rhinoceros and kneeling tiger, serpent-decorated coverings for the horses, silk curtains, and dragon patterns on the chariot hooks, as a means to nurture his awe-inspiring authority. And so, the horses of the Grand Chariot are repeatedly given training to be obedient, and only then will they be harnessed, as a means to nurture his safety.

Know well that in going out, to abide by the proper measure even at risk of death is the means to nurture one's life. Know well that to make expenditures is the way to nurture wealth. Know well that reverence, respect, and deference are the way to nurture safety. Know well that ritual, the standards of righteousness, good form, and proper order are the way to nurture one's dispositions. And so, if a person has his eyes only on living, such a one is sure to die. If a person has his eyes only on benefiting himself, such a one is sure to be harmed. If a person seeks safety only in laziness and sluggishness, such a one is sure to be endangered. If a person takes pleasure only in delighting his inborn dispositions, such a one is sure to be destroyed. And so, if a person puts even one amount of effort into following ritual and the standards of righteousness, he will get back twice as much. If he puts even one amount of effort into following his inborn dispositions and nature, he will lose twice as much. And so, the Confucians are those who will cause people to gain twice as much, and the Mohists are those who will cause people to lose twice as much. This is the difference between the Confucians and the Mohists.

Ritual has three roots. Heaven and earth are the root of life. Forefathers and ancestors are the root of one's kind. Lords and teachers are the root of order. Without Heaven and earth, how would one live? Without forefathers and ancestors, how would one have come forth? Without lords and teachers, how would there be order? If even one of these three roots is neglected, no one will be safe. And so, ritual serves Heaven above and earth below, it honors forefathers and ancestors, and it exalts lords and teachers. These are the three roots of ritual. . . .

In every case, ritual begins in that which must be released, reaches full development in giving it proper form, and finishes in providing it satisfaction. And so,

45. The *Wu* and the *Xiang* were pieces of music associated with King Wu.

46. The *Shao* and *Hu* were pieces of music associated with Shun and Tang, respectively.

when ritual is at its most perfect, the requirements of inner dispositions and proper form are both completely fulfilled.⁴⁷ At its next best, the dispositions and outer form overcome one another in succession. Its lowest manner is to revert to the dispositions alone so as to subsume everything in this grand unity.

By ritual, Heaven and earth harmoniously combine;
 By ritual, the sun and the moon radiantly shine;
 By ritual, the four seasons in progression arise;
 By ritual, the stars move orderly across the skies;
 By ritual, the great rivers through their courses flow;
 By ritual, the ten thousand things all thrive and grow;
 By ritual, for love and hate proper measure is made;
 By ritual, on joy and anger fit limits are laid.
 By ritual, compliant subordinates are created,
 By ritual, enlightened leaders are generated;
 With ritual, all things can change yet not bring chaos,
 But deviate from ritual and you face only loss.

Is not ritual perfect indeed! It establishes a lofty standard that is the ultimate of its kind, and none under Heaven can add to or subtract from it. In it, the fundamental and the secondary accord with each other, and beginning and end match each other. In its differentiations of things, it is the utmost in patterning. In its explanations, it is the utmost in keen discernment. Those under Heaven who follow it will have good order. Those who do not follow it will have chaos. Those who follow it will have safety. Those who do not follow it will be endangered. Those who follow it will be preserved. Those who do not follow it will perish. The petty man cannot fathom it. Deep indeed is the pattern of ritual! Investigations into the hard and the white, the same and the different drown when they try to enter into it.⁴⁸ Vast indeed is the pattern of ritual! Those expert in creating institutions and the purveyors of perverse, vulgar doctrines are lost when they try to enter it. High indeed is the pattern of ritual! Those who take violent arrogance, haughty indulgence, and contempt of custom for loftiness fall when they try to enter it.

And so, when the ink-line is reliably laid out, then one cannot be deceived by the curved and the straight. When the scale is reliably hung, then one cannot be deceived by the light and the heavy. When the compass and carpenter's square

47. Here and in many other places in "Discourse on Ritual," Xunzi is relying on the sense of *qing*, "dispositions," that is closer to our notion of "emotions." (For more on *qing*, see note 22, above.) In this case, his point seems to be that the perfect form of ritual is one in which inner feeling and outer expression are perfectly balanced and matched. Cf. *Analects* 6.18 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

48. This refers to debates among members of the so-called School of Names (see chapter 5 of this volume).

are reliably deployed, then one cannot be deceived by the circular and the rectangular. The gentleman examines ritual carefully, and then he cannot be deceived by trickery and artifice. Thus, the ink-line is the ultimate in straightness, the scale is the ultimate in balance, the compass and carpenter's square are the ultimate in circular and rectangular, and ritual is the ultimate in the human way. Those who nevertheless do not take ritual as their model nor find sufficiency in it are called "standardless commoners." Those who take ritual as their model and find sufficiency in it are called "men of standards." To be able to reflect and ponder what is central to ritual is called "being able to deliberate." To be able to be undeviating in what is central to ritual is called "being able to be firm." When one can deliberate and be firm, and adds to this fondness for it, then this is to be a sage. Thus, Heaven is the ultimate in height, earth is the ultimate in depth, the boundless is the ultimate in breadth, and the sage is the ultimate in the Way. And so, learning is precisely learning to be a sage—one does not learn solely so as to become a standardless commoner.

Ritual takes resources and goods as its implements. It takes noble and lowly as its patterns. It takes abundance and scarcity as its differentiations. It takes elevating some and lowering others as its essentials. When patterning and order are made bountiful, and the dispositions and implements are limited, this is the most elevated state of ritual. When the dispositions and implements are made bountiful, but the patterning and order are limited, this is the lowest state of ritual. When patterning and order, dispositions and implements are in turn central and peripheral, so that they proceed together and are mixed evenly, this is the intermediate course of ritual. And so, at his greatest, the gentleman achieves the most elevated state of ritual, and at the least he fulfills completely its lowest form, and when in intermediate circumstances, he dwells in its intermediate form. Whether going slowly, quickly, or at full gallop, he never departs from this, for this is the gentleman's home and palace. If a person grasps this, he is a man of good breeding or a gentleman. If he departs from this, he is but a commoner. Thus, to be able to travel everywhere in its midst and in every case obtain its proper arrangement is to be a sage. And so, being generous is due to the accumulated richness of ritual. Being great is due to the vastness of ritual. Being lofty is due to the elevated nature of ritual. Being enlightened is due to the exhaustive nature of ritual. The *Odes* says:

Ritual and ceremony have right measure completely.

Laugh and speak only in complete accord with propriety.⁴⁹

49. *Mao* # 209. These same lines are quoted earlier: see *Xunzi* chapter 2, "Cultivating Oneself," (above).

This expresses my meaning.

Ritual is that which takes care to order living and dying. Birth is the beginning of people, and death is the end of people. When beginning and end are both good, then the human way is complete. Thus, the gentleman is respectful of the beginning and careful about the end. When end and beginning are treated alike,⁵⁰ this is the way of the gentleman, and the proper form contained in ritual and the standards of righteousness. To treat people generously while alive but stingily when dead is to show respect to those with awareness and show arrogance to those without awareness. This is the way of a vile person and is an attitude of betrayal. The gentleman considers it shameful to use such a betraying attitude in dealing with servants and children—how much more so in the case of those he exalts and those he loves! . . .

For the funeral of the Son of Heaven, one notifies all within the Four Seas and summons the feudal lords. For the funeral of a feudal lord, one notifies all allied states and summons the grand ministers. For the funeral of a grand minister, one notifies all within his state and summons those distinguished among the well-bred. For the funeral of a distinguished, well-bred man, one notifies all in his county and summons his associates. For the funeral of a common person, one gathers together his family and friends and notifies all within the neighborhood and district. For the funeral of an executed convict, one is not allowed to assemble his family and friends but rather summons only his wife and children. The coffin's thickness may be only three inches. There may be only three layers of burial clothing and coverings. One is not allowed to decorate the coffin. One is not allowed to have the funeral procession during the day but must rather perform the interment at night. One goes out to bury him wearing ordinary clothing, and upon returning, there are to be no periods of crying, no wearing of mourning garb, and no differentiation of mourning periods for closer and more distant relatives. Everyone is to return to their normal ways and revert to their original state. When a person has just been buried, but it is as though there had never been a funeral and the matter has simply come to an end, this is called the greatest disgrace.⁵¹

Ritual takes care that fortunate and unfortunate events do not intrude upon each other. When it comes to the point where one has to place gauze on the person's face⁵² and listen for breathing, then the loyal minister and filial son know that the

50. I.e., with one and the same care.

51. Commentators note that Xunzi's description of this last kind of funeral largely resembles the kind of mourning regulations prescribed by Mozi for everyone (see *Mozi* chapter 25, in chapter 2 of this volume), and thus this passage serves as a criticism of Mozi by implying that Mozi would have us treat even our dearest loved ones as no better than executed criminals.

