

14.31.9 But fame and reputation are matters of outward display so do no good when it comes to expanding [*guang*] them [benevolence and righteousness].

That is, a reputation for benevolence and righteousness always springs from inadequacy in them.

14.31.10 When sources dry up and fish find themselves stranded together on land, they spew moisture on each other and wet each other with foam from their mouths, but it would be better if they could just forget about one another in rivers and lakes.”³²

That is, only when people forget all about benevolence do they really become benevolent.

14.32 When Confucius returned from his visit to Lao Dan, he did not speak for three days, but then one of his disciples asked, “When you, sir, saw Lao Dan, you surely corrected him, but how did you do it?”

14.33.1 Confucius replied, “Finally, now in him I have seen a dragon! As when a dragon coalesces so he creates a physical body and as when it disperses so he forms patterns [*chengzhang*].

That is, Lao Dan was capable of change and transformation.”³³

14.33.2 He rides on clouds and mist and so provides nourishment in terms of yin and yang.

That is, since he operates without direction, his spontaneity is quite up to everything.

14.33.3 My jaw so dropped I could not even close my mouth [and my tongue so rose that I could not even stammer],³⁴ so what chance had I to correct Lao Dan!”

14.34 Zigong then said, “As such, can a man be still as a ceremonial stand-in for the deceased yet have the look of a dragon, be utterly silent yet sound like thunder,³⁵ so that when he starts to act he moves like Heaven and Earth? Could I too have an opportunity to see him?” Subsequently he went with an introduction from Confucius to see Lao Dan.

14.35 Lao Dan was then in his hall sitting with legs outstretched, ready to respond, so he said in a small voice, “My years have about all run out, so how would you now instruct and admonish me?”

14.36 Zigong said, “Although the Three Sovereigns³⁶ ruled the world differently from the Five Emperors,³⁷ their fame persists in the same way, yet you, sir, alone hold the view that they were not sages—why ever not?”

14.37 Lao Dan replied, “Young man, approach a little closer! Why do you say that they ruled differently?”

14.38 Zigong answered, “Yao yielded to Shun, and Shun yielded to Yu. Whereas Yu acted energetically on his own, Tang employed troops. Although King Wen obeyed Zhou and dared not revolt, King Wu rebelled against Zhou in defiance of him. This is why I say they differed.”³⁸

14.39.1 Lao Dan then said, “Young man, approach a little closer! I shall tell you how the Three Sovereigns and Five Thearchs ruled the world. The Yellow Thearch so ruled the world that the common folk were encouraged to such unity of mind that when those among them had a parent die, though they failed to wail, people did not discredit them.

If they had discredited them, this would have forced them to wail.

14.39.2 Yao so ruled the world that the common folk were encouraged to such bias of mind that when those among them regarded relatives in terms of diminishing kinship ties [*sha qisha*], people did not discredit them.

Sha [more generally “kill”] here means “diminish” [*jiang*], which refers to how the closeness of kinship ties is seen progressively to diminish [*jiangsha*].³⁹

14.39.3 Shun so ruled the world that the common folk were encouraged to such a competitive state of mind that when pregnant women among them would give birth to a child in the tenth month, that child would be able to speak by the fifth month of life,

That is, teaching became as hurried as this.

14.39.4 and before it became a toddler it would know who was who.

“Who was who” means to distinguish among people. That pre-toddlers could already distinguish one person from another indicates how hurried competition in education had become.

14.39.5 This being so, people began to die young.

Since they no longer could merge other and self, they fixated on outdoing one another in differentiating gradations of kinship. As a result, they cut short their own natural lifespans.

14.39.6 Yu so ruled the world that the common folk were encouraged to such deviance of mind that people became cunning and amenable to the use of weapons.

That is, the reason why people were amenable to the use of weapons was because sedition already existed in the world.

14.39.7 So the killing of a robber was no longer the killing of a person.

Since robbers, of course, should die, people were willing to have them killed them, so it was not considered killing as such.⁴⁰

14.39.8 Since people regarded themselves as this type or that, it was all just due to the way of the world.

Unable to regard all people as one, every person differentiated himself from others; this is what “people regarded themselves as this type or that” means. Such tendencies have lasted for hundreds of ages and meet now in the vicissitudes of the present. That the ruination reached such an extreme as this did not happen because of Yu, which is why the text says “it was all just due to the way of the world.” That is, it was not impressions left by the sage’s wisdom that inflicted chaos on the world, but the world itself that insisted on having such chaos.