52. I.e., as a means of detecting breath visually.

person's illness is serious indeed. Even so, they do not yet seek the items for dressing the corpse and the lying-in-state. They weep and are filled with fear. Even so, they do not stop in their feelings of hoping that miraculously the person will live, and they do not cease their attempts to maintain the person's life. Only when the person has truly died do they then make and prepare the necessary items.

Thus, even the best-equipped households are sure to pass a day before the lying in state, and three days before the mourning garments are complete. Only then do those sent to notify people far away set out, and only then do those responsible for preparing things get to work.

And so, at its longest, the lying in state is not to last for more than seventy days, and at its quickest, it is not to last less than fifty days. Why is this? I say: It is so that those far away can come, so that many needs can be fulfilled, and so that many matters can be accomplished. The loyalty expressed in this is of the highest sort. The proper regulation involved in this is of the greatest type. The good form displayed in this is of the greatest kind. . . .

The standard practice of funeral rites is that one changes the appearance of the corpse by gradually adding more ornamentation, one moves the corpse gradually further away, and over a long time one gradually returns to one's regular routine. Thus, the way that death works is that if one does not ornament the dead, then one will come to feel disgust at them, and if one feels disgust, then one will not feel sad. If one keeps them close, then one will become casual with them, and if one becomes casual with them, then one will grow tired of them. If one grows tired of them, then one will forget one's place, and if one forgets one's place, then one will not be respectful. If one day a person loses his lord or father, but his manner in sending them off to be buried is neither sad nor respectful, then he is close to being a beast. The gentleman is ashamed of this, and so the reason that he changes the appearance of the corpse by gradually adding more ornamentation is to eliminate any disgust. The reason that he moves the corpse gradually further away is to pursue respectfulness. The reason that only over a long time does he gradually return to his regular routine is to properly adjust his life.

Ritual cuts off what is too long and extends what is too short. It subtracts from what is excessive and adds to what is insufficient. It achieves proper form for love and respect, and it brings to perfection the beauty of carrying out the standards of righteousness. Thus, fine ornaments and coarse materials, music and weeping, happiness and sorrow—these things are opposites, but ritual makes use of them all, employing them and alternating them at the appropriate times. And so, fine ornaments, music, and happiness are that by which one responds to peaceful events and by which one pays homage to good fortune. Coarse mourning garments, weeping, and sorrow are that by which one responds to threatening events and by which one

pays homage to ill fortune. Thus, the way ritual makes use of fine ornaments is such as not to lead to exorbitance and indulgence. The way it makes use of coarse mourning garments is such as not to lead to infirmity or despondency. The way it makes use of music and happiness is such as not to lead to perversity or laziness. The way it makes use of weeping and sorrow is such as not to lead to dejection or self-harm. This is the midway course of ritual.

Thus, when the changes in disposition and appearance are sufficient to differentiate good fortune and ill fortune and to make clear the proper measures for noble and lowly, close relations and distant relations, then ritual stops. To go beyond this is vile, and even should it be a feat of amazing difficulty, the gentleman will still consider it base. And so, to measure one's food and then eat it, to measure one's waist and then tie the mourning sash, to show off to those in high positions one's emaciation and infirmity—this is the way of a vile person. It is not the proper patterning of ritual and the standards of righteousness; it is not the true disposition of a filial son. It is rather the behavior of one acting for ulterior purposes.

And so, a joyful glow and a shining face, a sorrowful look and a haggard appearance—these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune,⁵³ happiness and sorrow are expressed in one's countenance. Singing and laughing, weeping and sobbing—these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are expressed in one's voice. Fine meats and grains and wine and fish, gruel and roughage and plain water—these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are expressed in one's food and drink. Ceremonial caps and embroidered insignias and woven patterns, coarse cloth and a mourning headband and thin garments and hempen sandals—these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are expressed in one's dress. Homes and palaces and cushions and beds and tables and mats, a thatched roof and mourning lean-to and rough mat and earthen pillow—these are the ways in which the dispositions in good fortune and ill fortune, happiness and sorrow are expressed in one's dwelling.

When people are born, the beginnings of these two dispositions are originally present in them. If you cut these dispositions short and extend them, broaden them and narrow them, add to them and subtract from them, make them conform to their proper classes and fully express them, make them abundant and beautify them, cause root and branch, beginning and end all to go smoothly and fit together, then they can serve as the model for ten thousand ages—and just such is what ritual does! None but a devotedly and thoroughly cultivated gentleman can understand it.

53. Here *qing*, “dispositions,” seems to refer specifically to people’s feeling positive or negative emotions in response to good or bad events. See note 47, above.

Thus, I say that human nature is the original beginning and the raw material, and deliberate effort (*wéi 偲*) is what makes it patterned, ordered, and exalted. If there were no human nature, then there would be nothing for deliberate effort to be applied to. If there were no deliberate effort, then human nature would not be able to beautify itself. Human nature and deliberate effort must unite, and then the reputation of the sage and the work of unifying all under Heaven are thereupon brought to completion. And so, I say, when Heaven and earth unite, then the myriad creatures are born. When *yin* and *yang* interact, then changes and transformations arise. When human nature and deliberate effort unite, then all under Heaven becomes ordered. For Heaven can give birth to creatures, but it cannot enforce distinctions among creatures. Earth can support people, but it cannot order people. In the world, all members of the myriad things and the human race must await the sage, and only then will they be appropriately divided up. The *Odes* says, “He mollifies the hundred spirits, and extends this to the rivers and towering peaks.”⁵⁴ This expresses my meaning.⁵⁵ . . .

For the burial offerings,⁵⁶ among the hats there is to be a helmet but no straps for binding the hair. There are to be various vessels and containers, but they are to be empty and unfilled. There are to be mats but no bedding materials. The wooden utensils are not to be completely carved, the pottery utensils are not to be finished products, and the utensils woven from reeds are not to be capable of holding things. A set of music pipes is to be prepared, but they are not to be harmonized. A lute and zither are to be laid out, but they are not to be tuned. A chariot is to be included in the burial, but the horse returns home. This is to indicate that these things will not be used.

One prepares the utensils used by the person in life and takes them to the tomb, and this resembles the way one acts when moving house. The burial goods are to be simple and not perfect. They are to have the appearance of the regular items but are not to be functional. One drives a chariot out to the tomb and buries it, but the bit ornaments, bridle, and harness are not to be included. This makes clear that these things will not be used. One uses the semblance of moving house but also makes clear that the things will not be used, and these are all means by which to heighten sorrow. . . .

54. Mao # 273.

55. This paragraph does not fit well with the context. Burton Watson (*Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963]) suggests that it may have fallen out of place from chapter 23. Nonetheless, it expresses very important ideas relating to Xunzi's view of human nature.

56. In this paragraph, Xunzi speaks mainly of the *míng qì 明器*, or so-called “spirit goods,” items made specifically to be buried along with the deceased.

Depriving the dead to give to the living is called Mohism.⁵⁷

Depriving the living to give to the dead is called confusion.

Killing the living to send off the dead is called villainy.⁵⁸ . . .

Among all the living things between Heaven and earth, those that have blood and *qi* are sure to have awareness, and of those that have awareness, none fails to love its own kind. Now if one of the great birds or beasts loses its group of companions, then after a month or a season has passed, it is sure to retrace its former path and go by its old home. When it does, it is sure to pace back and forth, cry out, stomp the ground, pause hesitatingly, and only then is it able to leave the place. Even among smaller creatures such as swallows and sparrows, they will still screech for a moment before being able to leave. Thus, among the creatures that have blood and *qi*, none has greater awareness than man, and so man's feeling for his parents knows no limit until the day they die. Will we follow foolish, ignorant, perverse men? Those who have died that morning they forget by that evening. If one gives way to this, then one will not even be as good as the birds and beasts. How could such people come together and live in groups without there being chaos? Will we follow cultivated gentlemen? For them the twenty-five months of the three-year mourning period pass by as quickly as a galloping horse glimpsed through a crack. If one acquiesces in this, then mourning will continue without end. Therefore, the former kings and sages accordingly established a middle way and fixed a proper measure for it, such that once mourning is made sufficient to achieve good form and proper order, then one stops it.

That being the case, then how is it divided up? I say: The mourning for those most close is broken off at one year. Why is that? I say: By then, Heaven and earth have already gone through their alterations, the four seasons have already completed their course, and everything in the world changes and begins again. Thus, the sage-kings accordingly took this and made it their image. That being the case, then why the three-year mourning period? I say: To add loftiness to it, they accordingly made the period double, and thus it continues for another year. What about the mourning of nine months and below? I say: They accordingly made it not reach as long. Thus, the three-year mourning period is the most lofty, the *sima* and *xiaogong* mourning periods are the most slight,⁵⁹ and the year-long and nine-month mourning periods are in between. The sage-kings took an image from

57. This sentence and the two that follow it are rhymed in the original.

58. The term *zéi* 賦, here translated as “villainy,” often had the connotation of murder in particular. Xunzi here is criticizing the practice of “accompanying burials,” in which people were sacrificed to serve the deceased in death.

59. The *sima* lasted for three months, and the *xiaogong* lasted for five months.

Heaven above, they took an image from earth below, they took a standard from humans in the middle, and then the order by which people are to live together in harmony and unity was complete. . . .

The sacrificial rites are the refined expression of remembrance and longing. To be moved and feel upset are things that cannot but come upon one at times. And so, on occasions when people are happy and join together harmoniously, then a loyal minister or filial son will also be moved and such feelings will come to him. When the feelings that come to him stir him greatly but simply play themselves out and stop, then with regard to the refined expression of remembrance he will feel anguished and unsatisfied, and his practice of ritual and proper regulation would be lacking and incomplete. And so, the former kings accordingly established a proper form for it, and thereby was set what is righteous in venerating those esteemed and loving those intimate. Thus, I say: The sacrificial rites are the refined expression of remembrance and longing. They are the utmost in loyalty, trustworthiness, love, and respect. They are the fullest manifestation of ritual, proper regulation, good form, and proper appearance. If one is not a sage, then one will not be able to understand them. The sage clearly understands them. The well-bred man and the gentleman are at ease in carrying them out. The officials take them as things to be preserved. The common people take them as their set customs. The gentleman regards them as the way to be a proper human being. The common people regard them as serving the ghosts. . . .

For the ritual sacrifices, one engages in divination and determines the appropriate day.

One fasts and sweeps out the site, sets out tables and food offerings, and has the “announcement to the assistant,” as if the deceased were attending a banquet.⁶⁰ The impersonator of the dead takes the goods and from each of them makes a sacrifice, as if the deceased were tasting them. One does not use a helper to raise a toast, but rather the host himself takes hold of the cup, as if the deceased were engaging in the toast. When the guests leave, the host sends them off and bows to them as they go, then returns and changes his clothing.⁶¹ He goes back to this position and cries, as if the deceased had left. How full of sorrow! How full of respect! One serves the dead as if one were serving the living, and one serves the departed as if one were serving a surviving person. One gives a shape to that which is without physical substance and magnificently accomplishes proper form.

60. The “announcement to the assistant” is a part of the ceremony in which the impersonator of the dead gives blessings to the host of the ceremony. The idea seems to be that just as guests come with expressions of thankfulness for the host of a feast, so the spirit of the dead expresses thanks for the sacrifice. Also, from here to the end of the chapter, the text is rhymed in the original.

61. According to commentators, the host changes from the sacrificial robes back into the robes of mourning.

Chapter Twenty: Discourse on Music

Music is joy, an unavoidable human disposition.⁶² So, people cannot be without music; if they feel joy, they must express it in sound and give it shape in movement. The way of human beings is that changes in the motions of their nature are completely contained in these sounds and movements. So, people cannot be without joy, and their joy cannot be without shape, but if it takes shape and does not accord with the Way, then there will inevitably be chaos. The former kings hated such chaos, and therefore they established the sounds of the *Ya* and the *Song*⁶³ in order to guide them. They caused the sounds to be enjoyable without becoming dissolute.⁶⁴ They caused the patterns to be recognizable without becoming degenerate. They caused the progression, complexity, intensity, and rhythm of the music to be sufficient to move the goodness in people's hearts. They caused perverse and corrupt *qi* to have no place to attach itself to them. This is the manner in which the former kings created music, and so why is Mozi denouncing it?⁶⁵

And so, when music is performed in the ancestral temple and the ruler and ministers, superiors and inferiors listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously respectful. When it is performed within the home and father and sons, elder and younger brothers listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously affectionate. And when it is performed in the village, and old and young people listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously cooperative. Thus, music observes a single standard in order to fix its harmony, it brings together different instruments in order to ornament its rhythm, and it combines their playing in order to achieve a beautiful pattern. It is sufficient to lead people in a single, unified way, and is sufficient to bring order to the myriad changes within them. This is the method by which the former kings created music, and so why is Mozi denouncing it?⁶⁶ . . .

Chapter Twenty-One: Undoing Fixation

In most cases, the problem with people is that they become fixated on one twist and are deluded about the greater order of things. If they are brought under control,

62. That is, people have a natural tendency to feel joy in response to certain things, and this tendency is sure to manifest itself in such feelings sooner or later. For more on *qing*, “dispositions,” see note 22, above.

63. The names of parts of the *Odes*. See the entry for the *Odes* in *Important Texts* in the appendices.

64. Compare *Analects* 3.20 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

65. See *Mozi* chapter 32 (in chapter 2 of this volume).

66. The repetition of this sentence may be meant to mock Mozi's own repetitive style.

then they will return to the right standards. If they are of two minds, then they will be hesitant and confused. There are not two Ways for the world, and the sage is not of two minds. Nowadays, the feudal lords have different governments, and the hundred schools have different teachings, so that necessarily some are right and some are wrong, and some lead to order and some lead to chaos. The lords of chaotic states and the followers of pernicious schools all sincerely seek what they consider correct and put themselves into achieving it. They hate what they consider erroneous views of the Way, and others are seduced into following their same path. They selfishly favor the approach in which they have accumulated effort and only fear to hear it disparaged. They rely on it when regarding other approaches and only fear to hear those others praised. Therefore, they depart further and further from getting under control and think they are right not to stop. Is this not because they have become fixated on one twist and missed the true object of their search? If the heart does not apply itself to the eyes, then black and white can be right in front of you and the eyes will not see them. If the heart does not apply itself to the ears, then drums and thunder can be right at your side and the ears will not hear them. How much more so in the case of that which is applying itself in the first place!⁶⁷ The person of true Virtue and the true Way is denounced from above by the lords of chaotic states, and denounced from below by the followers of pernicious schools. Is this not lamentable?

Thus, among the cases of fixation, one can be fixated on desires, or one can be fixated on dislikes. One can be fixated on origins, or one can be fixated on ends. One can be fixated on what is far away, or one can be fixated on what is nearby. One can be fixated by broad learning, or one can be fixated by narrowness. One can be fixated on the ancient past, or one can be fixated on the present. In whatever respect the myriad things are different, they can become objects of fixation to the exclusion of each other. This is the common problem in the ways of the heart. . . .

Mozi was fixated on the useful and did not understand the value of good form. Songzi was fixated on having few desires and did not understand the value of achieving their objects. Shenzi was fixated on laws and did not understand the value of having worthy people. Shen Buhai was fixated on power and did not understand the value of having wise people. Huizi was fixated on wording and did not understand the value of what is substantial. Zhuangzi was fixated on the Heavenly and did not understand the value of the human.

Thus, if one speaks of it in terms of usefulness, then the Way will consist completely in seeking what is profitable. If one speaks of it in terms of desires, then

67. That is, just as the heart must apply itself to the sense organs in order for them to perceive correctly, so it must watch over itself in order to avoid obsession and apprehend the truth.

the Way will consist completely in learning to be satisfied. If one speaks of it in terms of laws, then the Way will consist completely in making arrangements. If one speaks of it in terms of power, then the Way will consist completely in finding what is expedient. If one speaks of it in terms of wording, then the Way will consist completely in discoursing on matters. If one speaks of it in terms of the Heavenly, then the Way will consist completely in following along with things. These various approaches are all merely one corner of the Way. As for the Way itself, its substance is constant, yet it covers all changes. No one corner is sufficient to exhibit it fully.

People of twisted understanding observe one corner of the Way and are unable to recognize it as such. So, they think it sufficient and proceed to embellish it. On the inside, they use it to disorder their own lives. On the outside, they use it to confuse other people. As superiors, they use it to transfix their subordinates. As subordinates, they use it to transfix their superiors. This is the disaster of being fixated and blocked up in one's thinking. Kongzi was benevolent, wise, and was not fixated, and so through his study of various methods, he was worthy of being one of the former kings. His one line alone grasped the way of the Zhou and upheld and used it, because he was not fixated by accumulated deeds. Thus, his Virtue equals that of the Duke of Zhou, and his name ranks with those of the three kings. This is the good fortune that comes from not being fixated.

The sage knows the problems in the ways of the heart, and sees the disaster of being fixated and blocked up in one's thinking. So, he is neither for desires, nor for dislikes, is neither for the origins, nor for the end results, is neither for what is near, nor for what is far away, is neither for what is broad, nor for what is shallow, is neither for the ancient past, nor is for the present. He lays out all the myriad things, and in their midst suspends his scales. For this reason, the various different things are unable to become fixating and so disorder his categories of judgment.

What am I calling his "scales"? I say: It is the Way. Thus, one's heart must not be ignorant of the Way. If the heart does not know the Way, then it will not approve of the Way, but will rather approve what is not the Way. For what person would wish to be so dissolute as to keep to what they disapprove and reject what they approve? If one chooses people using a heart that does not approve of the Way, then one is sure to accord with people who do not follow the Way, and one will not know to accord with people who *do* follow the Way. To use a heart that does not approve of the Way and to join together with people who do not follow the Way when judging people who do follow the Way—this is the root of chaos.