14.39.9 At this, the whole world fell into panic, which prompted the rise of the Confucians and the Mohists.

And with this came the ruination of hundreds of ages.

14.39.10 What they first formulated may have been moral principles, but these now have reached the point where daughters are taken as wives.

That nowadays daughters are taken as wives and superiors and subordinates oppose one another happens not because what they first formulated lacked moral principles, but because what they did led to the ruination of such principles, culminating in such a state as this.

14.39.11 What else need be said!

Ruination arises from moral principles, thus there is nothing more to say.

14.39.12 I say to you that in ruling the world, although the Three Sovereigns and Five Thearchs have been said to have ‘brought order to it,’ they could not have caused it more disorder!

Inevitable ruination was the sure result.

14.39.13 Wisdom associated with the Three Sovereigns repels the light of the sun and moon above, acts contrary to the vital essence of mountains and streams below, and disrupts the effect of the four seasons in between. Wisdom associated with them, more lethal than the tail of a scorpion, is such that even the tiniest creature has failed to remain content with the innate tendencies of its own endowed nature, yet they consider themselves to have been sages! Was it not shameful, such lack of shame!”

14.40 Zigong was so shocked that he could just stand there ill at ease.

Zigong said at first that although Master Lao distinguished the Three Sovereigns from the Five Sovereigns, he wanted to judge them the same. But now that he perceived that Master Lao lumped the Five Thearchs together with the earlier Three Sovereigns in blanket condemnation, he lost the basis of what he had to say.

14.41.1 Confucius said to Lao Dan, “I have been studying the six classics, the *Odes*, *Documents*, *Rites*, *Music*, *Changes*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*, for what I consider a long time, so I know full well how to explain them. Despite expounding to seventy-two morally recalcitrant rulers the Dao of the former kings and explaining to them the record of achievements of Dukes Zhou and Zhao, I have not been employed by a single ruler. How very difficult it is to persuade such men! Is it really so hard to explain the Dao?”

14.42.1 Master Lao replied, “How fortunate that you, sir, did not encounter a ruler who might really govern the world! The six classics are just footprints left behind by the former kings. Why should they be taken for the maker of such footprints!

The maker of such footprints is true nature. Footprints left by those who allowed people their true natures are what constitute the six classics.

14.42.2 What you, sir, are talking about is like such footprints. Footprints were produced when feet walked. Why should the footprints ever be taken for the walking itself!

Even more important for the present state of the world, he [Confucius] should realize that it was spontaneity that did the walking and the *Six Classics* that were the footprints made.

14.42.3 Just by looking at each other, white cormorants, without the movement of an eye, accomplish fertilization, and as for insects, when the male chirps upwind, the female just has to reply downwind to be fertilized.

Cormorants just have to look at each other with their eyes and insects just have to chirp and respond for both to beget offspring without depending on physical union. Therefore, the text uses the term “fertilized.”

14.42.4 And since some species are such that the individual is both male and female, fertilization takes place that way.

Every male and female of the same species is capable of mutual response, but their ways of responding differ infinitely, but as long as one of the same species finds another, the fertilization is not difficult, which is why with some fertilization takes place even through distant resonance.

14.42.5 Original nature can't be changed; fated endowment can't be altered; time can't be stopped; and the flow of the Dao can't be obstructed.

Therefore, the Perfected one always complies with and allows them free flow.

14.42.6 If one attains to the Dao, no matter where he starts from he shall be up to it.

Although things transform in infinite ways, one shall be capable of dealing with them all.

14.42.7 But one lost to it will lack a place from which he can start.”⁴¹

No matter in what circumstances, he will never be up to it.

14.43.1 Confucius did not go out for three months and then, when he again went to see him, he said, “I actually got it! Magpies hatch their young; fish depend on froth; the thread-waisted wasp transmutes.

That is, creatures are naturally endowed in such a way that each kind has its own sexual nature.

14.43.2 And once younger brother arrives, older brother howls.

That is, it is the nature of humans to neglect the older and cherish the younger, thus the older howls.

14.43.3 I have long failed to allow others be their own persons! Since I did not allow others to be their own persons, how could I have nurtured them!”

To allow others be their own persons is to allow them self-transformation. If one tries to influence them by spreading the six classics, he shall just alienate them.

14.43 Master Lao then said, “Right, you actually got it!”