How will one know [which are the people who follow the Way]? I say: The heart must know the Way, and only then will it approve of the Way. Only after it approves of the Way will it be able to keep to the Way and reject what is not the Way. If one chooses people using a heart that approves of the Way, then one will

accord with people who follow the Way, and one will not accord with people who do not follow the Way. To use a heart that approves of the Way and to join together with people who follow the Way when judging what is not the Way—this is the essential thing for good order. What problem of not knowing [those who follow the Way] could there be? Thus, the essential thing for good order rests in knowing the Way.

How do people know the Way? I say: With the heart. How does the heart know the Way? I say: It is through emptiness, single-mindedness, and stillness. The heart is always holding something. Yet, there is what is called being “empty.” The heart is always twofold. Yet, there is what is called being “single-minded.” The heart is always moving. Yet, there is what is called being “still.” Humans are born and have awareness. With awareness, they have focus.⁶⁸ To focus is to be holding something. Yet, there is something called being “empty.” Not to let what one is already holding harm what one is about to receive is called being “empty.”⁶⁹ The heart is born and has awareness. With awareness, there comes awareness of differences. These differences are known at the same time, and when they are known at the same time, this is to be twofold. Yet, there is what is called being “single-minded.” Not to let one idea harm another idea is called being “single-minded.” When the heart sleeps, then it dreams. When it relaxes, then it goes about on its own. When one puts it to use, then it forms plans. Thus, the heart is always moving. Yet, there is what is called being “still.” Not to let dreams and worries disorder one’s understanding is called being “still.”

For those who have not yet grasped the Way but are seeking the Way, I say: Emptiness, single-mindedness, and stillness—make these your principles. If one who would search for the Way achieves emptiness, then he may enter upon it. If one who would work at the Way achieves single-mindedness, then he will exhaustively obtain it. If one who would ponder the Way achieves stillness, then he will discern it keenly. One who knows the Way and observes things by it, who knows the Way and puts it into practice, is one who embodies the Way. To be empty, single-minded, and still—this is called great clarity and brilliance. For such a one, none of the myriad things takes form and is not seen. None is seen and not judged. None is judged and loses its proper position. He sits in his chamber yet sees all

68. “Focus” is *zhi* 志. This is the character that appears in the text, but most other commentators and translators read it as *zhi* 誌, “memory.” Cf. *Mengzi* 2A2 (in chapter 4 of this volume, where *zhi* is translated “resolution”; see also the accompanying note 19) and *Zhuangzi* chapter 4 (in chapter 8 of this volume, where *zhi* is translated “attention”; see also the accompanying note 49).

69. From this explanation, it is clear that what Xunzi means by “emptiness” is *not* having no thoughts or clearing out one’s mind, but rather the ability to take up new ideas and objects of attention. Thus, his “emptiness” is more akin to what nowadays would be called “receptiveness.”

within the Four Seas.⁷⁰ He dwells in today yet judges what is long ago and far away in time. He comprehensively observes the myriad things and knows their true dispositions. He inspects and examines order and disorder and discerns their measures. He sets straight Heaven and earth, and arranges and makes useful the myriad things. He institutes great order, and the whole world is encompassed therein.

So vast and broad is he! Who grasps his true limits?
 So lofty and broad is he! Who grasps his true Virtue?
 So active and varied is he! Who grasps his true form?⁷¹

His brilliance matches the sun and moon. His greatness fills all the directions. Such a one is called the “Great Man.” What fixation could there be in him?

The heart is the lord of the body and the master of one’s spirit and intelligence. It issues orders, but it takes orders from nothing: *it* restrains itself, *it* employs itself; *it* lets itself go, *it* takes itself in hand; *it* makes itself proceed, *it* makes itself stop. Thus, the mouth can be compelled either to be silent or to speak, and the body can be compelled either to contract or to extend itself, but the heart cannot be compelled to change its thoughts. What it considers right, one accepts. What it considers wrong, one rejects. And so, I say: If the heart allows its choices to be without restraint, then when it reveals its objects⁷² they will surely be broadly varying. Its perfected disposition is to be undivided. The *Odes* says,

I pick and pick the *juan-er* leaves,
 but cannot fill my sloping basket.
 Oh, for my cherished one!
 He is stationed on the Zhou campaign.⁷³

A sloping basket is easy to fill, and the *juan-er* leaves are easy to get, but one must not be divided with thoughts of the Zhou campaign. And so, I say: If the heart is split, it will be without understanding. If it deviates, it will not be expertly refined. If it is divided, then it will be confused. If one guides its examinations, then the myriad things can all be known together, and if the person thoroughly develops his original substance, then he will be truly beautiful.

70. Compare *Daodejing* chapter 47 (in chapter 6 of this volume).

71. The first two of these lines are rhymed in the original. The third does not rhyme in its current form, and Gu Qianli suggests emending the word “form” to make it rhyme. I have not adopted his emendation, but given the parallel structure here, it is likely that the third line was supposed to be part of the rhymed set, so I have grouped it with the others.

72. The word here is *wù 物* (lit. “things”), which in this context could refer to one’s thoughts and/or to one’s purposes; rendering it as “objects” is intended to cover both possibilities.

73. *Mao* # 3. These lines are rhymed in the original.

The proper classes of things are not of two kinds. Hence, the person with understanding picks the one right object and pursues it single-mindedly. The farmer is expert in regard to the fields, but cannot be made Overseer of Fields. The merchant is expert in regard to the markets, but cannot be made Overseer of Merchants. The craftsman is expert in regard to vessels, but cannot be made Overseer of Vessels. There is a person who is incapable of any of their three skills, but who can be put in charge of any of these offices, namely the one who is expert in regard to the Way, not the one who is expert in regard to things. One who is expert in regard to things merely measures one thing against another. One who is expert in regard to the Way measures all things together.⁷⁴ Thus, the gentleman pursues the Way single-mindedly and uses it to guide and oversee things. If one pursues the Way single-mindedly, then one will be correct. If one uses it to guide one in examining things, then one will have keen discernment. If one uses correct intentions to carry out discerning judgments, then the ten thousand things will all obtain their proper station. . . .

The human heart can be compared to a pan of water. If you set it straight and do not move it, the muddy and turbid parts will settle to the bottom, and the clear and bright parts will be on the top, and then one can see one's whiskers and inspect the lines on one's face. But if a slight breeze passes over it, the muddy and turbid parts will be stirred up from the bottom, and the clear and bright parts will be disturbed on top, and then one cannot get a correct view of even large contours. The heart is just like this.⁷⁵ Thus, if one guides it with good order, nourishes it with clarity and nothing can make it deviate, then it will be capable of determining right and wrong and deciding what is doubtful. If it is drawn aside by even a little thing, then on the outside one's correctness will be altered, and on the inside one's heart will deviate, and one will be incapable of discerning the multifarious patterns of things. . . .

In the caves there lived a man named Ji.⁷⁶ He was good at guessing riddles because he was fond of pondering things. However, if the desires of his eyes and ears were aroused, it would ruin his thinking, and if he heard the sounds of mosquitoes or gnats, it would frustrate his concentration. So, he shut out the desires of his eyes and ears and put himself far away from the sounds of mosquitoes and gnats, and by dwelling in seclusion and stilling his thoughts, he achieved comprehension. But can pondering benevolence in such a manner be called "true sublimeness"? Mengzi hated depravity and so expelled his wife—this can be called "being able to force

74. Compare *Analects* 2.12 (in chapter 1 of this volume; see also the accompanying note 23).

75. Compare *Zhuangzi* chapter 5 (in chapter 8 of this volume).

76. This person is unattested elsewhere, and the pronunciation of the name is uncertain.

oneself.”⁷⁷ Youzi⁷⁸ hated dozing off and so burned his palm to keep awake—this can be called “being able to steel oneself.” These are not yet true fondness. To shut out the desires of one’s eyes and ears can be called “forcing oneself.” It is not yet truly pondering. To be such that hearing the sounds of mosquitoes or gnats frustrates one’s concentration is called “being precarious.” It cannot yet be called “true sublimeness.” One who is truly sublime is a perfected person. For the perfected person, what forcing oneself, what steeling oneself, what precariousness is there? Thus, those who are murky understand only external manifestations, but those who are clear understand internal manifestations. The sage follows his desires and embraces all his dispositions, and the things dependent on these simply turn out well-ordered. What forcing oneself, what steeling oneself, what precariousness is there? Thus, the person of benevolence carries out the Way without striving, and the sage carries out the Way without forcing himself. The benevolent person ponders it with reverence, and the sage ponders it with joy. This is the proper way to order one’s heart.

Chapter Twenty-Two: On Correct Naming⁷⁹

In setting names for things, the later kings followed the Shang in names for punishments, followed the Zhou in names for official titles, and also followed their rituals in names for cultural forms. In applying various names to the myriad things, they followed the set customs and generally agreed usage of the various Xia states. Villages in distant places with different customs followed along with these names and so were able to communicate.

As for the ways the various names apply to people, that by which they are as they are at birth is called “human nature.” The close connection of response to stimulus, which requires no effort but is so of itself, and which is produced by the harmonious operation of the nature, is also called “human nature.” The feelings of liking and disliking, happiness and anger, and sadness and joy in one’s nature are called the “dispositions” (*qīng* 情).⁸⁰ When there is a certain disposition and the

77. For an account of this incident, see D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 217.

78. Youzi, also known as You Ruo, was a disciple of Kongzi.

79. “On Correct Naming” deals, among other things, with issues raised by the School of Names (see chapter 5 of this volume). For the phrase “Correct Naming,” see *Analects* 13.3 (in chapter 1 of this volume; see also the accompanying note 118). “Name” in both passages is *míng* 名, which can refer not only to proper names, but to words in general.

80. For more on *qing*, “dispositions,” see note 22 above. Here Xunzi most clearly has in mind the aspect of *qing* we call “emotions.”

heart makes a choice on its behalf, this is called “deliberation.”⁸¹ When the heart deliberates and one’s abilities act on it, this is called “deliberate effort.” That which comes into being through accumulated deliberations and training of one’s abilities is also called “deliberate effort.” Actions performed for the sake of profit are called “work.” Actions performed for what is required by the standards of righteousness are called “personal conduct.” That by which people understand things is called the “understanding.” When the understanding connects to things, this is called “knowledge.” That by which people are able to do things is called “ability.” When ability connects to things, these are also called “abilities.”⁸² When the nature is injured, this is called “illness.” When one encounters unexpected circumstances, this is called “fate” (*ming* 命). These are the ways the various names apply to people. These are the ways the later kings set names for things.

So, when the kings established names, the names were fixed, and the corresponding objects were thus distinguished. This way was followed, and the kings’ intentions were thus made understood. They then carefully led the people to adhere to these things single-mindedly. Thus, they called it great vileness to mince words and recklessly create names so as to disorder the correct names and thereby confuse the people and cause them to engage in much disputation and litigation. This wrongdoing was considered to be just like the crime of forging tallies and measures. Hence, none of their people dared rely on making up strange names so as to disorder the correct names, and so the people were honest. Since they were honest, they were easy to employ, and since they were easy to employ, tasks were accomplished. Because none of the people dared rely on making up strange names so as to disorder the correct names, they were unified in following the proper model of the Way and were conscientious in following commands. Because they were like this, the legacy of the kings was long-lasting. To have such a long-lasting legacy and to achieve such accomplishments is the height of good order. Such is what can be accomplished by diligently preserving the agreed names.

Nowadays, the sage-kings have passed away, and the preservation of these names has become lax. Strange words have arisen, the names and their corresponding objects are disordered, and the forms of right and wrong are unclear. As a result, even officers who diligently preserve the proper models and scholars who diligently recite the proper order for things are also all thrown into chaos. If there arose a true king, he would surely follow the old names in some cases and create new names

81. That is, when one is disposed a certain way, such as feeling anger, and the heart reflects and chooses whether and how one will act on that feeling, this is to engage in deliberation.

82. That is, when the potential to do something is manifested in a certain activity, it is called a particular ability (e.g., one is said to have the *ability* to drive when one performs the activities specific to that skill).

in other cases.⁸³ Thus, one must examine the reason for having names, the proper means for distinguishing like and unlike, and the essential points in establishing names.

When different forms make contact with the heart, they make each other understood as different things. If the names and their corresponding objects⁸⁴ are tied together in a confused fashion, then the distinction between noble and base will not be clear, and the like and the unlike will not be differentiated. If this is so, then the problem of intentions not being understood will surely happen, and the disaster of affairs being thereby impeded and abandoned will surely occur. Thus, the wise person draws differences and establishes names in order to point out their corresponding objects. Most importantly, he makes clear the distinction between noble and base, and, at the least, he distinguishes the like and the unlike. When noble and base are clearly distinguished, and like and unlike are differentiated, then the problem of intentions not being understood will not happen, and the disaster of affairs being thereby impeded and abandoned will not occur. This is the reason for having names. . . .

Names have no predetermined appropriateness. One forms agreement in order to name things. Once the agreement is set and has become custom, then they are called “appropriate,” and what differs from the agreed usage is called “inappropriate.” Names have no predetermined objects. One forms agreement in order to name objects. Once the agreement is set and has become custom, then they are called “names of objects.”⁸⁵ Names do have a predetermined goodness. If they are straightforward, simple, and do not conflict, then they are called “good names.” Some things have a like appearance but reside in unlike classes, and others have unlike appearances but reside in the like class, and these two can be differentiated. For those which have a like appearance but reside in unlike classes, even though they could be combined into one class, they are called two separate objects. If the appearance changes but the object does not become different so as to belong to an unlike class, this is called a transformation. When there is transformation without such difference, it is still called one and the same object. These are what to rely

83. A noteworthy alternative way of reading this line is proposed by the commentator Wang Xianqian, who interprets it as saying, “If a true king were to arise, he would surely follow along with the old names [that are still in use] and change back the new [i.e., bad] names.”

84. Xunzi’s word “object” (*shí 實*) appears to include both the meaning and referent of a term, as distinguished by modern philosophers.

85. Xunzi’s point seems to be that only after usage is set do the names have any meaning, rather than being mere sound.

upon in observing the objects and determining their numbers.⁸⁶ This is the essential point in establishing names, and the names established by the later kings must not go unexamined.

Claims such as “To be insulted is not disgraceful,”⁸⁷ “The sage does not love himself,”⁸⁸ and “To kill a robber is not to kill a man”⁸⁹ are cases of confusion about the use of names leading to disordering names. If one tests them against the reason why there are names, and observes what happens when they are carried out thoroughly, then one will be able to reject them. Claims such as “Mountains and gorges are level,”⁹⁰ “The desires of one’s natural dispositions are few,”⁹¹ “Fine meats are not any more flavorful,” and “Great bells are not any more entertaining”⁹² are cases of confusion about the use of objects leading to disordering names. If one tests them against the proper means for distinguishing like and unlike, and observes what happens when they are thoroughly practiced, then one will be able to reject them. Claims such as [. . .]⁹³ “Oxen and horses are not horses”⁹⁴ are cases of confusion about the use of names leading to disordering the objects. If one tests them against the agreement on names, using the fact that what such people accept goes against what they reject, then one will be able to reject them. In every case of deviant sayings and perverse teachings that depart from the correct Way and recklessly innovate, they will belong to one of these three classes of confusion. Thus, the enlightened lord understands their kind and does not dispute with such people.

The people can easily be unified by means of the Way, but one should not try to share one’s reasons with them. Hence, the enlightened lord controls them with his power, guides them with the Way, moves them with his orders, arrays them with his judgments, and restrains them with his punishments. Thus, his people’s

86. Xunzi here seems to be talking about identifying and individuating classes, rather than identifying and individuating particular entities.

87. This claim was put forth by Songzi.

88. It is unknown who put forth this claim.

89. This is a famous Mohist argument.

90. This claim was put forth and defended by Huizi (see chapter 5 in this volume).

91. This is another of Songzi’s famous claims.

92. The origin of these last two statements is uncertain.

93. Here the text seems very corrupt. I have translated the clearest part of the sentence, and omitted the rest.

94. It is uncertain who maintained this thesis, but its similarity to the famous claim that “a white horse is not a horse” made by Gongsun Longzi suggests that it might also be his (see “On the White Horse,” in chapter 5 in this volume). We also find the similar phrase “Oxen and horses are not [only] oxen and they are not [only] horses” in a passage that is apparently part of a rebuttal to Gongsun Longzi in *Mohist Canon B* (not in this volume).

transformation by the Way is spirit-like. What need has he for demonstrations⁹⁵ and persuasions? Nowadays the sage-kings have all passed away, the whole world is in chaos, and depraved teachings are arising. The gentleman has no power to control people, no punishments to restrain them, and so he engages in demonstrations and persuasions.

When objects are not understood, then one engages in naming. When the naming is not understood, then one tries to procure agreement. When the agreement is not understood, then one engages in persuasion. When the persuasion is not understood, then one engages in demonstration. Thus, procuring agreement, naming, discrimination, and persuasion are some of the greatest forms of useful activity, and are the beginning of kingly works. When a name is heard and the corresponding object is understood, this is usefulness in names. When they are accumulated and form a pattern, this is beauty in names. When one obtains both their usefulness and beauty, this is called understanding names. Names are the means by which one arranges and accumulates objects. Sentences combine the names of different objects in order to discuss a single idea. Persuasion and demonstration use fixed names of objects in order to make clear the proper ways for acting and remaining still. Procuring agreement and naming are the functions of demonstration and persuasion. Demonstration and persuasion are the heart's way of representing the Way. The heart is the craftsman and overseer of the Way. The Way is the warp and pattern of good order. When the heart fits with the Way, when one's persuasions fit with one's heart, when one's words fit one's persuasions, then one will name things correctly and procure agreement, will base oneself on the true disposition of things and make them understood, will discriminate among things without going to excess, and will extend by analogy the categories of things without violating them. When listening to cases, one will accord with good form. When engaging in demonstration, one will cover thoroughly all the reasons. One will use the true Way to discriminate what is vile, just like drawing out the carpenter's line in order to grasp what is curved and what is straight. Thus, deviant sayings will not be able to cause disorder, and the hundred schools will have nowhere to hide. . . .

All those who say that good order must await the elimination of desires are people who lack the means to guide desire and cannot handle the mere having of desires. All those who say good order must await the lessening of desires are people who lack the means to restrain desire and cannot handle abundance of desires.

95. The word here is *biān 辨*, which literally means “to discriminate among things.” This character was interchangeable with another, also read *biān 辩*, which means “to argue, dispute.” The text seems to play on a fusion of these senses in the idea that true differences between things will be presented and defended through argument. Therefore, I have rendered it “demonstration” to convey the sense both of pointing out differences and arguing for a position.

Having desires and lacking desires fall under two different kinds, namely being alive and being dead, not order and disorder. Having many desires and having few desires also fall under different kinds, namely the numbers of people's dispositions, not order and disorder.

The occurrence of desires does not wait upon the permissibility of fulfilling them, but those who seek to fulfill them follow what they approve of.⁹⁶ That the occurrence of desires does not wait upon the permissibility of fulfilling them is something which is received from Heaven. That those who seek to fulfill them follow what they approve is something which is received from the heart. When a single desire received from Heaven is controlled by many things received from the heart, then it will be difficult to classify it as something received from Heaven.

Life is what people most desire, and death is what people most despise. However, when people let go of life and accomplish their own death, this is not because they do not desire life and instead desire death. Rather, it is because they do not approve of living in these circumstances, but do approve of dying in these circumstances.⁹⁷ Thus, when the desire is excessive but the action does not match it, this is because the heart prevents it. If what the heart approves conforms to the proper patterns, then even if one's desires are many, what harm would they be to good order? When the desire is lacking but one's action surpasses it, this is because the heart compels it. If what the heart approves misses the proper patterns, then even if the desires are few, how would it stop short of chaos? Thus, order and disorder reside in what the heart approves, they are not present in the desires from one's dispositions. If you do not seek for them where they reside, and instead seek for them where they are not present, then even though you say, "I have grasped them," you have simply missed them.

Human nature is the accomplishment of Heaven. The dispositions are the substance of the nature. The desires are the responses of the dispositions to things. Viewing the objects of desire as permissible to obtain and seeking them are what the dispositions cannot avoid. Deeming something permissible and guiding one are

96. This section is difficult to translate, because the word *ke* 可 is used multiple times in senses that cannot always be easily rendered consistently into English, and it is not clear that Xunzi is using it consistently in the first place. When used as a verb, I have rendered it as "approve." When used adjectively or adverbially in this section, I have usually rendered it as "permissible" (where I take it that Xunzi really intends something like "should be approved"). *Ke* also has the sense of "possible [to do]," and in certain places, it seems necessary to take it this way (which I have rendered as "can" or "cannot"). One could try to use this latter sense throughout, substituting "possible" for "permissible" and "think possible" for "approve," which would give the argument a very different sense, but it seems to me that such a reading is less preferable given the overall context.

97. This might be a denial of the claim about the role of desire in moral motivation made in *Mengzi* 6A10 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

what the understanding must provide. Thus, even were one a gatekeeper, the desires cannot be eliminated, because they are the necessary equipment of the nature. Even if one were the Son of Heaven, one's desires cannot be completely satisfied. Even though the desires cannot be completely satisfied, one can get close to complete satisfaction. Even though desires cannot be eliminated, one's seeking can be regulated. (Even though what is desired cannot be completely obtained, the seeker can approach complete satisfaction. Even though desires cannot be eliminated, when what is sought is not obtained, one who deliberates about matters desires to regulate his seeking.⁹⁸⁾ When the Way advances, then one approaches complete satisfaction. When it retreats, then one regulates one's seeking. In all under Heaven there is nothing as great as it. Among all people, no one fails to follow that which they approve and to abandon that which they do not approve. For a person to know that there is nothing as great as the Way and yet not follow the Way—there are no such cases. Suppose there were a person who did not have much desire for heading south, but did have no little dislike for heading north. How would it be that, because of the impossibility of going all the way south, he would depart from the south and instead go north? Now in the case of people who have not much desire for something, but do have no little dislike for something else, how would they, because of the impossibility of completely fulfilling their desires, depart from the way of obtaining their desires and instead take what they dislike? Thus, if one approves of the Way and follows it, how would lessening things lead to disorder? If one does not approve of the Way and departs from it, then how would increasing things lead to order? Thus, those who are wise judge the Way and that is all, and the things the lesser schools wish for in their prized doctrines will all decline.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Human Nature Is Bad

People's nature is bad. Their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort. Now people's nature is such that they are born with a fondness for profit. If they follow along with this, then struggle and contention will arise, and yielding and deference will perish therein. They are born with feelings of hate and dislike. If they follow along with these, then cruelty and villainy will arise, and loyalty and trustworthiness will perish therein. They are born with desires of the eyes and ears, a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If they follow along with these, then lasciviousness and chaos will arise, and ritual and the standards of righteousness, proper form and

98. The repetitive character of these sentences makes them seem very much like glosses that were miscopied into the main text.

good order, will perish therein. Thus, if people follow along with their inborn dispositions and obey their nature, they are sure to come to struggle and contention, turn to disrupting social divisions and disorder, and end up becoming violent. So, it is necessary to await the transforming influence of teachers and models and the guidance of ritual and the standards of righteousness, and only then will they come to yielding and deference, turn to proper form and order, and end up becoming controlled.⁹⁹ Looking at it in this way, it is clear that people's nature is bad, and their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort.

Thus, crooked wood must await steaming and straightening on the shaping frame, and only then does it become straight. Blunt metal must await honing and grinding, and only then does it become sharp.¹⁰⁰ Now since people's nature is bad, they must await teachers and proper models, and only then do they become correct. They must obtain ritual and the standards of righteousness, and only then do they become well-ordered. Now without teachers or proper models for people, they will be deviant, dangerous, and not correct. Without ritual and the standards of righteousness, they will be unruly, chaotic, and not well-ordered. In ancient times, the sage-kings saw that because people's nature is bad, they were deviant, dangerous, and not correct, unruly, chaotic, and not well-ordered. Therefore, for their sake they set up ritual and standards of righteousness, and established proper models and measures. They did this in order to straighten out and beautify people's nature and inborn dispositions and thereby correct them, and in order to train and transform people's nature and inborn dispositions and thereby guide them, so that for the first time they all came to order and conformed to the Way. Among people of today, those who are transformed by teachers and proper models, who accumulate culture and learning, and who make ritual and the standards of righteousness their path, become gentlemen. Those who give rein to their nature and inborn dispositions, who take comfort in being utterly unrestrained, and who violate ritual and the standards of righteousness, become petty men. Looking at it in this way, it is clear that people's nature is bad, and their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort.

99. Here and elsewhere, this chapter deploys two terms in rapid succession, *li* 理 and *zhi* 治, which both mean “order” or “well-ordered,” and their close proximity makes it difficult to translate the text without making it sound as if Xunzi is simply repeating himself. In such cases, I have kept *li* as “order,” while rendering *zhi* as “controlled,” in the sense of disciplined restraint. *Zhi* can also carry the connotation of good government in particular, though that sense seems less relevant in the instances where *li* and *zhi* are closely juxtaposed. When not so juxtaposed, both *li* and *zhi* have been rendered here as “order” or “well-ordered,” depending on context.

100. Compare Gaozi's metaphor in *Mengzi* 6A1 (in chapter 4 of this volume), and the opening paragraph of *Xunzi* chapter 1 (above).

Mengzi says: When people engage in learning, this manifests the goodness of their nature. I say: This is not so. This is a case of not attaining knowledge of people's nature and of not inspecting clearly the division between people's nature and their deliberate efforts. In every case, the nature of a thing is the accomplishment of Heaven. It cannot be learned. It cannot be worked at. Ritual and the standards of righteousness are what the sage produces. They are things that people become capable of through learning, things that are achieved through working at them. Those things in people that cannot be learned and cannot be worked at are called their "nature." Those things in people that they become capable of through learning and that they achieve through working at them are called their "deliberate efforts." This is the division between nature and deliberate effort.¹⁰¹

Now people's nature is such that their eyes can see, and their ears can hear. The brightness by which they see does not depart from their eyes, and the acuity by which they hear does not depart from their ears. Their eyes are simply bright, and their ears are simply acute. One does not learn this brightness. Mengzi says: People's nature is good, but they all wind up losing their nature and original state.¹⁰² I say: If it is like this, then he is simply mistaken. People's nature is such that they are born and then depart from their original simplicity, depart from their original material; they are sure to lose them. Looking at it in this way, it is clear that people's nature is bad. The so-called goodness of people's nature would mean for one not to depart from one's original simplicity and instead beautify it, not to depart from one's original material and instead make use of it. It would be to cause the relation of one's original simplicity and original material to beauty, and the relation of the heart's thoughts to goodness, to be like the way the brightness by which one sees does not depart from one's eyes, and the acuity by which one hears does not depart from one's ears. Thus, I have said: "The eyes are simply bright and the ears are simply acute." . . .

Someone asks: If people's nature is bad, then from what are ritual and the standards of righteousness produced? I answer: In every case, ritual and the standards of righteousness are produced from the deliberate effort of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature. Thus, when the potter mixes clay and makes vessels, the vessels are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature. Thus, when the craftsman carves wood and makes utensils, the utensils are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature. The sage accumulates reflections and deliberations and practices deliberate efforts and reasoned activities in order to produce

101. Compare Xunzi's definitions in *Xunzi* chapter 22, "On Correct Naming" (above).

102. Cf. *Mengzi* 6A6, 6A8, 7A15, and 7B31 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

ritual and standards of righteousness and in order to establish proper models and measures.¹⁰³ So, ritual and the standards of righteousness and proper models and measures are produced from the deliberate efforts of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature.

As for the way that the eyes like pretty colors, the ears like beautiful sounds, the mouth likes good flavors, the heart likes what is beneficial, and the bones and flesh like what is comfortable—these are produced from people's inborn dispositions and nature. These are things that come about of themselves in response to stimulation, things that do not need to await being worked at before being produced. Those things that are not immediate responses to stimulation, that must await being worked at before they are so, are said to be produced from deliberate effort. These are the things that nature and deliberate effort produce, and their different signs.

So, the sage transforms his nature and establishes deliberate effort. In establishing deliberate effort, he produces ritual and the standards of righteousness. In producing ritual and the standards of righteousness, he institutes proper models and measures. Thus, ritual and the standards of righteousness and proper models and measures are produced by the sage. Thus, that in which the sage is like the masses, that in which he is no different than the masses, is his nature. That in which he differs from and surpasses the masses is his deliberate efforts.

Liking what is beneficial and desiring gain are people's inborn dispositions and nature. Suppose there were brothers who had some property to divide, and that they followed the fondness for benefit and desire for gain in their inborn dispositions and nature. If they were to do so, then the brothers would conflict and contend with each other for it. However, let them be transformed by the proper form and good order of ritual and the standards of righteousness. If so, then they would even give it over to their countrymen. Thus, following along with inborn dispositions and nature, even brothers will struggle with each other. If transformed by ritual and the standards of righteousness, then they will even give it over to their countrymen.¹⁰⁴

In every case where people desire to become good, it is because their nature is bad. The person who has little longs to have much. The person of narrow experience

103. There is a noteworthy alternative way of reading this line, which construes it as being in the past tense, and with a plural subject: "Sages accumulated reflections and thoughts and practiced deliberate efforts and reasoned activities. . . ." This reading would fit well with the suggestion by David S. Nivison ("Critique of David B. Wong, 'Xunzi on Moral Motivation,'" in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe [Chicago: Open Court, 1996], 323–31) that Xunzi's view can allow for a series of sages to produce ritual and the standards of righteousness by working in a piecemeal fashion over time, perhaps without even being fully aware of what they were doing.

104. This seems to be a reference to the story of Bo Yi and Shu Qi. See *Important Figures* in the appendices.

longs to be broadened. The ugly person longs to be beautiful. The poor person longs to be rich. The lowly person longs to be noble. That which one does not have within oneself, one is sure to seek for outside. Thus, when one is rich, one does not long for wealth. When one is noble, one does not long for power. That which one has within oneself, one is sure not to go outside oneself for it. Looking at it in this way, people desire to become good because their nature is bad.

Now, people's nature is originally without ritual and without the standards of righteousness. Thus, they must force themselves to engage in learning and seek to possess them. Their nature does not know of ritual and the standards of righteousness, and so they must reflect and deliberate and seek to know them. So, going only by what they have from birth, people lack ritual and the standards of righteousness and do not know of ritual and the standards of righteousness. If people lack ritual and the standards of righteousness, then they will be chaotic. If they do not know of ritual and the standards of righteousness, then they will be unruly. So, going only by what they have from birth, unruliness and disorder are within them. Looking at it in this way, it is clear that people's nature is bad, and their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort.

Mengzi says: People's nature is good. I say: This is not so. In every case, both in ancient times and in the present, what everyone under Heaven calls good is being correct, ordered, peaceful, and controlled. What they call bad is being deviant, dangerous, unruly, and chaotic. This is the division between good and bad. Now does he really think that people's nature is originally correct, ordered, peaceful, and controlled? Then what use would there be for sage-kings? What use for ritual and the standards of righteousness? Even though there might exist sage-kings and ritual and the standards of righteousness, whatever could these add to its correctness, order, peaceful, and controlled state? Now, that is not the case, because people's nature is bad. Thus, in ancient times the sage-kings saw that because their nature is bad, people were deviant, dangerous, and not correct; unruly, chaotic, and not well-ordered. Therefore, for the people's sake they set up the power of lords and superiors in order to oversee them. They made ritual and the standards of righteousness clear in order to transform them. They set up laws and standards in order to make them well-ordered. They multiplied punishments and fines in order to restrain them. As a result, they caused all under Heaven to come to order and conform to goodness. Such are the ordering influence of the sage-kings and the transformative effects of ritual and the standards of righteousness.

Now suppose one were to try doing away with the power of lords and superiors, try doing without the transformation from ritual and the standards of righteousness, try doing away with the order of laws and standards, try doing without the restraint of punishments and fines, then relying on these things and observing

how all the people of the world treat each other. If it were like this, then the strong would harm the weak and take from them. The many would tyrannize the few and shout them down. One would not have to wait even a moment for all under Heaven to arrive at unruliness and chaos and perish. Looking at it in this way, it is clear that people's nature is bad, and that their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort.

So, those who are good at speaking of ancient times are sure to have some measure from the present. Those who are good at speaking of Heaven are sure to have some evidence from among mankind. For any discourse, one values it if things conform to its distinctions, and if it matches the test of experience. Thus, one sits and propounds it, but when one stands up then one can implement it, and when one unfolds it then one can put it into practice. Now Mengzi says: People's nature is good. Nothing conforms to his distinctions, and this does not match the test of experience. He sits and propounds it, but when he stands up then he cannot implement it, and when he unfolds it then he cannot put it into practice. Is his error not great indeed! Thus, if human nature is good then one may do away with the sage-kings and put ritual and the standards of righteousness to rest. If human nature is bad, then one simply must side with the sage-kings and honor ritual and the standards of righteousness. . . .

Someone suggests: Ritual and the standards of righteousness and the accumulation of deliberate effort are people's nature, and that is why the sage is able to produce them. I answer: This is not so. The potter mixes clay and produces tiles. Yet, how could the clay of the tiles be the potter's nature? The craftsman carves wood and makes utensils. Yet, how could the wood of the utensils be the craftsman's nature? The relationship of the sage to ritual and the standards of righteousness can be compared to mixing up clay and producing things. So, how could ritual and the standards of righteousness and the accumulation of deliberate effort be people's original nature? In every aspect of human nature, the nature of Yao and Shun was one and the same as that of Tyrant Jie and Robber Zhi. The nature of the gentleman is one and the same as that of the petty man. Now will you take ritual and the standards of righteousness and the accumulation of deliberate effort to be a matter of human nature? Then for what do you value Yao and Shun? For what do you value the gentleman? Everything that one values in Yao and Shun and the gentleman is due to the fact that they were able to transform their nature and to establish deliberate effort. In establishing deliberate effort, they produced ritual and the standards of righteousness. Thus, the relationship of the sage to ritual and the standards of righteousness and the accumulation of deliberate effort is like mixing up clay and producing things. Looking at it in this way, then how could ritual and the standards of righteousness and the accumulation of deliberate effort

be people's nature? What one finds base in Jie and Robber Zhi and the petty man is due to the fact that they follow along with their inborn dispositions and obey their nature and take comfort in utter lack of restraint, so that they come to greed for profit and to struggle and contention. Thus, it is clear that people's nature is bad, and that their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort. Heaven did not favor Zengzi, Minzi Qian, and Xiao Yi¹⁰⁵ and exclude the masses. Then why is it that only Zengzi, Minzi Qian, and Xiao Yi were rich in the true substance of filial piety and were perfect in their reputation for filial piety? It is because they exerted themselves to the utmost in ritual and the standards of righteousness. Heaven does not favor the people of Qi and Lu and exclude the people of Qin. Then why is it that with regard to the standards of righteousness for father and son, and the distinction between husband and wife, the people of Qin are not as good at filial reverence and respectful good form as those of Qi and Lu? It is because the people of Qin obey their inborn dispositions and nature, take comfort in utter lack of restraint, and are lax in regard to ritual and the standards of righteousness. How could it be because their nature is different?

Anyone on the streets could become a Yu. How do I mean this? I say: That by which Yu was Yu was that he was benevolent, righteous, lawful, and correct. Thus, benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness have patterns that can be known and can be practiced. However, people on the streets all have the material for knowing benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness, and they all have the equipment for practicing benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness. Thus, it is clear that they can become a Yu. Now if benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness originally had no patterns that could be known or practiced, then even Yu would not know benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness and could not practice benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness. Shall we suppose that people on the streets originally do not have the material to know benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness, and that they originally do not have the equipment for practicing benevolence, righteousness, lawfulness, and correctness? If so, then within the family, people on the streets could not know the standards of righteousness for father and son, and outside the family, they could not know the proper relations of lord and minister. This is not so. Now it is the case that anyone on the streets can know the standards of righteousness for father and son within the family, and can know the proper relations of lord and minister outside the family. Thus, it is clear that the material for understanding these things and the equipment for practicing them is present in people on the

105. Zengzi (Master Zeng) and Minzi Qian were both disciples of Kongzi. Xiao Yi (or "Filial Yi") was heir to the throne of Gaozong, ruler of the Shang dynasty. All three were famous for their displays of filial piety.

streets. Now, if people on the streets were to use their material for understanding these things and the equipment for practicing them to base themselves upon the knowable patterns and practicable aspects of benevolence and righteousness, then it is clear that anyone on the streets could become a Yu. Now, if people on the streets were to submit themselves to study and practice learning, if they were to concentrate their hearts and make single-minded their intentions, if they were to ponder, query, and thoroughly investigate—then if they add to this days upon days and connect to this long period of time, if they accumulate goodness without stopping, then they will break through to spirit-like powers and understanding, and will form a triad with Heaven and earth.

Thus, becoming a sage is something that people achieve through accumulation. Someone says: Sageliness is achieved through accumulation, but why is it that not all can accumulate thus? I say: They can do it, but they cannot be made to do it. Thus, the petty man can become a gentleman, but is not willing to become a gentleman. The gentleman can become a petty man, but is not willing to become a petty man.¹⁰⁶ It has never been that the petty man and gentleman are incapable of becoming each other. However, the reason they do not become each other is that they can do so but cannot be made to do so. Thus, it is the case that anyone on the streets can become a Yu, but it is not necessarily the case that anyone on the streets will be able to become a Yu. Even if one is not able to become a Yu, this does not harm the fact that one could become a Yu. One's feet can walk everywhere under Heaven. Even so, there has not yet been anyone who has been able to walk everywhere under Heaven. It has never been that craftsmen, carpenters, farmers, and merchants cannot do each other's business. However, none have ever been able to do each other's business. Looking at it in this way, one is not always able to do what one can do. Even if one is not able to do it, this is no harm to the fact that one could do it. Thus, the difference between being able and unable, and can and cannot, is far indeed. It is clear, then, that [the gentleman and the petty man] can become one another.

Yao asked Shun, “What are people’s inborn dispositions like?” Shun answered, “People’s inborn dispositions are most unlovely! Why ask about them? When one has a wife and son, then one’s filial piety to one’s parents declines. When one’s appetites and desires are fulfilled, then one’s faithfulness to friends declines. When one’s rank and salary are full, then one’s loyalty to one’s lord declines. People’s inborn dispositions? People’s inborn dispositions? They are most unlovely. Why ask about them? Only the worthy man is not like that.” . . .

106. Cf. *Mengzi* 6A15 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

Chapter Twenty-Five: Working Songs

There are warp threads for weaving good order:
 Rites and punishments are exactly these.
 The gentleman takes and cultivates them.
 The common folk are thereby put at ease.
 Make virtue bright. Treat penalties with care.
 This orders the state and its families,
 And peace comes to all within the Four Seas.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Grand Digest

The gentleman dwells in benevolence by means of righteousness,¹⁰⁷ and only then is it benevolence. He carries out righteousness by means of ritual, and only then is it righteousness. In conducting ritual, he returns to the roots of things and completes the branches of things, and only then is it ritual.¹⁰⁸ When all three are thoroughly mastered, only then is it the Way. . . .

Chapter Twenty-Nine: The Way to Be a Son

To be filial upon entering and to be a good younger brother upon going out is lesser conduct. To be compliant to one's superiors and devoted to one's subordinates is middle conduct. To follow the Way and not one's lord, to follow righteousness and not one's father is the greatest conduct. If one's intentions are at ease in ritual, and one's words are put forth in accordance with the proper classes of things, then the Confucian way is complete. Even Shun could not improve on this by so much as a hair's breadth.

There are three cases in which the filial son does not follow orders. When following orders will endanger one's parents, but not following orders will make them safe, then the filial son will not follow orders, and this is having scruples. When following orders will disgrace one's parents, but not following orders will bring them honor, then the filial son will not follow orders, and this is being righteous. When following orders requires a beastly act, but not following orders requires cultivation

107. The wording here recalls *Analects* 4.1 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

108. Commentators offer different suggestions about how to construe the “roots” and “branches.” Perhaps the most plausible is the Tang commentator Yang Liang’s view that “roots” refers to benevolence and righteousness, and “branches” refers to particular regulations of ritual.

and decorum, then the filial son will not follow orders, and this is being respectful. And so, not following orders when it is permissible to do so is to behave as though one is not a son. Following orders when it is not permissible to do so is to lack any scruples. If one understands the proper purposes of following and not following orders, and if one can be reverent, respectful, loyal, trustworthy, scrupulous, and honest so as to carry these out vigilantly, then this can be called the greatest filial piety. A proverb states, “Follow the Way, not your lord. Follow righteousness, not your father.” This expresses my meaning.

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Translations

- Hutton, Eric L., trans. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. (A handy, one-volume English rendering of the entire text of the *Xunzi* by the translator of this chapter. There are some minor differences between the present selections and the full-length translation, due mostly to different conventions adopted for this volume.)
- Knoblock, John, trans. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vols. 1–3. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (vol. 1, 1988; vol. 2, 1990; vol. 3, 1994). (The first full translation of Xunzi's works in English. Includes detailed information on historical and philosophical background, as well as an extensive bibliography of works pertaining to Xunzi.)
- Watson, Burton, trans. *Xunzi: Basic Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. (A slightly updated version of Watson's highly readable selective translation of the *Xunzi*, first published as *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* in 1963.)

Secondary Works

- Goldin, Paul R. *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi*. La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 1999. (A wide-ranging study of Xunzi's thought. Examines in detail his views on human nature, Heaven, ritual, and language.)
- Hutton, Eric L., ed. *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2016. (Provides thorough and in-depth discussion of many different aspects of Xunzi's thought. Also contains lengthy discussions of Xunzi's influence in the later history of China, Japan, and Korea.)
- Kim, Sungmoon. *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics: The Political Philosophy of Mencius and Xunzi*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. (Provides a detailed account of the similarities and differences between the political theories of Xunzi and Mengzi, with special attention to how they responded to the challenges of their times.)
- Kline, T. C., III, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the "Xunzi."* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000. (An anthology containing many of the most influential modern essays on Xunzi's thought in English.)
- Kline, T. C., III, and Justin Tiwald, eds. *Ritual and Religion in the "Xunzi."* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014. (An anthology focusing on the religious dimensions of Xunzi's thought. Includes discussion of ecological concerns in Xunzi's views, as well as comparisons between Xunzi and Sigmund Freud, Peter Berger, and other thinkers concerned with religious themes.)

- Lewis, Colin J. "Ritual Education and Moral Development: A Comparison of Xunzi and Vygotsky." *17, no. 1 (2018): 81–98. (Argues that Xunzi's model of moral education fits well with and complements a highly influential modern theory of learning that is also supported by empirical studies.)*
- Machle, Edward J. *Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A Study of the "Tian Lun."* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993. (Considers Xunzi as a religious thinker through his views on *tian* ["Heaven"]. Argues against reading *tian* as amoral, scientific "Nature.")
- Nivison, David S. "Critique of David B. Wong, 'Xunzi on Moral Motivation.'" In *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe, 323–31. Chicago: Open Court, 1996. (Offers an innovative account of how Xunzi can explain the development of human morality in history, despite believing that human nature is bad.)
- Stalnaker, Aaron. *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. (Develops a methodology for cross-cultural studies and provides a detailed Confucian-Christian comparison, focused on the topic of self-cultivation.)
- Sung, Winnie. "Xunzi" in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Chinese Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2018. DOI: 10.1093/obo/9780199920082-0124. (A substantial annotated bibliography covering many significant publications on the *Xunzi* in English and other languages, updated periodically.)
- Tang, Siufu. *Self-Realization through Confucian Learning: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Xunzi's Ethics.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016. (An in-depth study arguing that Xunzi's view can meet the modern demand that ethical theories answer people's need for self-realization.)
- Van Norden, Bryan W. "Hansen on Hsün Tzu." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 20 (1993): 365–82. (Investigates the extent to which Xunzi may be considered a "conventionalist" in language and in ethics.)
- Wang, Ellie Hua. "Moral Reasoning: The Female Way and the Xunzian Way." In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, edited by Ann A. Pang-White, 141–56. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. (Argues that Xunzi's view of moral judgment is not as incompatible with certain feminist views as it might first appear, and that Xunzi's ethics—and Confucian ethics more broadly—overlaps with but also constitutes a noteworthy rival to feminist care ethics.)